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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 Pieterse 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**

Professor, Interdisciplinary and Museum Studies  
School of the Arts, University of Pretoria

# Contributors

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**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, *Dorothea 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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