

# **Commemorative Portraiture: The artistic representation of black women in key positions from the Vaal Region.**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Technologiae: Fine Art in the Department of Visual Arts and Design, Faculty of Human Sciences, Vaal University of Technology.

## **DECLARATION**

I, Matshepo Priscilla Matoba-Thibudi, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own independent work, except where otherwise stated. The dissertation has not previously been submitted at any other university. All sources are acknowledged, and explicit references are provided.

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Matshepo Priscilla Matoba-Thibudi

Date: 05 December 2016

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother, Alinah Abzika Motsitsi-Matoba and my late sister, Khahliso Cecilia Matoba may your souls rest in peace.

## **ABSTRACT**

My practice-based research aimed to produce commemorative portraits of black women in key positions who are associated with the Vaal Region. The study was undertaken in order to contribute to the empowering, positive and growing body of creative research on the visual representation of black women in the visual art field. My concern lies in the dearth of artistic representation of black women, particularly from the Vaal Region and with the hegemonic Westernised portrayal of black women in a Visual Arts discipline dominated by prejudiced attitudes towards issues of race and gender. This was accomplished in two steps. Firstly, through the examination of black feminist theories which underpin my theoretical framework, and further challenge and draw attention to the omissions, invisibility, non-recognition and negative portrayal of black women. In addition selected techniques in artworks of Zanele Muholi, Karina Turok, Sue Williamson and Bongki Bengu have been appropriated to create my body of work. Secondly, I utilise commemorative portraiture to produce iconic portraits of advocate Faith Pansy Tlakula, Professor Ntombekayise Irene Moutlana, Professor Kholeka Constance Moloi, Avitha Sooful, Lerato Moloi, Terry Pheto, *Lira*, Palesa Mokubung and the late mama Adelaide Tambo which were exhibited in the *bodutu* gallery accompanied by a catalogue and a comment book. Both of these methods are qualitatively explored as creative strategies to portray and award agency positively to black women through Third World readings of gendered perspectives.

**Key words:** Commemoration, portraiture, representation, black women, Vaal Region, black feminism

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction to the field of study

We can keep an image as an object or store it in our imagination to be retrieved whenever... [we] witness the famous portrait of Bantu Steven Biko emblazoned on current fashion label 'Stoned Cherry!'... (Siopis in Comley, Hallet & Ntsoma 2006:9)

The above comment by artist Penny Siopis (b.1953) is important, particularly when considering the absence of similar equally famous portraits of women. In the visual arts field there is a wide range of commemorative art, which recognises and celebrates the life and legacy of high-profile male figures in society. Images of these high-profile men are seen on covers of books and magazines, and musicians sing songs commemorating them. Memoirs and biographies are written about them. Publications, buildings and institutions, streets and places are named after them. In democratic South Africa, we have also witnessed a rise in the number of places or institutions commemorating Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko and Oliver Tambo, very little is being done to commemorate high profile black women in the Vaal Region and in many other places in South Africa.

While women in general are underrepresented, African women in particular find themselves surrounded by cultural, social, economic and political barriers. Despite all these challenges, African women can be found in several key positions in our society and my study focuses on these women. It explores ways of creatively and visually commemorating high-profile black women, particularly those occupying key positions and who are associated with the Vaal Region either by birth, dwelling, work or education. Through mixed media portraiture, I have produced a series of commemorative portraits of advocate Faith Pansy Tlakula, who is a former South African Chief Electoral Officer and Chancellor of the Vaal University of Technology; Professor Ntombikayise Irene Moutlana is the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the Vaal University of Technology; Professor Kholeka Constance Moloji is a researcher and professor of Education in the Faculty of Human Science at the Vaal University of Technology; Avitha Sooful is a visual artist and former Head of Department of Visual Arts and Design at the Vaal University of Technology; Lerato Moloji is a model, the former brand ambassador and first black face of Elizabeth Arden; Terry Pheto is a film producer, an actress and former ambassador for L'Oréal; singer, song writer, actress, South African Audi, Johnnie Walker brand ambassador and South African Bobbie

Brown cosmetics brand influencer Lerato Moipone Molapo is known by her stage name *Lira*; Palesa Mokubung is a fashion designer and the owner of Mantsho couture and the late mama Adelaide Tambo was a prominent anti-apartheid activist.

This study, uses black feminist theory to position and frame my approach to the creative strategy of commemorative portraiture and my focus on the themes of representation and under-representation. I explore these themes in order to address and in some measures redress the absence of iconic black women in the domain of visual representation. These themes have also been explored by black feminists such as bell hooks<sup>1</sup> (1992, 1995), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Yvette Abrahams (2004), Nombiso Gasa (1999, 2007) and Dabi Nkululeko (1987); also by art historians such as Judy Ramgolam<sup>2</sup> (2011) and Portia Malatjie (2011) as well as visual artists Sue Williamson (b.1941), Bongzi Bengu (b.1970), Zanele Muholi (b.1972) and Karina Turok (b.1963).

The focus of my study is on women artists whose works feature prominent black women as their subject matter and the portraiture genre as a creative form in their artworks. Instead of looking at black women as victims and passive individuals, the study looks at them as subjects with agency, thinkers, producers and leaders. Of importance to this study is to explore and find ways of representing the above-mentioned women in visual portraiture that identifies, recognises, celebrates and commemorates them.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In framing issues of representing black women, this study relies on black feminist theories and the related texts on the politics of representation and commemoration in a new and Postcolonial dispensation. One of the objectives of black feminist theory is to analyse, critique and draw attention to black women's oppression and discrimination, which arises from the complex and fraught notions of race, gender and class (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991). The theories also question, challenge and expose the

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<sup>1</sup> bell hooks spells her name in small letters, to differentiate herself from her grandmother who has the same names as well to place the focus and attention on her work rather than her name.

<sup>2</sup> Judy Ramgolam reverted to her maiden surname, Peter.

omissions, invisibilities, non-recognition and the negative portrayal of black women, whose voices have been and which presently are overlooked by the oppressive measures of the (white) patriarchal system in society.

Black feminists have therefore developed strategies of not only exposing the negative portrayal of black women but also to subvert the problem through finding creative and practical solutions. Collins (2000:67) defines how black feminists can “find a voice” and self-define a position in patriarchal societies. hooks (1989:42) argues that, when black women are seen as subjects, they determine their own identity and create their history, unlike when they are viewed as objects, where their identity and history are defined in relation to those who are the subject. Collins (2000) also values the thoughts of all black women as part of knowledge production. The power of self-definition is important to black feminists who have found voices to redefine and create their ‘her-stories’.

Black women artists such as Zanele Muholi (b.1972), Bongi Bengu (b.1970), Mary Sibande (b. 1982), Nandipha Mntambo (b. 1982), Simphiwe Dana (b. 1980), Lebogang Mashile (b. 1979), Napo Masheane (b.1977) and Thandiswa Mazwai (b. 1976) amongst others, have used autobiographical and auto-ethnographical strategies to represent themselves and their bodies through art to communicate their experiences, ideas, histories, desires and identities. Jeanne Perreault (1995:2) comments that “[t]he feminists affected by this process of self-writing make the female body of she who says ‘I’ a site and source of written subjectivity, investing that individual body with the shifting ethics of a political, racial and sexual consciousness.” Nicholas Holt (2003:2) also argues, “by writing themselves into their own work as major characters, auto-ethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher’s voice is not included in the presentation of findings.”

Pumla Dineo Gqola (2007: 38) comments that there is a lack of recording of women’s narratives about women’s survival and it is important to uncover their stories so as to augment the archival information. She also adds that women in earlier periods were not acknowledged, nor given the recognition and attention they deserved. Through the portrayal of not only positive images but also of affirmative and feminist imagery the selected black women for this study will be given a voice. I use the genre of portraiture and representational strategies such as monetary notes, t-shirts, wallpaper, the African commemorative cloth and so forth to celebrate black women. In order to redress the gaps and absence of research completed on portraits of black women and to visually

complement the existing visual representation of black people by asserting black women's physical and symbolic existence in the visual arts especially in the Vaal Region.

### **Statement of the problem**

This study is concerned with the re-positioning of black women in South African visual art and representation. On the one hand, there is a lack of visual representation of the image of black women in artistic production, especially in the genre of portraiture. On the other hand, when black women are featured in visual representation, they are negatively portrayed as jezebels, mummies, matriarchs and welfare recipients (Collins 2000:69). There is a general understanding that most representations of women are by men; hence women are perceived through the 'male gaze' which is arguably flawed with histories pertaining to sex, gender, race and class (Schmahmann 2004:4). In terms of race and gender, white men, white women and black men mostly create such negative portrayals of black women (Collins 2000:4-6).

### **Aim**

The study aims to produce commemorative portraits of black women in key positions, particularly those women associated with the Vaal region. The objective is to contribute to the empowering and positive representation of black women in the visual arts field, as pursued by artists Bongi Bengu and Zanele Muholi as well as scholars Judy Ramgolam (2011) and Portia Malatjie (2011) in their creative and scholarly works. The commemorative portraits will be in the form of iconic representations that make high-profile career-achieved black women both visible and recognisable. It will celebrate the achievements and successes of black women as visionaries and leaders.

### **Rationale**

The importance of the study lies in its contribution to the growing body of creative research on the visual representation of black women. The study will attempt to address Martha Helm's view that women in key positions tend to be trapped within the limits of what is referred to as the "glass ceiling and stiletto ceiling" (2004:56-71). It does so through commemorative art, which recognises and celebrates the legacy and life of high-profile figures in society (Marschall 2006:6), as is notable with male figures



who dominate visual iconography in public statues, bank notes, wall portraits, posters, stamps and t-shirts.

Black women artists, Nelisiwe Xaba (b. 1972), Neo Ntsoma (b. 1972) and Mary Sibande (b.1982), for example, are producing artworks in which they represent themselves, with black women's identities, bodies, experiences and desires in the South African context. Their work is very important but does not focus on black women in key positions such as those that my study undertakes to commemorate. Thus far in the history of South African visual arts, Sue Williamson, Bongi Bengu, Zanele Muholi and Karina Turok are the only women artists who have focused on high-profile black women in politics, academia, the arts, commerce and other professions. Therefore, this study builds on the works of the above-mentioned women artists and scholars by expanding the representation of black women and focusing on those associated with the Vaal Region. The study also challenges the historically dominant representation of black women as objects, erotica, spectacle, slaves and whores. This challenge has been subverted in the series of commemorative *Medal 1* (fig. 26). The medals are designed to award women in different fields, bearing likeness of the nine selected women in order to pay homage and to acknowledge their contribution. These negative representations of black women are critiqued by black feminists and tackled by black women artists, whose scholarly and creative works I review in the following section.

## **Literature review**

In South African visual arts, Ramgolam's dissertation *Identity, place and displacement in the visual arts of female artists at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT), 1994-2004* (2011) and Malatjie's thesis *Framing the Artwork of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle through Black Feminism* (2011) are important studies on black women artists. Ramgolam examines how black women artists' construction and representations of their identity, place and displacement influenced their environmental factors, history, politics and academic culture in the Vaal region. Her study addresses the invisibility of women artists in contemporary literature and focuses on creative works of fourteen women artists from the Department of Visual Arts and Design (VAD) at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT). Cultural studies, Postcolonial studies and feminist discourses inform the theoretical underpinnings of Ramgolam's study. Malatjie's thesis is concerned with the dearth of black feminism that makes it difficult to theorise and critique the complex works of black women artists. She demonstrates

how autobiography and auto-ethnography, both feminist strategies, can be utilised to engage with works of Tracey Rose (b.1974) and Berni Searle (b. 1964), while inserting them in South African art history.

There are four books on South African women artists that are important for this study: *Through the Looking Glass* (2004), *Women by women: 50 Years of Women's Photography in South Africa* (2006), *Life and soul portraits of women who move South Africa* (2006) and *Faces and Phases* (2010). In *Through the looking glass*, Schmahmann (2004:2) explores "representation of self by South African women artists". Her book is based on an exhibition by the same title, which showcased works done by women artists who engaged with issues about representation and gender. Schmahmann (2004:4) focuses on the "visual politics"; she looks at the portrayal of women as objects by white heterosexual males. She examines how, through the genre of portraiture, women have been seen through the male gaze and women artists excluded from the arts. The book serves as a platform for South African women artists to represent themselves, add their voices to art history and to amplify visual representation of women by women.

In *Women by women: 50 Years of Women's Photography in South Africa*, Robin Comley, George Hallet and Neo Ntsoma commemorate the fifty-year anniversary of the 1956 women's march to the Union Buildings. It also celebrates the most significant images of women through the lenses of seventy-five women photographers. The book is the first publication to record and promote the positive contribution made by women to the art of photography in South Africa. Ntsoma (2006:89) remarks that the media industry is predominantly male and aims to change imbalances of race and gender through her work as well as to encourage others.

Ntsoma's comments speak to black feminism, whose concern is mainly to formulate and rearticulate racial and gendered distinction by creating new knowledge (James and Sharpley-Whiting 2000:186). In her work *Unknown* 2006, Ntsoma (b.1972) juxtaposes the image of the four women leaders participating in the 1956 march photographed by Jürgen Schadeberg (b.1931). In this creative work, Ntsoma is in charge of women's self-representation and inserts herself in the art world. As Alice Walker points out, "She must be her own model as the artist attending, creating, learning from, realizing the model, which is to say herself" (Quoted in Collins 2000:20).

The feminist movement in the mid-1990s enabled diverse women artists to take control over how they should be represented and to produce works about women's experiences. Muholi, Turok, Bengu and Williamson exemplify these women artists in South Africa. Muholi's book *Faces and Phases* visually represents the faces of seventy-five black queer individuals at different phases of their lives through black and white photographic portraiture. Muholi photographs these individuals to celebrate and commemorate their lives; she also preserves their memories and creates memorable records. For Muholi (2010:6) "it is important to mark, map and preserve our mo(ve)ments through visual histories for reference and posterity so that future generations will note that we were here".

Karina Turok's *Life and soul portraits of women who move South Africa* is about seventy-five women from different professions, photographed in black and white portraits. The book celebrates South African women through documenting their achievements and their history by accompanying each portrait with the selected woman's experiences recorded in printed text. Turok applied the snowballing sampling technique to select her subjects; she explains: "I asked them to suggest other women to include in the book" (2006:8). By using this technique, Turok could locate several black women who were relatively unknown.

Unlike Turok, who made efforts to locate unknown black women, Bengu and Williamson focused on known black women occupying key positions in society. In her collage series *Marching to Freedom* (2001), Bengu celebrates female pioneers and heroines that include Thandi Klaasen (b.1931), Miriam Makeba (1935-2008) and Dolly Rathebe (1928-2004). These heroines' faces are rendered larger than life, cartooned, and the scale is exaggerated to emphasise their facial expressions and to indicate their identity. The images of Rathebe, Makeba and Klaasen (b.1931) are caricatured whereby they are imitated in order to create a comical or grotesque effect. Symbols like the butterfly are depicted to show that these women are *free* from the apartheid system; they can move freely and freely associate with each other. In this body of artwork, she seeks to establish these women's places in history, as they are 'invisible' in currently published visual art books. "As a Black visual artist," Bengu explains, "my experience is that woman is still not represented and valued in the same manner as man" (Quoted in Roberts 2004).

In the series *A few South Africans* (1987), Williamson depicted Maggie Magaba (1983), Helen Joseph (1983), Nokukanya Luthuli (1983), Elizabeth Paul (1983), Mamphela Ramphele (1983), Amina Cachalia (1984), Annie Silinga (1984), Virginia Mngoma (1984), Caroline Motsoaledi (1984), Charlotte Maxeke (1985), Jenny Curtis Schoon (1985), Winnie Mandela (1985) and Miriam Makeba (1987). The series honours women who played a role in the struggle against apartheid. The works of these South African women artists significantly inform this study, which is delimited to the Vaal Region, and by my employment status as a junior lecturer in Fine Art in the VAD at VUT and my political and ethical agendas in terms of investigating ways of representing black women positively. By representing black women through portraiture, this study undertakes to elevate the status of women in their expression of dignity, self-esteem, leadership and achievements. The study contributes to the importance and value of the Vaal region, particularly by bringing recognition and respect to its culture, history and treatment of black women.

Portraiture is my preferred genre for the visual commemoration of the black women I have selected, as it enables the expression of the importance, positioning, identity and likeness of those persons portrayed for posterity. Robin Gibson (1993:63) explains that portraits may range from the personal to the judicial, and are used for a variety of purposes that include propaganda, patronage, status, immortalisation, remembrance or recognition. Apart from the use of portraits for propaganda, all other uses of portraits as Gibson noted are applicable to this study as they speak to commemoration. According to Simpson and Weiner (1989:545) to commemorate is “to call [for] remembrance, or [to] preserve in memory of; to be a [memorialized] or [to become a] memento of; [or] to [be] mention[ed] as [being] worthy of remembrance.” This form of honouring or visibly celebrating the memory of someone is achieved by making portraits in various forms, such as miniatures, coins, stamps, prints, statues or monuments, and by naming places, streets, institutions, buildings, or heritage sites after persons like Mandela, Biko, Sisulu, Tambo and Hendrik van der Bijl. These forms of honouring and other symbolic representations are important and should be done for black women as well.

## **Methodology**

The methodology of this study is premised on practice-based research within a qualitative framework in the visual arts, working with mixed media to create

commemorative portraits. The research approach was informed by John Creswell's (2009:4) explanation that a qualitative inquiry is useful in exploring and understanding human problems. This methodology guided the researcher as to what issues are important to examine and the people that need to be studied (Ibid.62). This was achieved by means of a practice-based approach, which integrated both the textual component and the creation of artworks (Doman and Laurie 2011).

Linda Candy (2006:1) explains that “[p]ractice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and outcomes of that practice”. The approach emphasises that the process and practice of creating portraits is at the centre of the research design. It is also the research output, involving a visual diary, records of the reflection-in-action process, while producing the artworks (Schön 1983:60). The creative process, leading not only to the practical but also to the theoretical component, is integral to the thinking, producing and writing of the thesis in its various stages and moments. The textual component should not be considered simply as the report of the outcome of the whole study, but also as the process of making. Yet, in the form of the dissertation document, it will theoretically frame and contextually articulate the finished product through reflection-on-action (Schön 1983:26).

Graeme Sullivan (2010:xi) writes that practice-based research is needed because “[a]rt practice as research explores the capacity of visual research to create knowledge that can help us in understanding, in a profound way, the world we live in and how we learn to make sense of it”. This process, in the visual arts, involves multiple forms of representation. It explores designing, creating and exhibiting artworks, ideas, themes and issues that matter, as a way of experiencing, understanding and theorising about the world. In practice-based research, the artworks serve as data and evidence (Niedderer 2004:3).

Primary research was conducted by means of gathering textual data and multiple visual images. The data was sourced from various texts: newspaper clippings, pictures, photographs, magazine articles, academic journals, the Internet and other sites. These texts were studied, analysed and interpreted to theorise and contextualise the topic of this research, and they were experimented with and translated into the creative process of producing mixed-media portraits. The black women who form part of the iconography of my study will be represented individually in the form of portraits that

explore new ways of transforming the image and of creating an alternative means of representation (hooks 1992:6). Considered are issues of design, style, concept, layout, pose or posture, symbolism and iconography (Marschall 2006:165), reflecting on the identities and positioning of the black women in society.

Informed ideas on creating portraits and coming up with creative strategies for this study are based on the works of art created by postmodernists. Postmodernism is a combination of different art movements, artistic styles, media and genres in art (Ward 1997). Postmodernist artists use the pastiche technique, by borrowing from previous artists to create *new* works of art. Dadaists, like Marcel Duchamp in *Fountain* (1917) and *L.H.O.O.Q* (1919), use collage and ready-mades. Pop artist Andy Warhol reproduced sequential images on a single canvas: e.g. *Marilyn Monroe* (1967), *Campbell's soup cans* (1962), and *Cola bottles* (1962). I will appropriate and assimilate these creative strategies and techniques, especially George Seurat's and Paul Signac's 1886 pointillism, which is a technique of applying small dots in a pattern to create a series of portraits. Aborigine artists in Australia also use this technique. Creative strategies such as collaging, borrowing quotes, mixed media and appropriating images from textual data for this research involved a combination and an exploration of these different approaches, media and techniques.

### **Scope of the study**

The study explores black feminist theoretical readings and it references four South African artists and their works of art. I appropriate their use of iconography in their selected works to create my body of works. My study also focuses specifically on nine<sup>3</sup> black women in key positions, who are associated with the Vaal region either by birth, dwelling, occupation or education. These selected black women will be commemorated through mixed-media portraiture. The black women referred to are African women historically and presently included in the definition of black in South Africa. The focus is also on women as current achievers, without taking into account their sexual orientation and class background. The study is delimited to women from the Vaal region<sup>4</sup> in leadership positions in different careers such as politicians,

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<sup>3</sup> The number nine symbolizes the ninth of August 1956, the women's march. Also to recognise women as the givers of life, the nine months of carrying a baby to term.

<sup>4</sup> The Vaal Region has been chosen because I was born and raised in Sebokeng, went to school at Viljoensdrift, furthered my tertiary education in Vanderbijlpark and am currently employed as a junior lecturer at the Vaal University of Technology.

researchers, academics, film producers, fashion designers, visual artists and performers. My concern was with the dearth of black commemorative art depicting women but black women specifically. By creating the commemorative, my intention is to bridge this gap. This was achieved through referencing works of Muholi, Williamson, Turok and Bengu, to produce my body of works.

### **Ethical consideration**

Allan Munro (2015:121) explains the demands of research ethics for a research project (Creswell 2009, Gillian 2007). Ethics are principles that ensure the protection of human participants that consent to participate in professional research. These principles must be applied especially when dealing directly with human subjects in research. Although the research is dealing with human subjects, its engagement with the selected black women involves no direct contact with them. As discussed in the methodology section, appropriated images of black women are sourced from various media sources: textual data and multiple visual materials that are already in the public domain. This appropriation is commonly practiced in postmodernist visual arts, particularly when portraits are not derived from sitters but from popular media, as notable in the works of Brett Murray and cartoonist Zappiro. In these instances artists borrow images and recreate new images from existing ones. The research involved neither personal contact nor interviews with the black women commemorated; hence it was not necessary to obtain informed consent especially in view of the fact that the study is a personal creative undertaking, whose intended outcome is a positive representation. The artistic license to appropriate the images without copyright was done in the context of re-investing these images with renewed significance.

### **Outline of chapters**

The second chapter explains the themes and creative processes that underpin the body of practical artworks. Firstly, primary research method involved an in-depth excavation of published material from magazines, academic articles and journals, internet, newspaper clippings and images of the selected black women with no specific time frame involved. Secondly, the collected data was examined and only the relevant material was considered for this research. Thirdly, the portraits were scanned, Photoshopped and experimented with in the creation of visual diaries. The technique of pointillism was the first method used in visually representing these women. Later on,

collages were made to reinforce the project. A stippling technique was used as an introductory phase, so as to familiarise myself with each individual being depicted. Some of the practical work such as the monetary prints, the textual prints, relief sculptures and the catalogue were collaborative efforts with other artists<sup>5</sup>.

The created works are exhibited in a gallery space (*bodutu*) and presented through a curatorial framework with a printed catalogue. The descriptive catalogue accompanies the exhibition which consisted of an in-depth and detailed book with introductory essays, a poem and detailed descriptions of each piece produced. These are interpreted in the text, and presented with an artist statement. This printed book becomes a permanent record of scholarship which underlies the intentions of the project. A dvd recording on the opening of the exhibition on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2016 and a walkabout which was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2016 was produced entitled *Black Queens: Reign Supreme* at the Vaal University of Technology in the *bodutu* gallery.

The third chapter, sets out to define black feminism and the aspects of it that are relevant to my study. The focus on black feminism is mainly on issues of representation and commemoration. I provide as well, a context in which themes such as self-insertion, self-determination and misrepresentation as well as issues that concern this study may be understood and engaged with. This chapter also articulates the approach of the study, which includes the aim, purpose of study, theoretical framework, literature review and methodology.

In the fourth chapter, I explore the appropriation and creative strategies in these artworks: *Walk to freedom* by Bongi Bengu, *A few South Africans* series by Sue Williamson, *Faces and Phases* by Zanele Muholi and *Life and Soul portraits of women who move South Africa* by Karina Turok. I use the qualitative method in collecting relevant data on the chosen artists and their artworks. Explored also are their themes of clothing, hair, backgrounds, composition, poses, the gaze and so forth. These

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<sup>5</sup> Rodney Hopley is a printmaker, Tiwonge Kanchenche and Nandi Yaone Mogodi who are the graphic designers, photographers like Malcolm Phafane, Jabulani Dhlamini, Nocebo Bucibo, beautician Tshepiso Mokhele and Gomolemo Sefothelo and Makwela Mashaole who is a digital imaging artist.



themes are grappled with to find appropriate solutions to finding the best way of depicting the selected nine women through portraits and the use of the portraiture genre in the context of South African art. Firstly, biographical details are provided on the four artists. An explanation is offered as to why these specific artists have been selected and black feminist theory is used to analyse visually the chosen works and their significance to my body of work. This will establish an enabling context and pertinent characteristics for my own creative body of artworks.

In Chapter Five I provide a summary of the study and reflect on the research findings, including achievements and aspects not covered or accomplished, and will provide suggestions or indications of aspects for further research.

The following chapter provides an in-depth reading into the black feminist theory, the literature review and appropriation which is a chosen creative strategy in creating my series of artworks.

## CHAPTER 2: THE MAKING AND FRAMING OF COMMEMORATIVE PORTRAITURE

### Introduction

This chapter explores themes and creative processes that underpin the body of practical artworks. It also provides a curatorial framework for their presentation as visual narratives to be exhibited in the (*bodutu*) gallery space.

I have located my study within the Vaal Region because it is my birthplace, I have studied and I am currently working in Vanderbijlpark and living in Meyerton. The Vaal Region is to the south of Johannesburg, formerly known as the Vaal triangle due to the Vereeniging, Vanderbijlpark and Sasolburg that form a triangular area of land. The Vaal Triangle Information website describes it as the industrial hub of South Africa. It comprises towns such as Heidelberg, Meyerton, Potchefstroom, Sasolburg, Sebokeng, Sharpeville, Vanderbijlpark, Vereeniging and Zamdela. The treaty of Vereeniging was signed in Vereeniging on the thirty-first of May 1902. The Sharpeville massacre played a critical role in the history of South Africa and March twenty-first, human rights day, commemorates that pivotal day in 1960. There is also Boipatong, a township near Vanderbijlpark, where some of the residents were massacred on the seventeenth of June in 1992.

In creating my body of works, I have borrowed from Muholi's installation ideas of her *Faces and Phases* series as discussed by Underwood (2015). This is noticeable in the pointillist series (fig.27, fig.28, fig.29, fig.30, fig.31, fig.32, fig.33, fig.34, & fig.35) displayed in black frames against the white walls upon entering the gallery. The biographies of the selected nine women are compiled in a digital display instead of being written on walls like Muholi. Thandiswa Mazwai's recorded sound-track *Niza/wa Ngobane* meaning who gave birth to you, plays in the background. My favourite part of her song is towards the end, where she sings *qhawe, Madikizela...qhawe lama qhawe*; in which she mentions the heroine of the heroic struggle who has moved South Africa.

I have also made use of creating a series. The images of the nine women are repeated in textile *Abonmpopie* series (fig.142, fig. 42, fig. 43 & fig.44) and monetary prints, drawings, magazine covers, wallpaper prints, brooches and badges. Similarly to Chicago's *The Dinner Party* installation, where she created the triangular shaped table, thirty nine women on either side with mixed media porcelain plates, glasses, sewn table runners with embroidery and white tiled 'Heritage' floor of 999 women painted in

gold to finish the look. I have displayed these images in all four corners of the gallery. Chicago's series redresses the underrepresentation of women in the visual arts by celebrating their achievements through vaginal imagery.

I also considered the title of the works which were the names of the depicted women in the same way as *Dorothy Masuku* (fig. 58), *Albertina Sisulu* (fig. 59) and *Zanele Muholi* (fig. 17) artworks. As part of commemorative art, I also produced t-shirts and bags copied from *the Keep Calm and Carry On* British poster in 1939 during the Second World War, to *Black Queens keep clam and Reign Supreme*. This serves as a remembrance of the exhibition. I echo the use of African commemorative cloth in which faces of African leaders are displayed on t-shirts, bags and worn as head wraps and dress in order to honour and celebrate them.

Selected magazine covers such as *Destiny* and *New African Women* magazines are replaced with depictions of Terry Pheto and Palesa Mokubung. The Mandela five rands coin is compared with the *Medals series* (fig. 25 & fig. 26), Basotho blankets with *Abonmpopie series*, wallpapers of *Prof. Irene Moutlana 1* (fig.45), *Avitha Sooful 1* (fig. 46) and *Lerato Moloji 1* (fig. 47), the brooch series and so forth. I also considered artists such as Kara Walker (b. 1969) and Mary Sibande (b. 1982) who uses the black colour to express themselves and to explore themes of gender, race and class. I kept in mind the large-scale cut-out silhouettes by Kara Walker (b. 1969) and I used 'carbothello' pastels on 'fabiano' paper and digitally enhanced images through the Photoshop program. I also had to bear in mind how all of these works would read when displayed in a gallery space.

I have used black fine liner to stipple the portraits of chosen black woman as indicated in pointillist series. Each dot made on the surface represents the different kinds of footprints these chosen women have left behind which have shaped them.

These marks or footprints when put together make the person or portrait.



Fig.27. THIBUDI, Matshepo Priscilla. 2016. *Prof. Irene Moutlana* “My first year was accompanied by excitement ... finally I reached what I had wanted. But I was aware that I was in an environment riddled with turbulence and had to address issues without causing too much resistance. As a new person I knew I would be faced with decision-making traps. It was a humbling experience.”

The words stated above are of Irene Nomhle Ntombikayise Moutlana, a Professor and Vice-Chancellor at the Vaal University of Technology describing her first year in office when she first took over from her predecessor Aubrey Mokadi on the fifteenth of January in 2007 in an interview with Cornia Pretorius on the eighteenth of February and reported in the *Mail and Guardian*. Moutlana is a former school teacher, university lecturer, mother and wife. She has held leadership positions before as the first black woman Vice-Rector at the former Technikon of Port Elizabeth and is currently VUT's first woman Vice-Chancellor. She won the Fulbright scholarship to the United States during the 1980's making her one of the first black women to win this prestigious award. She also completed her PhD Studies at Harvard University. She has extensive qualifications and certificates in the education field. Her managerial experience was gained in different Universities including her being an interim Vice- Chancellor at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) from January 2005 until December 2006.



Fig.28. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Adv. Pansy Tlakula.*

Advocate Faith Dikeledi Pansy Tlakula is a black South African woman, born on the eighteenth of December 1957 in Evaton in the Vaal Region. Tlakula is married into the royal Tlakula family of Elim in Limpopo. She is the former South African Chief Electoral Officer, the Chancellor of the Vaal University of Technology as well as the Head of Lehotsa Holdings. She also holds a Chair on the University of North West Council and she is an advocate of the Supreme Court of South Africa. Tlakula received her undergraduate degree in law at the Turfloop University (now University of the North). She later went on to study further at the University of Witwatersrand and obtained her LLB and later her Masters at Harvard.

Tlakula has held several high profile positions such as the Commissioner of the South African Human Rights Commission from 1995 up until 2002. She was also an Independent Non-Executive Director of the Bidvest Group Limited in 2006. She has received numerous awards for being the *Most influential woman* in 2007 from the *CEO magazine* well as a Prestigious woman award in 2007 from the *Rapport/ City Press*.



Fig. 29. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla 2016. *Prof. Kholeka Molo.*



Professor Kholeka Constance Moloji is described as a distinguished woman in the social sciences and humanities in the *Mail and Guardian Women and Science award in the 23<sup>rd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> 2013 issue*. Moloji is currently the professor of Education in the Faculty of Human Sciences at VUT. She obtained her doctoral qualification in 1999 from the former Rand Afrikaans University, which is currently the University of Johannesburg. She has a wealth of experience in teaching and research as she has worked with local and international researchers both locally and internationally. Moloji has authored and co-authored many articles as well as written books. She has also received numerous accolades for her work. She comments on the VUT Research and Higher Degree website on her congratulatory article written by the then Executive Director of Research at VUT, Dr. B.J. Johnson.

“Dear Dr. Johnson. Thank you for this beautiful surprise once again. It is a privilege to work at VUT and an opportunity to support the great vision, mission statement and institutional direction. Change comes through our individual and collective intelligence, commitment and positive attitudes. Without commitment to a common course, we may not succeed. Indeed, excellence comes through repeating the same activity 1000 times. With more effort, perseverance and patience, the sky may not be the limit. With appreciation. KC Moloji” (Dated 2013-09-02 08:20).



*Fig. 30. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. Late Adelaide Tambo.*

The late Adelaide Frances Tambo was born on the eighteenth of July in 1929 in Vereeniging in the Vaal Triangle and died on the thirty-first of January in 2007, at the age of seventy-seven at her Hyde Park home in Johannesburg. She was known as a prominent activist and politician, also as mama Tambo. In 1939, Adelaide did her primary schooling at Saint Thomas Practising School in Johannesburg and later her high school at Orlando High. She started working as an ANC courier while studying at her high school. She then met with Oliver Tambo at one of their branches. At the age of eighteen, she became the chairperson of the George Goch branch of the ANCYL. One of her duties as the chairperson was to open branches of the youth in the Transvaal ([www.sahistory.org.za/](http://www.sahistory.org.za/)).

On 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2007 in the *Guardian*, David Beresford wrote about Tambo's involvement in politics when she became a parliamentary member in South Africa from 1994 until 1999. The article also traces her biography from when she was a member of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement and the PAN African Women's Organisation while based in London. She financially assisted and identified families whose children needed help after the 1976 uprisings. Tambo's work as a community builder and as a nurse received numerous accolades such as the Noel Foundation Life Award, the Order of Baobab in gold. The nursing and science school at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in Pretoria is named after her as is the Adelaide Tambo School for the Handicapped in 2000, in White City, Jabavu in Soweto. The Development Center in Wattville, a township south of Benoni in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, is named after her to honour her involvement in the community. She is survived by three children who are Dali, Thembi and Tselane and grandchildren.



Fig. 31. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Avitha Sooful*.

As stated by Judy Peter née Ramgolam (2011:171) Avitha Sooful was born in 1964 in Kwazulu Natal and is of Indian origin, but classifies herself as black. Ramgolam provides an extensive biography of Sooful's academic record and about her active role in the politics of South Africa. Sooful is currently registered for her Doctoris in Facultate Technologiae at the Vaal University of technology. Ramgolam (2011:170) also touches on her achievements, awards, exhibitions, curatorial practices and residencies through her visual arts career as well as on her employment history from being a temporary tutor in 1989 at the former University of Durban Westville to an art educator in 1991 to being employed at the Vaal University of Technology as a senior lecturer and course coordinator since 1998 in the Visual Arts and Design Department. Sooful has also headed the Visual Arts and Design Department at VUT and is currently employed as a Senior Lecturer in the Fine art programme at the University of Pretoria. Sooful is also a practicing artist who specialises in painting and Ramgolam (2011:171) explains that Sooful's works focus on her political South African identity. She looks at the exclusion of Indians from the Free State during the apartheid era and her works are viewed from a feminist perspective.



Fig. 32. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla 2016. *Terry Pheto*.

Moitheri Terry Pheto is a black South African female producer, entrepreneur and actress, best known for her leading role as Miriam in the 2005 Oscar winning *Tsotsi* film. She was born on the eleventh of May 1981 in Evaton in the Vaal area. She has recently directed and produced the *Ayanda* movie in 2015. Pheto has appeared in other films such as *Catch a Fire* in 2006, *Goodbye Bafana* in 2007, *Mafrika* in 2008, and she played a heart surgeon as Dr. Malaika Maponya in the *Bold and Beautiful* in 2011. This was followed by *How to steal 2 Million* in 2012, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* in 2013, and *Cuckold* in 2015. Pheto also acted in television drama series like SABC 1 *Justice for All* as Lerato, *Zone 14* as Pinky Khumalo, *Jacob's Cross* as Mbali and on SABC 2 as Fikile in *Hopeville*. She has also been featured as the subject in the documentaries: *The Close up* on etv and *Play your part* on SABC 1. She was a guest judge on the *Class Act*, a reality show in 2010 in the *Film Noir* episode. Pheto acted in theatre productions, also appeared in numerous magazines ranging from *Destiny*, *Vanity Fair*, *Heat*, *Elle*, *Bona*, *Drum*, *True Love*, *Marie Claire*, and *Cosmopolitan* amongst others. She was also the brand ambassador of L'Oréal in 2008.





Fig. 33. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Lira*. "I split myself into three positions and created three different people who worked for Lira...These people were named Lerato, Moipone and Lira. All are my names. Lerato was in finance and sent out invoices. Moipone was my booking agent and diary manager ...Lira, the artist."

This is Lira's description of herself taken from her biography titled *LIRA-making herstory* (2013:30) co-written by Clyde Meela and Robin C Kohl. The book is about her life, divided into three parts where she firstly gives an overview of her background, then goes into her personal life, her love life, disappointments and motivation behind her songs and lastly her husband Robin Kohl, who is also her business partner, producer and manager who gives his insight into the creation of Lira, the brand. Lira is an actress, songstress, a writer, producer and a business woman. Meela and Kohl (2013: 130), take us through Lira's biography from being born as Lerato Moipone Molapo in Benoni to discovering her voice at the age of sixteen to chapter two of the book (2013:140), where she registered to study accounting at the then Vaal Technikon, now Vaal University of Technology. Lira is her stage name so as to separate herself from her public persona. She is a multiplatinum selling and award winning afro-soul artist.

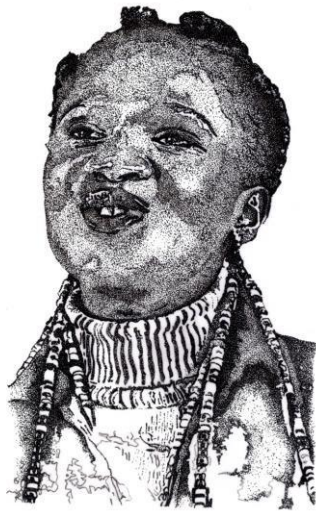


Fig. 34. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Palesa Mokubung*.

Palesa Mokubung is a black Sotho woman, a fashion designer, an entrepreneur and an owner of *Mantsho* couture which means the one that is black in Sesotho but she defines it as brutally black couture. Her *Mantsho* website, [www.mantsho.co](http://www.mantsho.co) states that Mokubung was born in Kroonstad in the Free State and later relocated to Sharpeville. On her Facebook page she has posted that she was born on the twenty second of April in 1981 and attended Vaal High school in Vanderbijlpark. In her *Designer: one on one* interview with Phumeza Tontsi on the eighth of April in 2011, Mokubung discusses her journey in the fashion industry. She indicates how she later studied clothing production at Vanderbijlpark Technical College and holds a Bachelor's Degree in Fashion. She has won numerous fashion awards, travelled and has shown her collections both locally and internationally. The mantsho website page, [www.mantsho.com/](http://www.mantsho.com/) designed by SMUUCH Media also converses about her work experience from working in a boutique called Stoned Cherrie in Rosebank in Johannesburg to owning her own business. It is also explained in the website about her choice of material being from Africa which she transforms into "confident and effortless silhouette, structure and quiriness" which is her focus. As she explains "it stores a woman's confidence".



Fig. 35. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla 2016. *Lerato Moloji.*

In 2009, Lerato Mpho Moloji became the first black face for Elizabeth Arden, the cosmetic brand. She was born on the sixth of May in 1982 and grew up in Sharpeville. In her interview with Clare Murphy from BBC: *In The Eye of the Beholder*, (the third of December 2003 issue) Moloji explains her frustrations with the modelling industry after being dropped by an élite New York agency for being too fat while “Africans still prefer women to be fleshier than they do in the West, young girls here are increasingly concerned with being thin. The more exposed we are to western media, the more we buy into it.” Moloji features on the cover of *Mimi Magazine*, volume 5, January 2009. She explains how she wanted to become a psychologist instead she began modelling at the age of seventeen. Her first shoot was an editorial for *Elle Magazine*. She tells of her frustrations of being an African model both locally and internationally when a stylist or designer cannot get her right shoe size, in a country where shoes are too small to squeeze into. In 2002, she became a finalist in the M-Net beauty contest. Moloji has modelled abroad and for local fashion houses and brands such as Stoned Cherrie, Sun Goddess, Mantsho and others.

### **Pointillist technique**

I started by creating pointillist portraits, where the stippling technique was used to understand the form of each woman and to create a realistic representation of their faces. This dot technique was first used by the aborigines in their Australian art. Then it was later adapted by Impressionist artists Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, whereby dots are applied in a pattern to form an image. The Pointillist technique can use different media such as fine liners, paintbrushes and paint, pins, beads, paper cut-outs and so forth. This technique took me into a meditational state, focusing only on the task at hand that is to create a portrait. Thavamani Pillay (2014:54) explains that Simmi Dullay finds her painstaking pointillist technique to be a spiritual experience which she finds to be cathartic. I began with this dot technique using black fine liners in order to get to know and understand the chosen subjects.

## Medals



Fig. 25. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Medal 1*.



Fig. 26. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Medal 2*.

## Magazine covers



Fig.20. RURAMAI, Musekiwa. 2015. *Claire Mawisa*.

*Sibahle* means we are beautiful, is a women's network which was founded by Ruramai Musekiwa. This movement celebrates Africanism by using African women at the helm of its vision. Musekiwa created an illustrative on going poster series of African women such as Wangari Maathai, *Claire Mawisa* (fig.20) and others, paying homage to them and acknowledging their worth.

# NewAfricanWoman

R30 Issue 01

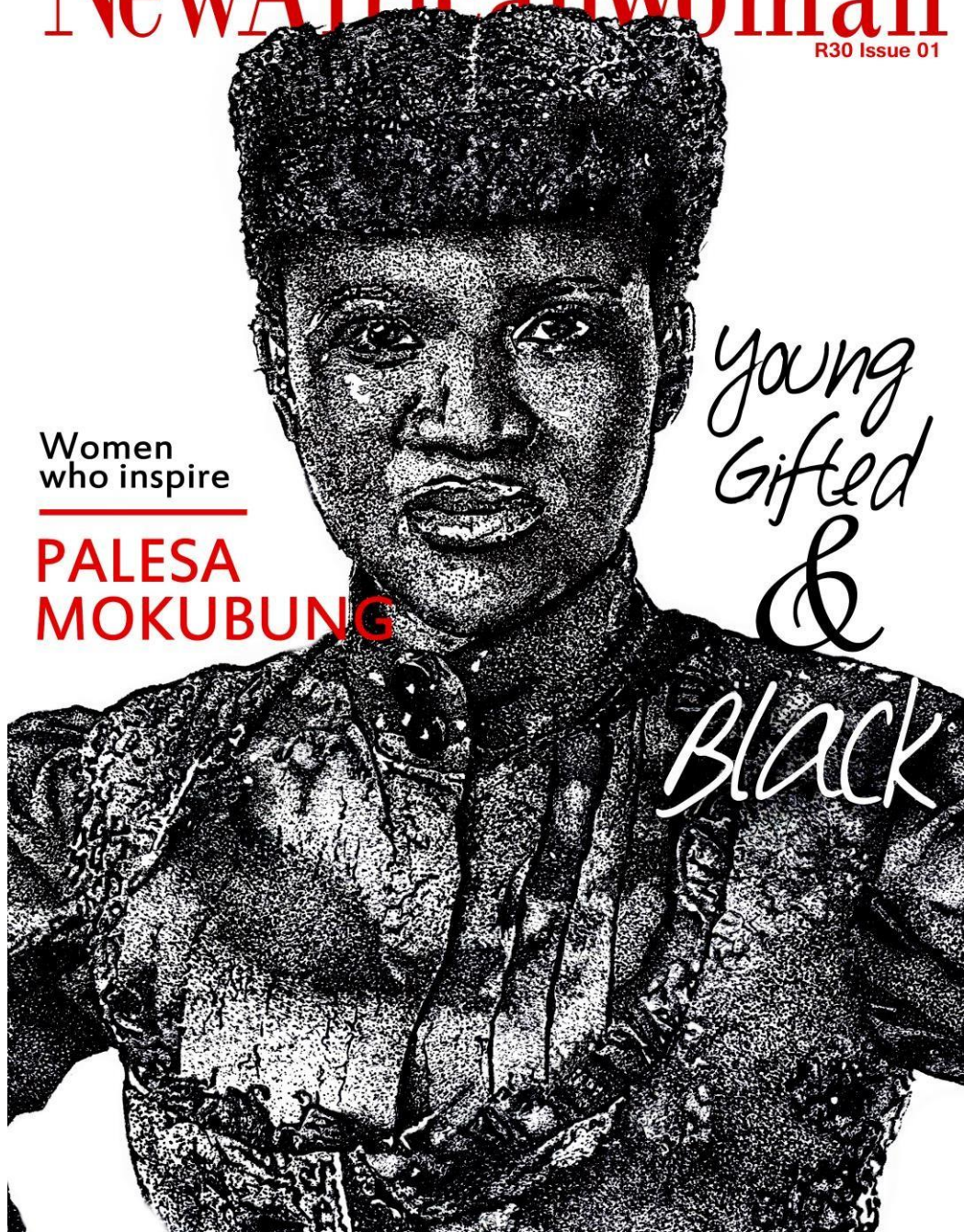


Fig.36. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Palesa Mokubung* (NAW Magazine).



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Fig. 37. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Terry Pheto* (*Destiny Magazine*).

Similarly to the Sibahle poster series such as *Claire Mawisa* (fig. 20), I scanned the pointillist portraits of Mokubung and Pheto and *New African Woman* (NAW) and *Destiny* April 2016 *Magazine* covers, Photoshopped and digitally printed depictions of Mokubung and Pheto. NAW is edited by a Zimbabwean London-based reGina Jane

Jere. The magazine covers African women's issues, ranging from fashion, culture, women's rights, politics, entrepreneurship and so forth. It was launched in 2009. The mission of the magazine is to inspire, advise and portray the diverse beauty of the African continent ([nawmagazine.com](http://nawmagazine.com)) which resonates with black feminism and which also deals with black pride. NAW echoes Mokubung's clothing label which celebrates the African materials by transforming them into contemporary designs. Using the original Julia Daka's *New African Woman* of February/March 2014 issue the South African Cover has been replaced with the Young, gifted and black version of *Palesa Mokubung (NAW Magazine)* (fig. 36). *Destiny*, a women's fashion, entrepreneurship, business, career magazine was founded in 2007 by Khanyi Dhlomo, a black South African woman. It is aimed at women who aspire to be successful business entrepreneurs, aged between twenty-five and fifty-five ([www.destinycoconnect.com](http://www.destinycoconnect.com)) and Pheto fits the profile. *Destiny Magazine* personifies Archbishop Tutu's 'rainbow nation'. The magazine covers diverse South African issues of diverse women. Dhlomo has created a platform for multicultural women to insert themselves into business, entertainment and lifestyles. Lupita Nyong'o's *Destiny* May 2014 issue has been appropriated with Pheto's portrait as depicted in *Terry Pheto (Destiny Magazine)* (fig. 37).

South African paper money



Fig. 3. Artist unknown. 2012. R10 note. 15.2cmx 7cm.



Fig. 38. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. Adv. Pansy Tlakula 1.



Fig. 39. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Late mama Adelaide Tambo 1*.

The former slave, American abolitionist and African woman Harriet Tubman was announced on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2016 on *Kaya FM* to be the face of the \$20 bill, to honour her in American history. In 2012 in South Africa, President Jacob Zuma announced that South African bank notes would bear the late Nelson Mandela's face, making him the first black image to appear on South African money. Money is indeed a great way to get a message through, as it is used as a medium of exchange. The American paper money similarly to the South African currency features portraits of men and women who deserve to be celebrated, remembered and honoured. The *R10 note* (fig. 3) is an obverse portrait of Nelson Mandela and the reverse is the rhinoceros. I have juxtaposed the faces of Tlakula who is noticeable in *Adv. Pansy Tlakula 1* (fig. 38) and Tambo in *Late mama Adelaide Tambo 1* in (fig. 39) on the South African notes which have the signature of Gill Marcus, the first women to be appointed as the governor of the South African Reserve Bank from 2009 to 2014 (Who's who website). Black women have always run households when their unemployed men went out to find jobs, were migrant workers and it is the very same women who found the means to feed their families, single-handedly and headed households. They were matriarchs and I found it appropriate that they should be honoured for being the 'finance ministers' in households (Kuzwayo's *Call me woman*, 1987, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, 1988).

Interpretation of cultural traditions



Fig. 10. GIOLITO, Roberto. & STEPHENSON, Frank. 2007. *Fiat 500*. 2.97m



Fig. 18. NGOXOKOLO, Laduma. 2010. *Mntanom' Gquba* collection.



Fig. 13. MAKHETHA, Thabo. 2014. *Kobo Short Cape*. Dimensions unknown.

Esther Mahlangu b.1935 is an Ndebele artist who is known for her Ndebele heritage paintings. On the fifth of October 2007 in Turin, Italy, Mahlangu exhibited a *Fiat 500* (fig. 10) at the 'Why Africa?' Pinacoteca Giovanni E Marella Agnelli (Lingotto). Mahlangu transformed the car using an Ndebele design. Laduma Ngxokolo b.1986 is a Xhosa male artist who uses mohair and wool to create traditional knitwear designs for the Xhosa initiates called *amakrwala* shown as *Mntanom' Gquba* collection (fig. 18) Thabo Makhetha b.1988 is a black female fashion designer based in Port Elizabeth and designs a range from using the Basotho blankets such as the *Kobo Short Cape* (fig. 13) (Makhetha 2016). These three artists have taken their culture and traditions and interpreted them in a new context to suit the contemporary scene and to be relevant. I imitated the idea of commemorative cloth, by appropriating. The wallpaper series and the *seanamarenas*, the Basotho blankets to create head wraps incorporated the nine women's portraits.



Fig. 40. THIBUDI, M. P. 2016. *Viva Valians 2 (tukufontein)*.

### The Basotho blankets

The designs on the Basotho blankets are copied and inserted with pointillist portraits of the chosen nine black women. These designs are repeated on *Viva Valians 2 (tukufontein)* (fig. 40) as well as in the wallpaper series with *Prof. Moutlana 1* (fig. 45), *Aitha Sooful 1* (fig. 46) and *Lerato Moloji 1* (fig. 47). The colours of the bull denim material are borrowed from the coloured blankets that vary from red as seen on *Nompapie 1* (fig. 41), green on *Nompapie 4* (fig. 43), blue on *Nompapie 5* (fig. 44), yellow, black and white on *Nompapie 3* (fig. 42) and so forth. The Aranda website <http://www.aranda.co.za/> explains the different types of blankets and provides images of such as those shown below. These blankets are for rituals and celebrations such as the circumcision ritual or a special fertility blanket called the *Moholobela*. The *lekhokolo* blanket is worn when a boy reaches manhood. During wedding occasions a man would wear *motlotlehi* and present his wife with *serope* when his first child is born. Even when a *mosotho* dies, he or she is buried with a blanket. The blankets such as *Seanamarena Poone* design (fig. 1) use *poone* (mealies) to symbolise harvest or wealth as well as fertility, ace, heart or *pelo* and so forth. There are also different types of blankets as they vary in quality and brand such as Victoria England is the oldest, *Seanamarena*, *Motlatsi* which was a blanket created to honour the birth of Crown Prince Lerotholi in 2007, *Kharetsa* epitomises the aloe plant found in the Maluti mountains in Lesotho, *Sefate* and *Morena* design (fig. 2) are blankets worn everyday by Basotho. *Nompapie 5* (fig. 44) artwork is a copy incorporating the *morena* design. *Matlama* are predominatly worn by women.



Fig. 1. ARANDA. Date unknown. *Seanamarena Poone* design.



Fig. 2. ARANDA. Date unknown. *Morena*.



***Abonompope***



Fig. 41. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Nompope 1*.



Fig. 42. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Nompope 3*.



Fig. 43. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Nompopie 4*.



Fig. 44. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Nompopie 5*.

I also did a series titled *abonmpopie*, meaning dolls, which are dressed in various cultural head-coverings or head-wraps in different South African cultural styles. In isXhosa *iqhiya*, in isZulu *isicholo* which indicates status and power and in Sesotho or tswana *tuku* and muslim women wear the *hijab*. Head coverings in these different cultures these are a sign of respect and are part of cultural attire, worn for different reasons, ranging from marriage, ceremonies or church, awareness like the CANSA bandanas to protect the hair as well as a fashion accessory to movements such as *#RespectTheDoek*.

### Wallpaper series

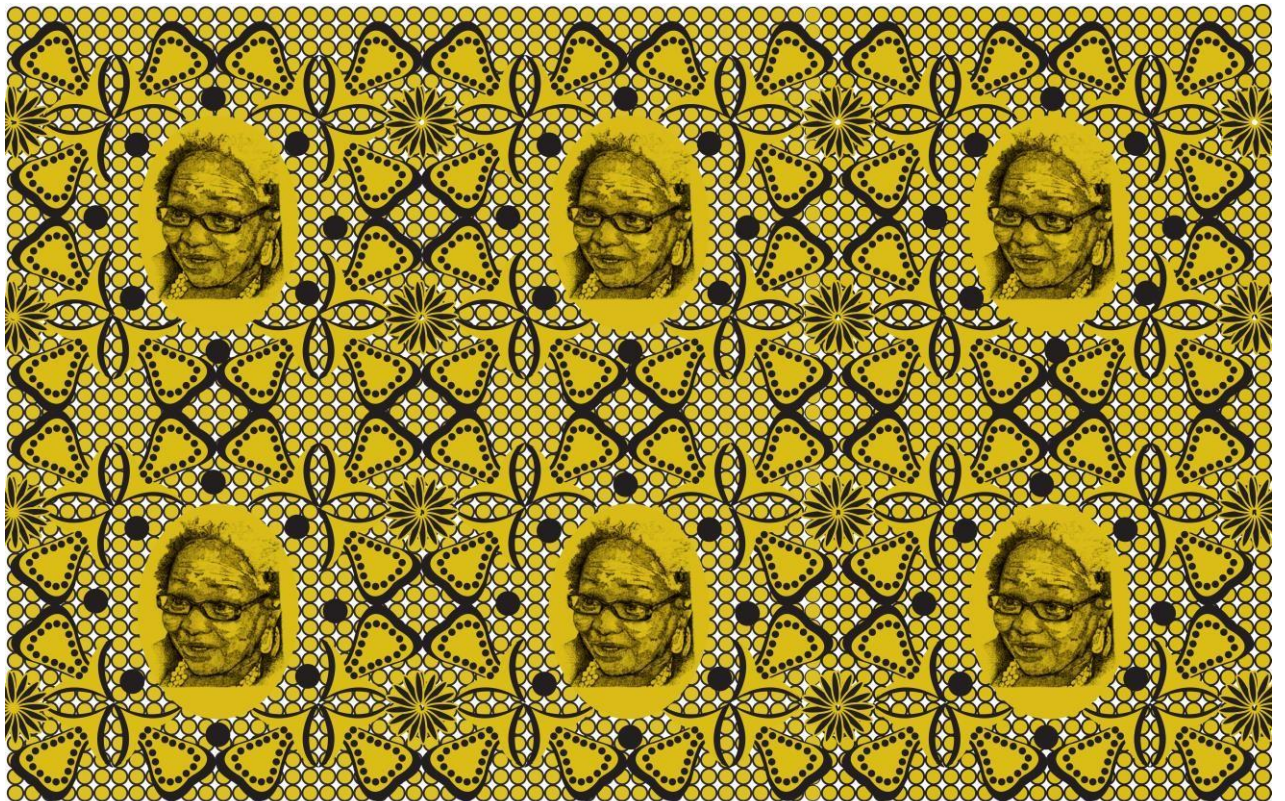


Fig. 45. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Prof. Moutlana 1*.



Fig.46. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Avitha Sooful 1*.

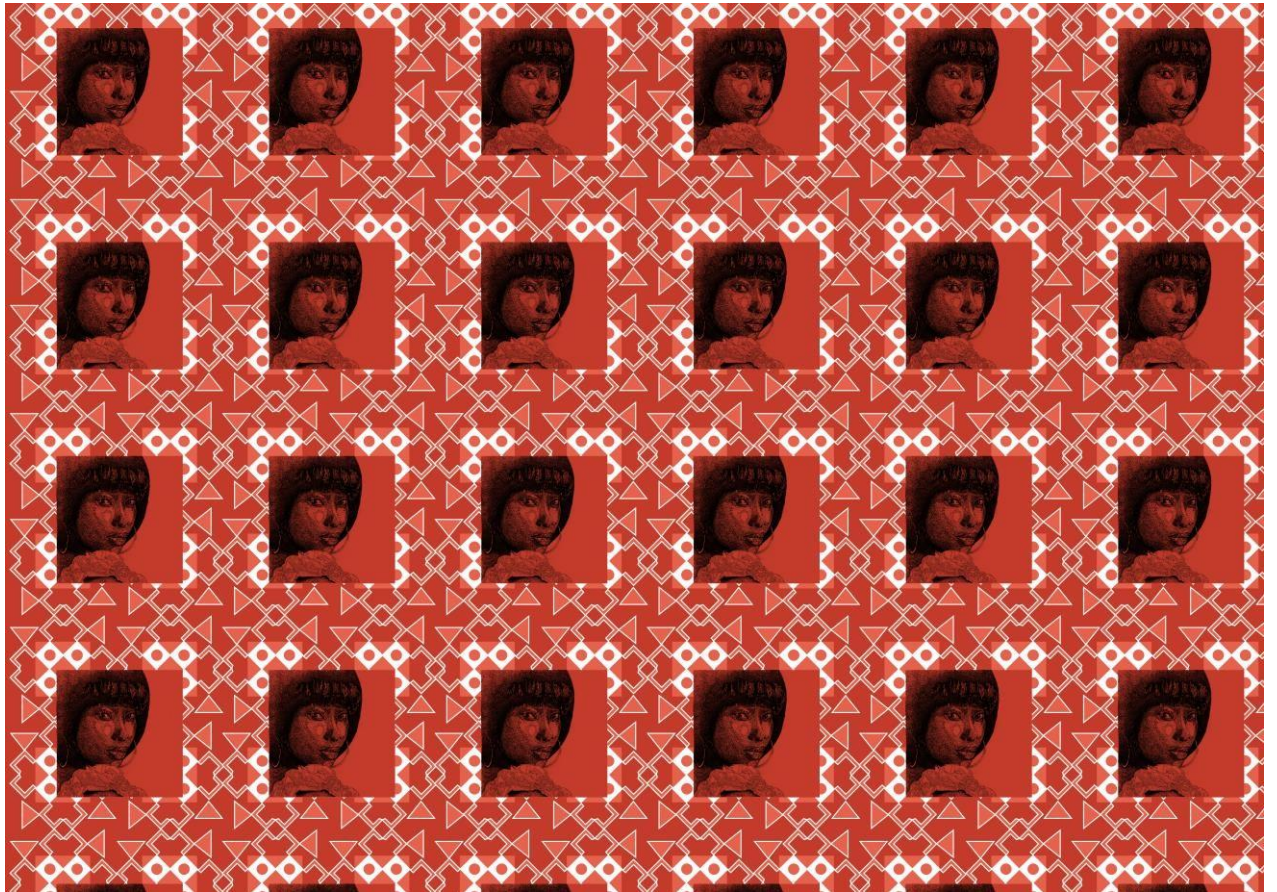


Fig. 47. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Lerato Moloji 1*.

The series appropriates Warhol's 1962 *Marilyn Diptych* (fig. 60) of Marilyn Monroe. The silkscreened image serves as a reminder of the popular Hollywood star who died in August of 1962. The fifty repetitive images portray her life and death; colours start off strong, vibrant from the left and fade off into black and grey tone to symbolize her death. The digitalised images Prof. Moutlana, Sooful and Moloji form part of the wallpaper series which is printed on paper and pasted on the wall of the gallery like the Ndebele patterns.

**Adornments: Brooch series**



Fig. 48. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Prof. Kholeka Moloji 1 (series)*.



Fig. 49. Brooch series from the left: Sooful, Moutlana, Tambo and Tlakula.



Fig. 49. Brooch series continue to the right: Lira, Moloji, Mokubung and Pheto.



The brooch is used for decorative purposes. African women previously used a bone to hold their clothing together. African men wore bone necklaces as an indication of how many wild animals especially lions they had slain, as a symbol of power. A brooch can be a badge or a safety pin or *sepelete* in Sesotho to fasten pieces of clothing together. A brooch can also be an accessory or jewellery and made out of different media. I have incorporated this idea in creating a brooch out of laser cut on Perspex as *Prof. Kholeka Moloji 1 (series)* (fig.48) consists of the smaller wooden brooches of *Sooful, Moutlana, Tambo and Tlakula, Lira, Moloji, Mokubung and Pheto* (fig.49).

### **Stabilo carbothello drawings**

Stabilo carbothello is compressed charcoal and I chose the drawing medium in creating the large scale portraits of Prof. Moutlana in *Phenomenal woman* (fig. 50) and Lira titled *I am an African* (fig. 51). The drawings are executed in black pastel as a chosen colour on white 'fabriono' paper. The medium has a great blending ability, high pigmentation and blends easily with other media. This type of 'carbothello' can be easily controlled and is versatile when used with a putty eraser and white chalk.



Fig. 50. THIBUDI, M. P. 2016. *Phenomenal woman*.

The Vice Chancellor, Professor Irene Moutlana in her speech on the eighth of August 2014, VUT's annual women's day, spoke of how women need to understand their purpose and power in the twenty first century. She continued to talk about the dilemma of woman's identity and the pivotal role women play in society. The Vaal University of Technology annually celebrates Women's day, the ninth of August by hosting different acts. These acts range from women comedians such as Tumi Morake as well as Zelda La Grange, who was the late Mandela's personal assistant. They are invited to talk about their experiences as women and to motivate the VUT women staff. Prof. Moutlana referenced the late Maya Angelou (1928-2014) in her speech, the drawing with Angelou's poem *Phenomenal woman* has been selected as a remembrance of that day. The poem celebrates what a woman is and what she has: her curves, smile, confidence in her walk, her hair her entire body as an expression of womanliness. I

found it fitting to describe her as the supreme woman, as in the third stanza she writes “phenomenally/phenomenal woman...” that is Prof. Moutlana drawn in (fig. 50).



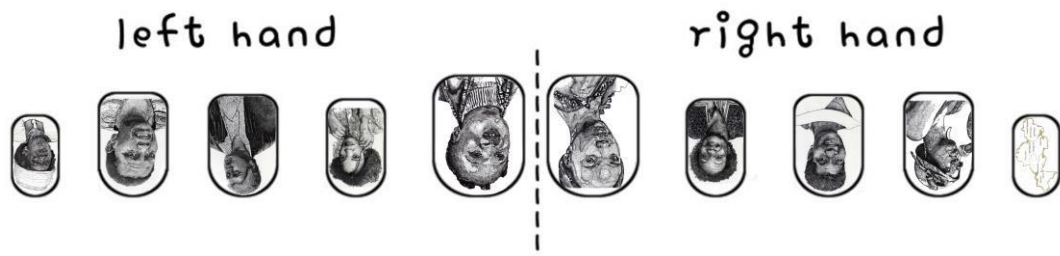
I enjoy and love dressing in brightly coloured African dresses and earrings, because I love the fashion and it always made a bold statement that I am from the African continent. It is not essential that I do this, but I believe it is important to stand proud in being African, in a world that depicts it as poor and destitute. My music is the least African part of my expression, but this is simply because of my musical influences. I choose to sing in African languages because, firstly, I can! Secondly, because the languages are beautiful. The construction of a sentence is often so different from English. The expressions are so poetic and detailed, even in their simplicity. There are plenty of phrases in African languages that you will simply not find in English, because they don't exist. I love isiZulu – it's my favourite. I also enjoy Sesotho. I think isiXhosa is the most unique. These are the only three African languages I read and write, and I wish I knew more.

Fig.51. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *I am an African*.

On the other hand, Lira always celebrates everything that is African and this is seen in her attire, her adornments such as large African earrings, keeping her hair natural and in African prints where she is depicted as *I am an African* (fig. 51). In her autobiography *Making Herstory. Lira a decade of achievements* 2013, (2013:50-68) she writes about her influences:

“I enjoy and love dressing in brightly African dresses and earrings, because I love the fashion and it always makes a bold statement: that I am from the African continent... it is important to instill pride in being African, in a world that depicts it as poor and destitute.”

### Nail art template



The portraits above are Photoshopped on a nail template. From the left: Adelaide Tambo, adv. Pansy Tlakula, Avi Sooful, Terry Pheto, Palesa Mokubung, Lerato Moloi, Prof. Irene Moutlana, Prof. Kholeka Moloi, *Lira*, Vaal Region map.

Phoebe Davies (b. 1985) is a British artist and producer who started a nail art project in 2013. The *Influences nail* series deals with women;s adornment in contemporary culture by creating nail wraps in which she features faces of past and present influential women. I have borrowed the concept and appropriated the nine selected women on my nails and the tenth nail is the map of the Vaal Region, therefore reading as nine women from the Vaal Region. The images were manicured on my nails by a beautician and photographed, shown as the *Black queens: Reign supreme Invitation* (fig. 52).

### The concept: Black Queens: Reign Supreme

The idea of the theme was inspired by the passing of my mother in August of 2014. I found solace in Tupac Amur Shakur's song *Dear Mama* (1995), which resonates with my life and my mother. The song begins with "You are appreciated" and Shakur continues to rap "*You always was a black queen, mama...*" The song speaks of his mother's struggle, the late Black Panther activist Afeni Shakur, who raised him and his sister alone and the challenges that they experienced of growing up and rebelling, their economic status, his mother's drug problems, being arrested, the absent father and so forth. Later on in the song, Tupac comes to a realisation that it is a challenge for any mother to single-handedly raise a man. Thus the theme honours and seeks to acknowledge all the other black women who have worked hard to raise their children alone and should continue to reign supreme in the ranks of leadership - thus *Black Queens: Reign Supreme* that recognises and pays tribute to all black women who continue being *imbokodo*'s in their children's lives.



Fig.53. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Black Queen: Reign supreme t-shirt*.



Fig. 54. THIBUDI, M. P. 2016. *Black Queen: Reign supreme bag*.

### **Opening**

Emails were sent to VUT staff on the mailing list, a Facebook page with the same theme was created to invite the public, WhatsApp messages were sent and *Posters series* (fig. 55, fig. 56 & fig.57) were posted all over the campus to invite people for the opening on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April at 18:00. There is also a digital video disc with a recording of the event.

### **Catalogue**

I have produced a catalogue as proof and as an archival record of my exhibition themed *Black queens: reign supreme*. The layout of the catalogue includes a cover page of myself with the theme written on the front in black and white. The catalogue includes write-ups from Prof. Mary Pinkoane of Health and nursing, who wrote a forward. Mogomotsi Momo Mogale wrote a poem and Lucia Radebe's essay. The artist statement, the images of the works exhibited, my curriculum vitae and acknowledgement of artists who I have collaborated with in compiling the catalogue are all presented together. Below is the invitation and the poster series.



Fig. 52. Thibudi, Matshepo.Priscilla. 2016. *Black queens: Reign supreme Invitation.*





**bodutu**  
ART GALLERY

23 April 2016, 18h00 | Department of Visual Art and Design  
Vaal University of Technology | Room k102. KBlock.  
Exhibition ends 29 May 2016

Fig. 55. THIBUDI, M. P. 2016. *Poster: Tambo, Tlakula & Sooful*. Digital print.



**bodutu**  
ART GALLERY

23 April 2016, 18h00 | Department of Visual Art and Design  
Vaal University of Technology | Room k102. KBlock.  
Exhibition ends 29 May 2016

Fig. 56. THIBUDI, M. P. 2016. *Poster: Moutlana, Moloji & Lira.*

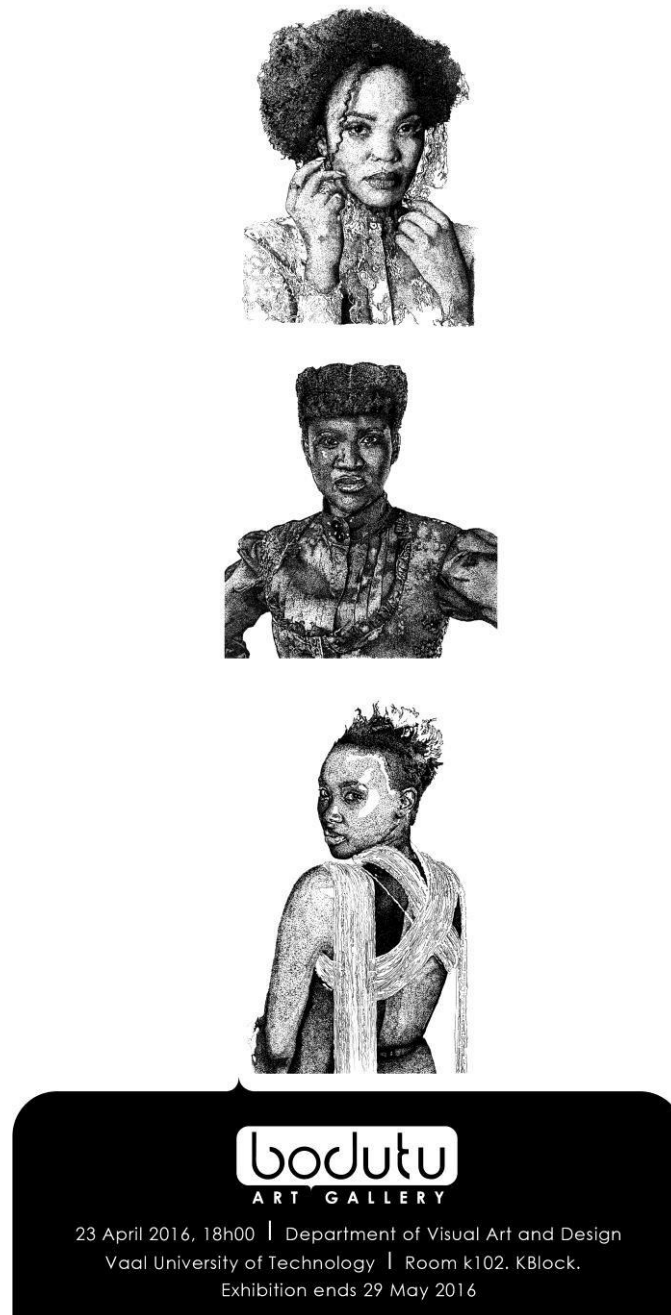


Fig. 57. THIBUDI, Matshepo. Priscilla. 2016. *Poster: Pheto, Mokubung & Moloji.*

### Visual Journal

Throughout the whole process of creating the practical body of works I have kept visual journals or diaries. In some instances I have randomly jotted down ideas I thought were most interesting and then revised them later and thought otherwise as some did not work. I have bought a lot of magazines such as *New African Women*, *Bona*, *Drum*, *Tribute*, *Time*, *Vogue*, *True Love*, *Destiny* to mention but a few, in which I searched for

contemporary images of the selected women and the interesting articles or journals written by women on their stances on representation. I have also followed a lot of groups and individuals on Facebook like *Sibahle Women's Network*, *Black fashion stars*, *I love being black*, *Unapologetically Black*, Lira, Pheto, Mokubung to mention a few. I have reflected endlessly when doing my work, like having critique sessions with my supervisor, presenting in colloquiums, entering my work in exhibitions and art competitions as well as taking a step back, reflecting upon the work and contemplating the processes whilst creating the work.

**A pictorial illustration of the display of the exhibition.**



As you are about to enter the *bodutu* art gallery (situated in the Visual Arts and Design Department) there is an artist statement on the door which is an introductory text to the exhibition.



The pointillist series and the *abonompie* series are the first works of art seen upon entering the gallery



The two drawings of *Phenomenal woman* on the far right, next is the *I am an African* drawing then the two magazine covers of *Terry Pheto* (*Destiny Magazine*) and *Palesa Mokubung* (*NAW Magazine*) on the right.

## Opposite the gallery door



The next body of work on the wall starts with the Viva Valians1 (manis) titled *Black queens: Reign supreme Invitation* (fig. 52), *Viva Valians 2 (tukufontein)* (fig. 40), tshirt (fig. 53) and bag (fig. 54) *keep calm series*, then the brooches series titled *Prof. Kholeka Moloji 1* (fig. 48) and on the pedestals are the medal series. The television screen presents the digital imaging series on the *Biographies* of the nine chosen women, with the three wallpapers of *Prof. Moutlana 1* (fig. 45), *Avitha Sooful 1* (fig. 46) in black and white and *Lerato Moloji 1* (fig. 47) in red wallpaper designs. Playing in the background is a recording of Thandiswa Mazwai's *Nizalwa Ngobani* from her 2006 *Zabalaza* album. The biographies and some of the pointillist portraits are digitalised through an Aftereffect and Photoshop programme, which plays for four minutes, but looped to play continuously.

## Comment Book

“WOW! Everything is highly impressive. I really like the theme of Black Queens. Nor only do I understand why they have been chosen but I also agree with why these were chosen. Well done Priscilla. You have made me proud to be a black woman.”

The comment book is placed with the catalogue next to the *Viva Vaalians* series on a table, for the comments of the viewers. The comments include VUT staff members, students from different faculties and people from the Vaal Region community. The comment above is from Rachael Nyarai Tadokera who is a communication skills lecturer at the Vaal University of Technology. I have chosen her contribution from the other remarks because she epitomises what I aimed to achieve in doing my masters, which is to inspire, enlighten, inform and stimulate through acknowledging those who have created the platforms for all the other queens to excel on.

## Walkabout

A walkabout took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2016, which included first, second, third and masters students and it was opened to all those who were interested in hearing me speak about my work and also to obtain feedback from the viewers. There is a recording of this which forms part of the archival recording.

In conclusion, different forms of artistic representation were considered. I adopted several ways in which the late Nelson Mandela has been commemorated in art. These forms range from t-shirts, laser cut brooches, carbothelo poster-like drawings, head wraps, wallpapers, magazine covers and monetary prints. The head-coverings (*Viva valians 2* or the *Abonompapie series*) designs are adopted from the Basotho blanket designs. Likewise cultural appropriation of artists such as Mahlangu's Ndebele paintings, Ngoxokolo's Xhosa knitwear and Makhetha's Basotho fashion.

The wall paper series was also inspired by artists like Mokubung's *seshweshwe* fabric designs and *Shine to Shine* designs in Cape Town. The carbothello drawings were copied from the 2013 *Mandela's poster project*, which inspired the quotes referenced in my drawings, and from Sibande's life-size sculptures and Lionel Smit's monumental

painted portrait faces. Mandela's monetary prints motivated the digital prints of adv. Tlakula and Tambo. As well, my manicured nails (*Viva valians 1*) were copied from Davies' 2013 nail project.

Until this exhibition, VUT Visual Arts and Design students especially from the Fine Art Department had not seen an M-tech exhibition before. This is documented and most comments referred to finding the work inspirational. This was also reflected in the walkabout dvd. The completed body of works covering visual representation of black women, through portraiture has never been attempted at the institution. The catalogue is produced to archive the exhibition like Muholi's *Faces and Phases 20062014* (2014). The research question was answered and affirmed in the comment book, which was part of the exhibition which ran from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April until the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2016.



## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

### Introduction

This chapter provides perspectives on defining black feminism and the aspects of it relevant to my study. The focus on black feminism is mainly concerned with issues of representing black women's agency, through affirmative, commemorative and celebratory imagery in the visual arts. I have provided a context in which themes of struggle, racism and sexism and issues of lack of representation and misrepresentation that concern this study, may be understood and engaged with. As Black feminism is located within mainstream feminism, I explore how black women in key positions have been positively portrayed within the South African visual arts. Lastly I discuss appropriation, as a black feminist strategy which I employ to inform the dissertation.

In the South African context, I also engage with Judy Ramgolam's dissertation: *Identity, place and displacement in the visual arts of female artists at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT), 1994- 2004* (2011) and Portia Malatjie's master's thesis *Framing the art of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle* (2011). The following four books are also important: *Through the Looking Glass* (2004), *Women by women: 50 years of women's photography in South Africa* (2006), *Life and soul portraits of women who moved South Africa* (2006) and *Faces and Phases* (2010).

### Black feminism

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

Portia Malatjie is a curator and an art historian, who completed her masters in history of art from the University of the Witwatersrand. In her master's thesis *Framing the art of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle* (2011), Malatjie locates her study within black feminist thought in a South Africa context particularly in the visual arts. She confronts the issue of the lack of representation of black women and absence of black feminism as a critical factor within South African art history (2011:04). In the above statement, Malatjie explains that black feminism developed from feminism in America during the 1960's and 1970's which was concerned with black women's experiences and it was out of this that black feminism developed.

Black feminism withdrew from mainstream white Western feminism which was largely concerned with dismantling oppressive structures that dealt with universal and generalised women's issues. Black feminists believed that white feminism was biased towards black women (Nkululeko 1987:101). Furthermore, feminism did not include all women; it failed to recognise women of different races, classes, sexuality, nationalities, ethnicities amongst others from particular political environments and locations, cultures and societies especially the third world countries (Collins 2000, Hooks 1992, Qunta 1987, Gqola 2010). Chandra Talpade Mohanty is a Postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist who points out in her article *Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourse* (1988), that most writings were written by white women from their viewpoint on homogenous women's issues and focused on white women's perspectives of western cultures. As a result black feminists argue that women are not the same, are not oppressed in the same way, cannot be spoken for and that black women demand recognition. Black feminism affirms that black women's individual achievements need to be acknowledged (Collins 2000).

Black feminists claim that black women need to dismantle all these oppressive structures or systems in order to be free. As suggested by Audre Lorde, an American black lesbian feminist in her 1984 essay titled *The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*, in which Lorde explains that feminism needs to be deconstructed, taken apart and rebuilt. This is vital in order to discard oppressive structures by employing different strategies and tools that focus on black women's experiences to be able to gain freedom and to bring about change. The master's tools that Lorde is speaking of are systems of oppression, ranging from racism, sexism, classicism,

homophobia, to mention a few that need to be destroyed to have equality. This is seen in theories such as post-colonialism, which is aimed at demolishing oppressive structures and is concerned with discussing and representing various experiences of individuals and of the silenced 'other'. Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1995) also refer to the multiple forms of oppression. Other black feminists such as Dabi Nkululeko (1987) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) explain how it is a necessity to construct suitable tools, theories, ideologies and strategies to address these oppressive systems which are interconnected and not to rely on the 'master's tools'. Black feminists claim that white feminists were only concerned with dismantling white women's oppressive structures, thus only freeing white women (hooks 1992, Collins 2000).

bell hooks who is a black American feminist indicates that

“white feminism has not offered (ample or enabling) grounds on which black women are able to subvert their subjugation in the process of self-writing. Thus there is a need for a distinct black feminism which encounters white feminism that has failed to account for race in its advocacy for gender and class regarding black women's needs (1992:147).”

hooks suggests that black women's experiences were not considered nor taken into account in dismantling the sexist and racist structures in a patriarchal society. She is supported by Patricia Hills Collins (2000:7-8), who is also a black American feminist who affirms that white feminism is indeed “racist and concerned with white, middleclass women's issues. Theories advanced as being universally applicable to women as a group appear, on closer examination, to be greatly limited by the white, middleclass origins of their proponents and by the notion of a generic woman who is white and middle class.” The exclusion of black women in mainstream feminism meant that their ideas were excluded, their voices were silent, they were not acknowledged because they are invisible and in some cases they were misrepresented. It is important that black women represent their positions, express their individualism and positively portray their perspectives to complete the imagery in the visual arts.

It is imperative in black feminism that black women must write their own 'herstories' in order to insert themselves into history and to answer Linda Nochlin's call on *Why there*

*are no great women artists* (1988). Bongi Bengu (b. 1970), Zanele Muholi (b. 1972), Nandipha Mntambo (b. 1982) and Reshma Chhibha (b. 1983) are among the emerging South African black women who produce scholarly works on their own work. In her book *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2000:21), a black American feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins expresses the view that “Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of black women’s reality by those who live it”.

Nkululeko concurs with Collins that oppressed people cannot depend on theories, knowledge and research produced by Eurocentric authors. They need to insert themselves by writing their own stories (1987:88). hooks (2000:21) writes on how, as a graduate student, she discovered the shortage of writings on black women, She decided to focus her studies on uncovering stories on neglected black women such as Toni Morrison is a African American novelist, professor and editor. Alice Walker, the African American activist and writer also participated in recovering works of the late Zora Neale Hurston, a black American anthropologist author. Such writings on black women by black women contribute to the body of work on feminist literature, which amplifies academic work, represents the marginalised and acknowledges iconic black women. My study aims to redress the under-representation of black women in the Vaal Region.

Similarly, Nomboniso Gasa, the editor of *Women in South African History: Basus’imbokodo, Bawel’imilambo, they remove Boulders and Cross Rivers* (2007) has collected sixteen feminists to narrate their perspectives on the history of South Africa from the pre-colonial period to contemporary struggles of women. Gasa’s work is a continuation of the book *Women marching into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo* (2000) by the Human Sciences Research Council Group: Democracy and Governance (HSRC). The volume commemorates South African women who shaped the history of South Africa. It pays tribute to these women who marched on the ninth of August in 1956 against the pass laws and white rule. The book focuses on women’s achievements and their contribution in the fields of politics, sciences, humanities and business.

Nomboniso Gasa is a feminist who writes on gender equality issues. Her four part book, covers four chapters in each part making it sixteen chapters, written by women on the historiography of women. These writings on South African history are from feminist perspectives, dating from women in pre-colonial and pre-Union periods, through to the 1900s and six of these chapters are written by black women. In the chapter, *Like three tongues in one mouth': tracing the elusive lives of slave women in (slavocratic) South Africa*, Gqola (2007:21) traces biographies of slave women who are excluded from the historical narrative. Gqola mentions that it is important to amplify the archive on slave women in order to redress the gaps in the research by thinking about, acknowledging, recognising and appreciating their contribution in South African colonial historiography through the visual arts. My practice-based research contributes to the empowering imagery of black women by making them visible, through archiving them in a catalogue and displaying them in public, similarly to books of Muholi (2010, 2014) and Turok (2006).

Most of the documentation is a representation from the white settlers' perspectives about their exploitation of the black sexuality which created stereotypical imagery of black women. This is clearly exemplified in the white male's fascination, obsessions and fantasies in creating the sexual icon, Sarah Bartmann, a Khoikhoi woman, born in Southern Cape in 1788, who was taken into exile in November 1809 by Hendrik Cezar, an Englishman. Bartmann epitomises the black women's gender, race, sexuality and class. As an academic and a scholar, Yvette Abrahams, discusses the historical abuse of Bartmann. She decided to teach and make it her purpose to write text which does not 'other' black women, text which conceives of a black woman as self, to re-centre and reclaim 'auntie' Sarah (2004:423). Abrahams contributes writing by an African on an African (Sarah Bartmann) on issues of identity, being an African, a native and a slave. Abrahams' writing titled *Ambiguity is my middle name: a research diary* is also published under the same title in *Hear our voices: Race, gender and the status of black women in the academy* (2004). It critiques and exposes the white supremacists who wrote on Bartmann.

Reitumetse Mabokela and Zine Magubane's (2004) book titled *Hear our voices: race, gender and the status of black South African women in the academy*, is composed of

eight chapters which debate issues of gender biasness and 'black absence' in curriculum and pedagogy (hooks 2000:21) in South African tertiary education. The articles focus on black women similar to Pumla Dineo Gqola, Yvette Abrahams, Julian Prins who are academics. They articulate their personal experiences in South African Universities on issues of race, gender, representation and inequality. Magubane (2004:1) elaborates that "to be black and female in the academy has its own particular frustrations because it was never intended for us to be here. We are in spaces that have been appropriated for us." Black women were never meant to be employed in white or black male-dominated institutions of higher learning. History of the apartheid educational system continues to inform and play a role in issues of racism and sexism which disadvantage women whether in historically black universities (HBU) or historically white universities (HWU) irrespective of English or Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

Mabokela (2004:67) explains how HBU tend to use African culture to hinder the progress of women. Black women are often seen as subordinates in lower ranks of employment. Furthermore, female academics struggle with publishing, acquiring the relevant qualifications to be eligible for promotion because there is no support, no mentoring and they are overwhelmed with the workload. Nonetheless, women who managed to obtain senior positions still experience challenges with their male colleagues. Mabokela and Magubane's book records some of the challenges black women academics experience in their workplace and they indicate why there is a lack of black women's representation in higher institutions of learning.

In HWU, window dressing prevails, where black academics are assumed to be unprofessional and are irrelevant in white academic environments. Successful black women in leadership positions are labelled as rare. As explained by Professor William Makgoba that

"My story is part of a long chain of orchestrated patterns to destroy African pride, upliftment and achievements... underpinned by the white belief that blacks are no good whatsoever...As a consequence...there will be no black producers of knowledge or intellectuals, no scholars, there will be no black mentors, role models, and philosophers. How can there be, for we [blacks] are cheats, fraudulent and incompetent (1997:117)."

It is vital that black women be part of the decolonisation of knowledge so as to be able to contribute their perspectives through their presence in higher Institutions of learning.

It is imperative that black women scholars and teachers examine ways to negotiate their identities by exposing the racist and sexist practices in South African Universities. They need to comment on their positions and challenges as black, women, writers and academics in white-dominated South African Universities. Hooks comments on how professors, who were mainly male, taught only male studies, no books or studies on women were represented in lecture rooms or represented in the curriculum. It was as if such studies did not exist (1990:15).

### **Self determination**

Malatjie asserts that the objectives of black feminism can be achieved when black women self-insert themselves into history through self-determination. In the essay *Insertion: self and other* (2002:02), Salah Hassan defines self-insertion as “the quest for self-representation and a negation of self-identity.” This insertion is possible when black feminists use the first person to include personal experiences as well as their own bodies as subjects in their works of art. Patricia Hill Collins (2000:ix) explains that by “...inserting myself in the text by using, “I”, “we”, and “our” instead of the more distancing terms “they” and “one,” was freeing for me.” Dabi Nkululeko (1987:88) agrees that black women have the right to determine themselves in order to engage with their lived experiences and she confirms that “knowledge cannot best be determined by alien researchers, who will be laden with the trappings of their own history, values, culture and ideology”. Alice Walker also states that a black feminist “... must be her own model as the artist attending, creating, learning from, realizing the model, which is to say herself” (quoted from Collins 2000:06).

Dabi Nkululeko, is a black South African activist and scholar, who in her book *The right to self-determination in research: Azania and Azanian women* (1987), writes about how white women have better resources than black women, which suggests that white women have more access, opportunities and enjoy more privileges than black women

who cannot attain the necessary education to determine themselves. Dabi Nkululeko states that

“Settler women occupy a class, position and status which is above that of their native counterparts, male and female. For example, European Settler women researchers, enjoy the privileges which their male and female subjects who are native do not enjoy. They have liberal access to financial, educational and social facilities. This is the reason why settler women manage to write about the natives, not because they are more intelligent or more willing” (1987:101).

It is due to the lack of education and resources amongst other reasons, that many of the black feminists are invisible, unknown, not documented and are excluded from the history of feminism. Hence an increased number of womanists emerged in the academy as teachers, scholars, artists, critics to produce work on negotiating their identities.

Malatjie responds to overcoming the shortage of black women artists and writers by writing on the black women artists Tracey Rose (b.1971) and Berni Searle (b.1964) and by employing autobiography and auto-ethnography in discussing their works. She points out that

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

In her article *Doing it for daddy*, Sharlene Khan (2011), Khan makes reference to hooks’ in which she question the white patriarchy which is still prevalent in the visual art field. Khan argues that the transformation is stagnant, race, gender and class issues still exist, and institutions are still lead by whites as expressed by Dabi Nkululeko, Makobela Magubane, Thembinkosi Goniwe and others.



## **Omission of black bodies in the South African art field**

The South African field of visual arts is still dominated by white women scholars. Nontobeko Mabongi Ntombela (2013: 63) discusses how the visual art history is represented by white women scholars such as Marion Arnold, Brenda Schmahmann, Brenda Atkinson, Sue Williamson, Sabine Marschall, Lize van Robbroeck, Nessa Leibhammer, Jillian Carman, Anitra Nettleton and Elize Mile amongst others and that there is a dearth of black women scholars who write on the positions of black women. This is evident in the four editions of the *Visual Century: South African art in context* (2011) books by editors such as Jillian Carman, Lize van Robbroeck, Mario Pissara, Thembinkosi Goniwe and Mandisi Majavu, there are no black women writers. Ntombela mentions a few black women scholars by the likes of Lerato Bereng, Gabi Ngcobo and Melisa Mbobweni who contribute writings on past and present black women's experiences in the visual arts. This is problematic as Malatjie (2011:10) indicates in her thesis that "there remains an absence of black feminist theories and discourse that enable one to theorise and critique work by black women artists...and this problem is bound to occur when black women are absent from art history". This is a challenge due to the imbalances of power, education and class structures. Thembinkosi Goniwe (2004:15) adds that most art spaces; competitions, galleries, institutions of learning and so forth are still predominantly 'white'.

Even after apartheid, black women remain marginalised. This is apparent in the *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa* by Sophie Perryer, which is a celebratory book, commemorating a decade of democracy in South Africa in 2004. The book was aimed at surveying the state of visual arts in ten years, a decade after South Africa's democratic elections in 1994. Perryer selected fifteen art critics, writers and curators such as Emma Bedford, David Brodie, Thembinkosi Goniwe, Khwezi Gule, Sharlene Khan, David Koloane, Andrew Lamprecht, Moleleki Frank Ledimo, Virginia MacKenny, Siphon Mdanda, Tumelo Mosaka, Tracy Murinik, Colin Richards, Kathryn Smith and Sue Williamson, then each nominated six or seven contemporary artists to include from the visual art field.

Perryer states that issues of race and gender are still evident in the South Africa visual arts. This is clearly demonstrated in the number of black women represented. The term

black in this context, refers to African women with the inclusion of coloureds and Indians who are as historically defined as such in South Africa. For instance, out of 100 recommended artists by each writer only thirteen are black. These are Gabisile Ngcobo (b. 1974), Zamuxolo Dunywa (b. 1977), Gabisile Nkosi (1974-2008), Bongi Bengu (b.197), Noria Mabasa (b. 1938), Nontsikelelo Veleko (b. 1977), Senzeni Marasela (b. 1977), Tracey Rose (b.1974), Berni Searle (b. 1964), Rookeya Gardee (b. 1968), Usha Seejarim (b. 1974), Sophie Peters (b. 1960) and Thembeqa Qangule (b. 1969). There is only one black woman writer, Sharlene Khan. This clearly indicates that no effort was made to find solutions to the imbalances of power and inequalities. Perryer justifies her task of selecting writers from those she has worked with on other projects and others were suggested by other writers. She notices the imbalances but does not indicate how she tried to find solutions. All that is done is to mention the obvious.

Goniwe (2004: 11-12) who is one of the writers, an artist and a curator, explains that the Visual Arts field remains racially divided as whites write about whites and blacks write about blacks. Evidently so, white women writers such as Sue Williamson, Kathryn Smith, Tracy Murinik, Virginia Mackenny write on mainly white female artists and Emma Bedford is the only one who writes on a coloured female artist who is Tracey Rose. While Sharlene Khan, an Indian and coloured female artist, a writer and a curator is the only woman who writes on the likes of Zamaxolo Dunywa, Rookeya Gardee, Gabisile Nkosi, Sophie Peters, Berni Searle and Usha Seejarim who are black women artists. The ratio of 5:1 indicates that white women continue to dominate and gain ground in inserting themselves in South African art history even in the post-apartheid era. Black women still remain silent and excluded in the field.

Similarly in *Through the looking glass* (2004), Schmahmann confirms such divisions. The book is divided into four chapters 'Self as Artist', 'Self and Family', 'Self and Locale', 'Self and Body' and 'Enactments'. The book focuses on South African women artists' exploration of representing themselves in art through painting, sculpture, prints, photographs and so forth, as an attempt to insert South women artists into art history. Schmahmann examines how portraits of women as the subject or object of art for male artists has been depicted and the issues of self-portraiture or self-representation is discussed under themes of politics, memory and so on. White women predominate, as there is no black women scholar featured. Jacqueline Nolte, is the only black scholar

referenced by Schmahmann (2014: 31) in discussion of works by Lallitha Jawahirilal (b.1955) and Bongi Bengu (b.1970). The writings on black women artists by white females continue to lack critical engagement. This is evident in Schmahmann's (2004:19) discussion of Bonnie Ntshalintshali's (1967-1999) work as compared to white artists discussed in the book. Further, there are no diverse points of views added from different races which is the initial aim of the book, to enable women to represent themselves and their bodies so as to be able to create their own identities.

### **Class: invisibility**

It was through class hierarchies that women were divided. White women were privileged, well-educated, had the right to vote and achieved equal access to class powers as their white male counterparts. Whiteness became a privileged category. White women's concerns became the main issues that were focused on and received attention, thus the media highlighted issues of the fortunate. They became more visible than black women. Class divisions opened up a 'can of worms', class and race differences became apparent. Rita Mae explains that

“class is much more than Marx's definition of relation to the means of production. Class involved your behaviour, your basic assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act” (quoted from hooks 2000: 39).

Furthermore the South African old apartheid regime, created more imbalances. In the book *Grey Areas Representation, identity and politics in contemporary South African art* (1999), Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa (b. 1956) is interviewed by Brenda Atkinson (117126) to review the South African visual art field. Dhlomo-Mautloa expounds on the educational apartheid system. She highlights that art was not taught in the black school's syllabus. Black women could and were only expected to be nurses or teachers. Dhlomo-Mautloa further adds that the art world in South Africa is still faced with the same problems as during apartheid. These problems range from art administrators and practitioners speaking on behalf of the artist, that the art is still dominated by men, that all the 'old masters' throughout history are males. Also that art institutions are still headed by white men who also dominate the art world. Dhlomo-

Mautloa states that art in South Africa is still racialised, that there are collectors who collect art as well as those who collect 'black art'. Thus, black feminism sought to address issues of class elitism because it creates inequalities, marginalises and categorises people by placing them in groups making some superior to others. Issues of oppression, exploitation and discrimination become apparent.

White women still benefit more economically and gain more class power than black women (Khan 2011). Knowledge is documented and produced by the white patriarchy; and history is written from the white perspective by the white historians (Nadine 2015). Third world and postcolonial feminists argue that oppression is manifested in the histories of imperialism, exploitation, sexism and racism (Scholtz 2010, Gasa 2007, Nkululeko 1987). Third world Postcolonial feminism argues that the effects of colonisation and experiences of women in cultures affected by colonialism are vastly different from that of women in Western countries and this should be acknowledged. Western feminism failed to recognise that not all women live in Western political environments and locations. Mainstream feminism also failed to incorporate the struggles of the Third World into the movement and their various experiences ranging from race, religion, migration, slavery, and others.

### **Misrepresentation or negative portrayal**

Malatjie refers to problems of black women's ideas being excluded in the visual arts, meaning they are silent and cannot voice their concerns. Evidently, this resulted in black women being absent from history and in some cases they are misrepresented, where white women assume the right to speak on behalf of black women. As explained by Christina Qunta (1987:11), who is a South African feminist and scholar

“African womanhood has been an increasingly topical subject for writers in recent years. Unfortunately, however, the majority of them have not themselves belonged to the community of African women. This in itself is problematic, since the non-African who studies this rather complex issue is inevitably an observer rather than a participant. The limitation is further complicated by the fact that European authors tend to employ theoretical assumptions and methodology which hamper or in some cases preclude a realistic assessment of the subject matter.”

Collins (2000:69) states that black women's oppression has been through stereotypical images. I have chosen to discuss matriarchs, as my study engages with commemorating women leaders, through iconographic representation of matriarchs which is defined as women rulers, empresses, queens and so forth. This positive imagery of black matriarchy as a symbol of power, leadership, and a woman as the head of the family has been misrepresented to depict black matriarchs as control freaks and bossy bitches.

In a sexist world women are perceived through the eyes of men which is referred to as the 'male gaze'. John Berger in his book, *Ways of seeing* (1972), explains how over centuries women's bodies have been under the ownership of men. Berger mentions that women's bodies have been reduced and used to signal certain masculine virility and seen as men's accessories. Generated patriarchal sayings such as "behind every successful man, there is a woman" make women's visibility and achievements to be always seen through being appended to famous men (Gqola 2013: 48). Black women such as Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Phumzile Mlambo Nqucuka, Albertina Sisulu, Adelaide Tambo, Winnie Madikizela Mandela to mention a few, are always represented as someone's wife. Little is known about their contribution and their work. As observed by Leah Tutu (2006:32), a spiritual leader and human rights activist that people need "... to know me as me, not as Desmond's wife, which is nearly always the case." Tutu inputs that she does not need to be seen through the patriarchal view, of only being a wife to Tutu but that she is also her own person.

Dr Mamphela Ramphele, a medical doctor, an academic, anthropologist, first black woman Vice Chancellor of University of Cape Town, former Managing Director at the World Bank, business woman, author and former leader of a political party *Agang*, has made a tremendous impact on South Africa's history, but is still perceived as Steve Bantu Biko's mistress. Biko on the other hand who died thirty nine years ago, is to this day is still celebrated and regarded as the father of the Black Consciousness movement. It is this patriarchal thinking that has conditioned women to view themselves as inferior to men (Tsitsi Dangarembga 1988, Ellen Kuzwayo 1995, Arundhati Roy 1997). It is also evident in kwaito and hip hop music videos, where the

more women a man has, he is regarded the 'top dog' or 'the man' and women posing are rendered as whores and vixens. Nonetheless it is South African activists such as *One in Nine*, a feminist campaign that have placards outside courts reading "not just a face and a vagina", protesting against sexual violation and rape. They proclaim that there is more to womanhood than their bodies or vaginas as written by Eve Ensler in her 1998 book, the *Vagina monologues*. Hooks also urges women to no longer see themselves or their bodies as properties. Black feminists need to challenge and change the sexist female perceptions and create a powerful sisterhood (1990:15).

Throughout history, black women have been perceived from a patriarchal perspective, which negatively represents them as objects of desire. A black entrepreneurial woman such as Molemo Kgomo (2016:18) creates black dolls under her brand name *Ntombe'entle* with black fuller figures, with hips and bums, black textured hair and black complexions dressed in traditional attire representing the Zulu, Ndebele, Sotho, Venda, Tsonga, Pedi, Tswana and Xhosa cultures. Barbara Thompson edited the book *Black womanhood: images, icons, and ideologies of the African body* (2011), and in it she explores the representation of the black female body in the visual arts through diverse materials, across different cultures, in their social locations, in time and place. The book is divided into three parts composed of historical and contemporary depictions of the African body, in images of sculpture, photographs, textiles, paintings, prints, postcards, ceramics and video installations accompanied by narratives and exchanges by artists and writers who self-reflect on imagery. It commemorates the representation of the black body through art and through taking charge.

Black feminism allows women to affirm and celebrate their colour and culture in ways that Western feminism does not. Walker (1984: xi-xii) furthermore defines a womanist as a "woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength". As part of third wave feminism, womanist theory challenged the stereotypical representation of women and celebrated women's sexuality similar to Zanele Muholi initiative.

## Commemorative art: positive representation

“The year 1963/ The People’s president/ Was taken away by security men/ All dressed in a uniform/ The brutality, brutality/ Oh no, my black president/ Him and his comrades/ Were sentenced to isolation/ For many painful years/ Many painful years of hard labour/ They broke ropes/ But the spirit was never broken/ Never broken/Oh no, my black president” (Brenda Fassie’s tributary lyrics of her song *My Black President*, album *Black President* which was released in 1990.)

The most commemorated figure is the male body. Evidently, in South Africa, the late Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is one of the most celebrated male figures both nationally and internationally. There is a Nelson Mandela Bridge in downtown Johannesburg which was completed in 2003, Desré Buirski designed Madiba shirts; musicians ranging from the late Brenda Fassie (1964-2004), Zahara (whose real name is Bulelwa Mkutukana) (b. 1988) sing songs about him; street names are named after him; monuments are unveiled to commemorate Mandela; statues and sculptures are modelled to honour him; shopping malls; parks; buildings; halls; community centres; schools; organisations; museums; universities; hospitals; municipalities; townships; theatrical centres; even nuclear particles and flowers are named after him and South African currency represents Mandela on the banknotes. Mandela has been portrayed in cinemas and on television in the films such as the *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013) and there are about twenty six written biographies and 136 books published and written on Nelson Mandela. The eighteenth of July marks Mandela Day to symbolise his caring nature. It is Mandela’s birthday which is dedicated locally and internationally where all people are meant to contribute minutes to do something for the less fortunate.

By comparison, the ninth of August is a national holiday which pays tribute to women and there are only two women’s monuments: the *Women’s monument* (fig. 23) in Bloemfontein and *Imbokodo* (fig. 7) in Pretoria which honours South African women. As Marschall points out, most monuments and memorials against apartheid focused on the resistance of men. This clearly exposes the absence of monuments and memorials dedicated to the commemoration and contribution to the struggle of women in South Africa. In both the above works, women are collectively commemorated. Why? In this regard, as Marina Gardiner (2006:16) highlights memorials and monuments

exist all over the world in remembrance of a past event, people from history and important ideals such as liberty, kindness, love, freedom to mention but a few that changed the world. Furthermore, these events, people and ideals are memorialised to remind people to respect the specific day or people or ideal.



Fig. 23. SOFF, F & VAN WOUW, A. 1913. *Women's Monument*.



Fig. 7. CRUISE, W & HOLMES, M. 1999. *Imbokodo*.

In South Africa, *imbokodo*, is a hard grinding stone which is used to crush maize corn to make maize flour for porridge. It represents the women's struggle during apartheid. It also means a boulder, a rock - which relates to the expression *Wathint' abafazi*, *wathint' imbokodo* meaning you strike a woman you strike, a rock. The monument honours all 20 000 women who marched on the ninth of August in 1956. The act of grinding maize meal symbolises the black women's act and as Rayda Becker (2000) suggests, the stones are an African female icon. This multimedia, public monument is



located at the Union Building in Pretoria, surrounded by security, where the audience does not have easy access to a place where women of all races are collectively represented. This is what black feminism problematizes in its discourse. All women do not exist in a single space and time and that each woman's experience differs from the next.

This collaborative monument was executed by artist Wilma Cruise (b. 1945) and architect Marcus Holmes (date not provided) instead of an Indian, black, white and coloured woman artist to signify the four women leaders Rahim Moosa, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and Sophia Williamson and to represent all races that marched to Pretoria. Brenda Fassie's bronze sculpture situated in Newton, Johannesburg is sculptured by Angus Taylor (b.1970). Fassie (1964-2004) is a late South African pop diva. Do we not have female sculptures in South Africa? Why was the likes of Noria Mabasa or black architects such as Mokena Makeka who was involved in a *Wonder woman* project in 2014 with Karina Turok not selected to partake in the project? Even with biographies, which are written by black men, such as Njabulo Simakahle Ndebele's writings and biography on Winnie Madikizela Mandela (*The cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003) and Bongani Madondo (2014) *I'm not your weekend special: portraits on the life and style and politics of Brenda Fassie*). How about Miriam Tlali, the first black woman to publish a novel in South Africa?

Despite this suppression, Pumla Dineo Gqola writes a piece on Simphiwe Dana titled *A Renegade called Simphiwe* (2013), who is a South African songstress and actress. The book is more of an academic piece of writing than a biography on Dana. However, it was written by a black woman scholar on a black female artist about Postcolonial issues experienced by her in post-apartheid South Africa. Dr Mamphela Ramphele, Dr Kopano Matlwa and *Lira*, are amongst the few black women who have written their own autobiographies. This clearly demonstrates that men are still behind the representation of women, meaning that *aluta continua*.



Fig. 21. SCHADEBERG, J. 1956. *The four delegates approach the Union Buildings with masses of petition papers.* from left Rahima Moosa, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, and Sophie Williams.



Fig. 24. TAYLOR, A. 2006. *Brenda Fassie*

### South African art: books

The book *Women by women: 50 Years of Women's Photography in South Africa*, is compiled by Robin Comley, George Hallet and Neo Ntsoma. It commemorates the fifty-year anniversary of the 1956 women's march to the Union Buildings. The purpose of the project was to recover works of past women photographers and to exhibit their photographs. Therefore the title *Women by women*, seventy five photographers and their works. The book provides no background information or description of the works and no artist's statements. The details of works are very brief and not properly referenced as there is no provision for the name of the artist, the year of production of the work, the title, medium, dimensions and the place where the original is stored. The photographs are randomly arranged with no chronology or theme and rationale for the choice of the artist or the work to reinforce or make the project stronger. There is a need for a more in-depth discussion of the project, photographs and the artists featured.

By comparison, Karina Turok's *Life and soul portraits of women who move South Africa* (2006) is more organised. Turok is a white Jewish photographer, married to Jonathan Shapiro, who is mostly referenced as Zapiro, the cartoonist. Turok appropriates Brian Lanker's project entitled: *I dream a World: Portraits of Black Women who changed*

*America* (1989). Lanker is a white American photographer, who represents women engaged in a number of fields including entertainment, literature, sports and politics. These women include the likes of Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Janet Collins, Oprah Winfrey, Coretta Scott King and Septima Poinsette Clark amongst others. Lanker's book consists of black and white photographs of seventy-five women from different professions accompanied by their transcripts on which they speak of a unique moment in their lives. Lanker (1989:10) explains that he wanted to contribute to the growing number of black women's contributions. He came up with the list of women to include, had three hour interviews with a list of questions focusing on their experiences with sexism and racism and he asked these women to recommend others, until there were seventy five. Below are some of the examples of his photographs.



Fig. 11. LANKER, B. 1989. *Maya Angelou*.



Fig. 12. LANKER, B. 1989. *Odetta*.

Similarly, Turok celebrates seventy-five<sup>6</sup> women from different professions and backgrounds in black and white photography with an insert of her conversation with the selected women as well as their biographical details accompanied by their selfportraits. The book consists of thirty-five black women, twenty six whites, seven Indians and seven coloureds. This clearly represents the racial demography of South Africa in which black people make up the majority of the population whilst the Indians and coloured are in the minority. The number seventy-five is also the number of chosen

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<sup>6</sup> The list of women includes: Albertina Sisulu, Natalie du Toit, Gcina Mhlophe, Ellen Kuzwayo, Helen Suzan, Mamphela Ramphele, Cheryl Carolus, Antjie Krog, Thandiswa Mazwai, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Nadine Gormier, Leah Tutu, Leleti Khumalo, Masingta Masunga, Hilda Tloubatla of the Mahotella Queens, Rayd Jacobs, Frene Ginwala, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Npmaindia Mfeketo, Ray Alexander, Ruth Mompati, Wendy Luhabe, Glenda Gray, Patricia de Lille, Yvonne Mokgoro, Phyllis Spira, Adelaide Tambo, Zola Budd, Esther Mahlangu, Basetsana Kumalo, Fatima Meer, Denise Ackermann, Karen Zoid, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Maria Ramos, Noleen Maholwana-Sangqu, Thandi Klaasen, Marlene Dumas, Sindiwe Mangona, Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan, Alison, Elisabeth Eybers, Berni Searle, Janice Joseph, Prudence Mabele, Ferial Haffajee, Abigail Kubeka, Pregs Govender, Sue Williamson, Thandi Modise, Mary Burton, Mimi Coertse, Amina Cachalia, Sandra Prinsloo, Sibingile Khumalo, Jane Raohaely, Zoe Wicombe, Dorothy Masuku, Josie Boraine, Nicky Newton-King, Rebecca Malope, Shaleen Surtie-Richards, Martha Mosoahle, Kate O'Regan, Gloria Serobe, Doreen Morris, Shula Marks, Barbara Maekela, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Lynette Denny, Magrita Adams, Janice Honeyman, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Ngqakula, , Magrita Adams, Epainette Mbeki, and Nkhesani Manganyi Nkosi.

participants to be photographed by Lanker, Turok and Moutoussamy-Ashe. There no explanation, and the number, it seems, is arbitrary.



Fig. 58. TUROK, K. 2006. *Dorothy Masuku*.

Turok names the chosen candidate with their portfolio presented below their names. Each declares the most influential people in their lives. Then a description follows on how they came to pursue their chosen careers. A biography of each comes next, which includes their date of birth and place of birth and their accomplishments. The next page is a black and white portrait photograph of the participant, with no details of the work. This word portrait project, features struggle stalwarts such as the late Albertina Sisulu (1918-2011) and the late Adelaide Tambo (1929-2007), powerful women in parliamentary positions such as Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka (b.1955) and Frene Ginwala (b.1932), the designer and founder of fashion label Stoned Cherrie Nkhensani Nkosi (b.1973), businesswoman and former beauty pageant title-holder Basetsana Khumalo (b.1974), performers from musicians to actresses to storytellers and sport and business women. The discussions are on inequalities during apartheid regarding issues of education, racism and the economy. Some recall the violence, loss of their

loved ones, being exiled and imprisoned. Ultimately, each woman celebrates the fact that they have overcome all prejudice and are movers in South Africa.

*Faces and phases* (2010) forms part of Zanele Muholi's concept which started in 2006. This is a lifetime project in which she aimed to finish five hundred portraits by end of 2014. Zanele Muholi is a black lesbian activist and photographer. Muholi documents portraits of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities (LGBTI). Muholi's 'aha!' moment was when a friend of hers gave her a book *Viewfinders: black women photographers* (1986) by Moutoussamy-Ashe Jeanne. It was this book that changed her life and made her think of dealing with her own personal issues through photography.

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe (b. 1951) is a black American photographer. She explains that her project initially started in 1982, while visiting Yale University, where she first witnessed well known photographs of black Americans which were taken by Eslanda Cardoso Goode Robeson (1986:xvii). She was concerned with the absence of research completed on black women photographers. Also that photography was a male-oriented field and that women who were mentioned in the history of photography were mainly white. Thus she tasked herself with creating an archive, recording black women's accomplishments in the field of photography, and who documented their personal lives or communities (1986: xvii).

In the book, she documents black women photographers from 1839 up 'till 1985. The book is divided into five parts: 1839-1910, 1910-1930, 1930-1950, 1950-1970 and 1970-1985. Moutoussamy-Ashe attempts to create a black women's archive to compile a record of black women who ventured into professional photography. Seventy-five accomplished black women ranging from different professions were selected and interviewed. Moutoussamy-Ashe explains that her primary intention was to focus on black pioneers. Due to the lack of research completed, the task seemed impossible. There was little information recorded on black women's contribution to photographic history and to American history. The Moutoussamy-Ashe archive serves to contribute work and stories on black women's experiences. The photographs serve as visual statements and an archive and in marking, mapping and preserving the invisible queer

or black women's community Moutoussamy-Ashe pays tribute to the contribution made by the black women in black, American history and photographic history.

Likewise, Muholi's project creates a visual identity, making black queers visible by positively depicting the black queers in portraiture to produce memorable records.

Muholi explains during her *Art Basel Exhibition* in 15-19 June 2011, that

“in the face of all the challenges our community encounters daily, I embarked on a journey of visual activism to ensure that there is black queer visibility.

*Faces and Phases* is about our histories and the struggles that we face.

'Faces' express the person, and 'Phases' signify the transition from one stage of sexuality or gender expression and experience to another. 'Faces' is also about the face-to-face confrontation between myself as the photographer or activist and the many lesbians, women and transmen I have interacted with from different places. Photographs in this series traverse spaces from Gauteng, Cape Town, Mafikeng and Botswana to Sweden”.

Each black and white photograph is of a face actively 'returning' the viewer's gaze, some half-length and several depicted with only head and shoulders of the participants. Each photo has a caption with the name of the individual, place in which they were photographed and the date stating that the images were taken from Gauteng, Cape Town, London and Toronto, Alexandra, Soweto, Voslorus, Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Katlehong and Kagiso. Muholi's photo's deal with queers issues ranging from corrective rapes to murders. In another interview with Deborah Willis, Muholi explains her journey on creating the project (that appeared in the issue 5 of *Aperture Photography*). She talks about how there was a dedication to her friend who died of HIV-related complications in 2007 at the age of twenty-five. Muholi explains how she saw a gap in the absence of black visual history on LGBTI. She started to write her own history to validate her existence and to provide a platform for others. She refers to the visual history of photography, where most depiction was consumed by male photographers, the likes of Alf Khumalo (1930-2012), Ernest Cole (1940-1990), David Goldblatt (b.1930) and Jürgen Schadeberg (b.1931) who portrayed women in despair during the apartheid era.



*Faces and Phases 2006-2014* (2014) is an extension, a sequel from the 2010 edition, there are more than 250 portraits in this book, accompanied by moving testimonies of her participants which presents a compelling statement about the lives and struggles of these individuals. Gabeba Baderoon is a poet, literature and media scholar, who collaborates with Muholi and writes a text on her series. She explains that the more she has the better.

### **South African art: black feminism**

In the South African context, Ramgolam's dissertation *Identity, place and displacement in the visual arts of female artists at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT), 1994-2004* (2011) as well as four books: *Through the Looking Glass* (2004), *Women by women: 50 Years of Women's Photography in South Africa* (2006), *Life and soul portraits of women who move South Africa* (2006) and *Faces and Phases* (2010) are pertinent to this study.

Judy Ramgolam's research is positioned within a regional context so as to examine its influences and the impact on creative production of the artworks. Ramgolam discusses women from the same regional context. But she not only writes on the chosen black women, she also creates artworks inserting her views about her position as a black woman from the Vaal Region. The objective is to contribute to the empowering and positive representation of black women in the Visual Arts field, as pursued by Brenda Schmahmann (2004), Robin Comley, George Hallet and Neo Ntsoma (2006), Karina Turok (2006) as well as Zanele Muholi (2010) in their creative and scholarly works.

Ramgolam's writing on the fourteen women, inserts them into art history. Some had been omitted and so she inserted and represented them. I look into how commemorative portraits of iconic representations and high profile career-achieving black women are made both visible and recognisable in these books from a South African feminist perspective.

## **Appropriation as a black feminist strategy**

Appropriation is often adopted by black feminists and used as a creative strategy to insert their experiences into the visual art history. In *Post-colonial studies the key concepts* co-written by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2000: 19) appropriation is discussed as a

“term used to describe the ways in which post-colonial studies take over those aspects of the imperial culture- language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis- that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities”.

This is evident in Kara Walker's (b.1969) works, in which she creates life-size silhouette cut-outs, exploring race, gender, violence, sexuality and identity in her work (art21 2001-2016) . Traditionally, it is associated with practices of artists such as Barbara Kruger (b. 1945), Sherrie Levine (b. 1947), Cindy Sherman (b.1954), Judy Chicago (b.1939), Faith Ringgold (b.1930), Wangechi Mutu (b.1972), as well as the critical discourse of postmodernism (Desmond 2011:151). The term appropriation often refers to the use of borrowed elements ranging from artistic styles, images and ideas from history. The term came into use in the 1980s by artists such as Sherrie Levine, an American artist who re-photographed Edward Weston (1886-1958) and Walker Evans' (1903-1975) photographs and titled her appropriated images *After Walker Evans* (1981). Levine also copied and recreated Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1971) in 1991 into a bronze reproduction. In selecting specific male artists, Levine challenges the ideas of originality and sexism in the art field, by drawing attention to issues of power and gender.

Homi Bhabha in his essay on *Mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse*, Bhabha refers to mimicry as “colonial appropriation” (1994:126). It exists in the coloniser and the colonised or the self and each appropriates the other. Mimicry is the art of mimicking someone or something, and to mimic is to imitate someone's or something's voice, gestures and expressions in order to amuse others. Bhabha (In Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000:139) explains that mimicry takes place “[w]hen colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result

is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening". The idea of hybridity is very prevalent in colonial appropriation. Performance artists such as Nandipha Mntambo, Tracey Rose, Berni Searle, Nelisiwe Xaba and others use their bodies to comment on such through stage performance Napo Masheane, poetry by Lebohang Mashile and in songs of Thandiswa Mazwai.

Schneider (2012:346) discusses cultural appropriation as a process used in which the white; (named the outsider) represents the insider's (the Guaraní community) and their cultural patterns and oeuvres in their designs. In cultural terms, Bryant

(1994: 100) explains that this sort of appropriation takes place when a community's symbols, language, beliefs, lifestyle, foodways, music, dance, art and traditions are taken, reinterpreted, documented, preserved, redesignated, reproduced or disseminated by the disproportionate benefit of those outside that community".

Nelson (2003:172) refers to Edward Said (in *Culture and imperialism*), who explains that in the process of cultural appropriation there are those who act, and those who are acted upon, for those whose memories and cultural identities are manipulated by aesthetic, academic, economic, or political appropriations. In a nutshell Bryant (1994:100) declares that appropriation means an unequal exchange between parties, no more, no less. It is the process by which one party benefits to the detriment of the other". bell hooks, in her book *Art on my mind* (1995) claims that these [a]cts of appropriation are part of the process by which we make ourselves. hooks states that the crucial point in taking something for one's 'use' lies in what one makes of what is appropriated. hooks points out that cultural appropriation is part of who we are and should not be equated with exploitation. Nelson (2003:172) adds that appropriation is important as it encourages us to ask why and how.

Appropriation re-contextualises the original imagery making the viewer renegotiate the meaning of the original in a different, more relevant and current context. The reinterpretation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1494-1499) to appropriated series ranging from Mary Beth Edelson's *Some living American women artists/Last supper*

(1972), Judy Chicago's *Dinner party* (1979) to Thandiswa Mazwai's *digital manifesto* (2014), exemplifies Bourriaud's concept of postproduction. Edelson collaged women artists' portraits such as Nancy Graves on da Vinci's mural of John the Baptist, Christ is covered by Georgia O'Keeffe. The work serves as a reproduced poster of da Vinci's Last Supper with superimposed images of portraits of women artists over Christ and his disciples and more artists are depicted as a border to frame the imagery.



Fig. 9. EDELSON, M.B.1972. *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper*



Fig. 6. CHICAGO, Judy. 1979. *The dinner party*.

On the one hand, Chicago's *The dinner party* (fig. 6) also serves as a reinterpretation of a woman's point of view of the Last supper. Surprisingly enough throughout history, women are the ones who prepare the meals and set the dinner tables but they are not honoured guests. Thus Chicago uses vagina plate sets to represent thirteen distinguished women borrowed from the number of thirteen men at the *Last supper*. The triangular table is set for thirty nine guests with names of another hundred inscribed on the porcelain floor. Chicago (1979:11) created the *Dinner table* to honour women's achievements and to record their lives which have been omitted and excluded in history. She explains that the "absence of any sense of our tradition as women seemed to cripple us psychologically. I wanted to change that, and I wanted to do it through art." (1979:12).



DOUZA, Nash. Paul. 2012. *Thandiswa's digital manifesto*

On the other hand, Thandiswa Mazwai, a South African Afro pop artist, on her blog ([thandiswa.com](http://thandiswa.com)), her last supper was created by *antiflutter* who is a designer from India, Nash Paul Dsouza, is also described by Percy Mabandu (2014). She is digitised onto the *last supper* and sited in the centre as King *Tha*. The women include the late Busi Mhlongo (1947-2010), her late mother Beledé Mazwai, Winnie Madikizela Mandela (b.1936), the Rain Queen Modjadji, the late Lebo Mathosa (1977-2010), the late Miriam Makeba (1932-2008), Sarah Baartman (1789-1815), Grace Jones (b.1948), Princess Magogo (1900-1984), Angela Davis (b. 1944), Betty Davis (b. 1945) and Bi Kidude (1910-2013). On top of each name Mazwai gives a brief explanation on her selection of these women to share the last meal with her, women who have directly and indirectly influenced her development (2014:13).

Above the selected women she describes Princess Magogo as “one of her musical icons, with a great South African voice”. The late Busi Mhlongo is defined as her favourite African singer, a dear friend who she deeply misses and her mother is the queen of her heart, *idlozi lam elihle*, meaning her beautiful ancestor. Mazwai echoes Maria Stewart challenge that black women need to reject negative portrayal of their womanhood, to use their roles to determine themselves as well as reclaiming and constructing black women’s knowledge (from Collins 2000:02).

According to Nicholas Bourriaud's book (2000: 7, 12) *Postproduction*, appropriation is the initial stage of postproduction. Bourriaud explains that postproduction refers to processes applied to recorded materials. He further adds that this sort of art is a response to the rise in the supply of works. Artists insert their own work in that of others, blurring the notions of originality and creation, borrowing styles, sounds, images and forms from previous artists. Bourriaud states that the artistic investigation is no longer about making something new, but about remixing forms and available data to create new contexts, looking for the meaning not the use. Bourriaud makes reference to three artists such as deejays, web surfers and postproduction artists as 'semionauts' who copy, paste and juxtapose recorded sounds.

Robert Nelson (2003) explains that appropriation is a complicated term, riddled with complex theories. Nelson introduces the term by providing a personal visual journey when visiting his father's grave, and maintains that acts of appropriation are personal not impersonal (2003:164). Appropriation can be a perception and a response to one's memory. Nelson calls attention to the symbolic appropriation of the bronze horses in the cemetery, applying the theory of semiotics by Roland Barthes. Referring to appropriation as myth which as he explains that it breaks down over time, fades away and mutates. It is altered and distorted by new contexts and histories (2003:163). Nelson (2003:165) states that in the arts, appropriation has been used with the term allegory linked with negative and positive connotations.

### **History of appropriation**

Appropriation is often associated with postmodernism. Postmodern art is a collection of ideas, a combination of different art movements, artistic styles, media and genres in art (Ward 1997). Postmodernist strategies which are similar to appropriation are re-vision, re-evaluation, imitation, improvisation, mimicry, re-contextualisation, and pastiche involving commonly famous and recognisable works of art which are easily accessible images from media. Postmodernism blurs categories and fuses high art with low art and introduces elements of consumerism, and kitsch. Barbara Kruger (b. 1945) mixes photography with text to create meaningful messages, deals with consumerism pieces like *I shop therefore I am* (1987).



Fig. 60. WARHOL, A. 1962. *Marilyn Diptych*.

Postmodern practice which is also known as appropriation, includes art movements such as Dadaism, Pop Art to mention two. Creative techniques used are readymades (found objects are exhibited in a new context (Hodge 2011:205), pastiche, collage (an artistic technique where artists stick different materials, such as cloth, newspaper, tissue paper and others items to a flat surface (Hodge 2011:204), photomontage, assemblage (a work of art made with objects or fragments of objects that were originally used in other ways (Hodge 2011:204), found objects (also known as *trouvés*, are objects that have been found by artists, incorporated in artworks and exhibited so others can appreciate them (Hodge 2011:204) .Examples range from Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Juan Gris (1887–1927) collages of cloth and newspapers pasted onto canvases to create the *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass* (1912) and *Bottle of Rum and Newspaper* (1913). Marcel Duchamp's readymade titled the *Fountain* (1917) and the appropriated image of *Mona Lisa* (1503–1517) pencilled in a goatee and moustache then titled *L.H.O.O.Q* (1919). Surrealist, Swiss artist Meret Oppenheim's use of found objects in his work of fur covered cup, saucer and spoon titled *Object* (1936). As well as Pop artists incorporating symbolic images such as American flags, repetitive images of iconographic objects and figures like Campbell's soup cans, dollar bills, Brillo soap boxes, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and others in multi-colours.



Since the 1980's, appropriation has been used by artists as a practice for creating new work by borrowing elements from prior works (Atkins 1997). Robert Atkins adds that such borrowings range from found objects to collages.

David Evans' book *Appropriation* (2009), gives insight into appropriation as a creative technique used by artists such as Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Glenn Ligon, Cindy Sherman, John Stezaker, Retort, Martha Rosler, Philip Taaffe amongst others. These written chapters<sup>7</sup> in *Appropriation* are about creative strategies that range from the ready-made, détournement, pastiche, rephotography, recombination, simulation and parody. A chapter on the *feminist critique* (2009:104) mentions artists such as Cindy Sherman, Deborah Cherry and Barbara Kruger who combines text and imagery in her works. These women artists were amongst others who were concerned with disassembling the structures that oppress women, by self-inserting themselves through appropriating art created by the opposite sex.

*New African Woman's* magazine article titled *Appropriation: Hey, we love everything about you... just not you*" written by Sherida Kuffour (2016:46-50) is about the west appropriating the African continent cultures but not acknowledging it. In the *Bad Girls* 1994 catalogue which Linda Goode Bryant (1994:100), writes in her essay *All that she wants: transgressions, appropriation, and art* defines "appropriation as an unequal exchange between parties, where one party benefits to the detriment of the other". In cultural terms, it is where Picasso took African art and reinterpreted, documented, preserved, re-designated, reproduced or disseminated to the disproportionate benefit of himself, who is the outsider to the African community.

Kuffour (2016:49) further explains how Picasso travelled to the African continent to gain inspiration for his cubist paintings but rarely acknowledged this. Neither did he give credit to the origins of his idea. Another case is of Lupita Nyong'o (b.1983) a Mexican

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<sup>7</sup>These chapters are written by Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin, Nicolas Bourriaud, Douglas Crimp, Thomas Crow, Guy Debord, Georges Didi-Huberman, Marcel Duchamp, Okwui Enwezor, Laura Mulvey, Jo Spence, Elisabeth Sussman, Lisa Tickner, Andy Warhol and others.

Kenyan actress, who during her 2016, May third *Met Hair Gala* inspiration was misappropriated by Vogue's Andre Leon Talley to an Audrey Hepburn (1929-1993) 1963 photoshoot. On May fourth 2016, Nyong'o posted a video on Instagram, referencing images of African women specifically Zulu women and Nina Simone with a caption *Hair inspiration. Check* and tagged *Vogue* Instagram handle. This echoes Kuffour's (2016:49) saying that "Black cannot be beautiful unless it is laced with whiteness." Nyong'o's sculptural hairdo had to be seen with reference to the late white British actress's hairstyle instead of a black woman. Nyong'o comments not only corrects the assumptions but also inserts a black woman's standpoint about her identity and being proud of who she is by simply using her body to insert herself in a white dominated fashion world.



UNDERWOOD, K. 4 May 2016. Lupita Nyong'o Puts 'Vogue' in 'Check' About Her Met Gala 2016 Hairstyle. (Available at:< [www.usmagazine.com/celebritystyle/news/lupita-nyogo](http://www.usmagazine.com/celebritystyle/news/lupita-nyogo)> Accessed: 6/05/2016)

Further politicising black women's hair in South African, artist and 2013 Standard Bank Young artist award winner, Mary Sibande (b. 1982) explores issues of gender, race and class through sculpturally representing her alter ego Sophie, who dresses in Victorian style, altered domestic uniform. Sibande explains in her artist statement that she "uses her body as an exploration of claiming identity in Postcolonial South Africa [and] as a tool to express concerns [with] the stereotypical depiction of women, particularly black women." This is exemplified in *conversation with Madame CJ Walker* (fig. 22), a sculptural piece, which features Madame CJ Walker's portrait being made out of synthetic hair by 'Sophie'. Sibande commemorates CJ Walker (1867-1919), the

million dollar beauty entrepreneur, who made hair products for black women. Hair forms part of black women's identity, a crown which forms part of their representation.



Fig. 22. SIBANDE, Mary. 2009. *Conversation with Madam CJ Walker*.

In her book: *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, hooks explains that

“many women have appropriated feminism to serve their own ends, especially those white women who have been at the forefront of the movement; but rather than resigning myself to this appropriation I choose to re-appropriate the term ‘feminism’, to focus on the fact that to be ‘feminist’ in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression” (1981).

### **Usefulness of appropriation**

The study of the colour line is problematised by Franz Fanon, who writes about the *fact of blackness: an issue of the black identity* (1986:16). As well as Steve Biko (2014:21) who writes that there are others who debate that they are not responsible for racism, claiming that they too are oppressed just like black people. Basically they argue that they are white skins wrapped in black souls. Similarly to Candice Breitz (b.1972) series *Extra* (2011) of the soapie, *Generations*, Breitz inserts her white body in the filming of the soapie, creating interference with the usual shootings.

Sam Nhlengethwa's (b. 1960) *Tribute series* (2008-2014), pays homage to South African visual artists<sup>8</sup> who contributed to the country's art history (Artist's press n.p). Nhlengethwa recreates the artists' work and re-contextualises it by displaying the work on an imaginary gallery space. Sebidi's *Tears of Africa*, (1988) well-known charcoal collage work is presented so that the viewer can renegotiate its original meaning in a different context of works.



Fig. 19. NHLENGETHWA, S. 2008-2014. *Tribute to Helen Sebidi*.

### **Problems with misappropriation**

An interrogation of whether or not appropriated artworks are original or authentic comes into play. Appropriation has been seen as inappropriate, immoral, plagiarising and as destroying the arts and opening up debates around issues of originality, copyright and authenticity. Artists who embark on this technique tend to misuse and steal. Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and Shepard Fairey (b.1970) are amongst some of the artists who have been faced with lawsuits. A South African fashion designer, Gavin Rajah has been involved in five copycat allegations involving stealing designs (Skade 2016)

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<sup>8</sup> These artists are Ephraim Ngatane, David Golblatt, Henri Matisse, Romare Bearden, Jean Michel Basquiat, Cecil Skotnes, Helen Sebidi, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Deborah Bell, Dumile Feni, William Kentridge, Judith Mason, Marlene Dumas, Peter Clark, David Koloane, George Pemba, Dumisani Mabaso, Esther Mahlangu, Robert Hodgins and Gerard Sekoto

In instances where appropriation is used inappropriately, issues of trivialisation become evident and misrepresentations of communities occur. The outsiders take credit for everything, where photographs of people in their cultural attire are taken and placed out of context, Candice Breitz' (b.1972) photomontages postcards, the *Rainbow series* (1996) as well as the *Ghost series* (1994-96). Nombiso Gasa (1999:319) points out that black women's bodies and sexualities have to be used in order to empower and create a balance by exposing the negative and positive portrayal of black women instead of only showing black women as helpless victims. As well, Bryant (1994:100) explains that the process entails one party benefiting at the expense of the other, especially in cultural appropriation, where those acted upon are exploited and misrepresented. In *Bad Girls* the new museum of contemporary art, a New York catalogue consisting of forty-five artists, Bryant further (1994:100) describes appropriation as an "unequal exchange between parties no more, no less. It is the process by which one party benefits to the detriment of the other."

### **Summary of Chapter Three**

Chapter three, provides an overview of black feminism. I have engaged with the writings of feminists such as hooks, Collins, Dabi, Qunta, Qqola, Malatjie, Peter to mention a few in discussing issues of representation. Malatjie in her thesis confronts the lack of black representation and the dearth of black feminism within South African art. Lorde suggests dismantling oppressive structures and employing different strategies and tools that focus on black women's experiences. The process of self-writing remains one of the prevalent strategies in black feminism as indicated by feminists such as Gasa, Magubane and so forth who narrate historiographies of South African women from a feminist perspective. Qqola, Makobane, and Abrahams point out that this process is critical in amplifying the archive of black women as they redresses the gaps of knowledge or research and recognise and celebrate the contributions of South African women. Ramgolam discusses Post-colonialism as one of the theories in her thesis, about seventeen female artists who were employed in the VAD at VUT from 1994 to 2004. These mentioned feminists are concerned with reclaiming and reframing the black image in history. I also make references to books written by Schamahmann, Turok and Muholi who self-insert themselves in order to explore how they positively portray black women within the South African art field.

Lastly, I discuss appropriation, as my adopted strategy to create commemorative portraits. This is done by borrowing elements from prior works of artists of the likes of Chicago, Levine, Sibande and others, to produce my *Black Queen: Reign supreme* series.

The next chapter discusses and analyses artworks of four selected South African women and indicates how the selected works have been appropriated to create my own body of artworks.

## **CHAPTER 4: APROPRIATION AND CREATIVE STRATEGIES IN THE WORKS OF FOUR SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN ARTISTS.**

### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out to discuss appropriation and creative strategies that are employed by four South African women artists: Zanele Muholi (b. 1972), Karina Turok (b. 1963), Sue Williamson (b.1941) and Bongi Bengu (b. 1970) in their works *Faces and Phases* (2010), *Life and Soul portraits of women who move South Africa* (2006), *A few South Africans* (1989) and *Walk to freedom* (2001). I explore their themes of the post-colonial gaze, homosexuality, identity, black and white photography and mixed media and their use of the portraiture genre in the context of South African art. Firstly I provide biographies on the chosen artists, giving a background to their choice of medium. Then I analyse the chosen works and in doing so I have employed Prof Allan Munro's (2015:71-87) four steps to criticism. Munro's first step is to give a description of what the work is about. The second step is to, classify and place the work into a category by means of looking at how it fits into the chosen field of study. The third step is to interpret what the work means then lastly to evaluate the effectiveness of the work.

### **Zanele Muholi's Biography**

Zanele Muholi is a black lesbian activist and photographer. Born in Umlazi, Durban in South Africa on the nineteenth of July 1972. Muholi is the youngest of the five children, born to Ashwell Tanji Banda Muholi and Bester Muholi. She completed her Advance course in photography at the Market Theatre Photoshop, in Newton, Johannesburg in 2003. She later held her first solo exhibition called *Visual sexuality* at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in March of 2004. She was awarded her Masters of Fine Arts degree in Documentary Media from Ryerson University in Toronto in 2009. Her thesis: *Mapping our histories: A visual history of black lesbians in post-apartheid South Africa* explores how visual activism can be employed by socially, culturally and economically marginalised women as a site of resistance to return the gaze of colonisers as well as to gaze critically into hetero patriarchal constructs of black women's bodies and their sexualities through photography (2009:3).

Muholi's work deals with bringing visibility to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) group in the black community. Through her photography, she

documents and researches journeys of this community and displays the images to make the public aware of the realities of assaults, hate crimes such as corrective rape and HIV/AIDS faced by the LGBTI community. She founded the *Inkayiso* organization in 2009, that serves as a platform for queer activism. She is also the co-founder of the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), which is a black women's organisation. It was founded in 2002 in Johannesburg and aims at articulate, advance, protect and promote the rights of black lesbians, bisexual and transgender women (LBT). ([www.charity-charities.org/South-Africacharities/Johannesburg-1556423html](http://www.charity-charities.org/South-Africacharities/Johannesburg-1556423html). Accessed 24/ 01/2013).

Muholi has participated in several group and solo exhibitions both nationally and internationally. Her series titled *Faces and Phases* was shown in Germany, Toronto, Montreal and Berlin in 2014. In 2013, the series was exhibited in Italy, and New York. In 2010 it toured to Germany and Johannesburg and in the same year it toured to London. In 2009 it opened at the Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg. She has also been awarded numerous local and international awards and residencies. Some of her works have been collected by museums in the United States of America, Germany, France, Netherlands, Italy, London and South Africa, to mention a few.

### ***The Faces and Phases series***

According to the Stevenson gallery, the *Faces and Phases* series consists of more than 250 portraits dating from 2006 to 2014. The ongoing series is of black and white photographic portraits of queers' experiences from different countries such as Botswana, Toronto, Amsterdam and Zimbabwe, at various ages and from various backgrounds and a wide range of professions such as "...scholars, soccer players, cultural activists, dancers, lawyers, filmmakers, writers, photographers, human rights and gender activists, mothers, friends, sisters, brothers, daughters and sons" (Muholi 2010:7). For example, there is an image of Pastor *Nokuthula Dhladhla* (2007) dressed in a clerical collar, with a shirt and suit jacket.

Muholi refers to the meaning of *Faces and Phases* and the interplay of the two words. Her project focuses on the *Face* which she uses in the dictionary's definition of "the front of the head, from the head to the chin". Muholi (2007:64) explains that it means,



as a “photographer and community worker, being face-to-face with the many lesbians I interact with from different Gauteng townships such as Alexandra, Soweto, Vosloorus, Katlehong, Kagiso...” Phases are the different stages that the LGBTI community goes through and their many identities. Muholi (2010:7) also highlights that *Faces and Phases* is about the histories, struggles and lives of LGBTIs “...on this mother queer planet...”



Fig. 15. MUHOLI, Zanele. 2007. *Nokuthula Dhladhla*.

This commemorative and celebratory series was published in a book in 2010 by Prestel publishers and later in 2014 it was republished as *Faces and Phases 20062014* by Steidl and the Walther Collection. Muholi (2010: 6) states that she embarked on this visual activist journey to portray black queers positively and to make them visible through portraiture to preserve their visual histories for posterity. She further explains that *Faces* expresses the person, and the *phases* signifies the transition from one stage of sexuality or gender expression and experience to the next. In viewing the work, she wants the viewer to ponder the following questions:

“What does an African lesbian look like? Is there a lesbian aesthetic or do we express our gendered, racialized and classed selves in rich and diverse ways? Is this lesbian more ‘authentic’ than that lesbian because she wears a tie and the other does not? Is this a man or a woman? Is this a transman? Can you identify a rape survivor by the clothes she wears?” (Muholi 2010:7).

These fine portraits are photographed by Muholi, who is in control of the light and directs the sitter. Muholi (2009:16) clarifies that she uses both 35mm and 120mm film

with still cameras. She adds that she prefers to use black and white because of the texture and the classical feel it creates in the photographs. The photographic prints are 86.5cm x 60.5cm in paper size on silver gelatin print, the image sizes are 76.5 x 50.5cm. The portraits are placed against plain or various patterned backgrounds such as a tablecloth *Dorothy Magome* (2010) in a floral shirt and hat and floral duvet cover in *Zimaseka 'Zim' Salusalu's* (2011) portrait, wearing white pants and an Uzzi (is a South African Italian inspired and lifestyle fashion label) shirt. The backdrops of the participants are the real backgrounds, photographed in the spaces of the participants. The poses of the participants differ from one sitter to the next. Some of the photographs show head and shoulders like *Nomonde Mbusi's* (16) portrait. There are no full length portraits in the series. All photographs are visual representations of a single person. They all gaze directly at the camera or the viewer, except for the portrait of *Busi Sigasa* (14). Sigasa looks away from the camera, into the distance and she is commemorated as one of the participants who passed away on the twelfth of March 2007 at the age of twenty-five (2009:23). She contracted HIV/AIDS after she was raped (2009:24).



Fig. 16. MUHOLI, Zanele. 2007. *Nomonde Mbusi*.



Fig. 17. MUHOLI, Zanele. 2006. *Busi Sigasa*.

According to Mulvey (1989:19), women are displayed on two levels. They are gazed upon as erotic subjects by the person doing the capturing or as erotic subjects for spectators partaking in the act of objectification. Historically women have been the

image: being gazed upon termed the post-colonial gaze. Those looked at and those looking enter into a power relationship. In Muholi's series the participants, return the gaze, by looking straight at the viewer. Gadede Baderoon, is an author, poet, media scholar and an academic, who writes in her essay *How to look* (2007) that Muholi's photographs reframe the way of seeing and looking at the black body.

Muholi also self-inserts herself in the series, this is noticeable in *Zanele Muholi* (fig. 17). The inclusion of Muholi herself in the series represents her assertion of her identity as a black lesbian activist and an artist in her self-portrait Zanele. She explains that in her Zulu culture, men were responsible for taking pictures and preserving lives and women were seen as the spectacle (2009:14). Muholi reimages and reimagines herself and her participants to celebrate what it means to be lesbian in South Africa. bell hooks in her book *Art matters* (1995), expresses the fundamental concern in black feminism to engage with the notion of black self-definition. That the notion of autobiography plays an integral part in questioning, challenging and overcoming all forms of domination that black women experience in society.



Fig. 17. MUHOLI, Z. 2011. *Zanele Muholi*.

Most of the participants are photographed in the outdoors, making use of the natural light and Muholi (2009:16) adds that no fancy equipment and artificial lights are used in any of her work. Their faces and expressions dominate, as the viewer is left with contemplating what the subject is gazing at. In the article *Zanele Muholi: Faces and Phases: aperture 218 queer* (2014:63), which records an interview with Deborah Willis, the Chairperson of the Department of Photography and Imaging at Tisch School of the Arts in the New York University, Muholi reveals that she asks her participants to look good. She asks her participants to look the way that they would like their photographs

taken. They need to ask themselves questions of who they are, where they come from, what shaped their lives and what made them the person they are (2014:63).

The participants are composed or positioned in the middle of the frame, dressed in different attire ranging from designer t-shirts such as *Mbali Zulu* (2010), shirts, cropped tops and ties, caps and hats, jackets and jerseys in diverse hairstyles such as dreadlocks, weaves and bald heads. Mbali wears a superman t-shirt, the iconic symbol of the white male superhero. The character is set to save lives, stop crime and give assistance where needed. On the other hand, *Pinky Zulu* (2010) wears a t-shirt screen-printed *102% homosexual* with two interconnected female astrological symbol for Venus which makes a statement that Pinky is 102% into the same sex. Muholi (2009:17) explains that the images that are captured do not have any makeup or artificial lighting and the participants are presented in the natural manner to reveal the intimacy that is a feature of the LGBT phenomenon.

The portraits are collectively displayed to create a visual archive. Each photograph is recorded with a full name of the participant, place and date of the sitting. The images are exhibited on the walls in a uniform grid. Muholi references the late Audre Lorde who was a black lesbian feminist writer. In her essay *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984), which is a collection of fifteen essays and speeches dating from 1976 until 1984, she also challenges the 'queerphobia' making the invisible visible. Muholi is an insider and outsider within the black lesbian community in which she extends her portraits to include a button format. In this way participants have direct ownership of their images. Participants can decide on how, where and when their images can be accessed. Muholi (2009:29) explains that her use of five buttons are used to mark the existence of black lesbians and as a medium to producing archival material in large quantities. Two buttons are for participants, two are kept by the artist and one is contributed to the Black Lesbian Memory project which was initiated by FEW in 2008 to archive black lesbian lives. As well as the Lesbian Herstory Archive (LHA) in New York and in Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action previously known as GALA in South Africa (Muholi 2009:39).

Joseph Underwood's *Another Africa* article on *Zanele Muholi: Faces and Phases: 3 Years, 3 Continents 3 Venues* on the sixth of October 2015, compares three installations in the *Faces and Phases* series. Underwood analyses the installation, framing, spacing and lighting of the work and the impact each has on the display and the artwork. The three exhibition spaces are the *Isibonelo/ Evidence* which was her solo show at the Brooklyn Museum in 2015, the *Precarious Imaging* exhibition at the Raw Material Company in the 2014 *Dak'art art Biennale* and the *Imaginary Fact* exhibition at the 55<sup>th</sup> *Venice Biennale* in 2013 in the South African Pavilion.

The 2015 exhibition was mounted in the US in November during the campaign #BlackLivesMatter. On one end of the gallery were handwritten testimonials of LGBTI participants. The portraits are dry mounted, framed in glass and white matte frames and arranged in a grid with no empty spaces. On the other hand, in the *Precarious Imaging* exhibition, the series is unframed and simply pinned to the wall. Still in the grid format, but some of the spaces are missing, left open, exposing the grey wall, leaving the viewer to ponder as to what happened to the missing image or the participants. Maybe this is to symbolize the gaps and missing information on participants who either were murdered or went missing with their stories still untold.

Lastly, the *Imaginary Fact: Contemporary South African art* which was an archive exhibition curated by Brenton Maart in which he featured other artists such as Joanne Bloch (b.1939), Wim Botha (b.1974), David Koloane (b.1938), Donna Kukama (b.1981), Gerhard Marx (b.1976), Maja Marx (b.1977), Philip Miller (b.1964), Sam Nhlengethwa (b.1955), Johannes Phokela (b.1966), Cameron Platter (b.1978), Andrew Putter (b.1965), Athi-Patra Ruga (b.1984), Penny Siopis, James Webb (b.1975), Sue Williamson and Nelisiwe Xaba (b.1972). The series is placed in a grid with 200 portraits pinned to a white wall (2013:108). There were still some open areas. The white wall gives the portraits a sense of isolation as though they are not connected and are displayed as separates.



Zanele Muholi- *Isibonelo/Evidence Installation View*, 2015. Photo by Jonathan Dorado. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum. (Available at:< <http://www.anotherafrica.net/art-culture/zanele-muholi-faces-and-phases-3years-3-continents-3-venues>> Accessed 30/11/2015)



*Precarious Imaging Exhibition Installation View*, 2014, Dakar, Senegal. Photo by Joseph Underwood. (Available at:< <http://wikis.fu-berlin.de/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=646984871>> Accessed 2/11/2015)



Zanele Muholi's *Faces & Phases* @ 55th Venice Biennale, Italy.2013. (Available at:< <https://inkanyiso.org/page/84/>> Accessed 2/11/2015)

Muholi clarifies in her interview with Willis that the ongoing series of *Faces and Phases* started when she was twenty-five years of age. Her idea developed when a friend of hers gave her the book called *Viewfinders: Black women photographers* (1993) written by Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe published in America. Muholi references Joan Elisabeth Biren's (also known as JEB) work. She is an American photographer who also documents LGTBI communities in her work. Muholi (2009:1) quotes Biren's take on visual activism that "without a visual identity there is no community, no support network and no movement". Consequently the LGTBI community has continuously to make themselves visible. Muholi (2014: 60) appropriates Biren's work, stating that Biren has captured what she was trying to do except Muholi is doing it from the South African perspective. Like in the portraits in the *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians* (1979: 69) book there is an image of a lesbian couple lost in an embrace. Anderson (2004), who is an educator, historian and community activist, interviewed Biren about photographing lesbians. She explains that Biren wanted to reflect on her own reality:

"I think everybody wants that. My experience is that there's an enormous hunger among people to be able to see themselves. You know, people want to see themselves in photographs, they want to see themselves on TV, they want

to see themselves in film. It's always an enormous emotional high the first time you see something that is you in that medium. And that is because there's this huge hunger for the kind of validation that comes from seeing a reflection. And part of why I've devoted my life to what I call 'making the invisible visible' is for that reason" (Anderson February 2004: 70).



Fig. 5. BIREN, Joan E. 1979. *Priscilla and Regina*.

### **Karina Turok's biography**

Karina Turok was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1963 in Cape Town. Turok specialises in social documentary, which she started while studying the Jewish community through her photography. This study titled the *Jewish at the tip of Africa* was part of her Bachelor's Degree at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts in Cape Town. It consists of photographs of the European descendants living in Africa, in images of a haircutting ceremony of a three year old, a watchmaker who stays in Long Street in Cape Town and a shop owner in Woodstock.

Turok obtained her master's degree in 2002 which focused on the *Social skin: initiation through bodily transformation of four South African women: an exploration using documentary photography*. Through photography, Turok documents the transformation of the physical body of four young South African women through their initiations into adulthood. She documents Tanya Leroux, a seventeen year old from a



coloured community in the Western Cape, Rocklands, Mitchell's Plain, who practices teeth extraction termed 'passion gap' (2002:26). Also at the Xhosa traditional ritual of rite of passage *intonjane* of Ntombovuyo Alice Mtengwane in Transkei which includes the cutting and marking the body (2002:60-74). The marriage ritual of Sarah Green who is from a Jewish community, her Hasidic bride's ritual practices which includes a hair covering ritual, a *sheitel* and bath ritual, and a *mikvah* (2002:76-87) and Narissa Hanekom who tattoos her body, these are documented (2002:50-58) in photographic images. Turok has received numerous accolades and has photographed the likes of the late Nelson Mandela and has exhibited both locally and abroad.

### ***Life and Souls women of who have moved South Africa***

*Life and Souls women of who have moved South Africa* is a book which acknowledges seventy-five South African women in black and white photography. Thirty five of these women are black, twenty-six are whites, seven are Indians and seven are coloureds. The portraits include a narrative of each woman telling stories about their lives of what has made them to be the particular individuals they turned out to be. The women come from a wide range of professions as political activists such as the late Albertina Sisulu and Adelaide Tambo, to story tellers such as Gcina Mhlope, women in parliament Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, singer Abigail Khubeka (2006:102) and fashion designer Nkensani Nkosi.

## Dorothy Masuku human rights activist, singer, composer

My father used to be a great traveller, because he worked on a train. Strictly for whites. He was a chef – that's how he met my mother in Bulawayo. So he met this girl and they fell in love and I was born from that. They never married but eventually my father brought me back after paying lobola. Then he was allowed to bring me back to South Africa. That was in 1945. I stayed with my aunt who lived in Sophiatown, but I used to go and visit my mother.

I was born a politician. I was very conscious of wrong things from the word go; from a very young age I saw wrong and right. I knew there was something wrong, why the white folks were not allowing me to do certain things. And these things used to puzzle me until much later when I discovered what was happening. When I went to school in Johannesburg, I was very confused. How even in church people were not mixing. There used to be some children from a white school, a white convent, coming to our school for some reason known to the authorities. They would sit on one side of the church and at lunchtime they would be taken back to their school for lunch or they would have lunch there, but in a different room. I used to question. I still did not understand, I still could not get the answer, because to me a human being was still a human being, and the reason why there was this segregation I did not understand at all.

I did fundraising. I was fighting for this region to be freed. For me it was Africa and it is still Africa. People would see me; they would start a little group to sing about intimidation, political songs, because I used to write a lot of political songs. In Zambia I wrote one song that was banned immediately. They just got rid of that song at once, but it used to get

through to people, on Radio Freedom. The translation of the song is this: 'A Boer child was brought up without manners, he or she grew up without respecting me, but he will respect me when I take over the country.' That is happening now. When they released great Mandela from prison, I was very happy. The other person I adored was De Klerk. He released my hero. The thinking people of South Africa must honour De Klerk.

I would like to be remembered. I will be remembered. You will remember me all right because some of us do not die. You still have my songs; you still have me in your movies. When I am gone a hundred, you will still remember me for the good things I am doing for people.

### B I O G R A P H Y

Born in Bulawayo. Dorothy Masuku composed the popular *Pata Pata* song recorded by Miriam Makeba, among many other compositions. For over thirty years she performed to raise funds for the liberation of Africa. More recently she has raised money from performances to help researchers develop a cure for HIV/Aids.

1 2 4

### An example of one of the biographies (Turok 2006:124)

Each individual also gives a background on influential people in their lives and how they came to pursue their chosen careers. The biographical detail of each participant is given in which the name of the candidate, date and place of birth and their chosen field. It is noticeable in Masuku's biography that she was born in Bulawayo, she is a composer, human rights activist and singer. She composed the popular song *Pata pata* which was recorded by Miriam Makeba amongst other recordings. For thirteen years she has performed to raise funds for the liberation of Africa. Most recently she has raised money from her performances to help researchers develop a cure for HIV/AIDS (2006:124).

Some of the women in their narratives converse about their educational, economic and racial struggles during apartheid their loss and separation from their loved ones, being exiled and imprisoned. Mamphelle Ramphele who is an academic, doctor and activist writes

"If I had lived within the boundaries society put on one, I would be somewhere in some rural village- you would never have met me and I would probably be married with six children and suffering abuse like many women... I have had a

very full life and I have accomplished much of what I wanted to do. I wanted to shape the politics of my country and I did that as a political activist. I wanted to shape the socio-economic state side of my country; I have done that as a researcher and a Vice Chancellor at the University of Cape Town. I wanted to understand and play some role in shaping the global environment; I think I have done that with the World Bank..." (2006:20).

The late Amina Cachalia, who was an anti-apartheid activist, a politician and a women's rights activist, narrates her experience of the ninth of August 1956 march, a Thursday, a day chosen because it was a day off for domestic workers. She explains how she was fully pregnant with her first child and was taken straight to the amphitheatre to wait for the rest of women at the Union Buildings (2006:114).



Fig. 59. TUROK, K. 2006. *Albertina Sisulu*.

The late Albertina Sisulu's (1918-2011) portrait is of her with one of her grandsons as indicated in *Albertina Sisulu* (fig. 59). In the portrait Albertina is characterized as her referred name 'Mother of the nation'. She was one of the organisers of the 1956 march, who used her home in Orlando Soweto as a classroom. She was an activist, leader, nurse, matriarch, wife and mother to the nation while her husband was imprisoned on Robben Island. Turok portrays her seated with a toddler and in the background is her late husband Walter Sisulu's portrait. The three images are composed looking happy when reading from their facial expressions. Walter is overlooking or watching over the mother and child, symbolising the idea of absent but present father figure. He was either out attending to political matters, underground and hiding from the police during

apartheid or in jail for twenty six years, missing out on the upbringing of his children. Zapiro's cartoon, *Our great tree Ma Sisulu 1918-2011* (fig. 63) personifies Sisulu's character. She was known as ma Sisulu and she was a mother to Max, Mlungile, Zwelakhele, Lindiwe and Nonkululeko and adopted three others during her lifetime.



Fig. 63. ZAPIRO. 2011. *Our great tree Ma Sisulu 1918-2011*.

In the book, Turok acknowledges other photographers such as Zanele Muholi, Zanele Guguza and eleven others who assisted her in the 'photoshoots'. Others transcribed the interviews, designed the book and provided financial support. Friends, families and mentors are thanked for their support in dealing with this mammoth project. Clearly she indicates that the project was a collaborative exercise where professionals in different fields were sourced to assist in bringing the project together. Turok (2006:8) in her preface, expresses how she selected her participants through a snowballing technique. Extensively consulting with informed bodies for advice and guidance on how to approach the project and who to include or exclude. She also states her limitation with regards to the project that she would have liked to have included individuals such as Miriam Makeba, Brenda Fassie who died, Zanele Mbeki and Winnie Madikizela Mandela amongst others but she could not persuade them to participate. Turok does not elaborate on the chosen poses and shots she took of these women. No dates, places or details of the chosen backgrounds are given in the actual information on the photographs so as to contextualise the whole project.

Similarly to Muholi, Turok borrowed her idea from Brian Lanker's book *I dream a world of black women who changed America* 1989. Turok (2006:6) recalls that she came across Lanker's book while studying and working in New York in 1989 and 1990 at the International Center for Photography. She says that she knew that one day she would create a similar book celebrating South African women instead. Likewise, seventy-five black African women are interviewed by Lanker (1989:6), a white male photojournalist who felt that he needed to prevent these historical lives from being forgotten. There are numerous deductions that one can draw from these two projects of Turok and Lanker. One is that white individuals can still find black subjects topical even if they do not belong to the black community. Christine Qunta (1987:11) highlights that this is a problem as the white observers are outsiders looking in and continue to employ theoretical assumptions and methodologies which hamper the realistic assessment of the subject matter. Black feminism promotes the idea of self-determination that black women need to insert themselves and tell their stories instead of the whites creating information for them. This information clearly indicates that, for the most part, black women are invisible and oppressed.

Dabi Nkululeko (1987:88-89) points out that "...knowledge cannot best be determined by alien researchers who will always be laden with the trappings of their own history, values, culture and ideology, regardless of how progressive they may be." In agreement the late Black Conscious leader, Steve Biko, (2004:98) also expresses concern that

"[it] is not enough for whites to be in the offensive. So immersed are they in the prejudice that they do not believe that blacks can formulate their own thought without white prejudice and trusteeship. Thus, even those whites who see much wrong with the system make it their business to control the response of the blacks to the provocation. No one is suggesting that it is not the business of liberal whites to oppose what is wrong. However, it appears to us too much of a coincidence that liberals- few as they are- should not only be determining the modus operandi of those blacks who oppose the system, but also leading it, in spite of their involvement in the system. To us it seems that their role spells out the totality of the white power structure- the fact that though whites are our problem, it is still whites who want to tell us how to deal with that problem."

While whites in South Africa whether male or female have the power or authority and resources to oppress black women and whites can oppress blacks and misrepresent black experiences to forward their own agendas, arguably black women can also do the same to blacks. A black woman cannot speak on behalf of all black women and assume that her experience as a black woman is a standard for all blacks as this would undermine the idea of self-determination. Patricia Hill Collins (2000:ix) says that she cannot and should not speak on behalf of all African American women because a black feminist must first learn to speak for herself. But, she can empower herself by meeting other black women who have undergone similar journeys so that she and them can change the world which they inhabit.

### **Sue Williamson's biography**

Sue Williamson was born in 1941 in Lichfield, England and immigrated to South Africa in 1948. She now lives and works in Cape Town. She obtained her Advance Diploma in Fine Arts from the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town in 1984. She completed a two year Fine Art Diploma at Rorkes Drift Art Centre in 1978. Williamson works in a variety of media, including prints, photography, and installations. Her works specifically focus on dealing with memories of apartheid. Apart from obtaining numerous awards, she has exhibited her work nationally and internationally. She is also a writer, a critic and an Editor-in-chief of *ARTTHROB*. Williamson has exhibited extensively both locally and internationally in solo and group exhibitions. She has also received numerous accolades and her work is collected both locally and abroad. She is written about in selected articles and books and she has curated three catalogues and authored three books: *Resistance art in South Africa* (1989), *Art in South Africa: the Future Present* (1996) and *South African art now* (2009).

### ***A few South Africans series***

*A few South Africans* is a mixed media series in photo etchings and screen print collages sourced from magazines, newspapers and photographs. The series features South African women involved in the struggle against apartheid. It was compiled between 1983 and 1987. These environmental portraits are of black, white and Indian women executed in the subject's home or in their life and surroundings. For example, *Amina Cachalia's* (fig. 61) portrait is of her and in the background is her

husband, Yusuf and her sister who were not allowed to have any communication with her until her ban was removed in 1978. They lived next door to her, the gate symbolizes the barrier and her staring into the distance in her loneliness. The women included in the series of seventeen portraits were: Maggie Magaba (1983), Helen Joseph (1983), Nokukanya Luthuli (1983), Elizabeth Paul (1983), Amina Cachalia (1984), Annie Silinga (1984), Virginia Mngoma (1984), Caroline Motsoaledi (1984), Lilian Ngoyi (1984), Albertina Sisulu (1984), Case No. 6831/21 (1984), Charlotte Maxeke (1985), Jenny Curtis Schoon (1985), Winnie Mandela (1985), Mamphela Ramphele (1985) and Miriam Makeba (1987). Each piece represents a woman who contributed to African history and who deserves recognition.

A few represent the anonymous many who were part of the struggle. This is because little was known about them and their pictures never appeared in popular press during apartheid. Williamson sourced the images of the women from banned books in hidden University libraries and some she photographed, such as *Mamphela Ramphele* (fig. 62). Each woman is depicted in front of a significant landscape and surrounded by specific references to the subject's life. The size of each image is 100cm x 70cm. The series honours women who played a role in the struggle against apartheid. Williamson (1989:77) knew some of the women she represented and she researched biographies of those she did not. The layered silkscreened borders around the portraits add further details. When it came to the way people in the squatter camps and townships lived, she elevated family snapshots to small artworks by framing these images with coloured paper cut with zig zag scissors. The borders were derived from homemade picture frames Williamson encountered on visits to black townships where she also came across kanga clothes or personal artefacts.

(Goodman gallery 2014).

According to Garney (2004), Williamson's work is about the people rather than herself. Williamson explains that how she uses stories from people and transforms them into artworks. She reasons that by making images of popular figures, most people will understand her works. She also sees herself as an archivist, in which she presents materials in a serious matter and wants to see her projects develop. An important part of the history of this series is that they were printed as postcards, in order to make the

images widely accessible to the general public. These postcards have been referred to as 'one of the most important icons of the eighties' (Goodman gallery 2015).

In Turok's book, Williamson comments that she was very anxious about creating the series of portraits of women in the struggle, in the 1980s. She explains that when representing somebody's life, one has to be so sensitive, because one is taking someone's life and making it your version. The end product is viewed by others. Williamson further adds that she was anxious about accusations of climbing on the bandwagon and appropriating other people's stories. Her anxiety was laid to rest, when Helen Joseph agreed to open her exhibition and spoke of how 'Sue has taken our history out of the cupboard and she's put it on the wall' (2006:106).

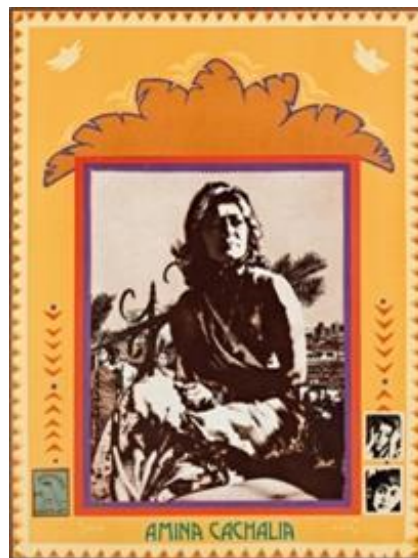


Fig. 61. WILLIAMSON, Sue. 1984. *Amina Cachalia*





Fig. 62. WILLIAMSON, Sue. 1985. *Mamphela Ramphele*.

### **Bongi Bengu's biography**

Bongi Bengu was born in Eshowe, in 1970. Bengu left with her family in 1978 when they went into exile. In 1993, she obtained her BA in Fine Arts from Mount Vernon College in Washington D.C. In 1997, she received her Master's Degree in Fine Arts from Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town titled *Power gained – power lost: aspects of contemporary African women visualized* in which she tries to align herself with the selected women in order to construct her own identity. In her interview with Gerry Rantseli-Elsdon on the *Africa News Network (ANN7) Vuka Africa*, Bengu explains how she and her family were exiled because of her father's political involvement during apartheid. She was only eight years old when they moved to Switzerland where she was homesick and felt like an outsider, 'being the other'. Having experienced being dispossessed, she went through forms of oppression such as racism, classism and sexism (1997:4). Thus her study, developed out of her examining her own history and finding strength in black women such Miriam Makeba who were also exiled. Bengu's works deal with issues of race and gender. (<http://www.art.co.za/bongibengu/>. Accessed 16/01/2012). Bengu has widely exhibited, locally and international and has been involved in numerous residencies and workshops.

### ***Marching to freedom (2001)***

Bongi's collage *Marching to Freedom* (fig. 4) is a mixed media artwork on 100cm x125cm paper. Bengu celebrates female pioneers and heroines that include Thandi Klaasen (1931), Miriam Makeba (1932-2008) and Dorothy Masuku (1935) a Zimbabwean singer and composer. Masuku and Makeba were best friends, performed and toured together. Masuku also wrote the *Pata pata* song in which Makeba performed. All three women are musicians, all acted in the *King Kong* (1959) production and were exiled for thirty one years due to the play. Makeba was one of the first artists to put South African music on the international map in the 1960s. Thandi Klaasen is a legendary jazz singer from Sophiatown who is well known for her *tsotsi taal*. Music during apartheid was used as an instrument of communication to the outside world.

Bengu (1997:19) explains that she sources her material from photographs in newspapers and magazines. She creates collages by collecting different images and then cutting and pasting them together. In her usage of colour, she uses colour scheme of greens and reds and browns, earth-toned colours to represent African women and their association with the earth. These heroines' faces are drawn bigger in caricature than their actual faces to emphasise their facial expressions and to indicate their identity. Symbols like the butterfly are depicted to show that these women are free from the apartheid system; they can walk freely and freely associate with each other. In this body of artwork, she seeks to locate these women's places in history, as they are invisible in visual art books. "As a Black visual artist," Bengu explains, "my experience is that woman is still not represented and valued in the same manner as man" (Quoted in Roberts 2004).



Fig. 4. BENGU, Bongji. 2001. *Marching to Freedom*.

### **In summary**

Williamson and Bengu focused on creating colour collages made from mixed media of women who are well known and who were in key positions during apartheid. They were affected by the segregation acts implemented, ranging from forced removals, *dompas* requirements and individuals such as Miriam Makeba being exiled. Turok and Muholi's works involve black and white photography and one-on-one interviews with the

subjects, some unknown, unlike Williamson's and Bengu's work. Bengu did not create a series from her work, as she portrays all three women on one canvas and the other three artists have created platforms for individual subjects. The three artists: Muholi, Turok and Williamson made multiple works on the same theme which creates a sense of cohesiveness and of a coherent body of work. The works are not repetitive, each piece is compelling and powerful on its own. In all four artists' works, there is a hint that the women icons stand for and are symbols of the struggle and are recognised as embodying certain qualities: black women like 'mother of the nation', Albertina Sisulu, 'mama Africa' Miriam Makeba and so forth.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

The aim of my study was to contribute to the empowering and positive representation of black women in the Visual Arts by producing commemorative portraits of black women in key positions who are particularly associated with the Vaal Region. It is in chapter one that I provide an overview of the study what it entails, the aims, rationale, the literature and theoretical review on black feminism, methodology and I outline the chapters.

Chapter one, introduced Penny Siopis's comment on the importance of an image. The quotation is relevant and significant as it reveals the crucial role of commemorative portraiture. This form of art displays portraits of iconic and high profile figures in society. Siopis references the well-known and late Black Consciousness Movement leader, Steve Bantu Biko who bewailed the absence of the visual representation of black women's images in the Visual Arts, especially in the genre of portraiture. Whereby similar famous women such Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, Nkosazana Dhlamini Zuma, Esther Mahlangu, the late Miriam Makeba and others were under-represented and misrepresented in the Visual Arts.

Apart from the Stoned Cherry fashion label owner; Nkhensani Nkosi, I considered other black feminists: bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Yvette Abrahams, Nombiso Gasa, Pumla Dineo Gqola amongst others These are black feminists who have taken it upon themselves to question and challenge the misrepresentation of black women by inserting and writing themselves and their bodies into 'her-stories' using black feminist theory to redefine and create such stories. Historians such as Judy Peter and Portia Malatjie contribute to the positive and empowering representation of black women whilst Muholi, Bengu, Sibande and others artistically communicate their ideas, experiences, desires, histories and ideas through art.

To enhance the visual representation, I have selected nine black women who are associated with the Vaal Region. This is done by producing commemorative portraits

by creatively appropriating other visual artists through qualitative inquiry by integrating textual and theoretical components to produce this practice-based research.

In chapter two, in order to frame this visual representation, black feminist theories of self-insertion, self-determination and self-representation were employed to question, challenge and expose the omission, invisibility, non-recognition and the negative portrayal of black women. The chapter commences with Malatjie's definition of black feminism. She explains that black feminism developed from mainstream feminism and that it broke away from feminism because mainstream feminism dealt with universal and general women's issues. It did not include all women from different races, classes, sexuality, nationalities and so forth from Third world countries.

Black feminists affirm that black women's achievements need to be acknowledged individually such as in Muholi's *Faces and Phases* series. Malatjie further explains that black feminism employs strategies and theories such as self-insertion through self-determination, self-representation, self-identity, and the black women being her own model. It also adopts appropriation as a black feminist strategy to articulate their own identities in the Visual Arts. Theories of classicism in the old regime under Apartheid created an imbalance, where white concerns predominated over any others. Whiteness was more privileged and more fortunate as argued by Khan, Goniwe and others. Third World and Postcolonial feminists argue that women from different cultures experienced effects of colonialism differently from women in Western countries.

Malatjie also discusses the individual black women's experience in the light of mainstream feminism which excludes concern for women from the Third World that are different from those who are white and western. Black feminism advocates for black women to be the speaking subjects by self-writing themselves into their own stories to amplify the archive on black women in order to redress the gaps of thinking, acknowledgement, and recognition and to commemorate black women's contributions. Such writers as Collins, hooks, Gqola, Portia Malatjie, Peter, Abrahams, Gasa and Nkululeko, informed my research and provided different viewpoints on representation, under-representation and ways in which to consider creating my own body of works.

In chapter three I undertook a deeper reading of the works of Sue Williamson *A few South Africans* (1989), Bongi Bengu's *Walk to freedom* (2001), Karina Turok's *Life and Soul portraits of women who move South Africa* (2006) and Zanele Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2010) and their approach to appropriation as a creative black feminist strategy and technique in creating commemorative portraiture in their art. I explored their themes of identity, the Postcolonial gaze, black female body and a range of mixed media from photo etching and collage to black and white photography which addresses issues of patriarchy, sexism, homophobia and racism in South Africa.

Chapter Four takes you through the processes and methods I embarked on in creating the artworks to the opening of the exhibition and the walkabout. This chapter that a lot of records took place to archive the actual event through video recording. A catalogue was created to document the work and a comment book was put on display to receive written feedback from the viewers.

The study of commemorative portraiture is increasing and more black women are inserting themselves into the field of the Visual Arts, but more work still needs to be done. I had purposively selected a small group of women who were black and were associated with Vaal Region which enabled me to answer my research question, but they are not representative of the population of Black women from the Vaal. My study is important to the South African art field as it builds on works of other female artists, redresses the under-representation and negative portrayal of black women by focusing mainly on the women associated with the Vaal which has not been addressed before.

I was able to have a successful opening, a walkabout and received positive feedback. The study covered only nine women and was prefaced with Lucia's essay on other women from the Vaal Region which is included in the catalogue. It did not include any coloured women and black males as part of the series, since a diverse visual recording of key people in the Vaal Triangle was beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, further studies can be explored on either black men or coloured, Indian and white women in key positions. I can also extend my research methodology to include

interviews and to undertake more in-depth research into television documentaries such as *21Icons*, *The Close Up*.

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