Conversations with an Exhibition

Edited by **Laura de Harde**

inherited obsessions

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This publication accompanies the exhibition *Inherited Obsessions*
held at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, Pretoria,
24 September 2022 - 24 January 2023
curated by Laura de Harde and Motsane Gertrude Seabela

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Cover page
Ovambo Woman (2022) by Laura de Harde. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

Title page
Free motion graffiti embroidery by Tilly de Harde (2022). Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

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Foreword

It is an enormous privilege to be an academic in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria. From our campus, a stone's throw from the Union Buildings that frame this city in particular ways, our views from the buildings of learning are spectacular. However, these views obscure and overlook life's realities for many in Pretoria and the rest of this country.

From this beautiful campus, it is difficult to reconcile media headlines in South Africa that speak of violence and injury, from the Cape Flats in Cape Town to Marikana in North West Province ten years ago. We constantly seem to be marking points of no return, a stark reminder of the lines between then and now, here and there, and us and them. *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) asks difficult questions of each of us, the assumptions we hold about the world, the public that museums, galleries, and universities serve, and the assumptions and hierarchies of power we need to challenge if we are interested in other ways of being.

This exhibition is a scholarly project that is rooted in the imagination. I admit that I am out of my depth. I have never practised as an artist, I lack the necessary technical skills, and I admit, like many who visit galleries or see works of art in the public space, that I do not always comprehend fully what a piece of art may mean. However, what is unambiguous, regardless of my lack of initial comprehension, is that I will leave a gallery or exhibition space with a worldview that has shifted in some or another way, even though the shift and what it means may not be apparent for some time.

And this is the power of the creative endeavour, a particular kind of intellectual work with artists of all persuasions working in messy terrain that gestures toward thinking about unfinished business. The imagination offers a layered and unfettered palette of prints of photographs, textiles and threads, and traces of hands that hold, love, and create. *Inherited Obsessions* scrutinises history and the complex world in which we live.

The magic of the kinds of questions in this exhibition probes and unsettles. The works dance with our senses in an attempt to think about these lines and responsibilities between public and private and urge all of us to think about the role of creatives and the public and politics to which they respond. This exhibition responds, in part, to a call to action in a deeply unequal society through a palimpsest of history, simultaneity, and the present.

An exhibition such as *Inherited Obsessions* crosses several borders: between dominant and silenced knowledges, between disciplines, between times and space, and between the intellect and the imagination. It draws attention to and references the spatial and temporal implications of the circuits of power and knowledge, indicating the urgency to respond to incomplete tasks that resist closure and homogenising.

The relationship between art, history, heritage, and the public confronts us with the need for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of our past and the imprint of global and shared histories of oppression. Work of this nature can speak to these histories and allows us to disrupt the deep inscription of power and urges us to think about being human in profound ways.

Any knowledge project that shifts views and ways of being comes from particular curiosity and demands a necessary depth. It requires healthy scepticism and deep self-reflexivity. It has to be nuanced and demonstrate an intellectual humility that underscores that knowledge

production is shaped by numerous interactions with ordinary people outside of this space who may never have heard of Sekoto, Kentridge, or Foucault.

Inherited Obsessions has traces and hints of questions that remind us to guard the past, to give it a presence in the 'here' and the 'now', and to remember and to respond to an obligation that must include a reflexive and honest acknowledgement of the stark divisions and inequalities that are the lived realities of the majority of South Africans.

I thank the artist, the curators and contributing authors for this timely exhibition and publication. For a brief moment in September 2022 – Heritage Month in South Africa – we can renew hope. A hope that a few decades from now, we will be able to reflect on this moment as one that marked a shift. That when we look back at the objects we hold dear, they will tell a different story. They will speak of resilience and hope and a settlement of a debt due to millions, including 13-year-old Hector Pieterson in 1976, 34 miners in Marikana in 2012, and the rape and murder of women and children in South Africa on a daily basis.

Inherited Obsessions tells us that we deserve no less.

Siona O'Connell
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School of the Arts, University of Pretoria

Contributors

Laura de Harde is a visual artist, researcher and curator. This publication and accompanying exhibition are key outcomes of the project she developed as the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria (2020–2022). In addition, Laura was Lize Kriel's research partner in a Catalytic Research Grant received from the NIHSS in 2020. This exhibition and publication were partly funded by this project. Laura developed a special interest in surfacing 'quieter' contributions to knowledge production, eclipsed by overarching master narratives while completing her doctorate in history of art at Wits University (2019). Continuing with this theme, Laura has contributed to books and published articles in journals such as *de arte* and *Critical Arts*. Her creative work has been included in group exhibitions, most recently the *KKNK Virtual Exhibition*: 'If you think about it, just midding in the meantime (or) Progression' (2021) and *Nirox Open Lab II*: 'Good Neighbours' (2022).

Lize Kriel is Chair of the Visual Arts Programmes in the School of the Arts at the University of Pretoria and coordinator of the NIHSS-funded research project 'African au-o-ral art in image-text objects: Cultural translation of precolonial memories and remains'.

Teboho Lebakeng is an interdisciplinary multimedia artist and curator based in Pretoria. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City, and his Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Pretoria, where he currently works as a lecturer.

Olivia Loots is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the research programme at the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD) at Nelson Mandela University. Her transdisciplinary research focuses on new materialist readings of the intersection between social and environmental justice in South Africa. Under the supervision of Dr Bibi Burger and Prof Lize Kriel, Olivia received her doctorate in visual studies, 'Stuff matters and moves: Analysing environmental consciousness and memory objects through a new materialist lens', in 2022 from the University of Pretoria, where she also completed her undergraduate studies. As a graphic designer, Olivia has done work for various South African universities and other entities.

Matthew McClure is a doctoral candidate within the Faculty of Health Sciences Education at Wits University. He is currently working on surfacing histories related to the Alexandra Health Centre during South Africa's transition to democracy. Matthew has a deep interest in South African museums and the ability of artistic and creative praxis to contribute to the meaningful transformation of museum spaces through the creation of teaching and learning resources. He is currently engaged in a trans and interdisciplinary partnership in the burgeoning field of medical and health humanities with the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, the University of Johannesburg and Wits University. He also works at the Adler Museum of Medicine at the Wits Faculty of Health Sciences to re-contextualise their collection of medical materials through research and exhibition-making.

Motsane Getrude Seabela is currently the curator of Anthropology at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Before that, she worked as a project officer at the University of Witwatersrand, Rock Art Research Institute. She received her Bachelor of Arts in social sciences from the University of Limpopo, a Bachelor of Arts Honours in anthropology from the University of South Africa, a Postgraduate Diploma in heritage and museum studies and Master of Social Sciences in heritage and museums studies (cum laude) from the University of Pretoria. Motsane Gertrude has a keen interest in oral histories, heritage and museums and researches the muted voices, the issues of representation, erasures, memory and memorialisation and decolonisation of museums. Her recent publications are on the Sammy Marks Museum, a site under the Ditsong Museums of South Africa.

Jessica Webster currently holds a postdoctoral position at Stellenbosch University and is a communications strategist with the social and environmental NGO, Water for the Future. Coming from a long-term professional practice in contemporary painting, Jessica has keenly observed the evolution of threats that already cause intense suffering to South Africa's disadvantaged majority and natural ecologies. Her critical writing and action research projects are engaged with the poetics of agency in the face of climate change and trauma – informing her contribution to the local decolonisation of the historical and cultural landscape.

Jill Weintroub is an honorary research associate at the Origins Centre. In that role, she has contributed to the exhibition 'Navigating the past through glass beads: Global trade in southern and eastern Africa' (2021), which displayed items from the university's archaeological bead collections. She is presently working on an exhibition provisionally titled 'Exhibiting the Archives of Empire: Johannesburg 1936', which revisits the world's exhibition mounted in Johannesburg to coincide with the city's 50th jubilee in that year. Jill's biography, D*orothea Bleek, A Life of Scholarship*, drawing on research conducted for her doctorate in history (University of the Western Cape, 2011), was published in 2016. Prior to her current interests in the politics of museums and collections, and the poetics of display, she researched the making of the Bleek and Lloyd collection for her MPhil at the University of Cape Town (2006).

Justine Wintjes is an archaeologist, art historian and occasional artist. She works as a curator in the Department of Human Sciences at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum and is a research associate of Wits University. Her interests include historical material culture in southern Africa, intersections between art and archaeology, and art and science more generally. Her work is strongly object-based and often delves into the 'biographies' of things. She also has a particular interest in human-plant relationships. She holds a degree in fine art from La Cambre in Brussels, for which she created installations of ceramic, botanical and photographic objects dealing with plant domestication and museum collections. She subsequently obtained a Master of Archaeological Science at Leiden University for an archaeo-botanical analysis of an Iron Age site in the Netherlands. Her doctorate at Wits examined the role of copies in the production of rock art knowledge in southern Africa, from eighteenth century hand-drawn examples through to the digital era.

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Chapter 01

Threads Between Photographs as Image Objects in Collections and Photographic Images of Collecting

Lize Kriel

This publication and accompanying exhibition are key outcomes of Laura de Harde's project, *Inherited Obsessions* (2022). De Harde developed the project in response to what the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (hereafter NIHSS) identified as shortcomings in post-colonial forms of thinking about heritage and scholarship. She conceptualised the project as a collaboration with the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (hereafter DNMCH), working with Motsane Gertrude Seabela, Anthropology Collections Curator, to revisit the museum's collections in ways that address and challenge what can sometimes be presumptive and lasting cultural stereotypes. The chapters in this publication are the result of research and creative work conducted as part of, or in conversation with, the *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) project, which centres on the following themes: objects of culture, collection, conservation, memory, and commemoration. Hosted by the DNMCH in Pretoria and opening on Saturday, 24 September 2022, the curators want the exhibition to invite contemplation about the nation's heritage and the collective consciousness of South African communities and society at large. However, the politics of the personal and the multiple collectives we associate with as individuals are also at play: the ties that bind us by birth, profession, age, conviction, obligation, association, and discrimination.

Photographs as *Objects with Stories* (2022)

De Harde's art exhibition, co-curated by museologist Seabela, coincides with a cultural-historical exhibition on the same floor of the DNMCH museum, titled *Objects with Stories* (2022). In this exhibition, adjacent to a display of cameras from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, visitors are offered a view of a selection of photographs from the museum's collections. As the medium demanded subjects to 'hold still' in the early days of analogue photographic technology, the people in the older photographs were captured while 'posing' whilst going about their daily activities. Obviously, this selection of photographs in the exhibition represents the more interesting photographic images from the museum's extensive collection. Although the people depicted are not identified by name, their actions and interactions are considered informative and educational for a present-day audience in revealing something about the diversity of South African society.

As viewers, we know what the power relations and the racial hierarchies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were. Especially in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century images, we can guess that persons of colour would most probably have been 'curated' by a white photographer. Regarding the selected photographs, one gets the impression that the actors, albeit colonial subjects, were not taking on their parts altogether unwillingly. A striking example is a photograph taken in Pretoria in the 1890s, apparently to advertise the signwriting and interior decorating business of Van Bommel and Schürmann (Figure 1.1). The tools, equipment, and some examples of their products (a painting of a Dutch windmill prominently displayed on an easel) are arranged around a vast billboard on which line-drawn, chubby, naked angels with palettes are at work. In the foreground of the photograph, amongst the ladder, easel, tins, and brushes arranged around the billboard, a seated African man leans in on his right forearm and looks straight into the camera. There is a mysterious confidence in him. From the early twentieth century, another image presents street vendors posing with their basketsful of wares, two balancing these baskets on their heads. From the same period there are several images of African women posing whilst doing domestic work: washing clothes, carrying water, fetching wood, and grinding maize (Figure 1.2). The latter photographs may have been labelled as 'ethnographic' in a different context. Still, it seems as if the curators were deliberately scrambling such categorisations to focus on the diversity of activities these early photographs depicted.

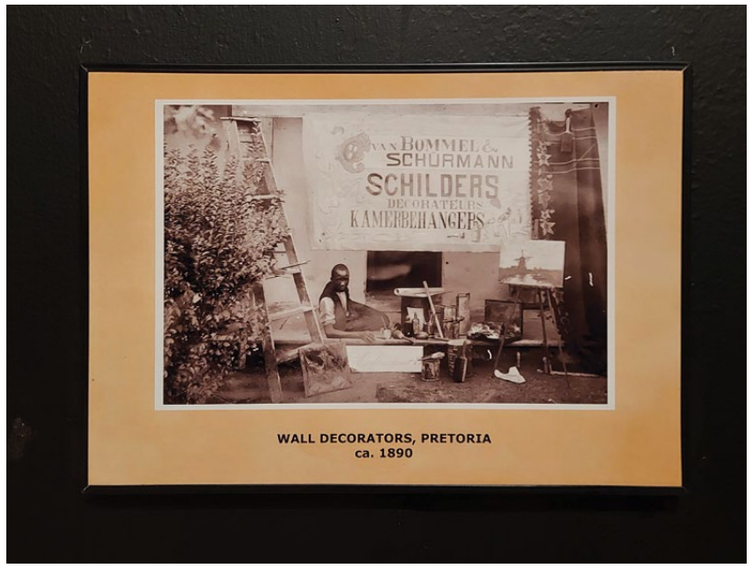

Figure 1.1.
A photograph from the DNMCH collection as reproduced for the *Objects with Stories* exhibition. It features the services of the Van Bommel and Schürmann decorating business and was taken in Pretoria in the 1890s. Photograph by Laura de Harde, 2022.

The photographs selected for *Objects with Stories* (2022) could be and probably are arranged in such a manner as to elicit all kinds of questions, such as the gendered and racialised properties of work, and about who and what had been left out in the quest to represent as wide a range of activities as possible. A national museum's inheritances and acquisitions are meant to be taken as the nation's collective memory. Young democratic South Africa inherited her institutions after more than a century of white supremacist collecting. Inevitably, many past obsessions continue to loom over the collections and memories of previous displays, demanding intervention and mediation in the collective consciousness. The DNMCH collections entail, so to speak, an incomplete heritage, fragments of remainders from a much more extensive human experience. But as the photographs in the *Objects with Stories* (2022) exhibition suggest, remainders have connotations that extend much further than the objects' image or material presence. A nation's memory is locked into objects that relate to past individuals' being human: their joys, their agony, their pride, their envy, their triumph, their resignation, their deprivation, and their resilience.

Inherited Obsessions **(2022)**

Adjacent to the cultural-historical *Objects with Stories* (2022) exhibition, the art exhibition, *Inherited Obsessions* (2022), features De Harde's works in ink and thread on various surfaces. These artworks resemble portraits of individuals, but unlike photographs that capture a single instant in time, the artist had made the markings on the paper surfaces run and fade in layers. In many works, it seems as if repeated attempts were made to wash away and rework the sitters' faces, over and over—obsessively, as if this ritual might have helped to rekindle the essence, the substance, of those human beings irrevocably no longer there. Ornately embroidered veils of stitching pierce the remainders of the ink layers that had repeatedly been applied and washed away. In some of the works, the paintings appear like disintegrating photographs, held together merely by the threads going through the unravelling surface. Most of the artworks seem to be translations of old photographs. The sitters resemble the diversity of South African colonial society, somewhat like the photographs selected for *Objects with Stories* (2022). However, De Harde does not attempt to represent the sitters through their *actions*; she focuses primarily on their faces, seeking in their gaze some reassurance about their agency; trying to

recover their personhood in their eyes and their features, drawing the viewer into wrestling with questions such as who the sitter may have been and under what circumstances a photographer must have tried to capture their likeness. Hence the artist's obsessive attempts to reach the sitters' elusive humanity through washing and reconfiguring, as if the repeated action might implore their spirits to resurface. As such, the artwork is the remainder of the labour of sense-making, the residue of a ritual. (See Chapter 4, in which Teboho Lebakeng will contemplate his art and allude to the possibility that De Harde's work might be interpreted this way.)

In the works described above, De Harde engages the DNMCH's exhibition strategies and the challenges of living with its colonial legacies—aspects which Matthew McClure and Motsane Gertrude Seabela will elaborate on in Chapters 2 and 3. However, when moving to the objects in *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) that are more personally related to the artist, there is a change in approach and feeling, even though the media she works in remain the same. The portrait of the artist's mother (Figure 1.3) is presented in the same disintegrating state as some of De Harde's renderings of colonial photographs. This tricks the viewer's notion of time passing—the inexorable certainty that the future will bring the fraying of her own mother's legacy is painful in a different way than the historical truth of the museum's inability to do justice to the memory of all the persons represented in the photographic image objects preserved in its cold storerooms, not to mention the many others of whom the museum has no record whatsoever. No amount of collecting can adequately account for a nation, and even less so for the whole of humanity's experience of being human. Neither can collecting atone for a single human being's sense of inevitable loss. (Jessica Webster in Chapter 5 will address this aspect.) However, within the moment of experiencing the exhibition, the artist's mother is present through the aura of her artwork. Amongst De Harde's ghost and spirit portraits, her mother's quilt work (referred to in Chapter 9) enchants the viewer as objects of exquisite beauty. Tilly de Harde's quilts compel the viewer to utter: 'these belong in a museum' because as much as it tells of a mother's labour of love gifted to her children, the beauty, the exceptionality, and the exquisiteness are almost too much for the realm of the personal. Museums have a connotation with safekeeping, preserving, prolonging an object's life and enduring its legacy. Justine Wintjes

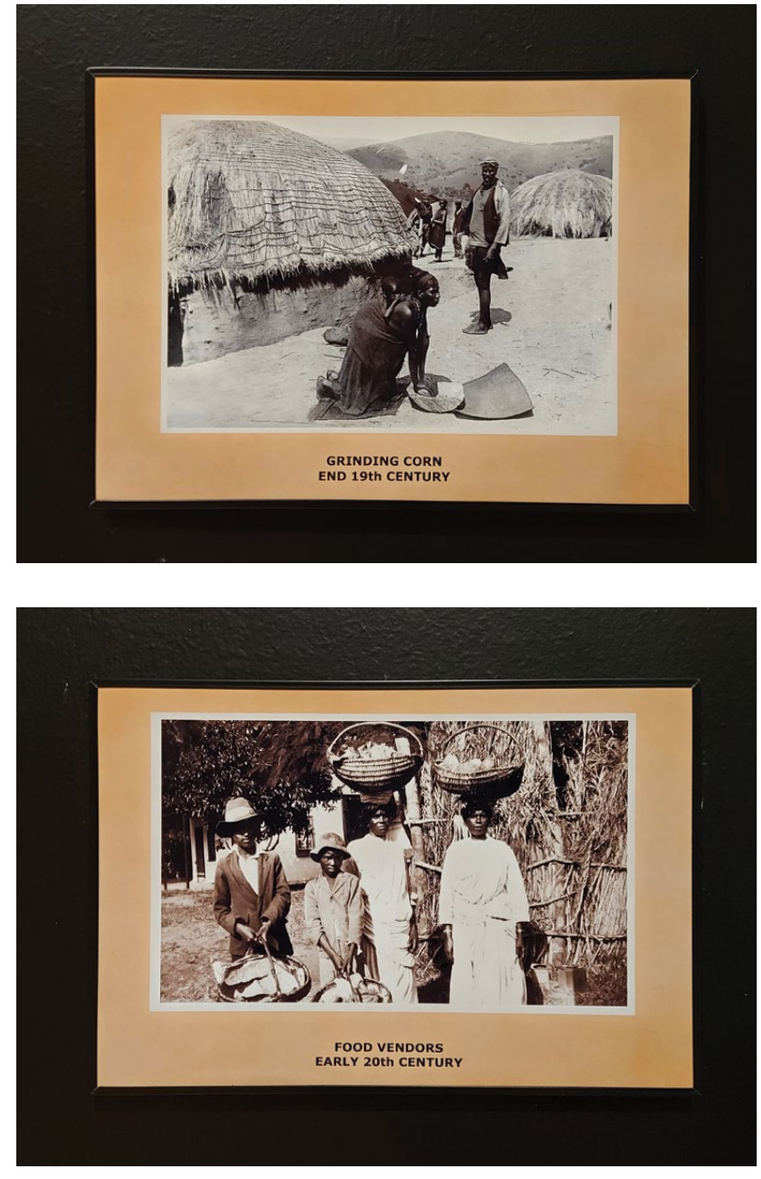

Figure 1.2.
Reproductions of photographs from the early twentieth century featured in the *Objects with Stories* exhibition at DNMCH. Photographs by Laura de Harde, 2022.

Figure 1.3.
A study of the artist's mother by Laura de Harde, 2022. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

will eloquently argue this point in Chapter 8 with her discussion of the gourd Magema Fuze donated to the Natal Government Museum (today KwaZulu-Natal Museum) in 1904.

De Harde's work invites one to think about inheritances, whether embraced, denied, or contested. It wants us to face the world of objects, collectively and individually: what to keep and what to discard (a question that will be contemplated in Chapter 7 by Olivia Loots): what to value, how to cherish, how to preserve, and whom to entrust with conservation (see Jill Weintraub's contribution in Chapter 6 in this regard). It challenges us to consider how one generation's pride, or obligation, can become an embarrassment, or a burden, to the next—and yet: how we are inclined to lament what has been lost. 'Obsessions' in the exhibition title relates as much to the practice of collecting as to finding meaning in the collected. The tension between individuals' challenges to store and curate their possessions and the delegation of that responsibility to institutions such as museums and archives runs through De Harde's exhibition and the chapters in this publication. Somehow considerations about the 'whether', the 'why', and the 'how' of 'getting', 'having' and 'keeping' cannot be boxed neatly into either the affective or the rational.

In the introduction to his study on German ethnographic museums, historian Glenn Penny (2002:1) states that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, German ethnologists were at the forefront of a scientific approach to the acquisition, ordering, studying, and displaying of objects from all around the world in their quest for a cosmopolitan, Humboldtian understanding of humanity. At the apex of their rational approach came their resignation—they 'found that they had reached the limits of their empiricism, and they encouraged a younger generation to abandon the project'. Penny (2002:13) also describes museum visitors' often counter-scientific expectations when entering the exhibition space as a penchant for the spectacular and the amazing. All the empiricism in the world cannot supersede this human inclination to be enchanted. Is it not because affect is the spark that begins the urge to collect? Art critic Mari Shaw explains that she—and others inflicted by what they acknowledge as the 'ignoble' practice of collecting—buy what they love 'which is often work we do not understand' (Shaw 2017:4). Objects have a propensity to invoke fascination, curiosity, and a sense of wonderment.[1]

This is what objects do. They engage us. They entice us. They make us obsessive. And this appeal of the object precedes, sustains, and will transcend museum science. We rely on museums to be the responsible custodians of the labour that objects impose on humans, namely that of collecting. As collecting surpasses the lifetime of a single human being, objects of value are bequeathed, passed on, and handed down. Art collectors Mari and Peter Shaw earmark their art acquisitions as bequests to museums (Shaw 2017:2–3)—forward-dating, so-to-speak, their private obsessions as future public inheritances. As problematic as some inheritances are to the museum institutions of the post-apartheid South African nation, the museum still has the responsibility to broaden understanding and the capacity to facilitate the public admiration of objects of value. Penny (2002:51) quotes Georg Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) to explain: 'We call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them.'

Collections of photographs

Worldwide, including on the African continent, the scholarly engagement with historical collections of photographs of Africans is receiving increasing interest as objects of value. Summarising the situation in 2012 and referring to, amongst other trends, the role of indigenous agency in shaping ethnographic photography, Richard Vokes (2012:23–24) predicted: 'our current narratives about the emergence and spread of photography in Africa—and about the ongoing place of historical photographic images in various types of "memory work"—will doubtless become significantly more refined'. Kiyara Ananmalay's (2017:10–14) study on the 'field practices of writing and photography' by the Frobenius expedition to Natal (today KwaZulu-Natal Province) in 1929 is an excellent example of such research. She refers to the 'traces of social histories contained within, or tangential to' the photographs taken during the exhibition. We should keep in mind, Ananmalay (2017:14) argues, that 'the Frobenius team recorded a range of expressions of a particular way of living which included both oral histories and material culture, resulting that the team interacted with various people they met along the way'. Most photographs end up in collections with far less contextualising information than the ones in the Frobenius Archive, but Ananmalay's foregrounding of this particular situatedness will be helpful to inform and sensitise our imagination when engaging with 'ethnographic' photographic objects where the backstories are less forthcoming.

[1] Even if the conqueror loots an object from the vanquished, which he finds repulsive rather than fascinating, there is still a thrill, however perverse, in the taking of the spoils. (Edward Said referred to these pleasures of imperialism in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993:111, 123, 132–61)).

The possibility of digitising images and making them available online is a far-reaching dimension of research projects involving photographic collections, especially as it enables new ways of studying a series of resources and undertaking broader comparative work. One such example is the International Mission Photography Archive (IMPA), a digital hub from where the photographic collections of dozens of missionary societies stationed in Africa (and other parts of the world) during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be accessed. The possibility to pair similar and juxtapose contrasting images from different missionary societies working in different parts of the African continent, of course, also comes with the responsibility not to detach these images from the archival documents that might explain the conditions under which these photographs were taken, reproduced, and circulated. Such detachments might, sadly, perpetuate the act of alienating the memory of the people and objects from the situation in which the camera had captured them.

Strangely, the possibility of digitising photographs refocused the attention of historians and artists alike on the presence of analogue photography in museums as image objects (Vokes 2012:23). Similarly, the labour of digitising historical records foregrounded the life of the text, or document, as an *object* in archival repositories. Maureen de Jager's creative work *History [TBC]: refocusing the South African War* (2019), in which she inventively photographed aspects of historical documents (such as the holes made in papers to bind together the reports written on them), draws attention to what she refers to as 'the blind spots in history' and thus she grapples with her own 'ambivalent "inheritance" as an "anglicised Afrikaner"'. De Harde undertakes the artistic work for collections of South African photographic image objects that De Jager is doing for archived documents as objects. To contextualise this notion, this chapter proposes some possible contributions which artistic unsettling (of the kind De Harde's work elicits) can make to cultural and historical interpretations of photographic collections and the image and text they display.

Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer's edited volumes *Tribing and Untribing the Archive* (2016) did a lot of work to bring museum collections into the ambit of the South African archival heritage and to emphasise the backstories of objects and the collections they find themselves in, as well as the 'public lives' they have led as part of exhibitions and publications. This should be considered when tracing their changing meaning and significance over time. The potency and elusiveness of historical photographic image objects in museum collections, as on display in the *Objects with Stories* (2022) exhibition coinciding with *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) at the DNMCH, receive attention in several of the contributions in *Tribing and Untribing* (2016). Hlonipha Mokoena (2016:526–45) discusses late nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs depicting the peculiar colonial practice of collecting photographs of African policemen in the service of the British colonial administration. She found such photographs in studio archives and family albums, with reproductions featuring in ethnographic monographs and on postcards. Her essay also addresses the colonial practice of collecting Zulu knobkieries, such as the ones displayed in the photographs she discusses. Elaborating on this point, Mokoena discusses how linguist and anthropologist Nicolaas van Warmelo, appointed Government Ethnologist in 1930, not only took photographs of African policemen carrying knobkieries but also collected the artefacts themselves (Mokoena 2016:540).

In their contribution to *Tribing and Untribing* (2016), Sara Byala and Ann Wanless discuss the Clem Webb collection of Zulu regalia. They also feature a photograph from the 1880s depicting the collector dressed up in his acquisitions. Byala and Wanless (2016:549–50) use Major Webb's collection to illustrate that '[a]s a way of both gathering and categorising knowledge, collecting was as much about colonial control as it was about colonial curiosity. As such, collecting and colonialism compelled each other.' The authors use a quote from Tom Griffith's (1996:17) book to add a dimension that was not at play for the collectors who returned to Europe but which lay at the heart of the hierarchical diversity of colonial society itself: 'Collecting was … a "respectable" form of hunting for late nineteenth-century gentlemen, a pursuit that was guided by a colonial need to become local.' In contrast to Major Webb's authoritative affirmation of his local 'belonging' through the comprehensiveness of his collection, the photographs Mokoena selected for discussion depict two 'native policemen' in varying, 'incomplete' stages of appropriating objects of European apparel and on both occasions their weapon, the knobkierie, continues to signify their 'Zuluness'.

Sartorial collecting

Mokoena's discussion focuses on the role and meaning of knobkieries in photographs. The argument centres on the other sartorial markers

of the African policemen's inferiority through the colonial gaze. In the first photograph, taken in a studio, a standing African policeman poses next to a seated white policeman. Their uniforms are neatly arranged for the picture, but the shoes on the black policeman's feet are conspicuously absent. In the second photograph of a Zulu policeman scrutinised by Mokoena in her investigation into knobkieries, the description of the man's dress reveals even more elements of 'incompleteness' than a lack of shoes (Figure 1.4). Mokoena (2016:541) describes it as follows:

> Although he is wearing thongs on his feet—unlike the barefoot constable—his uniform is an unexpected combination of formality and informality, as well as Western and indigenous items. Thus, he is wearing both his shirt and jacket unbuttoned, which suggests that he did not 'prepare' for this photo to be taken and was caught in a spontaneous moment. The top half of his body stands in sharp contrast to the bottom; his thongs and *isinene* (the tassled front piece) are 'traditional' dress. The fact that his hands and arms are also carrying items further adds to this confusion. [...] His gaze seems to be fixed on the horizon rather than on the photographer who is taking the picture, and this belies his slightly dishevelled comportment; it is as if his stiff and upright pose with all his weapons and personal effects neatly arranged is to compensate for the fact that he is not 'properly' dressed.

The photograph described here is part of the collection of the long-serving twentieth century state ethnologist Nicolaas van Warmelo. Observations such as 'unexpected combinations', 'confusion', and 'dishevelled comportment' indicate some resemblance to the following description from a missionary's diary dating from 1895, in which Christoph Sonntag describes Hananwa women having escaped from indentured labour on Boer farms in what was then the Transvaal.[2] Another correlation, besides the fact that the observers concur that the performers were not wearing their costumes 'correctly', is their agreement that the Africans were finding the objects of Western apparel desirable: the Zulu policeman used them to affirm his authority among fellow Zulu people, and the Hananwa women proudly showed off their trophies to their families and friends. Missionary Sonntag did not take a photograph or leave any other graphic image of what he had observed. Still, the following is the verbal image[3] he conjured up in writing—as translated into English by his grandson:

> A number of the women and the older girls who had returned, already carried signs of their attempts to emulate the representatives of the new civilisation. Some of them had been overjoyed by their mistress with the remains of a modern jacket. Others had acquired a huge discarded bonnet, others again had been put by their mistress into a most-respectable blue-print [isiShweshwe] dress. If the good women who had bestowed these gifts on them had hoped thereby to shackle their servants to their kitchens, they were very much disappointed.
>
> On the Sunday that the escapees came to church, the owners of these articles of clothing paid us a visit and flaunted their latest acquisitions. The twists and turns, the waltzing motions and the revolutions these ladies performed in the costumes to which they were by no means accustomed yet, defied description (Sonntag 1983:149).

Perhaps, for a moment, we should consider the danger of conflating scholarly observations about an African sartorial 'incompleteness' in colonial images with the colonial gaze itself. The colonial gaze entails a way of looking that persists in the expectation that the complete and comprehensive mimicry of the Western master is the norm and that anything less merely amounts to 'playing' at being civilised, an affirmation that there is something 'lacking' in being African. Through the colonial gaze, Zulu men wearing police uniforms without shoes, for example, are infantilised (Mokoena's word choice (2016:528)). This might have been the intention of colonial authorities, who refused to issue black policemen with shoes. However, infantilisation is not a satisfactory explanation for the bare feet of numerous African Christians photographed in Western attire in the late 19th century (Vosseler 2022:306) or of the Hananwa ruler in a photograph taken at his royal abode as late as 1939 (Figure 1.5). The researcher should make provision for other possible ways of interpreting African appropriation of apparel objects besides a colonial way of seeing the African as not (yet) completely 'civilised' owing to unconvincing copying of European dress.

When we remind ourselves of two central themes in the *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) project—objects and collecting—it may be

[2] Now-retired DNMCH curator Johnny van Schalkwyk (1995:100–101) referred to this quotation from the Sonntag diary in his doctoral thesis. [3] With reference to WJT Mitchell's genealogy of images as graphic, optical, perceptual, mental, or verbal (2006:196–99).

Figure 1.4.
Image of 'Zulu Policeman on patrol, Nocombotshe, Msinga'. Photograph taken by Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo, date unknown. Courtesy of Van Warmelo Collection, University of Johannesburg. https://hdl.handle.net/10210/2051 (accessed 1 September 2022).

worthwhile to consider the following alternative: Two decades ago, Antoinette Burton's book *Dwelling in the Archive* (2003:141) appealed to researchers to look differently at those persons who are the most likely to be considered the historical subjects of colonial archives. She encouraged us to see them as possible creators of historical collections in their own right.[4] All the images discussed in the previous paragraphs carry evidence of this notion. In clear view of these photographic objects collected by colonial agents and acquired by colonial museums are images depicting indigenous Africans as the collectors of European objects: jackets, coats, and hats. And in accumulating such new and curious things, the African collectors we see in these photographs did not necessarily abandon local items which were convenient and familiar to them. We must also consider that, although they were colonial subjects, there may have been circumstances under which Africans could exercise a right to choose what appealed to them, or to adjust the expected appearance as a means of subverting authority.

What might be deplored through the colonial gaze as the incompleteness of the colonial subject may be reconsidered through a decolonial lens as an altogether different configuration in which incompleteness 'is the normal order of things [...] Things, words, deeds, and beings are always incomplete, not because of absences, but because of their possibilities,' anthropologist Francis Nyamjoh (2017:253–56) argues. Compositeness, he continues, is a far more reasonable and practicable condition of being human than the myth of completeness. Throughout their lives, in encounters with other human beings, people continue to make and remake themselves by combining, discarding, and taking over different technologies, practices and appearances from others. Said introduced what may have been an allusion to compositeness when he stated that 'the history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowings' (Said 1993:7). There is more to Nyamjoh's notion of compositeness than *bricolage. Bricolage* implies 'making do' with remainders; compositeness implies making up with what one likes. In Chapter 4, Teboho Lebakeng reflects on his artistic practice as a means of doing just that. As in De Harde's work, Lebakeng's art involves fabric, and ritualistic repetition, working with the personal inheritance of collective obsessions.

Why was De Harde drawn to stitching and Lebakeng to fabric in their artistic practice? Could it be because fabric and dress enable such an embodied, personal form of collecting, of composing the

[4] Stephan Miescher (2007:131–45) applied Burton's work, which focused on Indian women, to an African context in an article on Ghanaian *akrakyefoo* indigenisation of collecting, archiving, exhibiting, and memorialising in domestic settings.

self—as we have seen in the images of black policemen and Hananwa women who had liberated themselves from Boer farms? For museum curators, fabric is a challenging medium. At the DNMCH, curator Annemarie Carelsen and her team preserve historical apparel with gentle precision. They discourage the prolonged exhibition of objects containing fabric to counter the deterioration process. In personal possession, however, clothing is frequently displayed, and wear and tear is inevitable. Ironically, the photographic images of colonial subjects displaying their collections of dress items withstood the test of time far better than the material objects themselves. Photographs seem the best evidence today that African colonial subjects were collectors of Western attire.

Robert Ross (2008:7) concurs and argues that dress is a language, which says: 'This is who I am, and this is what I am doing'. He adds that it is also a language that can easily be misunderstood. What colonial overseers laughed and sneered at and what they saw as their colonial subjects' odd sartorial combinations of random parts into incomplete appearances may be reconsidered from the opposite perspective. Africans in colonial societies were also interested in collecting strange new objects (dare one say, Western curiosities) for the curation of their personal appearance. This was not necessarily always performed as an obligation to conform to what was perceived as the Western norm. Africans were more than capable of mimicking European dress codes to the button and the shoe buckle, but every photograph in which this is not the case need not be read as an example of sartorial failure. Steeve Buckridge (2004:78) explains it well:

> The significance of dress in colonial society provided possibilities for resistance, because the semiotic process was never fully controlled by the ruling elite. As a result, dress and the body, as signifiers of contrasting and complex meanings, enabled oppressed people (including slaves) to symbolically and covertly resist, to make satirical and politically subversive statements about their identities in relation to the dominant power. Dress and the body could thus be deliberately manipulated in an effort to alter social representation and relations of power. As such, they became persuasive agents of movement towards a moral ethic that would guarantee freedom, if not completely, at least temporarily.

Figure 1.5.
Kgaluši Sekete Mmalebôhô, the ruler of the Hananwa people of Blouberg from c.1880–1939, was photographed by a visitor to the royal household shortly before his death. Transvaal Archives Repository 26079. Courtesy of the National Archives of South Africa Photographic Collection.

This explanation by Buckridge helps one understand De Harde's intuitive reach for stitching and the use of fabric in her artistic endeavour to *will* a sense of being, of mattering, but also an acknowledgement of vulnerability, into the faces of colonial subjects captured and preserved in photographic objects in museum collections. This chapter focused on the possibilities of finding African agency within colonial photographs by probing into practices and objects of culture visible in these selected photographs. In her artistic pursuit, De Harde keeps engaging with people's faces, reworking them as she continues to seek what those eyes could have seen, contemplate what they might have looked at, and ask if those past lives might be acknowledged through memory.

***

The creative work and research presented in this project are interwoven in a fabric of connections and collaborations, which can be described in different textures of patronage, collegiality, and friendship. I would like to think of it as a collective (Mühling 2022) within a broader field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). From within the collective, I would like to extend my appreciation and recognition to all who contributed to this production, in which art, history, literature, anthropology, and archaeology converged. But there was also the patient indulgence of colleagues, parents, and partners. Babies were born, a girl child became a teenager, some loved ones had joined the realm of the ancestors, and a dog and a few kittens were adopted.

For me, it all started with the artwork produced by Sikho Siyotula for her final year exhibition at the University of Pretoria, which sparked conversations about remainders from the precolonial in our world today. This became a leading motive in Siyotula's doctoral project that took her to Potsdam, and Anja Schwarz and Lars Eckstein with their Minor Cosmopolitanisms Research Training Group. Siyotula's work does not form part of this publication. Still, I am indebted to her for the notion of 'remainders', which added some spring to my wanderings (with cultural-historical trainers on my feet) within the maze of missionary archives. What I was hoping to learn from the image-text-objects in these archives regarding African-European interaction unfurled into the oxymoron of Christian missionary fascination with the African cosmology they had come to (try and) overturn. I also endearingly think of what I have learnt in this regard from Adam Jones, who opened my eyes to photographs as historical sources, and Annekie Joubert, who was a pioneer in linking African oral art and visual culture studies.

Annekie and I (and a few missionary history cronies from previous collaborations) are indebted to Laura de Harde and Sikho Siyotula for the further funding which followed from a proposal into which their work on remainders and attempts to copy and translate them culturally could be incorporated. De Harde had sharpened her tools in Justine Wintjes's research team at the University of the Witwatersrand and carried them with her when she came to Pretoria as a postdoctoral fellow sponsored by the NIHSS. She was taking the NIHSS up on their call for 'the necessary work of creating post-apartheid forms of thinking, of heritage and scholarship' by researching and disseminating the findings that can counter enduring, reductive cultural stereotypes (NIHSS homepage: about us).

We came up with the idea to work not only with WJT Mitchell's genealogy of images (2006) but also with his delectable concept of the image-text and image/text (Mitchell 1994). However, the subject matter we were spending so much time on in archive and museum vaults, at heritage sites, and (the artists) in studios, made us decide to twist the concept further: The notion of 'image-text-objects' would serve our focus on the materiality of remainders that could be studied in pursuit of African traditions of knowledge—on Francis Nyamjoh's (2017:255) recommendation, *not* 'traditional knowledge', as that implies fixity and forecloses possibilities for innovation and adjustment. At the DNMCH, De Harde found a like-minded partner in Seabela for just that: innovation and adjustment. It is gratifying that the DNMCH's long-standing openness towards the education of the students at the University of Pretoria School of the Arts can be acknowledged through the collaboration of an artist and a museum curator in *Inherited Obsessions* (2022).

I cannot help but think of Johnny van Schalkwyk, Isabel Hofmeyr and Carolyn Hamilton as 'living-intellectual-future-ancestors' of much with which we are busying ourselves. Our publication is also breathing in the inspiration generated over the past few years in the making (and now utilising) of the book *Archives from Times Past* (2022), edited by Cynthia Kros, John Wright, Mbongiseni Buthelezi and Helen Ludlow. The NIHSS also generously sponsored that project. I remind myself of what Penny (2012:282) had taught me many years ago, that 'form follows funding', and I realise how lucky we have been.

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Chapter **02**

Dis/Tending the Museum: Archival Intervention and Disruption at The Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History

Matthew McClure

The Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (hereafter DNMCH) sits on Visagie Street, on the edge of the Pretoria Central Business District, nestled between Post-Modernist South African apartment buildings in varying states of repair and decay. The museum's iconic convex roof juts through umbrellas of jacaranda trees shedding winter leaves. On my first visit there, I cannot help but wonder if the people living and working in the city, hurrying back and forth between work and family commitments on the pavements outside the museum's high fences, have any idea of what goes on inside this looming structure. Similarly to other state-owned museums in South Africa, the DNMCH carries a heavy historical legacy, which is being navigated through interactions and partnerships with creative practitioners from fields outside of traditional museological and curatorial practice. This chapter aims to explore how one of these interactions, stewarded by Motsane Gertrude Seabela (curator of the anthropological collection) and Laura de Harde (a postdoctoral fellow at the NIHSS, University of Pretoria), is starting to prod and poke at the history of the museum, and explore the lives of objects within its collection of anthropological materials that carry connotations of value, heritage, conservation and nationhood as they lie encased within the museum's storerooms.

I will confess that the title of this book, to which I was invited to contribute, is what initially lured me in. *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) and the ideas that begin to crystallise around these words speak to my own professional and academic research interests regarding museum practice, curating and object research. What do we, as curators, stewards, custodians and facilitators of collections, *inherit* when we move in and out of museum spaces in Southern Africa? How do historical, social and cultural legacies, *inheritances*, *obsessions* and ideas of heritage, value, nation, and conservation haunt us long after the progenitors of these ideas are confined to the history books? What do we as artists and academics do with the heavy bags that the originators of these ideas and *obsessions* leave at our doors? What materials do we choose to work with, and why? These questions provide the framework for De Harde's intervention within the archives of the DNMCH's anthropological collection. She draws her creative inspiration from 'a quieter scholarship' (De Harde 2019:22) within contested archives and museum spaces in Southern Africa. The DNMCH, like many of its contemporaries, is an example of a layered and contested space that provides many opportunities in this regard. In order to gain a valuable perspective on the historical context of this institution, it is helpful to reference an article penned by Johnny van Schalkwyk, the then curator of the anthropology and archaeology collections, in the *de arte* journal in the year 2000, written at a particularly interesting time in South African history (Van Schalkwyk 2000:83–91).

Van Schalkwyk's writing reveals a museum subjected to the harsh light of critical, reflexive, academic examination in the context of the newly formed 'rainbow nation'; a country just starting to form a cohesive narrative of national identity on the back of a new democratic political dispensation and a fractious past. While instructive purely in this regard, Van Schalkwyk's article also refers to the problematic foundations of his collections. He writes that it was only in 1964 that the museum split its natural history and cultural history collections; before that, since the museum's foundation at the end of the nineteenth century, material objects related to *nature* and *culture* were lumped into one homogenous mass, collected on a whim and by personal taste and choice by natural scientists, entomologists and reverends of the church (Van Schalkwyk 2000:83). That these objects were historically treated as casual commodities, even to be classified and traded outside of any frame of contextual relevance (Van Schalkwyk 2000:84–85), is evident from Van Schalkwyk's brief history, but what is also clear is how material cultural objects such as smoking pipes, food baskets and weapons were classified in the same category as natural science materials such

as rocks, plant specimens and insect fossils. This blunt conflation in collection and accession strategy hints at the overtly racist tendencies forming the foundations of many similar museums. These strategies are intimately connected to the very essence of historical, colonial museological practice where objects, through the carefully controlled specificities of collection, accession and display for *consumption,* are transformed and stripped of their original significances to suit the objectives and motivations of the collectors (Lentz 2007:24–25).

Of course, much time has passed at the museum since Van Schalkwyk's tenure. Seabela, appointed as curator of the museum's anthropological collection in January 2014, is aware of these dialogues and historical contexts and is actively engaged in pilot projects related to the collections she curates to expand their reference and relevance through inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary collaborations. That the successes of museums have conventionally relied heavily upon, and been measured by, ideas of an *archive*; of valuable objects and materials encoded and stored within unassailable vaults, impervious and resistant to ingress or contamination, makes the work that she is undertaking all the more important. Interferences into these banks of knowledge (repositories that are safely categorised, easily understood and clearly catalogued) are not always met with happy welcomes. This is because these vaults of knowledge have deep roots connected to ancient legacies of mythological, hallowed civilisations; whose ontologies and identity were captured within these deified spaces as a historical database from which a select group of people could draw a kind of special legitimating power (Butler 2016:31–69). Thus, museums have traditionally had deep investments in maintaining the status quo, lending legitimacy to governments and administrations. This makes archival ingresses such as Laura de Harde's NIHSS Fellowship critical within a South African academic de-colonised context. Seabela is, as custodian of the DNMCH's anthropological collections, committed to these acts of ingress. She is also currently working on a transnational curatorial project with Njabulo Chipangura, curator of Living Cultures at the University of Manchester's Manchester Museum, in a collaborative effort to re-contextualise beadwork in their collections through the methodology of source community interaction.

Readers of this publication will be familiar with the volumes of academic literature (see, for example, Hamilton & Leibhammer 2016) on the politically charged and essentially artificial dichotomies and teleologies of classification and display in museums that hold collections that have been historically classified as ethnographic or anthropological. The history of these museums and their collections (the narratives of which are in many ways similar to that outlined by Van Schalkwyk) are important to understand in relation to the archival interventions and interactions with collections and objects *living* in these spaces that De Harde as a fine artist and Seabela as a curator are engaged in, and which forms the topic of this volume. Museums such as the DNMCH are grappling with and teasing out their historical complicity in pedagogical reinforcements of concepts related to *nation*, *nationhood*, *archive* and *heritage*, as briefly sketched above. Historically, museums such as these, which played a role in defining identities and building knowledges through these collection and exhibition strategies, find themselves stuck within historical, social and cultural lacunas. The exhibitions and objects within these spaces float in a vacuum. They exist within a strange, detached non-place outside of contemporaneity. Upon these plinths and in these glass vitrines, the dust of ages past accumulates on objects being displayed. Administrative frameworks actively prevent agitation through the rigid exhibition and display strategies that have been decided upon by a governing body, state department or curator. Each of these stakeholders also carry their own motivations and desires for legacies that live beyond their tenures. Contemporary artists, curators, academics and collection managers such as De Harde and Seabela, working as they do in the liminal spaces (the *quieter* moments) between these often overpowering and politically charged dialogues, could be viewed as negotiators between the past and the present: Together, they perform a sort of skilful tap dance that moves between the historical and political legacies and, to my mind, violences of these museums and their collections and collection strategies. Via their creative outputs, they expose the creative potential of these spaces and the objects within them to new audiences. Their aim, to open these collections and objects to fresh, contemporary discussions and critique, is vitally important in ensuring the relevance of these institutions.

The context of the field of museum work that artists such as De Harde and curators such as Seabela are engaged in to tease out and complicate these sticky and often painful histories is complex and rich, requiring much more space than what is permitted here, but is summarised neatly and sensitively for this chapter by Andrew Weiner's (2016) discussion with curator Clementine Deliss on her

curatorial work at the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, Germany. While it is important to note the social, cultural, political and historical differences between the Weltkulturen Museum and the DNMCH, there are similarities between the collection objectives that formed the foundation of both museums. Deliss' engagements within this space[1] point toward museums increasingly taking on the challenge of opening their ethnographic and anthropological collections to interactions and scrutiny by academic disciplines not necessarily directly related to the field of museum study. It is, as communicated to Weiner (Deliss 2020:134), one of Deliss' requirements in her curatorial work at the Weltkulturen Museum; namely, that producers of knowledge unrelated to museums, anthropology or ethnography enter the space to deconstruct and re/vision through fresh eyes the problematic contexts and methodologies of representation that I have briefly outlined earlier in this chapter.

One need not look far to find an example of a Southern African museum doing similar work to engage their archives in transformative ways. The Wits Art Museum (WAM), while primarily a university museum and thus different in many ways (historically, institutionally and methodologically) to the DNMCH, also holds collections of material culture—ethnographic and anthropological—obtained by different individuals and organisations, each with their motivations and considerations, at certain times during the history of each of its collections. There are marked similarities between the Weltkulturen Museum, WAM and the DNMCH and, importantly, the work being undertaken by curators and collections managers at each institution to surface the complicated legacies surrounding the objects in their storerooms through new exhibitions and creative manifestations. WAM's *Collections Re-engagement Project* in 2012 is an example of a contemporary interaction with the museum's collections aimed at highlighting the educational and artistic potentialities of the objects in their holdings through multifaceted interactions with different stakeholders. This particular project included creating teaching modules for university and secondary school students centred on the collections and items of material culture housed within the museum and, most relevant for the topic explored in this chapter, inviting contemporary artists into the museum to create outputs that drew on the museum's diverse collections (De Becker & Nettleton 2015:11–13).

One such artist is Walter Oltmann, who, during his career, spent time in the WAM archives working with their collections to develop his own

Figure 2.1.
Stacked Baskets, Walter Oltmann, 1990. © Iziko Museums of South Africa Art Collections. Photograph by Nigel Pamplin.

[1] Here I refer to Deliss' involvement of academics and creative practitioners from many different fields in symposia, colloquiums, panel discussions and creative interventions centred on the collections under her stewardship.

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artistic practice but also to shift the focus and re-vision some of the antiquated lenses through which the tangible material cultural objects in the WAM collections were historically viewed (De Becker & Nettleton 2015:97–111). Oltmann focused on wirework and beaded objects in the Standard Bank African Art Collection (part of the larger WAM holdings). His practice centred on navigating the problematic boundaries between and definitions of art and craft within a Southern African context (see Nettleton 2010). During this process, Oltmann drew extensively on the modality of handwork (the intellectual and physical process of using hands to create), the rich, textural materiality of the objects within the Standard Bank African Art Collection, and the applicability of these characteristics to his own artistic practice, stating that 'Valuing craftwork and handcrafted objects, and celebrating the "mindfulness" inherent in the making process, underlines all of my creative work' (De Becker & Nettleton 2015:103). The theoretical framework and practical approach underlying De Harde's project at the DNMCH is similar to Oltmann's work at the WAM. Both artists draw on the rich possibilities inherent in the materiality of objects within museum collections and their placement within the museum storerooms (De Becker & Nettleton 2015:105) to produce new pieces of creative output that frame these objects and the institution that houses them in a different light (Figure 2.1).

Similarly to Oltmann, De Harde took on the challenge of working within/with the DNMCH's anthropological collection (Figure 2.2) through the methodology of fine art. Seabela's facilitation of this process, as curator of the anthropological collection, reflects that of Clementine Deliss in terms of its recognition of the transformational potential inherent in stakeholders within museum spaces not necessarily coming from traditional fields of museum discourse, and should be read in conjunction with her collaboration with Chipangura at the Manchester Museum. It was on one of her field trips to the museum, facilitated by Seabela, that De Harde uncovered a small wooden cabinet on the fringes of the main anthropological collection in which a series of grainy black and white photographs were stored. According to De Harde and Seabela (2022), these photographs were taken by the museum's collectors on their travels. They depict people from the source communities from which some of the material cultural objects within the anthropological collection originate. Similarly to Oltmann, De Harde found fruitful potentialities in the *objectness* of these photographs; specifically, in the physical and conceptual separation between the photograph and the people in it (see Sontag 2007) that these documents symbolised. Interestingly, De Harde also found fertile areas of interest to explore in the placement of the photographs and the storage cabinet within (or in this case, outside of) the main anthropological collection.

This placement, as a study, is intriguing in itself: The wooden cabinet is placed outside of the neatly stored and climate-controlled environment where the objects photographed in the pictures reside, in a space separated from the rest of the collection by wire fencing. In this way, there is as much a physical and conceptual separation between these photographs and the main anthropological collection as between the hauntingly evocative individuals captured in half smiles and tones of sepia and the objects pictured with them: A pot or basket, a wooden staff. The unmistakable evidence of a lived life. There is a fission, a palimpsest of violent separation between these layers of significance and the values placed upon them. It is within and around the strata of this palimpsest that De Harde has worked. The disrupted surfaces of the artist's pieces (rent by threads, torn, dissolving) serve to emphasise this loud separation between person, object, photograph and archive, as well as the problematic methodologies of collection and preservation, of *inherited obsessions* that this museum and other institutions like it are tackling. De Harde's ghostly images, half unrecognisable, acknowledge the liminal space that these photographic documents occupy within the museum's anthropological collection, which is further reinforced through the physical placement of the photographs outside the main collection (Figure 2.3). Her work also gestures strongly towards the museum's positioning within the wider discourse of ethnographic and anthropological museum collections and their foundations in Southern Africa.

These photographs vibrate with intense and magnetic energy as source material and objects in their own right. Elizabeth Edwards (Peers & Brown 2003:297) has written on the self-same vibrant energy and the specific agency of photographs as distinct objects of power within museum collections. Edwards describes them as material traces and physical manifestations of the fraught relationship 'between the collector and the collected, the photographer and the photographed, the museum and the source community' (Peers & Brown 2003:84). It is this relational balance and *object power* that De Harde and Seabela are highlighting in this exhibition. Photographs, and their placement in museum collections, are not stable fields of reference and meaning, as is

Figure 2.2.
Dišego (grain storage baskets) in the Anthropology storage area of the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Photograph by Laura de Harde, 2022.

being made clear through De Harde's body of work produced as part of this Fellowship: They are entirely contingent on the ways that audiences (in this case, a curator, an artist and us as members of the public) construe them, and thus, for these reasons, their context within a museum collection is important. Through her work, De Harde acknowledges the vibrant energy and creative possibilities embodied by these photographs and how their ambiguousness as objects speaks to much more than what is represented on their dusty surfaces or referred to in well-trodden conversations around restitution and repatriation. Are De Harde and Seabela perhaps claiming, through this archival intervention in the form of an exhibition, that the collection of photographs is a window through which the DNMCH, as an institution, can be viewed? Is De Harde subtly adjusting the kaleidoscope and shifting the lenses of coloured glass through which we, the public, can view the museum? Does De Harde's body of work allow a multiplicity of lights to refract through the coloured prisms of the photographs to create a spectrum of readings that are legible to us, the viewers, and through which we can further understand the anthropological collection, the museum and its troubled foundations? Perhaps, through working with photographs in the museum's collection, she is also making a clever allusion to the trajectory of the DNMCH as a geographical site: The museum is located in what was the old South African Mint building ('A Missing Heritage Site' 2020), a place of commercial *wealth* production. As outlined in this chapter, museums are historically understood to produce a nation's political, cultural, and historical wealth through knowledge production. Photography was, at one time, as Susan Sontag quips, 'a toy of the clever, the wealthy, and the obsessed' (Sontag 2014:5). This would be a compelling subtext if indeed the case.

Material objects, such as this collection of photographs in their small wooden cabinet and the vast array of material cultural objects in the anthropological collection of the museum, possess a vast and often unpredictable power and agency which can be used in transformative ways. Jane Bennett (2010) spins an evocative tale—assisted by the work of Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch—of objects that enjoy a life of vital materiality that is at the same time dependent on and wholly separate from the human agency that acts on and with them. For Bennett, objects (individually, in concert with each other and activated through human interactions) can and do work to produce effect and affect. Bennett's ideas of vital materiality are most obviously at work in museum collections: A small cupboard containing photographic collections of source communities, and just beyond it, a collection of large Hananwa granary baskets woven by men and buried below ground to store food for the harsh winter months (Nettleton 2010:60–63), embody materialities and textualities that become saturated and heavy: Their layers of significance are imbued all at once with the vital materiality of the museum, of their makers and original intended use, of their placement within the archive, of the *inherited obsessions* of collectors and curators that resulted in their current location and context. Following this train of thought, we can also then say, as do Bill Brown and Arjun Appadurai (Brown 2001:1–22), that objects of material culture take on the contexts, connotations and acculturations of the environments from which they originate (and the ways that they move through and around these environments), as much as they also carry the importance given to them by the people that used them. These layers of significance and meaning—in a very real sense, the *textures* and *patinas* of the objects—*enliven* and *give life* to these objects. What then happens when these self-same items are incorporated into museum collections, with their own attachments, significances and bulky weights? The placement of a smoking pipe on a museum shelf, for example, adds as much of a layer of physical patina, of meaning, to that object as the tobacco residues around the rim. Bennett goes even further to argue that 'vital materialists' (Bennett 2010:17), or practitioners that recognise the continuity and synchronicities between the lives of these materials and their agency and engagements with the objects themselves, might be able to use this recognition in critical ways to broaden the interpretation of these materials. Can we then label De Harde and Seabela, as an artist and curator, vital materialists, in the sense that Bennett uses the term? Is this not ostensibly their role when engaging with objects of material culture? Should it be?

The answer to this question would be yes. De Harde harnesses the vital materiality, the rich creative potentialities of the photographs she is working with and the archive they live in to tease out a narrative of conservation, preservation, memory and the role of the archive as an institution, and she sets all of this against the backdrop of the historical legacy of the DNMCH. As audiences and consumers of visual culture, she draws our attention to the materiality of the photographs she is working with by dis/tending the surfaces of the paper she is using to depict the faces of the subjects forever frozen in a photographic

limbo. As this creative and conceptual process plays out through the form of her exhibition and her creative outputs, De Harde's works become almost insubstantial: Paper and fabric melt and drip, evoking a visceral feeling of destabilisation (Figure 2.4). The archive, the historical purpose and context of the museum, is flipped on its head through this engagement. It becomes as flimsy as the paper itself. As a stakeholder of agency in the museum, De Harde extends further into the anthropological collection beyond the wire fencing that encircles the wooden storage cabinet and photographs. She draws a correlation between her works and a collection of Hananwa granary baskets by positioning them in relation to her own art pieces. There is a relationship here, an association, a gesture, that De Harde is asking us to consider. The layering of these objects begins to speak loudly about heritage, conservation and the role of museums in Southern Africa. What are we choosing to preserve, and why?

Heritage and the role that museums take on to create a system of control (collection and accession strategies) to protect whatever it is they take to mean by this term needs constant and dialogic interference and interaction by creative stakeholders to create new definitions of these troubled and troubling terms (museum, heritage, nationhood). The vital materialities (tangible or intangible) and histories associated with these institutions can be teased out using creative outputs (Kasfir & Yai 2004:197), whether these are in academic discourses or, in this case, exhibitions and art. De Harde and Seabela's work referred to in this chapter must be seen in the context of this claim. It broadens the relevance of the DNMCH's collections while also signalling to contemporary debate centred on contentious and trendy buzzwords such as restitution and repatriation. Perhaps most promisingly, De Harde and Seabela's archival intervention is but the start of a longer discourse. It is not a final declaratory statement on the museum or its archives but is rather a baton that can be passed on to others in the near future.

Figure 2.3.
Portrait studies by Laura de Harde, inspired by photographs the artist found in a small wooden cabinet in the Anthropology storage area of the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

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Figure 2.4.
Ovambo Vrou (2022), a portrait study included in the exhibition *Inherited Obsessions*. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.


Chapter 03

Bulldozing and Violence Disguised in Preservation: Curating and Preserving the Confiscated Objects at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History

Motsane Getrude Seabela

In recent years, with the proliferation of museums focusing on diverse themes, communities, especially indigenous communities, are increasingly questioning the purposes of museums, their collections, and the continuous obsessions with preservation. This is so because the bulk of collections housed by ethnographic and anthropological museums relates to rituals and ceremonies that sometimes occur at a certain time or are made for a specific event or people and destroyed at the end of that event. The anthropology and ethnographic museums were used as a 'weapon, a method and a device for the ideology of white supremacy to legitimise, extend and naturalise new extremes of violence within corporate colonialism' (Hicks 2020:15). The Staats Museum, later renamed, the Transvaal Museum then Ditsong Museums of South Africa was established at a time when there was an exaggerated belief that indigenous races were dying out, and would soon become extinct, thus it was critical to collect and conserve evidence of their existence as part of the natural history of the world (Rassool 2015:654). As an indigenous healer, black and curator of an anthropological collection, I often find myself overwhelmed by how museums have long disregarded the makers and communities from where objects originate and their meanings. To start with, I find the term 'object' problematic as these 'items' are more than just 'things' but symbols and strands of people's lineages. And in the case of spiritual objects, they too are mediums and mediators between the living and their ancestors, often accompanied by certain rituals or ceremonies. By reflecting on three objects in the anthropology collection housed at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (hereafter DNMCH), this essay seeks to underline the intentional efforts by colonial rulers to ensure that black history is hidden and disrupted and to enforce a dislocation of objects relating to spirituality from the source communities and individuals. This essay emphasises that preservation cannot just be concerned with conserving the physical fabric but also the meanings embedded in these objects. To this effect, I explore dissociation from source communities as a way of reimagining curatorship and conservation of intangible heritage in museum collections.

History of the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History's Anthropology Collection

In 1892 the State Museum (Staats Museum) was established at the initiative of the State Secretary, Willem Johannes Leyds, for the Republic in Pretoria. It appointed a Board of Management or 'Curatoren'. During this period, no public collections of the fauna, the flora, or the ethnography of the Transvaal existed. Thus the first aim of the newly founded institution was to collect these objects as exhibits of historical and national interest. The museum later collected geological specimens and animals related to zoology within the Republic and beyond (Gunning 1908:1). In the initial stages, the museum occupied a building at Market Square, later known as Strijdom Square in the centre of Pretoria. A new building was installed at Boom Street in 1899, just before the Second Anglo-Boer War. However, the building soon became too small to house all natural and ethnographic collections. Subsequently, in 1913 a building was erected on Paul Kruger Street and would be named the Transvaal Museum. Only the natural history section moved to the new building, while the ethnology collections remained at Boom Street. It was only in 1964 that the separation was officially endorsed, and the National Cultural History Museum came into being (Van Schalkwyk 1996:83). Although the museum was officially founded in 1892, the anthropology collection predated the collection as objects belonging to black people began earlier. An example of the earlier acquisitions is a calabash with 'Bushman engravings' collected in 1894. Jan Willem Boudewijn Gunning[1], appointed as director of the Staats Museum in 1897, held that it was critical to collect ethnographic material as time was running out.

[1] Dr Gunning was a Dutch physician who was the director of both the Staats museum and the Zoological Gardens. Gunning acquired a collection of live animals which were kept in the Transvaal Museum garden. These live animals would later form part of the Pretoria Zoological gardens. When he was the director, Gunning also founded the Annals of the Transvaal Museum which was aimed at publishing research activities undertaken by museum staff. The first issue was published in 1908 (Gunning 1908:1).

The year 1898 saw a large acquisition from the indigenous people of the Portuguese colonies. It comprised a variety of objects such as knobkerries, spoons, hairpins and horns. This acquisition was facilitated through a Portuguese state official named Mousinho d'Albuquerque in Lourenço Marques (Grobler 1996:1–11). The material obtained during 1910–12, through Rev William Govan Robertson, stationed at Kawimbwe in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia), was regarded as a more formalised and organised way of collecting than earlier acquisitions. Robertson's acquisition comprised more than 100 objects. It included material from the Bemba, Itawa, Lunda and Mambwe. Among others, Robertson collected raw materials for making bark cloth, the equipment for processing the bark, and the finished products. Other objects in this collection included drums, baskets, clay pots, leather objects and tools. Alfred Richard Radcliffe-Brown[2], honorary curator at the time, made his biggest contribution to the museum by contacting missionaries, magistrates, administrators and public members on behalf of the museum and requesting donations of objects. In turn, various objects were acquired. Other collections acquired by Radcliffe-Brown included archaeological items. One of the extensive collections he could obtain was put together by E. Dora Earthy from amongst the Chopi and Lenge of Mozambique, ultimately used to illustrate Earthy's (1933) book *Valenge Women* (Van Schalkwyk 2000:86).

After Radcliffe-Brown's departure, Wiets Beukes was appointed in 1932. However, he only stayed for six months and was asked to join the Department of Anthropology with Professor Gerald Paul Lestrade at the University of Pretoria. Beukes stayed on as Honorary Curator for Ethnology, and during his stay, he extended the collection. Some of the collecting field trips he undertook were journeys to the 'Transkei (Eastern Cape—Nguni speakers—twice), Lesotho (twice), Sekhukhuneland (Sepedi speakers), Vendaland and Mozambique (Tsonga speakers)'. During the mid-1950s, Tienie Jacobs-Venter was appointed as the next professional officer for anthropology. She had a BA degree with anthropology as a major. Although she did not conduct any fieldwork, she could still acquire numerous objects through writing to the various police stations, magistrate offices and traders, requesting any material they could contribute. Most of the material, however, arrived with little historical information (Van Schalkwyk 2000:87).

The Anthropology Department of the Randse Afrikaans Universiteit (today the University of Johannesburg) closed and sold its collection to the museum in the late 1980s. It mainly consisted of beadwork from the Transkei. During this time, the anthropology collection at the National Cultural History Museum moved towards a more social-historical direction by collecting the liberation and struggle material that Sam Moifatswane undertook. In 1996 the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria transferred their collection of ethnographic material to the museum but unfortunately, without proper documentation. This collection included material that belonged to Michael Daniel Christian de Wet-Nel, former minister for Bantu Administration and Development in the Nationalist Government. De Wet-Nel was much involved with the 'development' of the so-called homelands, officiated at many official functions, and was presented with many gifts (Van Schalkwyk 2000:90).

Colonial legacies in anthropological and ethnographic collections: Preservation and representation

Anthropological museums and collections materialise, embody and perpetuate 'traditions and styles of anthropological knowledge'. These collections are muddied in colonial trajectories and have turned into sites for the contestation and renewal of anthropology, from within and from without. Anthropological and ethnological collections were founded on the ideas of collecting, displaying, and learning, reflecting deep roots in societies that were under imperial rule or came under some Western sovereignty (Oswald & Tinus 2020:18). Although the history of most ethnological museums evolved out of prior histories of conquest, commerce, and political exploitation, the museum has struggled to redeem itself as a forum for the broadening and production of knowledge and to transform in its totality. Similar to the university, the scientific laboratory, the archive, and the church, the museum is viewed as a repository of Otherness or as a scientific laboratory for restoring, repairing, and recovering special materials, tools, styles, and forms (Appadurai 2020:45–47). Therefore, anthropological collections cannot be viewed universally but as a plural and complex part of anthropologies. These collections necessitate applying approaches highlighting various overlaps and engagement with sociology, history and museum and heritage research. At present, the pressure against the colonial history of anthropological collections is vital and warranted due to the formative role of colonialism in forming these institutions and the implications that continue to play out. Activists, artists, curators and academics are thoroughly reflexive to interrogating the

[2] Radcliffe-Brown is regarded as one of the founders of modern social anthropology and the main theorist of structural functionalism. In 1921 he joined the Staats Museum as the first professionally trained anthropologist. Dr Radcliffe-Brown worked for the museum for a short period from January to July 1921 and shortly afterwards he was appointed chair of social anthropology at the University of Cape Town. During his time as a curator at the Staats Museum he contacted missionaries and interested parties to sell and donate objects to the museum (Van Schalkwyk 2000:86)

coloniality in ethnographic and anthropological museums and collections toward a decolonised move (McDonald 2020:51–53).

In his analysis of Jacque Maquet's paper entitled the 'Objectivity of Anthropology' (1964), Archie Mafeje[3] points out that the anthropologist was not only a 'member of the white ruling oligarchy' but also served 'as a representative of the European middle classes who were architects of colonialism' (1998:3). Undoubtedly, today we are becoming more aware of that knowledge produced by disciplines such as anthropology 'acquired and used readily by those with the greatest capacity for exploitation' (Mafeje 1998:3). The reality is that pre-war social anthropology was a plausible and effective enterprise because of the power relations between the dominating Europeans and the dominated non-European cultures. Also, social anthropology provided proximity for the colonial authorities to gain access to the oppressed (Asad 1973:16–17). In South Africa, the largest collections of evidence of the South African human past in museums are those of ethnography. Although consisting of indigenous materials, these objects were appropriated by the white population. At the Staats Museum, for instance, the researchers and curators in the ethnology section later renamed the Anthropology Collection, comprised of white officials. These were individuals who were responsible for amassing objects through fieldwork and purchases. Also, donations from missionaries and magistrates came from white individuals presented to white museum officials (Van Schalkwyk 2000:2016). Indigenous artefacts were collected primarily to demonstrate the progress the settlers had made, as indigenous cultures were seen as primitive and inferior to European civilisation. South African museums were launched at a time of great interest in biological evolution, particularly with the spread of Social Darwinism in the later parts of the nineteenth century. They were interested in the early development of humans and other species. Indigenous Africans were seen as living examples of one of the earliest stages in the evolution of man (Gore 2004:31).

Curating objects of violence

One critical point in curating violent objects is their portrayal of power, powerlessness and resistance. Max Weber describes power as 'the ability to enforce one's will on others', thus making someone do something they normally would not have done had they not been overpowered (Eriksen 2010:166–67). Objects discussed in this essay were forcefully obtained from indigenous communities and individuals who, owing to their intrinsic use, ritualistic, historical and cultural significance, would not have been given away freely. Because of colonial structural and institutional powers, objects captured and hidden in anthropological collections are often presented or recorded as gifts (Hicks 2020:20). Colonial artefacts present an intricate layer in that ownership and how artefacts were collected have gloomy historical records. These artefacts amassed during colonial times took on many forms. Some were freely given or allegedly collected under reciprocal exchanges. 'While some of these objects are said to have been sold to explorers, colonists, and collectors' (Garsha 2020:46), many are looted objects taken from their owners under force. These artefacts travelled interwoven paths to reach the metropole and became displayed material and represented in such a way those who uprooted them saw fit. Indeed, it can be argued that even the most overt examples of materials considered to have been legitimately collected are still stolen items. Colonisation was founded on the oppressor having power over the oppressed. Thus, 'there was no fair exchange, and any transaction between colonisers and the colonised is an example of an acquisition taken under duress' (Garsha 2020:46–48). Objects discussed in this chapter display colonial authorities' power over black people. And that is depicted on object tags and accession records inscribing that they were confiscated, thus implying violence took place.

Confiscated objects at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History

Curatorial practice presents intricate paradoxes of being viewed as a productive space for engagement, understanding, and interaction and, at the same time, the inescapable partiality of redemption and reconciliation, often in contexts that knew no prior conciliation (Patterson 2011:21). In 2014, I was appointed by Ditsong Museums of South Africa as the curator of the anthropology collection at the DNMCH. Among other duties, I was responsible for the safekeeping and preservation of around twenty-five thousand artefacts, mainly from different African regions, a few from the Australian Aborigines, South America and Asia. This preservation I was to be responsible for is for future generations, or so my job description outlined. Over the years, as I interrogated this anthropology collection such as accession registers and letters, the silences of the source communities and artists that created the objects grew even louder. I grappled with the issues of representation and identity in this collection. Through this continuous interaction with objects, their accompanying

[3] Archie Mafeje was a professor of Anthropology born in the Eastern Cape South Africa in 1936. During his time as an exiled intellectual, Mafeje wrote on revolutionary theory and politics. He was a Marxist and by the 1960s and 1970s he had managed to reconcile both his political and academic work (Nyoka 2020).

documentation, tags and labels, I realised how much of a responsibility I have towards contributing to the redemption and transformation of a problematic collection such as this anthropological one. As Laura de Harde appropriately put it in one of our discussions, curating a collection mudded in colonial origins is, to some extent, a 'burden as it is inherited obsessions' of those that cared for the collection before my time (pers. comm. 2022). Unlike objects with little or no information regarding their original location or acquisition method, the confiscated objects in the anthropology collection tell us not just about the history of the objects or their cultural or ritualistic usage but also the country's history at the time they were collected.

Figure 3.1.
Bambatha blacksmith bellows handle, length 39cm. The Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History collection. Photograph by Julia Montlha, 2022.

Bambatha rebellion bellows

When the Natal administrators imposed a poll tax on unmarried Zulu men, there was a general objection by many Zulu people against this tax. An uprising of a bloody armed campaign to challenge British colonial rule ensued. The uprising, which intensified in January, led to what would later be known as the Bambatha Rebellion in the middle of 1907 (Reeding 2000:31). In 1914, the Transvaal Museum received a donation of 'AmaZulu bellows collected from the Piet Retief District' (Figure 3.1). As detailed in the accession register, the bellows were 'confiscated from a native smelter delivered in the act of manufacturing 'assegai' for sale to the Zulu rebels during the rebellion of 1906–7 on the farm that was under Chief Mtshekula in Piet Retief District'. This donation was received from the resident Magistrate in June 1914. Although today only one handle of the bellows marked 4464 remains, it is not surprising that an object associated with what is considered one of the best-known examples of resistance against colonial rule in Africa, namely the Bambatha Revolt, found itself in an anthropological collection. The impounding of the bellows, which were later donated to the Transvaal Museum, served several purposes. Firstly, to obscure a part of the Bambatha Revolt history, the manufacturer was referred to only as 'native smelter', with nothing mentioned about the estimated number of assegais that might have been produced and how they were collected from the manufacturer during the revolt. Concurrently, the bellows symbolise the British conquest of the Zulu people. As noted by Rassool (2015:658), a museum cannot be viewed as an institution of modernity and ordered citizenship but is a primary institutional form of empire. It was made and is being remade and adapted through both sides of the empire's history: by a rapacious and violent empire of plunder and

conciliation and by empire as 'benevolent colonisation', humanitarianism and trusteeship over people and things.

The Nyabela Stick

An object with accession number 4495 is described in the anthropology collection accession register as 'a club or knobkerrie made out of rhinoceros' horn (Figure 3.2). It was the symbol of dignity for Chief Njabel (Nyabela) and was taken out of his hands by General Joubert after he had conquered his tribe (Mapoch tribe of AmaNdebele). This club was 'presented to the museum by Piet Joubert', op Julie [in July] 1883'. The club was confiscated from Nyabela after refusing to surrender Mampuru to General Piet Joubert, leader of the Transvaal commandos.

Towards the end of 1882, the Transvaal Boers continued their military expeditions against African communities residing within what they considered the parameters of their state. This time the expedition aimed at Nyabela's Ndzundza clan of Ndebele people that occupied hilly terrain bordering the ZAR's Middelburg district. Nyabela's royal headquarters, KoNomtjarhelo, was built by his father Mabhogo (whom the Boers referred to as Mapoch) in the 1830s, whereby he recruited and commissioned distinguished land surveyors, hunters and military experts, who were subjects of the Swazi King, Mangwane, to lay out his capital. Other features at KoNomtjarhelo included laying out 'large cattle pens, terraced agricultural fields and irrigation ducts fed by water springs. An interlocking system of fortresses, subterranean tunnels, rock barriers and underground bunkers was constructed for defensive purposes' (Saks 2008). When Nyabela took over as regent chief in 1875, the Ndzundza kingdom population was 15 000. The Boer and Ndzundza maintained a cordial truce in the 1870s and even collaborated to fight Sekhukhune of the Pedi people. However, the relationship took a different turn in 1881 when Nyabela resisted colonial control. In July 1883, Nyabela, the son of Mabhogo, was captured by forces of the Transvaal state after Mampuru[4] took refuge with one of Nyabela's subordinate chiefs, Makwani. Subsequently, Nyabela was summoned by the Government to give up the fugitive that was Mampuru, but he refused. During this period, the Transvaal was a disorganised state. A serious expedition against a powerful 'native tribe' would not have been undertaken by the Volksraad had it not been considered advisable to demonstrate to the British Government that they were better able to cope with the 'native tribes' (Hunt 1931:304; Boeyens & Van der Ryst 2014:40).

Figure 3.2.
Nyabela rhino-horn stick, length 48cm. The Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History collection. Photograph by Motsane Getrude Seabela, 2022.

[4] Mampuru was a Pedi chief who for years was in a power struggle with his brother Sekhukhune. In mid-1882, Mampuru's followers attacked Sekhukhune and killed him, subsequently Mampuru fled to Nyabela's land. On two occasions the ZAR authorities had attempted to arrest Mampuru for resisting and causing disorder but did not succeed, and so the murder allegation was the last straw (Saks 2008).

Figure 3.3.
Mankgwanyana, divination thongs used in indigenous healing, height 49cm. The Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History collection. Photograph by Motsane Getrude Seabela, 2022.

In October 1882, Nyabela was given an ultimatum to avert war. He had to hand over Mampuru to the Republican authorities for a murder case of his brother Sekhukhune, but Nyabela refused to comply with the ultimatum. Nyabela told the authorities that he had swallowed Mampuru, and to get to him [Mampuru], they would have to kill him [Nyabela] first (Saks 2008). Indeed, a war that would take nine months followed between Nyabela and the Transvaal commandos. Nyabela was defeated and subsequently surrendered to Mampuru. The two were arrested on 11 July 1883, Nyabela's headquarters was burnt down, and his people, the AmaNdebele of Ndzundza, scattered across the country. Nyabela was sentenced to life in prison but released in 1898. Mampuru was sentenced to death and hanged on 22 November 1883 in Pretoria (Hunt 1931:304). The imprisonment of the two and the death of Mampuru took place at the old Pretoria Central Prison, close to the site where the DNMCH is situated and where Nyabela's royal stick is housed. In 2012 a street close to the museum was renamed from Potgieter to Kgosi Mampuru Street. This was followed by renaming the Pretoria Central Prison in 2013 to the Kgosi Mampuru II Prison.

It is apparent that the royal stick taken from Nyabela was a deliberate act to demonstrate the colonial conquest of another black group by Republican authorities; hence it was placed in a museum to feed the colonial gaze. The stick having been removed from Nyabela resulted in a tradition loss and the history of the AmaNdebele disrupted. Conversely, this royal stick became an object of contention in that the different groups of AmaNdebele have laid claim to this object. These frictions about whom is next in line to inherit the stick may have been averted had it been returned to Nyabela upon his release from prison in 1898.

Mankgwanyana

I often find myself confronted with objects I inherited from my predecessors to curate in line with museological practices. But as a healer, I also encounter spirits and energies that will sometimes not even allow me to open cupboards or touch the divination apparatus and other ritualistic objects. Some of these spirits are just lost or hurting. I am constantly confronted with the presence of objects relating to divination which would not have been given freely to anyone unless they were a healer. For those reasons, I continuously have to ask for permission from the indigenous ancestors dragged from different parts of Africa and imprisoned in a museum collection. One of these objects is a divination

instrument called *Mankgwanyana* (Figure 3.3). This instrument would either have been passed down by another healer within the family or made by its owner as per the ancestors' directive through dreams. For continuity and perpetuity, a descendant of the healer within the lineage would inherit the indigenous healing gift through which they would use the instrument for healing and foretelling. The one side of a note on a tag attached to object ETH8592, *Mankgwanyana,* reads thus: 'Lazy tongs type of divinatory instrument confiscated at Sibasa 1939 from Venda diviner, Venda name libeshu (comparatively modern), not a Venda object, but Sotho'. On the other side of the tag, the note continues to read as follows: '... mankxgwanyana, repaired by me. Note two catholic pendants at the tip. Photographed by me NJ van Warmelo 5.5 1944'. This demonstrates identity loss and trauma incited on descending generations due to the displacement of a symbol serving as a medium between healers and those (ancestors) they walk with.

Conversely, Van Warmelo also demonstrated a form of invasion by restoring a divination tool, handled only by those to whom it was bestowed. While museums continue to preserve in the name of future generations, the perpetual conservation is also an act of taking away and depriving or disturbing a future generation from preserving their traditions and spirituality bestowed upon them by their ancestors. Engagement and co-curation with source communities and individuals then become critical about handling objects such as *Mankgwanyana* that possess divination values. In essence, the move should be toward an indigenous form of conservation inclusive of indigenous ways of preservation that is also inclusive.

Dissociation from source communities

Four months after assuming the position as curator of the anthropology collection at the DNMCH, I went to China, where I spent three months on a Conservation Training Programme, then later a Heritage Management Programme. One of the things that stood out during the Conservation Training Program was the Chinese's combination of modern advanced technologies and indigenous methods in conservation. In 2015, I enrolled for a Postgraduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies with the University of Pretoria to gain more insight into the practices of museology, or at least I hoped. Although restoration was my least favourite part of the program, the conservation module was important as I learnt practices such as handling objects and their storage, which came in handy in my curatorial work. After all, that is part of collection management. Of course, this handling and storage of artefacts were of Western methods that totally disregarded the indigenous ways or even considered the people who made and handled the objects before they were brought into museums. Preventative conservation is considered a critical component of preservation within a museum environment. Also, it stresses the need to align with best international practices to ensure that objects do not deteriorate. There are ten agents of deterioration in conservation practices that museum officials working with collections must pay attention to: physical forces, theft, vandalism and displacers; fire, water, pests, pollutants, light; incorrect temperature; incorrect humidity and dissociation. Dissociation 'is when an item becomes separated from information about why it is valuable' (Lacombe Museum and Archives 2022). The challenges I face in curating the anthropology collection, which depicts colonial conquest, are not unique to the DNMCH as other museums and curators in Africa, Europe, and Australia, among others, face the same difficulties.

The development and ratification of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) have resulted in significantly increasing international debate about the nature and value of intangible heritage. The gaps found in available heritage literature have come to be filled by intangible heritage and represent an important cross-section of ideas and practices associated with intangible cultural heritage (Smith & Akagawa 2009:1). Cultural heritage preservation has become even more complex and politicised than it was when 'preservation institutions restricted their interest to monuments and artefacts' (Blake 2009:46). Whether in intangible or tangible forms, heritage symbolises identities of people (McLean 2006:3–4). Recognising intangible heritage as an important component of conservation in a practice that heavily emphasises materiality is a shift towards redressing the imbalances that have existed for a long time. The underlying notion is that objects do not necessarily have fixed meanings but that meanings are attributed to the social contexts through which the objects pass (Herle 2003:194). The dissociation that museums should emphasise is the intangible knowledge lost when objects were dislocated and disconnected from their places of origin to serve a colonial gaze and paralyse their existence as living objects.

Some efforts to transform have been made by my predecessor, Johnny

van Schalkwyk who presented a paper at the South African Museums Association (SAMA) proposing, in 1991, that museums should cease the display of sacred and sensitive materials such as those concerning initiation. Following the 1991 presentation was an exhibition he curated on the *BaHananwa* from the Limpopo Province, wherein they were invited to the museum to open the exhibition. The group in attendance was also taken on a tour of the anthropology collection storeroom specifically to view the crocodile sculpture associated with *koma,* the male initiation of *BaHananwa.* Upon viewing the sculpture, the group resolved that it should remain in the museum (Van Schalkwyk pers. comm. 2016; 2022). In an attempt to move from merely acknowledging the colonial traces in the anthropological collection towards a reinvented and transformed museum and curation, in 2017, the DNMCH had an exhibition entitled *Dipitša ke Bophelo/Pots are Life,* curated by Johnny van Schalkwyk to commemorate the artists that created pots from different cultural groups. This exhibition opposed the norm of highlighting the cultural group when displaying objects rather than individual artists. Certainly, van Schalkwyk's gesture is commendable toward transformation in curation, but the community were still on the periphery and not included in the curation and creation of the exhibitions. Certainly, an exhibition is not enough; hence Ditsong Museums of South Africa continue to engage in projects that seek to be transformative and towards a co-curation and co-production of knowledge with source communities. Through a project funded by the John Ellerman Foundation, I recently partnered with Dr Njabulo Chipangura, curator of the Living Cultures at the University of Manchester Museum, on provenance research of the Zulu beads housed by both DNMCH and the University of Manchester Museum. We also were interrogating the social biographies of these beads by engaging with community members in Nongoma and Durban, South Africa.

Ditsong Museums of South Africa have joined in on the global efforts of transforming and decolonising by taking stock and interrogating acquisition methods of its collections to engage with source communities and source countries regarding new forms of curating and knowledge production that are inclusive. This also includes provenance research on objects held in the museum but without stories of the makers. Dissociation in museum conservation concerns any data linked to an object, such as accession registers, photographs and movement forms. Thus, any loss or separation of the data associated with a specific object is considered to contribute to its deterioration. I propose that in addition to separating data from the object, dissociation should also include separating objects from their source communities, which resulted in misrepresentation and obscured provenance or the lack thereof. Due to colonialism, the silenced voices of indigenous communities in museum collections have separated the intangible from the tangible heritage of objects. It makes no sense to encourage the continued preservation of such objects merely for preserving them (because it has always been done so). This chapter and the exhibition co-curated with Laura de Harde seeks to deal with the challenges of curating 'inherited' collections embedded in colonial origins and the 'obsession' of preserving.

Conclusion

In recent times, indigenous groups have been increasingly raising concerns which are essentially religious and political. These concerns should be viewed within the context of an overall renewed awareness of their culture and identity. Museums worldwide still house numerous objects of spiritual, ritualistic and traditional values. For indigenous groups, objects taken from their ancestors surpass the legitimacy of scientific research – the issue for them is a perceived continuation of their cultural degradation and racist conduct. Museum objects are not just physical representations of tangible heritage but are also symbols of the loss of autonomy and culture and histories through military, legal and demographic processes (Tymchuk 1985:389–90). While only three objects were discussed in this chapter, the DNMCH houses far more objects confiscated during the colonial and apartheid eras. Ethnography has been used to represent the people colonised by Europeans and provided the 'scientific' justification for much of the colonial projects in the Americas and Africa. Even though the strategy emerged more than two hundred years ago, it incessantly continues to influence how indigenous peoples are represented in museums and related cultural institutions (Silverman 2009:9). Unlike objects alleged to have been presented to museums as gifts, the method of acquisition of objects under discussion in this chapter is apparent as they have been recorded as confiscated, thus the intention of the collection was clearly to display overthrow and violence. Alongside monuments, memorials and statues, 'museums can today also be viewed as potent, celebratory reminders of colonialism' (Giblin, Ramos & Grout 2019:471) disguised as preservation institutions.

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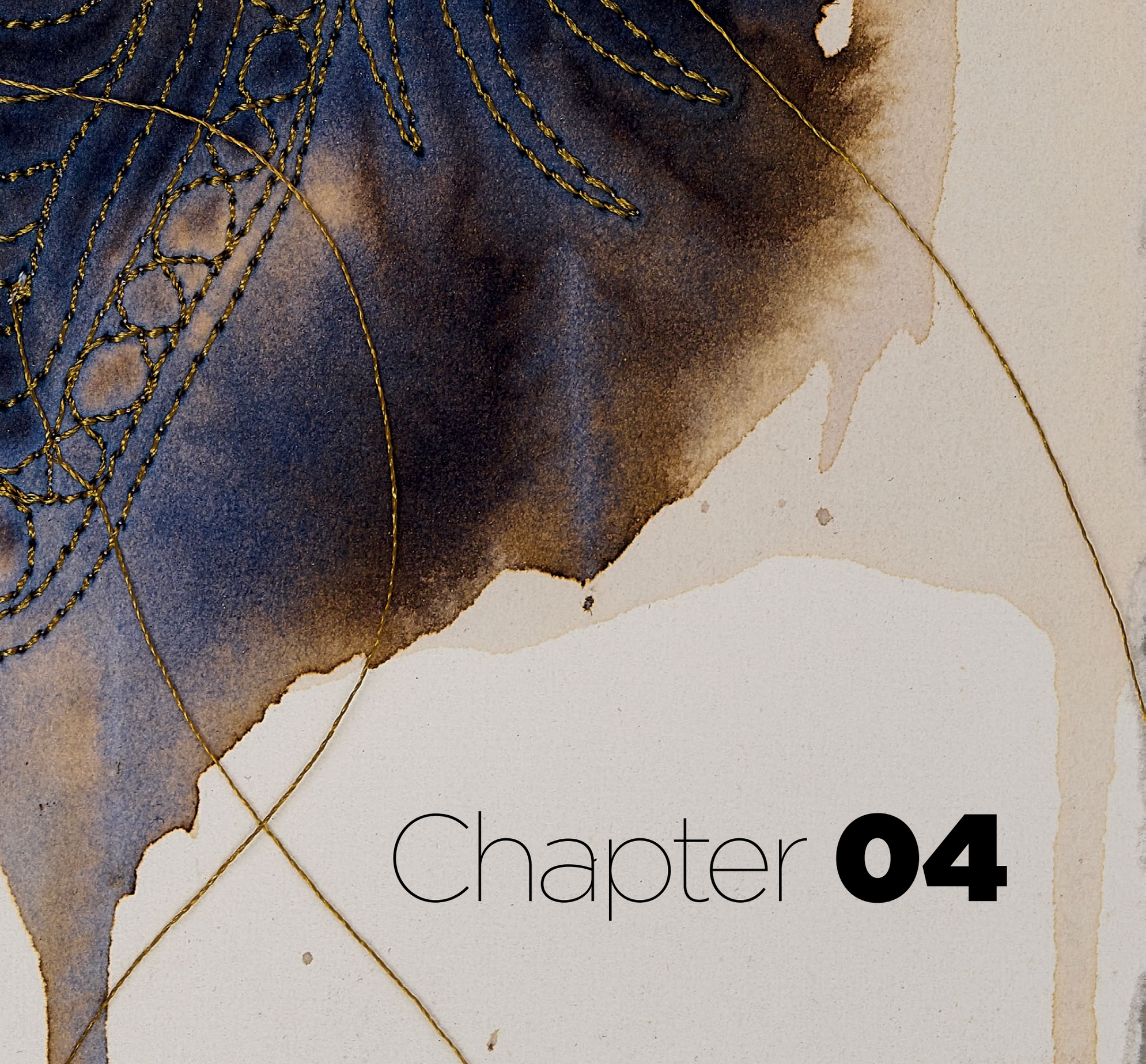

Chapter 04

To Be Untitled: Rituals and Being

Teboho Lebakeng

Translation is a word often associated with and used within the context of language to communicate the meaning of a specific language text through an equivalent but different target-language text (Newmark 1991:1–4). A lesser-known meaning of the word is the process of moving something from one place to another. An example of this translation of relics within the context of the Christian faith and practice is the removal of holy objects from one site to another (Williams 1989:100). Ceremony and formality during the moving process were reserved for the remains of a saint's body. At the same time, items such as clothing were treated as secondary relics and thus did not receive the same treatment. All-night vigils and processions involving the entire community could accompany these translations (Williams 1989:101).

When translating something from one form to another, something from the original remains, such as the remains of the saint being translated. Does this skeleton or underlying structure support the meaning that needs to remain intact for the translation to be deemed accurate – with words having multiple meanings in one language and objects and symbols having just as many associations in a particular cultural context? A word or object with an overlapping meaning in one language or culture might not perfectly overlap with all the possible meanings it carries when translated to another (Newmark 1991:1–4). The structure of the skeleton is at risk of simply being a pile of bones that, in an attempt to be understood, are reconnected and reassembled into something they were not before.

So how could one go about reading these bones? Well, one could always elicit the help of a bone caster—those traditional healers (known as *sangomas*[1] in South Africa). They are gifted with the ability to convene with their ancestors through the reading and interpretations of bones. Thrown into a circle, they do not need to come together and form anything recognisable or literal to be understood. The things that can be gleaned from these interpretations are often related to how patients can address their issues by performing a particular ritual or act or receiving a message intended for them. Some believe that the spirits of our ancestors communicating with us through the bones is a literal act and experience, and the *sangoma* is the interpreter of these messages. Others see it more as an act of projection where our subconscious tries to make sense of external symbolism (Cumes 2013:63).

Before embarking on my artistic exploration and examining myself, I read and interpreted the signs of an affliction that has plagued me from within the bones of the words I translate in my mind before speaking. What affliction, you may ask? That of a fractured self-identity.[2]

Introducing myself to myself[3]

My name is Teboho Lebakeng, and I am the son of a Xhosa woman and a Sotho man. I was born in the United States of America in Springfield, Massachusetts, even though my parents are South African. This happened because, during the fight against apartheid, my mother went into exile in 1976 at age 19, and my father went into exile in 1975 at age 17. This put them on the path to meet in Tanzania[4] and spend their lives outside of their home country until they could finally return when apartheid officially ended.

My name is Teboho Lebakeng, and I grew up believing that I was named after my father, only to find out that that was not the whole truth. My father's legal first name is Josiah, and he was named after his grandfather, who was also named Josiah. But in the Southern Sotho culture, when you refer to someone named after an elder in the family, you may not address them by that very name as that would be considered disrespectful. Only the elder is addressed by that name while the other person adopts a second or a nickname. No one ever called my father by his first legal name Josiah. Instead, he was given the nickname Oupa, which means grandfather in Afrikaans.

When my father went into exile, he rejected these names and adopted one that better suited what he considered to be his growing black consciousness. As a result, he chose to refer to himself as Teboho

[1] Sangoma is a Zulu term used colloquially to describe South African traditional healers. [2] The main text in this chapter will be that of self-exploration and self-examination. I will present the scholarly grounding of this main text as a para-text in footnotes in a bid not to interrupt the flow of the essay with any source references. [3] This article is a re-contextualised excerpt of Teboho Lebakeng's Master of Fine Arts dissertation titled *"An Art-Based Auto-ethnographic Exploration of Ritual as Identity Formation"*. [4] Tanzania was considered a frontline state during the fight against apartheid despite it being geographically far from South Africa. Both the ANC and PAC were hosted in Tanzania when their freedom fighters were in exile and the parties even received land to start building schools and for refugee camps, making Tanzania a huge supporter of the liberation struggle.

(a name which means gratitude in the Sotho language) as an act of rebellion, which would serve as his struggle name. He wanted a name he could identify with and a name to project this new self-identity. However, his official legal identification documents still mention Josiah and were never changed. I was, therefore, not named after my father, I was named after the man he had chosen to be, and before my artistic practice, this is a name I struggle to identify with.

The artwork presented in this article relies on interpreting this identity crisis as a form of personal ambiguity or disorientation that can be navigated to create a synchronistic identity through hybridisation (Bhabha 1994:3–9). This does not negate the liminality but rather maintains it and allows for its projection through art-based methodologies onto a space that can manifest into a heterotopic space as a result (Foucault 1986:24–25).

Art viewed through an auto-ethnographic[5] lens

In 2015, there was a family gathering on my mother's side organised to celebrate my cousin's return from the initiation school he had attended. The event was intended to welcome him back into society after his initiation into manhood. This is part of a rite of passage known as *Ulwaluko*[6], which is a ritual circumcision that is considered sacred and family-orientated, which accounted for my invitation. Even though male circumcision can be done in a hospital or clinic (as I had done), this is not considered a viable alternative to the practice of Ulwaluko as it does not carry any of the cultural meaning or context of Ulwaluko. It is not enough to simply remove the foreskin in a similar manner. It is not enough to translate a word and expect the translation to retain all the possible meanings and complexities of the original word. Before a boy is seen off by his family, numerous ceremonies occur to request blessings. They are also exposed to ideas of what it means to be a family man within the Xhosa culture and the role they are expected to play in society. Their history is explained to them, but perhaps more importantly, they are reintroduced to their ancestors.

I had never been to such an event apart from a ritual done for me when I was a young boy (which involved having my forehead pressed against a goat while someone prayed over me, followed shortly by the slaughtering of the said goat). At the time, I did not know what it was or why it was happening. In fact, I still do not know why it was done, and the experience left me confused, to say the least. This inability to locate myself in these specific cultural spaces left me with a feeling of dislocation[7], a dislocation which stems from a fragmented self-identity. As a solution, I thought I might investigate my own cultural, racial and historical background to use those findings as a guide to help me decide to which group I owe my fidelity. But this turned out to be a superficial solution. It does not address how I feel when confronted with these societal structures at these family gatherings. Thus, in my practice, I examined how ritual as self-identity construction through art-making can be used to counteract the effects of dislocation felt due to a fragmented self-identity.

As part of my intention to negate and deconstruct the hegemonic effects of the cultural model of the initiation into manhood, I offer a reconsideration of the very signs used in this rite of passage. To reconcile disparate parts of my identity, I bring them together within the artworks being made. I do this through an art-making process that uses materials made from items that play a role in South African ritualistic practice. My process combines sculpture, printmaking, and installation. I combine fabrics often associated with the identities of various South African cultures with various items that I have a strong connection to, via memory and experience, but a lesser connection to, through meaning and understanding, and I make them occupy the same space. They undergo formal and symbolic transformation by blending shapes, symbols, and signifiers. The artwork becomes a new contact zone that facilitates the exchange and produces transcultural forms – a translation.

It is important to remember that traditions and rituals have always slightly changed and adapted with time. A good example is how young boys cannot take half a year off from school to complete the circumcision initiation ritual, which is more of a practical consideration. Not only that, but rituals have always been done a little differently from family to family and from community to community, depending on preference. Despite this, there are also some aspects of the traditions and rituals that have managed to remain consistent throughout time. One such aspect that remains consistent is the consumption of *umqombothi*. Umqombothi is a homemade sorghum beer and plays an important role in most prominent cultural occasions. In appearance, the beer is opaque and light tan. It has a thick, creamy, gritty consistency from the sorghum and a sour aroma. It has a very low alcohol content as it is made to be consumed out of respect for tradition, not to become intoxicated.

[5] Auto-ethnography is a research method that makes use of personal experiences to interpret cultural practices. In this chapter it allows me to use my biography and personal life experiences as a way to orientate the article and then reflect on my experience in relation to the practice of making the artwork. [6] IsiXhosa words, or words in the Xhosa language, will be italicised the first time they are being introduced to the text. [7] Also see Seabela's chapter, in which she explains the dislocation of cultural objects from the spirituality of their source community when suspended in museum spaces. What is the resemblance, and difference between the agency of a dislocated person and a dislocated cultural object?

There are traditions to be observed both in the brewing of the beer and the serving and drinking of it. The beer is traditionally brewed by women, made from maize, maize malt, sorghum malt, yeast and water, and has a distinctive sour flavour. One of the by-products of making the beer, *isidudu*, is porridge, while the grains left over from the process are used to feed chickens. Tradition states that the woman scattering the grain for chickens gives thanks to the ancestors while doing so. Sorghum beer is fermented for several days in a huge drum covered with a thick blanket, and on the day of the traditional ceremony, the beer is brewed and poured into a calabash, also called *ibhekile*. These customs are not written down in a rulebook. They are passed on orally and through practice.

Before anyone can drink the umqombothi, they must pour a small amount of it onto the ground to share with their ancestors. And then, someone ceremoniously opens the drinking by taking a small sip, which signifies that it is safe and everyone can start drinking. Within my family's Xhosa culture and practices, it is believed that the ancestors will not recognise a ritual that one is performing if umqombothi is not part of it. In some cases, it is a way of communing with the dead as they also used to make umqombothi. It allows one to connect with them by practising an act they once participated in. This notion is reflected in my artistic practice because the unconventional use of umqombothi as a material only takes place after I make it using the same processes my family used in the past. The connection here might not go directly to my ancestors as is traditionally intended, but through memory and remembering, it does tether me to my family.

It is important to take a moment to clarify that *Untitled Hlano* (Figure 4.1) is not intended to serve as a metaphor; it is instead a remnant, or remains[8], left over from the art-making process. As an artist and practitioner, I am a hybrid. Not the work, but the work's symbolic value is built around me. I become that way through the process of making the art, so the experience of interacting with the materials changes me by giving me a new relationship with them that is not based on alienation.

In the book *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, the author Pierre Bourdieu (1977) explains his thoughts on habitus. In this book, the problem revolves around agency and structure. He states that habitus is something that is shaped by your position within social structures. But at the same time, that habitus works to generate action. This means that when you exercise your agency, you reflect the structures

Figure 4.1.
Untitled Hlano (2018) by Teboho Lebakeng, 65 x 52cm, mixed media: isiShweshwe fabric, umqombothi,maize malt and sorghum malt. Courtesy of the artist.

[8] See Jessica Webster's chapter for her discussion on remains resisting symbolisation, and how she relates the repetitive/ritualistic/reproductive acts in De Harde's artworks to a 'creaturely form of caring'. De Harde and I are looking into cultural practices in rather incomparable ways, but in our artistic practice there are moments when we look each other in the eye.

Figure 4.2. (above)
Audience engagement with *Dissolving Divisions* (2022) by Laura de Harde at Nirox Sculpture Park. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 4.3. (opposite)
Dissolving Divisions (2022) by Laura de Harde at Nirox Sculpture Park. Courtesy of the artist.

that have shaped you in whatever you do (Bourdieu 1979:78–79). This position worked well for my practice as I could mine from my experience of creating the work. Therefore, I was part of the practical exploration when I created my artwork. And exercising my agency through the work created, offered the opportunity for observation, contemplation, and reflection.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the irony therein that those cultural inner circles I envy, because I feel a sense of not belonging to them, may be the very confines that the people within them wish to escape from. This was sparked by reading *The Metropolis and Mental Life* by Georg Simmel (1997). One important point is how people in urban settings can feel a lack of restrictions and the kind of prejudices they would associate with smaller or more religious communities. This is exasperated when said urbanites find themselves experiencing rural life (Simmel 1997:181). I often ask if tradition is about closing ranks or bringing people in. Perhaps both or perhaps the one cannot exist without the other.

In the book, *Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts,* edited by I. William Zartman (2000), the overall premise is the examination of traditional conflict management practices used to deal with the various effects of violent conflicts and the conflicts themselves. One of the sections is written by Laurie E. King-Irani and titled 'Rituals of Forgiveness and Processes of Empowerment in Lebanon'. In this essay, she discusses the power of ritual and empowerment through ritual. These ideas are explored through the backdrop of the Lebanese civil war and how the after-effects of that war have left many people feeling displaced in their homes as life around them has changed so much. She speaks of transformative social and personal powers that can be used to heal victimised individuals or societies and how these powers can occasionally be accessed through rituals (King-Irani 2000:130). The process here consists of a transitional rite of passage that would allow one to transition into something that would allow them to handle the aspects of their daily lives that are consistently changing (King-Irani 2000:134). The idea of transitioning or transforming into a state that grants you properties and characteristics that allow you to deal with a specific problem on various levels is what my artwork incorporates from the writings of Laurie E. King-Irani. In my case, though, the state of being that is transitioned into relies on simultaneously embodying the different cultural groups one belongs to. It is not a rejection of one

Figure 4.4.
Untitled One (2018) by Teboho Lebakeng, 76 x 48 mcm, mixed media: isiShweshwe fabric, umqombothi,maize malt and sorghum malt. Courtesy of the artist.

in favour of the other but rather a constant negotiation that allows a hybrid form to be born.

As I have already stated, a major component of my artistic practice is the use of umqombothi, but another material that serves as a core part of my engagement is the fabric print known as *isiShweshwe*[9]. One of the reasons for using isiShweshwe is that it is an appropriate material to explore notions of cultural identity formation in the context of my hybridity and thus serves as part of the foundation for my work (Leeb-du Toit 2017:1). The material is of German origin but has been adopted by Xhosa and other cultures in South Africa, such as in the Sotho culture. It first became accessible because it was brought to the country through trade, but now it is a part of these cultures' visual identity (Leeb-du Toit 2017:179).

Dissolving Divisions (Figure 4.3) by Laura de Harde is a mixed media installation for the *Good Neighbours* (2022) exhibition at Nirox Sculpture Park. The work overlaps with my own not only in the choice of material but, perhaps more importantly, in the reason for that choice. The cultural relevance and symbolism of the isiShweshwe fabric are a starting point and stand at the nexus of our processes. In this work, viewers are invited to become participants who use safety pins to pin different patterned isiShweshwe fabrics together.

De Harde's work explores the complexities of boundary negotiation and the impact those negotiations can have on those on either side of those boundaries. The use of different patterns of isiShweshwe fabrics hints at the nature of some of those boundaries found in the meeting point of different cultures. But by using black lines on the fabric that draw their visual vocabulary from our understanding of maps and topography, we understand that these boundaries straddle the line and weave in and out of being both geographical and cultural.

That said, the name *Dissolving Divisions* already positions the artwork as a unifier of sorts. Through this lens, I must look at the act of participants pinning the fabrics back together (Figure 4.2). The act is more than a surface-level symbol for putting two different things together; it is one in which participants get to have a shared experience that is facilitated by an object and their interaction with it. Even if a participant were to visit the work alone, the adjustments and changes that they make to the work would affect the way that the participants interact with it but would also be a reaction to those who came before them, creating a link that is embodied in the shared history of the material.

[9] The use of fabric is another converging point between my art practice and De Harde's. In the *Inherited Obsessions* exhibition however, her focus is not isiShweshwe (which she has used in the *Good Neighbours* sculpture exhibition at Nirox in May 2022), but more closely on the sewing and fabric culture related to her own upbringing as a white South African of Dutch descent.

In my and De Harde's approaches to our artworks and creative practices, there is the search for connection (Figure 4.4). The question of whether culture and boundaries are about inclusion or exclusion is imprinted in these works; whether it is through physically connecting one fabric to another, connecting with the meaning embedded in the fabric, connecting to one's culture through the material, or connecting to people by way of the medium.

A crucial part of my art practice involves my interaction with the materials. Unlike in *Dissolving Divisions* which encourages audience participation, my interaction with the material is undertaken in solitude and does not require input from anyone else. The isiShweshwe fabric is used in conjunction with the umqombothi by pouring it onto the fabric to make it wet and malleable. The fabric is shaped when I dance on it in the traditional Xhosa dance known as *ukuXhensa,* which involves stomping the feet (Figure 4.5).

Various types of ukuXhensa are performed for specific occasions such as weddings and even dances reserved for specific genders. The one used in creating this artwork is called *umguyo* and is performed by young uninitiated boys before they leave to enter the initiation process in the mountains. The performance of the dance itself is seen as a symbol of one's start to transition from boyhood to manhood. The dancing is done to a rhythm dictated by a song from my childhood. Through this act, the fabric begins to move under my feet and take on a shape created by my movements. After the dancing stops, the fabric has taken on a wrinkled shape created by my stomping, and I leave it to dry as it is. Because the umqombothi has starch in it, the fabric becomes firm and keeps the shapes that have been created from the stomping. The umqombothi (a link to the past and family) helps the fabric retain the memory of an act that requires the practitioner's memories to perform. It retains and preserves proof of my movement and direct contact with the fabric.

The last step has to do with the use of the left-over sap from the umqombothi preparation (something that would usually be thrown away). I apply it onto the fabric's surface to help harden it and allow me to engage with the textural qualities of the artwork. The transcultural aspect of this process has to do with the origins of the materials as well as their treatment rather than only what the material is. Due to my upbringing, I did not engage with these materials and symbols outside the occasional ritual circumstances. The engagement remained hollow and lacked meaning for me. Therefore, I used the materials in a way that they were not intended to be used – to claim my own personal relationship and understanding with them and to create a relationship that I did not have before. By using the materials to make artwork in this manner and creating an artistic context, I am imbuing them with meaning to which I can connect.

This artistic practice as a whole was facilitated by not giving in to any pre-existing model of societal expectations but by creating something that combines objects and symbols from different cultures. The postcolonial writer Homi K. Bhabha (1994) takes a deconstructionist approach to culture and the social sciences in that he is anti-dichotomous in his views. He rejects the binary views of writers such as Edward Said (1978) as advanced in *Orientalism*. Bhabha (1994) is instead concerned with hybridity, as he describes in his book *The Location of Culture*. He asserts that one can form a mixed identity by mimicking someone's culture. The idea is that oppressed people can mimic the culture and language of those colonising them as a form of political resistance as the act gives the person being mimicked a destabilising feeling (Bhabha 1994:56, 85–92).

The catharsis I thought I was looking for by creating this work is very different from what I sought. In making these works, the goal was to connect and form a deeper bond with my culture but what happened instead was that the connection allowed me to let go. It opened me up to experiencing a sense of completeness within the incomplete state I perceived within myself and an understanding that what I sought had less to do with being recognised by others than with recognising and acknowledging myself.

I use mimicry in my work in that I mimic the dancing and practices found in my mother's culture, things that I am not supposed to have access to because, in the Sotho tradition, I am meant to take after my father. This mimicry is meant to help facilitate the crossing over into cultural liminality and transcultural space. It is also aimed at destabilising the patriarchal and hegemonic structures that force the binary imposition of being man or boy and all the statuses. This translation, my movement into the liminal, allows me to read the bones of my work and commune with the meanings that my materials and objects carry. This translation is supported by the skeleton of our original understanding of the function and symbolism of the objects we explore, not in hopes that we may simply read them but in hopes that they may speak to us.

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Figure 4.5.
Photograph of the artist dancing on isiShweshwe fabric as part of the shaping process. Courtesy of the artist.


Chapter 05

The Creaturely Life of Entropy: Producing Meaning in the Service of Art or Science

Jessica Webster

> *Schoonraad's statement is ambiguous. He may be saying that Battiss imaginatively filled in parts of the paintings that were actually missing in the original. However, Schoonraad could also have meant that those parts that were 'missing' were simply not immediately apparent and could become visible when the light changed or the viewer shifted their perspective. In my experience, the paintings can be visually unstable, particularly the faded or incomplete ones, with their appearance changing throughout the day and depending on the weather conditions* (De Harde 2022:95).

Introduction

Much art centres on capturing otherwise fleeting moments. Photography holds this function in a way that is often equated with a kind of death (Sey 2015:104), so close does it come to reducing the real, lively experience of time (and its perpetual loss), freezing forever its subject as a pure condition of material substance against light.

But a material capture is also produced in hand-painted work, not as a product of instantaneity, but through processes of enactment. A certain event is mimetically reproduced through strange fragmentations and unexpected convergences of the original event's associative or metaphoric powers—an often confusing or surprising *re-enactment,* because what is realised through the process is not a new idea so much as a focusing on what has always been internal to or hidden in the original event. In Laura de Harde's practice, the interminable entropy associated with history is reproduced in an allegory of missed encounters with her subjects and their subjectivities—who remain in the archives.

In this reproduction of anonymous photographic portraits, light and solid matter of surface—a record of first causes—is scrambled. The loose-leaf papers are shared with her mother (a celebrated master quilter), who works on the paper with her Bernina 770 QE sewing machine. The thread is driven through the surface in circular whirls of curlicues, often found as framing elements of portrait miniatures. In a curious collapse of the passe-partout, the Bernina is piloted straight over the picture plane as if to trap the portraits within the delicate whorls, being disfigured and sometimes structured by them.

De Harde engages in staining acts of play between the absorbency of the paper and thread and the fluidity of the ink medium. Some resemblance to her subject (the old photograph portrait) is loosely gestured outwards and drawn in with blue-grey ink washes. The washes are also drawn to an edge which sharply circumscribes a fine outline or detail. The artist works minimally with bleach on the ink stains which have the curious effect of fading the ink but leaving yellow-brown traces that are suggestive of old bruises and wounds. The works are then left to dry, but in some cases, the water of the face stains has dissolved or imprinted the paper so that the portraits are skeletally reduced to her mother's stitching, forming web-like structures of lace, or decay.

The fragmentary sheathes hold a fragile indeterminacy and organic cross-pollination of forms that register as beautiful and ephemeral: a 'collection' worth keeping. But these anonymous portraits are not restored to subjectivity by the process of abrading surface and reducing form, of supplementary details and imposed decay. It is less that the photographs are reproduced in painting than a moment of breakdown is repeatedly enacted: the process of entropic dissolution into obsolescence, something that the archives themselves are undergoing

Figure 5.1.
Pride by Laura de Harde, 15 x 20 cm, 2020, ink and thread on Fabriano paper. Courtesy of the artist.

over time, is reproduced. A process and a posture of disintegration and of loss is mimetically captured and reanimated as a function of its capture. These pieces exemplify Theodor Adorno's conception of art's role in post-war society:

> art's frozen mimetic snapshots of reality take on its sclerotic features, while yearning for something more flexible, a something which glimmers elusively in the childlike possibility of an open relationship between artworks and those who receive them (Connell 1998:68).

That tension between a sclerotic entropy and yearning for *something* claimed as a quality of fragile beauty in these works contains the germ of 'creaturely life' I want to explore as a feature of De Harde's scholarship in relationship to art and the archives and which connects in its 'spectral materiality' to certain art forms as 'an archive of creaturely life' (Santner 2006:xiii). Developed by theorist Eric Santner (2006), this extra-aesthetic domain describes the affective force of bearing witness to the remnants of violence that characterises much of Western history and tales of scientific progress. Drawing from Walter Benjamin (1928), Santner construes creaturely life as an immanent perceptual quality of reflecting on the past, but which is also tainted by a strange sense of enjoyment at this encounter with the ruins of symbolic life: with the revelation of a particular temporality of truth in its lived materiality, now lost.

In this essay, I view the artistic process of De Harde's paintings as a mimetic enactment of entropy. In material processes exemplifying the entropic principle of simplification and disorder, De Harde illuminates or brings this haunting, spectral quality of creaturely life into tangible form. With reference to the notion of entropy in science discourses, I reflect on an eerie psychological space of jouissance and loss in knowledge-making practices. The observing position being so key to the perception of entropy—the experience of joy or trauma—I contend that the ethical dimension of witnessing and making meaning of the past in our time is all-important to a project of restoration. I argue that it is precisely in the dream-wish for a more wholesome state of being, for a fuller understanding and more complete knowledge, that a form of uncertainty is introduced, which has devastating effects on humankind and the environment. This writing forms the beginning of

an appeal to science to reflect on the creaturely life that generates and maintains its burgeoning grip on the material world. Mirroring the natural world in its speechless unpredictability, this remnant of the drive to knowledge, the will to power, is perceptible at the level of a thoroughly human condition.

The obscurity of origins

A qualitative element of all worthwhile research maintains an element of lasting mystery. It is known for its effects on the researcher; it is a mainspring of much discovery. It *is* the sense of discovery, but it also concerns the seeming limitless anxiety with which the discovery is pursued. *It* holds curiosity and enigma, but remaining out of view, is also crashing in its disappointment. It is a remainder of the content under investigation (or experimentation) that escapes representation. Difficult to describe, it is called simply the remainder, or 'thing', or the noumenon.[1] It remains unclear whether that unknowable element is a property of the object perceived or purely subjective, remaining just out of grasp to the subject of cognition or an internal quality of her own imaginative limits—or desire.

My interest in this remnant is framed here as an extra-aesthetic domain of the 'creaturely'. The term frames desire in proximity to the natural world of creatures because it lacks representation—the enigmatic particle that refuses discursive language—yet, 'it' gazes back. As Eric Santner (2006:52) states, it is a distinguishing feature of a fundamentally human 'thingness' precisely because it is felt in relation to the loss of symbolic meaning that historical artefacts and archives present: all the 'past lives and lost possibilities' that the things of the past can affectively trigger. Santner (2006:16) draws in the main from Walter Benjamin's melancholic positioning of the creaturely against a 'backdrop of breakdown and reification': but what is lost is not the natural world as such, but the symbolic meaning humans have invested the world with. In particular, the loss of symbolic life is an effect of history's decay and human sovereignty's destructive potential. It is visibly tangible in witnessing 'cycles of emergence and decay of human orders of meaning' such as architectural ruins or relics and artefacts that have become obsolete—an entropic condition, the repetition of which is 'always connected to violence' (Benjamin in Santner 2006:17).

Over the course of his prestigious 2021 Boyle Lecture at the International Society of Science and Religion, acclaimed scientist and professor of natural philosophy Tom McLeish invokes the thermodynamic principle of entropy as exemplary of science while noting how entropy is much more relative and less exacting than the objectivity, lucidity and rigour held up as science's ideal. According to McLeish, observing entropy reveals the imminent potential for mores of scientific objectivity to acknowledge and even harness a close relationship to subjective conditions of imagination and memory. As with the experience of viewing Monet's paintings, he states, the definition of entropy 'corresponds exactly' to the 'careful choice' of proximity or distance the observer has to her subject matter. Thus, whereas entropy is most often described as 'an intrinsic measure of disorder', it is

> [...] better thought of as a measure of our deliberate ignorance in contemplating the system: Of how many detailed components we choose to blur together in our mental and mathematical representations of nature [...] The glorious paradox here is that by negotiating an entropic relationship with the world—by formally choosing to know *less* about its detail in this way, we can arrange to understand *more* (McLeish 2021).

A similar argument is addressed in intensive detail throughout De Harde's scholarship on the archives of rock art, especially hand-painted reproductions of rock art, as they may form an epistemological contribution to the field of rock art studies. For all the quiet backroom research and sweaty excursions to rock faces De Harde has undertaken, she ventures an argument with radical implications: that we can develop our engagement with rock art—and potentially what the art was originally meant to signify or do—through formally analysing and contextualising (through properties of line, colour, and composition) the history of San art *reproductions* (De Harde 2022:76; Weintroub & De Harde 2021:85).[2]

With McLeish's reframing, we may characterise De Harde's research as centred on the 'entropic relationship' of creative copies with their originals: by actively choosing not to focus on the core body of scholarship around rock art (the art's original function and signification), work is produced to understand more of the ever-shifting terrain of visuality and knowledge production—ultimately, our scholarly, *scientific* interest in the interpretation of visual data depends on it. The research is reflective in this way. Against an instrumental unpacking of rock art as a historical

[1] I have argued previously that this resistant element is linked to notions of experiencing trauma because both trauma and remainders resist symbolisation, and indeed the present text returns to the problem of identification (Webster 2017). [2] Besides the obvious empirical reasons—many of the originals have suffered the ravages of touch, time and neglect—De Harde analyses rock art copies not for a clearer sense of narrative content that may subtend the re-articulation of these finely painted figures and forms, but for how copying processes are 'creative practices' in themselves. Through time, the aesthetic choices of copyists have come to structure some of the 'hidden' or 'complex ways' in which visual knowledge has developed in this field (De Harde 2022:76; Weintroub & De Harde 2021:87).

record, De Harde's argument intentionally steers readers towards 'the uncertainty and nuance that remains at the heart of scholarly research and knowledge-making' (Weintroub & De Harde 2021:84).

Negotiating entropy opens productive space because eliding certain information in favour of something else intangible and uncertain shines not only on the ethical prerogatives of 'careful choice' as espoused by McLeish but also on the creaturely life of creative acts in science: the very notion of the *imagination* and its role for research. The term, as invoked in McLeish's lecture (2021), is put to theological work drawing the possibility of continuity with Medieval science as a 'rung … in the healing relationship to nature'—a concept he goes on to draw out, holding original proximity with the Christian doctrine of divine inspiration. Imagination maintains some of this enigmatic dearth of connotation in more recent treatments of science philosophy, McLeish states, citing Karl Popper acknowledging that 'there is no scientific method for generating those scientific hypotheses that he spent the next 500 pages on in the first place' (McLeish 2021).

De Harde engages the question by raising the quite astonishing detail that the reproductions made by Walter Battiss, a well-known twentieth century South African artist and recognised researcher of rock art, cannot, most often, be linked to the originals at all.

> This difficulty in matching original with copy reinforces my contention that Battiss sometimes deviated deliberately from the original rock art, even though his process involved elements of close observation and 'accurate' copying. (De Harde 2022:92)

With critical distance, De Harde (2022:95) reviews arguments about Battiss's artist sensibility presenting 'uncanny' examples of intuition and traces the 'imaginative' scope Battiss found in San approaches to perspective. She also describes his compulsive return to rock faces in terms of 'enchantment' (2022:85), a concept of social anthropologist Alfred Gell which De Harde and Wintjes (2020:66) deploy in another text towards considering the technological processes of reproduction as a 'strategy creat[ing] a degree of remove in relation to the enchanting original; it opens the dynamic of enchantment itself up for investigation'.

The uncertainty asserted as internal and vital to the study of reproductions also holds an ethical function in diminishing the grip of modern Western meaning-making on experiences of an 'other', particularly one who is lost to history. Uncertainty is deployed as a form of critique in Catherine Zaayman's (2014) scholarship on the figure of Krotoa, where there is primarily evidence of Krotoa's life in the archives as absent. We know through Van Riebeeck's diaries that Krotoa was a Khoi woman indentured as a child servant by the 1600s Dutch settlers in the Cape and who came to hold something of an interstitial role in Dutch and Khoi relations. But while records of Krotoa are scant, myths, theories, and creative imaginings of Krotoa's life abound (Zaayman 2014:303). After marrying a white settler and bearing mixed-race children, Krotoa was ultimately eschewed from Dutch colonial society while estranging from her original kin (Zaayman 2014:307). This 'colonial identity' is at once the basis of myth-making, which construes Krotoa as 'the first true South African' (2014:310). Also, it designates her as a sign of all those Khoisan who are missing or 'lost' in the archives: a 'pressure' exerted on this lonely figure to represent 'the loss of history' itself (2014:303). Zaayman holds that while imaginative transculturation of narratives for Krotoa are often a significant attempt to grapple with postcolonial identity and heritage within the ashes of apartheid, the symbolic violence contained with that pressure—to represent so much trauma—is also implied.

The proclivity for trauma to make its place in the gaps of uncertainty and missed encounters has a long history, particularly in the scrupulous recording and mapping of colonial settlers in the Cape. David Chidester (1996:2) draws from archived accounts of European encounters with Khoisan, whose language was so 'other' from the flattened vowels of European speech that 'the problem of intercultural communication was initially posed as an extraordinary situation in which human language was totally absent'. This perception progressed to the study of the gesture and movement of Khoisan bodies, Chidester writes, resulting in a fixation with body parts and 'mutilation' of subjects in the name of scientific inquiry, as well as other brutal acts of extermination accorded those who have been turned into objects.

The truth of this violence is approached in a much more recent account of forensic scrutiny and the black body by the late artist, theorist and art critic Colin Richards (1954–2012). Here truth is cast as a missed encounter with his own deep trauma and sense of complicity in apartheid. This moving and sensitive essay details the artistic complex of conveying memory as truthful to and authentic of the trauma he bore witness to and felt instrumentalised by, first as a young conscript

on the Angolan border and later, as a science illustrator working in the pathology labs of Wits Medical School (1999:9, 14). In the essay, Richards discloses his unwitting participation in Steve Biko's post-mortem when asked to provide forensic labels and indicators on carelessly taken photographs of a bruised and wounded body. As he realised later, this grisly record was material for the inquest into Biko's murder (Richards 1999:10). Viewed in association with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (which was taking place while he began producing the work under discussion), Richards's project grapples with the tensions and breakdowns of memory and meaning that characterise acts of witnessing and confession:

> In the TRC's often painful public choreography of disclosure, we find the serpentine presence of what Sarah Nuttall (1998) calls the 'messy activity of memory'. We find, through rough images drawn from ruined and ruinous recollection, unimaginable truths and unspeakable lies taking the same stand (1999:2).

Mirroring these tensions between truth and lies, Richards frames his research as inhabiting an uncertain space where the glimmers of psychic exposure to the real—a revisiting of trauma that recalling these events prompts—also tend to remain 'veiled' to total recall. His doubts are doubly veiled by his misgivings for art to 'rescue' truth from the 'deep duplicities of memory' (1999:4). In Richards's meditations, both art and memory are essentially reproductions or copies of the original event. Between art and memory, 'making sense of the past' is understood as a 'radical simplification' or condition of entropy, which 'demands a selecting, ordering, and simplifying, a construction of coherent narrative whose logic works to draw the life story towards the fable' (Samuel & Thompson 1990, as cited by Richards 1999:3).

As Richards describes it, the 'provisional rescue' which representation and narrative can perform are just as quickly replaced by doubts and uncertainty towards his real and imagined 'fabrication' of meaning that his art practice performs. Santner similarly describes this domain of psychological tension as the 'signifying stress' of creaturely life: the 'never-ceasing work of symbolisation and failure at symbolisation, translation, and failure at translation' (2006:33).

De Harde raises the vicissitudes of signifying stress in her reflections on Walter Battiss's practice as a copyist and as an original

Figure 5.2.
Almost White by Colin Richards, artwork (right panel of triptych, *Almost Non-White, White Headstone, Almost White*), 28 x 21 cm, 1999, pen and ink on paper. Courtesy of the Sasol Art Collection.

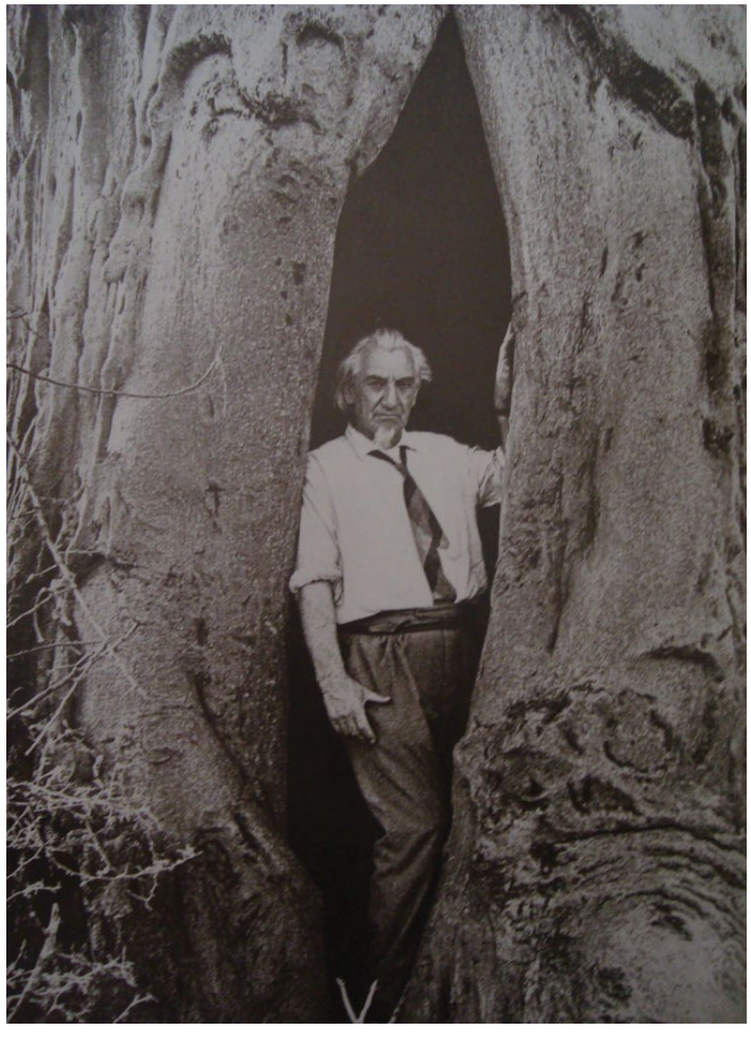

Figure 5.3.
Untitled portrait, Walter Battiss in a baobab, date unknown, from his book *Limpopo* (1965), published by Van Schaik, Pretoria. Courtesy of the Walter Battiss Museum.

artist, a 'dichotomy of identity' which apparently 'plagued' him in his early years: 'Was he Battiss, the student of prehistoric art, or was he Battiss, the artist?' (Schoonraad in De Harde 2022:97). In both roles, Battiss demonstrated an obsessive drive that resulted in a prolific output of creative work, neither of which, as noted, is strictly referential to a particular source or subject matter but which was illuminated by originality which remains singular and unique even within the contemporary global milieu of artists young and old. In as much as the form of life and character evoked by San rock art was a source of inspiration, it is equally likely that the inherent 'failure to translate' San art inhabited the original resolve to manifest new worlds of colour and meaning so adjacent but different to the familiar scenes of the everyday. More recently, as De Harde (2022:97) points out, the Wits Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) restored a significant number of Battiss's reproductions for a 2016 exhibition, the same year in which collector and philanthropist Jack Ginsberg, together with curator Warren Siebrits, produced a separate exhibition at the Wits Art Museum (WAM) entitled *I Invented Myself*.

This access to creaturely life is not what De Harde's own dichotomous working process reveals. Her repetitive return to painting the old portraits within the archives, many of which in South Africa and Zimbabwe are in various stages of crumbling neglect, may be interpreted as an act of sublimation: a decompression of the signifying stress her scholarly research meaningfully pursues. The pieces act for and re-enact within the strange temporality of reproducing the archives. Indeed, the retrieval of the past for the recognition of its loss creates this effect on time. But this reproduction of countless reproductive acts, of lives lost to obscurity, is inscribed in these works, literally and conceptually, as a maternal emblem of care. A creaturely form of caring this may be, because the integrity of subjectivity is in no way restored to these faces. Rather, a tenderness towards the human condition of remains unfolds.

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Chapter **06**

After the Fire: Thoughts on Documents and Archives

Jill Weintroub

A manageable loss

The destruction by fire of a small (reportedly minor) part of the collection of photographs and documents that were once part of Dorothea Bleek's southern African research project prompts a personal reflection on my entanglements with the Bleek collection. The loss of these materials, for the most part, photographs arranged as objects in albums and preserved according to archival conventions, provides an acute reminder of the impermanent condition governing archives and the instability of the objects they contain and preserve.

The documentary residue of Dorothea Bleek's life and work is preserved within the University of Cape Town's larger and internationally acclaimed Bleek and Lloyd collection (Weintroub 2013, see also 2006). The collection is most celebrated for the notebooks of |xam narratives collected by Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm Bleek in the early 1870s and 1880s (Bank 2006; Skotnes 2007). Given its status on UNESCO's Memory of the World register (UNESCO n.d.), it is not surprising that this part of the collection was immediately salvaged from the ruins of the Jagger Library (Kirkwood 2021a:1). In the aftermath of the devastating fire in April 2021, some of Dorothea Bleek's materials had been destroyed. In light of the themes of the *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) exhibition and Laura de Harde's artistic practice, I consider the loss of these documents and, at the same time, reflect on my years of research in the now incomplete collection. In the following account, I show how the materials burnt in the fire constitute a sad but manageable loss.

The day Pippa Skotnes's email bounced into my inbox, another burning episode gripped the country (the July 'unrest/ insurrection', see Msimang 2021 for a cogent analysis of the events). 'Dorothea Bleek materials' read the subject line. In the body of the email: Did I have any photographs, 'even bad cell phone pics', notes, or any other materials that I might have gathered through my work on Dorothea Bleek to contribute to her effort to 'secure' the Bleek and Lloyd collection 'after the shock and panic of the fire'? This was 28 July 2021, not quite three months since raging winds blew fire from the slopes of Table Mountain and Devil's Peak across upper Rondebosch, a not-unusual occurrence in a typical Cape Town summer (Van Wilgen & Van Wilgen-Bredenkamp 2021). This time, however, apart from the usual damage to domestic properties established in areas historically known to be vulnerable to seasonal fires, the fire spread to the University of Cape Town's upper campus, leading to the destruction of the African Studies/Jagger Reading Room along with other historic buildings in the area including Mostert's Mill (BBC 2021; Wroughton 2021). Along with local and international handwringing, diverse environmental and social reasons reportedly caused what started as a seasonal wildfire to incinerate priceless collections (BBC 2021; Seekings & Saunders 2021). In the wake of the narrative that would, in significant ways, be repeated in the aftermath of the fire at the National Parliament of South Africa on 2 January 2022, Cape Town seemed to be suffering under a curse of some kind.

As cataclysmic images of fire destruction morphed into the realisation that significant flooding in basement storage areas had occurred during firefighting, I had heard from colleagues, friends and media reports about the heroic rescue efforts that had animated Cape Town's scholarly circles and members of the public to urgently save the water damaged records from the basement at Jagger (Banda 2021; Kirkwood 2021b; Singer 2021). I saw online images of masked men and women forming a human conveyor belt to move records from the basement into waiting vans sponsored by a supermarket chain and other corporates (Kirkwood 2021b:47–49; 2021c). 'Triage tents' were set up, and refrigerated containers were brought onto campus so that water-damaged documents could be frozen to ameliorate water damage and preserve items for later cleaning and conservation (Jagger Library Recovery n.d.; Kirkwood 2021c; Singer 2021). The relief

efforts began immediately. Many Cape Town residents responded to the call to salvage what they could in light of the traumatic destruction of collections and records of international acclaim. These redemptive acts would irrevocably transfigure the archive at UCT and inscribe the ruination of the fire onto the records, documents, materials and collections for all users in the future. After processing or painstaking repair and conservation, I learned that all records rescued from the flooded basement would be marked with the legend 'Survived the Jagger Library fire, 18 April 2021 (Satgoor 2022; Jagger Library Recovery n.d.).

These salvage and recovery actions and efforts have been memorialised in different ways, including personal testimony, display, online photography collation, and an exhibition opening a year after the fire (Michaelis School of Art 2022; Singer 2021).

By July 2021, after months of painstaking processes of salvage and recovery, it had emerged that 'a lot of Dorothea Bleek's photographs and some documents are destroyed' (Skotnes 28 July 2021). The library reported in a list assessing the records of Dorothea Bleek:

> … the following boxes [are] missing: 63, 66, 67, 68. This reflects the following series in the collection: BC151_J2–J7 and F1.16–F2.4. The collection then continues uninterrupted with the rest of the sequence. Sadly, this represents those physical records that were locked in the Archives Office above the Reading Room during the fire (Kirkwood 2021a:2).

In the immediate aftermath of the fire, there had been some confusion about the integrity of the Bleek and Lloyd materials. However, I had heard that the famous notebooks had been saved and remained intact. In her email to me, Skotnes wrote:

> The bad news is that an assessment has finally been done, and a lot of Dorothea Bleek's photographs and some documents are destroyed. I am now trying to find out if any of these exist in copies made by those who worked with the material. Even bad cell phone pics would be better than nothing (Skotnes 28 July 2021).

Special Collection's archivist Clive Kirkwood (2021a:2) confirmed in a formal report just a few months later that 'four archival boxes of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection (out of a total of 88 archival boxes and oversize material)' had been destroyed in the fire. These materials were part of the work on a digitisation request and had therefore been locked in an archival working room awaiting processing. These materials were destroyed along with the building. There was a silver lining, though: Much of the 'original material lost in the fire … which was unique in terms of its origin in the work of the Bleeks and Lloyd themselves, had been scanned [to archival standards] and is available in digital form' (Kirkwood 2021a:2). Kirkwood wrote of the remaining material that had not been scanned, 'much did not originate in the work of the Bleeks and Lloyd themselves nor did it have direct relevance to the focus of their work' (Kirkwood 2021a:3).

Further corroborating the efficiency and professionalism of the salvage operation and its recognition of the collection's global significance, Kirkwood noted that 'the very first collection removed from the damaged Jagger Library and assessed was the Bleek and Lloyd Collection. As stored in the archival basement, the collection was intact and had not suffered any exposure to dampness. To ensure the best possible archival conditions, the Bleek and Lloyd Collection was moved to Special Collections' custom-built archival store in the Oppenheimer Institute on Library Road on the upper campus' (Kirkwood 2021a:1).

To what extent could researchers who had worked with the materials be able to provide images and documents to stand in for items that had been lost in the fire? What could I do to contribute to making Dorothea Bleek's documentary records whole again?

File by file

I had to return to files and notes from an earlier epoch in my scholarly life to decades previous, when I first ventured into what would become years of research on the Bleek and Lloyd material, culminating in my biographical investigation into the scholarly and personal life of Dorothea Bleek. What remnants of these years of research, pre-dating 2010, survived in my records? I returned to a file bearing the label '*Dorothea*'. Metadata told me that the file was created in September 2016, but I knew that my PhD research spanned 2006 to 2011, when my degree was conferred. The 2016 date indicated when the files were transferred onto the laptop I continue to use. From a list of subfiles with titles such as *Final drafts June 2008*; *Notebooks*; *On Rock Art*; *The Dictionary*; *The Dictionary, DB's Language Research*, I find one labelled *Research BC 151 file by file*. Would this be of assistance, I wondered?

Figure 6.1.
A selection of Dorothea Bleek's field notebooks and other materials, photographed in February 2010 in the University of Cape Town Libraries' Manuscripts and Archives reading room. Courtesy Special Collections, University of Cape Town Libraries.

In my *file by file* directory, I find a subfile labelled *F1.13.1 – F1.18 misc (sic) writings by others*. The library's list itemises *F1.16 – F2.4 – Miscellaneous writings of others (destroyed in fire).* My notes appear to cover some of the surviving materials up to F1.16, but not all of the materials catalogued from F1.18 to F2.4. (The letters F and J refer to the archival classifications given to materials, with the letter J indicating predominantly photographic material. The numerals represent the subfiles into which the various documents are sorted.) My document is barely two pages long, and the notes are fragmented.

Under F1.16, which has been destroyed, my notes read:

> Hand-written on blue stationery A5, in copperplate script, heading 'A story told to me by an old Bushman who appears to be between 70 to 80 years of age' – two stories about 'watermeide' [sic] or 'waterwomen', told by 'old Africaander' who addresses the writer as 'baas'.

For F1.17, also destroyed, I wrote:

> Hand-written on A5 notepaper, in German, with archivist note referring to 210 in top LH corner, heading 'Aus Customs and Beliefs of the |Xam Bushmen' – may have something to do with Käthe Woldmann …

Dorothea Bleek had enjoyed a long friendship and correspondence with Käthe Woldmann, based in Switzerland. Having met in South Africa, their friendship grew out of a shared fascination with the folklore and art of people they called 'Bushmen'. As noted in my biography (Weintroub 2016), much of the intimate detail about Dorothea's personal life was drawn from this correspondence, conducted in German and preserved in the Käthe Woldmann collection, presumably still safe and sound in UCT Libraries Special Collections.

Finally, under F.18, I had written, in part:

> [Pencilled note on catalogue next to this entry records the name R. Storey 1937]
>
> Typewritten field notes by unknown writer, based on language interviews at the camp associated with the Empire Exhibition in Jhb, with a woman identified as "Kabala" and language called "Kilhausi", said to be slightly understood by the /auni – although they would only address each other in Nama. She was the only one of her tribe present.
>
> Text contains a ref to Professor Maingard's assertion that 'there is no passive in the Bushman languages'. Some pointers to chaos in the method, eg. Difficulties in finding a common language between researcher and object of research – 'Although the woman was an intelligent and patient subject, she knew only a few words of Afrikaans'… 'It was difficult to get her to speak sufficiently slowly, and almost impossible to get her to speak a sentence in exactly the same words'.

For the rest, my document is silent. I cannot make sense of the fragments contained within what I had hoped would be detailed research notes. How to make sense of the loss of the original materials from which my notes were drawn? Does any of this matter? Is this not to be taken as evidence of the inevitable limits of any research endeavour, where the researcher is always required to make selections, to include or exclude words, phrases, quotations, and descriptions? As Kirkwood's report suggests, F1.16–F2.4 was material that was 'not directly relevant to the work of the Bleeks and Lloyd' (2021a:3). When I close my document, Word warns me that the file format is out of date; the Microsoft Word 97–2003 Document needs to be updated to docx format, which requires me to save it as such.

Moving to the J series, the archivist's 2021 report states:

> J2.1 Album containing photographs of Bushmen dancing, as well as their shelters and implements. Taken by DF Bleek at Van Wyksvlei, Prieska, Gordonia, Nossop, Lake Chrissie, Bechuanaland and Angola. n.d. c.1920s–30s. Descriptions on the backs of the photographs. (scanned)
>
> J2.2 Photographs taken by D F Bleek during a research trek in Bechuanaland, Christmas 1919. Includes list of photos. (unscanned – lost in fire)

Again, my supposed file-by-file research does not precisely correspond with the listed materials. My file named *J2.1 Photography*

on DISC, including Sandfontein, Kakia is seven pages long. Under the heading VIEWED ON 28.01.09, my notes read:

> ACTUAL ALBUM J2.1 is a thick tome, cloth bound grey, now frayed at the corners and edges, with blue and gold embossed title in the middle front in Italic script 'Post-Cards'.
>
> Inside are matt black pages of cartridge paper with cut marks where you can slide in your postcards, or photographs as DB did, to accommodate two sizes of card … but no writing in the book itself, only the annotations on the photos. Her name does not appear anywhere in the book, and there is no mark or writing therein at all! MUST ESTABLISH PROVENANCE OF THIS ALBUM which has been digitised by M&A, and the original put away, altho (sic) it was no problem for me to get access to the album itself to view alongside the digitised version.
>
> When paging through the album pix fall out of their mountings.

It seems superfluous to note that this level of engagement with documents in material rather than digital form has, in the case at hand, been lost. Whatever quirks of arrangement Dorothea might have employed in laying out her photographs in this album can no longer be observed. Similarly, this is a loss that will be replicated in other collections now rendered incomplete due to the fire. Returning to the Dorothea Bleek collection, I remember more clearly the materials catalogued within the J series, which covered photography, including field photographs produced by Dorothea Bleek and miscellaneous photographs presumably included in the collection because they were important to Dorothea Bleek for scholarly or perhaps familial reasons. Back in 2009, I had the advantage of engaging with the materiality of this particular residue of Dorothea Bleek's life and research. That experience will no longer be available to researchers. One surviving view of the images in J2.1 and the ones in J2.2 now lost (Figure 6.2) is available in the critical reading of the collection in Bank (2006).

The term polycrisis flitted into my head as I browsed UCT libraries' online media, where several sites and blogs told stories about the emotional, spatial, classificatory, and logistical responses to the devastation of fire and flood. It struck me how the technocratic response from librarians, archivists and conservators, with assistance from members of the public, corporates and businesses in Cape Town, gave new meaning to the landmark theoretical ideas about archives and collections that had been advanced by scholars such as Michel Foucault (1989) and Jacques Derrida (1995), in relation to how documents and archival materials related to structures of knowledge, orders of governance and disciplinary power, and how this related to the Foucauldian idea of the episteme.

Once the newly catalogued post-fire lists are returned to use, the record for each item salvaged from the flooded basement will be marked 'Survived the Jagger Library fire, 18 April 2021'. Items not recovered will remain listed, and the record will be marked 'Lost in the Jagger Library fire'. Interventions such as these notwithstanding a 'significant institutional loss' remained in that 'the original card catalogues for the manuscripts and archives repositories, the history of UCT Libraries and the special collections archive office and administrative records', vice-chancellor Mamokgethi Phakeng said in a statement issued shortly after the fire (Banda 2021). Not only were these records destroyed but also the historic building, which had undergone careful renovation in 2012 to restore its interiors to the original style and décor, including furnishings from the 1930s. I was taken back to my years of research in that same space now reduced to ash, before COVID, before the fire, before the #mustfall movements. I remember those card catalogues: wedge-shaped cabinets beautifully fashioned in blonde wood, with drawers exactly designed for the cards, a cabinet of curiosities of sorts.

It is not surprising that in the aftermath of the fire, UCT Libraries plans to enhance and continue with its 'substantial investment in a digital preservation system for university-wide use' (Kirkwood 2021b:54). Special Collections was determined to rise from the ashes, by enhancing the focus on digitisation of archival material, together with an enhanced potential to make digital surrogates accessible online linked to the finding aids. The rebuilding provided an opportunity 'for renewal, to add value and become more relevant to users' needs while upholding the university's mandate and fulfilling Special Collections' mission as a leading repository of African research resources' (Kirkwood 2021b:55).

Thus, despite the profound extent of the loss, librarians and archivists at UCT remain committed to conserving, recreating, and remaking what existed before. As director Satgoor (2022) declared earlier this year in an update on post-fire mitigation efforts:

> By being focused and strategic about our needs and requirements, we relocated to new premises; consolidated all our dispersed materials to a single location; continued with remedial conservation by staff, an international visiting conservator, and interns; re-organised the thousands of crates into collections; commenced the transfer of primary materials into new archival stationery; sourced additional funding for critical conservation equipment, shared expertise, digitisation of at-risk collections, and future capacity building; and commenced the rebuilding [of] the African Studies collection by re-shelving some of the salvaged and restored materials with the note 'survived the Jagger fire' on each bibliographic record. In addition to the above, the outsourced restoration projects of our rare and antiquarian books and monographs, and audio-visual collections are well underway. After all this activity, we are now better positioned to present the 12-month Jagger Fire report to the UCT community.

Indeed, the entire university appears to be determined to remake this disaster as an opportunity for transformation and redress. As vice chancellor Mamokgethi Phakeng wrote in a letter published by UCT just as the final draft of this paper was being revised, the library rising from the ashes would be reimagined collaboratively and inclusively. As Phakeng put it: 'We want the new Jagger Library to be a space for rethinking, reimagining, re-energising and repurposing higher education; for creating a strong, purposeful community of knowledge builders and knowledge users who will help lead the many changes we foresee in the future'.

In closing

The Jagger fire of 2021 brings home what critical studies on the nature of the archive have been arguing for the longest time regarding the ineffability of archives and their contents. In the formulation of Hamilton, Harris and Read (2002:10), the archive is as much about hopes and longings for the future as it is about the past. One way to provide space for this fluid nature of the archive is to think about the idea of an archival gap—to see the archive as a sliver rather than as an incomplete whole. In the same volume, Harris (2002b:135–42) argues for the notion of 'the archival sliver' to remind us of the selections, exclusions, and even destruction of records, which are inevitably part of the processes of archive formation and dissolution. Harris (2002b:135–36) is acutely aware of the limits imposed by archival practice, arguing that what archivists like to call 'the record' is in practice 'just a sliver of a window into an event', that the record itself is 'substantially reduced through deliberate and inadvertent destruction by records creators and managers, leaving a sliver of a sliver from which archivists select what they will preserve'. After Derrida, Harris (2002a:63) argues for the 'contradictory' and 'always dislocating' nature of the archive and calls for a recognition of the relation between the known, the classified, and the accounted for, against what is beyond or outside of the archive, the unknowable, unarchivable, the other. The archive is being turned inside out by postmodernist epistemologies and the technological revolution. And yet, many archivists have still to acknowledge 'the devastating rebuttal of the notion long cherished … that in contextualising text they are revealing meaning, resolving mystery, and closing the archive' (Harris 2002a:71). What needs to be acknowledged instead argues Harris (2002a:71), is the Derridean framing of archival endeavour as being about 'the releasing of meanings, the tending of mystery and the disclosing of the archive's openness'. What is needed is a recognition of the 'blindness or limits residing at the heart of archival practice, the need to move away from binary oppositions such as knowledge or ignorance, self and other, reason against passion' (Harris 2002a:71-75).

In my book (Weintroub 2016), I argued for greater recognition for Dorothea Bleek's role in preserving the documents and papers created and produced by her father and aunt. In the preface, I described how my engagement with the Bleek and Lloyd materials had pre-dated my particular interest in Dorothea as the only daughter who had prolonged and extended the scholarly work of her father and aunt. She, out of five Bleek daughters, was the one who had taken what had been home-based domestic interactions out of the living room and into the field, taking regular trips across southern African landscapes to continue the language and folklore work begun by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd. However, my concern with Dorothea had grown out of a broader interest in the making of the archive and indeed in critically assessing what the Bleek and Lloyd collection could say about the place of the archive in contemporary worlds:

Figure 6.2.
Album J2.1 in its archival storage box February 2010. Courtesy Special Collections, University of Cape Town Libraries.

> … my interest in the collection and the drama of its making would keep me busy for many years. While working on my MPhil at UCT in the early 2000s, I researched the story of Otto Hartung Spohr and discovered how his dedicated detective work and roots in pre-World War II Germany and Eastern Europe had played out in his study of German librarians at the Cape and of German Africana, and in his writings on the life of Wilhelm Bleek. … As I read his correspondence [written while working as a librarian at UCT], it became clear to me that Spohr's interest in Wilhelm Bleek was as much emotional as it was professional. The empathy he felt towards Wilhelm Bleek, combined with a profound nostalgia for the Eastern Europe he had been forced to flee in the 1930s, leapt out at me as I read his letters. I began to realise how much Spohr's personal quest and his passion were embedded in a collection of documents that are now often mined for other reasons. This realisation led me to the person of Dorothea Bleek (Weintroub 2016:vii–viii).

Looking back on years of work among archived documents, in the wake of the fire and loss of so much, one is reminded of the contingency of knowledge and the need always to negotiate gaps and omissions. It becomes clear that the work of the archive can be imagined as a relentless, never-ending quest for wholeness and a search for a totality that can never be realised or attained.

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Chapter 07

Stored in a Red Briefcase: Unpacking the Affectivity and Fluctuating Value of Memory Objects

Olivia Loots

Materialities play an active role in 'triggering and shaping recollection' and linking humans and ideas across time and space (Rigney 2017:474). Memory objects, as one particular materiality, 'fascinate through their shape, texture, colour and size' and 'promise us stories by outliving the time in which they first came into being' (Rigney 2017:474). Recently, I dedicated my doctoral thesis to exploring the relationships between humans and objects (Loots 2022). The study grew from my lifelong fascination with the tales told by mundane objects through their entanglements with memories and humans. Memory objects can be described as any object that belongs to someone, usually as a form of remembrance and commemoration of an event or relationship. Such objects are not necessarily functional but could be and are predominantly valued for their sentimental value (Gordon 1986:135; Hatzimoyis 2003:373). As objects that capture relations and past events commonly through meticulous care, memory objects are undoubtedly often associated with notions such as inheritance and obsession. A central theme in this book is the 'obsessive' preservation of inherited objects in museum archives. In this chapter, I turn away from the museum space and turn towards an intimate, informal home space to unpack, physically and theoretically, objects in a private collection.

The study's research process included conducting interviews with twenty-one participants, during which we discussed, amongst other things, their memory objects. Before each interview, I asked each participant to think about memory objects they kept (if they did) and would be willing to share details about on the day of our conversation. Some memory objects discussed in the interviews included heirlooms such as furniture, quilts and rings; travel souvenirs such as mugs, earrings and fridge magnets; found objects such as coins and glass bottles; self-actualising objects such as paintings, flutes and diaries; spaces, such as gardens and cities; and experiences, such as holidays or family rituals. The transmission of possessions, knowledge, and rituals 'contaminated' with previous owners' affective qualities reveals social practices' inner workings and how objects constitute and enrich social identities over time. Analysing the qualitative interviews unveiled diverse themes associated with memory objects, including family lineage, tourism, value, life experiences, death, transience, and time (Loots 2022).

In this chapter, I provide short descriptions of participants' relations with objects and home in one interview in particular. During the conversation with Nicholas,[1] the affectivity evoked by and the malleable value of memory objects from his childhood came to the fore especially. I arrived at Nicholas's Pretoria home on a sunny Friday morning in March 2019. He guided me to a wooden table overlooking a garden. On the table was a bright red briefcase, closed. The briefcase, I soon learnt, previously belonged to his mother, was used to store most of his childhood memory objects and was a sentimental object itself (Figure 7.1). Throughout this chapter, set out in three sections, I refer to narratives from our interview[2] to sketch memory objects' affectivity and fluctuating value.

Firstly, I provide a brief historical overview of the theoretical framework used in this chapter, namely the new materialisms. This informs a new materialist analysis (following Fox & Alldred 2015, 2017) that is useful in introducing the ambivalences surrounding human/nonhuman relations, affective flows and materialities' fluctuating value. The chapter's two remaining sections are framed by two interlinking questions:

- What affective flows between memory objects and Nicholas emerged during the interview?
- How did objects' perceived fluctuating value shape Nicholas's engagement with them?

[1] Pseudonyms were self-selected by the participants. [2] The interview with Nicholas was conducted in Afrikaans after which I translated it into English. For the original Afrikaans quotations and more on the translation process see Chapters 7 and 8 of my doctoral thesis (Loots 2022).

These questions are unpacked by referring to two theories associated with the new materialisms: 'affect theory' as theorised by, amongst others, Deleuze (1995), Seigworth and Gregg (2010), Massumi (1995), and Hemmings (2005) and Maurizia Boscagli's (2014) 'stuff theory'. Firstly, when it comes to affect, one must trace objects' potency, which lies in the recognition that it is at once 'flighty and hardwired, shifty and unsteady but palpable too' (Stewart 2007:3). Studying affect, Kathleen Stewart (2007:1) notes, must be approached as 'an experiment, not a judgment'. In the final section, I argue that Boscagli's (2014) use of the term 'stuff' appropriately highlights matter's plasticity, transformative potential, and inextricable ties with the human. I conclude by summarising the discussion and briefly reflecting on the new materialisms.

Framing: New materialisms

The term 'new materialisms' emerged in the mid-1990s as a method, conceptual frame, and political strategy (Braidotti 2012:16). William Connolly (2013:399) describes it as the 'most common name given to a series of movements' that criticise anthropocentrism by rethinking human and nonhuman forces and processes, by exploring the dissonant relations between those processes and cultural practice and by rethinking sources of ethics. Taking matter 'more seriously' is one of the movement's chief projects (Adkins 2015:11). The term has been used increasingly to 'stress the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power', especially by challenging binaries such as human/nonhuman, culture/nature, and mind/matter (Braidotti 2012:16).

The new materialisms were partly inspired by Gilles Deleuze's reading of seventeenth century philosophers Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In contrast to other modern materialists, Spinoza and Leibniz thought all matter was defined by an immanent capacity or power (Gamble, Hanan & Nail 2019:119). New materialists have taken up this tradition to move beyond the ancient and modern mechanistic materialist treatments of matter as the passive object of external forces. The renewed interest in materialism over the last few decades can thus, to some degree, be seen as a 'return' to and reinterpretation of such existing philosophical ideas.

As a domain within posthumanism that attends to matter by rejecting dichotomous understandings, the new materialisms developed as a response to the linguistic turn. Some thinkers within this turn focus on discourse at the expense of the material. From this grew an entangled material-discursive philosophy where epistemology, ontology and ethics imbricate (Barad 2007). The material turn has since, at least in part, been informed by poststructuralist, feminist, postcolonialist, and queer theories, which are committed to reconceptualising the subject and mapping the 'ethics of relationality' (Braidotti 2006:24–25; Gamble, Hanan & Nail 2019:130–31; Dolphijn & Van der Tuin 2012:86). Due to the multiplicity of intellectual currents that flow through new materialist work, some theorists take issue with its characterisation as 'new', suggesting that one thinks instead in terms of 'conceptual infusions' into an emerging programme of materially-informed thought and practice (Massumi 2002:4; Jones & Hoskins 2016:79).

Emerging twenty-first century perspectives that call for a re-evaluation of human/object relations form part of a long history of engaging with the matter. Common in Euro-American philosophical tradition is erecting divisions between the human and the nonhuman, or between knowing *subjects* on the one hand and *objects* of knowledge on the other. These two 'classes of entities' are considered different (Law 2004:132). The new materialisms challenge such binaries by seeing human bodies and all other social, material, and abstract entities in relation to one another and therefore move away from conceptions of objects and bodies as occupying distinct spaces. This shift emphasises the flows produced *through* the relationship between bodies, things, and ideas (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:261). Deepening an understanding of the deliberately constructed nature of binary relations—or materiality as 'put in place'—has 'far-reaching cultural, social, and political possibilities' (Boscagli 2014:14).

Precisely because the new materialisms typically comment on crucial issues of materiality, embodiment, and subjectivity, these theories can contribute to the current renewal of interest in realist perspectives (that there exists a 'real' world independent from a human's perceptions, theories, and constructions of it) (Braidotti 2012:16). In short, the new materialisms foreground 'what it means to exist as a material individual with biological needs' inhabiting a world as one object among many objects (Coole & Frost 2010:28). From this brief background it becomes clear that the eclecticism and historically rich ideas that inform the new materialisms have the potential to productively dissolve (or at least soften) human/nonhuman boundaries. To illustrate what the perspectives made possible by the new materialisms might look like, I now turn to a new materialist analysis of the interview with Nicholas.

Figure 7.1.
Nicholas's briefcase that belonged to his mother. It is used to store memory objects from his youth. 29 March 2019. Photograph by Olivia Loots.

New materialist analysis: Nicholas and the briefcase

According to Jamie Lorimer (2013:62–63), a 'clear-sighted' new materialist research approach encompasses at least three interwoven strands. Firstly, it is committed to sustained interrogations of the modern divisions that determine which forms have agency. This commitment can be honoured by drawing attention to the diverse objects, organisms, forces, and materialities that 'cross between porous bodies' (Lorimer 2013:62). Secondly, because such ontological manoeuvrings have epistemological consequences, it is vital to rethink which forms of intelligence, truth, and expertise count. This rethinking leads to questions of embodiment and affect in the form of 'relational and distributed forces' (Lorimer 2013:62). Finally, this approach supposes distinct politics and ethics. Appreciating nonhuman agencies underlines humans' material connections to the world and how these can be made to matter.

I rely here on Fox and Alldred's (2017) model for materialist social enquiry, namely new materialist analysis. Incorporating the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987), Coole and Frost (2010), Braidotti (2013), and Clough (2004), the collaborators have developed, reassessed, and applied this method since 2015 (Fox and Alldred 2015a; 2015b; 2019; 2021). The tool is based on propositions such as focusing on matter; exploring what matter *does* through affect (not what it *is*); not privileging human agency; seeing thoughts, memories, desires, and emotions as having material effects; and highlighting the micropolitical aspects of material forces (Fox & Alldred 2017:23–27). A new materialist analysis begins by trawling the data to make sense of how various materialities have assembled. This places the analytical focus firmly upon materiality and its relationality—what it does rather than what it is. One then composes a 'cloud' of 'intra-acting' (Barad 1996:179) material relations which can be visually represented (in no particular order) (Fox & Alldred 2017:28):

> materiality – materiality – materiality – materiality – materiality – materiality – materiality – materiality – materiality – ...

This visual representation instantly reminds one of Massumi's (1987:xi) description of Deleuzoguattarian 'nomad thought' that replaces the 'closed equation of representation, x = x = not y (I = I = not you)' with an 'open equation: ... + y + z + a + ... (+ arm + brick + window + ...)'. Through this 'open equation', a network of many materialities comes to the fore. Fox and Alldred's (2017:29) model provides a way to determine 'how assembled relations affect or are affected by each other'. Following them, a new materialist analysis that illustrates the relations between the actors present at the time of the interview with Nicholas might reveal something such as this:

> Nicholas – red briefcase – mother – memory objects – childhood – collection – classification – fascination with round-shaped objects – preservation – memories – family connections – storage – space – sense of perfection – meaning – shift – adulthood – changed way of thinking about memory objects – experiences – interview – researcher – storytelling – language

Here, various materialities, such as humans, objects, thoughts, memory narratives, words, and so on, are interacting. The following two sections discuss how I identified these materialities as part of this 'cloud' and how the interactions between them came about. I first home in on 'affect' as a critical component in foregrounding objects' agency. I then move on to the notion of fluctuating value by drawing on Boscagli's 'stuff' alongside Nicholas's awareness of how his sentimentality is a 'completely different experience now' from when he was younger.

Affective flows

In line with new materialist thinking, I wanted to remain conscious of participants' bodily reactions towards me as a researcher, the questions posed, and their memory objects. Participants' relations with their memory objects evoked diverse emotions ranging from comfort, contentment, pride and joy to anxiety. Together, we engaged with memory objects presented by each participant. Some took an object from a box, bag, or larger pile of items and held it in their hands, feeling its texture or weight. Whereas some scooped the object up, others touched it briefly while telling its story.

In some cases, the participant's eyes met mine; in others, their eyes remained fixed on the object. When an item was large or in another part of the room, some pointed to it while giving some background, while others got up and walked towards it. Sometimes I was invited to a different space—the garden, the kitchen, the bedroom—where we inspected objects together (Loots 2022:212).

Upon reaching the part of the interview, when I asked Nicholas which memory objects he kept, he mentioned that most of what he still treasured could be found in the briefcase in front of us. Nicholas's mother bought it in the 1980s, possibly from Edgars,[3] and considered herself 'very grand: the only woman [in the Transnet offices] with a briefcase and, please note, a *red* one'. She used to go to work in 'a white or black shirt with a red skirt, red stockings, red shoes, a red necklace, red earrings, red nails, and red lips'. Nicholas remembered being fascinated by the briefcase's red colour since he was little. 'The enigma of the combination lock mechanisms naturally added to my preoccupation with the briefcase', he added. He could not recall the exact moment but explained that his mother probably gifted it to him around the end of primary school when she no longer used it for work. Resting his hand on its leather surface, he explained that this occasion—in my presence—was the first time in a long time that he was opening the briefcase:

> So, for me it will be just as big a surprise to see what is inside. Um, I know of a few things that are in there I can now definitely recall being there, but I think there will be things in there of which I don't know what they are. And that's quite exciting. Because objects recall memories. Like when you touch them. There are triggers. Absolutely. Of course, there are also scents that accompany them, like how certain things still smell after all these years and you're not quite sure how.

It felt like minuscule jolts of energy were sparked in me by the unveiling of the objects (Figures 7.2 and 7.3) inside. Nicholas took out (almost) every object individually and explained where it came from and why he kept it. Or that he was not sure why he *still* kept it. His meticulous, almost obsessive classification of things round, stringy, things with words, things shiny, and things from the hospital was noteworthy. From the briefcase emerged orthopaedic plaster casts (he had surgery as a baby for his club feet), coins from different countries, a set of keys, and small pieces from a 'doedelsakkie'. ('Doedelsakkie' is a word his parents used for 'small bags with stuff in', which has the other meaning of a small set of bagpipes, while ringing with Afrikaans words related to 'doing', 'sleeping', and 'doodling'). Then emerged a golden scarab beetle ornament with a hidden clock underneath its moveable wings, tiny shiny objects (a green fish, a transparent triangle with a pink flower in it), a range of round objects

Figure 7.2. (above)
Stuff from the red briefcase, including plaster casts from an operation for club feet in Nicholas's childhood, a collection of round objects, a scarab beetle ornamental clock, and a sea urchin shell. 29 March 2019. Photograph by Olivia Loots.

Figure 7.3. (below)
Things round and/or shiny and/or transparent Nicholas collected during his childhood. 29 March 2019. Photograph by Olivia Loots.

[3] Edgars is a well-known South African chain store that sells mass-market fashion items. During South Africa's 'retail revolution' from the 1960s to the 1980s, Edgars targeted predominantly white, middle-class customers (Dos Santos 2018).

Figure 7.4.
The round-shaped plastic 'dingetjie' Nicholas used to carry around as a child. 29 March 2019. Photograph by Olivia Loots.

('I had a thing with circles'), a marble turtle, porcupine quills, a sea urchin shell, letters from old boyfriends, a piece of his parents' wedding cake ('8 Mei 1982' marked on the side), his first lock of hair, and photographs.

Pausing to hold a coin-sized, scratched and scuffed plastic mould cast with one red rose, one white rose, and a few green fern stems in the palm of his hand, Nicholas exclaimed, pausing before and after the word 'object': '*This* is my favourite … object … in the world. What it is, I don't … don't know how to describe it to you … This I've had since I was three, four, five years old' (Figure 7.4). This was followed by a brief recollection of the potential origins of what he called his 'dingetjie'[4] [thingie]: perhaps a gift? Perhaps found in the street? Perhaps from his grandmother's house? He chuckled: 'I [used to] carry it around in my bag [...] every single day'. 'It's also gotten lost in the past', he added, 'and I was hysterical [to the point] that my parents had to turn the place upside down to find it, because … it's … my "dingetjie" is gone.' He looked down at the object: 'I knew I still had it [...] It's been thirty years that I've been dragging this along. [...] It makes me so … it gives me unbelievable pleasure holding this in my hand now, still, after all these years.' From his tone of voice, body language, and gaze at that particular moment, it was clear that Nicholas was physically, emotionally, psychologically and physiologically touched by the round object in his palm.

From this event, one may infer that the object has *affected* Nicholas. Affect,[5] according to Claire Hemmings (2005:551), is a 'state [...] of being' that can be transferred onto various objects, people, emotions, and other affects. Seigworth and Gregg (2010:1) argue that affect arises amid *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. For Massumi (1995:85), affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity, a 'moment of unformed and unstructured potential', which becomes emotion once recognised and owned.

Deleuze (1988:45), following Spinoza, locates affect and the capacity to be affected amid relations or assemblages composed of bodies, things, and ideas in the world. Affect becomes 'persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms' (Seigworth & Gregg 2010:1). As responsive humans, we can be moved by materialities: such affective bodily responses are easily aroused by factors beyond human control. This places humans, as can be seen in Nicholas's case above, in networks of heterogeneous materialities with affective flows between them. Drawing on various perspectives, I understand affect to be 'mediated and transmitted through an automatic sensory flow of uncontained energies that move across thresholds' (Loots 2022:51).

Considering affect as something that flows between materialities also evokes ways of thinking about the human body as one such materiality.[6] Massumi (1995:85) maintains that affect is usually directly manifested at the surface of the body—on the skin—as something that can be scientifically studied, where we are 'directly absorbing the outside'. O'Sullivan (2001:126) agrees that affects can be seen as 'moments of intensity, [...] reaction[s] in/on the body' which take place at the level of 'matter' and which are 'immanent to experience'. For Nicholas, it is possible that the sensation of the object on his skin evoked strong childhood memories and accompanying responses: his human body becomes an object that can be moved to actualise specific capacities.[7]

Affect theory provides a way of understanding agency *not* tied to human action, which shifts the focus for social inquiry from 'humans and their bodies' to examining how relational networks of 'animate and inanimate [objects] affect and are affected' (DeLanda 2006:4). Similarly, Sedgwick (2003:17) holds that affect can be a way of deepening one's vision of the studied terrain and of allowing for and prioritising its 'texture'. Hemmings (2005:548) shares this view but warns that although the return to ontological demands of objects is useful, theorists should remain wary of the possible effects of positioning affect as *the* sole answer to philosophical questions concerning the relations between materialities.

While there is no certainty surrounding how and when affect moves between materialities, these affective nuances are interesting when studying human/object relations. For example, affective flows between Nicholas and the memory objects in the red briefcase diverge: some objects have a stronger pull, others less so. In moments of 'unstructured potential', noting affect is crucial in determining the relative relations between bodies, objects, and environments and what their future arrangements might be (Massumi 1995:85). Knowing what affect is and what it does to materialities in constant interaction, sets the scene for a discussion on the mutating value of such materialities, prominently illustrated through the term 'stuff', as set out below.

Stuff's fluctuating value

With each interview, I noticed that participants interpreted the notion of 'value' in variegated ways. Value judgment about memory objects

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[4] 'Dingetjie' is an Afrikaans word that loosely translates to 'thingy'. Anything small and unidentified can be a 'dingetjie'. It can also be a term of endearment or rejection, depending on context and tonality. [5] For a historical overview of affect theory, see *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010). [6] Jennifer Lauwrens's (2014) doctoral thesis traces the role of affect (alongside anti-ocularcentric and multisensory approaches) in relation to artworks. [7] Different spatiotemporal contexts, including micropolitics of the self and macropolitical social relations of power, are involved and cannot be overlooked when studying affect (see, for example, Ahmed 2004 Hemmings 2005).

became specifically apparent when discussing change: participants usually critically engaged with their memory objects during transitional life phases, such as cleaning up their (or a family member's) home, losing a loved one, losing weight, changing jobs, or having children. The sentimental, functional, or economic value that participants attached to some objects later in their lives faded almost completely, while other objects became more valuable (Loots 2022:302–3). In short, the affective flows between materialities shift over time in unpredictable ways (Fox & Alldred 2019:29). Depending on where objects are incorporated and reincorporated into new systems of exchange and use, they are constantly commodified—by human users—as useless or valuable.

During our interview, Nicholas spent a significant amount of time reflecting on how his relationship with objects changed:

> I think as a child I was extremely sentimental. I was kind of a hoarder. I hoarded stuff, I stored it away, archived it, made lists of things and had collections of stuff. I got hysterical when I couldn't complete a collection of something. In the sense of, perhaps, a sense of perfection. [...] It started, I think ... there were these sticker books from Walt Disney. [...] Then marbles came out. [...] I collected, um, pencils ... different ... as many different pencils as I could, grouped them by colour. I tried collecting stamps at some stage. I still have sets of postcards I collected ... There are, hm ... I collected coins, especially foreign ones.

The process of collecting objects concerns 'what, from the material world, specific groups and individuals choose to preserve, value, and exchange' (Clifford 1985:240). These collections of objects have 'interacted with the world and its subjects, and have a story to tell' (Boscagli 2014: 14). In this process, care—often to the degree of obsession—is taken to preserve such precious objects. While some objects are exhibited in public spaces such as The Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, others remain in private collections and will likely never have the same degree of allure for a public audience. As seen here, this does not detract from the care, and meticulous curation often associated with collections, be they private or public.

At the time of the interview, Nicholas described himself as being at ease with 'carry[ing]' fewer objects with him (which in itself was an insightful, intentional or not, choice of words seeing he quite literally moves things around in a briefcase). Nicholas described his sentimentality as an 'energy that changed shape': his sentiment was 'displaced from objects as the sentimental thing [...] to the experience as the sentimental thing'. He was no longer 'so sentimental', he said, 'about [these] objects that I need to touch them or use my senses to engage with them in order to have that sentimental feeling', although he still thoroughly enjoyed it.

Crucial in this regard is that, after unpacking the red briefcase's content, Nicholas stated that he would discard some objects once I had left. Examples included a brochure from a visit to the South African Mint,[8] a palm-sized black disk from Sun City with wording in gold, 'Africa's kingdom of pleasure', and a key chain with the words 'Elke dag is 'n geskenk van God' [every day is a gift from God]. He explained that upon seeing these objects again, they no longer had 'meaning' for him. As becomes clear, one can see such objects not as designated 'for one type of matter, forever fixed, but [as] a category into which various objects can enter, and exit, in different historical circumstances' (Boscagli 2014:14). Similarly, Sherry Turkle (2007:6) notes how neither 'life nor the relationships with objects that accompany its journey' are lived in discrete stages: objects have 'roles that are multiple and fluid'.

Like all the other participants, Nicholas made value distinctions about memory objects (between objects with or without sentimental value, sentimental objects with or without monetary value, objects that are recyclable, donatable, upcyclable, and so on) (Loots 2022:264). Many objects that previously carried much sentimental value were later meaningless, while others became more valuable with time. Such malleability and transformation in value are 'evidence that objects are not locked into categories' but liminal, always bordering on gaining or losing value (Hawkins 2006:78). To illustrate this point further, I refer to Boscagli's use of the term 'stuff', as set out in her book *Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism* (2014).

Informed by new materialist thinking, stuff theory explores everyday objects' radical potential and instability in a culture of consumption and spectacle. Boscagli (2014) unpacks humans' entanglement with unstable and affective objects by referring to such objects as 'stuff'. She proposes looking at stuff as a test case for the new materialist designation of matter as 'active, rhizomatic and emergent' by emphasising flux (Boscagli 2014:14). In her book, 'stuff' was illustrated through five intermittent flashes of 'minor' materiality in twentieth century modernity: through memory objects, fashion wear, clutter, home décor and waste. These fluctuating 'flashes

[8] The building that used to house the South African Mint – of which Nicholas discarded the brochure – has more recently become The Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History where the *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) exhibition is held.

contain groups of objects' that share a liminality, a plasticity, transformative powers, and a capacity to generate events and 'promis[es] new versions of subject-object entanglements' (Boscagli 2014:3).

Throughout an exploration of each materiality, 'stuff' is not contained by epistemological fields or 'taxonomies of knowledge': it is 'always on the verge of becoming valueless while never ceasing to be commodified, awash with meaning but always ready to become junk or to mutate into something else' (Boscagli 2014:2–3). In this process, material stuff and humans interact in unpredictable, intimate, and intensely somatic ways. Through its unceasing traffic with the human, volatile stuff challenges an engrained Western history of object categorisation. This undoing of the philosophical and semiotic order of things provides novel ways of thinking about the complexity of humans' daily interaction with material objects, which informs the new materialism's call for a focus on human/nonhuman relations (Barad 2007).

In Nicholas's case, it was insightful that his relationship with memory objects—that can be read as stuff—shifted throughout his life. Although contained in a briefcase, the stuff was 'unstable, recyclable, made of elements put in place by different networks of power and meaning' (Boscagli 2014:5). The red briefcase itself could also be regarded as an object that has undergone shifts in the way it is valued: from being used as a carrier for important documents to and from the workplace by Nicholas's mother a few decades ago, it has since become laden with sentimental value, and storage space for memory objects. Although material objects are rooted in a certain historical production and specificity, they may have varied uses at later stages in their social lives, recontextualising them (Hallam & Hockney 2001:7). As Hawkins (2006:77) holds, it is difficult to sustain 'essentialist claims about the identity and fixed life cycle of things' since objects are constantly, through material practices, reincorporated into new systems of exchange and use.

Within the context of this study, then, objects are constantly moving into and out of categories. Once-sentimental objects might just as well become recyclable (or unrecyclable) stuff, or unsentimental objects might gain value over time. Some, such as the 'dingetjie'—objects in the world, may never lose their sentimental touch but will most definitely not be carried on the adult body from day to day as in childhood. How materiality is apprehended is, therefore, a key aspect of valuing transformation. In summary, Nicholas's relationship with the objects in the red briefcase changed over time as they could no longer be neatly categorised as simply 'sentimental'. Because as matter is experienced and 'knotted through different encounters', it becomes clear that an object's perceived value impacts its affective hold, and vice versa (Boscagli 2014:12). Acknowledging hybrid materialities as uncategorisable and volatile reveals something of humans' entanglement with them.

Conclusion

Contemporary society teaches what it means to be human in the twenty-first century, and its modes of vision frame our perspectives on the interplay between human and nonhuman actants (Ayers 2012:45). The diligence with which some objects in both public and private spaces are preserved speak of such objects' affective demand for human responsibility and respect. The current chapter and the study from which it originated form part of a growing body of research projects that aim to expand methods to analyse the affective dimensions of experiences. In this chapter, I first discussed the new materialisms' dedication to undoing longstanding dichotomies. A useful new materialist point of departure is based on three entwined threads: interrogating modernist divisions; attending to questions of embodiment and affect; and examining emerging ethics that arise by exploring how human/nonhuman connections matter (Lorimer 2013:62–63).

Making use of an interview that demonstrates affect between objects as prominent, I was able to elaborate on the new materialisms' potentials: the unpacking of the interview with Nicholas showed how he, as a human, was intimately and somatically connected with the material objects that surrounded him. These relations were then discussed through an engagement with 'affect', a notion central to new materialist vocabulary. Analysing material and affective flows—that enliven some capacities and suppress others—reveals that objects, memories, and spaces constantly mediate human/nonhuman relations. Only when humans acknowledge the capacity to be affected by objects' fluctuating value can more just material relations emerge.

I finally turned to Boscagli's (2014) 'stuff theory', which helps think about the transforming and transformative potential of memory objects shifting in and out of categories throughout their lifespan. In a world inundated with emerging object formations, I suspect that an increasing number of things—or unruly stuff—that stretch far beyond the boundaries of objects with sentimental value would not fit easily into collections or categories. Unpredictable flows disrupt our efforts and teach us new ways of living with stuff, no matter how much and how often we collect, categorise, and attempt to delay decay.

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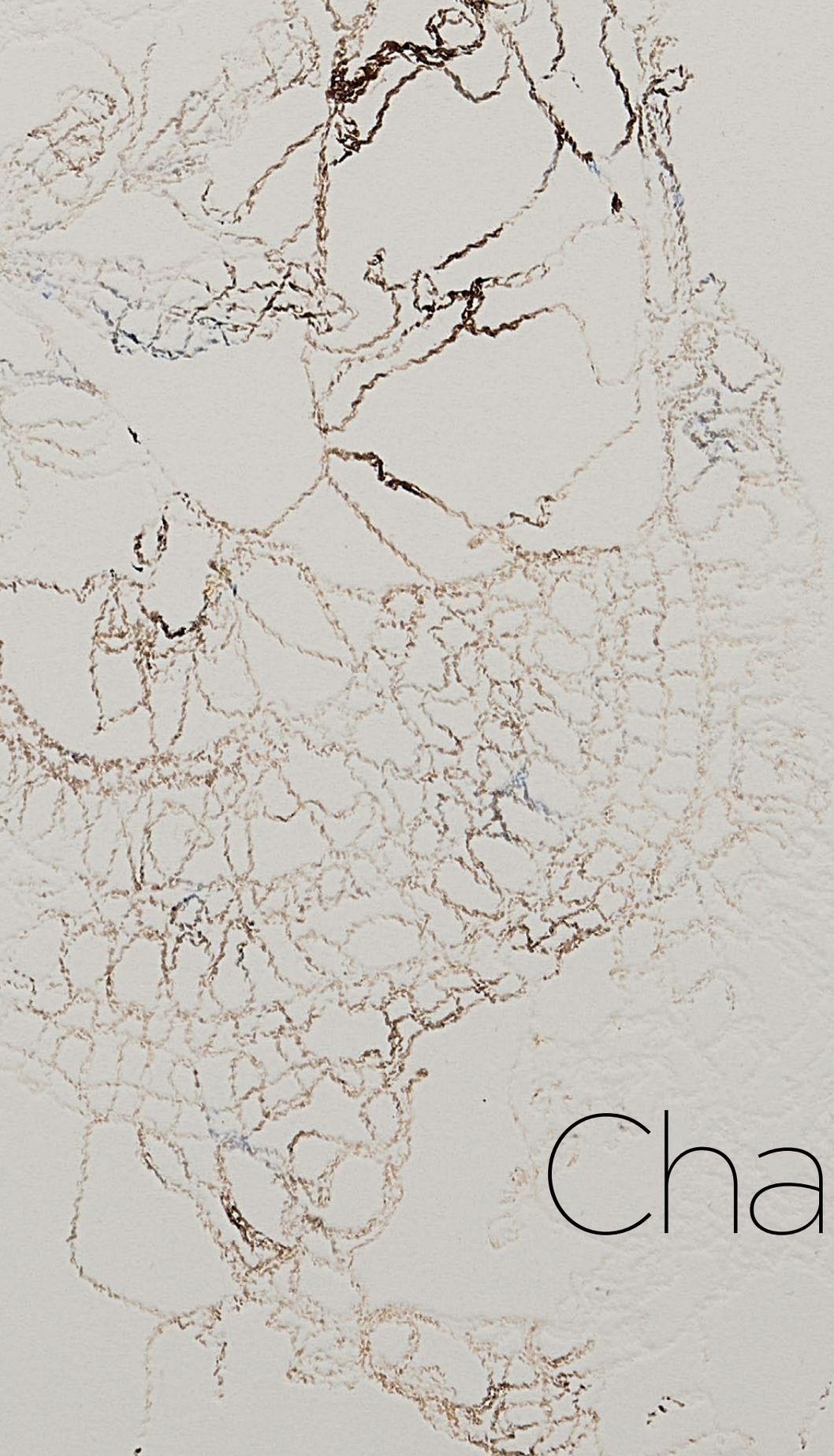

Chapter **08**

Fuze's Gourd: *Umuntu kafi aphele*[1]

Justine Wintjes

'Gourd beer vessel showing repair of fracture'

Housed in the collections of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum is an old beverage container made from the hard shell of a fruit (Figure 8.1). The object is subspherical, with a flattened underside and a round hole at the top where the fruit's point of attachment to the stalk would have been. It has a matt brown patina with dark patches and pale vertical streaks as if from a milky liquid spilt over the rim. At the time of donation, it had cracks that had been carefully repaired, pulled neatly closed by regular stitches of vegetal fibre (Figure 8.2). It clearly had a history of use. It has not, as far as I know, been exhibited in the museum or researched before.

Figure 8.1.
Two views of a gourd beer vessel in the collections of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum, donated by 'Magema de Fuza' in 1904 (object no. 258), showing repaired fractures on one side. Photograph by Chiara Singh, 2021, for the Five Hundred Year Archive.

Figure 8.2.
A detail of the stitched repair on the object depicted in Figure 8.1. Photograph by Chiara Singh, 2021, for the Five Hundred Year Archive.

[1] Translating as, 'When a person dies, that is not the end of him', this was the title of a series of articles by Magema Magwaza Fuze that appeared in the newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal* between 1916 and 1922 (Mokoena 2011:42).

Figure 8.3.
Magema Magwaza Fuze. Photographer unrecorded, 1920, Campbell Collections of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, File 2 of the Fuze Papers, KCB1127.

The entry for this object in the museum accession register reads, 'Gourd beer vessel showing repair of fracture', from 'Maritzburg', donated by 'Magema de Fuza' in 1904 to the then Natal Government Museum.[2] The surname was written down in the accession register as 'de Fusa' by Frederick Fitzsimons[3] (Natal Museum 1904–12:9) and published as 'de Fuza' in the Annual Report (Natal Government Museum 1906:48). This donor was likely Magema Magwaza Fuze, the well-known *kholwa* intellectual (Figure 8.3).[4] The transcription of the surname as 'de Fusa'/'de Fuza' is a misspelling or modification that I cannot currently explain. Fuze's name underwent several transformations in his life (Mokoena 2011:280 (n.1); 2012:403), but I have not seen a similar form anywhere else. It could reflect an indirect link between Fuze and Fitzsimons—perhaps somebody brought the gourd to the museum on Fuze's behalf, or it came with documentation in which the name was not clearly written—but there is no further information in the museum that would shed light on the exact circumstances of the donation.

Figure 8.4.
The Natal Government Museum as it looked when it opened in 1904. Photographer unrecorded (Natal Government Museum 1906: frontispiece).

[2] The museum was renamed Natal Museum in 1910 and KwaZulu-Natal Museum in 2011. [3] Fitzsimons worked as curator for the Natal Society and its successor the Natal Government Museum from 1896 to 1906 (Guest 2006:11). [4] Hlonipha Mokoena (pers. comm. 2022) points out that 'Magema' is not a common name and agrees that it is likely that the donor was Fuze.

The museum opened as a fully-fledged museum in 1904 (Figures 8.4 and 8.5). Its predecessor, the Natal Society, had begun 'collecting materials of a museum' in 1851, which were housed initially in a small back room of the Society's library building in the centre of Pietermaritzburg (Guest 2006:2, 4). The Natal Society struggled to attract a regular source of funding to support the museum but developed its public profile by making the collections accessible in the form of displays and acknowledging donations in *The Natal Witness*; by the end of the nineteenth century its spaces were 'bursting at the seams' (Guest 2006:13). The idea of a dedicated building was approved in 1901 and built and occupied by 1903. This flurry of growth was tempered by ongoing challenges of funding, staffing and space (Guest 2006:14–15). It seems as though a formal accession register for the 'ethnology' collection was started only once the custom-built premises were occupied, and in the museum's first few years, a vast amount of work took place in a short period to catch up on the backlog.[5] Fitzsimons wrote more than 350 entries into the accession register over 1903–04, including approximately 100 representing acquisitions in 1904 alone. Other acquisitions made in 1904 comprise a motley set of objects acquired by purchase, donation or exchange and do not shed much contextual light on the gourd.

Fuze was a prominent member of a community of mission-educated African intellectuals known as the *amakholwa*, and he is famously the author of the first book published in Zulu by a native Zulu speaker, *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona,* which appeared in the year he died (Fuze 1922, 1979, 2022a, 2022b). His biography sheds light on how a person originating within an oral culture adapted to living in a literate one, creatively melding elements from both contexts in a practice of bricolage (Mokoena 2011). Fuze was an avid writer of different kinds of texts, which form a significant source for understanding his life story as well as his legacy as an intellectual, even though his personal story remains something of an enigma (Mokoena 2012:403). By contrast, the object he donated to the museum has decidedly few words associated with it and nothing directly linkable to Fuze's voice. In Fuze's writings, I have not yet found any references to the donation, or beer gourds more generally, or to the museum. Although the source information is incomplete for many entries in the accession register, Fuze is one of the few named black contributors to the collections, certainly for this early period.[6] It is tempting to imagine that this item was personally meaningful to Fuze, a kind of individualisation

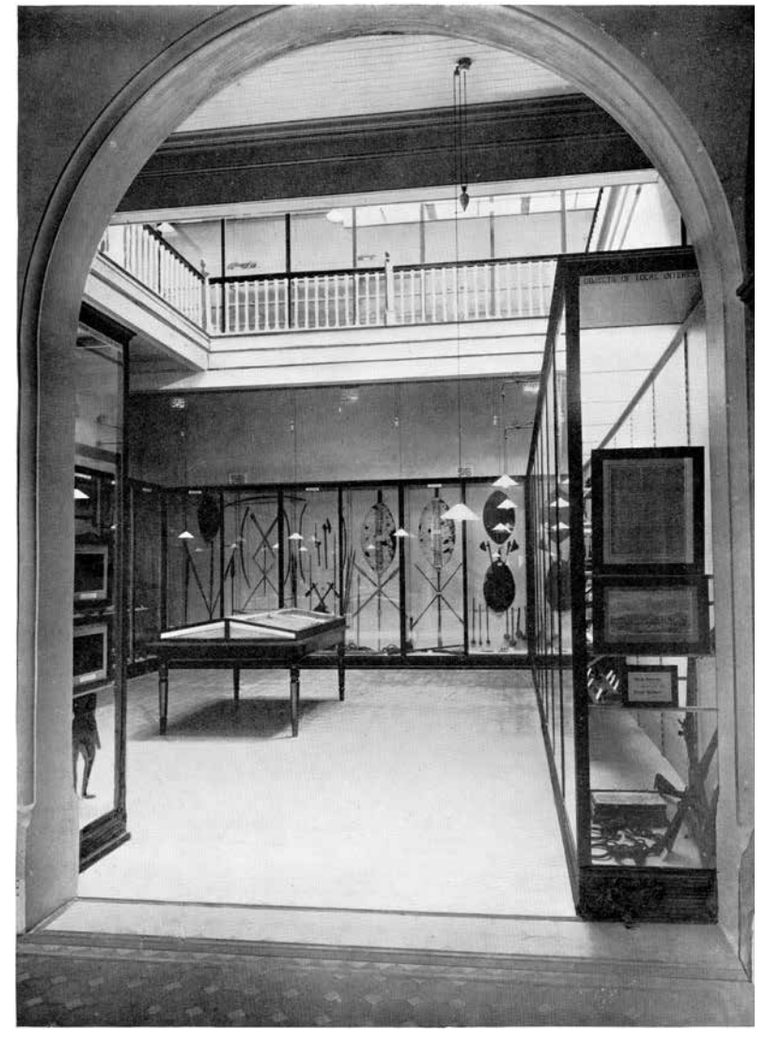

Figure 8.5.
The 'Ethnological Room' of the Natal Government Museum. Photographer unrecorded (Natal Government Museum 1906: illustration 6 (pp. 12–13)).

[5] Prior to 1904, donated items were appended to annual reports and published in *The Witness*, and before 1885 they were listed in the museum committee's minute book (Guest 2006:13).
[6] A decade later, in 1914, Jim Makanya of Pietermaritzburg presented a worked stone to the museum (object no. 1925/9 (originally 2323): 'Bushman Digging Stone—unfinished specimen'; Natal Museum 1912–96:13).

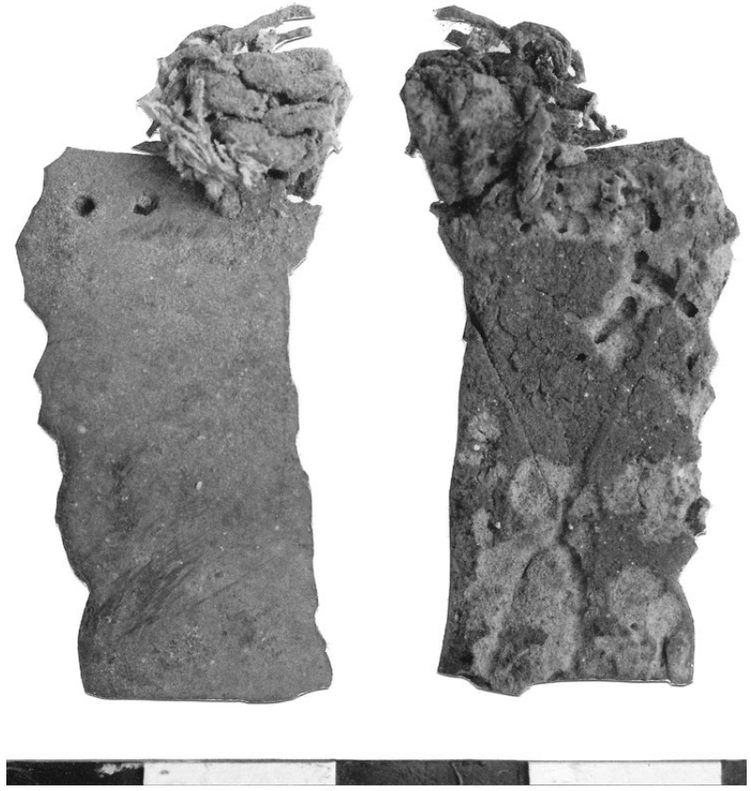

Figure 8.6.
Fragments of a gourd with twine recovered at Collingham Shelter (front and back), probably reflecting a repair (Mazel 1992:34 (figure 29)).

rare in museum collections of a supposedly 'anthropological' nature. Yet, it is still largely dissociated from what would have made it meaningful in its earlier context (see Seabela and De Harde's chapters). It is nevertheless possible to imagine what inspired his bequeathment of this object to the museum, based on elements of his biography and of the cultural context of gourds in early twentieth century Natal.

Gourds in the museum

The bottle gourd or calabash (*Lagenaria siceraria*) is a vine generally considered indigenous to Africa and apparently one of the oldest domesticated plants in the world. It produces fruits known as gourds or calabashes ranging in shape from bottle-like to sub-globose. The outer skins of these fruits dry into strong, hard shells that allow their use around the world as containers and acoustic resonators. Described as 'one of the most cross-culturally ubiquitous crops' with a 'pan-tropical distribution by the beginning of the Holocene' (Kistler et al. 2014:2937), the species has a rich and complex past as a domesticate. However, many questions remain regarding the specifics of this history. The bottle gourd/calabash has been argued to be a 'utility' species that, along with the dog, was domesticated long before other food crops or animals (Erickson et al. 2005), but transoceanic drift likely assisted its distribution (Kistler et al. 2014).

The KwaZulu-Natal Museum (KZNM) Anthropology Collection includes various gourd-based items from different parts of the world, including central African thumb pianos with gourd resonators, West African bowls, South American cups for yerba maté and a European gourd bottle pendant. The gourd-based items originating from what is now the province of KwaZulu-Natal include bottles and containers designed for holding substances of different kinds (such as beer, sour milk, ilala palm wine, fat, sap and medicine), as well as bowls, scoops and ladles. Small gourds were transformed into scent boxes and snuff boxes, some with stoppers. Many are decorated with beads, wirework or pyro-patterning. A few are entirely natural, unmodified, whole fruits that may have served as rattles or seed stores.

As with the broader field of material culture within the isiZulu context, the lexicon for objects made out of gourds/calabashes (*iselwa*, pl. *amaselwa*) is complex and reflects functional and conceptual distinctions and entanglements (Bryant 1905:204, 207, 767, 768; Krige 1962:397–98; Bosch & Griesel 2020:18–19). Among the museum's

specimens are two types that correspond with discrete spheres of food and drink. A generally bottle-shaped gourd container destined for milk, often with small holes underneath for running off the whey as the milk curdles, is an *igula*. A gourd container used for water, beer or fermented porridge (*amahewu*), but not for milk or food, and with a small opening not wider than one's thumb (Bryant 1905:767, 768) is an *isigubhu*. This term might be appropriate for other museum specimens of different sizes ranging from bottle-shaped to round, whose precise function is not recorded. Nowadays, *isigubhu* is a more general term for large containers (around 5 litres or more) used for storing liquids (Nothando Shabalala pers. comm. 2022). A gourd container for water or beer, whether large or small and regardless of shape, with an opening wider than one's thumb, is an *igobongo* (Bryant 1905:767, 768; Krige 1962:397), the term that seems most apt for Fuze's gourd.

Of all the undecorated gourd containers in the museum, it is the most spherical and the one that most closely resembles an *ukhamba* or ceramic beer pot, but without anything akin to the textured decoration this latter object type often carries.

Gourds in the past

The deep history of gourd use is difficult to investigate as most gourds tend to be lost to decomposition. A few remains have been recovered from archaeological contexts in KwaZulu-Natal, among them gourd-vessel fragments with notched lips from Late Iron Age layers at Mhlwazini Cave and Sibhudu Cave (Mazel 1990:117; KwaZulu-Natal Museum archaeological archive), and gourd fragments, including perforations and twine stitching, from Later Stone Age contexts at Driel and Collingham Shelters (Maggs & Ward 1980:52, 58; Mazel 1992:34 (figure 29), 2022:202; Figure 8.6). There is also a dearth of accurately provenanced historical gourds in museum collections. However, hints about the role of gourds can be gleaned from various documentary sources, and gourd containers are present in many early photographs (Whitelaw 2015:70; Figures 8.7 and 8.8).

As a way into exploring gourds in an isiZulu context in the past, I begin with the assumption that the inscription in the museum accession register of Fuze's gourd as a 'beer vessel' is accurate. The general shape of the vessel and the milky streaks on the outside appear to confirm this identification, as they are reminiscent of the residues that beer leaves behind when it foams up and overflows, an occurrence that is considered to be a good omen (Nothando Shabalala pers. comm. 2022). However, Fuze's gourd is entirely undecorated, which might seem surprising considering its purported use as a beer vessel. For reasons I explore below, if the gourd was an object of personal significance to Fuze, the donation might have made more sense if it were a gourd for *amasi* (sour or curdled milk). The metaphorical realms pertaining to *amasi* and beer (*utshwala*) are quite different. Ideally, containers used for one would never be used for the other and tended even to be kept in separate areas of the household (Raum 1973:126, 340, 380–81; Armstrong et al. 2008:544).

Amasi was customarily shared only by people related by descent due to associations between *amasi*, semen and the ancestors (Armstrong et al. 2008:544). The powerful association of gourds with men/*amasi*/ancestors contributed to a close personal identification between gourds and men, such that a man's *amasi* gourd was destroyed on his death, sometimes broken over his grave, because it can only have one owner. By contrast, the gourds of his wife can be retained for use after her death (Raum 1973:356). A king's calabash would come from carefully selected sources—'special varieties … cultivated by high ranking women'—and were laid to rest alongside the king, in the hands of one of the king's attendants who were buried with him (Kennedy 1993:242, 245).

Utshwala is a fermented beverage traditionally made from sorghum or millet, nourishing and mildly alcoholic. It forms a counterpoint to *amasi* because its consumption is fundamentally social and public, as it is shared among people that include non-kin, in other words, 'people with whom one cannot share sour milk, that is, potential partners in marriage' (Armstrong et al. 2008:544). It serves many purposes, being 'brewed for parties, to celebrate birth, marriage and other rites of passage, to honour the ancestors, to reward work parties, for reconciliation following disputes, and to dispense largesse' (Armstrong et al. 2008:516). Therefore, beer and its serving vessels 'participated' in important social processes such as marriage negotiations, providing these exchanges with a familiar sensory tactile element (Armstrong et al. 2008:545).

In more recent times, beer drinking and serving vessels have been made from ceramic (*izinkamba*), with elaborate textural decoration that adds another dimension to the tactility of drinking beer and serves to 'patrol' the tensions inherent in social relationships through appeals to 'proper' behaviour that offer respect to the head of the homestead. A

Figure 8.7.
A group of people preparing for a wedding feast, with an assortment of basketry, ceramic and gourd vessels. Photographer unrecorded, 1928, Campbell Collections of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Album D7 'Zulu customs book 1', D07-145.

Figure 8.8.
'Women carrying gourd vessels and baskets on their heads, Zululand'. The event depicted may have been a bridal party (*umthimba*). The round basket is an *isichumo*. Photographer: James Stuart, n.d. (late nineteenth/early twentieth century), Campbell Collections of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Album D10 'Zulu customs book 2', D10-127.

Figure 8.9.
'Gudu's Kraal at the Tugala [Thukela]/Women making beer' (1849, National Library of Australia, PIC Volume 505 #S4422) (Angas 1974:pl. 26) depicting different containers, including several large brewing vessels (*izimbiza*) and several smaller types, some possibly made out of gourds. Note also the fresh and whole gourds piled onto a table in the lower right-hand corner.

similar textured decoration is observable on other serving receptacles used in public contexts, such as meat platters. The rise in popularity during the twentieth century of these highly decorated *izinkamba*, also linked to their commercial success as collectable art objects, has obscured the earlier history of beer vessels. It seems as though before about 1850, beer containers were made primarily of basketry but also gourds (Testimony from Msimanga in Webb & Wright 1986:42; Gluckmann 1935:256; Raum 1973:151, 274; Jolles 2005:109–10), with ceramic being used for the large undecorated brewing vessels (Jolles 2005:109–10; Whitelaw 2020:173, 175; Figure 8.9). The transition to a ceramic medium would not have been a simple replacement of one material by another; it would have involved a complex rearrangement of a nexus of intertwined relationships, visible and invisible. As with other aspects of material culture, design shifts would have been shaped by the physical potential of different materials but also by shifts in conceptual or political emphasis and the entanglement of the one with the other.

Overall, there is little information available to draw on for beer gourds. In written sources, gourds appear to be more frequently associated with milk than beer. It is clear that gourds formed part of the material culture of second-millennium farming communities in the region. They were in some instances decorated in the same way as ceramic vessels, the most common kind of decoration being lip notching. It is also possible that other kinds of decorative messaging enhanced the male associations of beer-serving vessels through accessories that have not been preserved.[7] For example, the strong identification of beer baskets (*izichumo*; Figure 8.8) with men, who were the makers of the tightly woven baskets used for food and drink, might persist in contemporary times in the practice of using small basketry covers for beer pots reserved for male consumption, and possibly by married men specifically (*izimbenge*; Armstrong et al. 2008:524; Whitelaw 2020:175). The example of this type of accessory points to the need for gourds to have extensions to render them more practical as vessels—their round bottom would often require some sort of net or cradle enabling a stable upright position, and different kinds of covers or plugs would be used to seal the opening to protect the contents (Raum 1973:274; Figure 8.8). But even without any accessories or enhancements, baskets and gourds used in a beer-drinking context in the past may have served to emphasise a paternal and agnatic presence through a different aesthetic expression, by means of male associations of the materials themselves (see also Whitelaw 2015:166, 2020:173, 175).

[7] The history of gourd ornamentation, design and accessorisation across all types of gourd-based containers in southern Africa deserves more attention. Gourds in other Bantu-speaking contexts were sometimes heavily decorated by engraving, carving, painting or dyeing, or supplemented with other materials (Berns & Hudson 1986; Holdsworth 2014), although the designs in southern Africa appear generally to have been less ornamented (Kennedy 1993:245).

The traces of a contemporary repair on Fuze's gourd reflect a habit of keeping gourds over long periods. The practice of repairing both gourds and pots is well established. It is a feature of second-millennium material culture: one of the finds from Collingham Shelter was a piece of a gourd with holes through which twine stitches were threaded, possibly representing a repair (Mazel 1992:34 (figure 29); Figure. 8.6).[8] Repair work would have been risky because making holes for the stitches could cause more damage and extend the fissures, and required skill as it needed to maintain the functionality of the vessel. As with beer baskets, the vegetal fibres would swell up with the liquid inside to become a watertight container. The stitches became a prominent aspect of the vessel's appearance, adding a textural basketry element.

The proverb '*mus'ukupa (*or *sipula) izintselwa njengabaTwa*', translated as 'you mustn't root out (and throw away) your gourds like Bushmen (who presumably did not value them, and yet they have been of such useful service to mankind)', and explained as meaning, 'you should not treat contemptuously or speak ill of your benefactor' (Bryant 1905:566; italics and parentheses in the original), also points to the re-use value placed on gourds, the idea of a gourd as a provider of support and sustenance, and the ways in which gourd-related practices were linked to collective identity.

Fuze's life

I now look at some elements of Fuze's biography to contextualise the donation of the gourd to the museum. Although Fuze was an important figure in the vanguard of black writing, the vision carried by him and his peers for a novel kind of indigenous literate community was never fully realised during their lifetimes. The emergent intellectual force they represented was 'stifled in its infancy' due to wider political factors such as the formation of a white state, and the unresolved dilemma they faced as simultaneously critical thinkers and colonised subjects (Mokoena 2011:18–19). There is, however, currently renewed interest in Fuze's life and career due to the scholarship of Hlonipha Mokoena (2011, 2012, 2022) and the recent republication of *Abantu Abamnyama* (Fuze 2022a, 2022b). Several digital curations published on Emandulo, the Five Hundred Year Archive's experimental platform, make materials related to Fuze available online and attempt to give further texture to his life (Figure 8.12). But again, many aspects remain enigmatic, so any biographical bearing on the museum donation remains speculative.

Fuze was born near Pietermaritzburg in the Colony of Natal *c.*1844 and spent much of his life in and around this town. He was educated at Ekukhanyeni, Bishop John William Colenso's mission school at Bishopstowe, to the east of Pietermaritzburg, from age 12 (as Colenso estimated him to be when he arrived in 1856; Mokoena 2012:403). There he trained as a printer and was subsequently appointed head printer in 1862 and placed in charge of Ekukhanyeni alongside William Ngidi while Colenso was in England over the following three years (Mokoena 2011:32).

As a prominent member of this dynamic and erudite community, Fuze was embroiled in understanding contemporary affairs characterised by 'the ever-constant intrusion of Zululand politics and Natal's colonial ambitions and intrigues' and entered into contact with the Zulu monarchy in 1859 (Mokoena 2011:32–33). It is impossible to account for all of his activities over the years, but he went on to experience first-hand several key events of his times, namely 'the arrest and deposition of the Zulu king Cetshwayo, the destruction of the Zulu kingdom in 1879, the exile of the Zulu prince Dinuzulu in 1890, and the Bhambatha rebellion in 1906'—which put him in a unique position to observe and comment on this period of colonialism in Natal and Zululand (Mokoena 2012:404). His continental and global outlook toward African history was influenced by his travels to the island of St. Helena to serve as a tutor to the exiled Dinuzulu in 1896. Having returned from exile in 1898 to the Zulu country, Dinuzulu summoned Fuze again in 1904. Fuze was about 60 years old at the time.

Whether the donation of the gourd happened before or after Fuze's second assignment with Dinuzulu, it is tempting to imagine that it might have been inspired in some way by the prospect or experience of visiting Zululand in that year. However, the 'Maritzburg' locality indicated in the accession register suggests that the gourd was local (the 'source' usually refers to the origin of the item rather than the donor).

Fuze on gourds

The only mention of 'gourds' that I have found in Fuze's writing is about the 'first fruits' ceremony (*umkhosi*), which was an agricultural celebration and ritual of fertility: 'When the king tastes the first fruits [*ukweshama*],[9] the medicine men set out to procure the wild gourd [*uselwa*] from other places, together with the medicines required for the ceremony' (Fuze 1922:160, 2022:99; bracketed insertion in the

[8] Other examples of gourds with contemporary repairs from Africa were recently featured in an online post published by the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge (Carreau 2022; Figure 8.10 and Figure 8.11). [9] The spelling should be *'ukweshwama'*. An alternative name for this festival is *Umkhosi Woselwa* ('festival of the calabash') (Nothando Shabalala pers. comm. 2022).

Figure 8.10.
Repaired gourd from Kenya, stitched with plant fibre, collected by Louis Leakey, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge (MAA 1950.562). Photograph by Lucie Carreau, 2022.

Figure 8.11.
Detail of the repaired gourd depicted in Figure 8.10. Photograph by Lucie Carreau, 2022.

original). Other testimonies describe the gourd as being crushed or smashed against the shields of nearby warriors as part of the ceremony (Testimony of Ndukwana in Webb & Wright 1986:270–71; Gluckmann, 1938:28; Raum 1973:538 (n.79)).

Steve Kotze has argued that the earlier portrayals of first fruits ceremonies reveal a greater emphasis on the 'hoecultural' aspects of cultivation—the domain of women's work—and later depictions portray more of 'a national celebration of male-dominated militarism focused on the monarchy in the person of the Zulu king' (Kotze 2018:13). Fuze's account seems to illustrate the latter tendency, with its emphasis on a ritual performance by the king involving a gourd. There is a question about what 'gourd' denotes in this context, as the term can be used as a more generic term for cucurbits or melons, of which there are several useful species, both wild and cultivated. Gourds referred to in accounts of the *umkhosi* are generally thought to have been representatives of the wild melon (*Lagenaria sphaerica*), known as *iselwa-lamkhosi* (Kennedy 1993:239–40), meaning 'the King's gourd' (Gluckmann 1938:27). The small, bitter, 'wild' early-season gourd mentioned in Fuze's account of the *umkhosi* seems to contrast with the full-bodied, late-season non-bitter fruit that his beer gourd was made from. A bitter, wild gourd may have represented foreignness, or an external danger or threat to the realm, hence its smashing. But although contrasting in this way with the kind of gourd used as food containers, the wild gourd seems nonetheless to have formed part of a more general sphere of associations between chiefs and royalty and gourds of different kinds.

For this reason, it would be interesting to look further into the similarities, connections and differences, both pragmatic and metaphorical, between wild, bitter gourds and the sweet, domesticated variety: the fruits of the bottle gourd are generally not considered edible, but young, tender fruits can be eaten although considered an emergency food by some; as with many other cucurbits, the leaves are eaten as a vegetable, relish or herb (Van Wyk & Gericke 2007:46). The frequent use of bottle gourds as containers entangles them in the world of food and drink in other ways, and for them to be useable as food containers they need to be of a non-bitter, edible type.

Umuntu kafi aphele

Towards the end of his life, in his seventies, Fuze wrote about his ideas on what happens after the death of the human body, including

a series of articles titled, 'Umuntu kafi apele'[10] ('When a person dies, that is not the end of him') published in *Ilanga lase Natal* between 1916 and 1922 (Mokoena 2011:42).[11] In these articles Fuze presented an original eschatological theory that can be characterised as a kind of immortalism (Mokoena 2011:253). His eschatology demonstrated that he was familiar with Zulu cultural practices concerning death but was not simply a syncretism of indigenous and Christian beliefs (Mokoena 2011:263). Throughout his writings, he wove together in complex ways elements from biblical scriptures with traditional Zulu expression, as illustrated in a passage that refers to a beer vessel:

> We mourn greatly, even though our mourning will not help anything. That saying [word] of ours is great when we say we are dead, we have died the death of clay-pot beer that had not been served [decanted]. We trust the One Above, who has prepared for us all like his Son has said (Fuze, 1915, translated in Mokoena, 2011:259; bracketed insertions in the translation).

Hlonipha Mokoena points out that the verb—*thunga* ('to decant or serve') is difficult to translate and can also be understood to mean 'to sew', so an alternative translation could be 'We have died the death of the clay pot that cannot be sewn' (2011:311 (n. 11)). The Zulu word for 'clay-pot' in Fuze's original text is *imbiza*, which is a type of large ceramic brewing vessel (Figure 8.9). The alternative translation points to the practice of repairing pots and to the strong personification of pots, which are analogous to people, a repaired pot being thinkable as symbolic of an extension of life.

In the epilogue to *Abantu Abamnyama*, published in the year Fuze died, he wrote:

> Concerning my own deliberations, gentlemen, I now suggest that we immediately prepare for the benefit of our future generations a record of events to show them where they came from. A grasshopper when it is fertilised at the end of a year and when it feels that it is about to die, digs a hole in the ground and lays its eggs there and covers them with soil, and then settles on a twig to wither and die. After a time the eggs hatch out, and its children emerge as grasshoppers just like it. We should remember that on death we do not come to an end, but by our progeny we renew ourselves to continue indefinitely, and so arise anew as if we were beginning at the beginning. Remember the old proverb, 'A skin cradle is not thrown away because of a death.' I am concerned to preserve. It will be a good thing if even in the future our children gain knowledge about their past, rather than remain ignorant and stupid like the *siphumamangati* eagle (2022b:155).

These elements—the persistent presence of gourds in a range of cultural contexts alongside an apparent decline of their use as beer-serving vessels, the apparent close association between gourds and male personhood and authority, and Fuze's concern to leave something of himself after death, something that might serve as a record for future generations—help to sketch a broader context for the donation to the Natal Government Museum. It adds further context to a suggestion I published previously on this beer gourd, which was, in a sense, the seed of this chapter:

> In choosing to place this object into the museum's care, the donor [Fuze] was making a contribution to what was by then already a substantial repository of material culture relevant to the history of the KwaZulu-Natal region. Gourds were potent symbols of personal identity for men in particular, and this gourd may have been Fuze's own beer vessel, which he bequeathed to the museum—a contribution to the archive of something personally meaningful (Wintjes 2021:280–81).

Indeed, Fuze's donation seems to reaffirm the fundamental role gourds played as vessels and the significance of such items at the intersection of the personal and the historical. The presence of the gourd in the museum today speaks to the possibility of weaving together Fuze's story with the gourd's story to form a kind of 'individualised and imagined moment' (Ntombela 2016:88; see also De Harde's chapter). Yet what the specific significance of this gourd was to Fuze, why the choice of a beer gourd rather than some other kind of object, and what exactly motivated him to make a donation remains elusive, as well as Fuze's understanding of the purpose of the museum, and museum collections more generally, in relation to personal objects of utility, belonging and identity. As a writer and thinker on issues of

[10] The current orthography is 'Umuntu kafi aphele'. [11] A selection of articles from this series is available on the Emandulo website of the Five Hundred Year Archive (http://emandulo.apc.uct.ac.za/metadata/Fuze/4508/4558/index.html).

Figure 8.12.
Screenshots from a digital curation about Magema Magwaza Fuze on the Five Hundred Year Archive's Emandulo website, 2022.

amazwi (words), text, language and translation, one wonders about Fuze's ideas on the changing context of lived material culture that the gourd so powerfully evokes. Examined in the context of Fuze's life and his ideas surrounding death, the gourd takes on additional affective layers of meaning, further complicating and enhancing its presence in the museum.

The gesture of donation seems paradoxical, similar to how Hlonipha Mokoena describes the writing of *amakholwa* generally: 'both backward- and forward-looking, expressive of both pre-colonial as well as of colonial or modern African society', arising out of a 'predicament of being entangled in the tension between pre-colonial and modern, colonial forces' (2011:23–24). Fuze likely saw the museum as an institution of modernity and education, aiming to preserve something of older ways of being in the world in the context of dramatic societal changes. His gesture of placing the gourd into the museum's care might be regarded as conscious (auto-)ethnography, self-realisation as a historian contributing to the archive, and a creative act of bricolage, melding detachment with bequeathal. The gourd, with its stitched repair, holding it together in a strange afterlife, evokes Fuze's career as a writer and intellectual: a deferred yet resilient and provocative force.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter **09**

Objects on Life-Support: Items on Pallets and Bundles in Cupboards

Laura de Harde

During one of my first visits to the Anthropology storage area, located in the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (DNMCH), Motsane Gertrude Seabela, curator of Anthropology Collections, introduced me to the grain storage baskets or *dišego* in the Sepedi language. Over the years, the museum has amassed an assortment of grain baskets of varying shape, size and tonal range. They sit quietly alongside one another, huddled together on covered metal pallets towards the left-hand side of the dimly lit, air-cooled storeroom. Historically, African baskets were produced in a range of sizes to act as vessels for containing and storing provisions such as vegetables, grains and, in some cases, liquids, including beer (Nettleton 2010:60). Some baskets would be kept in designated huts (Monnig 1967) and others, the large woven baskets or *dišego*, such as the ones on display in the exhibition *Inherited Obsessions* (2022), were made to store grains including maise, wheat and sorghum.

The *dišego* displayed in *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) were made using a technique called coiling, which is one of the most common forms of indigenous basket-making in southern Africa (Nettleton 2010:62). Coiling is a process whereby 'thin bundles of sedge grass stalks are bound together in coils'; the bundles are then 'sewn together to form vessels of various shapes, and for a variety of purposes' (Nettleton 2010:62). Following their completion, the *dišego*, are 'planted by men' (Masekoameng 2007:29) and buried in the community cattle kraal (Masekoameng 2007:29; Seabela 2021). Seabela explains how

> a large hole is excavated in the centre of the kraal and lined with grains (called *ditokole*) at the bottom of the hole, one or two feet thick. The basket is then placed in the hole so that the bottom rests on the wheat. Two poles on which a crossbar rests are planted opposite sides of the hole. A strap is fastened to the transverse pole, while the other end, which is fastened to a strong beam of

Figure 9.1.
Dišego (grain storage baskets) propped up in the Anthropology storage area of the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Photograph by Laura de Harde, 2022.

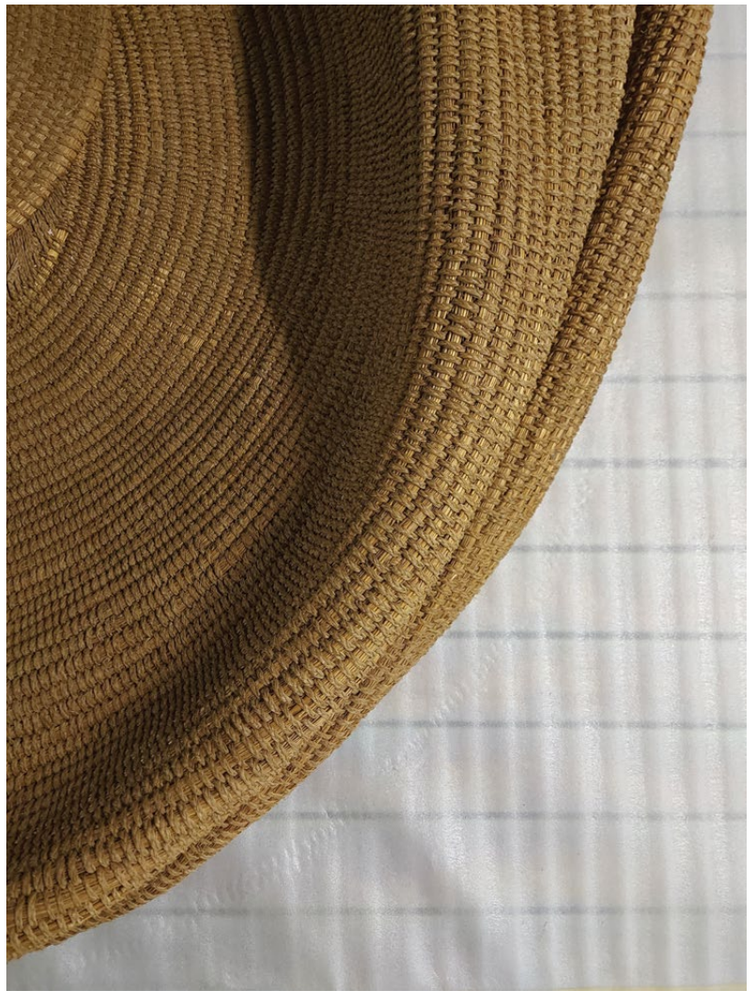


Figure 9.2.
Close-up photograph taken of a *sešego* (grain storage basket) in the Anthropology storage area of the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Photograph by Laura de Harde, 2022.

> about 3 metres, is placed in the basket so that the transverse one passes in front of the mouth. A further two poles of about 3 by 4 metres are planted in the beam about 2 metres apart. At these two poles, two ends of cowhide are [buried] so that the other end runs through into the basket (Seabela 2021).

Once below ground, the *sešego* can efficiently maintain its contents at low temperatures. The material used to weave the baskets 'absorbs any possible sweating that might exist due to embryonic breathing of the sorghum grains' (Masekoameng 2007:5). Stored in this way, crops can remain fresh for two to three years (Khumbane 2004). Sorghum can be stored for more than ten years.

The baskets were therefore made with the knowledge that they would be stored below ground and, in this way, be supported by the earth. In other words, they were not made to support themselves or to hold their spherical shapes for extended periods. Today, as they sit positioned on metal pallets in the exhibition space (a re-enactment of their lives in the storeroom), their 'bodies' are exposed to the public, their forms bending and buckling, some assisted by wooden supports or positioned on wire stands propped up against supports and others with their bodies imploded. The physicality of these objects, their forms and their bodies provide evidence of the conservation difficulties Seabela contends with at the museum (Figures 9.1 and 9.2).

Seabela (see Chapter 3) finds herself frustrated and overwhelmed when confronted with the gaping holes of unrecorded information pertaining to the communities, makers, and locations, where objects in the museum are severed from their provenance. Even in instances when 'individualised information does exist, it is now largely detached and disassociated from the objects' (Leibhammer 2017:83). Yet the inscrutability of objects and archives is ever present in collections and is also true for objects preserved in the DNMCH storeroom, with individual objects each displaying a label with an accession number but, in many instances, not much else and with no supporting documentation immediately available. Where the *dišego* are concerned, the museum's *Anthropology Collection Accession Register* retains some information regarding the provenance of some of the baskets. In one instance, the maker's name has been recorded as 'Phineas Phelego of the Hananwa people at the southern foot of the Blouberg, Leipzig in the Limpopo Province' (Seabela 2021). It reportedly took Phelego two

months to make the basket, and according to the accession record, Phelego sold the basket to the museum in 1966.

Citing the long history of basketry in Africa, the use of 'locally available materials', and the continuation and utilisation of 'inherited techniques', Nettleton sees the craft of basket-making as a 'vector for an African identity' (2010:56). Yet even with this prominence, in the five decades since their acquisition, the *dišego* in the DMNCH storeroom have never been exhibited nor have they left the storeroom (Seabela pers. comm. 2022). As co-curators of the exhibition accompanying this volume, Seabela and I elected to revive these objects by transferring them from the positions they occupy in the storeroom into the gallery space in the museum.

Patiently waiting

In earlier chapters in this volume, Matthew McClure (Chapter 2) and Motsane Gertrude Seabela (Chapter 3) consider the history of the DNMCH and reflect on the events that led to the making of the Anthropology Collection over which Seabela now presides. Since the early 1880s, the anxiety that indigenous races were on the brink of extinction motivated a scramble 'to collect and conserve evidence of their existence as part of the natural history of the world' (Rassool 2015; Van Schalkwyk 1996, cited in Seabela, Chapter 3 in this volume). As McClure points out, the objects allocated to the categories of '*nature* and *culture* were lumped into one homogenous mass, collected on a whim and by personal taste and choice by natural scientists, entomologists and reverends of the church' (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, Seabela ponders her role in caring for these objects, listing the agents of preventative conservation and pauses to reconsider the definition of dissociation as the act of 'an item becom[ing] separated from information about why it is valuable' (Lacombe Museum and Archives 2022, cited in Seabela Chapter 3). Seabela offers a broader definition to 'include the separation of objects from their source communities, which results in misrepresentation and obscured provenance or the lack thereof'. For Seabela:

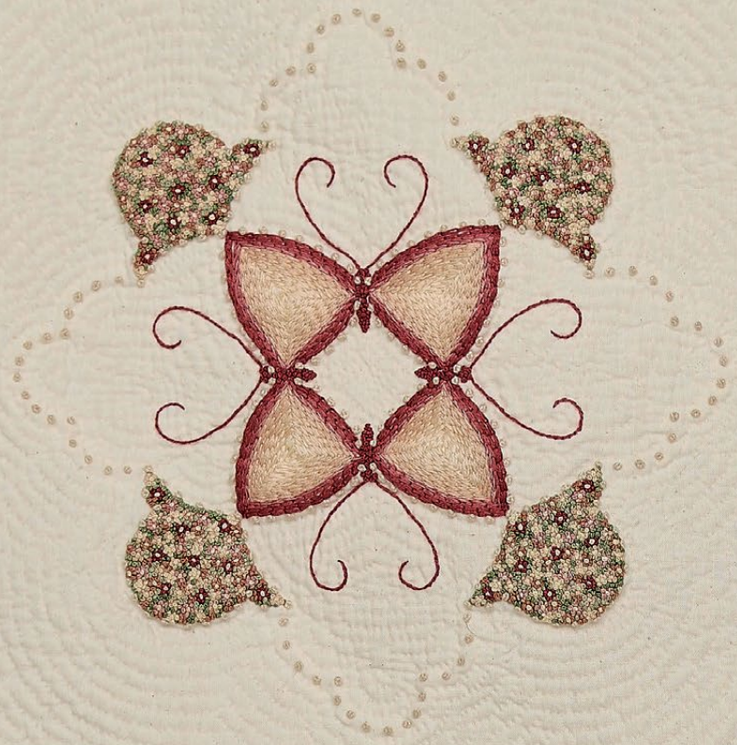
> the silenced voices of indigenous communities in museum collections due to colonialism have resulted in the separation of the intangible from the tangible heritage of objects. Encouraging the continuous preservation of such objects merely for the sake of preserving them (because it has always been done so) makes no sense (see Chapter 3).

In 2016, I described the materials I encountered in the Survey Room on the second floor of the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences (ZMHS) as 'sleeping' (after Foucault 1994:123 in De Harde 2019:21). There has moreover been a comparison drawn between the 'unseen archives, study rooms, and libraries which are inaccessible to the public' and the crypt (Brusius & Singh 2018). As Theodore Adorno once commented:

> the German word *museal* (museumlike) has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association (Adorno 1982:178 in Witcomb 2002:102).

Yet my experience walking through the air-cooled and humidity-controlled Anthropology storage area at the DNMCH was quite different from my encounter with the Survey Room in Harare (De Harde 2019; 2021). If the materials I engaged with in the ZMHS related to the scholarship of Elizabeth Goodall were quietly left to rest, the objects in the DNMCH storeroom are purposefully positioned in cupboards, on shelves and raised off the polished and sealed cement floors on pallets. In the large windowless room in central Pretoria, the objects exist mostly in the dark, carefully monitored at intervals by Seabela, who has described them as 'paralysed' (Seabela pers. comm. 2022). In addition, Seabela takes umbrage with the term 'object', seeing them as 'more than just things but symbols and strands of people's lineages' (Chapter 3). Inspired by these discussions, I began thinking again about the term 'object' in relation to the anthropomorphising terms attributed to storage, as discussed above. As I reflected on my visit to the dimly lit, quiet room, it seemed to evoke a visit to the Intensive Care Unit in a hospital. Following this thought, I found it provocative to consider the items in the storeroom as 'patients'.

Previously, the *dišego* (and by association, their makers) had been aligned with nature. They were housed in natural history or ethnographic museums and deemed to be 'ethnographic' or craft items with mere utilitarian significance. As we follow the trajectory of the appropriation of African material culture into Western Art History, we see that, as



Nessa Leibhammer observed, only some select pieces were recognised as 'masterpieces' and displayed as 'worthy' of aesthetic contemplation (2017:70). 'Objects formerly treated simply as craft', as Anitra Nettleton points out, 'were, in a number of places, decontextualised in their display as aesthetic objects, and reinterpreted as the "art" of black Africans' (2010:57). 'With a swift sleight of hand', placed on display in museum and gallery spaces, 'they became "art", occupying the realm of "high culture"' (Leibhammer 2017:59–60). My and Seabela's decision to include these objects as part of *Inherited Obsessions* (2022) is made with the intention of mobilising the baskets and reconfiguring and redefining them by this relatively brief intervention. In this exhibition, the grain storage baskets are not confined to their function, nor bound by their perceived aesthetic value, but rather are shown as objects with their physicality, as bodies that convey the burden of preservation and conservation as it is inherited by our future successors.

Bundles of burden

In thinking through the notion of representation and the issue of 'black subjectivity' concerning fine art production and the history of art, Nontobeko Ntombela has explored the possibility of employing what she calls 'individualised and imagined moments'. She describes this concept as being

> based on the idea of contemporary art as a discipline primarily located in the engagement of imagination, memory and storytelling, ideas positioned within wider practices of contemporary art. Such artistic practices compel us to take a closer look at the context that brings to the surface the issue of 'black subjectivity' (2017:88–89).

This exhibition manifests our conversations and my creative work, where I try to empathise with Seabela's role as curator, custodian, carer and nurse. In reflecting on Seabela's burden of inheriting what I refer to as the 'obsessions' of others in trying to preserve what are often cumbersome, fragile and decaying objects, I draw on my personal experience, less formal and on a much smaller scale.

In the top of a built-in cupboard in the family home where I grew up is a loosely rolled up bundle made up of two queen-sized quilts (Figures 9.3 and 9.4). Together these quilts are the product of 13-and-a-half years

Figure 9.4. (above)
Close-up photograph taken to show the individual knots that make up Tilly de Harde's hand-embroidered quilt. Photograph by Laura de Harde, 2022.

Figure 9.3. (opposite)
Close-up photograph taken of Tilly de Harde's hand-embroidered quilt. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

Figure 9.5.
Tilly de Harde nearing the end of her project, photographed stitching the first of the two quilts, *Golden Memories*. Photograph by Barry de Harde, c. 2000.

of handwork produced by my mother, internationally acclaimed Master Quilter and Fibre Artist, Tilly de Harde. What started as a single block grew through a six-and-a-half-year period into a quilt that brushes the ground on three sides when spread over an extra-length queen-sized bed. Each embroidered thread has been individually knotted and placed by hand, and each stitch that binds the three layers of fabric together, in effect, 'quilting' it, has been sewn by hand. These quilts fall into the category of objects that Olivia Loots (Chapter 7) explains can 'no longer be neatly categorised as, simply, "sentimental". Because matter is experienced and "knotted through different encounters"'. In this way, Loots argues that 'an object's perceived value impacts its affective hold, and vice versa' (Boscagli 2014:12 in Loots Chapter 7).

In the years since completion, the quilts have been shown to the public several times; in each instance, they have received awards and acclaim. Aside from these public viewings, they are taken out twice a year to be aired and folded again to prevent creasing. Driven by my mother's fear that they would be dirtied, hooked, or damaged in some way, the quilts have never been used. They live in the dark in a cupboard purposefully chosen because there is no geyser nearby and, therefore, no risk of water damage. One day, one (if not both quilts) will be bestowed on me, and I will be responsible for looking after one or both of them. While in her possession, Tilly de Harde has cared for them, preserving them pristinely. I often think of these objects, sewn by my mother's hands, and the enormous amount of work, perseverance and dedication that has been stitched into them (Figure 9.5)

In placing the grain storage baskets and my mother's embroidered quilts imaginatively alongside one another in this chapter, I am considering the responsibility of what will one day be the burden of preservation that I will need to shoulder. These objects, burdens of inheritance—my mother's embroidered quilts and Seabela's grain baskets—are engaging in an endless dialogue about the categories of art and craft, which has been continuing over decades.

Some affinities can be drawn between the woven baskets and the stitched fabric, from an appreciation of the hours dedicated to handwork stitched and worked and embedded into the surfaces to the desire to preserve something of the makers' identities. The traditions from which both objects develop face similar challenges, both, for example, are seen as falling into the domain of 'women's work'. Yet as Rozika Parker points out in *The Subversive Stitch* (1984), Medieval embroidery was

practised by both men and women, a detail obscured by the Victorians who presented it as 'an inherently female activity, a quintessentially feminine craft' (1984:17).

Slivers in cabinets

While trawling through a small wooden cabinet in the Anthropology storage area, in close proximity to the baskets but 'separated from the rest of the collection by wire fencing' (see McClure, Chapter 2), amidst a pile of photographs with the inscription 'Issued by the South African Information Service, Pretoria' typed on their versos, I found two black and white photographs relating to the grain storage baskets.

The first, 'Photo No. 2358', showed the grain baskets in the background with several women positioned in the middle ground forming a line separating a collection of smaller bowls on the ground from the large baskets in the background. The description typed on the back, 'bringing the grain for storage', provided context for the activity captured in the frame. 'Photo No. 2359' seemed staged by comparison with the previous image. The images of 12 women standing in a line in front of the *dišego* are captured within the frame of the photograph. They stand still for their portraits, looking out to the right, beyond the frame created by the photograph, each figure dwarfed by the sheer scale of the grain storage baskets in the background. On the back, the inscription reads, 'South-West Africa. Ovambo women in front of their grain stores'.

I have always been interested in photography. Not necessarily the image itself, but the photograph as an object with a life of its own, separated from the sitter whose likeness it reflects and the photographer who captured the moment. When I was growing up, my mother had a hand-coloured photograph of herself at about two years of age, taken in the 1960s (Figure 9.6). This image is the only one my mother has of herself as a small child. She treasured this item, and I remember her efforts to preserve it. One of her interventions was moving this photograph along with a few other cherished family portraits out of the way of home renovators and into a cupboard for safekeeping. At some time in the months that followed, a geyser burst, leaking water onto the ceiling of the house. The water ran down the walls into the cupboard where the photographs were being stored, seeping into the frames and blurring the pigment on the surfaces, disrupting the portraits. My mother was devastated. Insurance compensation replaced the beams in the roof and the wood in the cupboard, but the

Figure 9.6.
Hand-coloured portrait of my mother at about age two, damaged by water while in storage. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

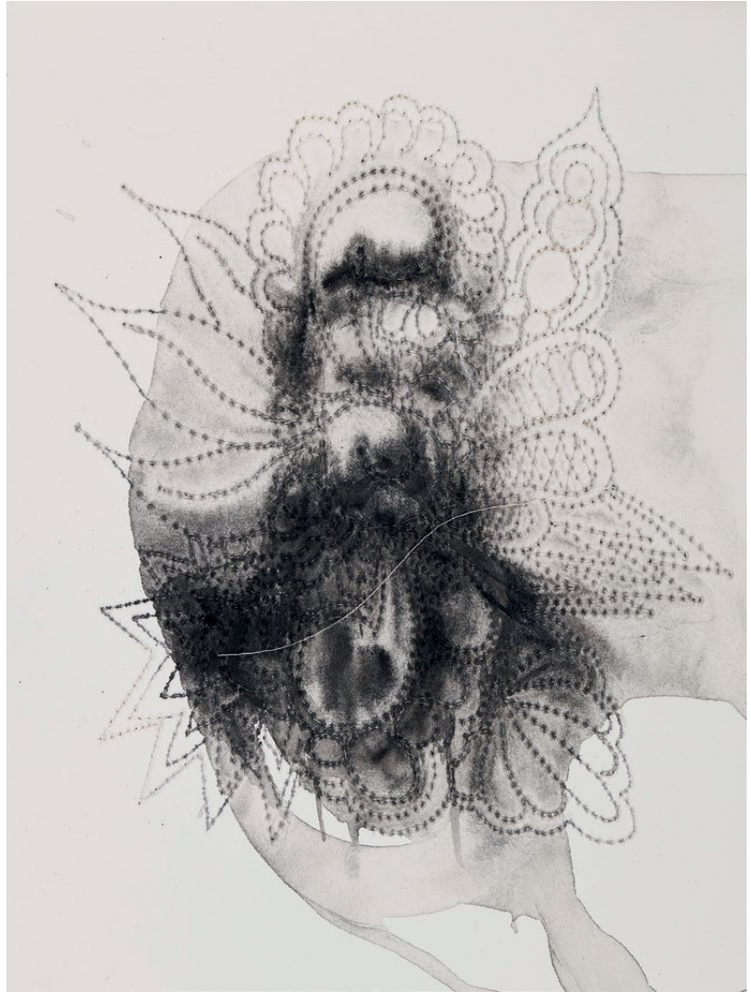


Figure 9.7.
An artwork where I incorporated my mother's mark-making (2020). This work is inspired by a photograph in the Documents and Materials Collection at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

portraits were destroyed. No copies had been made, and there was no way of replacing them. This event haunts and informs my creative research—the urgency to protect a loved object from damage and the devastation when efforts fail. I believe I have inherited something of this obsession from my mother to care for and preserve cherished items. I, too, have faced devastation when these interventions fail, and items are damaged. It feels as if what is often associated with motherhood, the motherly instinct of care, can also be stifling and suffocating.

In 2020, I began working with my mother's mark making, her stitching, incorporating it into my creative practice. Her work has evolved from the labour-intensive task of hand stitching employed in her embroidered quilts. She has now developed her mode of mark-making, a technique called 'free motion quilting' whereby she moves the fabric under the needle of her Bernina 770 QE sewing machine to create intricate and spontaneous patterns. In my studio practice, I began integrating my mother's gestural mark-making by having her transfer her technique (usually done on fabric) onto paper (Figure 9.7). Her patterns are visually attractive as they flow across the surface, puncturing holes in quick succession. I would collect the stitched sheets of paper from her, return them to my studio and imprint onto the stitched paper my renditions of digital copies of photographic portraits I had taken in storerooms and in archives. In the studio, I experimented with reproducing the images using ink and water. The water destabilises the ink, moving it across the surface of the paper and making any attempt at precision copying unattainable and futile. In Chapter 5, Jessica Webster describes these portraits as trapped 'within the delicate whorls' of stitching 'being disfigured, and sometimes structured by them'. The ink is unstable in the reaction it has with water and light. It flows and bleeds across the textured paper surface, changing colour as it is diluted. In the future, in the life the images lead beyond the confines of the studio, the ink will continue to change colour, and as a result, the images will continue to shift and change in ways beyond my control.

My time spent working in commercial galleries and museums and the cross-continental research I have conducted in various storerooms and archives have revealed the instability and fickleness undermining the project of preservation. Objects entrusted and interred in museum storerooms for posterity are subject to the changing objectives of those museums. Objects stored for decades can be deaccessioned, or museums can lose funding and close their doors. Or, as Jill Weintroub discusses in Chapter 6, archives and the objects they protect can be

extinguished by fire. In my engagement with these concepts, I am aware of my subjective and irrational desire to preserve and keep the many objects in museums, storerooms, and archives safe. I have been exposed to the futility of failed preservation.

Nevertheless, through my experimental creative research, I try to capture, reproduce, copy, and conserve the likeness of the sitters in the portraits I have encountered. But the water disrupts the ink, forcing it across the surface of the paper in ways I cannot control, evading my ability to accurately record recognisable details of the individuals (Figure 9.7). My mother's stitching sometimes holds the image in place, giving it form, but the ink inevitably slips through the holes that pierce the paper, showcasing the inefficaciousness of my attempts to preserve the original photographs in this way. These early efforts to grapple with and understand the urge to preserve images (objects) with the knowledge that our efforts are only ever fleeting and frustrated, and while our legacy of 'pristinely preserving' a cherished item may be remembered briefly, the burden to continue preserving rests on the shoulders of future generations.

Seabela has commented on what she sees as a momentary intervention in what will inevitably be the decay of objects (Seabela pers. comm. 2022), such as the *dišego*, for example, that are kept on life-support in storerooms. I, too, have explored this notion of inexorable decay in my studio practice. Building on my mother's stitching on paper, I have explored what would happen if I used my mother's stitching as the thread that holds the image together, dissolving all the background materials (Figure 9.8). These artworks begin to convey the texture and physicality of the object (photograph) as it decays. Here I combine my desire to preserve something of the original object and the likeness of the sitter with an exploration of the process of deterioration. I use a range of experimental techniques and distinctive materials to capture the materiality of decay. This resonates with the otherwise hermetically preserved objects/bodies of the *dišego* exhibited in conversation with the outcomes of my creative research.

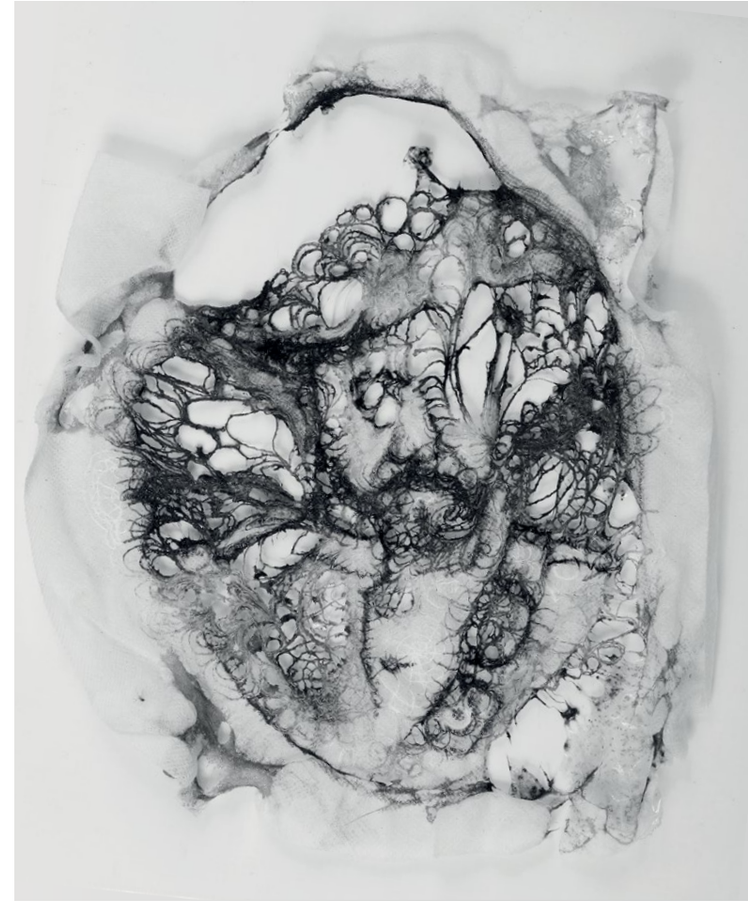


Figure 9.8.
An artwork demonstrating my efforts to translate the physicality of decay using experimental techniques and my mother's mark-making (2020). This work was inspired by a photograph in the Documents and Materials Collection at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

Layers of meaning

The small wooden cabinet in which I found the photographs discussed above holds a collection of materials that seem to have been left undisturbed for decades (Seabela pers. comm. 2021). As I looked through the photographs, I realised that my chance encounter with

these additional materials offered me a glimpse into the infinite variety of stories that can be told through the process of archival sleuthing and 'close reading' (Bal 2002:9–10), and the opportunity to invoke a biographical approach to objects (Wintjes 2017:137–53). The presence of these women in the archive, their likenesses immortalised alongside objects carrying a description denoting their ownership of the baskets, led me to more questions than answers. As Justine Wintjes reminds us, 'certain items remain frustratingly opaque and mysterious' (2017:145).

Extending the concept of the layered meanings entwined in the archive to my creative work, I reflect on the layering of meanings in relation to the *dišego*. These baskets are the objects that inaugurate my creative interactions with Seabela and the DNMHC. The women in 'Photo No. 2359' became the focal point of my creative engagement. The artworks in the exhibition represent the outcomes of various experimental encounters with various materials and images. The artworks selected for display are the culmination of two years of creative research where I try to convey visually what I understand and experience as the conceptual layering of meaning in the archive. To this end, I worked with a range of experimental printmaking techniques (Figure 9.9), incorporating my mother's stitching as the canvas on which I tried to record the portraits of the 12 women in 'Photo No. 2359' whose names and identities have not been recorded. My ability to capture, interpret and record the portraits is disrupted by my mother's stitching, which also keeps the images that I paint together. In this way, the various layers in my work represent my understanding of my subjectivity as it guides my research practice and engagement with objects.

Through a series of portrait studies using experimental printmaking techniques with watercolour, thread, and embossing, I work consciously in the space of the unknown, frustrating the viewer with images that remain obscure, depicting people whose identity remains always just out of reach (Figure 9.10). I have purposefully chosen not to reproduce the photographs here, deliberately concealing the identities of the sitters from the viewers. In this way, my work is a response to the limitations of the archive. It is a creative attempt to acknowledge the 'the devastating rebuttal of the notion long cherished … that in contextualising text they are revealing meaning, resolving mystery, and closing the archive' (Harris 2002a:71, cited in Weintroub Chapter 6).

Driven 'by the pleasure and enjoyment of the detective-like nature of the work' (Wintjes 2017:144) and working imaginatively in the space where the 'openness' of the archive is acknowledged, like Teboho Lebakeng (Chapter 4), I am cognisant of my role as translator and mediator. My engagement with the portraits while keeping the identity of each sitter out of reach of the viewer ignites a frustration, a desire in both artist and viewer to want to find out more. Through this method, I simultaneously present the possibilities offered by the 'object biographies' (Wintjes 2017:137–53) approach but simultaneously acknowledge the limitations of the archive. As Wintjes explains:

> It is about what [we] do with what [we] have, and it is about acknowledging and working actively with the indeterminacy, provisionality and uncertainty of knowledge (2017:146).

The exhibition *Inherited Obsessions* (2022), together with the edited volume, had its inception in the winter of 2020, when I answered a call for a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship position at the University of Pretoria put forward by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS). Established in 2013 in response to what an independent statutory body identified as the neglect of the Humanities and Social Sciences, the NIHSS saw a shortcoming in 'post-apartheid forms of thinking, of heritage and scholarship', resulting in what it deemed to be reductive 'shocking and enduring cultural stereotypes' (NIHSS n.d.). The concerns of the NIHSS align closely with an overarching interest that motivated my doctoral research, *Elizabeth Goodall: A Quiet Contribution to Rock Art Research in Southern Africa* (2019), where I stirred an archive containing a range of fragmentary materials to unmask subtle aspects of knowledge production that are often eclipsed by dominant narratives. While my doctoral research was text-based and without a formal creative component, my supervisors commented on an aspect of my work, noting that I presented

> … a fine-grained art-historical reading of the evolving methods, fieldwork and creative practices that frame processes of rock art reproduction and serve to structure in hidden ways how the art is interpreted (Wintjes & Weintroub 2019).

My post-doctoral work under the auspices of Lize Kriel's NIHSS-funded project 'African Au-o-ral Art in Image-text Objects: Cultural Translation of Precolonial Memories and Remains' – within which

Figure 9.9.
An example of an artwork where I experimented with printmaking techniques incorporating Tilly de Harde's stitching (2022). Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

Figure 9.10.
Issued by Woman 1, a portrait study by Laura de Harde, included in the exhibition *Inherited Obsessions*, 2022. Photograph by Neil Kirby, 2022.

this publication and exhibition are a key outcome – responds to the concerns outlined by the NIHSS while drawing on the methodological approach I employed in my PhD, as well as in my creative practice as an artist and printmaker. This project evolved from the notion of 'image-text-objects' as discussed by Kriel in this volume (Chapter 1) to include conversations with colleagues, many of whom have contributed to this volume. The visual component of this project is the physical manifestation of my creative response to these conversations and the ongoing dialogue Seabela and I started in 2021. Seabela commented that she 'loves working with artists'; when I prompted her, she elaborated positively by saying, 'You have no boundaries' (Seabela pers. comm. 2022). Creativity takes many directions providing possibilities for co-enriching collaboration. Like items on shelves and pallets and bundles at the top of cupboards, museum curators can find themselves paralysed by conventions and modes of display and engagements with collections inherited from their predecessors. The role of artists to disrupt these spaces, questioning conventions and presenting different perspectives, brings fluidity to what can often be a stale and stagnant environment. The intervention in *Inherited Obsessions* (2022), enacted in a collaboration between artist and curator, is merely a momentary encounter with the chosen objects in the museum collection, reviving a small selection of object-patients and engaging them in conversation, yet opening up possibilities for other conversations and different interpretations that are infinite and exciting.

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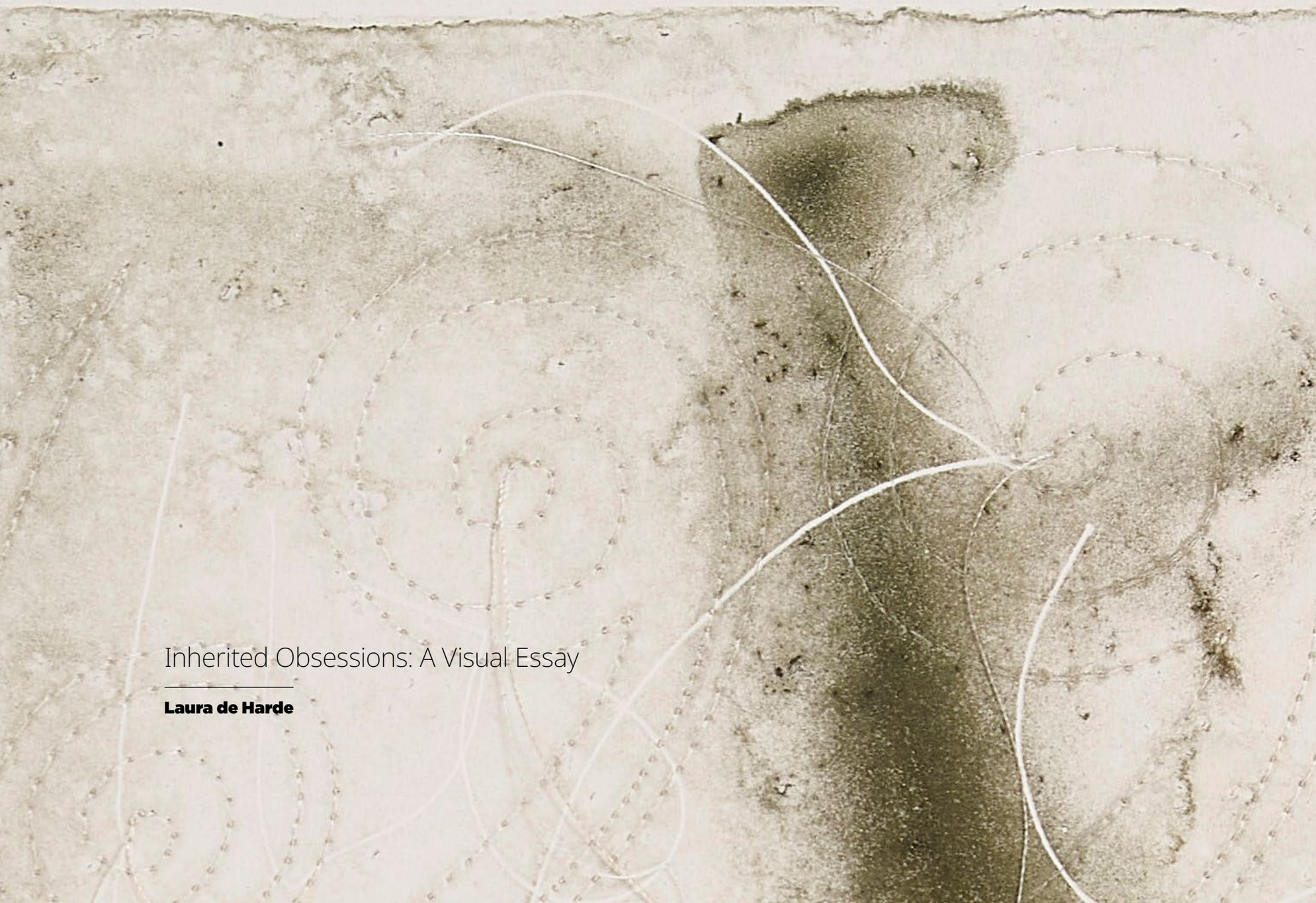
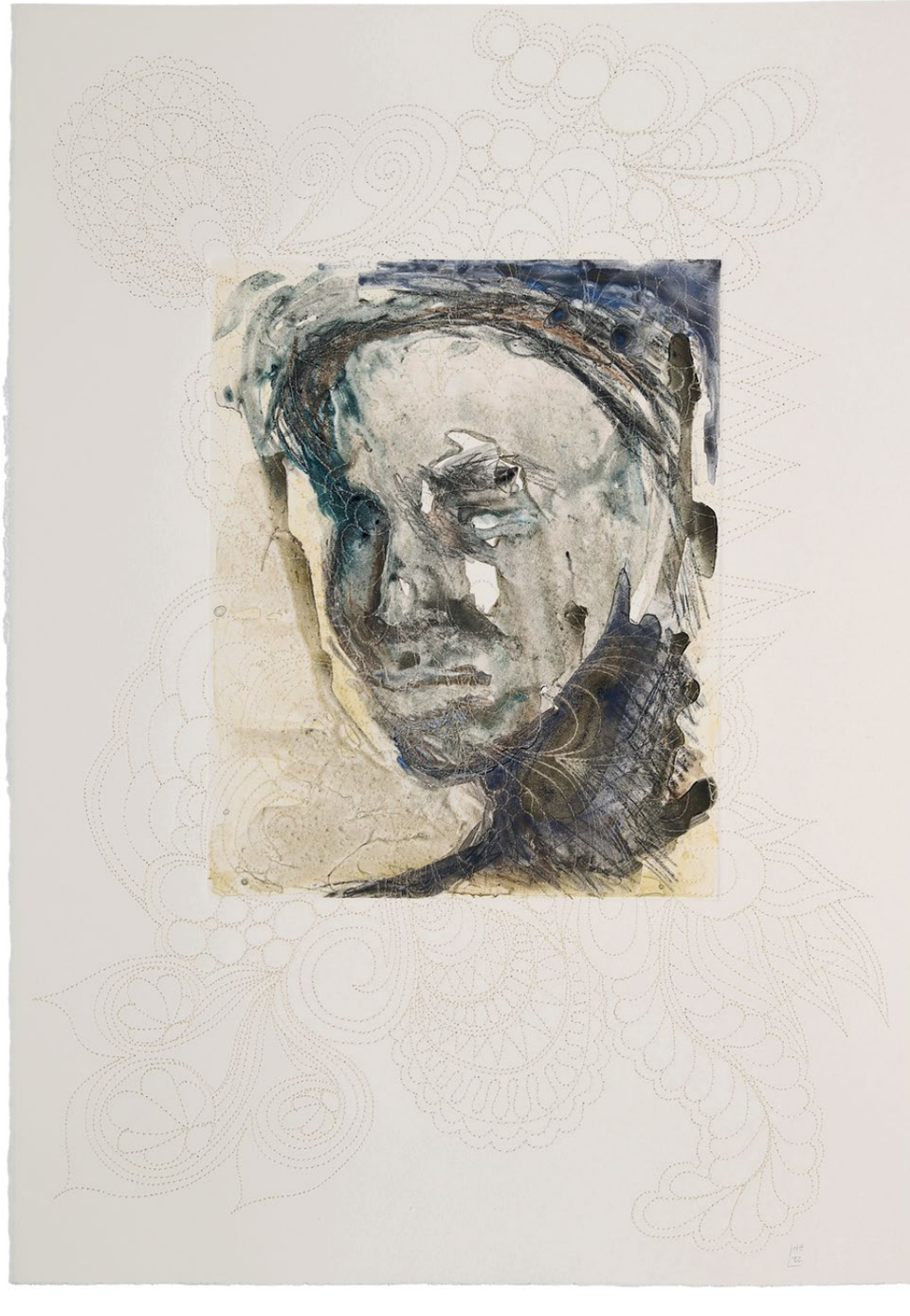
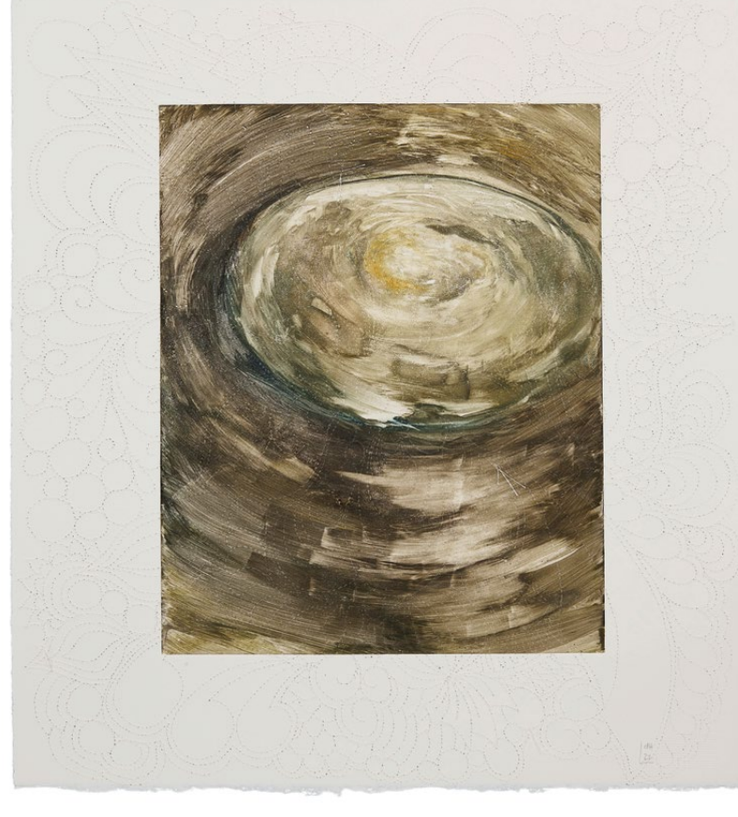
Chapter 10

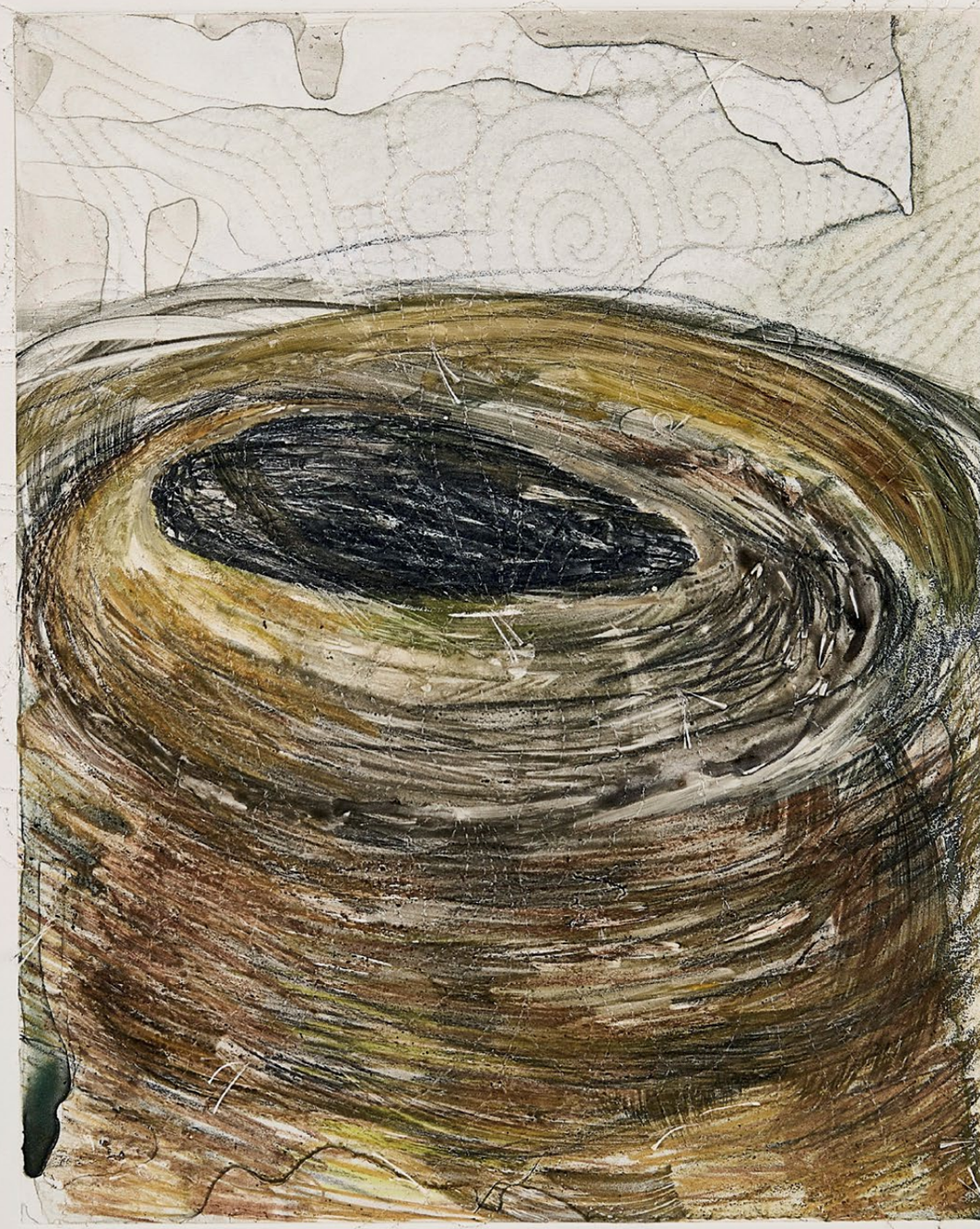


Inherited Obsessions: A Visual Essay

Laura de Harde





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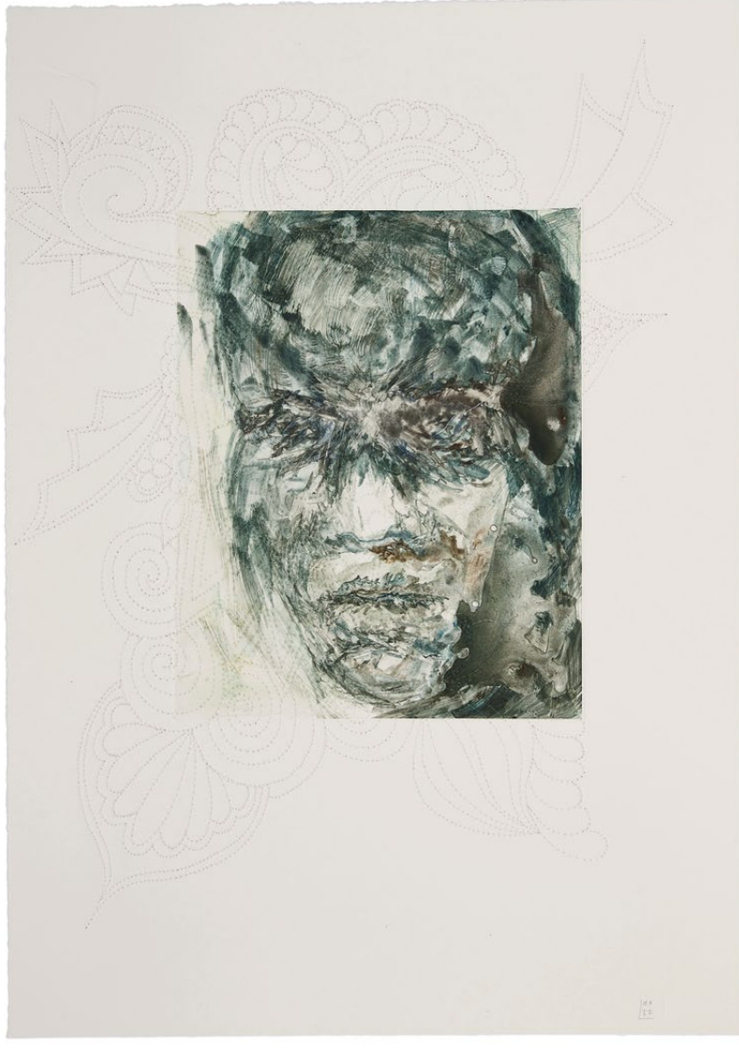


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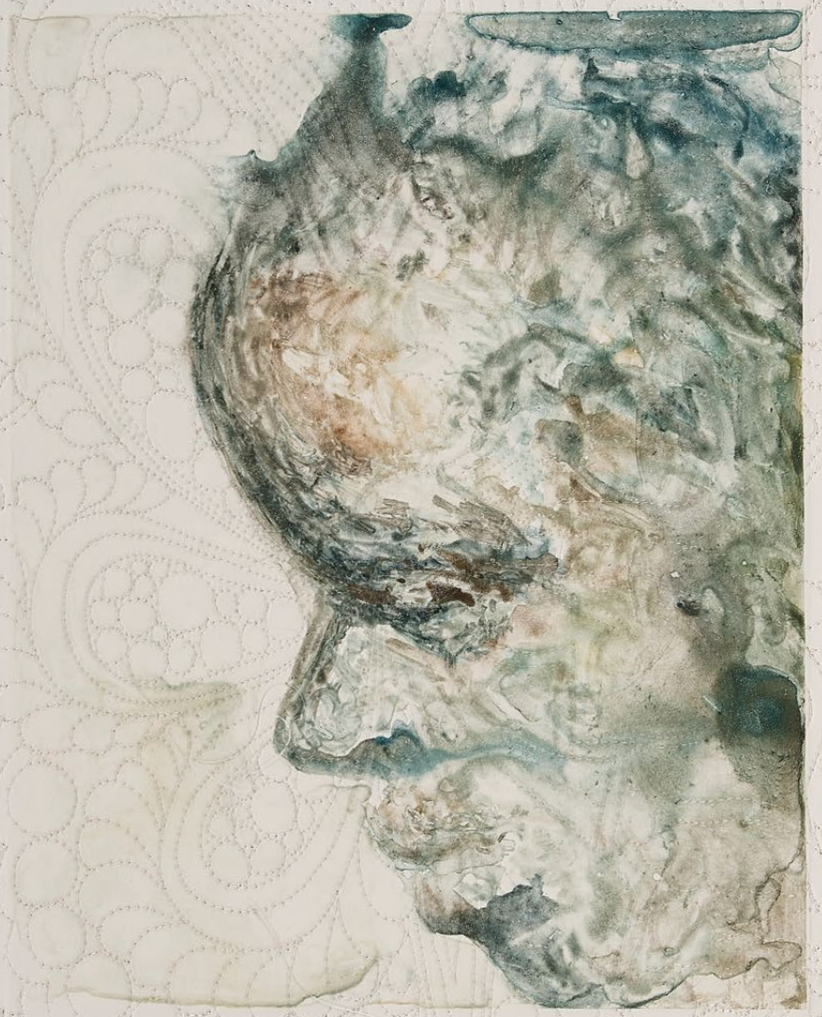

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104 *No. 2358*, watercolour monotype on stitched Fabriano paper, 50 x 35cm, 2022.
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141 *Ovambo Vrou*, watercolour and embroidery, 93 x 65cm, 2022.

Artworks stitched by Tilly de Harde

Tilly de Harde is a Master Quilter, Fibre Artist and teacher. Her creative practice is driven by an interest in fabrics, fibres and techniques. Tilly's artworks develop from a strong foundation in quilting. In order to find different ways of creating texture from fibres, Tilly does a lot of research. She experiments with innovative techniques and teaches the results to her students. Since 2000, Tilly has won numerous awards both nationally and internationally, most recently she won Best on Show at the National Quilt Festival in 2019. Tilly has been recognised as a Master Quilter since 2008 and in June 2020 she was inducted into the South African Quilters' Guild Hall of Fame.

Artworks printed with Bevan de Wet

Bevan de Wet is an award-winning artist and printmaker based in Johannesburg. He graduated with a BFA with distinction from Rhodes University in 2008. From 2011–2016, Bevan worked at the Artist Proof Studio in Johannesburg as a professional print technician, collaborator, and academic facilitator. In 2016, he founded his own print studio, *Eleven Editions,* where he also collaborates with other artists and publishes various projects. Bevan regularly works with Phumani Archive Mill, a paper-making research unit at the University of Johannesburg, where he produces his handmade paperwork. Bevan works primarily with paper: with a focus on etching, relief printing, papermaking, drawing and installation.

Artworks photographed by Neil Kirby

Neil Kirby is a commercial photographer and industrial designer based in Johannesburg, South Africa. He completed his education at Technikon Natal in 1997. In 2007, he was awarded the coveted PICA photographer of the year for an editorial in *DeKat* magazine, involving leading artists, poets and actors. Neil is actively involved in art reproduction and his clients include William Kentridge, Rina Stutzer, Elizabeth Castle and the Wits Origins Centre. When he is not behind his camera, he can be found pursuing his quest to create the perfect pizza.

Publication designed by Charl Malherbe

Charl Malherbe is a graphic designer from Johannesburg. He started his career in 1998 and spent the first four years as an editorial designer in the commercial magazine industry. He then went on to work as a graphic designer at a design agency in Bath in the United Kingdom. After returning to South Africa, he became the art director for the award-winning *DeKat* Magazine. He left to become the co-founder of a successful design company, specialising in magazine design, where he art directed magazines such as *Destiny Man*, as well as brand design, illustration and all other below-the-line marketing material. He now runs his own design studio, *Design Garage*, as a brand custodian and creative director for academic institutions. When he is not in front of his laptop, he can be found in his workshop, covered in sawdust, building high-end boutique guitars.


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