

The Political House of Art:  
The South African National Gallery 1930-2009

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# Declaration

I, Catherine N Hahn, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own work. Where work has been derived from other sources, I confirm this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

The thesis analyses modes of representation in the South African National Gallery (SANG) between 1930 and 2009. Built in 1930, for the larger part of its history SANG was situated in a white state that disenfranchised the black populace. Whiteness, as citizenship, was normalised and glorified in the state's museums. Analysis of evidence collected from the archive, décor, art collection, exhibitions, attendance of walking tours and semi-structured interviews with staff demonstrates that SANG's historic practice does not fit neatly within the dominant theoretical understanding of the art museum, namely a sacred space in which power has been obscured through the 'art for art's sake' model. Instead, the thesis finds at SANG invisible symbolic capital resided alongside the more muscular capital of the colony, which derived its strength from an overt relationship with commerce, politics and race. The thesis further finds that SANG developed a close relationship with its white audience through its construction as a 'homely space'. As a consequence, I argue SANG developed museological conventions that better fit the analogy of the political house than the temple.

Taking new museum ethics into consideration, the thesis examines how SANG's distinctive heritage impacted on its ability to be inclusive. My fieldwork on recent representational practice at SANG reveals strategies congruent with the post-museum, including performative political exhibitions, diversification of the collection and active dialogue with the communities it seeks to serve. At the same time embedded modes of white cultural representation were identified that restricted its capacity to 'move-on'. The thesis contributes to the field of museum studies by drawing attention to the significance of the individual histories of art institutions in determining their ability to make change. The thesis also contributes to the field of visual sociology by presenting images and 'map-making' as an integral feature of the research design.

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## Introduction

On the 3rd November 1930 The South African National Gallery (SANG) was the final public institution to be opened in Cape Town's prestigious Company's Garden. Company's Garden began its life in 1652 as the main source of fresh food for the Dutch East India Company (le Roux 2005: 6). Initially tended by slaves who lived on site, the Garden's origins foreshadowed its later manifestation as the seminal containment vehicle for the rationalisation of white South African power. As the map of Company's Garden [plate 0.1] demonstrates, the majority of the country's cultural, political, legislative and administrative seats were erected either within or in the immediate vicinity of the garden. These edifices enforced white authority through, what Hommi Bhaba describes, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), as 'the immediate – unmediated – visibility of its rules of recognition as the unmistakable referent of historical necessity' (1994: 112).

SANG, as the final building to be erected in the garden, stood as testament to the journey white settlement had taken. Its origins lay in a small and 'dingy' collection housed for decades in inauspicious settings including the 'back rooms' at the South African Museum (SAM) (Green 1966: 12). In the 1920s the Cape municipality added additional funds to an early donor bequest with the specific intention of constructing a purpose built gallery to attract 'a national collection worthy of this name' (ibid.). SANG's architecture added credence to the notion of white 'historical necessity' through its neoclassical design, white walls and pillared entranceway [plate 0.2], while its integration of elements of the Cape farmhouse: green shuttered windows and terracotta roof tiles, signalled a local intent. Combining the imperial with the familiar added a personal dimension to the austere museum, which recast it as the political house.



Plate 0.2 SANG (drawing by Catherine Hahn 2010)

My thesis analyses modes of representation at SANG from late 1930 to early 2009. Through my research I found that the gallery developed as a white space, but that its willingness to ‘stake its claim’ in an openly discriminatory identity created conflicts that signalled the possibility for new ownership. The tensions in SANG’s practice illuminate its role as a political house.

My thesis title ‘The Political House of Art’ is derived from the nineteenth century satirical poem *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819).<sup>1</sup> Written by the Radical pamphleteer William Hone the poem critiques King George III and Parliament’s responses to the Peterloo Massacre. In common with the symbolic house in Hone’s poem, SANG took its shape from the actions and behaviour of those who inhabited it: typified by its homely atmosphere, complex racial dynamics and overtly political display. The intimate relationship SANG developed with its white audience, through its partisan, communicative approach, opened doors for new allegiances. As Hone elucidates, although the authority of the political house appears unassailable, having built momentum as it grows, the overtly self-interested actions of its inhabitants expose it to challenges by ‘the people’ (ibid.). As well as producing opportunities for change

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<sup>1</sup> *The Political House that Jack Built* has its antecedent in the nursery rhyme *This is the House that Jack Built*, which introduces the reader to increasingly outlandish scenarios and characters (unknown origins, first published in *Nurse Truelove’s New-Year’s Gift, or the Books for Children*, Truelove 1755).

through conflict, the museum's sociable approach to display laid the foundations for wider engagement.

As my thesis will demonstrate, SANG's complex identity ran counter to the archetypal art museum model of the temple (discussed in detail in chapter one). In *Civilising Rituals* (1995) Carol Duncan describes how the temple applied distancing mechanisms that placed all of the attention on the art, thereby turning the museum's content into objects of aesthetic appreciation. In the ensuing atmosphere of contemplation the art work, as timeless masterpiece, served as a conduit for moral and spiritual enlightenment (ibid.: 8). Conversely, SANG used a range of strategies, including changes to its exhibition programme, multi-levelled story-telling and leisure and educative initiatives to encourage social and political engagement.

Duncan cautions against wider application of the temple and limits the scope of her study to major art museums in western democracies (ibid.: 3). Nevertheless, art museums internationally are frequently viewed through the temple's lens. At SANG this type of representation has been misleading as it has obscured its political and racial practices. For example, it has been assumed that South African mining magnates, like western donors to the temple, became public benefactors to mask their societal role (Carmen 2006; Stevenson 1997). In contrast, I found those magnates who donated collections to SANG revelled in their wealth and its brutal associations with their business interests. Similarly, apartheid is thought to have been imposed on the virtuous gallery space, rather than generated from within its walls (Lilla 2004). The specific consequences of viewing SANG as a temple are discussed where relevant in the thesis and are mentioned here to point to the need for the gallery's closely observed historic study. C. Wright Mills, in *The Sociological Imagination*, reminds us to pay detailed attention to historic material as otherwise we risk 'sketching in the background' with known 'historical explanations' (2000: 154).

Another reason why it is essential to analyse SANG is to draw attention to its capacity for diversification. Over 88% of South Africa's population is black or mixed-race<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> In the 2011 South African census 79% of people defined themselves as black African, 9% 'coloured' (mixed-race heritage), 9% white and 2% Indian (Statistics South Africa 2011).

it has an art history that is estimated to be at least 70,000 years old.<sup>3</sup> But the majority of South Africa's national cultural sites, including SANG, were established in the last one hundred and fifty years to cater for the white population. It is therefore imperative to examine how SANG has responded to the need to represent all South Africans and the obstacles it has faced in this regard. South African museological research has focused elsewhere as a consequence there has been limited attention paid to the practices that have enabled SANG to change. Through my analysis I ascertain the central role black participants have played since the late 1980s in altering SANG's practices through their combined influence as educators, artists and activists.

In choosing to research a museum that has previously been subject to limited academic attention the challenge was to develop a methodological approach that could encompass its unique history and social situation. In order to understand SANG's representational strategies across time I developed a multi-method approach with a strong visual component that included reconstructing displays through map-making, drawing and photography.

## Chapter layout

Chapter one, *The Political House*, defines the primary differences between SANG, as a political house, and national art museums designed on the temple model. In contrasting these models it is discerned that SANG's homely, openly partisan and communicative approach enabled it to develop into a less 'highbrow' entity than its European counterparts. However, SANG's development as a political house did not translate into equality of access. In identifying specific areas of historic practice which may have hindered SANG's capacity to 'move on' the chapter identifies the significant role that race played in shaping its development, in particular through its fine art collection and its championship of specific white identities.

Chapter two, *Method and Form*, sets out the main methodological and conceptual principles that inform the thesis. The chapter begins by introducing my role in the

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<sup>3</sup> According to Henshilwood et al. (2009) the oldest art works in South Africa discovered thus far, are two cross-hatched carvings on ochre found in the Blombos Cave in the Blombosfontein Nature Reserve dated between 80,000 and 100,000 years old.

research and the situation of the study in the public sphere. The chapter goes on to explore the need to incorporate historic analysis as an integral feature of the study. Out of this discussion emerges the further need to identify what the museum valued at different points in time. In advocating for an immersive mixed-method approach I set out how the methods I used in combination facilitated the identification of the museum's values and assumptions. I then look in detail at these methods, which include archival research, visual methods (photography, drawing and map-making), interviews and attendance of gallery tours. The methodological approach is shown to provide a basis for exploring how specific features of the museum have made it more or less amenable to change.

Chapters three to five provide historical investigations of SANG, paying particular attention to aspects of its practice that illuminate its relationship with race. Chapter three, *Setting the Stage*, provides a detailed account of the museum's internal décor, which has been in situ since the gallery's inception in 1930 and serves as a backdrop to the museum experience. In contrast to European décor, which tended to focus on 'great art' and elevation, SANG's décor told a proletariat story of progress through industry. Within this construct a myth was created of naturalised white rule and English ascendancy. Chapter four, *The Civilised-Brute*, explores SANG's art collections between 1930 and 1947. During this period SANG received multiple bequests from mining magnate patrons, which became the nuclei of the nation's art display. These collections turned the museum into the realm of the civilised-brute, a term I have used to signify the confluence of aggressive white masculinity and high art culture. Chapter five, *The Apartheid Gallery*, examines the gallery's shift during apartheid from a hyper-masculine environment to one that incorporated the white family. At this time SANG introduced educative and leisure strategies that placed a weighted emphasis on community cohesion and engagement.

Chapter six, *Resistance and Change*, covers the period between 1979 and 1993 when SANG moved from being an apartheid museum, serving a white audience, to one that attempted to engage with the wider black public. Key themes emerge from analysis of the museum during this period, including the notion of the museum as a contested space and the significant role played by the resistance art movement, black artists and black members of staff in bringing about change.

The final four chapters, chapters seven to ten, examine specific aspects of SANG's post-apartheid practice, beginning in 1994 and ending at the start of 2009. Each chapter is dedicated to a different aspect of SANG's practice with the intention of exploring how it helped or hindered change. Evidence for these chapters is gathered from case studies of exhibitions, which includes map-making of the displays, interviews and attendance of walking tours. In each case particular attention is paid to the 'museum talk' that accompanied the exhibitions and the way they were responded to by the public.

Chapter seven, *Facing the Past*, explores the museum's retention of a white curatorial team post-apartheid and the potential impact that white staff had on its contemporary display. Chapter eight, *New Life for Old Masters*, examines revisionist strategies used in the historic European fine art displays and explores their potential to challenge the European collection's position as the gallery's 'master collection'. Chapter nine, *African Art*, encompasses display strategies at SAM, adjacent to SANG, and explores the interplay between representations of African art and culture at these sites. Chapter ten, *Second to None*, looks at the potential impact of new gatekeepers on the gallery through a detailed examination of the exhibition *Second to None* (2006), which was the first exhibition at SANG to be designed by a curatorial team led by a black female curator. This innovative and politically confrontational exhibition demonstrated the gallery's capacity for social inclusion.

# Chapter One:

## The Political House

Museums share an historic commitment to ‘acquire, safeguard, conserve and display objects’ and have therefore often developed along similar lines, especially when accommodating similar content (Vergo 1989: 41). Close attention is therefore required to identify the individual journeys that museums have taken and to distinguish them from unifying theoretical models. By identifying the processes at work in individual museums one can begin to extrapolate which features of their practice may make them more or less amenable to change. In SANG’s case analysis reveals distinctions between its processes and those of the dominant art museum model of the temple. Identification of SANG’s unique characteristics as a political house provides the discursive framework for considering its capacity for inclusion.

The first section, *The Temple and the House*, elucidates the key differences between the temple model and SANG as a political house. The differences between the two types of museum indicate SANG would be better able to respond to calls for political and social change. However, the second section, *A White Space*, explores research already undertaken at SANG, which shows that despite its seeming capacity for inclusion it retained a white identity post-apartheid. I identify potential factors that can explain why this is the case, namely, the history of fine art and its associations with whiteness and the influence of English South African culture on the gallery. In undertaking research on SANG I found that the majority of the literature on South African museums and cultural sites has concentrated elsewhere, providing further impetus for the study.

### Section One: The Temple and the House

In this section I begin by exploring the paradigm of the temple before turning to the political house. Duncan used the paradigm of the temple to describe art museums built in the west between the late eighteenth and early twentieth century, the Louvre in Paris (built in 1789) being the earliest example (2006). The model has also been applied to different types of museums in other contexts. In contrast, the political house has specific

applicability to SANG, with some features relevant to other colonial sites. Clarification of the differences between these models provides the means to assess the political house's relative capacity for making change.

## The temple

The temple model has been challenged as an imprecise analogy for the museum by those who rightly argue museums have more complex and nuanced roles. In *National Museums*, Simon Knell, Peter Aronsson and Arne Bugge Amundsen et al. argue that the alteration and adaption of museums to 'local needs', means that 'national museums in different national settings cannot be read as nations doing the same thing' (2011: 6). Nonetheless, their work supports the idea that most historic national art museums have transitioned through the temple model. For example, in her essay in Knell et al.'s compendium, Eugenia Afinoguenova identifies how the Prado, Madrid, shifted in the 1920s from a popular, carnivalesque atmosphere to one of 'distanced aestheticism' (ibid.: 220). Likewise, Christopher Whitehead, in the same anthology, describes how in the nineteenth century the National Gallery, London, chose to leave out references to recent British history and instead focused on European art, so as to 'supress documentary interpretation of objects in favour of aesthetic apprehension' (ibid.: 112). Meanwhile, Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, in *Post-Critical Museology* (2013), describe how the Tate Galleries took until the 1980s to move away from the prevailing 'paradigm of the autonomy and universalism of art' to engage more critically with their collections (2013: 27).

The power and durability of the temple paradigm derives from its role as 'one of the longest standing and most traditional ways to envision the museum' and from the enlightenment ideals that have attended it (Marstine 2011: 9). Duncan identifies that it is not simply a search for metaphoric resemblance that led those building art museums to replicate the temple, but a conscious decision to create a secular 'ritual space' in which the art object as aesthetic experience is foregrounded (1995: 8). In order to create the requisite atmosphere of reverential contemplation the art museum utilised specific technologies of representation. Separated from other structures, elevated by a flight of stairs and entered through huge pillared doorways, the art museum was positioned and presented so as to distinguish it from the outside world (ibid.: 10). These technologies

created a 'liminal space' where people could 'step back' from the 'psychic constraints of mundane existence' and look at the world with 'different thoughts and feelings' (ibid.: 11-12).

Unlike ethnographic, scientific and anthropological sites, which typically crowded their exhibits with contextual information, art museums designed on the temple model were orchestrated to deliberately congregate attention around their artistic content by leaving the other space bare. The hang, layout and architecture complemented the atmosphere of quiet contemplation, creating a 'universe of timeless values' (ibid.: 19, 27). Duncan describes how the procession of sequenced halls in the art museum summoned associations with the religious experience as they encouraged the audience to assume the role of 'pilgrims' following a 'structured narrative route' through the interior of the museum (ibid.: 12). The configuration brought comparison with the temple and its deities to the fore as it staged the art works as sacred stopping points along the way.

The technologies used in the temple model have elevated the museum's status and justified its lack of change. In *New Museum Theory and Practice* (2006), Janet Marstine notes that the temple model's emphasis on the 'unencumbered aesthetic experience' has been used to argue that the art museum is 'more significant than other kinds of museums' (its 'aura' having 'given it special status') and by extension that its collections and ideas are in greater need of protection (ibid.: 10). Andrew McClelland, in his book *Inventing the Louvre*, describes how the canon has supported the notion that art museums should be preserved, in perpetuity. He identifies that the strict divisions and hierarchies used in the temple model, categorised and fixed objects in relationships of (unequal) status (2003: 14). As the decider of what work is good and important the temple model became the arbiter of universal truths and was therefore systemically opposed to contingent, non-hierarchical, inclusive ways of viewing (ibid.).

## Exercising power

Through its production of hidden hierarchical technologies the temple model helped in the exercise of state power. On entering the temple's portals the audience was seduced into believing its mode of expression to be the truth. As Brandon Taylor has outlined in *Art for the Nation* (1999), in the early twentieth century the design of the art museum

coupled with its fine art content marked the extent to which ‘aesthetic enjoyment, artistic skill, scientific knowledge and design competence’ were ‘indissolubly linked in the moral order of the ... state’ (ibid. 73). Tony Bennett in his book, *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), investigates the museum’s capacity to exert a wider influence on society. He proposes that the formation of the museum needs to be seen in light of general developments ‘through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power’ (ibid.: 18, 19). Building on Foucault’s notion that knowledge is inseparable from power, Bennett argues that the museum’s capacity for reformation of the self, put it on par with other regions of governance: as its function as an instrument for the improvement of man’s inner life, enabled it to act as an architect of social practice (ibid.: 18, 145). Through its ‘educative and civilising agencies’ the museum came to play a pivotal role in the development and continuity of the nation-state (ibid.: 66).

In, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, Timothy Luke gives impetus to the notion that temple model performs as an instrument of state when he describes how the ‘truths’ produced in western art museums are fashioned into ‘useful knowledge’ (2002: xxiii). Exploring the rules deployed by these institutions Luke maintains they preserve, expand and shape cultural memories in ways that authenticate particular notions of society, and validate particular ‘beliefs’ about the ‘order of the world, its past and present, and the individual’s place within it’ (ibid. xxiii, 8). As Luke indicates, the temple model’s arrangement and reverential atmosphere has a hierarchical dimension that regulates the audience as well as the art (ibid.: 8). It is here that the temple model has been its most divisive, separating the audience into those who belong and those who do not.

In their ground-breaking work *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public* (1991), Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel show how art museums became the ‘privilege of the cultivated class’ through their long engagement with them. The audience’s exposure to the museum’s way of viewing created inheritable values and tastes that Bourdieu and Darbel have termed ‘cultural capital’ (1991: 37). The idea of cultural capital has been critiqued for being inflexible, as it has failed to recognise that people and systems are capable of adaptation to different cultural repertoires and crossing cultural boundaries (see Swidler 2001). Yet, the premise that distinctions in

cultural participation in museums *are* linked to levels of exposure and social status have been identified across contexts. For example, in *Classification in Art* (1987), Paul DiMaggio identified that in America, which has relatively greater social mobility than France, audience members with cultural capital have retained authority, as they have learnt through acculturation to absorb more artistic models than other members of society (ibid: 440-445). Expanding on this point Bennett writes:

The art gallery's capacity to function as an instrument of social distinction depends on the fact that only those with the appropriate kinds of cultural capital can both *see* the paintings on display and *see* through them to perceive the hidden order of art that subtends their arrangement (1995: 35)

Abolishing the 'sacred frontier which makes legitimate culture a separate universe' has therefore become a potent concern in research on art museums (Bourdieu 1984: 6).

In elucidating the temple model key concepts emerge. The model places all attention on the art object, which is conceived as having intrinsic 'aesthetic value'. The temple has a hierarchical mode of display which fixes objects in unequal relationships and it manifests the power of the state through its improving and civilising auspices, which are themselves products of its hierarchical arrangement. It facilitates the construction of an inner audience, who, by virtue of their association with it, and extensive knowledge of its works, derive cultural capital. At the same time the temple model hides its power through technologies that make it appear natural and always thus.

## The home

In exploring SANG I found that it contained characteristics from the temple, but that their meaning was altered through the museum's association with the home.

SANG's architecture borrowed features from the temple model, these included its white edifice, raised entrance, portico and mouldings in the Greco-Roman style and its interconnecting display halls, which were situated around a central courtyard. The sacred atmosphere that these technologies created were supported by the unencumbered view of Table Mountain rising up behind the museum, which brought spiritual notions of nature, beauty and reverence to the fore. However, these congruities with the temple,

were challenged by SANG's intimate, almost home-like scale. When SANG was built it contained just six display halls and a small vestibule. Since then it has increased in size to a total of nine halls. In comparison the Tate Gallery was designed with thirty halls,<sup>1</sup> the National Gallery with forty<sup>2</sup> and the Louvre with sixty-three. SANG's homely appeal was advanced through ornamental elements, including the reed logged pond, green-shuttered windows and terracotta roof tiles (mentioned in the introduction), which drew associations with the Dutch farmhouse rather than the grandiose museum.

SANG's original collection yielded further symmetries with the domestic realm. Museums built on the temple model in Europe were, until recently, the preserve of fine art, which was strategically displayed to tell the story of the 'masterpiece' and of the great nation (Wright 1989: 122). In sharp contrast, newspaper accounts from the early 1930s show SANG initially contained a disparate mix of utilitarian objects, women's home-craft and personal items. These objects tapped into practical and nostalgic ideas of home. For example the collection contained: embroidered shawls, altarpieces, ceramic mascots,<sup>3</sup> posters,<sup>4</sup> lace, candlesticks and a doll's bed',<sup>5</sup> along with a small selection of 'second-rate' fine art.<sup>6,7</sup>

In contrast to the 'universal' distancing mechanisms of the temple, SANG's inclusion of familial items would be anticipated to have prompted memories and dreams of childhood, the mother country and the settler's new home. These nostalgic associations resonate with Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological account, *The Poetics of Space* (1958). In which he describes the home as a place of dreams and daydreams, a place of compressed time to return to in one's mind 'through the crypts of memory' (1958: 141). Bachelard identifies that the intimacy created in the house, prompts shared dreams that translate into shared codes or bonds (ibid.: 68). SANG's appeal to intimacy, through its diminutive size and nostalgic content, is anticipated to have produced a similar sense of

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<sup>1</sup> The Tate Gallery numbered thirty main exhibition halls in 1926 this does not include the further temporary spaces on the lower ground floor (Taylor 1999: 150-153).

<sup>2</sup> This is an educated guess based on the additional rooms added in the late nineteenth century. Initially the gallery had forty-eight rooms, but shared these with the Royal Academy (Charles Saumarez Smith, *The National Gallery: A Short History* 2009).

<sup>3</sup> South African Art Exhibition 7th December 1931 Catalogue – SANG archive.

<sup>4</sup> *Posters*, Cape Times 14th November 1932 'newspaper clippings 1932' SANG archive.

<sup>5</sup> Items lent by Lady Phillips for the gallery opening (Stevenson 1997: 203).

<sup>6</sup> *Art Lover* Argus 22nd December 1926. Newspaper archive – SANG archive.

<sup>7</sup> *The Art Gallery* 24th March 1931 'newspaper clippings 1931' SANG archive (no newspaper name listed).

kinship with its visitors. It could therefore be suggested that SANG offered a more expansive invitation to membership than the temple, in which the development of a relationship with the audience was linked to instilling cultural capital in the bourgeoisie. SANG's homely environment can be seen to have produced its own devolved form of cultural capital as it encouraged the settler community to feel at ease.

## The colonial site

SANG's homely atmosphere had parallels with other colonial art museums established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which shared its 'commonplace' content. For instance, Jacqueline Strecker, in *Colonizing Culture* (2001), describes the National Gallery of Australia's original holdings as a motley collection of coins, gems and statues as well as pictures (2001: 200). Similarly, Jillian Carman, in *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine* (2006), describes the Johannesburg Art Gallery as containing a wide range of utilitarian objects such as ironwork, needlecraft and furniture alongside a small selection of fine art (Carman 2006: 185).

The similarities between the colonial museums' original collections are partly explained by an absence of willing donors. They also reflect the colonies' shared interest in attracting settler communities, as evidenced by their museums' concentration on art works with local (white) appeal (Strecker 2001; Magocsi 2007). For instance, Paul Magocsi, in the *Encyclopaedia of Canada's People*, describes how the National Gallery of Canada's collection was informed by the agrarian vision of the largely peasant immigrant community (2007: 315). Similarly, the National Gallery of Australia was informed by the 'collective urban idealism' of the settlers (Strecker 2001: 105) and the Johannesburg Art Gallery by the twin impulses of promoting 'industrial art' and home-making ideals in the 'rough and ready' environs of the shanty town (Carman 2006: 35, 185). In SANG's case the primary interests lay in attracting local white workers and in particular English South Africans (discussed in section two).

One reason why colonial museums may have adopted a homely guise is suggested as a meta-narrative in *The Love of Art* (1991) in which Bourdieu and Darbel describe the 'cultural goodwill' attached to museums in countries that do not have a long-established museum tradition (ibid.: 34). Bourdieu and Darbel identify that museums acquire status

across time and only emerge as consecrating systems at the point when they, and the nations they are situated within, have accrued cultural capital (ibid.: 38). They argue that the ‘paucity of cultural capital’ in newer countries pushed them to adopt a more open approach in their museums than those countries whose systems of validation date back to antiquity (ibid: 34-36).<sup>8</sup> To illustrate their point Bourdieu and Darbel examined the Polish museum system against the French, which revealed the Polish system offered significantly greater access across class (ibid.: 35).

In the colony the imperative to create a common white culture from disparate communities would have served as a further inducement to develop a museum language accessible to most whites. The fact that the majority of the colonial art galleries contained an assortment of objects, including craft and fine art, provides evidence of their communicative aim. In this respect they had more in common with the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London, a design and ornamental art museum, whose primary function was to educate working-class people, than the elite art temples of Europe (Trench 2014: 7-14).

SANG’s investment in the local community suggests it better reflected the aims of the educational model of the museum than the temple. In *Curating Subjects* (2007), Mark O’Neill outlines the difference between the two models. He describes how the aesthetic model espouses ‘that the serious pleasure of aesthetic contemplation of works of art has an inspirational value, which needs no other justification’, whereas the educative model perceives art as a learning or communicative tool (O’Neill 2007: 25). SANG’s alliance with the educational model is significant as it implies it would share its relatively egalitarian, less hierarchical, aspirations (ibid.).

## Politics and storytelling

SANG’s role as a conduit for educative and communicative practice came to the fore when it moved in the mid-1930s from showing an eclectic mix of objects to only showing fine art. This is an interesting development as it could be assumed that in becoming a vehicle for fine art SANG would adopt the aestheticizing features of the

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<sup>8</sup> The Tate Gallery in London did not open until 1897, but much of its collection was initially housed at the National Gallery, which opened in in 1836, meanings its status was quickly secured (Taylor 1999: 117).

temple. Indeed, Strecker found that in Australian museums the shift from craft to fine art resulted in ‘colonial regionalism’ being subsumed by imperialist cultural values and the ‘aesthetic universalities of British culture’ (2002: 100). However, at SANG a strong investment in local productions of whiteness generated a distinct political identity. The reason for SANG’s divergence from other art museums can partly be explained by the particulars of its collection.

SANG’s initial fine art displays reflected the vernacular style of art that was popular with the white community in the Cape. The antecedents of this work lay in nineteenth century ‘Africana’ in which the main motivating force was ‘to describe and report on the external world’ for an audience ‘back home’ in Europe (Arnold 1996: 5). According to Marion Arnold, in *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996), the resultant art work was intended to provide an ‘authentic’ experience of Africa. As a consequence, the quality of the images was frequently considered ‘less important than the content of the image as historical document’ (ibid.). Between 1935 and 1948 SANG received major bequests of European (mainly English) fine art. Although these additions meant the collection became more English, the gallery’s commitment to localism was retained through a preponderance of narrative and anecdotal art (discussed in chapters four ) and the introduction of leisure and educational initiatives (discussed in chapter five).

The communicative mode of practice that the emphasis on ‘story-telling’ and education engendered corresponded with the popular approach used in fine art ‘exhibitions for the poor’ in early twentieth century England. In her illuminating book *Civilising Caliban: The Misuse of Art 1875-1980* (1987) Frances Borzello describes how the exhibitions for the poor attracted their audience by providing them with message orientated displays that tapped into their shared interests and community based version of reality (ibid.: 5-6, 62). These exhibitions, like SANG, did not deal in universal matters and external values that the audience should be educated to appreciate in order to ‘be considered truly civilised’ (ibid.: 6), but instead, presented art as a collaborative endeavour linked to community cohesion (ibid.). SANG’s commitment to audience participation made it a powerful social medium.

## Activism

For most of its history SANG's commitment has been to its white audience, yet its communicative appeal and political practice have arguably equipped it to take on the responsibility of wider social inclusion. Before exploring whether this is the case, I will briefly outline the key expectations that have been placed on museums in Europe since the 1980s and how these expectations pertain to SANG.

In *The Reticent Object* (1989), the art historian Peter Vergo describes how in the 1980s western museums were torn between their traditional role as custodians of objects and the need to respond to an increasingly diverse public (ibid.). In *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference* (2007) Richard Sandell identifies factors that led museums to re-evaluate and re-orientate their role, these include: the global influence of human rights discourse; a heightened awareness of multiculturalism and 'an approach to the politics of difference which rejects assimilationist policies in favour of those which affirm cultural and ethnic differences' (ibid.: 6). He also draws attention to the increased pressure on museums from governments who expected to see benefits from funding in the shape of social development (ibid.). In South Africa the imperative to change was more keenly felt than in most other countries, as the majority of its museums were developed as white institutions either under imperial or apartheid rule. When the African National Congress (ANC) came into power in 1994 it sought to address the inherent inequalities in South Africa's public museums through its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) Framework for Arts and Culture (1994). The programme targeted its funding at 'redressing imbalances of the past, transformation and development' and the promotion of 'non-racism, non-sexism, human rights and democracy', with the intention that museums and cultural sites 'fully reflect the many components of cultural heritage'.<sup>9, 10</sup>

Following the calls in the 1980s for wider inclusion a more radical concept of the museum emerged in Europe in the early twenty-first century that was underpinned by a reconceptualization of museum ethics (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Sandell 2007; Marstine

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<sup>9</sup> Sections 3.4.3.9. p 1-.4 [www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/rdp/rdp3.html](http://www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/rdp/rdp3.html) accessed 18/11/06.

<sup>10</sup> These principles were formalised in the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACTS) White Paper (1996).

2011). In *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000) Eilean Hooper-Greenhill defines the new type of institution as the ‘post museum’, a space that she typifies as being ‘eager to share power, by initiating open dialogues and forging new partnerships’ (ibid.: 27-28). In *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics* (2011), Janet Marstine takes forward Hooper-Greenhill’s concept of the post-museum to define the ethical museum as a space that is deeply engaged with the world around it, ‘adaptive and improvisational’ (2011.: 8). In order to achieve such a space, she argues for a new museum ethics defined by its contingent nature (ibid: 3). In challenging the authorised view of museum ethics, in which ‘professionalisation’ is centred, Marstine presents a museum model built on ‘moral agency’ with three guiding principles: ‘social responsibility, radical transparency and shared guardianship of heritage’ (ibid.: 5). Marstine views social responsibility as the key principle in this model, which she attaches to the notion of ‘democratic pluralism’— a term taken from the philosopher Iris Marion Young to denote practices that solicit divergent and transgressive voices (ibid.: 11). In championing the ethical museum, Marstine acknowledges ‘the place and power of activism in museum dynamics’ (ibid.: 13).

## Closing down

Looking back at the distinctions between the temple and the political house it is clear that some museums would find it easier to take on the mantle of activism than others. Indeed, the temple, with its rarefied approach to art work, has struggled to adapt to demands for change.

In *Museums, Society, Inequality* (2002), Richard Sandell observes that of all museum types the art museum built on the temple model has had the greatest difficulty in trying to respond to parliamentary and public calls for greater equality (ibid.: 20). He cites the art museum’s commitment to the aesthetic view as the main reason why it has not managed to encapsulate the “‘prevailing moral spirit” of society as a whole’, as its construction on a fixed set of precepts and universal norms make it ‘resistant to social and political influence’ (ibid.: 18-20).

Currently, the temple paradigm manifests in two main museum models. Firstly, long-established historic art institutions, which have preserved the purity of the linear fine art

tradition through the decision not to show the work of living artists (such as the National Gallery in London and the Louvre in Paris), which have effectively become mausoleums to high-art (Stevenson 1997: 237). Secondly, the modernist ‘white cube’<sup>11</sup> which emerged in the 1970s whose stark antiseptic environment places all of the attention on the work of art. Multicultural, post-structural and post-modern art works have entered the white-cube. However, its commitment to the pure, uncluttered object (or *l’art pour l’art*) has created a protective barrier against the intrusion of their overtly political ideas. As outlined by Christopher Grunenberg in *The Modern Art Museum*:

The cube owes its success to its strategy of effacement and simultaneous self-negation; highlighting the inherent (that is formal) qualities of a work of art through the neutralization of its original context and content, while at the same time, remaining itself virtually invisible and thus obscuring the process of effacement (1999: 31)

The effectiveness of the white cube is such that even where artists seek radical change, its hermetically sealed environment obscures their political intent.

## Opening up

SANG shares some of the reductive attributes of the historic art museum and the white cube, for example its fine art collection, layout and ‘clean’ design. However, its role as a communicative, political space has given it greater flexibility to respond to calls for change. Indeed, SANG’s conception of art as a resource makes it a ready candidate for activism. This was demonstrated in the 1980s, when following a period of intransigence, SANG employed black education officers who expanded the exhibition programme to include community based non-fine art works and political displays (discussed in chapter six).

In 1997 SANG’s Director, Marilyn Martin (1990-2009) reaffirmed SANG’s commitment to continuing on a political path:

We believe that we are doing more than passively holding a mirror to society, that we inform, construct, change and direct the narrative –

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<sup>11</sup> A term coined by the art critic Brian O’Doherty in *‘Inside the white cube’: notes on the gallery space* (p. 24-31) in *Artforum*, vol. XIV, no.7. March 1976.

aesthetically, culturally, historically, politically – through our acquisitions and exhibitions, that we invigorate art practice and that the national art museum is integral to refiguring and reinventing South African art and identity (1997: 18)

**Table 1.1** Exhibitions of Contemporary Art (1995-2008)

Year	Exhibition title
1995	Positive Lives: Responses to HIV (exhibition 1)
1998	Mute Testimonies Objects in the Press of History: Confessing the Past and Reshaping Memory
2001-2002	Can't Forget, Can't Remember: Truth and Reconciliation Commission
2002	A Broken Landscape (responses to HIV)
2002	Positive Lives: Responses to HIV (exhibition 2)
2004-2005	A Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994-2004
2006-2007	Positive Lives: Responses to HIV (exhibition 3)
2006-2008	Facing the Past: Seeking the Future – Reflections on a Decade of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
2006-2007	Second to None: Celebrating 50 Years of Women's Struggles

Between 1995 and 2009 SANG evidenced its commitment to a social agenda through the purchase of art works that contained an overt political message<sup>12</sup> and socially themed exhibitions (discussed in chapters seven and ten). As Table 1.1 illustrates, of the nine largest contemporary exhibitions post-apartheid, four were orchestrated around the HIV/AIDS's crisis and three on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

SANG staged numerous political and social events that presented opportunities for community activism and shared guardianship. In the Director's words these were framed within a concept of the museum as a vehicle for: 'tackling serious social problems such as AIDS, healthcare, drug abuse, crime, widespread social misery, unemployment and environmental degradation' (Martin 1999: 3). SANG also broadened its collection through purchases of African art.<sup>13</sup> The museum's commitment to a

<sup>12</sup> Between these years the majority of SANG's small acquisition budget was spent on political art works, many of which were created under the banner of resistance art (Annual Report of Iziko museums Cape Town 2004/5 'reports' (2005: 60) SANG archive).

<sup>13</sup> The term African in a South African context has taken on more complex and contrary meanings (including both derogatory and affirmative connotations). In some quarters it is now applied across race to describe all peoples living in Africa. To avoid confusion the term is used sparingly in this thesis and most frequently in relation to 'African art'. The term African art has been used for over a century in literary, art and anthropological contexts to refer to craft based art practices undertaken by black people in

diversified agenda was demonstrated on the walking tours I attended, in which staff concentrated on the socio-political content of art works, which they used to illuminate the themes of the displays.

## Section Two: A White Space

SANG's inclusion of black participants and its social, political and educational programmes suggested it had successfully refashioned itself as part of the global museum movement building towards a less prejudiced society. In particular as many aspects of its practice moved from a singular authorial voice to poly-vocality, which enabled it to act less like a traditional museum and more like a forum (Mason, Whitehead and Graham 2013: 164). However, closer inspection revealed SANG's capacity to operate as an inclusive space was hampered by its historic investments in whiteness; its European art collection and its retention of core white staff. Returning to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* one is reminded that the intimate connotations of the house have an exclusionary, as well as inclusionary, dimension.

Despite its elite ambience the temple is effectively open to all as a space of worship, whereas the home is a personal place in which entry is achieved by invitation. Although SANG did not refuse black visitors during apartheid, they were at best un-catered for guests. Conversely, white visitors learnt through the museum's practice to see SANG as their home. As Bachelard recounts the home provides a vital space for its inhabitants, where they learn to 'take root' in their 'corner of the world' (1958: 4). In addition, as 'the King of their castle' the white visitor is provided with a metaphoric armoury that protects them (and by extension their art traditions), from external threat.

In this section I look at research undertaken at SANG which demonstrates black audience members continue to feel estranged from the site. In looking back at the museum's history I pinpoint practices that are anticipated to have impeded its quest for inclusivity, in particular its ties to fine art and a white English South African identity. Although SANG's function as a political house makes it appear a ready choice for

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Africa (Cornevin 1980: 27). In the case of this thesis it is used alongside the terms European and western art to correspond with its local application and ease of understanding, not with the intention of re-affirming these boundaries.

analysis I describe how the majority of South African research has congregated elsewhere. In looking at why research has focused on other cultural sites I consider the potential implications for the gallery.

## Studies on SANG

In 2002 Julie McGee and Vuyile Voyiya undertook a documentary study that explored how black art world professionals experienced SANG entitled *The Luggage is Still Labelled: Blackness in South African Art*. In 2006 McGee followed up their research with an essay, *Restructuring South African Museums: Reality and Rhetoric within Cape Town* (2006). Covering a wide range of topics, including what black stakeholders thought of the museum and what they felt individual staff could do to improve access, *The Luggage is Still Labelled* provided a thorough assessment of black stakeholders' experience of SANG at the turn of the twenty-first century, which, to quote McGee, was that it was "too white", in terms of power, and "too foreign" and unwelcoming' (2006: 199). From the study McGee surmised little has changed in the stakeholders' relationship with the gallery post-apartheid, as it remains a privileged institution 'that first denied black artists equal opportunities, resources, and education [and] still controls the history of South African art' (ibid.: 186).

In 2005 Yoshie Yoshiara conducted a study, *Museums in a Diverse Society: A Visitor Study at the South African National Gallery*, which supported Voyiya and McGee's findings.<sup>14</sup> Yoshiara's central concern was to ascertain 'the meaning of art museums serving a diverse society' from the perspective of the audience who make up this diversity (2005: 14). To this end she developed her work around three concurrent exhibitions which represented different facets of SANG's practice: one European, one African and one contemporary.

Yoshiara concluded that black audience members experienced disorientation and alienation in the gallery to the degree that their access was impeded (ibid.: 196).

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<sup>14</sup> Hitherto, there had been no detailed research undertaken on SANG's audience. The only recording at the gallery was of its visitor numbers, but these were not broken down by race, gender or age making them an imprecise measure of attendance (Yoshiara 2005: 14). Similarly, although there was a visitors' book, very few visitors contributed to it, and again it was not possible to ascertain from the entries what the backgrounds of the contributors were.

Consequently they had a limited sense of ownership and visited infrequently in small numbers (ibid.: 166-170, 200). She identified that SANG's historic European fine art display specifically estranged black audience members who described it variously as 'colonial' and 'imperial' and as having 'little association with themselves' (ibid.: 166, 170). Young white audience members also expressed a degree of alienation from the European collection, because it was 'too old', 'not appealing' and 'not from South Africa' (ibid.: 130-131). Yet, in contrast to black audience members, whites were commonly able to orientate themselves through 'reference to their knowledge of artists or art history' (ibid.). The distinction in visitor experience suggests that although some whites lacked interest in the European fine art collection they were not disinherited from it in the same way as black audience members. Yoshiara supported her argument by drawing attention to the fact that, with the exception of schoolchildren, visitor numbers declined post-apartheid, which would not be anticipated if SANG was successfully reaching the previously excluded (ibid.).

Taken together Voyiya and McGee and Yoshiara's research showed black practitioners and visitors did not experience a sense of ownership of SANG on par with whites. These findings suggest it would be premature to assume the gallery has attained the level of inclusivity that it sought to achieve through its communicative practices and diversified political agenda. McGee went so far as to conclude that despite the gallery claiming to have transformed what was actually occurring was 'transformation rhetoric' (2006: 191-192). A participant in her documentary gave voice to this sentiment when he described SANG as an 'apartheid gallery' in 2002 (ibid.).

## White history

Despite having created significant areas of change, SANG has retained a legacy in white practice that has restricted its ability to be inclusive. The museum's ongoing reliance on white staff has proved a particular obstacle to change (discussed in chapter seven) as has its heritage in apartheid era South Africa and its reliance on fine art, discussed here.

From South Africa's formation in 1910 to the end of apartheid in 1994 white hegemony was a feature of the state drawing all whites, regardless of political persuasion, into its auspices. In *The Racial Contract* (1997), Charles Mills describes white engagement in

racist societies as a 'Racial Contract' which implicates all whites in the state's construction through their role as its main beneficiaries. As a consequence of their involvement in this 'contract' whites come to see themselves as sharing a common entitlement and identity (1997: 11-12). In *The Racial State*, David Goldberg, taking Mills literally, rightly argues that the development of white identity is more complex than a 'Racial Contract', as white supremacy was not built on an 'actual contractual arrangement' which whites bought into at a 'non specified time in history' (2002: 311). Yet, Mills' idea that whites share a racial contract has resonance in the South African context. The constructed nature of whiteness is apparent in the tacit alliance created between the Afrikaners and English in the early twentieth century following the Boer war, which enabled them to present a united front against the black population, and in the strategic decision to give white women the vote in 1930 to dilute and counter the small black vote (Arnold 1996: 3). In 1948, whiteness was legally constituted as citizenship through the apartheid political system, which gave whites the option of voting for one of only two parties, both of which agreed fundamentally on white privilege and black exclusion (Norval 1999: 28-29). The ensuing implementation of separate development policy 'safeguarded the racial identity and dominance of whites' (Barber 1999: 140).

One of the main implications of white South Africans adopting a shared identity is that it created a covenant that crossed national, language, religious, class and gender boundaries and accorded benefits to whites based on race and race alone (McClintock 1995: 6). The depth and range of subject positions made available to whites (and not to others) meant they came to perceive themselves:

[Not] *as* whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race (Dyer 1997: 3)

The equation of whiteness with normalcy has been vociferously and unrelentingly challenged by the black majority in South Africa ensuring its continued visibility in public life. Yet, despite awareness of the artificiality of whiteness, whites continue to get caught up in its glare (Elgar 2007: 7).

## Museum whiteness

Only by unearthing both the operational logic of race and its manner of guiding the interpretation of our visual world may we come to comprehend, and potentially dislodge, its power (Berger 2005: 8)

There is a strong argument to suggest that whiteness is a tactical identity worn to wield advantage over other people. Yet, whites are also seduced into performing whiteness, by which means they come to inhabit it as lived experience. One of the most persuasive means by which whites in South Africa have been encouraged to experience whiteness as both the normal and the dominant societal position is through the division of its museums into (white) fine art and (black) anthropological sites (Picton 1999; Kasfir 1999). Extensive research has been undertaken on the negative impact of displaying art by black people under one banner as ‘African art’ and presenting it in separate reductive environments (see Clifford: 1988; Goldberg: 1993 and Hassan: 1999 discussed in chapter nine), whereas relatively little research has been undertaken on the impact of dedicating art museums to white made fine art produce. Here studies by Richard Dyer and Martin Berger provide essential guides.

Dyer, in *White* (1997), utilises his background in visual studies to determine that whiteness continues to have specificity in imagery even when it is not ‘marked’ by the presence of the non-white subject and has relevance even when actors are not conscious of its existence (1997: 14). Exploring how whiteness has come to take up the dual positions of ordinariness and specialness in western visual culture, Dyer traces its origins to the expansionist ideals of the late Renaissance, and specifically to the crusades and the desire to separate the Christian from the non-Christian subject (ibid.: 67-68). Prior to the late Renaissance fine art demonstrated little interest in skin tone and made little differentiation between black and white subjects (ibid.). In contrast, in the late Renaissance artists distinguished between both black and white subjects and between different shades of white – the ‘whitest-whites’ becoming associated (in the white European mind) with purity and goodness, as illustrated in images of Christ and the Virgin Mary who were rendered ‘paler, white, than everyone else’ (ibid.: 66). The overt forms of strategically conceived whiteness that emerged in this process

synthesised the white subject with Christianity and Christianity with the linear progressive art model (ibid.: 67).

In the seventeenth-century French Academy the white subject came to fully inhabit the role of *the* subject of fine art through elaboration of the classical doctrine. At this time ‘what were taken to be the natural hierarchies and categories of painterly subjects, from history painting to still-life to portraiture to landscape’, were ‘naturalised as a central tenet of aesthetic lore’ (Simon 1999: 55). History painting (which included religious and mythological themes as well as epic historic subjects) emerged from this system as ‘morally, intellectually and aesthetically the most elevated and demanding of genres’ (ibid.). Consequently, the white subjects that populated ‘history painting’ assumed heroic status as *the* subjects of history.

In the twentieth century the secularisation of fine art and competing artistic models have broadened ideas of art and with them what constitutes the ideal subject (Dyer 1997: 49, 145-183). Nevertheless, as Paul Dash identifies in *Social and Critical Practices in Art Education* (Atkinson and Dash 2005), at a basic level art museums in the west continue to foreground white history through the plethora of white subjects in their collections. As a result, whites have their images reflected back at them from the gallery walls and experience a sense of belonging within the museum, which is not available to the same degree for other audiences (ibid.: 120).

In *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* Martin Berger, like Dyer, identifies racial sub-texts in images of white people and, importantly, also identifies white sub-texts in representational forms that contain no human presence, such as landscape painting and architecture. Exploring American visual culture from the perspective that shared investments in whiteness imperceptibly direct what whites see, Berger demonstrates ‘decidedly racialized perspectives’ animate ‘even those cultural products most removed from racial concerns’ (2005: 2). In doing so he repudiates the commonly held (white) assumption that ‘racial minorities catalyse otherwise race-neutral texts’ (ibid.). According to Berger, visual texts operationalise ‘internalized historically specific ideologies linked to whiteness’, which confirm a white point of view (ibid.: 1). Analysing visual texts that have no obvious link to racial subjects, he determines that the logic of race has been used ‘as a powerful, comforting mould for

casting both human products and the natural environment into recognizable forms' (ibid.: 8).

At SANG the emphasis on narrative and anecdotal art has brought vigour to the racial sub-texts in its imagery (discussed in chapters three and four), arguably, to a greater extent than the temple. The universalising forces at play in the temple would have framed whiteness in the abstract, whereas at SANG whiteness was represented as a manifestation of tangible, personal experience.

## An Afrikaner problem

SANG's relationship with whiteness has been strengthened through the museum's special connection with English South Africans. Exploring SANG's specificity as a political house I found its décor and collection continue to have a distinct English bias. Yoshiara has drawn attention to SANG's English past in her thesis (2005), but in general research has paid little attention to the role of the English in museum development in South Africa and has instead concentrated on the Afrikaners. In particular research has focused on the *Voortrekker Monument*, the archetypal symbol of Afrikaner nationalism. As a consequence, South Africa's racist museum culture has been identified with the Afrikaners, rather than with whites more generally, or with the English specifically. For instance, in *Mounting Queen Victoria* (2009), Steven Dubin explores the 're-presentation of social memory through cultural production' in South African museums almost exclusively through the role of the Afrikaner (ibid.: 1). His emphasis on the Afrikaner is illustrated in the index to his book, which contains eighty-five page references under headings associated with 'Afrikaans' and the 'Afrikaner', including Afrikaner identity, language, culture and nationalism, and no entries under the headings 'English' or 'England' (ibid.: 325).

Concentrating on Afrikaner cultural practice reduces the likelihood of identifying the production of race in sites such as SANG, as it risks equating the defeat of Afrikaner nationalism at the end of apartheid with the end of white racism, thereby promoting the notion that South Africa has moved on from its racist past. This risk is demonstrated in Albert Grundlingh's work, *A Cultural Conundrum? Old Monuments and New Regimes* (2009), in which he frames the Voortrekker Monument as a once powerful but now

failed symbol of Afrikaner nationalism that no longer ‘insults black people who have ascended to and are secure in power’ (ibid.: 158) in a setting where people are ‘free to follow a new career, relatively unencumbered by the past’ (ibid.: 174).

A further implication of focusing on Afrikaner nationalism is that it disassociates the English from apartheid.<sup>15</sup> Saul Dubow and William Bienart note in *The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid* (1995):

A major theme in liberal historiography ... is the idea that the tragedy of race relations in South Africa reflects the capitulation of English-speakers’ flexible views to the harshly doctrinaire approach of Afrikaner nationalism (1995: 6)

Challenging this representation Dubow notes that the first theorists to outline a ‘systematic ideology of segregation’ in South Africa were English liberals (1995: 146-147). Similarly, in *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (1999), Aleta Norval describes how in the ‘minutiae of their analyses’ there is little difference between English and Afrikaner South Africans, who were both in agreement on the ‘fundamental need to exclude the black South African population from the centres of political power’ (ibid.: 28-29).

By including SANG’s past in the scope of the study I was able to identify the role English South Africans played in shaping the institution. What emerged from my research was that English involvement was not typified by liberalism. Despite being widely considered to be liberal, many English South Africans hold reactionary views, and it is this group that dominated SANG’s early audience base and patrons and whose tastes and interests were reflected in the museum (discussed in chapters three and four). In *Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* Patricia Hayes draws a clear distinction between the English and English South Africans (2000).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The following historic texts draw cogent links between Afrikanerdom and fascism, but at the same time portray apartheid as if it were imposed by the Afrikaner against the will of the liberal English: *The Rise of Afrikanerdom, Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Moodie 1975); *Constructing Afrikaner Nationalism* (Giliomee 1983: 21-54) and *Between Crown and Swastika* (Furlong 1991).

<sup>16</sup> The term English South Africans is used to refer to ‘English-speaking whites’ including British born South Africans, South Africans of British heritage and South African whites who felt a close affiliation with the English and England. Conversely, the term Afrikaner is used to describe white South Africans whose ‘loyalty’ was to the region rather than their country of origin. Most people who fall within this category were of Dutch or French descent, but it also includes some people of English heritage, in

Though superficially imitative of the mother-country, she identifies that the ‘cultural production of an “Englishman” in the Union of South Africa, was specific to the ‘colonial periphery’ in its appeal to an ‘earlier and more manly imperial age’ (ibid.: 339). As described by Hayes, these ‘Lords of the Last Frontier’, extolled physical strength and virility and had more than a ‘whiff of brutality’ (ibid.: 336-337). Robert Morrell gives substance to Hayes’ account in his illuminating local study, *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal 1880-1920* (Morrell 2001), in which he describes how a hyper-masculine culture was instilled in English South African boys from a young age through education, leisure and cultural activities that normalised their aggressive racist behaviour. My research supports the notion that SANG was intent on supporting local white identity construction. At the same time it indicates the gallery championed an inner circle of English South African men. Thus, in some cases, SANG’s communicative practices reinforced hierarchies and exclusions.

The rough masculinity in operation at SANG draws attention to the fact that racism is not a pristine force. Anne McClintock’s study, *Imperial Leather* (1995), on the intersection of domesticity, imperialism and industrialisation, serves as a reminder that ‘race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience’ but rather ‘come into existence *in and through* relation to each other’ (ibid.: 5, original emphasis). In my study recognition that racial practices are animated and complicated by gender, class and cultural concerns deepens awareness of the processes taking place at SANG. For example, McClintock’s discussion on the imperial project as a white male endeavour which ‘barred’ white women ‘from the corridors of formal power’<sup>17</sup> finds parallels with levels of gendered access and the production of race at SANG (ibid.: 7). Nonetheless, the museum’s foundations in the white state points to the need for race to be foregrounded in the study. A notion that is born out in research on South African museums that has sought to move the South African cultural sphere beyond a ‘black and white lens’ (Steyn 2001; Nuttall and Coetzee 2002; Nuttall 2009).

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particular those whose ancestors arrived in South Africa in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Barber 1999: 4).

<sup>17</sup> McClintock makes clear she is not suggesting white women were ‘onlookers’ in the colonial project, rather she refers to them as ‘ambiguously complicit’, having been placed, by men, in positions of ‘decided – if borrowed – power’ (1995: 7).

## Then and Now

The lack of research on English practice has been accompanied by a lack of academic interest in SANG (Voyiya, McGee and Yoshiara's work being the main exceptions). However, there has been extensive research on other South African museums that provides a useful resource for my study. The desire to move beyond the confines of race occupies much of this research.

In *Entanglement* (2009), Sarah Nuttall seeks to reveal the artificiality of race in South African museum culture by highlighting areas of commonality, hybridity and cultural cross-over. Building on her previous work (2000, 2002), Nuttall is critical of what she views as post-colonial theory's overemphasis on difference (2009: 8). She suggests that instead of using binary vantage points research should focus on areas of racial intersection (ibid.: 10). By 'grasping the instances and situations' in which the significance of race spills out of the 'routinised confines of absolute [black and white] figures' Nuttall identifies one can 'begin to rethink the institutionalisation of racial difference and similarity' (ibid.). In taking this approach Nuttall rejects Foucauldian and Adornian models of oppositionality in favour of what she refers to as a 'politics of the emergent' that is alert to 'the potential, both latent and surfacing, for imminent change' (ibid.: 158). A similar approach is advocated by Annie Coombes in *History after Apartheid* (2004) who traces the transitions and tensions that populate contested sites (2004: 4-5). In tracing these processes she reveals the artificiality of their heritage in 'apparently homogenous ethnic constituencies' and emphasises heterogeneity in the concept of 'community' (ibid.: 5). Likewise, Marion Arnold in her book *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996) explores areas of hybridisation, in her case to provide not 'merely a linguistic conjunction, but a means of effecting connectedness' (ibid.: 2). Together these scholars give attention to practices of mutuality and in doing so produce a space where one can begin to imagine culture beyond the racial rubric. For Nuttall this space is the 'after apartheid', an intentionally utopian term she uses to signal the country's 'potential for inclusivity' (2009: 11).

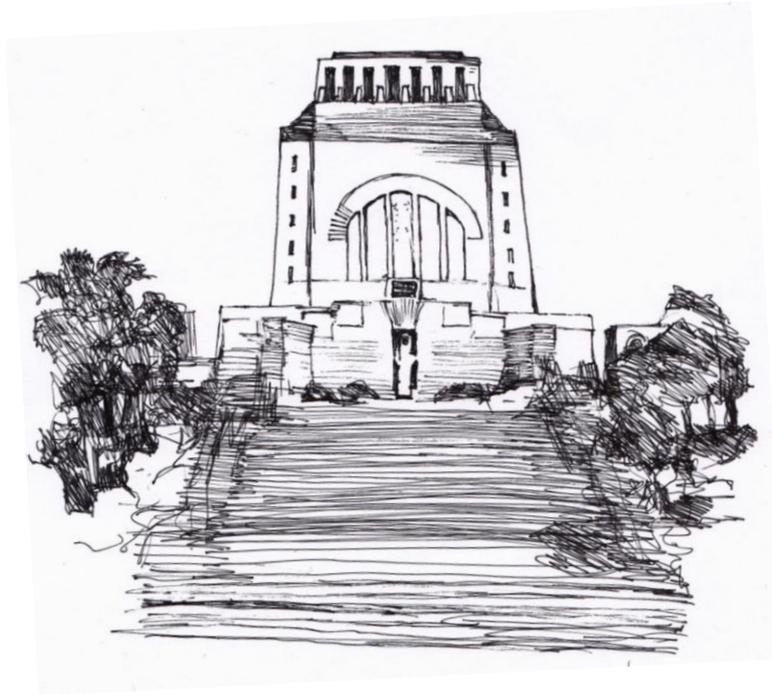


Plate 2.1 'The Voortrekker Monument'

As a by-product of seeking the after-apartheid, research has congregated around sites that best illustrate the shift from extreme manifestations of racist practice under apartheid, to more ethical, inclusive, progressive practices post-apartheid. An unfortunate and somewhat ironic consequence of research concentrating on these aspects of practice is that it has unintentionally amplified the divisions in the field.

Research on historic sites has focused on the notorious aforementioned Voortrekker Monument [plate 2.1] and the San Diorama in the South African Museum (SAM), Cape Town.<sup>18</sup> Built to commemorate the Great Trek of 1838, the Voortrekker Monument consecrates 'the idea of the trek as the moment of emergence of the Afrikaner as the founding ethnic group of a new nation, "the white tribe"' with 'divine rights' (Coombes 2004: 28). The San Diorama,<sup>19</sup> in the South African Museum, provides a 'natural' landscape dominated by a series of painted plaster models, cast from people of Khoisan heritage in the early twentieth century (Enwezor 1999; Goldberg 2002: 150-160; Coombes 2004: 206-242; Dubin: 2009: 54-83) (discussed in chapter nine). In both sites racist visual texts represent white people as having superiority over black people in

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<sup>18</sup> The following literature provides detailed discussions on either one or both of these sites: Davison 1990, 1993; Skotnes 1996, 1997; Enwezor 1999; Goldberg 2002; Coombes 2004; Atkinson and Brietz (eds.); 2005; Dubin: 2009 and Grundlingh 2009.

<sup>19</sup> The Diorama was closed in 2000, but remains in situ screened off from public view.

perpetuity. In the monument, through a marble panel depicting Afrikaner women and children being ‘slaughtered’ by ‘savage’ Zulu warriors and in the Diorama through its representation of the Khoisan as a primitive race.

These racist sites provide a stark contrast with new progressive South African museums that have also been heavily researched, such as the District Six Museum and The Robben Island Experience in Cape Town (opened respectively in 1994 and 1997). These new museums highlight racial injustice and de-legitimize the monocular historic view through their reclamation of lost histories; commemoration of past struggles and the facilitation of open dialogue. The District Six Museum explores the impact of forced removals on members of the District Six community, in the 1960s, which decimated its multicultural community and left a literal wasteland to the north of the city. The Robben Island Experience explores the lives of black political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, who were held on Robben Island during apartheid (Golding 2009; Coombes 2004; Koloane 2000). In both cases first-hand knowledge and experience is foregrounded and public testimony by black stakeholders forms a central component of the visit.

Discussing District Six and like-minded museums, in *Learning at the Museum Frontiers*, Viv Golding identifies them as operating at the museum ‘frontier’ (2009: 6). She uses this term to refer to the museums’ effectiveness at creating cross-platform collaborations that produce a ‘fusion of horizons ... in a process of dialogical exchange’ that is akin to a ‘deep respectful conversation’ (ibid.). Importantly, the ‘respectful’ conversations that accompanied the development of The District Six Museum and The Robben Island Experience were messy, confrontational, fragmented and frequently lacking in consensus (Coombes 2004; Thorne 2006). Marstine identifies this type of conflict as a necessary feature of healthy and fruitful museum dialogue, as it demonstrates the museum is soliciting, rather than shying away from, engagement with transgressive practice (2011: 11). She points out, that museums frequently avoid these kinds of exchanges as ‘it presumes the risk of unpredictability’ of the kind that threatens transformation of ‘the institution and self’ (ibid.). In allowing space for conflicts to emerge the District Six Museum and The Robben Island Experience have become more inclusive sites.

Museological research that looks at the ‘worst’ historic sites and the ‘best’ of the new illustrates that radical change has occurred in South African museum practice. Importantly, the research highlights the falsity of binary positions and hierarchies in traditional sites and the need for divergent voices to be heard and valorised. At the same time it has signalled a chasm between established and new museums.

Significantly, the use of different types of museums to mark the distinction between *then* and *now* has meant relatively little attention has been paid in South African research to the processes by which established institutions transform – with the exception of the Voortrekker Monument, which has been the subject of a detailed analytical study by Coombes.<sup>20</sup> This means that aspects of historic practice that might impede change have not been fully excavated and areas that could facilitate change have not been fully explored. Looking at the relative lack of research undertaken at SANG with awareness of this gap signals the need for its thorough examination. On the one hand it shows black participation to be an essential feature of change management and on the other that white dominated practices have held development back.

My study of SANG aims to contribute to South African museum research by paying attention to change and hybridity, whilst remaining alert to continuing racial binaries. These apparently contradictory goals are necessary in an environment in which racism and racial ideas retain resonance. Indeed, Nuttall acknowledges that the absence of critical attention drawn to whiteness in South African cultural sites still needs to be addressed (Nuttall 2000: 4) and Coombes suggests that ongoing scrutiny of the ‘processes by which histories are embodied in the public domain’ is required (Coombes 2004: 295).

## Conclusion

My research indicates that attention should be paid to how historic museological practice continues to inform SANG, with a particular emphasis on identifying practices of whiteness that have so far been relatively under explored. From this basis a better

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<sup>20</sup> In her nuanced study of the *Voortrekker Monument*, Coombes, assessed its capacity for change. She identifies that despite being a ‘stage upon which new identities and challenges have been launched’ it still has the capacity ‘to do real harm’ (ibid. 53). In this case the site’s history as a heritage site for ritualising Afrikaner heritage and its physicality as a fixed display are viewed as major impediments to enacting meaningful change.

understanding should emerge of why black audience members and stakeholders continue to feel estranged from SANG as well as their means to greater inclusion.

The concentration on Afrikaner practice and the ‘best’ new sites means South Africa may be prematurely seeking closure from its past. The risk of this happening indicates the need for greater scrutiny of institutions like SANG, which although demonstrably keen to make change, may be leaving raced practices unaddressed. With awareness that research needs to account for SANG’s history one of the major questions that will be addressed in this study is: how were racial identities, in intersection with class, cultural and gender identities, created and sustained by the gallery over time? I have outlined factors that might make SANG resistant to change, such as the presence of raced binaries; an historic bias towards English South Africans; a reliance on fine art and an established relationship with the white audience. I have also identified features of SANG’s practice that may make it adaptable and flexible to change – in particular its willingness to engage with story-telling, its interest in generating political talk (and thus preparedness to elicit conflict), its homely atmosphere and the involvement of black staff. These features provide the potential for SANG to engage with broader conceptions of art and broader audiences.

## Chapter Two: Method and Form

My analysis of SANG's practice across time and in its local context required a multi-levelled methodological approach. Beginning from a heuristic basis and developing methods to fit the circumstances as they arose, the research included archival study, interviews with key staff, attendance of tours and a large visual element, including mapping, drawing and photographing the displays. These methods were chosen because they enabled me to: include historic practice in the scope of the study; ascertain what SANG valued at different points of time and identify the underlying assumptions that attended valued practices. Within this framework the gallery's representational practice was foregrounded with a concern to understand what SANG wanted its audience to see.

This chapter is split into three sections. In the first introductory section, *Personhood and the Public Sphere*, I briefly locate myself in the research and describe the benefits of situating the study in the public sphere. In the second section, *History and Value*, I explore why historic analysis should be considered an essential component of museum study and then go on to identify what SANG has valued at key points in its history. In the third section, *Mixed Methods*, I look in detail at the methods I used to investigate the gallery and explore why they were chosen and how they were deployed.

### Section One: Personhood and the Public Sphere

My combined personal and professional experiences stoked my interest in wanting to examine SANG and look at how it negotiated art and race. In 2006 I undertook fieldwork in Cape Town for seven months, this was followed by a further six week visit in 2010 to photograph art works. Previously I experienced SANG as a regular visitor when I was a Masters student at Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (2000-2003) and a resident artist at Greatmore Art Studio, Cape Town (2002-2003). My background as an artist, and art degrees in South Africa and London, at The Slade, University College London, meant I shared much of the artistic language and many of the interests of the professionals who worked in the museum. I have also known and

worked alongside artists from a range of backgrounds in Cape Town and conducted research outside of the artistic field in the city, so I have a good knowledge of the environment in which the gallery is based. Further personal factors that brought me to this study are that: I am a white British woman from a family with long-term heritage in South Africa and Namibia; I have a mixed-race daughter (who came with me on visits), and I have a left-wing political outlook.

Having lived in South Africa before the end of apartheid and in the democratic state I am acutely aware of the changes that have occurred in the country and of the multifarious challenges it still needs to overcome. Apartheid is physically and psychologically wrought on the environment. To be in South Africa is to be raced.

### Access to the space

Professional roles in museums, including SANG, remain largely in white hands (McGee 2006: 190-192). In my interviews with black staff members they offered concrete examples of their own and black audience members' marginalisation (discussed in chapter six). In my own experience of the museum racial dynamics were also clearly at play. In some instances white staff members made comments that I do not believe they would have made if I had not been white. For example, a white curator used the term 'we' in reference to the presumed 'shared' experience of white audience members, which included myself (discussed in chapter seven). In another instance a white guide made derogatory remarks about a black artist's work that were inflected with racism and homophobia (discussed in chapter ten). These events offered insight into the discriminatory discourse in circulation at SANG and alerted me to my own racial presence in the gallery.

Although my decision to situate my research in the public sphere was unrelated to the differentiated levels of access in the museum it helped mitigate against potential bias. My interest in SANG's representational practice meant I concentrated on areas of the gallery that were physically accessible and open to the general public. I therefore did not need to develop 'backstage' relationships or to perform the role of the intimate outsider.

The multi-faceted nature of my project also enabled me to cross-analyse the exhibitions, walking tours and interviews. In doing so I found the public discourse remained fairly stable across contexts. For example, the political concerns that staff members expressed in their interviews were also present in their displays and public talks. Staff members' racial 'talk' also appeared in the public arena, including in impolitic comments on the museum floor. The staff members' openness and 'outspokenness' indicated that I had limited impact on the space and provided important evidence of SANG's role as a political house.

Though my thesis shows the staff members didn't share common objectives and there were racial divides all of them portrayed the gallery as a live political space which they were personally invested in changing. For example, a black ex-staff member described how when working at the gallery he came in on his days off to provide black visitors with tours (staff member C 2006). Three black ex-staff members also came back to the museum to do interviews with me and a fourth white staff member made me multiple disks of the displays. The staff members' generous actions went beyond their job descriptions and demonstrated their collective commitment to opening up the museum.

## Art and objectivity

As well as having a raced presence in the museum my involvement was informed by my art background. My prior art training and experience as an artist facilitated entry to the art works and museum display. However, my training in the western fine art tradition had a formative impact on my understanding of art and art history that was not nullified by my interest in wider practice – not least because those areas that I have 'expertise' in are also those which are privileged in the museum. Hence, I took considerable care to seek out and acknowledge art discourses related to practices with which I was hitherto unfamiliar and where needed to make my ignorance visible.

The limitations in my knowledge and a desire to gain a saturated experience of SANG's representational practice led me to adopt an approach informed by Phenomenology (Alfred Schutz 1967) and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969), perspectives which encourage close readings of bodies of material through interpretative analysis of content and display. With its roots in the reflexive critical interrogation of knowledge,

phenomenology proposes that to understand an experience submersion in the 'eidetical sphere' is essential (Schutz 1967: 113-117). This process is achieved through interrogation of 'common-sense' assumptions based on the principle of approaching the environment as if one were a stranger (ibid.). In order to retain a connection between the poetic forms of evidence thrown up by this mode of research and the political narratives that populated the domain I took cognisance of Symbolic Interactionism's interest in locating object interactions in space (Blumer 1969). In doing so I took on board Geertz's advice that a 'thick description' cannot be found in a vacuum: 'divorced from what happens ... from the whole vast business of the world' (1973: 17), to treat an interpretation as such would be to 'divorce it from its applications and render it vacant' (ibid.).

In order to include close subjective analysis of SANG alongside analysis of the museum as 'a whole', I adopted a mixed method approach that enabled me to engage at a deep level in SANG's representational practice and to include the museum's historic practice and societal role within the scope of the study.

## Section Two: History and Value

One of the abiding concerns of New Historicism is the reconstruction of our view of history not as a progression, evolutionary inevitability, but as a multidirectional network of ruptured continuities ... a complex, supra-temporal artefact in which the present derives its force from the un-pastness of the past (Osundare 2000: 114)

The retention and replication of past practices in contemporary museum processes makes historic analysis imperative. According to C. Wright Mills, in *The Sociological Imagination*, close historic analysis is essential to an understanding of society, as the 'variety' of the social world cannot be ascertained without recourse to 'specific historical contexts' (1959: 163). Mills considers that scrutiny of historical social structures enable us to formulate choices and 'enlarge the scope of human decisions in the making of history', a notion that informs his conception of the sociological imagination, on which subject he writes:

The future of human affairs is not merely some set of variables to be predicted. The future is what is to be decided – within the limits, to be

sure, of historical possibility. But this possibility is not fixed; in our time the limits seem very broad indeed (ibid.: 174)

Taking history as a discursive plane, my initial intention was to cut against the grain of authorised museum history in order to see SANG through ‘my own eyes’. Jane Rendall encourages this kind of excursion in *Trafalgar Square – Détournements (a site-writing)* (2010), where she deliberately circumnavigates the ‘established tour’ of Trafalgar Square so as to highlight the spaces beyond its remit and relocate the critical gaze. Nirmal Puwar, writing in regard to the English Parliamentary complex in her book *Space Invaders*, also supports this type of endeavour when she notes that even if an institution has been subject to extensive research we still need ‘more research journeys, rambles and excavations from differently situated flaneurs’ in order to uncover stories that have ‘yet to see the light of day’ (2004: 311).

Unfortunately, my desire to seek out SANG’s hidden past was hindered by a lack of authoritative literature on the gallery from which to take my own excursion. Although SANG’s archive and collection are in essence texts (with authorising stories and inherent regimes of truth) the gallery has not been the subject of detailed research of the type usually encountered in national museums. Four introductory texts provide brief information on the gallery’s history: *Ons Kunsmuseum (Our National Gallery)* (Brander 1940);<sup>1</sup> *The South African National Gallery* (Eldred Green 1966);<sup>2</sup> *The National South African Art Collection* (Matthys Bokhurst 1971) and *A Short History of the South African National Gallery* (Dolby 1981).<sup>3</sup> The longest of these texts is Joe Dolby’s *A Short-History*, which amounts to eleven pages of writing. A further four academic studies look at specific areas and periods of practice (three of which were mentioned in chapter one). Two of these studies: *The Luggage is Still Labelled: Blackness in South African Art* (Voyiya and McGee 2003) and *Restructuring South African Museums: Reality and Rhetoric within Cape Town* (McGee 2006) focus on how black art world practitioners perceived the gallery in 2003-4. The third, *Museums in a Diverse Society: A Visitor Study at the South African National Gallery*, explores visitor reception by race in 2005 (Yoshiara 2006) and the fourth, *Old Masters and Aspirations: The Randlords*,

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<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> October 1940 in Newweek translated text, ‘Publications other than Catalogue’ in SANG archive

<sup>2</sup> p.11-27 in Lantern vol xv no. 3 March 1966, Catalogue Box ‘South African National Gallery’ in SANG archive

<sup>3</sup> p. 37-50, Lantern Magazine 1981 Catalogue Box ‘South African National Gallery’ in SANG archive

*Art and South Africa*, looks from an art historical perspective at the bequests given by Randlords in the 1940s to South African museums (Stevenson 1997). These accounts, along with exhibition catalogues<sup>4</sup>, provide useful signposts to the museum's practice, but do not amount to an extensive history of the museum.

Consideration of how to attend to the gap in historic knowledge of SANG led me to Ann Laura Stoler's research, *Along the Archival Grain; Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (2009). In her investigation of the colonial archive she encourages researchers to explore obvious features of the terrain, rather than just concentrate on hidden meanings:

To explore the grain with care and read along it first ... paying attention to disruptions in the 'seamless' surface of colonialism's archival genres "its unexplored fault lines, ragged edges and unremarked disruptions" *but also* to focus on its repetitions, which 'join the disparate, enlist the counterintuitive, and provide the vectors of recuperations and ruptures by making familiar what colonial agents sought to know (2009: 51, 52 my emphasis)

In accordance with Stoler's recommendation I sought to identify the museum's repetitions as well as its disruptions. In this respect the lack of available literature proved beneficial as it forced me to undertake a more extensive examination than I had initially intended of the museum's past, which revealed its distinctive history.

## Art world values

In order to gain a fuller understanding of SANG I immersed myself in its public archive, exhibition halls and vaults. In undertaking this work it was apparent that a selection strategy was needed to sift the material I found into useful and less useful bodies of information. A crucial consideration was to establish what the museum valued at different points in its history, with acknowledgement that:

Museums do not simply issue objective descriptions or form logical assemblages; they generate representations and attribute value and

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<sup>44</sup> I found catalogue contributions on the patrons' collections by Proud and Tietz particularly useful (1995; 2001).

meaning in line with certain perspectives or classificatory schemas which are historically specific (Lidche 1997: 160)

In *The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures* Henrietta Lidche identifies that the significance of objects within museums is largely determined through the value (material or otherwise) that is placed upon them (ibid.). Elliot et al. in *Towards a Material History Methodology* (1994) concur with this assessment, noting that the four basic scientific properties of the art object: material, construction, provenance and function, are inadequate to the task of understanding its meaning without factoring in the 'highly interpretive' property of 'value' (1994.: 110). They conclude that it is through an object's perceived value to the society in which it is produced that its meaning is ultimately determined (ibid.: 110-113).

Network accounts of art prove useful here. Their comprehension of art as a product of inter-societal relationships provides the means to understand how art institutions give meaning and value to their objects (Becker 1982: 36). Empirical sociological studies of art institutions emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century that centred on the networks surrounding art. The research in this field is typified in America by the work of Howard Becker and in France by Pierre Bourdieu. In America network accounts can be traced to Danto (1964, 1992) and Dickie (1974). Danto in his discussion on art worlds developed the 'institutional theory of art' (1964: 34-39), which Dickie utilised to explain how objects that might have been unrecognisable as art in every-day circumstances, such as 'ready-mades' and conceptual work were designated as art through their authentication in the institutional system (1974: 34-38). In his seminal work *Art Worlds* (1982) Becker developed this theory to create a systematic account of how art is given meaning through a network of actors including, but not restricted to, artists, buyers, art institutions, audiences, critics and the state, which together create an art world, which connotes value and authority (ibid.: 35).

Network accounts provide access to the museum, however the methods commonly deployed in these accounts (namely interviews and observation) only prove fruitful when the network makes itself available to research. Chin-tao Wu discovered this when researching the role of private sponsors at *Tate Modern*, London, for her book *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (2002). The major

players at the museum refused to engage with her research project, forcing her to shift her focus to museum reports (ibid.). As Susan Pearce identifies in *On Collecting* (1994), standard network methodologies are also less helpful when examining historic cultural sites as their gatekeepers may be dead, no longer available, or unable to recollect the relevant display (1994: 130). I therefore chose to look at SANG's network of producers through its art works, displays and texts as well as first-hand accounts, as this enabled me to identify the relative value it applied to objects and practices across time.

## Traces of the past

A potential issue when researching museum practice through material evidence is that information relating to older displays and practices may be irretrievably lost. Pearce views this gap in data from an archaeological perspective as a significant or even critical loss (ibid.: 131). However, from the point of view of a longitudinal museum study these absences also provide clues to what was valued.

The partial nature of the archive coupled with ongoing fragmentation, in the form of damage, theft and loss, means that what one generally finds is 'the *traces* of various past events' (Seale 2004: 261). These vestigial elements, however slight, indicate what institutions considered important during different periods, through what they chose to preserve. A note of caution is required here as the relative value of events and objects to a network of producers cannot be determined solely by the amount of information they produced, nor by what they have retained. Indeed, Nigel Gilbert identifies that the frequency of an occurrence may offer a simplistic guide to intent, as tastes and fashions fluctuate across time (2001: 206). Yet, in the case of the art museum this method of enquiry gains saliency as one of the primary functions of the museum is to preserve objects and practices that the institution deems important (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991: 37).

The longer an object remains in an art institution the more status it accrues, as Dickie describes, art begins its life as 'a candidate for appreciation' before becoming 'a work of art' (1974: 33-34). Pearce identifies that the vast majority of objects that survive in art collections do so because of their perceived value to the museum, whereas items of comparatively less value are frequently sold or lost (1994: 131). Similarly, the

individuals with the most power in museums are those most likely to have their viewpoints recorded for posterity, as Clive Seale remarks, ‘the views of a managing director are more likely to survive in a company’s archive than the views of a receptionist’ (2004: 255).

At SANG sales of art and partial recording of shows actually aided identification of valued practice. Until the gallery introduced a non-accession clause in 1949 it was subject to extensive undocumented sales, including a sale of 129 art works in 1947, which meant only those works considered to be of particular economic or cultural worth were retained (Carman 2006: 14).<sup>5</sup> SANG’s limited funds also restricted its documentation of exhibitions and events to those that had particular significance to its gatekeepers.<sup>6</sup> In contrast large American and European museums had sufficient funds to document all of their exhibitions. SANG’s archive is therefore a particularly good guide to intent.

Using the quantity and quality of texts and the continued presence of art works and practice as evidence of value, phases were identified that were typified by particular practices or behaviours [table 2.1]. On the surface, phases in SANG’s development mirrored those of western museums, which typically moved from shaky beginnings through a period of elaboration and conservation to a more controlled use of displays. The first phase occurred in two parts. Firstly, from 1930-34,<sup>7</sup> when SANG’s focus was on its décor, which it used to signal its credentials, and secondly, 1935-49, when it gained a noteworthy historic European collection. In the second ‘consolidation’ phase, 1950-1979, the gallery introduced educative and leisure initiatives that helped promote its collection and expand its audience. The third phase, 1980-1994, represented a period of flux in which calls for greater access were responded to on the one hand by a retreat to tradition and on the other by expansion. This led to the fourth phase, 1994-2009, when the museum focused on curatorship and acquisition.

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<sup>5</sup> As a result of these sales there are large gaps in knowledge pertaining to the pre-1948 collections. For example, the specific content of the first bequest of 45 paintings given by Thomas Bayley in 1871 remains unknown (Dolby in interview 2006).

<sup>6</sup> The first time a deliberate attempt was made to comprehensively document the gallery collection was in 1948, following a government review, which noted that hitherto the museum had paid greater attention to its patrons than its art (Stratford 1947) Reports, SANG Archive. Significantly, even after a record system was introduced most exhibitions remained un-catalogued and undocumented - ‘New Director of Art Gallery’ *Cape Times* 29th January 1948 News cuttings, 1904-1983, compiled by J. Minicki and other librarians, SANG archive; Paris (1950).

<sup>7</sup> The years the study covers run from November 1930 to April 2009.

**Table 2.1** Phases in the Museum’s Development, by Main Focus and Evidence

Phase	Time period	Main focus	Evidence of focus
Development	1930-1934	Museum décor	Art work embedded in architectural design and included in all public rooms. Permanent display.
	1935-1949	Patrons and historic European fine art	Museum extended to house the patrons’ collections. Extensive newspaper reports focus on patrons and their gifts. Patrons’ European fine art collections dominated gallery.
Consolidation	1950-1979	Directorship – education, leisure and entertainment initiatives	Leisure and entertainment initiatives instituted by The Director were foregrounded in the press, museum reports and catalogues. Standardisation of design and management of display. Practices introduced by the Director (John Paris) in the 1950s were retained throughout apartheid.
Flux	1980-1993	Conservation versus expansion	Catalogues, newspaper reports and interviews with staff reflect dichotomy between SANG’s practices and those outside the museum. White South African art centred; Education Department expanded to include black education officers; African and community art shown. From 1993 education exhibitions in the main gallery.
Expansion	1994-2009	Curators, education and new collections	Division of museum into curatorial regions. Reduction in education department and expansion in number of curators. Exhibition programme built around curatorial themes. Curators allocated primary space in museum publications.

## Storytelling

Although SANG’s developmental phases seemed to correspond with those in western museums, closer inspection revealed SANG appeared less interested in aesthetics than in social ideas, and therefore performed more like a political house than a temple. A particular difference was that SANG used its collection as a medium for telling local stories.

SANG’s recourse to storytelling was not exceptional as all exhibitions are in essence narrative displays. In *Representation* (1997) Stuart Hall describes exhibitions as ‘systems of representation’ that work like a ‘language’ and are designed to deliver meaning: ‘every choice to show this rather than that, to show this in relation to that, to

say this about that – is a choice about how to represent’ (1997: 8). Furthermore, each of the choices made in an exhibition ‘has consequences both for what meanings are produced and for how meaning is produced’ – and therefore tell a particular story (ibid.: 8). In SANG’s case the stories that were told were made striking by their direct mode of delivery and the narratives they relayed.

In his essay *The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research* (2007), Ken Plummer notes that by identifying the specific features of stories one can determine the cultural factors on which they rely (2007: 8). Further, as stories are ‘embedded and patterned through cultures of inequalities’ identification of their key features determines for whom they are being told and who they advantage (ibid.). The main subjects of SANG’s stories are set out in table 2.2.

**Table 2.2** The Main Focus and ‘Stories’ of Each Time Period

Year	Focus	Main stories
1930-1934	Décor	Scenes of white South African life: early settler society, mine patronage, working life, black acquiescence to white rule.
1935-1949	Patrons and historic European fine art	Historic fine art displays (mainly of English work). White, male stories, sporting-life and female nudes. Rooms designated to individual patrons.
1950-1979	Director led practices	Contemporary white South African art. Leisure initiatives focused on inclusion of white families: tours, films, musical events and participatory exhibitions.
1980-1993	Conservation versus education	Competing claims to museum. Development of white South African collection. Introduction of black education officers and political, resistance art.
1994-2009	Curatorship	Political contemporary art displays with focus on multiculturalism and ‘rainbow nation’. The inclusion of ‘African art’. Revisionist historic European displays.

The direct engagement with racial subject matter at SANG was notable, as it contrasted with European and American art museums where whiteness took the guise of an invisible norm (Berger 2005: 14). In the first phase of SANG’s development, 1930-1949, its décor and collection promoted an overtly white, phallogocentric, English-South African view of the world linked to economic expansion and social control. This was followed in the second phase, 1950-1979, by a period of consolidation in which SANG was remodelled as a space for the white South African family. In its third phase, 1980-

1993, different and competing racial narratives emerged. On the one side, white recidivism, on the other, multiculturalism and black inclusion. In its fourth phase, 1994-2009, political art exhibitions were foregrounded, which were used as the backdrop for multicultural stories told primarily through the white curatorial team.

As well as indicating the need for site specific study, the distinction between SANG's relationship with race and that of European and American museums suggests a different methodological approach is required. 'Cultural blindness to whiteness' in the west has meant analysis of museum practice has concentrated on uncovering discreet racial tropes (ibid.: 14-15). Thus, Berger (discussed in chapter one) dealt with the issue of hidden whiteness by 'probing beneath the narrative surface' of seemingly innocuous images to reveal their raced characteristics (ibid.: 1-8).

Berger's preoccupation with uncovering hidden meanings was also informed by his concern not to reproduce prejudices. He cautions against exploring more overt forms of racial visual culture, such as caricature, arguing that their obviousness makes them dangerous ground for white academics, who under the mantle of 'racial justice' may be 'indulging in our long standing fascination with the other' (ibid.: 2-3). He also argues persuasively that dehumanising stereotypes wherever they are produced, including in academic texts, play a supporting role in reproducing discriminatory tropes as it keeps them in the public discourse (ibid.). In his case, the solution to this contradiction has been to explore less overt forms of racism. An approach aided by the prevalence of concealed and subtle forms of racism in Berger's chosen field. At SANG, where an openly racist, sexist and English-centred discourse has accompanied the art work for much of its history, the circumnavigation of racial tropes would not be possible without being potentially misleading. Attention is therefore given to both overt and discreet racial material.

A further reason to examine obviously discriminatory imagery is that it often conceals more complex meaning. Close examination of the stories told through SANG's collection reveals startling inaccuracies in what at first glance appear to be straightforward historic and biographical tales. These distortions correspond with those found by Lev Gumilev in his examination of the people of the Asian steppe in the early middle ages in *Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom* (1987). The stories he encountered

in the medieval texts, although appearing to refer directly to ‘real’ events, included inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and in some cases ‘blatant distortions’ (ibid.: 9). In order to uncover why these ‘exaggerations and omissions’ occurred (ibid.: 10) Macdonald describes how Gumilev treated his sources as if they were unreliable witnesses and he was a (fictional) detective seeking to uncover their motives (2001: 195). In viewing the material in this way Gumilev sought to ascertain who created it, who its stories benefitted and importantly who it sought to deceive (1987: 10, 362-363). By looking with an inquisitive eye at the stories SANG told my own study was enriched, as it revealed its partisan tales frequently advantaged particular groups and individuals. For example, white hegemony was assertively displayed during periods when whites felt themselves to be physically and economically under threat, whilst more liberal, transgressive forms of whiteness came into play when whites felt more secure in their power.

## Master narratives and their dichotomies

‘Playing the detective’ helped uncover the museum’s complex stories, which proved essential for understanding the museum. Clive Seale notes that the realist approach to archival research, in which the more material available about an event leads to it being viewed as having greater meaning, can be misleading for those seeking to gather ideas rather than facts (2004: 254). Table 2.3 shows that subsidiary or minor themes were in existence at SANG that provided important counters to its dominant norms. The presence of binaries dissembles ‘the neat divisions that could imagine a European history and its unified collectivities apart from the external’ (Stoler 2009: 5), as a consequence they also offer opportunities for change. For example, the gallery’s status as a picture gallery was refuted by the presence of craft objects and African art, which paved the way for education, community and political initiatives that in the west were rarely associated with the rarefied field of fine art.

**Table 2.3** Major and Minor Themes

Year	Major themes	Minor themes
1930-1934	White settlement English fine art	Black and Afrikaner culture
1935-1949	Historic European fine art	Craft, South African fine art
1950-1979	Historic European fine art and contemporary South African fine art by white artists	Education initiatives, African art
1980-1993	Historic European fine art and modernist European and South African fine art by white artists	Black people led education initiatives, community art, African art, political art
1994-2009	Historic European fine art, political art	African art

Placing a weighted emphasis on narratives produced by minor themes risks exaggerating their influence, nonetheless their presence in this study is required to give a greater understanding of how SANG evolved. Examination of SANG’s developmental phases shows that SANG’s processes were not linear, but layered, with minor ideas in one period frequently surfacing as dominant influences at later times. Looking more closely at SANG’s practice also reveals that narratives that initially appeared lost were more commonly concealed.

### Section Three: Mixed Methods

Working on the twin assumptions that common-sense knowledge should be interrogated and that the museum’s contents are ‘socially situated products’ (Scott 1990: 34), I used a mixed-method or ‘triangulated’ mode of enquiry (Denzin 1970). ‘Triangulation’, or the application of three or more methods to a research problem, has been challenged by postmodern writers for its reliance on truth claims, or the notion that by applying different methods one gets closer to the ‘facts’ (Richardson 2003: 517). While triangulation is limited by domain assumptions, including the notion that there is a fixed object that can be ‘triangulated’, the idea that a research field is best illuminated by light thrown from multiple sources has merit (ibid.). Norman Denzin who championed triangulation in the 1970s as a means to gain a full understanding of the field (1970) has in more recent years applied the same term more fluidly to the researcher’s role as a ‘methodological bricoleur’ (2003: 8-9). A term he ascribes to researchers who adopt a reflexive approach to the multiple methods in their employ so as to reveal a ‘quilt-like’

montage of impressions (ibid.: 9). In my case a more prosaic rationale for behaving like a bricoleur was that the scope of my study required a multifaceted approach.

Although art museums on the temple model have fairly stable collections, museums of contemporary art are more fluid and changing hence they are often described as ‘alive’ (Smith 1989: 6-21). SANG, with its assortment of contemporary and historic art objects and frequent changes to its display had a particularly unstable nature. The concern to capture its complexity, coupled with the wide span of time covered by my investigation and my interest in engaging with the politics of display meant that the archive, art collection, exhibitionary complex and gatekeepers all fell within the remit of the study. In the discussion below I look at how I engaged with these sources of data and the methods deployed for their analysis.

## The archive

Nothing starts in the Archive, nothing, ever at all, although things  
certainly end up there (Steedman 2008: 1175)

Approaching the archive I was mindful of Stoler’s poetic injunction that one should ‘look for its pulse in the quiescence and quickened pace of its own production ... formulae, and frames’ (2009: 35). In order to grasp the exigencies of SANG’s archive I sought to identify where its energies were expended and what conditioned its design. From this starting point I was able to ascertain ‘which visions ha[d] been generated in the pursuit of production’ (ibid.).

Identification of these mechanisms was achieved through rough adherence to the basic tenants of archival research set out by Pearce-Moses in *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (2005). Pearce-Moses advises those conducting research in the archive to begin with the general and then move to the specific ‘starting with the whole, then proceeding to components (series, subseries, folders and items)’ (2005: 7). Examining the archive as a whole I was able to observe how its serialisation controlled its content and impacted at an intrinsic level on what the museum sought to relay. By this means I identified how SANG’s discursive frame bore an affinity with the colonial

archives researched by Stoler, which served as ‘both transparencies on which power relations [are] inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves’ (2009: 20).

## The order of things

SANG’s library and archive were organised using *The Fine and Decorative Arts Section* (Volume 3) of the *Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index* (DDCRI) (1996 edition 21). The DDCRI is intrinsically bound to western precepts of art, as demonstrated by its division of art into three Euro-centric categories. Firstly, ‘Fine Art’, listed by sculpture, painting, drawing, graphic art and photography (517-520). Secondly, ‘Geographic Location’ – North America, Europe, The British Isles, England, ‘Miscellaneous Parts of Europe’ and ‘Other Geographic Areas’ (521-522). Thirdly, ‘Periods of Development’ with works divided by western art movements and style. This final section is further sub-divided by religion, with ‘Christian Subjects’ represented by almost a page of references in the index in contrast to ‘Other Religions’ which are represented by four entries (519-520).

The gallery’s adherence to the DDCRI meant the library corresponded spatially to its content with fifteen bookcases dedicated to specific western fine art practices, by type, region and period (this included a large section on English landscape painting that encompassed more than fifty books). In contrast, and again in correspondence with the DDCRI, literature on African art occupied minimal space on two shelves of one bookcase. A number of the African art books in this section were reductively categorised by the Dewey decimal code 709.01, which stands for ‘Non-literate peoples regardless of time or place, but limited to non-literate peoples of the past and non-literate peoples clearly not a part of contemporary society’ (Dewey Index p.522).

The inscription of racial hierarchies onto the archive had an impact on how staff responded to it. In 2006 one of the curators described (in interview) how she had asked SANG’s librarian to purchase more literature on African art, but was refused with the explanation that she could access these books at the South African Museum as: ‘they *should* have them in the social history division’ (Staff Member L 2006 213-219). The librarian’s response indicated that the form of categorisation used to index the books conditioned her expectation of the archive’s content.

## The underlying mess

The unequal treatment of European and African art practice in SANG's archive demonstrates that material discovered 'between the sleeves' of the formal archive needs to be viewed with the proviso that although significant it is a 'less actualisable force' than its container (Stoler 2008: 50). As Carolyn Steedman writes in *Dust*, researchers often get captured by reading 'for what is not there: the silences and the absences' rather than by what is present (2008: 177). Nevertheless, in moving from the formality of the DDCRI to the archive's content I found its subseries contained less formal, localised and in some cases transgressive practices that challenged its intent. Steedman notes that this duality is not unusual as the archive 'is not and never has been the repository of official documents alone' (ibid.).

While the archive index gave the impression of a totalising force, a perusal of the archive's content revealed its cataloguing was limited and incomplete. For example, the *Press Clipping Folders* contained newspaper articles in which texts were cut short and page numbers were missing. Lots of smaller items in the archive, including pamphlets, guides and catalogues, also went unrecorded in both the paper filing system and computer. Many of these were located in large containers itemised by category or type such as in the esoterically labelled box '*Items Other than Catalogues*'. The seeming lack of attention paid to individual items indicated neglect, but the particulars of their treatment contradicted this intention. For example, the newspaper articles appeared to have been painstakingly, if incompletely, collected and pasted into journals, in some cases with missing information added in pen. The physicality of these items and the evidence of the archivist's hand hinted at a personal interest.



**Plate 2.1** 'Newspaper cuttings' SANG archive  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The importance of exploring areas of the archive that appeared inconsistent with the whole was demonstrated by looking through the journals, some of which referenced material beyond the scope of the museum. For instance, some of the earlier newspaper journals (1930-48) made reference to art works by black artists who were not shown at SANG [plate 2.1]. Similarly, later journals and microfiche (1985-93) contained detailed material on the resistance art movement, which emerged in the late 1970s, and the cultural boycott (1980-93), which at the time lay largely outside the museum's remit. In both instances these inclusions bridged the gap between practices occurring outside and within the museum, offering valuable information on the wider cultural sphere in which SANG operated and the border-crossings between these domains.

## Art storage

The gap between the DDCRI and the actual content of the archive was replicated in contradictions in the storage of art. Again, these inconsistencies warned me to tread carefully when assessing the relative status and value given to objects and collections.



**Plate 2.2** 'The vaults'  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn 2010)

Unsurprisingly, the layout of the library was echoed in the gallery vaults, which contained row after row of oil paintings on sliding frames [plate 2.2]. The status of these objects was intimated by their air-controlled environment behind an electronic security door that resembled that of an old-fashioned bank safe. In contrast to this secure and stately environment the African art collection was housed in cardboard boxes in a single cupboard in the curators' wing, with only a standard door key for protection [plate 2.3].



**Plate 2.3** 'African art in storage'  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn 2010)

The exclusive use of the vaults for fine art storage appeared to connote the privileged position of this art form. However, closer inspection of the vault suggested a possible lack of care (or a comfortableness bred from familiarity), with some art works incorrectly placed on stands and in some instances propped up against each other on the floor. In contrast, the African art collection was packaged in cardboard boxes, each individually measured and made for content, their labels neatly printed and typed and the art works wrapped in tissue paper and tied with ribbon [plate 2.4].



**Plate 2.4** 'Boxed pipes' African art collection, SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn 2010)

The attentiveness paid to the packaging of the African collection suggests the lack of funds spent on housing it was not indicative of a lack of interest, but may have stemmed from a frugality born out of necessity in the post-apartheid economic climate. An idea lent support by the fact that there have been no improvements made to the vaults since the onset of democracy. However, African art was infrequently displayed at SANG, suggesting interest in this collection was restricted to certain parties.

Having access to the art in storage enabled comparison between what the gallery contained and what it exhibited. Identification of the differences between what was shown and what was 'left on the shelf', revealed practices of selection to be conscious choices and shed light on museum priorities and tastes. Taking the idea of the museum as a display case and repository into my analysis of past practice I was able to glean

further insights into what SANG favoured at different times. Concentrating on material intended for public consumption, I sought out records pertaining to the gallery's art collection and displays, mainly from catalogues, newspaper articles and museum reports. In the process of gathering evidence I copied hundreds of documents from the archive, which I turned into a mini sub-archive of cross-referenced labelled files. By cross-comparing images of the art works and their 'picture-lists', I could reimagine the content, layout and feel of past displays and divine further clues into what the gallery placed in the public domain and what it 'left behind'.

## Visual material: mapping and recording art works

In order to understand how art works and exhibitions are constituted sociologically Janet Wolff, in *Hermeneutic Philosophy and the Sociology of Art*, advocates a phenomenological approach underpinned by a hermeneutic structure (1975). She suggests investigations of art practices should include two key questions. Firstly, which social ideas, values and beliefs, are being expressed? and secondly, 'how are they thus expressed?' (ibid.: 54-55). She suggests that through this approach the analyst of social life and social structures is in the position to 'perceive the sub-structural, or super-structural, elements of society which could be symbolised artistically' (ibid.: 55). Sociological investigations of art, which include the art work, frequently consider art as the 'finished product' (the 'image') rather than a series of processes (ibid.). In contrast, seeing art works as elements in the broader display provides the opportunity to question processes of meaning-making more readily, as it enables art to be seen as part of the broader museum conversation. In order to understand SANG's art work in the context of its display I undertook extensive visual research in the gallery.

The majority of my fieldwork was spent collecting visual records of art works and displays. Spending a prolonged period in the museum creating images had two unforeseen benefits. Firstly, it increased my level of access, as my image-making was supported by staff who gave me permission to enter the museum on closed days and to spend time alone in the vaults. Secondly, the time spent producing images on site was akin to the experience of embedded fieldwork, as it offered an opportunity to observe museum practice and formulate new ideas through engagement with the display.

In order to capture the complexities of SANG’s collection I completed numerous sketches and drawings and took hundreds of photographs of art works in exhibitions and in the vaults. I also drew detailed maps of five displays: *Facing the Past* (2005), *Fabrications* (2006), *Romantic Childhood* (2006), *Second to None* (2006) and *Positive Lives III* (2006), and created two maps of permanent exhibitions at the South African Museum (SAM): *IQe* and *The African Studies Galleries*. The maps included: thumbnail sketches of the art works; the text on the ‘tombstones’ (the individual labels that accompany art works); exhibition texts and notes on audio-recordings. I have included colour-coded maps as reference points within the chapters of the thesis, an example of which is overleaf [plate 2.5]. The highlighted areas on the maps relate to specific ideas and themes from the exhibitions, which correspond to the coding scheme in the table below [table 2.4]. Further maps are provided between pages 342-366 that relate to more than one area of the thesis or provide background information.

**Table 2.4** Map coding

Main Idea	Colour coding
Exhibitionary Complex – relationships between works	Blue
Race	Pink
Exhibition text	Green
Notes outlining additional details	Lilac

The maps were complemented by visual records taken from a further five exhibitions through field notes and image-making: *Ilifa Labantu* (2005), *Voice-Overs* (2005), *Life and Soul* (2006), *Memory and Magic* (2006) and *Santu Mofokeng* (2006). I also undertook extensive photographic surveys of the paintings and sculptures in the vault and of the museum décor and architecture. The elaborate packaging used in the storage of the African art collection, coupled with its infrequent display, meant I was unable to record it in the same way as the European collection. However, Carole Kaufmann, the curator of the African art collection, kindly provided me with CDs containing images of a large number of works from the collection, which provided an invaluable resource. I also photographed a small selection of the works in storage.



The methods used to capture visual information were partly determined by practical considerations. Flash photography was not allowed in the museum and I was using a hand-held camera, which made levels of light crucial. Capturing small details, in particular in the décor, proved difficult and I sometimes relied on written notes as support for indistinct pictures or printed out the colour images in black and white. I was only given permission to photograph exhibitions that belonged to the museum, not those that were visiting, and there were therefore other instances when drawing or writing was essential.

My collection of visual material was also dictated by the capacity of various mediums to express my intent. Although I found all of the visual methods I used beneficial, drawing and map-making brought me closest to the museum. In *Hold Everything Dear* (2007), John Berger conceives of drawing and photography as two separate disciplines. In his view drawing is a facilitator of the poetic and imaginary whilst photography constructs a facsimile of reality (2007: 265-266). Thus he reminds his reader, photographs are ‘taken’ and pictures are ‘made’ (ibid.). This view-point is supported by the anthropologist Michael Taussig, in *What Colour is Sacred*, who identifies a drawing’s ‘corporeality’ as the feature that distinguishes it from photography (2007: 269). The distinction between these media is challenged by the fact that both are capable of rendering the imagined visible; are able to provide documentary accounts and have a physical presence. Nevertheless, Berger and Taussig’s assertions resonate in terms of the drawing’s ability to move beyond surface engagement.

The physical engagement with the space afforded by drawing makes it a valuable ethnographic tool. Berger refers to images created during research as ‘autobiographical records of one’s discovery of an event, seen, remembered, or imagined’ (2007: 3), an idea reinforced by Taussig who describes the process of drawing from life as a ‘mute conversation’ that requires ‘prolonged and total immersion’ (2007: 269). Contained within both these descriptions is the feeling of ‘oneness’ with the museum that I experienced when creating images of the art works and displays. The absorption in process, the search for verisimilitude and the subjectivity of my gaze deepened the encounter and left traces of the experience on the page.

The maps provided a singular means of ‘returning’ to the display [see plate 2.5 for an example]. The unintended consequence of recording details of the exhibitions ‘head-on’ in miniature was that I was forced to either move the map or my position to make the space intelligible, thereby producing a closer, physical engagement with the environment. This mode of recording, along with the inclusion of ‘thumbnail’ sketches, full title details and notes, enabled me to re-trace my journey through the display.

Drawing and map-making also helped capture the intentionality of the space by allowing weighted attention to be given to significant objects and events. For instance, it enabled me to enlarge significant details on the maps and include notations.

Photographs, in contrast, more readily capture detail, but their single perspective, limited tone and relative uniformity may offer a misleading symmetry when this was not the intention of the display. The ‘total’ recount of the photograph also leaves little to the imagination. Photographs therefore may present the concerns of the exhibition’s creators more didactically than intended. There is also the danger that an adequate image for research purposes may take on the expectation of an ‘art photograph’ when recording an exhibition, thereby diminishing the aesthetic power of the display by equating it with the record. In contrast to the photograph, drawings provide access to the imagined and unseen, creating room for other forms of misinterpretation through their reliance on the subjectivity and draftsmanship of the creator.

As a means to utilise the difference between photography and drawing I chose, where possible, to use photographs to capture the content of individual art works, when content analysis was required, and left the poetics of the space to the drawings. For the most part, the images I created were stored in the computer and then categorised into bodies of work, such as ‘museum décor’ and ‘sporting art’. The resulting image files were then used as an *aide-memoire*, in tandem with the maps, catalogues and newspaper reports, to revisit the collections and displays.

## Interviews and tours

To gain further clarity on current and recent museum practice I conducted interviews with key staff members and attended organised gallery tours. During my fieldwork periods in 2006 and 2010 I spoke to all of the gallery staff, this included the Directors,

curators, education staff, volunteer guides, gallery attendants, ‘Friends of the SANG’ (members of the gallery’s volunteer support group), librarians and the people who worked in the gallery shop.<sup>8</sup> I conducted interviews with fifteen people who were connected to the gallery, including key members of SANG’s staff team, past and present [table 2.5]. This included interviews with the curators of the following exhibitions: *Facing the Past: Seeking the Future* (2005), *Ilifa Labantu* (2005), *Memory and Magic* (2006), *Fabrications* (2006), *Romantic Childhood* (2006), *Positive Lives* (2006), and *Second to None* (2006).

## Interviews

Table 2.5 Interview details

Code name	Description	Type of interview (dates)
Staff Member A	White curator	Two taped interviews (6/08/06 and 14/11/06)
Staff Member B	White curator	Taped interview (10/10/06), field notes (various 2006 and 2010)
Staff Member C	Black ex-education officer	Taped interview (21/11/06)
Staff Member D	Black ex-education officer	Taped interview (09/09/06)
Staff Member E	Black ex-education officer	Interview with notes (08/12/06)
Staff Member F	Black ex-assistant curator	Two taped interviews (09/10/06 and 17/10/06), taped panel discussion (10/10/06), field notes (various 2006)
Staff Member G	Black education officer	Taped interview (4/09/06)
Staff Member H	White volunteer	Taped interview (1/09/06)
Staff Member I	White volunteer	Taped interview (22/08/06)
Staff Member J	Black student assistant curator	Taped interview (27/07/06)
Staff Member K	White student assistant curator	Taped interview (22/08/06)
Staff Member L	White curator	Taped interview (25/10/06) Field notes (various 2006)
Staff Member M	White visiting curator	Taped interview (10/10/06)
Visiting Artist N	White artist/curator	Brief taped interview at end of tour (10/10/06)
Staff Member O	Black, Indian Director	Discussion with notes (12/10)

Fourteen of the interviews were taped with a dictaphone and two were recorded using notes at the participants’ request. The interviews lasted between one and five hours (some split between two sessions). They took place in various locations chosen by the participants, including their offices and art studios, my room in shared accommodation and cafés over lunch. The interviews were non-standardised and semi-structured with an emphasis placed on discussing the participant’s role in the museum

<sup>8</sup> Emma Bedford the curator of contemporary art was on sabbatical during my fieldwork period in 2006 and subsequently left the gallery in 2008, so I derived information on her role from her written work.

through three main topics: their work practice; perception of the gallery and what they felt, if anything, the gallery should change.

While SANG's civic responsibilities indicate it should be held accountable for its practice, there was a counter requirement to ensure that those taking part in the research were not exposed to undue risk. Thus, the research involved a balance between:

A desire, on the one hand to reveal the processes at work ... on the other, to protect the privacy of individuals and groups and to recognise that there are private spheres into which the social scientist may not, and perhaps even should not, penetrate (Barnes 1979: 13-24)

As my research interest was in SANG's public representational practice I did not seek to delve into the private realms of the institution or to elicit personal information from interviewees. Nevertheless, on a couple of occasions participants made 'off the cuff' remarks that appeared personally revealing. There were also instances where staff made comments that had racist and/or homophobic connotations (mentioned in section one). For example a white guide referred to a black member of staff as 'the girl' (Staff Member I 2006: 413). In order to manage the competing concerns for transparency and protection, I made a case by case decision on the inclusion of data, based on whether or not the thoughts expressed by the interviewee transferred into action and the significance of the information to an understanding of the public domain. I also made it clear participants should only say what they would be happy to repeat in public and initiated each interview with a version of the following statement:

I don't ask anyone anything they wouldn't say publicly, so if there's anything that's private or whatever either don't tell me or get me to get rid of it. So it's stuff you would be prepared to say in the public domain rather than anything else (statement made in interview with Staff Member C 2006: 2)

I informed interviewees of my research intentions, in so far as I knew these at the time, and received verbal permission from participants to use their names in the research. Although the public nature of the museum meant I could not offer complete anonymity to interviewees I adopted the research convention of 'code names', except when discussing the curators of particular exhibitions, who I named in order to acknowledge their work.

## Walking tours

My primary means of gathering information on the gallery's public practice was from the exhibitions and walking tour attendance [table 2.6].

**Table 2.6** Walking tours

Code name	Description	Type of tour (date)	Exhibition/s
<b>Staff Member A</b>	White curator	Taped walking tour (06/08/06) accompanied by eight Friends of SANG	<i>Facing The Past: Seeking the Future</i>
<b>Staff Member H</b>	White volunteer	Taped walking tour (1/09/06) accompanied on and off by other visitors	<i>Facing The Past: Seeking the Future, Second to None, Romantic Childhood, Fabrications</i>
<b>Staff Member I</b>	White volunteer	Taped walking tour (22/08/06) accompanied by other visitors	<i>Facing The Past: Seeking the Future, Second to None, Romantic Childhood, Life and Soul</i>
<b>Staff Member M</b>	White ex-assistant curator (visiting)	Taped walking tour (10/08/06) accompanied by seven visitors; Panel discussion (10/08/06) approx. 50 attendees	<i>Second to None, Life and Soul</i>
<b>Visiting Artist N</b>	White artist (own display)	Taped walking tour (10/08/06)	<i>Life and Soul</i>

The walking tours fell into two categories: tours of specific exhibitions and public tours of the museum. The tours lasted between one and two hours and were conducted by a single guide. Each guide walked the audience through salient features of the exhibitions, offering opportunities along the way for the audience to engage in conversations. In the one instance when I attended a tour alone with a guide I asked them to conduct it the same way they would with the general public.

In order to capture the nuance of the interactions on the tours I adopted the approach advocated by Eric Gable in *Cultural Studies at Monticello* (2008), of taping the tours and the conversations that attended them. I ensured the attendees were aware of my role by briefly explaining my research project prior to the tours and seeking their permission to record their contributions. In all cases audience members were happy to be taped. In order to ensure the audience members' anonymity I did not include their names or any individualising identifying markers from their conversations.

The tours brought a further layer of meaning to the exhibition through ‘the rubric of “performance”’ (ibid.: 111). On the tours, dictaphone in hand, I took on the role of participant-observer. The experience gave me a better understanding of how staff negotiated the displays and interacted with the general public. It also provided further opportunity to study how the audience interacted with the gallery. I also attended multiple tours at SANG that I did not tape, both before and during my research. These tours followed a similar format to the majority I taped indicating that my dictaphone had not markedly interfered with the study.

However, there were two instances on the taped tours when the white guides veered ‘off script’ to speak negatively about an exhibition by a black curator (discussed in chapter ten). Although my presence may have encouraged these critiques the fact that the staff members made their comments on the museum floor makes them important for inclusion.

## Coding

At every stage in museum practice, from acquisition to display, choices are made which pre-empt any messages that might be conveyed (Pearce 1995: 115)

I transcribed the taped interviews and walking tours verbatim, minus recourse to language signifiers and patches of unclear tape. Sifting and evaluating the transcribed material, in combination with my visual and documentary evidence, aided identification of repeated themes that exposed the ‘community version of reality’ that was at play in the museum (Gilbert 2001: 143). In order to bring rigour to my analysis I coded and re-coded the transcripts as additional knowledge was acquired. I then re-grouped information in terms of repeated themes, making sure I retained reference to their original context. My final coding frames are set out in table 2.7.

**Table 2.7** Coding text

Primary themes	Main ideas discussed	Colour coding
Political/social climate	Impact of political situation/ broader society	Red
	Role of institution in society	Magenta
Exhibitionary Complex	Display strategies, design, thoughts on how to deliver a display	Dark blue
	Curator's role	Medium blue
Race	Assumption that audience is white	Dark pink 1
	Different perception of art by race	Dark pink 2
	Different perception of people by race	Medium pink
	Race as topic	Light pink
Cultural capital	Assumption audience knows about art/theme	Light blue
Institutional change	Considered to be too much	Yellow
	Considered to be too little	Light yellow
Narrative content of display	Political/religious art content	Ochre
	Race/culture difference in art/unclaimed/reclaimed histories	Olive
Art and artists	Art making, art content	Dark green
	Focus on particular art forms	Medium green
Staff stories	Personal interest/conflicting histories	Brown
Institutional discourse	Director/staff/audience/education	Grey
Discourse analysis	Audience participation Jokes/misunderstandings/ miscellaneous	Turquoise

When I cross-referenced the themes derived from the interviews and tours with those identified in the archive and collection it became apparent that racialised themes predominated across domains. It was also clear that although ideas on race changed across time whiteness and white privilege retained value despite competing cultural claims. The retention of these themes suggested that racial ideas, along with those pertaining to culture, class and gender, were passed down through the museum across generations. It also revealed that the ‘racial talk’ within the museum was largely dictated by the race of the speaker. In *Theorizing Museums*, Gable describes a similar dichotomy in operation on museum tours at an antebellum site in America. White staff used their tours to stabilise historic narratives of race whereas black staff frequently sought to disrupt them (1998: 172). In looking at how staff practice impacted on SANG’s public role I therefore took cognisance of the ethnicity of its gatekeepers.

## Conclusion

In adopting an interpretive approach I was conscious of the polysemic nature of the material that I sought to analyse and the potential for it to be open to multiple interpretations. This multiplicity was addressed in two main ways. Firstly, I interrogated art works, written texts and staff feedback as bodies of information and secondly, acknowledged that the study was intended to explore symbolic and social ‘realities’ rather than determine concrete facts (Atkinson and Coffey 1997: 47). I also made sure that I did not work in isolation, but instead drew on a multitude of external texts on museum and visual culture, which helped steer me away from my own assumptions and towards a greater understanding of the space. Developing a greater awareness of what SANG’s practices meant in their societal context of production, I became conscious of the interwoven relationship between whiteness, power and the museum. In coming to an understanding of how SANG developed into a white institution, I was also able to identify factors, such as interventions by black workers, that worked against the establishment norm. In doing this, I identified the seeds of practices that could enable SANG to operate on more equitable grounds.

# Chapter One:

## The Political House

Museums share an historic commitment to ‘acquire, safeguard, conserve and display objects’ and have therefore often developed along similar lines, especially when accommodating similar content (Vergo 1989: 41). Close attention is therefore required to identify the individual journeys that museums have taken and to distinguish them from unifying theoretical models. By identifying the processes at work in individual museums one can begin to extrapolate which features of their practice may make them more or less amenable to change. In SANG’s case analysis reveals distinctions between its processes and those of the dominant art museum model of the temple. Identification of SANG’s unique characteristics as a political house provides the discursive framework for considering its capacity for inclusion.

The first section, *The Temple and the House*, elucidates the key differences between the temple model and SANG as a political house. The differences between the two types of museum indicate SANG would be better able to respond to calls for political and social change. However, the second section, *A White Space*, explores research already undertaken at SANG, which shows that despite its seeming capacity for inclusion it retained a white identity post-apartheid. I identify potential factors that can explain why this is the case, namely, the history of fine art and its associations with whiteness and the influence of English South African culture on the gallery. In undertaking research on SANG I found that the majority of the literature on South African museums and cultural sites has concentrated elsewhere, providing further impetus for the study.

### Section One: The Temple and the House

In this section I begin by exploring the paradigm of the temple before turning to the political house. Duncan used the paradigm of the temple to describe art museums built in the west between the late eighteenth and early twentieth century, the Louvre in Paris (built in 1789) being the earliest example (2006). The model has also been applied to different types of museums in other contexts. In contrast, the political house has specific

applicability to SANG, with some features relevant to other colonial sites. Clarification of the differences between these models provides the means to assess the political house's relative capacity for making change.

## The temple

The temple model has been challenged as an imprecise analogy for the museum by those who rightly argue museums have more complex and nuanced roles. In *National Museums*, Simon Knell, Peter Aronsson and Arne Bugge Amundsen et al. argue that the alteration and adaption of museums to 'local needs', means that 'national museums in different national settings cannot be read as nations doing the same thing' (2011: 6). Nonetheless, their work supports the idea that most historic national art museums have transitioned through the temple model. For example, in her essay in Knell et al.'s compendium, Eugenia Afinoguenova identifies how the Prado, Madrid, shifted in the 1920s from a popular, carnivalesque atmosphere to one of 'distanced aestheticism' (ibid.: 220). Likewise, Christopher Whitehead, in the same anthology, describes how in the nineteenth century the National Gallery, London, chose to leave out references to recent British history and instead focused on European art, so as to 'supress documentary interpretation of objects in favour of aesthetic apprehension' (ibid.: 112). Meanwhile, Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, in *Post-Critical Museology* (2013), describe how the Tate Galleries took until the 1980s to move away from the prevailing 'paradigm of the autonomy and universalism of art' to engage more critically with their collections (2013: 27).

The power and durability of the temple paradigm derives from its role as 'one of the longest standing and most traditional ways to envision the museum' and from the enlightenment ideals that have attended it (Marstine 2011: 9). Duncan identifies that it is not simply a search for metaphoric resemblance that led those building art museums to replicate the temple, but a conscious decision to create a secular 'ritual space' in which the art object as aesthetic experience is foregrounded (1995: 8). In order to create the requisite atmosphere of reverential contemplation the art museum utilised specific technologies of representation. Separated from other structures, elevated by a flight of stairs and entered through huge pillared doorways, the art museum was positioned and presented so as to distinguish it from the outside world (ibid.: 10). These technologies

created a 'liminal space' where people could 'step back' from the 'psychic constraints of mundane existence' and look at the world with 'different thoughts and feelings' (ibid.: 11-12).

Unlike ethnographic, scientific and anthropological sites, which typically crowded their exhibits with contextual information, art museums designed on the temple model were orchestrated to deliberately congregate attention around their artistic content by leaving the other space bare. The hang, layout and architecture complemented the atmosphere of quiet contemplation, creating a 'universe of timeless values' (ibid.: 19, 27). Duncan describes how the procession of sequenced halls in the art museum summoned associations with the religious experience as they encouraged the audience to assume the role of 'pilgrims' following a 'structured narrative route' through the interior of the museum (ibid.: 12). The configuration brought comparison with the temple and its deities to the fore as it staged the art works as sacred stopping points along the way.

The technologies used in the temple model have elevated the museum's status and justified its lack of change. In *New Museum Theory and Practice* (2006), Janet Marstine notes that the temple model's emphasis on the 'unencumbered aesthetic experience' has been used to argue that the art museum is 'more significant than other kinds of museums' (its 'aura' having 'given it special status') and by extension that its collections and ideas are in greater need of protection (ibid.: 10). Andrew McClelland, in his book *Inventing the Louvre*, describes how the canon has supported the notion that art museums should be preserved, in perpetuity. He identifies that the strict divisions and hierarchies used in the temple model, categorised and fixed objects in relationships of (unequal) status (2003: 14). As the decider of what work is good and important the temple model became the arbiter of universal truths and was therefore systemically opposed to contingent, non-hierarchical, inclusive ways of viewing (ibid.).

## Exercising power

Through its production of hidden hierarchical technologies the temple model helped in the exercise of state power. On entering the temple's portals the audience was seduced into believing its mode of expression to be the truth. As Brandon Taylor has outlined in *Art for the Nation* (1999), in the early twentieth century the design of the art museum

coupled with its fine art content marked the extent to which ‘aesthetic enjoyment, artistic skill, scientific knowledge and design competence’ were ‘indissolubly linked in the moral order of the ... state’ (ibid. 73). Tony Bennett in his book, *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), investigates the museum’s capacity to exert a wider influence on society. He proposes that the formation of the museum needs to be seen in light of general developments ‘through which culture, in coming to be thought of as useful for governing, was fashioned as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power’ (ibid.: 18, 19). Building on Foucault’s notion that knowledge is inseparable from power, Bennett argues that the museum’s capacity for reformation of the self, put it on par with other regions of governance: as its function as an instrument for the improvement of man’s inner life, enabled it to act as an architect of social practice (ibid.: 18, 145). Through its ‘educative and civilising agencies’ the museum came to play a pivotal role in the development and continuity of the nation-state (ibid.: 66).

In, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, Timothy Luke gives impetus to the notion that temple model performs as an instrument of state when he describes how the ‘truths’ produced in western art museums are fashioned into ‘useful knowledge’ (2002: xxiii). Exploring the rules deployed by these institutions Luke maintains they preserve, expand and shape cultural memories in ways that authenticate particular notions of society, and validate particular ‘beliefs’ about the ‘order of the world, its past and present, and the individual’s place within it’ (ibid. xxiii, 8). As Luke indicates, the temple model’s arrangement and reverential atmosphere has a hierarchical dimension that regulates the audience as well as the art (ibid.: 8). It is here that the temple model has been its most divisive, separating the audience into those who belong and those who do not.

In their ground-breaking work *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public* (1991), Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel show how art museums became the ‘privilege of the cultivated class’ through their long engagement with them. The audience’s exposure to the museum’s way of viewing created inheritable values and tastes that Bourdieu and Darbel have termed ‘cultural capital’ (1991: 37). The idea of cultural capital has been critiqued for being inflexible, as it has failed to recognise that people and systems are capable of adaptation to different cultural repertoires and crossing cultural boundaries (see Swidler 2001). Yet, the premise that distinctions in

cultural participation in museums *are* linked to levels of exposure and social status have been identified across contexts. For example, in *Classification in Art* (1987), Paul DiMaggio identified that in America, which has relatively greater social mobility than France, audience members with cultural capital have retained authority, as they have learnt through acculturation to absorb more artistic models than other members of society (ibid: 440-445). Expanding on this point Bennett writes:

The art gallery's capacity to function as an instrument of social distinction depends on the fact that only those with the appropriate kinds of cultural capital can both *see* the paintings on display and *see* through them to perceive the hidden order of art that subtends their arrangement (1995: 35)

Abolishing the 'sacred frontier which makes legitimate culture a separate universe' has therefore become a potent concern in research on art museums (Bourdieu 1984: 6).

In elucidating the temple model key concepts emerge. The model places all attention on the art object, which is conceived as having intrinsic 'aesthetic value'. The temple has a hierarchical mode of display which fixes objects in unequal relationships and it manifests the power of the state through its improving and civilising auspices, which are themselves products of its hierarchical arrangement. It facilitates the construction of an inner audience, who, by virtue of their association with it, and extensive knowledge of its works, derive cultural capital. At the same time the temple model hides its power through technologies that make it appear natural and always thus.

## The home

In exploring SANG I found that it contained characteristics from the temple, but that their meaning was altered through the museum's association with the home.

SANG's architecture borrowed features from the temple model, these included its white edifice, raised entrance, portico and mouldings in the Greco-Roman style and its interconnecting display halls, which were situated around a central courtyard. The sacred atmosphere that these technologies created were supported by the unencumbered view of Table Mountain rising up behind the museum, which brought spiritual notions of nature, beauty and reverence to the fore. However, these congruities with the temple,

were challenged by SANG's intimate, almost home-like scale. When SANG was built it contained just six display halls and a small vestibule. Since then it has increased in size to a total of nine halls. In comparison the Tate Gallery was designed with thirty halls,<sup>1</sup> the National Gallery with forty<sup>2</sup> and the Louvre with sixty-three. SANG's homely appeal was advanced through ornamental elements, including the reed logged pond, green-shuttered windows and terracotta roof tiles (mentioned in the introduction), which drew associations with the Dutch farmhouse rather than the grandiose museum.

SANG's original collection yielded further symmetries with the domestic realm. Museums built on the temple model in Europe were, until recently, the preserve of fine art, which was strategically displayed to tell the story of the 'masterpiece' and of the great nation (Wright 1989: 122). In sharp contrast, newspaper accounts from the early 1930s show SANG initially contained a disparate mix of utilitarian objects, women's home-craft and personal items. These objects tapped into practical and nostalgic ideas of home. For example the collection contained: embroidered shawls, altarpieces, ceramic mascots,<sup>3</sup> posters,<sup>4</sup> lace, candlesticks and a doll's bed',<sup>5</sup> along with a small selection of 'second-rate' fine art.<sup>6,7</sup>

In contrast to the 'universal' distancing mechanisms of the temple, SANG's inclusion of familial items would be anticipated to have prompted memories and dreams of childhood, the mother country and the settler's new home. These nostalgic associations resonate with Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological account, *The Poetics of Space* (1958). In which he describes the home as a place of dreams and daydreams, a place of compressed time to return to in one's mind 'through the crypts of memory' (1958: 141). Bachelard identifies that the intimacy created in the house, prompts shared dreams that translate into shared codes or bonds (ibid.: 68). SANG's appeal to intimacy, through its diminutive size and nostalgic content, is anticipated to have produced a similar sense of

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<sup>1</sup> The Tate Gallery numbered thirty main exhibition halls in 1926 this does not include the further temporary spaces on the lower ground floor (Taylor 1999: 150-153).

<sup>2</sup> This is an educated guess based on the additional rooms added in the late nineteenth century. Initially the gallery had forty-eight rooms, but shared these with the Royal Academy (Charles Saumarez Smith, *The National Gallery: A Short History* 2009).

<sup>3</sup> South African Art Exhibition 7th December 1931 Catalogue – SANG archive.

<sup>4</sup> *Posters*, Cape Times 14th November 1932 'newspaper clippings 1932' SANG archive.

<sup>5</sup> Items lent by Lady Phillips for the gallery opening (Stevenson 1997: 203).

<sup>6</sup> *Art Lover* Argus 22nd December 1926. Newspaper archive – SANG archive.

<sup>7</sup> *The Art Gallery* 24th March 1931 'newspaper clippings 1931' SANG archive (no newspaper name listed).

kinship with its visitors. It could therefore be suggested that SANG offered a more expansive invitation to membership than the temple, in which the development of a relationship with the audience was linked to instilling cultural capital in the bourgeoisie. SANG's homely environment can be seen to have produced its own devolved form of cultural capital as it encouraged the settler community to feel at ease.

## The colonial site

SANG's homely atmosphere had parallels with other colonial art museums established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which shared its 'commonplace' content. For instance, Jacqueline Strecker, in *Colonizing Culture* (2001), describes the National Gallery of Australia's original holdings as a motley collection of coins, gems and statues as well as pictures (2001: 200). Similarly, Jillian Carman, in *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine* (2006), describes the Johannesburg Art Gallery as containing a wide range of utilitarian objects such as ironwork, needlecraft and furniture alongside a small selection of fine art (Carman 2006: 185).

The similarities between the colonial museums' original collections are partly explained by an absence of willing donors. They also reflect the colonies' shared interest in attracting settler communities, as evidenced by their museums' concentration on art works with local (white) appeal (Strecker 2001; Magocsi 2007). For instance, Paul Magocsi, in the *Encyclopaedia of Canada's People*, describes how the National Gallery of Canada's collection was informed by the agrarian vision of the largely peasant immigrant community (2007: 315). Similarly, the National Gallery of Australia was informed by the 'collective urban idealism' of the settlers (Strecker 2001: 105) and the Johannesburg Art Gallery by the twin impulses of promoting 'industrial art' and home-making ideals in the 'rough and ready' environs of the shanty town (Carman 2006: 35, 185). In SANG's case the primary interests lay in attracting local white workers and in particular English South Africans (discussed in section two).

One reason why colonial museums may have adopted a homely guise is suggested as a meta-narrative in *The Love of Art* (1991) in which Bourdieu and Darbel describe the 'cultural goodwill' attached to museums in countries that do not have a long-established museum tradition (ibid.: 34). Bourdieu and Darbel identify that museums acquire status

across time and only emerge as consecrating systems at the point when they, and the nations they are situated within, have accrued cultural capital (ibid.: 38). They argue that the ‘paucity of cultural capital’ in newer countries pushed them to adopt a more open approach in their museums than those countries whose systems of validation date back to antiquity (ibid: 34-36).<sup>8</sup> To illustrate their point Bourdieu and Darbel examined the Polish museum system against the French, which revealed the Polish system offered significantly greater access across class (ibid.: 35).

In the colony the imperative to create a common white culture from disparate communities would have served as a further inducement to develop a museum language accessible to most whites. The fact that the majority of the colonial art galleries contained an assortment of objects, including craft and fine art, provides evidence of their communicative aim. In this respect they had more in common with the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London, a design and ornamental art museum, whose primary function was to educate working-class people, than the elite art temples of Europe (Trench 2014: 7-14).

SANG’s investment in the local community suggests it better reflected the aims of the educational model of the museum than the temple. In *Curating Subjects* (2007), Mark O’Neill outlines the difference between the two models. He describes how the aesthetic model espouses ‘that the serious pleasure of aesthetic contemplation of works of art has an inspirational value, which needs no other justification’, whereas the educative model perceives art as a learning or communicative tool (O’Neill 2007: 25). SANG’s alliance with the educational model is significant as it implies it would share its relatively egalitarian, less hierarchical, aspirations (ibid.).

## Politics and storytelling

SANG’s role as a conduit for educative and communicative practice came to the fore when it moved in the mid-1930s from showing an eclectic mix of objects to only showing fine art. This is an interesting development as it could be assumed that in becoming a vehicle for fine art SANG would adopt the aestheticizing features of the

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<sup>8</sup> The Tate Gallery in London did not open until 1897, but much of its collection was initially housed at the National Gallery, which opened in in 1836, meanings its status was quickly secured (Taylor 1999: 117).

temple. Indeed, Strecker found that in Australian museums the shift from craft to fine art resulted in ‘colonial regionalism’ being subsumed by imperialist cultural values and the ‘aesthetic universalities of British culture’ (2002: 100). However, at SANG a strong investment in local productions of whiteness generated a distinct political identity. The reason for SANG’s divergence from other art museums can partly be explained by the particulars of its collection.

SANG’s initial fine art displays reflected the vernacular style of art that was popular with the white community in the Cape. The antecedents of this work lay in nineteenth century ‘Africana’ in which the main motivating force was ‘to describe and report on the external world’ for an audience ‘back home’ in Europe (Arnold 1996: 5). According to Marion Arnold, in *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996), the resultant art work was intended to provide an ‘authentic’ experience of Africa. As a consequence, the quality of the images was frequently considered ‘less important than the content of the image as historical document’ (ibid.). Between 1935 and 1948 SANG received major bequests of European (mainly English) fine art. Although these additions meant the collection became more English, the gallery’s commitment to localism was retained through a preponderance of narrative and anecdotal art (discussed in chapters four ) and the introduction of leisure and educational initiatives (discussed in chapter five).

The communicative mode of practice that the emphasis on ‘story-telling’ and education engendered corresponded with the popular approach used in fine art ‘exhibitions for the poor’ in early twentieth century England. In her illuminating book *Civilising Caliban: The Misuse of Art 1875-1980* (1987) Frances Borzello describes how the exhibitions for the poor attracted their audience by providing them with message orientated displays that tapped into their shared interests and community based version of reality (ibid.: 5-6, 62). These exhibitions, like SANG, did not deal in universal matters and external values that the audience should be educated to appreciate in order to ‘be considered truly civilised’ (ibid.: 6), but instead, presented art as a collaborative endeavour linked to community cohesion (ibid.). SANG’s commitment to audience participation made it a powerful social medium.

## Activism

For most of its history SANG's commitment has been to its white audience, yet its communicative appeal and political practice have arguably equipped it to take on the responsibility of wider social inclusion. Before exploring whether this is the case, I will briefly outline the key expectations that have been placed on museums in Europe since the 1980s and how these expectations pertain to SANG.

In *The Reticent Object* (1989), the art historian Peter Vergo describes how in the 1980s western museums were torn between their traditional role as custodians of objects and the need to respond to an increasingly diverse public (ibid.). In *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference* (2007) Richard Sandell identifies factors that led museums to re-evaluate and re-orientate their role, these include: the global influence of human rights discourse; a heightened awareness of multiculturalism and 'an approach to the politics of difference which rejects assimilationist policies in favour of those which affirm cultural and ethnic differences' (ibid.: 6). He also draws attention to the increased pressure on museums from governments who expected to see benefits from funding in the shape of social development (ibid.). In South Africa the imperative to change was more keenly felt than in most other countries, as the majority of its museums were developed as white institutions either under imperial or apartheid rule. When the African National Congress (ANC) came into power in 1994 it sought to address the inherent inequalities in South Africa's public museums through its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) Framework for Arts and Culture (1994). The programme targeted its funding at 'redressing imbalances of the past, transformation and development' and the promotion of 'non-racism, non-sexism, human rights and democracy', with the intention that museums and cultural sites 'fully reflect the many components of cultural heritage'.<sup>9, 10</sup>

Following the calls in the 1980s for wider inclusion a more radical concept of the museum emerged in Europe in the early twenty-first century that was underpinned by a reconceptualization of museum ethics (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Sandell 2007; Marstine

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<sup>9</sup> Sections 3.4.3.9. p 1-.4 [www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/rdp/rdp3.html](http://www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/rdp/rdp3.html) accessed 18/11/06.

<sup>10</sup> These principles were formalised in the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACTS) White Paper (1996).

2011). In *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000) Eilean Hooper-Greenhill defines the new type of institution as the ‘post museum’, a space that she typifies as being ‘eager to share power, by initiating open dialogues and forging new partnerships’ (ibid.: 27-28). In *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics* (2011), Janet Marstine takes forward Hooper-Greenhill’s concept of the post-museum to define the ethical museum as a space that is deeply engaged with the world around it, ‘adaptive and improvisational’ (2011.: 8). In order to achieve such a space, she argues for a new museum ethics defined by its contingent nature (ibid: 3). In challenging the authorised view of museum ethics, in which ‘professionalisation’ is centred, Marstine presents a museum model built on ‘moral agency’ with three guiding principles: ‘social responsibility, radical transparency and shared guardianship of heritage’ (ibid.: 5). Marstine views social responsibility as the key principle in this model, which she attaches to the notion of ‘democratic pluralism’— a term taken from the philosopher Iris Marion Young to denote practices that solicit divergent and transgressive voices (ibid.: 11). In championing the ethical museum, Marstine acknowledges ‘the place and power of activism in museum dynamics’ (ibid.: 13).

## Closing down

Looking back at the distinctions between the temple and the political house it is clear that some museums would find it easier to take on the mantle of activism than others. Indeed, the temple, with its rarefied approach to art work, has struggled to adapt to demands for change.

In *Museums, Society, Inequality* (2002), Richard Sandell observes that of all museum types the art museum built on the temple model has had the greatest difficulty in trying to respond to parliamentary and public calls for greater equality (ibid.: 20). He cites the art museum’s commitment to the aesthetic view as the main reason why it has not managed to encapsulate the “‘prevailing moral spirit” of society as a whole’, as its construction on a fixed set of precepts and universal norms make it ‘resistant to social and political influence’ (ibid.: 18-20).

Currently, the temple paradigm manifests in two main museum models. Firstly, long-established historic art institutions, which have preserved the purity of the linear fine art

tradition through the decision not to show the work of living artists (such as the National Gallery in London and the Louvre in Paris), which have effectively become mausoleums to high-art (Stevenson 1997: 237). Secondly, the modernist ‘white cube’<sup>11</sup> which emerged in the 1970s whose stark antiseptic environment places all of the attention on the work of art. Multicultural, post-structural and post-modern art works have entered the white-cube. However, its commitment to the pure, uncluttered object (or *l’art pour l’art*) has created a protective barrier against the intrusion of their overtly political ideas. As outlined by Christopher Grunenberg in *The Modern Art Museum*:

The cube owes its success to its strategy of effacement and simultaneous self-negation; highlighting the inherent (that is formal) qualities of a work of art through the neutralization of its original context and content, while at the same time, remaining itself virtually invisible and thus obscuring the process of effacement (1999: 31)

The effectiveness of the white cube is such that even where artists seek radical change, its hermetically sealed environment obscures their political intent.

## Opening up

SANG shares some of the reductive attributes of the historic art museum and the white cube, for example its fine art collection, layout and ‘clean’ design. However, its role as a communicative, political space has given it greater flexibility to respond to calls for change. Indeed, SANG’s conception of art as a resource makes it a ready candidate for activism. This was demonstrated in the 1980s, when following a period of intransigence, SANG employed black education officers who expanded the exhibition programme to include community based non-fine art works and political displays (discussed in chapter six).

In 1997 SANG’s Director, Marilyn Martin (1990-2009) reaffirmed SANG’s commitment to continuing on a political path:

We believe that we are doing more than passively holding a mirror to society, that we inform, construct, change and direct the narrative –

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<sup>11</sup> A term coined by the art critic Brian O’Doherty in *‘Inside the white cube’: notes on the gallery space* (p. 24-31) in *Artforum*, vol. XIV, no.7. March 1976.

aesthetically, culturally, historically, politically – through our acquisitions and exhibitions, that we invigorate art practice and that the national art museum is integral to refiguring and reinventing South African art and identity (1997: 18)

**Table 1.1** Exhibitions of Contemporary Art (1995-2008)

Year	Exhibition title
1995	Positive Lives: Responses to HIV (exhibition 1)
1998	Mute Testimonies Objects in the Press of History: Confessing the Past and Reshaping Memory
2001-2002	Can't Forget, Can't Remember: Truth and Reconciliation Commission
2002	A Broken Landscape (responses to HIV)
2002	Positive Lives: Responses to HIV (exhibition 2)
2004-2005	A Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994-2004
2006-2007	Positive Lives: Responses to HIV (exhibition 3)
2006-2008	Facing the Past: Seeking the Future – Reflections on a Decade of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
2006-2007	Second to None: Celebrating 50 Years of Women's Struggles

Between 1995 and 2009 SANG evidenced its commitment to a social agenda through the purchase of art works that contained an overt political message<sup>12</sup> and socially themed exhibitions (discussed in chapters seven and ten). As Table 1.1 illustrates, of the nine largest contemporary exhibitions post-apartheid, four were orchestrated around the HIV/AIDS's crisis and three on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

SANG staged numerous political and social events that presented opportunities for community activism and shared guardianship. In the Director's words these were framed within a concept of the museum as a vehicle for: 'tackling serious social problems such as AIDS, healthcare, drug abuse, crime, widespread social misery, unemployment and environmental degradation' (Martin 1999: 3). SANG also broadened its collection through purchases of African art.<sup>13</sup> The museum's commitment to a

<sup>12</sup> Between these years the majority of SANG's small acquisition budget was spent on political art works, many of which were created under the banner of resistance art (Annual Report of Iziko museums Cape Town 2004/5 'reports' (2005: 60) SANG archive).

<sup>13</sup> The term African in a South African context has taken on more complex and contrary meanings (including both derogatory and affirmative connotations). In some quarters it is now applied across race to describe all peoples living in Africa. To avoid confusion the term is used sparingly in this thesis and most frequently in relation to 'African art'. The term African art has been used for over a century in literary, art and anthropological contexts to refer to craft based art practices undertaken by black people in

diversified agenda was demonstrated on the walking tours I attended, in which staff concentrated on the socio-political content of art works, which they used to illuminate the themes of the displays.

## Section Two: A White Space

SANG's inclusion of black participants and its social, political and educational programmes suggested it had successfully refashioned itself as part of the global museum movement building towards a less prejudiced society. In particular as many aspects of its practice moved from a singular authorial voice to poly-vocality, which enabled it to act less like a traditional museum and more like a forum (Mason, Whitehead and Graham 2013: 164). However, closer inspection revealed SANG's capacity to operate as an inclusive space was hampered by its historic investments in whiteness; its European art collection and its retention of core white staff. Returning to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* one is reminded that the intimate connotations of the house have an exclusionary, as well as inclusionary, dimension.

Despite its elite ambience the temple is effectively open to all as a space of worship, whereas the home is a personal place in which entry is achieved by invitation. Although SANG did not refuse black visitors during apartheid, they were at best un-catered for guests. Conversely, white visitors learnt through the museum's practice to see SANG as their home. As Bachelard recounts the home provides a vital space for its inhabitants, where they learn to 'take root' in their 'corner of the world' (1958: 4). In addition, as 'the King of their castle' the white visitor is provided with a metaphoric armoury that protects them (and by extension their art traditions), from external threat.

In this section I look at research undertaken at SANG which demonstrates black audience members continue to feel estranged from the site. In looking back at the museum's history I pinpoint practices that are anticipated to have impeded its quest for inclusivity, in particular its ties to fine art and a white English South African identity. Although SANG's function as a political house makes it appear a ready choice for

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Africa (Cornevin 1980: 27). In the case of this thesis it is used alongside the terms European and western art to correspond with its local application and ease of understanding, not with the intention of re-affirming these boundaries.

analysis I describe how the majority of South African research has congregated elsewhere. In looking at why research has focused on other cultural sites I consider the potential implications for the gallery.

## Studies on SANG

In 2002 Julie McGee and Vuyile Voyiya undertook a documentary study that explored how black art world professionals experienced SANG entitled *The Luggage is Still Labelled: Blackness in South African Art*. In 2006 McGee followed up their research with an essay, *Restructuring South African Museums: Reality and Rhetoric within Cape Town* (2006). Covering a wide range of topics, including what black stakeholders thought of the museum and what they felt individual staff could do to improve access, *The Luggage is Still Labelled* provided a thorough assessment of black stakeholders' experience of SANG at the turn of the twenty-first century, which, to quote McGee, was that it was "too white", in terms of power, and "too foreign" and unwelcoming' (2006: 199). From the study McGee surmised little has changed in the stakeholders' relationship with the gallery post-apartheid, as it remains a privileged institution 'that first denied black artists equal opportunities, resources, and education [and] still controls the history of South African art' (ibid.: 186).

In 2005 Yoshie Yoshiara conducted a study, *Museums in a Diverse Society: A Visitor Study at the South African National Gallery*, which supported Voyiya and McGee's findings.<sup>14</sup> Yoshiara's central concern was to ascertain 'the meaning of art museums serving a diverse society' from the perspective of the audience who make up this diversity (2005: 14). To this end she developed her work around three concurrent exhibitions which represented different facets of SANG's practice: one European, one African and one contemporary.

Yoshiara concluded that black audience members experienced disorientation and alienation in the gallery to the degree that their access was impeded (ibid.: 196).

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<sup>14</sup> Hitherto, there had been no detailed research undertaken on SANG's audience. The only recording at the gallery was of its visitor numbers, but these were not broken down by race, gender or age making them an imprecise measure of attendance (Yoshiara 2005: 14). Similarly, although there was a visitors' book, very few visitors contributed to it, and again it was not possible to ascertain from the entries what the backgrounds of the contributors were.

Consequently they had a limited sense of ownership and visited infrequently in small numbers (ibid.: 166-170, 200). She identified that SANG's historic European fine art display specifically estranged black audience members who described it variously as 'colonial' and 'imperial' and as having 'little association with themselves' (ibid.: 166, 170). Young white audience members also expressed a degree of alienation from the European collection, because it was 'too old', 'not appealing' and 'not from South Africa' (ibid.: 130-131). Yet, in contrast to black audience members, whites were commonly able to orientate themselves through 'reference to their knowledge of artists or art history' (ibid.). The distinction in visitor experience suggests that although some whites lacked interest in the European fine art collection they were not disinherited from it in the same way as black audience members. Yoshiara supported her argument by drawing attention to the fact that, with the exception of schoolchildren, visitor numbers declined post-apartheid, which would not be anticipated if SANG was successfully reaching the previously excluded (ibid.).

Taken together Voyiya and McGee and Yoshiara's research showed black practitioners and visitors did not experience a sense of ownership of SANG on par with whites. These findings suggest it would be premature to assume the gallery has attained the level of inclusivity that it sought to achieve through its communicative practices and diversified political agenda. McGee went so far as to conclude that despite the gallery claiming to have transformed what was actually occurring was 'transformation rhetoric' (2006: 191-192). A participant in her documentary gave voice to this sentiment when he described SANG as an 'apartheid gallery' in 2002 (ibid.).

## White history

Despite having created significant areas of change, SANG has retained a legacy in white practice that has restricted its ability to be inclusive. The museum's ongoing reliance on white staff has proved a particular obstacle to change (discussed in chapter seven) as has its heritage in apartheid era South Africa and its reliance on fine art, discussed here.

From South Africa's formation in 1910 to the end of apartheid in 1994 white hegemony was a feature of the state drawing all whites, regardless of political persuasion, into its auspices. In *The Racial Contract* (1997), Charles Mills describes white engagement in

racist societies as a 'Racial Contract' which implicates all whites in the state's construction through their role as its main beneficiaries. As a consequence of their involvement in this 'contract' whites come to see themselves as sharing a common entitlement and identity (1997: 11-12). In *The Racial State*, David Goldberg, taking Mills literally, rightly argues that the development of white identity is more complex than a 'Racial Contract', as white supremacy was not built on an 'actual contractual arrangement' which whites bought into at a 'non specified time in history' (2002: 311). Yet, Mills' idea that whites share a racial contract has resonance in the South African context. The constructed nature of whiteness is apparent in the tacit alliance created between the Afrikaners and English in the early twentieth century following the Boer war, which enabled them to present a united front against the black population, and in the strategic decision to give white women the vote in 1930 to dilute and counter the small black vote (Arnold 1996: 3). In 1948, whiteness was legally constituted as citizenship through the apartheid political system, which gave whites the option of voting for one of only two parties, both of which agreed fundamentally on white privilege and black exclusion (Norval 1999: 28-29). The ensuing implementation of separate development policy 'safeguarded the racial identity and dominance of whites' (Barber 1999: 140).

One of the main implications of white South Africans adopting a shared identity is that it created a covenant that crossed national, language, religious, class and gender boundaries and accorded benefits to whites based on race and race alone (McClintock 1995: 6). The depth and range of subject positions made available to whites (and not to others) meant they came to perceive themselves:

[Not] *as* whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race (Dyer 1997: 3)

The equation of whiteness with normalcy has been vociferously and unrelentingly challenged by the black majority in South Africa ensuring its continued visibility in public life. Yet, despite awareness of the artificiality of whiteness, whites continue to get caught up in its glare (Elgar 2007: 7).

## Museum whiteness

Only by unearthing both the operational logic of race and its manner of guiding the interpretation of our visual world may we come to comprehend, and potentially dislodge, its power (Berger 2005: 8)

There is a strong argument to suggest that whiteness is a tactical identity worn to wield advantage over other people. Yet, whites are also seduced into performing whiteness, by which means they come to inhabit it as lived experience. One of the most persuasive means by which whites in South Africa have been encouraged to experience whiteness as both the normal and the dominant societal position is through the division of its museums into (white) fine art and (black) anthropological sites (Picton 1999; Kasfir 1999). Extensive research has been undertaken on the negative impact of displaying art by black people under one banner as ‘African art’ and presenting it in separate reductive environments (see Clifford: 1988; Goldberg: 1993 and Hassan: 1999 discussed in chapter nine), whereas relatively little research has been undertaken on the impact of dedicating art museums to white made fine art produce. Here studies by Richard Dyer and Martin Berger provide essential guides.

Dyer, in *White* (1997), utilises his background in visual studies to determine that whiteness continues to have specificity in imagery even when it is not ‘marked’ by the presence of the non-white subject and has relevance even when actors are not conscious of its existence (1997: 14). Exploring how whiteness has come to take up the dual positions of ordinariness and specialness in western visual culture, Dyer traces its origins to the expansionist ideals of the late Renaissance, and specifically to the crusades and the desire to separate the Christian from the non-Christian subject (ibid.: 67-68). Prior to the late Renaissance fine art demonstrated little interest in skin tone and made little differentiation between black and white subjects (ibid.). In contrast, in the late Renaissance artists distinguished between both black and white subjects and between different shades of white – the ‘whitest-whites’ becoming associated (in the white European mind) with purity and goodness, as illustrated in images of Christ and the Virgin Mary who were rendered ‘paler, white, than everyone else’ (ibid.: 66). The overt forms of strategically conceived whiteness that emerged in this process

synthesised the white subject with Christianity and Christianity with the linear progressive art model (ibid.: 67).

In the seventeenth-century French Academy the white subject came to fully inhabit the role of *the* subject of fine art through elaboration of the classical doctrine. At this time ‘what were taken to be the natural hierarchies and categories of painterly subjects, from history painting to still-life to portraiture to landscape’, were ‘naturalised as a central tenet of aesthetic lore’ (Simon 1999: 55). History painting (which included religious and mythological themes as well as epic historic subjects) emerged from this system as ‘morally, intellectually and aesthetically the most elevated and demanding of genres’ (ibid.). Consequently, the white subjects that populated ‘history painting’ assumed heroic status as *the* subjects of history.

In the twentieth century the secularisation of fine art and competing artistic models have broadened ideas of art and with them what constitutes the ideal subject (Dyer 1997: 49, 145-183). Nevertheless, as Paul Dash identifies in *Social and Critical Practices in Art Education* (Atkinson and Dash 2005), at a basic level art museums in the west continue to foreground white history through the plethora of white subjects in their collections. As a result, whites have their images reflected back at them from the gallery walls and experience a sense of belonging within the museum, which is not available to the same degree for other audiences (ibid.: 120).

In *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* Martin Berger, like Dyer, identifies racial sub-texts in images of white people and, importantly, also identifies white sub-texts in representational forms that contain no human presence, such as landscape painting and architecture. Exploring American visual culture from the perspective that shared investments in whiteness imperceptibly direct what whites see, Berger demonstrates ‘decidedly racialized perspectives’ animate ‘even those cultural products most removed from racial concerns’ (2005: 2). In doing so he repudiates the commonly held (white) assumption that ‘racial minorities catalyse otherwise race-neutral texts’ (ibid.). According to Berger, visual texts operationalise ‘internalized historically specific ideologies linked to whiteness’, which confirm a white point of view (ibid.: 1). Analysing visual texts that have no obvious link to racial subjects, he determines that the logic of race has been used ‘as a powerful, comforting mould for

casting both human products and the natural environment into recognizable forms' (ibid.: 8).

At SANG the emphasis on narrative and anecdotal art has brought vigour to the racial sub-texts in its imagery (discussed in chapters three and four), arguably, to a greater extent than the temple. The universalising forces at play in the temple would have framed whiteness in the abstract, whereas at SANG whiteness was represented as a manifestation of tangible, personal experience.

## An Afrikaner problem

SANG's relationship with whiteness has been strengthened through the museum's special connection with English South Africans. Exploring SANG's specificity as a political house I found its décor and collection continue to have a distinct English bias. Yoshiara has drawn attention to SANG's English past in her thesis (2005), but in general research has paid little attention to the role of the English in museum development in South Africa and has instead concentrated on the Afrikaners. In particular research has focused on the *Voortrekker Monument*, the archetypal symbol of Afrikaner nationalism. As a consequence, South Africa's racist museum culture has been identified with the Afrikaners, rather than with whites more generally, or with the English specifically. For instance, in *Mounting Queen Victoria* (2009), Steven Dubin explores the 're-presentation of social memory through cultural production' in South African museums almost exclusively through the role of the Afrikaner (ibid.: 1). His emphasis on the Afrikaner is illustrated in the index to his book, which contains eighty-five page references under headings associated with 'Afrikaans' and the 'Afrikaner', including Afrikaner identity, language, culture and nationalism, and no entries under the headings 'English' or 'England' (ibid.: 325).

Concentrating on Afrikaner cultural practice reduces the likelihood of identifying the production of race in sites such as SANG, as it risks equating the defeat of Afrikaner nationalism at the end of apartheid with the end of white racism, thereby promoting the notion that South Africa has moved on from its racist past. This risk is demonstrated in Albert Grundlingh's work, *A Cultural Conundrum? Old Monuments and New Regimes* (2009), in which he frames the Voortrekker Monument as a once powerful but now

failed symbol of Afrikaner nationalism that no longer ‘insults black people who have ascended to and are secure in power’ (ibid.: 158) in a setting where people are ‘free to follow a new career, relatively unencumbered by the past’ (ibid.: 174).

A further implication of focusing on Afrikaner nationalism is that it disassociates the English from apartheid.<sup>15</sup> Saul Dubow and William Bienart note in *The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid* (1995):

A major theme in liberal historiography ... is the idea that the tragedy of race relations in South Africa reflects the capitulation of English-speakers’ flexible views to the harshly doctrinaire approach of Afrikaner nationalism (1995: 6)

Challenging this representation Dubow notes that the first theorists to outline a ‘systematic ideology of segregation’ in South Africa were English liberals (1995: 146-147). Similarly, in *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (1999), Aleta Norval describes how in the ‘minutiae of their analyses’ there is little difference between English and Afrikaner South Africans, who were both in agreement on the ‘fundamental need to exclude the black South African population from the centres of political power’ (ibid.: 28-29).

By including SANG’s past in the scope of the study I was able to identify the role English South Africans played in shaping the institution. What emerged from my research was that English involvement was not typified by liberalism. Despite being widely considered to be liberal, many English South Africans hold reactionary views, and it is this group that dominated SANG’s early audience base and patrons and whose tastes and interests were reflected in the museum (discussed in chapters three and four). In *Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* Patricia Hayes draws a clear distinction between the English and English South Africans (2000).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The following historic texts draw cogent links between Afrikanerdom and fascism, but at the same time portray apartheid as if it were imposed by the Afrikaner against the will of the liberal English: *The Rise of Afrikanerdom, Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Moodie 1975); *Constructing Afrikaner Nationalism* (Giliomee 1983: 21-54) and *Between Crown and Swastika* (Furlong 1991).

<sup>16</sup> The term English South Africans is used to refer to ‘English-speaking whites’ including British born South Africans, South Africans of British heritage and South African whites who felt a close affiliation with the English and England. Conversely, the term Afrikaner is used to describe white South Africans whose ‘loyalty’ was to the region rather than their country of origin. Most people who fall within this category were of Dutch or French descent, but it also includes some people of English heritage, in

Though superficially imitative of the mother-country, she identifies that the ‘cultural production of an “Englishman” in the Union of South Africa, was specific to the ‘colonial periphery’ in its appeal to an ‘earlier and more manly imperial age’ (ibid.: 339). As described by Hayes, these ‘Lords of the Last Frontier’, extolled physical strength and virility and had more than a ‘whiff of brutality’ (ibid.: 336-337). Robert Morrell gives substance to Hayes’ account in his illuminating local study, *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal 1880-1920* (Morrell 2001), in which he describes how a hyper-masculine culture was instilled in English South African boys from a young age through education, leisure and cultural activities that normalised their aggressive racist behaviour. My research supports the notion that SANG was intent on supporting local white identity construction. At the same time it indicates the gallery championed an inner circle of English South African men. Thus, in some cases, SANG’s communicative practices reinforced hierarchies and exclusions.

The rough masculinity in operation at SANG draws attention to the fact that racism is not a pristine force. Anne McClintock’s study, *Imperial Leather* (1995), on the intersection of domesticity, imperialism and industrialisation, serves as a reminder that ‘race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience’ but rather ‘come into existence *in and through* relation to each other’ (ibid.: 5, original emphasis). In my study recognition that racial practices are animated and complicated by gender, class and cultural concerns deepens awareness of the processes taking place at SANG. For example, McClintock’s discussion on the imperial project as a white male endeavour which ‘barred’ white women ‘from the corridors of formal power’<sup>17</sup> finds parallels with levels of gendered access and the production of race at SANG (ibid.: 7). Nonetheless, the museum’s foundations in the white state points to the need for race to be foregrounded in the study. A notion that is born out in research on South African museums that has sought to move the South African cultural sphere beyond a ‘black and white lens’ (Steyn 2001; Nuttall and Coetzee 2002; Nuttall 2009).

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particular those whose ancestors arrived in South Africa in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Barber 1999: 4).

<sup>17</sup> McClintock makes clear she is not suggesting white women were ‘onlookers’ in the colonial project, rather she refers to them as ‘ambiguously complicit’, having been placed, by men, in positions of ‘decided – if borrowed – power’ (1995: 7).

## Then and Now

The lack of research on English practice has been accompanied by a lack of academic interest in SANG (Voyiya, McGee and Yoshiara's work being the main exceptions). However, there has been extensive research on other South African museums that provides a useful resource for my study. The desire to move beyond the confines of race occupies much of this research.

In *Entanglement* (2009), Sarah Nuttall seeks to reveal the artificiality of race in South African museum culture by highlighting areas of commonality, hybridity and cultural cross-over. Building on her previous work (2000, 2002), Nuttall is critical of what she views as post-colonial theory's overemphasis on difference (2009: 8). She suggests that instead of using binary vantage points research should focus on areas of racial intersection (ibid.: 10). By 'grasping the instances and situations' in which the significance of race spills out of the 'routinised confines of absolute [black and white] figures' Nuttall identifies one can 'begin to rethink the institutionalisation of racial difference and similarity' (ibid.). In taking this approach Nuttall rejects Foucauldian and Adornian models of oppositionality in favour of what she refers to as a 'politics of the emergent' that is alert to 'the potential, both latent and surfacing, for imminent change' (ibid.: 158). A similar approach is advocated by Annie Coombes in *History after Apartheid* (2004) who traces the transitions and tensions that populate contested sites (2004: 4-5). In tracing these processes she reveals the artificiality of their heritage in 'apparently homogenous ethnic constituencies' and emphasises heterogeneity in the concept of 'community' (ibid.: 5). Likewise, Marion Arnold in her book *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996) explores areas of hybridisation, in her case to provide not 'merely a linguistic conjunction, but a means of effecting connectedness' (ibid.: 2). Together these scholars give attention to practices of mutuality and in doing so produce a space where one can begin to imagine culture beyond the racial rubric. For Nuttall this space is the 'after apartheid', an intentionally utopian term she uses to signal the country's 'potential for inclusivity' (2009: 11).



Plate 2.1 'The Voortrekker Monument'

As a by-product of seeking the after-apartheid, research has congregated around sites that best illustrate the shift from extreme manifestations of racist practice under apartheid, to more ethical, inclusive, progressive practices post-apartheid. An unfortunate and somewhat ironic consequence of research concentrating on these aspects of practice is that it has unintentionally amplified the divisions in the field.

Research on historic sites has focused on the notorious aforementioned Voortrekker Monument [plate 2.1] and the San Diorama in the South African Museum (SAM), Cape Town.<sup>18</sup> Built to commemorate the Great Trek of 1838, the Voortrekker Monument consecrates 'the idea of the trek as the moment of emergence of the Afrikaner as the founding ethnic group of a new nation, "the white tribe"' with 'divine rights' (Coombes 2004: 28). The San Diorama,<sup>19</sup> in the South African Museum, provides a 'natural' landscape dominated by a series of painted plaster models, cast from people of Khoisan heritage in the early twentieth century (Enwezor 1999; Goldberg 2002: 150-160; Coombes 2004: 206-242; Dubin: 2009: 54-83) (discussed in chapter nine). In both sites racist visual texts represent white people as having superiority over black people in

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<sup>18</sup> The following literature provides detailed discussions on either one or both of these sites: Davison 1990, 1993; Skotnes 1996, 1997; Enwezor 1999; Goldberg 2002; Coombes 2004; Atkinson and Brietz (eds.); 2005; Dubin: 2009 and Grundlingh 2009.

<sup>19</sup> The Diorama was closed in 2000, but remains in situ screened off from public view.

perpetuity. In the monument, through a marble panel depicting Afrikaner women and children being ‘slaughtered’ by ‘savage’ Zulu warriors and in the Diorama through its representation of the Khoisan as a primitive race.

These racist sites provide a stark contrast with new progressive South African museums that have also been heavily researched, such as the District Six Museum and The Robben Island Experience in Cape Town (opened respectively in 1994 and 1997). These new museums highlight racial injustice and de-legitimize the monocular historic view through their reclamation of lost histories; commemoration of past struggles and the facilitation of open dialogue. The District Six Museum explores the impact of forced removals on members of the District Six community, in the 1960s, which decimated its multicultural community and left a literal wasteland to the north of the city. The Robben Island Experience explores the lives of black political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, who were held on Robben Island during apartheid (Golding 2009; Coombes 2004; Koloane 2000). In both cases first-hand knowledge and experience is foregrounded and public testimony by black stakeholders forms a central component of the visit.

Discussing District Six and like-minded museums, in *Learning at the Museum Frontiers*, Viv Golding identifies them as operating at the museum ‘frontier’ (2009: 6). She uses this term to refer to the museums’ effectiveness at creating cross-platform collaborations that produce a ‘fusion of horizons ... in a process of dialogical exchange’ that is akin to a ‘deep respectful conversation’ (ibid.). Importantly, the ‘respectful’ conversations that accompanied the development of The District Six Museum and The Robben Island Experience were messy, confrontational, fragmented and frequently lacking in consensus (Coombes 2004; Thorne 2006). Marstine identifies this type of conflict as a necessary feature of healthy and fruitful museum dialogue, as it demonstrates the museum is soliciting, rather than shying away from, engagement with transgressive practice (2011: 11). She points out, that museums frequently avoid these kinds of exchanges as ‘it presumes the risk of unpredictability’ of the kind that threatens transformation of ‘the institution and self’ (ibid.). In allowing space for conflicts to emerge the District Six Museum and The Robben Island Experience have become more inclusive sites.

Museological research that looks at the ‘worst’ historic sites and the ‘best’ of the new illustrates that radical change has occurred in South African museum practice. Importantly, the research highlights the falsity of binary positions and hierarchies in traditional sites and the need for divergent voices to be heard and valorised. At the same time it has signalled a chasm between established and new museums.

Significantly, the use of different types of museums to mark the distinction between *then* and *now* has meant relatively little attention has been paid in South African research to the processes by which established institutions transform – with the exception of the Voortrekker Monument, which has been the subject of a detailed analytical study by Coombes.<sup>20</sup> This means that aspects of historic practice that might impede change have not been fully excavated and areas that could facilitate change have not been fully explored. Looking at the relative lack of research undertaken at SANG with awareness of this gap signals the need for its thorough examination. On the one hand it shows black participation to be an essential feature of change management and on the other that white dominated practices have held development back.

My study of SANG aims to contribute to South African museum research by paying attention to change and hybridity, whilst remaining alert to continuing racial binaries. These apparently contradictory goals are necessary in an environment in which racism and racial ideas retain resonance. Indeed, Nuttall acknowledges that the absence of critical attention drawn to whiteness in South African cultural sites still needs to be addressed (Nuttall 2000: 4) and Coombes suggests that ongoing scrutiny of the ‘processes by which histories are embodied in the public domain’ is required (Coombes 2004: 295).

## Conclusion

My research indicates that attention should be paid to how historic museological practice continues to inform SANG, with a particular emphasis on identifying practices of whiteness that have so far been relatively under explored. From this basis a better

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<sup>20</sup> In her nuanced study of the *Voortrekker Monument*, Coombes, assessed its capacity for change. She identifies that despite being a ‘stage upon which new identities and challenges have been launched’ it still has the capacity ‘to do real harm’ (ibid. 53). In this case the site’s history as a heritage site for ritualising Afrikaner heritage and its physicality as a fixed display are viewed as major impediments to enacting meaningful change.

understanding should emerge of why black audience members and stakeholders continue to feel estranged from SANG as well as their means to greater inclusion.

The concentration on Afrikaner practice and the ‘best’ new sites means South Africa may be prematurely seeking closure from its past. The risk of this happening indicates the need for greater scrutiny of institutions like SANG, which although demonstrably keen to make change, may be leaving raced practices unaddressed. With awareness that research needs to account for SANG’s history one of the major questions that will be addressed in this study is: how were racial identities, in intersection with class, cultural and gender identities, created and sustained by the gallery over time? I have outlined factors that might make SANG resistant to change, such as the presence of raced binaries; an historic bias towards English South Africans; a reliance on fine art and an established relationship with the white audience. I have also identified features of SANG’s practice that may make it adaptable and flexible to change – in particular its willingness to engage with story-telling, its interest in generating political talk (and thus preparedness to elicit conflict), its homely atmosphere and the involvement of black staff. These features provide the potential for SANG to engage with broader conceptions of art and broader audiences.

## Chapter Two: Method and Form

My analysis of SANG's practice across time and in its local context required a multi-levelled methodological approach. Beginning from a heuristic basis and developing methods to fit the circumstances as they arose, the research included archival study, interviews with key staff, attendance of tours and a large visual element, including mapping, drawing and photographing the displays. These methods were chosen because they enabled me to: include historic practice in the scope of the study; ascertain what SANG valued at different points of time and identify the underlying assumptions that attended valued practices. Within this framework the gallery's representational practice was foregrounded with a concern to understand what SANG wanted its audience to see.

This chapter is split into three sections. In the first introductory section, *Personhood and the Public Sphere*, I briefly locate myself in the research and describe the benefits of situating the study in the public sphere. In the second section, *History and Value*, I explore why historic analysis should be considered an essential component of museum study and then go on to identify what SANG has valued at key points in its history. In the third section, *Mixed Methods*, I look in detail at the methods I used to investigate the gallery and explore why they were chosen and how they were deployed.

### Section One: Personhood and the Public Sphere

My combined personal and professional experiences stoked my interest in wanting to examine SANG and look at how it negotiated art and race. In 2006 I undertook fieldwork in Cape Town for seven months, this was followed by a further six week visit in 2010 to photograph art works. Previously I experienced SANG as a regular visitor when I was a Masters student at Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (2000-2003) and a resident artist at Greatmore Art Studio, Cape Town (2002-2003). My background as an artist, and art degrees in South Africa and London, at The Slade, University College London, meant I shared much of the artistic language and many of the interests of the professionals who worked in the museum. I have also known and

worked alongside artists from a range of backgrounds in Cape Town and conducted research outside of the artistic field in the city, so I have a good knowledge of the environment in which the gallery is based. Further personal factors that brought me to this study are that: I am a white British woman from a family with long-term heritage in South Africa and Namibia; I have a mixed-race daughter (who came with me on visits), and I have a left-wing political outlook.

Having lived in South Africa before the end of apartheid and in the democratic state I am acutely aware of the changes that have occurred in the country and of the multifarious challenges it still needs to overcome. Apartheid is physically and psychologically wrought on the environment. To be in South Africa is to be raced.

### Access to the space

Professional roles in museums, including SANG, remain largely in white hands (McGee 2006: 190-192). In my interviews with black staff members they offered concrete examples of their own and black audience members' marginalisation (discussed in chapter six). In my own experience of the museum racial dynamics were also clearly at play. In some instances white staff members made comments that I do not believe they would have made if I had not been white. For example, a white curator used the term 'we' in reference to the presumed 'shared' experience of white audience members, which included myself (discussed in chapter seven). In another instance a white guide made derogatory remarks about a black artist's work that were inflected with racism and homophobia (discussed in chapter ten). These events offered insight into the discriminatory discourse in circulation at SANG and alerted me to my own racial presence in the gallery.

Although my decision to situate my research in the public sphere was unrelated to the differentiated levels of access in the museum it helped mitigate against potential bias. My interest in SANG's representational practice meant I concentrated on areas of the gallery that were physically accessible and open to the general public. I therefore did not need to develop 'backstage' relationships or to perform the role of the intimate outsider.

The multi-faceted nature of my project also enabled me to cross-analyse the exhibitions, walking tours and interviews. In doing so I found the public discourse remained fairly stable across contexts. For example, the political concerns that staff members expressed in their interviews were also present in their displays and public talks. Staff members' racial 'talk' also appeared in the public arena, including in impolitic comments on the museum floor. The staff members' openness and 'outspokenness' indicated that I had limited impact on the space and provided important evidence of SANG's role as a political house.

Though my thesis shows the staff members didn't share common objectives and there were racial divides all of them portrayed the gallery as a live political space which they were personally invested in changing. For example, a black ex-staff member described how when working at the gallery he came in on his days off to provide black visitors with tours (staff member C 2006). Three black ex-staff members also came back to the museum to do interviews with me and a fourth white staff member made me multiple disks of the displays. The staff members' generous actions went beyond their job descriptions and demonstrated their collective commitment to opening up the museum.

## Art and objectivity

As well as having a raced presence in the museum my involvement was informed by my art background. My prior art training and experience as an artist facilitated entry to the art works and museum display. However, my training in the western fine art tradition had a formative impact on my understanding of art and art history that was not nullified by my interest in wider practice – not least because those areas that I have 'expertise' in are also those which are privileged in the museum. Hence, I took considerable care to seek out and acknowledge art discourses related to practices with which I was hitherto unfamiliar and where needed to make my ignorance visible.

The limitations in my knowledge and a desire to gain a saturated experience of SANG's representational practice led me to adopt an approach informed by Phenomenology (Alfred Schutz 1967) and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969), perspectives which encourage close readings of bodies of material through interpretative analysis of content and display. With its roots in the reflexive critical interrogation of knowledge,

phenomenology proposes that to understand an experience submersion in the 'eidetical sphere' is essential (Schutz 1967: 113-117). This process is achieved through interrogation of 'common-sense' assumptions based on the principle of approaching the environment as if one were a stranger (ibid.). In order to retain a connection between the poetic forms of evidence thrown up by this mode of research and the political narratives that populated the domain I took cognisance of Symbolic Interactionism's interest in locating object interactions in space (Blumer 1969). In doing so I took on board Geertz's advice that a 'thick description' cannot be found in a vacuum: 'divorced from what happens ... from the whole vast business of the world' (1973: 17), to treat an interpretation as such would be to 'divorce it from its applications and render it vacant' (ibid.).

In order to include close subjective analysis of SANG alongside analysis of the museum as 'a whole', I adopted a mixed method approach that enabled me to engage at a deep level in SANG's representational practice and to include the museum's historic practice and societal role within the scope of the study.

## Section Two: History and Value

One of the abiding concerns of New Historicism is the reconstruction of our view of history not as a progression, evolutionary inevitability, but as a multidirectional network of ruptured continuities ... a complex, supra-temporal artefact in which the present derives its force from the un-pastness of the past (Osundare 2000: 114)

The retention and replication of past practices in contemporary museum processes makes historic analysis imperative. According to C. Wright Mills, in *The Sociological Imagination*, close historic analysis is essential to an understanding of society, as the 'variety' of the social world cannot be ascertained without recourse to 'specific historical contexts' (1959: 163). Mills considers that scrutiny of historical social structures enable us to formulate choices and 'enlarge the scope of human decisions in the making of history', a notion that informs his conception of the sociological imagination, on which subject he writes:

The future of human affairs is not merely some set of variables to be predicted. The future is what is to be decided – within the limits, to be

sure, of historical possibility. But this possibility is not fixed; in our time the limits seem very broad indeed (ibid.: 174)

Taking history as a discursive plane, my initial intention was to cut against the grain of authorised museum history in order to see SANG through ‘my own eyes’. Jane Rendall encourages this kind of excursion in *Trafalgar Square – Détournements (a site-writing)* (2010), where she deliberately circumnavigates the ‘established tour’ of Trafalgar Square so as to highlight the spaces beyond its remit and relocate the critical gaze. Nirmal Puwar, writing in regard to the English Parliamentary complex in her book *Space Invaders*, also supports this type of endeavour when she notes that even if an institution has been subject to extensive research we still need ‘more research journeys, rambles and excavations from differently situated flaneurs’ in order to uncover stories that have ‘yet to see the light of day’ (2004: 311).

Unfortunately, my desire to seek out SANG’s hidden past was hindered by a lack of authoritative literature on the gallery from which to take my own excursion. Although SANG’s archive and collection are in essence texts (with authorising stories and inherent regimes of truth) the gallery has not been the subject of detailed research of the type usually encountered in national museums. Four introductory texts provide brief information on the gallery’s history: *Ons Kunsmuseum (Our National Gallery)* (Brander 1940);<sup>1</sup> *The South African National Gallery* (Eldred Green 1966);<sup>2</sup> *The National South African Art Collection* (Matthys Bokhurst 1971) and *A Short History of the South African National Gallery* (Dolby 1981).<sup>3</sup> The longest of these texts is Joe Dolby’s *A Short-History*, which amounts to eleven pages of writing. A further four academic studies look at specific areas and periods of practice (three of which were mentioned in chapter one). Two of these studies: *The Luggage is Still Labelled: Blackness in South African Art* (Voyiya and McGee 2003) and *Restructuring South African Museums: Reality and Rhetoric within Cape Town* (McGee 2006) focus on how black art world practitioners perceived the gallery in 2003-4. The third, *Museums in a Diverse Society: A Visitor Study at the South African National Gallery*, explores visitor reception by race in 2005 (Yoshiara 2006) and the fourth, *Old Masters and Aspirations: The Randlords*,

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<sup>1</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> October 1940 in Newweek translated text, ‘Publications other than Catalogue’ in SANG archive

<sup>2</sup> p.11-27 in Lantern vol xv no. 3 March 1966, Catalogue Box ‘South African National Gallery’ in SANG archive

<sup>3</sup> p. 37-50, Lantern Magazine 1981 Catalogue Box ‘South African National Gallery’ in SANG archive

*Art and South Africa*, looks from an art historical perspective at the bequests given by Randlords in the 1940s to South African museums (Stevenson 1997). These accounts, along with exhibition catalogues<sup>4</sup>, provide useful signposts to the museum's practice, but do not amount to an extensive history of the museum.

Consideration of how to attend to the gap in historic knowledge of SANG led me to Ann Laura Stoler's research, *Along the Archival Grain; Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (2009). In her investigation of the colonial archive she encourages researchers to explore obvious features of the terrain, rather than just concentrate on hidden meanings:

To explore the grain with care and read along it first ... paying attention to disruptions in the 'seamless' surface of colonialism's archival genres "its unexplored fault lines, ragged edges and unremarked disruptions" *but also* to focus on its repetitions, which 'join the disparate, enlist the counterintuitive, and provide the vectors of recuperations and ruptures by making familiar what colonial agents sought to know (2009: 51, 52 my emphasis)

In accordance with Stoler's recommendation I sought to identify the museum's repetitions as well as its disruptions. In this respect the lack of available literature proved beneficial as it forced me to undertake a more extensive examination than I had initially intended of the museum's past, which revealed its distinctive history.

## Art world values

In order to gain a fuller understanding of SANG I immersed myself in its public archive, exhibition halls and vaults. In undertaking this work it was apparent that a selection strategy was needed to sift the material I found into useful and less useful bodies of information. A crucial consideration was to establish what the museum valued at different points in its history, with acknowledgement that:

Museums do not simply issue objective descriptions or form logical assemblages; they generate representations and attribute value and

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<sup>44</sup> I found catalogue contributions on the patrons' collections by Proud and Tietz particularly useful (1995; 2001).

meaning in line with certain perspectives or classificatory schemas which are historically specific (Lidche 1997: 160)

In *The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures* Henrietta Lidche identifies that the significance of objects within museums is largely determined through the value (material or otherwise) that is placed upon them (ibid.). Elliot et al. in *Towards a Material History Methodology* (1994) concur with this assessment, noting that the four basic scientific properties of the art object: material, construction, provenance and function, are inadequate to the task of understanding its meaning without factoring in the 'highly interpretive' property of 'value' (1994.: 110). They conclude that it is through an object's perceived value to the society in which it is produced that its meaning is ultimately determined (ibid.: 110-113).

Network accounts of art prove useful here. Their comprehension of art as a product of inter-societal relationships provides the means to understand how art institutions give meaning and value to their objects (Becker 1982: 36). Empirical sociological studies of art institutions emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century that centred on the networks surrounding art. The research in this field is typified in America by the work of Howard Becker and in France by Pierre Bourdieu. In America network accounts can be traced to Danto (1964, 1992) and Dickie (1974). Danto in his discussion on art worlds developed the 'institutional theory of art' (1964: 34-39), which Dickie utilised to explain how objects that might have been unrecognisable as art in every-day circumstances, such as 'ready-mades' and conceptual work were designated as art through their authentication in the institutional system (1974: 34-38). In his seminal work *Art Worlds* (1982) Becker developed this theory to create a systematic account of how art is given meaning through a network of actors including, but not restricted to, artists, buyers, art institutions, audiences, critics and the state, which together create an art world, which connotes value and authority (ibid.: 35).

Network accounts provide access to the museum, however the methods commonly deployed in these accounts (namely interviews and observation) only prove fruitful when the network makes itself available to research. Chin-tao Wu discovered this when researching the role of private sponsors at *Tate Modern*, London, for her book *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (2002). The major

players at the museum refused to engage with her research project, forcing her to shift her focus to museum reports (ibid.). As Susan Pearce identifies in *On Collecting* (1994), standard network methodologies are also less helpful when examining historic cultural sites as their gatekeepers may be dead, no longer available, or unable to recollect the relevant display (1994: 130). I therefore chose to look at SANG's network of producers through its art works, displays and texts as well as first-hand accounts, as this enabled me to identify the relative value it applied to objects and practices across time.

## Traces of the past

A potential issue when researching museum practice through material evidence is that information relating to older displays and practices may be irretrievably lost. Pearce views this gap in data from an archaeological perspective as a significant or even critical loss (ibid.: 131). However, from the point of view of a longitudinal museum study these absences also provide clues to what was valued.

The partial nature of the archive coupled with ongoing fragmentation, in the form of damage, theft and loss, means that what one generally finds is 'the *traces* of various past events' (Seale 2004: 261). These vestigial elements, however slight, indicate what institutions considered important during different periods, through what they chose to preserve. A note of caution is required here as the relative value of events and objects to a network of producers cannot be determined solely by the amount of information they produced, nor by what they have retained. Indeed, Nigel Gilbert identifies that the frequency of an occurrence may offer a simplistic guide to intent, as tastes and fashions fluctuate across time (2001: 206). Yet, in the case of the art museum this method of enquiry gains saliency as one of the primary functions of the museum is to preserve objects and practices that the institution deems important (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991: 37).

The longer an object remains in an art institution the more status it accrues, as Dickie describes, art begins its life as 'a candidate for appreciation' before becoming 'a work of art' (1974: 33-34). Pearce identifies that the vast majority of objects that survive in art collections do so because of their perceived value to the museum, whereas items of comparatively less value are frequently sold or lost (1994: 131). Similarly, the

individuals with the most power in museums are those most likely to have their viewpoints recorded for posterity, as Clive Seale remarks, ‘the views of a managing director are more likely to survive in a company’s archive than the views of a receptionist’ (2004: 255).

At SANG sales of art and partial recording of shows actually aided identification of valued practice. Until the gallery introduced a non-accession clause in 1949 it was subject to extensive undocumented sales, including a sale of 129 art works in 1947, which meant only those works considered to be of particular economic or cultural worth were retained (Carman 2006: 14).<sup>5</sup> SANG’s limited funds also restricted its documentation of exhibitions and events to those that had particular significance to its gatekeepers.<sup>6</sup> In contrast large American and European museums had sufficient funds to document all of their exhibitions. SANG’s archive is therefore a particularly good guide to intent.

Using the quantity and quality of texts and the continued presence of art works and practice as evidence of value, phases were identified that were typified by particular practices or behaviours [table 2.1]. On the surface, phases in SANG’s development mirrored those of western museums, which typically moved from shaky beginnings through a period of elaboration and conservation to a more controlled use of displays. The first phase occurred in two parts. Firstly, from 1930-34,<sup>7</sup> when SANG’s focus was on its décor, which it used to signal its credentials, and secondly, 1935-49, when it gained a noteworthy historic European collection. In the second ‘consolidation’ phase, 1950-1979, the gallery introduced educative and leisure initiatives that helped promote its collection and expand its audience. The third phase, 1980-1994, represented a period of flux in which calls for greater access were responded to on the one hand by a retreat to tradition and on the other by expansion. This led to the fourth phase, 1994-2009, when the museum focused on curatorship and acquisition.

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<sup>5</sup> As a result of these sales there are large gaps in knowledge pertaining to the pre-1948 collections. For example, the specific content of the first bequest of 45 paintings given by Thomas Bayley in 1871 remains unknown (Dolby in interview 2006).

<sup>6</sup> The first time a deliberate attempt was made to comprehensively document the gallery collection was in 1948, following a government review, which noted that hitherto the museum had paid greater attention to its patrons than its art (Stratford 1947) Reports, SANG Archive. Significantly, even after a record system was introduced most exhibitions remained un-catalogued and undocumented - ‘New Director of Art Gallery’ *Cape Times* 29th January 1948 News cuttings, 1904-1983, compiled by J. Minicki and other librarians, SANG archive; Paris (1950).

<sup>7</sup> The years the study covers run from November 1930 to April 2009.

**Table 2.1** Phases in the Museum’s Development, by Main Focus and Evidence

Phase	Time period	Main focus	Evidence of focus
Development	1930-1934	Museum décor	Art work embedded in architectural design and included in all public rooms. Permanent display.
	1935-1949	Patrons and historic European fine art	Museum extended to house the patrons’ collections. Extensive newspaper reports focus on patrons and their gifts. Patrons’ European fine art collections dominated gallery.
Consolidation	1950-1979	Directorship – education, leisure and entertainment initiatives	Leisure and entertainment initiatives instituted by The Director were foregrounded in the press, museum reports and catalogues. Standardisation of design and management of display. Practices introduced by the Director (John Paris) in the 1950s were retained throughout apartheid.
Flux	1980-1993	Conservation versus expansion	Catalogues, newspaper reports and interviews with staff reflect dichotomy between SANG’s practices and those outside the museum. White South African art centred; Education Department expanded to include black education officers; African and community art shown. From 1993 education exhibitions in the main gallery.
Expansion	1994-2009	Curators, education and new collections	Division of museum into curatorial regions. Reduction in education department and expansion in number of curators. Exhibition programme built around curatorial themes. Curators allocated primary space in museum publications.

## Storytelling

Although SANG’s developmental phases seemed to correspond with those in western museums, closer inspection revealed SANG appeared less interested in aesthetics than in social ideas, and therefore performed more like a political house than a temple. A particular difference was that SANG used its collection as a medium for telling local stories.

SANG’s recourse to storytelling was not exceptional as all exhibitions are in essence narrative displays. In *Representation* (1997) Stuart Hall describes exhibitions as ‘systems of representation’ that work like a ‘language’ and are designed to deliver meaning: ‘every choice to show this rather than that, to show this in relation to that, to

say this about that – is a choice about how to represent’ (1997: 8). Furthermore, each of the choices made in an exhibition ‘has consequences both for what meanings are produced and for how meaning is produced’ – and therefore tell a particular story (ibid.: 8). In SANG’s case the stories that were told were made striking by their direct mode of delivery and the narratives they relayed.

In his essay *The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research* (2007), Ken Plummer notes that by identifying the specific features of stories one can determine the cultural factors on which they rely (2007: 8). Further, as stories are ‘embedded and patterned through cultures of inequalities’ identification of their key features determines for whom they are being told and who they advantage (ibid.). The main subjects of SANG’s stories are set out in table 2.2.

**Table 2.2** The Main Focus and ‘Stories’ of Each Time Period

Year	Focus	Main stories
1930-1934	Décor	Scenes of white South African life: early settler society, mine patronage, working life, black acquiescence to white rule.
1935-1949	Patrons and historic European fine art	Historic fine art displays (mainly of English work). White, male stories, sporting-life and female nudes. Rooms designated to individual patrons.
1950-1979	Director led practices	Contemporary white South African art. Leisure initiatives focused on inclusion of white families: tours, films, musical events and participatory exhibitions.
1980-1993	Conservation versus education	Competing claims to museum. Development of white South African collection. Introduction of black education officers and political, resistance art.
1994-2009	Curatorship	Political contemporary art displays with focus on multiculturalism and ‘rainbow nation’. The inclusion of ‘African art’. Revisionist historic European displays.

The direct engagement with racial subject matter at SANG was notable, as it contrasted with European and American art museums where whiteness took the guise of an invisible norm (Berger 2005: 14). In the first phase of SANG’s development, 1930-1949, its décor and collection promoted an overtly white, phallogocentric, English-South African view of the world linked to economic expansion and social control. This was followed in the second phase, 1950-1979, by a period of consolidation in which SANG was remodelled as a space for the white South African family. In its third phase, 1980-

1993, different and competing racial narratives emerged. On the one side, white recidivism, on the other, multiculturalism and black inclusion. In its fourth phase, 1994-2009, political art exhibitions were foregrounded, which were used as the backdrop for multicultural stories told primarily through the white curatorial team.

As well as indicating the need for site specific study, the distinction between SANG's relationship with race and that of European and American museums suggests a different methodological approach is required. 'Cultural blindness to whiteness' in the west has meant analysis of museum practice has concentrated on uncovering discreet racial tropes (ibid.: 14-15). Thus, Berger (discussed in chapter one) dealt with the issue of hidden whiteness by 'probing beneath the narrative surface' of seemingly innocuous images to reveal their raced characteristics (ibid.: 1-8).

Berger's preoccupation with uncovering hidden meanings was also informed by his concern not to reproduce prejudices. He cautions against exploring more overt forms of racial visual culture, such as caricature, arguing that their obviousness makes them dangerous ground for white academics, who under the mantle of 'racial justice' may be 'indulging in our long standing fascination with the other' (ibid.: 2-3). He also argues persuasively that dehumanising stereotypes wherever they are produced, including in academic texts, play a supporting role in reproducing discriminatory tropes as it keeps them in the public discourse (ibid.). In his case, the solution to this contradiction has been to explore less overt forms of racism. An approach aided by the prevalence of concealed and subtle forms of racism in Berger's chosen field. At SANG, where an openly racist, sexist and English-centred discourse has accompanied the art work for much of its history, the circumnavigation of racial tropes would not be possible without being potentially misleading. Attention is therefore given to both overt and discreet racial material.

A further reason to examine obviously discriminatory imagery is that it often conceals more complex meaning. Close examination of the stories told through SANG's collection reveals startling inaccuracies in what at first glance appear to be straightforward historic and biographical tales. These distortions correspond with those found by Lev Gumilev in his examination of the people of the Asian steppe in the early middle ages in *Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom* (1987). The stories he encountered

in the medieval texts, although appearing to refer directly to ‘real’ events, included inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and in some cases ‘blatant distortions’ (ibid.: 9). In order to uncover why these ‘exaggerations and omissions’ occurred (ibid.: 10) Macdonald describes how Gumilev treated his sources as if they were unreliable witnesses and he was a (fictional) detective seeking to uncover their motives (2001: 195). In viewing the material in this way Gumilev sought to ascertain who created it, who its stories benefitted and importantly who it sought to deceive (1987: 10, 362-363). By looking with an inquisitive eye at the stories SANG told my own study was enriched, as it revealed its partisan tales frequently advantaged particular groups and individuals. For example, white hegemony was assertively displayed during periods when whites felt themselves to be physically and economically under threat, whilst more liberal, transgressive forms of whiteness came into play when whites felt more secure in their power.

## Master narratives and their dichotomies

‘Playing the detective’ helped uncover the museum’s complex stories, which proved essential for understanding the museum. Clive Seale notes that the realist approach to archival research, in which the more material available about an event leads to it being viewed as having greater meaning, can be misleading for those seeking to gather ideas rather than facts (2004: 254). Table 2.3 shows that subsidiary or minor themes were in existence at SANG that provided important counters to its dominant norms. The presence of binaries dissembles ‘the neat divisions that could imagine a European history and its unified collectivities apart from the external’ (Stoler 2009: 5), as a consequence they also offer opportunities for change. For example, the gallery’s status as a picture gallery was refuted by the presence of craft objects and African art, which paved the way for education, community and political initiatives that in the west were rarely associated with the rarefied field of fine art.

**Table 2.3** Major and Minor Themes

Year	Major themes	Minor themes
1930-1934	White settlement English fine art	Black and Afrikaner culture
1935-1949	Historic European fine art	Craft, South African fine art
1950-1979	Historic European fine art and contemporary South African fine art by white artists	Education initiatives, African art
1980-1993	Historic European fine art and modernist European and South African fine art by white artists	Black people led education initiatives, community art, African art, political art
1994-2009	Historic European fine art, political art	African art

Placing a weighted emphasis on narratives produced by minor themes risks exaggerating their influence, nonetheless their presence in this study is required to give a greater understanding of how SANG evolved. Examination of SANG’s developmental phases shows that SANG’s processes were not linear, but layered, with minor ideas in one period frequently surfacing as dominant influences at later times. Looking more closely at SANG’s practice also reveals that narratives that initially appeared lost were more commonly concealed.

### Section Three: Mixed Methods

Working on the twin assumptions that common-sense knowledge should be interrogated and that the museum’s contents are ‘socially situated products’ (Scott 1990: 34), I used a mixed-method or ‘triangulated’ mode of enquiry (Denzin 1970). ‘Triangulation’, or the application of three or more methods to a research problem, has been challenged by postmodern writers for its reliance on truth claims, or the notion that by applying different methods one gets closer to the ‘facts’ (Richardson 2003: 517). While triangulation is limited by domain assumptions, including the notion that there is a fixed object that can be ‘triangulated’, the idea that a research field is best illuminated by light thrown from multiple sources has merit (ibid.). Norman Denzin who championed triangulation in the 1970s as a means to gain a full understanding of the field (1970) has in more recent years applied the same term more fluidly to the researcher’s role as a ‘methodological bricoleur’ (2003: 8-9). A term he ascribes to researchers who adopt a reflexive approach to the multiple methods in their employ so as to reveal a ‘quilt-like’

montage of impressions (ibid.: 9). In my case a more prosaic rationale for behaving like a bricoleur was that the scope of my study required a multifaceted approach.

Although art museums on the temple model have fairly stable collections, museums of contemporary art are more fluid and changing hence they are often described as ‘alive’ (Smith 1989: 6-21). SANG, with its assortment of contemporary and historic art objects and frequent changes to its display had a particularly unstable nature. The concern to capture its complexity, coupled with the wide span of time covered by my investigation and my interest in engaging with the politics of display meant that the archive, art collection, exhibitionary complex and gatekeepers all fell within the remit of the study. In the discussion below I look at how I engaged with these sources of data and the methods deployed for their analysis.

## The archive

Nothing starts in the Archive, nothing, ever at all, although things  
certainly end up there (Steedman 2008: 1175)

Approaching the archive I was mindful of Stoler’s poetic injunction that one should ‘look for its pulse in the quiescence and quickened pace of its own production ... formulae, and frames’ (2009: 35). In order to grasp the exigencies of SANG’s archive I sought to identify where its energies were expended and what conditioned its design. From this starting point I was able to ascertain ‘which visions ha[d] been generated in the pursuit of production’ (ibid.).

Identification of these mechanisms was achieved through rough adherence to the basic tenants of archival research set out by Pearce-Moses in *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (2005). Pearce-Moses advises those conducting research in the archive to begin with the general and then move to the specific ‘starting with the whole, then proceeding to components (series, subseries, folders and items)’ (2005: 7). Examining the archive as a whole I was able to observe how its serialisation controlled its content and impacted at an intrinsic level on what the museum sought to relay. By this means I identified how SANG’s discursive frame bore an affinity with the colonial

archives researched by Stoler, which served as ‘both transparencies on which power relations [are] inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves’ (2009: 20).

## The order of things

SANG’s library and archive were organised using *The Fine and Decorative Arts Section* (Volume 3) of the *Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index* (DDCRI) (1996 edition 21). The DDCRI is intrinsically bound to western precepts of art, as demonstrated by its division of art into three Euro-centric categories. Firstly, ‘Fine Art’, listed by sculpture, painting, drawing, graphic art and photography (517-520). Secondly, ‘Geographic Location’ – North America, Europe, The British Isles, England, ‘Miscellaneous Parts of Europe’ and ‘Other Geographic Areas’ (521-522). Thirdly, ‘Periods of Development’ with works divided by western art movements and style. This final section is further sub-divided by religion, with ‘Christian Subjects’ represented by almost a page of references in the index in contrast to ‘Other Religions’ which are represented by four entries (519-520).

The gallery’s adherence to the DDCRI meant the library corresponded spatially to its content with fifteen bookcases dedicated to specific western fine art practices, by type, region and period (this included a large section on English landscape painting that encompassed more than fifty books). In contrast, and again in correspondence with the DDCRI, literature on African art occupied minimal space on two shelves of one bookcase. A number of the African art books in this section were reductively categorised by the Dewey decimal code 709.01, which stands for ‘Non-literate peoples regardless of time or place, but limited to non-literate peoples of the past and non-literate peoples clearly not a part of contemporary society’ (Dewey Index p.522).

The inscription of racial hierarchies onto the archive had an impact on how staff responded to it. In 2006 one of the curators described (in interview) how she had asked SANG’s librarian to purchase more literature on African art, but was refused with the explanation that she could access these books at the South African Museum as: ‘they *should* have them in the social history division’ (Staff Member L 2006 213-219). The librarian’s response indicated that the form of categorisation used to index the books conditioned her expectation of the archive’s content.

## The underlying mess

The unequal treatment of European and African art practice in SANG's archive demonstrates that material discovered 'between the sleeves' of the formal archive needs to be viewed with the proviso that although significant it is a 'less actualisable force' than its container (Stoler 2008: 50). As Carolyn Steedman writes in *Dust*, researchers often get captured by reading 'for what is not there: the silences and the absences' rather than by what is present (2008: 177). Nevertheless, in moving from the formality of the DDCRI to the archive's content I found its subseries contained less formal, localised and in some cases transgressive practices that challenged its intent. Steedman notes that this duality is not unusual as the archive 'is not and never has been the repository of official documents alone' (ibid.).

While the archive index gave the impression of a totalising force, a perusal of the archive's content revealed its cataloguing was limited and incomplete. For example, the *Press Clipping Folders* contained newspaper articles in which texts were cut short and page numbers were missing. Lots of smaller items in the archive, including pamphlets, guides and catalogues, also went unrecorded in both the paper filing system and computer. Many of these were located in large containers itemised by category or type such as in the esoterically labelled box '*Items Other than Catalogues*'. The seeming lack of attention paid to individual items indicated neglect, but the particulars of their treatment contradicted this intention. For example, the newspaper articles appeared to have been painstakingly, if incompletely, collected and pasted into journals, in some cases with missing information added in pen. The physicality of these items and the evidence of the archivist's hand hinted at a personal interest.



**Plate 2.1** 'Newspaper cuttings' SANG archive  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The importance of exploring areas of the archive that appeared inconsistent with the whole was demonstrated by looking through the journals, some of which referenced material beyond the scope of the museum. For instance, some of the earlier newspaper journals (1930-48) made reference to art works by black artists who were not shown at SANG [plate 2.1]. Similarly, later journals and microfiche (1985-93) contained detailed material on the resistance art movement, which emerged in the late 1970s, and the cultural boycott (1980-93), which at the time lay largely outside the museum's remit. In both instances these inclusions bridged the gap between practices occurring outside and within the museum, offering valuable information on the wider cultural sphere in which SANG operated and the border-crossings between these domains.

## Art storage

The gap between the DDCRI and the actual content of the archive was replicated in contradictions in the storage of art. Again, these inconsistencies warned me to tread carefully when assessing the relative status and value given to objects and collections.



**Plate 2.2** 'The vaults'  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn 2010)

Unsurprisingly, the layout of the library was echoed in the gallery vaults, which contained row after row of oil paintings on sliding frames [plate 2.2]. The status of these objects was intimated by their air-controlled environment behind an electronic security door that resembled that of an old-fashioned bank safe. In contrast to this secure and stately environment the African art collection was housed in cardboard boxes in a single cupboard in the curators' wing, with only a standard door key for protection [plate 2.3].



**Plate 2.3** 'African art in storage'  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn 2010)

The exclusive use of the vaults for fine art storage appeared to connote the privileged position of this art form. However, closer inspection of the vault suggested a possible lack of care (or a comfortableness bred from familiarity), with some art works incorrectly placed on stands and in some instances propped up against each other on the floor. In contrast, the African art collection was packaged in cardboard boxes, each individually measured and made for content, their labels neatly printed and typed and the art works wrapped in tissue paper and tied with ribbon [plate 2.4].



**Plate 2.4** 'Boxed pipes' African art collection, SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn 2010)

The attentiveness paid to the packaging of the African collection suggests the lack of funds spent on housing it was not indicative of a lack of interest, but may have stemmed from a frugality born out of necessity in the post-apartheid economic climate. An idea lent support by the fact that there have been no improvements made to the vaults since the onset of democracy. However, African art was infrequently displayed at SANG, suggesting interest in this collection was restricted to certain parties.

Having access to the art in storage enabled comparison between what the gallery contained and what it exhibited. Identification of the differences between what was shown and what was 'left on the shelf', revealed practices of selection to be conscious choices and shed light on museum priorities and tastes. Taking the idea of the museum as a display case and repository into my analysis of past practice I was able to glean

further insights into what SANG favoured at different times. Concentrating on material intended for public consumption, I sought out records pertaining to the gallery's art collection and displays, mainly from catalogues, newspaper articles and museum reports. In the process of gathering evidence I copied hundreds of documents from the archive, which I turned into a mini sub-archive of cross-referenced labelled files. By cross-comparing images of the art works and their 'picture-lists', I could reimagine the content, layout and feel of past displays and divine further clues into what the gallery placed in the public domain and what it 'left behind'.

## Visual material: mapping and recording art works

In order to understand how art works and exhibitions are constituted sociologically Janet Wolff, in *Hermeneutic Philosophy and the Sociology of Art*, advocates a phenomenological approach underpinned by a hermeneutic structure (1975). She suggests investigations of art practices should include two key questions. Firstly, which social ideas, values and beliefs, are being expressed? and secondly, 'how are they thus expressed?' (ibid.: 54-55). She suggests that through this approach the analyst of social life and social structures is in the position to 'perceive the sub-structural, or super-structural, elements of society which could be symbolised artistically' (ibid.: 55). Sociological investigations of art, which include the art work, frequently consider art as the 'finished product' (the 'image') rather than a series of processes (ibid.). In contrast, seeing art works as elements in the broader display provides the opportunity to question processes of meaning-making more readily, as it enables art to be seen as part of the broader museum conversation. In order to understand SANG's art work in the context of its display I undertook extensive visual research in the gallery.

The majority of my fieldwork was spent collecting visual records of art works and displays. Spending a prolonged period in the museum creating images had two unforeseen benefits. Firstly, it increased my level of access, as my image-making was supported by staff who gave me permission to enter the museum on closed days and to spend time alone in the vaults. Secondly, the time spent producing images on site was akin to the experience of embedded fieldwork, as it offered an opportunity to observe museum practice and formulate new ideas through engagement with the display.

In order to capture the complexities of SANG’s collection I completed numerous sketches and drawings and took hundreds of photographs of art works in exhibitions and in the vaults. I also drew detailed maps of five displays: *Facing the Past* (2005), *Fabrications* (2006), *Romantic Childhood* (2006), *Second to None* (2006) and *Positive Lives III* (2006), and created two maps of permanent exhibitions at the South African Museum (SAM): *IQe* and *The African Studies Galleries*. The maps included: thumbnail sketches of the art works; the text on the ‘tombstones’ (the individual labels that accompany art works); exhibition texts and notes on audio-recordings. I have included colour-coded maps as reference points within the chapters of the thesis, an example of which is overleaf [plate 2.5]. The highlighted areas on the maps relate to specific ideas and themes from the exhibitions, which correspond to the coding scheme in the table below [table 2.4]. Further maps are provided between pages 342-366 that relate to more than one area of the thesis or provide background information.

**Table 2.4** Map coding

Main Idea	Colour coding
Exhibitionary Complex – relationships between works	Blue
Race	Pink
Exhibition text	Green
Notes outlining additional details	Lilac

The maps were complemented by visual records taken from a further five exhibitions through field notes and image-making: *Ilifa Labantu* (2005), *Voice-Overs* (2005), *Life and Soul* (2006), *Memory and Magic* (2006) and *Santu Mofokeng* (2006). I also undertook extensive photographic surveys of the paintings and sculptures in the vault and of the museum décor and architecture. The elaborate packaging used in the storage of the African art collection, coupled with its infrequent display, meant I was unable to record it in the same way as the European collection. However, Carole Kaufmann, the curator of the African art collection, kindly provided me with CDs containing images of a large number of works from the collection, which provided an invaluable resource. I also photographed a small selection of the works in storage.



The methods used to capture visual information were partly determined by practical considerations. Flash photography was not allowed in the museum and I was using a hand-held camera, which made levels of light crucial. Capturing small details, in particular in the décor, proved difficult and I sometimes relied on written notes as support for indistinct pictures or printed out the colour images in black and white. I was only given permission to photograph exhibitions that belonged to the museum, not those that were visiting, and there were therefore other instances when drawing or writing was essential.

My collection of visual material was also dictated by the capacity of various mediums to express my intent. Although I found all of the visual methods I used beneficial, drawing and map-making brought me closest to the museum. In *Hold Everything Dear* (2007), John Berger conceives of drawing and photography as two separate disciplines. In his view drawing is a facilitator of the poetic and imaginary whilst photography constructs a facsimile of reality (2007: 265-266). Thus he reminds his reader, photographs are ‘taken’ and pictures are ‘made’ (ibid.). This view-point is supported by the anthropologist Michael Taussig, in *What Colour is Sacred*, who identifies a drawing’s ‘corporeality’ as the feature that distinguishes it from photography (2007: 269). The distinction between these media is challenged by the fact that both are capable of rendering the imagined visible; are able to provide documentary accounts and have a physical presence. Nevertheless, Berger and Taussig’s assertions resonate in terms of the drawing’s ability to move beyond surface engagement.

The physical engagement with the space afforded by drawing makes it a valuable ethnographic tool. Berger refers to images created during research as ‘autobiographical records of one’s discovery of an event, seen, remembered, or imagined’ (2007: 3), an idea reinforced by Taussig who describes the process of drawing from life as a ‘mute conversation’ that requires ‘prolonged and total immersion’ (2007: 269). Contained within both these descriptions is the feeling of ‘oneness’ with the museum that I experienced when creating images of the art works and displays. The absorption in process, the search for verisimilitude and the subjectivity of my gaze deepened the encounter and left traces of the experience on the page.

The maps provided a singular means of ‘returning’ to the display [see plate 2.5 for an example]. The unintended consequence of recording details of the exhibitions ‘head-on’ in miniature was that I was forced to either move the map or my position to make the space intelligible, thereby producing a closer, physical engagement with the environment. This mode of recording, along with the inclusion of ‘thumbnail’ sketches, full title details and notes, enabled me to re-trace my journey through the display.

Drawing and map-making also helped capture the intentionality of the space by allowing weighted attention to be given to significant objects and events. For instance, it enabled me to enlarge significant details on the maps and include notations.

Photographs, in contrast, more readily capture detail, but their single perspective, limited tone and relative uniformity may offer a misleading symmetry when this was not the intention of the display. The ‘total’ recount of the photograph also leaves little to the imagination. Photographs therefore may present the concerns of the exhibition’s creators more didactically than intended. There is also the danger that an adequate image for research purposes may take on the expectation of an ‘art photograph’ when recording an exhibition, thereby diminishing the aesthetic power of the display by equating it with the record. In contrast to the photograph, drawings provide access to the imagined and unseen, creating room for other forms of misinterpretation through their reliance on the subjectivity and draftsmanship of the creator.

As a means to utilise the difference between photography and drawing I chose, where possible, to use photographs to capture the content of individual art works, when content analysis was required, and left the poetics of the space to the drawings. For the most part, the images I created were stored in the computer and then categorised into bodies of work, such as ‘museum décor’ and ‘sporting art’. The resulting image files were then used as an *aide-memoire*, in tandem with the maps, catalogues and newspaper reports, to revisit the collections and displays.

## Interviews and tours

To gain further clarity on current and recent museum practice I conducted interviews with key staff members and attended organised gallery tours. During my fieldwork periods in 2006 and 2010 I spoke to all of the gallery staff, this included the Directors,

curators, education staff, volunteer guides, gallery attendants, ‘Friends of the SANG’ (members of the gallery’s volunteer support group), librarians and the people who worked in the gallery shop.<sup>8</sup> I conducted interviews with fifteen people who were connected to the gallery, including key members of SANG’s staff team, past and present [table 2.5]. This included interviews with the curators of the following exhibitions: *Facing the Past: Seeking the Future* (2005), *Ilifa Labantu* (2005), *Memory and Magic* (2006), *Fabrications* (2006), *Romantic Childhood* (2006), *Positive Lives* (2006), and *Second to None* (2006).

## Interviews

Table 2.5 Interview details

Code name	Description	Type of interview (dates)
Staff Member A	White curator	Two taped interviews (6/08/06 and 14/11/06)
Staff Member B	White curator	Taped interview (10/10/06), field notes (various 2006 and 2010)
Staff Member C	Black ex-education officer	Taped interview (21/11/06)
Staff Member D	Black ex-education officer	Taped interview (09/09/06)
Staff Member E	Black ex-education officer	Interview with notes (08/12/06)
Staff Member F	Black ex-assistant curator	Two taped interviews (09/10/06 and 17/10/06), taped panel discussion (10/10/06), field notes (various 2006)
Staff Member G	Black education officer	Taped interview (4/09/06)
Staff Member H	White volunteer	Taped interview (1/09/06)
Staff Member I	White volunteer	Taped interview (22/08/06)
Staff Member J	Black student assistant curator	Taped interview (27/07/06)
Staff Member K	White student assistant curator	Taped interview (22/08/06)
Staff Member L	White curator	Taped interview (25/10/06) Field notes (various 2006)
Staff Member M	White visiting curator	Taped interview (10/10/06)
Visiting Artist N	White artist/curator	Brief taped interview at end of tour (10/10/06)
Staff Member O	Black, Indian Director	Discussion with notes (12/10)

Fourteen of the interviews were taped with a dictaphone and two were recorded using notes at the participants’ request. The interviews lasted between one and five hours (some split between two sessions). They took place in various locations chosen by the participants, including their offices and art studios, my room in shared accommodation and cafés over lunch. The interviews were non-standardised and semi-structured with an emphasis placed on discussing the participant’s role in the museum

<sup>8</sup> Emma Bedford the curator of contemporary art was on sabbatical during my fieldwork period in 2006 and subsequently left the gallery in 2008, so I derived information on her role from her written work.

through three main topics: their work practice; perception of the gallery and what they felt, if anything, the gallery should change.

While SANG's civic responsibilities indicate it should be held accountable for its practice, there was a counter requirement to ensure that those taking part in the research were not exposed to undue risk. Thus, the research involved a balance between:

A desire, on the one hand to reveal the processes at work ... on the other, to protect the privacy of individuals and groups and to recognise that there are private spheres into which the social scientist may not, and perhaps even should not, penetrate (Barnes 1979: 13-24)

As my research interest was in SANG's public representational practice I did not seek to delve into the private realms of the institution or to elicit personal information from interviewees. Nevertheless, on a couple of occasions participants made 'off the cuff' remarks that appeared personally revealing. There were also instances where staff made comments that had racist and/or homophobic connotations (mentioned in section one). For example a white guide referred to a black member of staff as 'the girl' (Staff Member I 2006: 413). In order to manage the competing concerns for transparency and protection, I made a case by case decision on the inclusion of data, based on whether or not the thoughts expressed by the interviewee transferred into action and the significance of the information to an understanding of the public domain. I also made it clear participants should only say what they would be happy to repeat in public and initiated each interview with a version of the following statement:

I don't ask anyone anything they wouldn't say publicly, so if there's anything that's private or whatever either don't tell me or get me to get rid of it. So it's stuff you would be prepared to say in the public domain rather than anything else (statement made in interview with Staff Member C 2006: 2)

I informed interviewees of my research intentions, in so far as I knew these at the time, and received verbal permission from participants to use their names in the research. Although the public nature of the museum meant I could not offer complete anonymity to interviewees I adopted the research convention of 'code names', except when discussing the curators of particular exhibitions, who I named in order to acknowledge their work.

## Walking tours

My primary means of gathering information on the gallery's public practice was from the exhibitions and walking tour attendance [table 2.6].

**Table 2.6** Walking tours

Code name	Description	Type of tour (date)	Exhibition/s
<b>Staff Member A</b>	White curator	Taped walking tour (06/08/06) accompanied by eight Friends of SANG	<i>Facing The Past: Seeking the Future</i>
<b>Staff Member H</b>	White volunteer	Taped walking tour (1/09/06) accompanied on and off by other visitors	<i>Facing The Past: Seeking the Future, Second to None, Romantic Childhood, Fabrications</i>
<b>Staff Member I</b>	White volunteer	Taped walking tour (22/08/06) accompanied by other visitors	<i>Facing The Past: Seeking the Future, Second to None, Romantic Childhood, Life and Soul</i>
<b>Staff Member M</b>	White ex-assistant curator (visiting)	Taped walking tour (10/08/06) accompanied by seven visitors; Panel discussion (10/08/06) approx. 50 attendees	<i>Second to None, Life and Soul</i>
<b>Visiting Artist N</b>	White artist (own display)	Taped walking tour (10/08/06)	<i>Life and Soul</i>

The walking tours fell into two categories: tours of specific exhibitions and public tours of the museum. The tours lasted between one and two hours and were conducted by a single guide. Each guide walked the audience through salient features of the exhibitions, offering opportunities along the way for the audience to engage in conversations. In the one instance when I attended a tour alone with a guide I asked them to conduct it the same way they would with the general public.

In order to capture the nuance of the interactions on the tours I adopted the approach advocated by Eric Gable in *Cultural Studies at Monticello* (2008), of taping the tours and the conversations that attended them. I ensured the attendees were aware of my role by briefly explaining my research project prior to the tours and seeking their permission to record their contributions. In all cases audience members were happy to be taped. In order to ensure the audience members' anonymity I did not include their names or any individualising identifying markers from their conversations.

The tours brought a further layer of meaning to the exhibition through ‘the rubric of “performance”’ (ibid.: 111). On the tours, dictaphone in hand, I took on the role of participant-observer. The experience gave me a better understanding of how staff negotiated the displays and interacted with the general public. It also provided further opportunity to study how the audience interacted with the gallery. I also attended multiple tours at SANG that I did not tape, both before and during my research. These tours followed a similar format to the majority I taped indicating that my dictaphone had not markedly interfered with the study.

However, there were two instances on the taped tours when the white guides veered ‘off script’ to speak negatively about an exhibition by a black curator (discussed in chapter ten). Although my presence may have encouraged these critiques the fact that the staff members made their comments on the museum floor makes them important for inclusion.

## Coding

At every stage in museum practice, from acquisition to display, choices are made which pre-empt any messages that might be conveyed (Pearce 1995: 115)

I transcribed the taped interviews and walking tours verbatim, minus recourse to language signifiers and patches of unclear tape. Sifting and evaluating the transcribed material, in combination with my visual and documentary evidence, aided identification of repeated themes that exposed the ‘community version of reality’ that was at play in the museum (Gilbert 2001: 143). In order to bring rigour to my analysis I coded and re-coded the transcripts as additional knowledge was acquired. I then re-grouped information in terms of repeated themes, making sure I retained reference to their original context. My final coding frames are set out in table 2.7.

**Table 2.7** Coding text

Primary themes	Main ideas discussed	Colour coding
Political/social climate	Impact of political situation/ broader society	Red
	Role of institution in society	Magenta
Exhibitionary Complex	Display strategies, design, thoughts on how to deliver a display	Dark blue
	Curator's role	Medium blue
Race	Assumption that audience is white	Dark pink 1
	Different perception of art by race	Dark pink 2
	Different perception of people by race	Medium pink
	Race as topic	Light pink
Cultural capital	Assumption audience knows about art/theme	Light blue
Institutional change	Considered to be too much	Yellow
	Considered to be too little	Light yellow
Narrative content of display	Political/religious art content	Ochre
	Race/culture difference in art/unclaimed/reclaimed histories	Olive
Art and artists	Art making, art content	Dark green
	Focus on particular art forms	Medium green
Staff stories	Personal interest/conflicting histories	Brown
Institutional discourse	Director/staff/audience/education	Grey
Discourse analysis	Audience participation Jokes/misunderstandings/ miscellaneous	Turquoise

When I cross-referenced the themes derived from the interviews and tours with those identified in the archive and collection it became apparent that racialised themes predominated across domains. It was also clear that although ideas on race changed across time whiteness and white privilege retained value despite competing cultural claims. The retention of these themes suggested that racial ideas, along with those pertaining to culture, class and gender, were passed down through the museum across generations. It also revealed that the ‘racial talk’ within the museum was largely dictated by the race of the speaker. In *Theorizing Museums*, Gable describes a similar dichotomy in operation on museum tours at an antebellum site in America. White staff used their tours to stabilise historic narratives of race whereas black staff frequently sought to disrupt them (1998: 172). In looking at how staff practice impacted on SANG’s public role I therefore took cognisance of the ethnicity of its gatekeepers.

## Conclusion

In adopting an interpretive approach I was conscious of the polysemic nature of the material that I sought to analyse and the potential for it to be open to multiple interpretations. This multiplicity was addressed in two main ways. Firstly, I interrogated art works, written texts and staff feedback as bodies of information and secondly, acknowledged that the study was intended to explore symbolic and social ‘realities’ rather than determine concrete facts (Atkinson and Coffey 1997: 47). I also made sure that I did not work in isolation, but instead drew on a multitude of external texts on museum and visual culture, which helped steer me away from my own assumptions and towards a greater understanding of the space. Developing a greater awareness of what SANG’s practices meant in their societal context of production, I became conscious of the interwoven relationship between whiteness, power and the museum. In coming to an understanding of how SANG developed into a white institution, I was also able to identify factors, such as interventions by black workers, that worked against the establishment norm. In doing this, I identified the seeds of practices that could enable SANG to operate on more equitable grounds.

## Chapter Three:

### Setting the Stage

Museums are our modernity's paradigmatic artifice, modernity's art par excellence, and the active, mediating, enabling instrument of all that we have learned to desire we might become (Preziosi 2001: 3)

European art museums built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were designed with decorative arrangements that spelt out their civilising purpose. The elements embedded in the walls and painted onto the ceilings of these museums were intended to provide two primary functions: first, to signal the importance of the museum's artistic content and second, to valorise the state through their expression of its values. In contrast to a museum's art collection, which can come and go, the built-in display is an immutable feature of the space, whose contents collectively demonstrate the specialness of the building and the culture it pertains to (Berger 2005: 118). Permanent décor has therefore played a vital role in the development of the museum. Writing about French museums, Duncan asserts that the state is embodied in the very form of the museum, where 'acting on behalf of the public, it stands revealed as the keeper of the nation's spiritual life' (1995: 12).

When SANG opened in 1930 its decorative schemata replicated those in European museums in so far as it revered the state, but differed in its content which manifested the gallery's role as the political house. In contrast to European museums SANG's décor, funded by the Cape municipality, made no reference to the country's artistic heritage and instead told a patriarchal story of working life that promoted white settlement and nation building. The décor offered a vision of a potential white run society not an accurate portrayal of South African life. Its aspirational portrayal of Cape society painted a picture of prosperity, progress and uncontested white rule during a period marked by poverty, political tension and dissent.

The thesis is the first study to pay critical attention to SANG's décor. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, *Work and Progress*, describes how the décor constructed a myth of segregated labour and cultural and economic progress

under white rule. The second section, *From the Farm to the Mine*, discusses how the décor's presentation of rightful white rule was extended to the land through its confluence of white hegemony with industrial advance. The third section, *The Apocryphal Tale*, offers a detailed case study of the painting *Holiday Time in Cape Town in the Twentieth Century* (James Ford 1899), which provided a fictive view of Cape Town as a white city. Although a painting cannot be considered décor in the traditional sense, *Holiday Time in Cape Town* is the only work to have been on permanent display at SANG since it opened and is treated by the gallery as a permanent fixture of the space,<sup>1</sup> making it imperative to include it in this discussion.

Material for the chapter is derived from observation of the décor; my photographs of the site and photographs from the archive. Before SANG opened in 1930 it commissioned art works as built-in features of the gallery. The works included two murals in the first display hall and twenty-one carved wooden panels, of approximately one foot in height and three feet in length, that were inserted above the doorways leading in and out of each of the gallery's halls. The murals and wooden carvings were accompanied by a set of ornate carved doors (provided by the Liberman estate); a series of stained glass windows and the painting, *Holiday Time in Cape Town*.

Information on the décor's narrative content was derived from the volunteer guides and my own knowledge of the subjects, in many instances my understanding was derived from astute guesswork based on awareness of the surrounding circumstances. Although the chapter does not concern itself with readings of the museum décor in the present day it should be noted that the majority of the décor remains on permanent display. This includes all but three of the original carved wooden panels, the *Liberman Doors* and the painting *Holiday Time in Cape Town*, meaning the décor continues to have a powerful presence in the gallery.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dolby *A Short History of the South African National Gallery* p. 42, Lantern Magazine 1981 (37-50) Catalogue Box 'South African National Gallery', SANG archive

<sup>2</sup> Eighteen of the twenty-one panels remain on public view in the gallery, one of a 'slave scene' was sold by the gallery at an unspecified time in the past and two have been obscured by a temporary display panel (Proud February 2010 fieldwork notes). The murals remained on the walls until the late sixties when they were taken down due to disrepair (Proud 1999: 10, 158).

## Section One: Work and Progress

Internal décor plays a fundamental role in all public museums, but at SANG it took on particular significance as the museum initially lacked a developed art collection through which to express its identity. As a consequence, between 1930 and 1935 the décor served as the museum's principle visual text. This section seeks to ascertain the atmosphere that the décor was intended to create when it was introduced to the gallery, which is partly discernible through its distinctions from the décor in the temple.

Taking the Louvre as her example, Duncan describes how European museums used their 'ceiling decorations' from the late eighteenth to early twentieth century to present the history of art as the 'history of western civilisation' (1995.: 27). Within their decorative schemes art was presented as the measure of the nation's progress through insignia that made reference to government and monarchical sponsors; images that honoured historic artists and narrative sequences that set out the 'greatest moments in art history' (ibid.: 26-32). The 'great artists' dominated the European décor, as they were considered to connote 'the highest kind of civic virtue' and the means by which citizens could come to 'know themselves to be civilised' (ibid.: 32). The images used in the décor in European art museums frequently required prior knowledge to access them, which was most readily available to the bourgeois audience, such as subject matter derived from historical sources or myths and legends (ibid.: 27).

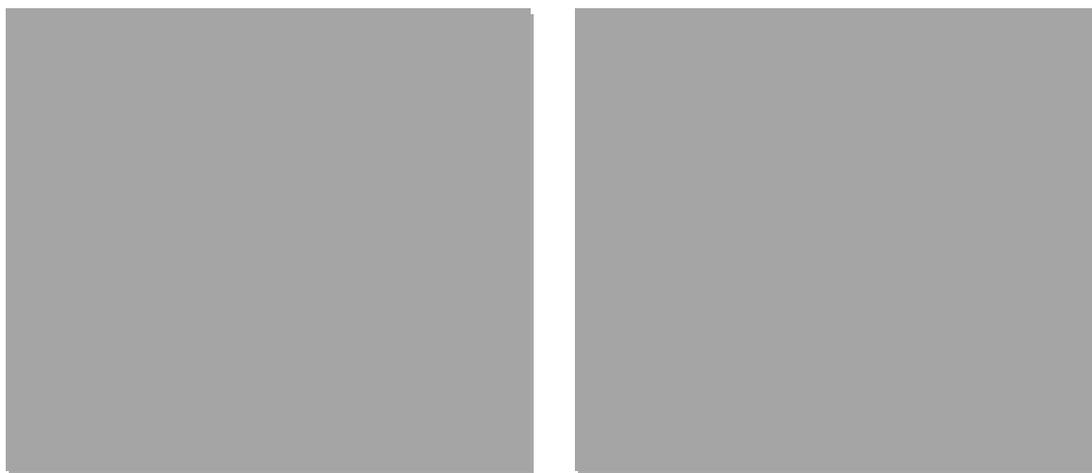
In contrast, SANG's permanent display used figure based narratives to convey its tale of working life in a straightforward manner that required little, if any, intersession on the part of a professional gatekeeper. The gallery's 'story based' approach stemmed in part from the particulars of the fine art tradition in South Africa, which was typified by hyper-realism (mentioned in chapter one) (Arnold 1996: 4-5). Consequently, SANG valued art as a medium for expressing societal ideas. The gallery's approach also stemmed from its desire to engage with the local white audience, which meant it emphasised the power of the white proletariat rather than a cultured elite.

SANG's décor used the realm of work to convey a sense of shared whiteness and nationalism to the local white populace. In *Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting*, Ann Jensen-Adams identifies that 'industry is a prevalent theme of images of

colonial communities abroad' (1994: 58). In Europe depictions of 'commercial enterprises in the private marketplace ... may have been viewed as potentially disruptive to the fabric of society', whilst in the colonial setting these same images offered a purposeful emblem of the imperial project (ibid.: 59).

Of the twenty-one wooden carvings in the permanent décor, fifteen contained images of people involved in physical labour or commercial transactions.<sup>3</sup> Other images in the décor made less direct connections with the world of work. For example, the *Liberian Doors*, which ostensibly told the story of Jewish settlement in South Africa, defined the characters in their stories by their work roles (merchant, labourer and farmer). The broad range of settings incorporated in the décor (farm, vineyard, mine and market) and its focus on black workers (including women as well as men) created the appearance that all South Africans were included in its vision of working life.

### From fiction to fact



**Plates 3.1 and 3.2** 'Manual labour,'<sup>4</sup> permanent display, SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Within the décor, the workforce was divided by race, with black people presented as manual labourers [plates 3.1 and 3.2] and whites as managers, overseers and rich landowners [plate 3.3].

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<sup>3</sup> The panels contained a number of minor themes that are not discussed here. Most notable of which were the 'Great Trek' and a series of images of soldiers that appeared to relate to the Boer war.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the panels contained titles. The titles were not visible from the ground and were too small to read from my photographs. I have therefore relied on my observations of the décor for content analysis.



**Plate 3.3** 'A wealthy white family', permanent display, SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The décor's representation of South Africa as a space defined by race and run by whites offers what many people today would recognise as an accurate reflection of the country's history under colonisation. However, when the museum opened in 1930 this vision of society did not correspond with the realities of the Cape, where the landscape was shaped by widespread poverty and racial tensions. For example, the décor's representation of prosperous whites defined by managerial roles was challenged by the hardship of the 1930s depression when one in every six white males in South Africa was unemployed and 'without recourse to funds' and the majority of the white population lived in poverty (Stigger 1994: 130). The décor was also inaccurate to present no alternatives to black people working under white rule. Although there are no accurate records of black employment in the 1930s, Stigger suggests black people experienced unemployment on a much larger scale than whites (*ibid.*), at the same time a significant number of black people owned their own land and did not depend on whites for work (Mbeki 1984: 27).<sup>5</sup> The exhibition therefore mobilised a differentiating narrative of authority to counter the more complex picture of employment relations in the Cape. In offering such a view, the décor both normalised and encouraged whites to pursue the fantasy of a white-run land.

The décor's representation of a willing and compliant black workforce under white authority was also disputed by the realities of the Cape. Although there were black

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<sup>5</sup> The 1929 voting register indicates that 8% of the people eligible to vote in the Cape were African and 12% 'coloured', which meant these voters were either 'landed' or of 'independent means' (Mbeki 1984: 27).

workers employed in white-run industries during this period, in particular on the mines, this involvement was often typified by tensions, militancy and dissent. In the 1920s the black trade union movement and the African National Congress' (ANC's) failure to halt increasingly discriminatory legislation forced them to move from 'moderate campaigns' to more direct challenges to the 'fundamental legitimacy of the [white] state' (Norval 1996: 15). In 1927 this culminated in mass strikes centred on the ANC's demand for 'self-determination through the complete overthrow of capitalist and imperialist rule' within the construct of the envisaged 'Black Republic' (Meli 1988: 77). Meanwhile, the economic depression and the racist concern of whites to have total control of the environment led to the Pact government's<sup>6</sup> landslide victory in the 1924 elections, based on its twin campaign promises to resolve the 'black threat' and the 'employment problem' (Barber 1999: 86). As discussed, both of these concerns, although ongoing in the real world, were represented as resolved in SANG's décor, in images of full and divided employment.

The backdrop of the depression and black refusal to concede power to whites provides a partial explanation for the décor's wishful representation of stable white rule. In *Racism*, Albert Memmi maintains that race comes into play most strongly during periods of societal 'threat' (2000: 169). His findings are supported by Berger, who notes that in the same time period as SANG, American museums used their décor to create safe 'eclectic interiors' as alternatives 'to the imperfect city' beyond the gallery's walls, thereby harnessing 'the threatening heterogeneity of the street' (2005:120-121). In SANG's case the imagery in the décor provided a reassurance to whites in the face of increasing poverty and black dissent.

In *Representation*, Stuart Hall describes how stable cultures require 'things' to stay in their appointed place. He notes that 'matter out of place' unsettles cultures as it breaks unwritten societal codes and rules and serves as a 'sign of pollution, of symbolic boundaries being transgressed, of taboos broken' (1997: 236). In light of these transgressions stable cultures close ranks against that which is defined as 'impure' or 'abnormal' (ibid.: 237). What differs in SANG's case, is that in representing a secure society ruled by whites, it was not just retreating to a known place of safety but helping

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<sup>6</sup> The Pact government, was a political alliance between the Afrikaner Nationalist Party (NP) and the English dominated Labour Party.

whites to create and consecrate a new vision of society in opposition to existing heterogeneous, porous societal norms.

As the nation's primary cultural site SANG was instrumental in shaping a vision of the new society. The decorative scheme incorporated specific ideas of white citizenry tied to the notion of the 'working society', industrialisation and capital growth. Its depiction of South Africa as a safe and profitable environment for whites is likely to have been aimed particularly at English South Africans whose recent settlement was marked by ambivalence towards South Africa and who retained strong links to the 'mother country'. Offering a stable vision of South Africa to whites would have encouraged them to see the country as their home and the white male as master of all he surveyed: people, resources and land.

### The empty land

The myth of a land of full employment overseen by whites was underpinned by an imperial story of progress that set out the right of whites to rule. Although not strictly diachronic, the wooden panels contained a discernible narrative of progress, in which whites were portrayed as bringing civilisation to South Africa. Within this narrative the experience of both black and white people was shown to have improved as a direct consequence of colonisation through successive eras of white rule. The rationalisation of the colonial project, as if it operated for the benefit of all, appeared intended to encourage white audiences to see themselves as natural leaders who had earned their right to own the land and its resources.



**Plate 3.4** 'People waiting by the water edge for the approaching ship', permanent display, SANG (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Viewed in relation to an historic timeline (rather than the position of the works in the gallery) the first panel represented the arrival of the white coloniser in the Cape as the point of origin of the country [plate 3.4]. In the panel, black people were shown in a state of undress looking out from the land towards approaching sailing ships. The near nakedness of the characters and their pose, gazing out from the rim of an untamed landscape, represented them as outside rather than within the landscape and as lacking the basic accoutrements of civilisation. SANG's depiction of black people as uncivilised 'natives' prior to colonisation accords with the myth of the 'virgin land', outlined by Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather* (1995). McClintock describes how western colonisers used the idea of an 'empty land' to facilitate the twin dispossession of people by race and gender in its 'thrusting, male insemination of history, language and reason' onto the virgin soil:

For if the land is virgin, colonized people cannot claim aboriginal territorial rights, and white male patrimony is violently assured as the sexual and military insemination of an interior void (1995: 30)

At SANG, the representation of the Cape as a 'virgin land' served to delete the time prior to the whites' arrival through a lack of reference to any preceding cultural narratives. The resultant disavowal displaced indigenous South Africans onto what McClintock has labelled 'anachronistic space' – where the colonised remain visible, but do not inhabit 'history proper', as they:

Exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic "primitive" (1995: 30-31)

The myth of an empty land proved useful for white colonisers as illustrated by Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, who describes how their representation of Africa as a 'world without men' was used to obscure the fact that Europeans went to the colonies 'to grow rich quickly' through their exploitation of people, land and resources (1952: 108). In SANG's case the visual displacement of the indigenous populace operated slightly differently as a means to explain, rather than obscure, black subjugation. An intention evidenced in the tale it told of 'native' development, from the 'naked savage' to the civilised workforce. A trope evidenced in a carving, which showed black people

being brought to civilisation through the distinction made between standing, clothed black benefactors and semi-nude kneeling ‘heathens’ [plate 3.5].



**Plate 3.5** ‘Alms’, permanent display, SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Hall describes how the stereotype of the ‘kneeling’ black person was deployed by abolitionists to present black people as ‘full of gratitude for being freed’, but also as ‘childish, simple and dependent’ (1997: 249). In SANG’s décor the ‘native’ in their innocent, primitive state was presented as requiring white control. The contrast provided between the kneeling black person and their clothed counterpart being used to represent their movement from the ‘savage’ state of nature to the realms of civilised (white-run) society.

A more brutal vision of black people being brought into the imperial system was provided in images of the slave market,<sup>7</sup> which conveyed a past that the white audience was invited to view with shame [plate 3.6]. Abhorrence for the slave market was relayed through representations of a mother holding her baby while waiting to be sold and of a white buyer inspecting a male slave’s teeth. Although presented as negative, the practice of slavery was paradoxically vindicated through the décor’s broader narrative, which contextualised slavery as a necessary feature of the colonial project.

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<sup>7</sup> Slavery was referenced in two near identical panels, one of which (pictured) remains in situ.



**Plate 3.6** 'The slave market', permanent display, SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The image of the 'native' as an empty vessel requiring white control corresponds with David Goldberg's analysis of the broad terrain of modernity in *The Racial State* (2002). Commenting on colonial South Africa, Goldberg shows how whites represented black people as unable to self-motivate in order to exclude them from 'modern state citizenship', by denying their capacity for 'self-mastery' and self-determination (ibid.: 48-49). SANG's décor would therefore have encouraged white audiences to view slavery and forced labour as unfortunate but necessary components on the journey to 'rightful' white rule. A viewpoint assisted by the retention of a hierarchical binary between white citizens and black subjects throughout the display, which corresponded with the 1930 government's representation of race as immutable and unassailable (Norval 1999: 28-29).



**Plates 3.7 and 3.8** 'Whites pointing the way' permanent display, SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Across the décor the unequal racial division between whites and blacks was relayed through the treatment of the people's hands. From the image of the white trader in the slave market choosing a slave by pointing at him, to the white woman pointing out an item for purchase, white people's hands were used to symbolise their power through their organisation of black labour [plates 3.7 and 3.8]. In the portrayal of a white woman, pointing out instructions, the demure and passive white female figure of historic fine art was momentarily replaced with an active version of femininity. This disruption of the feminine norm underscored the inviolability of white rule, through its suggestion that even the weakest whites were able to assert authority over the black populace.



**Plate 3.9** 'Reaching out' in a wooden panel, permanent display, SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Situated against the images of white mastery, black people's hands were used to cast them as obsequious. Such as in the aforementioned image of unclothed 'natives' with their hands depicted palms up, meekly waiting to receive benefaction [plate 3.9]. Elsewhere black people's hands were depicted as the tools of white directed labour, picking fruit, digging and selling items to whites [for example in plates 3.1, 3.2 and 3.7].

In general, when not engaged in work, black people were represented as limp handed. In this way, black people were framed as active members of society only in so far as their actions corresponded with the interests of white society, with whites taking on the role

of necessary masters without whom the work could not be achieved. Through these contrasting roles the racist imperialist evolutionary scale was activated, with the white European male at the top of the scale and the African at the bottom as the not yet fully formed ‘animal-child’ (McClintock 1995: 50-51).

There were two images that appeared to refute this rule – one of a Cape Malay household and one of a Sikh family surrounded by their possessions. In both cases the images indicated these communities had a degree of autonomy that was not available to Africans. There was also a single image that challenged the décor’s hierarchy through its depiction of a black hero. In contrast to a group of bowed black men breaking stones, a single black character was shown moving dramatically through a scene [no image available]. His dynamic stance was reinforced in the movement of his flowing cape, which along with his determined expression, associated him with the highwayman. This representational strategy read as if a black saviour had entered the scene with the intention of rousing the men from their work driven stupor and into rebellious action.

Whilst the inclusion of a heroic black character raised the potential for black insurrection the image also contained a contradictory subtext. The decision to stage the black hero as the outlaw, replete with cape, as opposed to a more true to life character such as a political agitator with a placard or gun, was prescient. Moving away from the realism of the other works, the image served to mythologise black insurgency. Although this staging did not negate the potential threat of blacks to whites, the exaggerated quality of the ‘hero’s’ imagined actions and the lack of response with which they were met by the black workers, diffused its intent, as did its staging as the impulse of a single black character.

## Reinforcing stereotypes

The power invested in the black ‘highwayman’ was further diluted by the repeated depiction of black subjugation, which a lone representation of black activism was not sufficient to dispel. Exploring film phenotypes in his essay *The Spectacle of the ‘Other’*, Stuart Hall identifies that the image of the amenable and pliant black person forms the ideal type in the white imagination as it provides no threat to white authority (1997:

253). Hall's description of the formulaic approach used for black subjects in white visual culture informs my analysis.

The portrayals of black people in SANG's panels differed from crass racial phenotypes produced in America and Europe, as they relied on discreet associations between subject and context rather than obvious caricature. Nevertheless, most of the works fell into four categories, which Hall identifies as typical of the 'racial grammar of representation' used for black people by whites in eighteenth and nineteenth century America and Europe (ibid.: 244-245). These categories were: the slave; the sentimentalised domestic servant; the happy native and the 'super-masculine' black male (ibid.: 233, 245). Each of these categories fed into the broader poetics of race theory of the late nineteenth century, which presented the 'civilised white' as having the capacity to either domesticate or control the black populace (McClintock 1995: 46-59). In SANG's décor these phenotypes performed the function of restating white authority.

In the panels the first two forms of representation, the slave and the servant, were present in the scenes of the slave market and the farm, which affirmed white authority through their depiction of black people's forced compliance and/or acquiescence to white rule.

Hall describes the third device, the 'happy native' as present in imagery of 'black entertainers, minstrels and banjo players' who were shown as having 'not a brain in [their] head, but sang, danced and cracked jokes all day long' (1997: 245). In SANG's décor this caricature was obliquely alluded to in two scenes of black musicians, one where they played in the fields whilst a group of workers gathered grapes, the other in a modern image of Cape Town (its modernity signified by skyscrapers carved into the background) where they played for a fashionably dressed white woman [plates 3.10 and 3.11]. In the second image the woman's presence was made significant by her being the only lone white female to be depicted across the panels. Twinning the white woman with the musicians and the contemporary city linked industrialisation with white power, as it inferred that the growth of commerce was congruent with white personal freedom – the image of the lone white female walking the streets alone in the presence of black men having framed the black male as the signifier of white female freedom.



**Plate 3.10** 'Street performers in modern Cape Town' **Plate 3.11** 'White woman paying for the music', permanent display, SANG (photographs by Catherine Hahn)

White power was reinforced in the fourth phenotype of the 'super-masculine' black male. The stereotype of the 'super-masculine' black subject has been used across western history to objectify black men by representing them specifically in relation to their bodies and as a fetish for white desire (see Kobena Mercer *Reading Racial Fetishism* 1994). In SANG's décor the strong black male body also signified the improvement of the black subject under white rule. In plate 3.12 white rule was literally carved onto the planes of the black body through its association with physical work. The image marked a significant shift in the appearance of black men from their first point of contact with whites, when they were depicted as soft and androgynous [plate 3.4], to the archetypal image of the toned and muscular black male engaged in white controlled physical labour. The purported physical changes wrought on the black male body through colonial rule affirmed white control at its most basic physical level. A position of authority supported by depictions of the brutish white male 'boss', who was presented standing fist raised over the naked, kneeling black worker [plate 3.12].



**Plates 3.12** The black male and the white boss in wooden panels, permanent display, SANG (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The image of the violent white performed two important yet contradictory functions in the display. Firstly, it presented a false divide between the brutality of early white rule and the peaceful later period, thereby suggesting the civilising potential of the colonial project for all parties. In doing so it created a route of progress from Afrikaner-Huguenot to English rule. Secondly, it recognised ‘settler masculinity’ as an integral feature of the colonial landscape and as necessary for the retention of white power. Robert Morrell in *From Boys to Gentlemen* describes how the core function of ‘settler masculinity’ in the colonial setting was to affirm white rule, regardless of white behaviour (2001). Like the images of the slave market, discussed previously, the image of the controlling mine boss reinforced the notion that white violence, although unpalatable, performed a necessary function in the colony where whites equated violence with conquest (ibid.). This notion was reinforced by the oblique threat of the ‘super-masculine’ black male, who was presented as the desired product of colonisation and as a justification for the brutal means of his control.

## Section Two: From the Farm to the Mine

The décor presented a narrative of nationhood and progress in which societal roles were demarcated by race and racial phenotypes. This story-line rationalised white rule and fixed people by race into the envisaged wage based market economy. In this section my analysis of the wider exhibitionary complex shows that the racial divide between whites and blacks was secured through the location of progress in the shift from the agrarian to industrial society. The emphasis on industrial advance presented the land, as well as the people, as improving through colonial investment. A narrative that would have helped to quell anxieties experienced by recent settlers whose exposure to the realities of South African poverty and racial tensions may have encouraged nostalgia for their countries of birth. More generally the narrative would have fostered a sense of pride in white South Africans for their perceived achievements.



**Plate 3.13** The left hand lunette of Room 1 depicting one of the F.K.Weiner Memorial Murals (Grace and John Wheatley c.1930) (image courtesy of SANG)

In the 1930s the first images the audience encountered on entering the gallery were a series of murals by Grace and John Wheatley (the then acting Director of the gallery) that covered the upper walls and ceilings of room one. The murals were complemented by decorative windows that drew light to this area of the display. Along the upper walls and ceiling vertical strips provided paintings of local flora and fauna that were accompanied by landscape paintings of the Cape on the lunettes at either end of the hall (Proud 1999: 58). The murals' local subject matter signalled the importance of the gallery's surroundings in Africa and alluded to the 'Africana' art works of the first European settlers. In the principle scene, on the left hand lunette, the Cape Highlands were shown as the backdrop to a large and prosperous farm estate [plate 3.13]. The implicitly white farm was peopled with black labourers who were represented working the fields and loading up a horse and cart with baskets.

The insertion of the farm at the entry-point to the gallery evoked the agricultural work of the Cape's first white Huguenot settlers, which in its scale and setting, across the wide arch of the ceiling, conjured biblical associations with the pilgrims reaching their 'promised land'. The mural's domination of the space and its location above the entranceway to the second gallery hall positioned the viewer looking up and across the landscape in such a way that they could both take in the whole scene and, in crossing the threshold through the door, feel themselves inhabit the farm estate as proprietor of

the terrain. The ensuing experience tallied with the audience's relationship to landscape painting in America and Europe in the late nineteenth century, which positioned the spectators so as to give them a 'magisterial gaze' (Berger 2005: 75-76). This viewpoint gave (white) audiences metaphoric ownership of the 'fictive scene' and hence 'the natural world' (ibid.). In SANG's lunette the inclusion of black farm labourers in the implicitly white farm estate also suggested black workers fell within the auspices of the white proprietorial gaze.

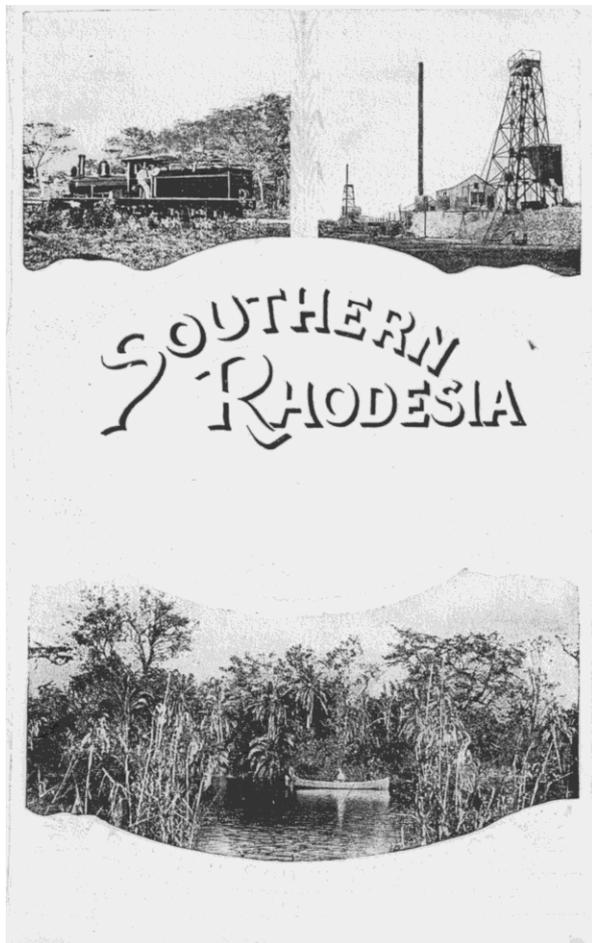
The link between white domestication of the land and control of its inhabitants was repeated across the display, most tellingly at its end-point in the *Liberian Hall* where the narrative culminated in an image of the mine. By the early twentieth century the mining monopolies were the most powerful political and economic force in Southern Africa and the mine had become a primary signifier of white industrial growth (Davies, O'Meara and Dlamini 1985: 14). Crucially, by the 1940s the mines had also become the main source of SANG's patronage (discussed in chapter four). The inclusion of the mine in the permanent décor therefore acknowledged its importance as one of the country's main sources of revenue and served as an advertisement for future benefaction.

The placement of the mine in the *Liberian Hall* was particularly significant as the room was intended to host South African art (Dolby 1981: 42).<sup>8</sup> Although this aim was not achieved until the 1940s, the inclusion of images of the mine in a space intended for South African art presented the mining industry as commensurate with the South African story. A carving positioned above the doorway at the entrance of the *Liberian Hall* depicted an interior scene of a mine tunnel (unfortunately, no photographs were available of the image, as it was obscured by a temporary structure during the period I conducted my fieldwork). The panel contained images of three miners, two of whom were identifiable as black from their physical features (the third was obscured by a cap). The miners' clothing and equipment informed the viewer that they were encountering a modern scene. This viewpoint was underscored by the modernity of the image of the mine tunnel, which was represented in cross-section as if its wall had been peeled away to reveal its contents. The metaphoric penetration of the mine by white viewers

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<sup>8</sup> p. 37-50, Lantern Magazine 1981 'SANG information' (SANG Archive).

accorded them the privileged vantage point of the explorer/adventurer, which aligned them with mine ownership and capital.



**Plate 3.14** 1910 promotional booklet 'Southern Rhodesia'  
(copy courtesy of the South African Library)

SANG's romantic depiction of the mine tunnel tallied with an understanding of the mine as a powerful symbol of the white man's command of nature and scientific and philosophic mastery over the rest of the world (Sekula 1986: 204). An interpretation that stems from the vital role the mine played in creating capitalism and to the physical challenge it epitomised, reaching down to the deepest recesses of the earth and out to the most dangerous locations (ibid.). The romance associated with the mining story across the mining regions of Southern Africa is indicated in the 1910 promotional booklet 'Southern Rhodesia' in which the mine is conjoined with other potent symbols of white imperialism, namely the 'intrepid white explorer' and the steam train [plate 3.14].

The fact that black workers were the mines' primary employees explains why SANG chose to represent the mine so positively in comparison to England, where pity for white miners translated into gritty social realism (McClintock 1995: 115). Gold mining also better captured the public imagination than coal, as can be seen in the romantic appeal of the American 'gold rush'. Nevertheless, in America attitudes towards the mine remained ambivalent in comparison to South Africa. In *Territorial Photography* (1994) Joel Snyder uses the work of the famous landscape photographer Carleton Watkins to identify how American artists in the early twentieth century attempted to 'harmonise' the mine with nature – an approach achieved through tonal techniques that sought to 'aestheticize and overwhelm' the 'unnatural' image of the mine by blending it into the environment (ibid: 187). In contrast to this aestheticizing approach, SANG created a narrative of progress from the farm to the mine and placed the mine unequivocally onto the cultural landscape. In the process, SANG transferred power from the world of nature to the white man-made world of industry. The mine's success as an emblem of society was given veracity through its representation as a site of useful production for black workers and subliminally as a site of black containment.

Importantly, the white stories of progress in SANG's décor were inflected with pro-English sentiment. Emphasis on the mine drew attention to its beneficiaries the majority of whom were of English origin, and subliminally credited English South Africans with the country's economic 'success' as the Afrikaner's derived less than two per cent of their revenue from the mines (Davies, O'Meara and Dlamini 1985: 10-11). The broader story of progress also contained pro-English elements as it portrayed the brutal landscape under Afrikaner control being replaced by a 'natural order' under the English.

## Section Three: The Apocryphal Tale



**Plate 3.15** *Holiday Time in Cape Town in the Twentieth Century* (James Ford 1899), permanent display, SANG (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

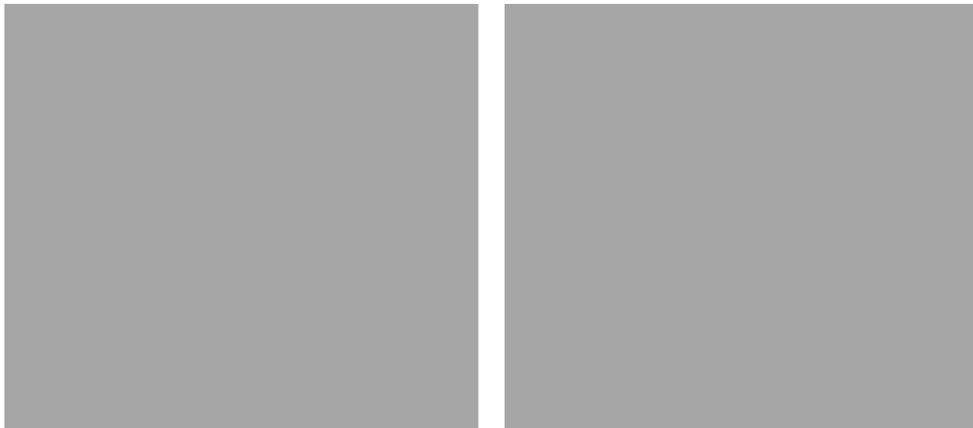
*Holiday Time in Cape Town in the Twentieth Century* (James Ford 1899) was bequeathed to SANG on permanent loan in 1930 and has remained in situ ever since, with an engraved gold plaque attached to the wall above it [plate 3.15].<sup>1</sup> The painting is fundamental to any discussion on SANG's permanent display as it has acted throughout the gallery's history as the centrepiece of the collection. One of the main reasons why *Holiday Time in Cape Town* accrued such status was because of its popular and historic appeal as an idealised image of Cape Town c.1900. It is also a rare example of early South African fine art, recognisable as such through its heightened realism and saturated palette (Arnold 1996: 5). Taken together these factors served to present the painting as the white English South Africans' *magnum opus*.

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<sup>1</sup> The painting was still in place on my last fieldwork trip in 2010.

## The story

*Holiday Time in Cape Town* refuted the weighty subjects of the English Academy and the esotericism of Modernism, and instead relied on a quirky literalism. The painting offered a futuristic view of Cape Town, as imagined by the artist at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Set as if on a stage with the curtains drawn back, the scene was intended to be both playful and revelatory. Famous European landmarks, including the Eiffel Tower and the Victorian and Albert Museum, were placed alongside Cape Town's architecture, including The Opera House and City Hall, which represented South Africa as if it were an extension of the European cultural scene. The inclusion of the planned Cape to Cairo railway station alongside a series of miniature mud huts at the border of the painting extended the work's geographical links by embedding it in its African surroundings, as well as signifying the imperial project. In keeping with the style used for the townscape the city's main white inhabitants were painted in uniformly bright colours, with women represented strolling along the foreshore in ornate Victorian dresses accompanied by men in suits and hats [plates 3.16 and 3.17].



**Plates 3.16 and 3.17** 'The City', details from the *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The scenes Ford constructed in *Holiday Time in Cape Town* revealed his admiration for Cape Town's English elite, while his painting style displayed irreverence towards the English fine art tradition. Ford, perhaps unintentionally, demonstrated his disregard for

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<sup>2</sup> The key landmarks and personalities that are depicted in the work were brought to my attention on a walking tour by the gallery guide (walking tour Staff Member H 01/09/06).

the academic conventions of the Academy (one point perspective and subdued tonal palette) through his deployment of multiple perspectives and saccharin colours. In flaunting the rules and conventions of the academic tradition the painting breached the ‘codes’ that made fine art ‘sacred’ in Europe, such as being untouchable, contemplative and silent so as to accord the viewer pure appreciation of a ‘priceless’ work (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991: 51). Instead, Ford’s method of painting created a carnival-like atmosphere that in both style and subject bordered on naïve. Although his rejection of the elitism associated with the English Art Academy would have made the work unpopular in ‘high-art’ circles in England, it would have found sympathy with the settler community – who as Morrell describes were highly antagonistic towards ‘metropolitan snobbery’ (2001: 17).

The containment of Cape Town in the painting’s miniaturised view brought intimacy to the relationship with the English South African audience. Bachelard describes how the painstaking task of miniature-making stands as testament to the artist’s dedication leading the audience to the intuitive conclusion that the maker must ‘love’ the ‘space to describe it as minutely’ (1958: 159). The residual passion of the artist’s relationship with the work coupled with the smallness of the miniature images would have drawn the audience into its tale, as identified by Bachelard: ‘in looking at a miniature, unflagging attention is required to integrate all the detail’, therefore making its narrative more compelling (ibid.).

*Holiday Time in Cape Town*’s vision of an English-led city added intimacy and complexity to the tropes told in the panels: transforming ‘Englishness’ to fit with the dreams and interests of the incoming colonisers. Its representation of an English society, purportedly free from English snobbery, offered a new vision of elitism tied to industrialisation that welcomed English South Africans’ to their new home.

## Rhodes versus Kruger

I contend that we are the finest race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race. Just fancy those parts that are at present inhabited by the most despicable specimens of human beings what an alteration there would be if they were brought under Anglo-Saxon influence (Cecil Rhodes 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1877, quoted in Wheatcroft 1985: 140)

*Holiday Time in Cape Town* provided a mythic space in which Cape Town's real multiracial inhabitants were uprooted and replaced by a white citizenry with Cecil Rhodes, mining magnate and ex-Prime Minister of the Cape (1890-1896), at its helm doffing his top hat to the visitors to *his* city and to *us* (the white audience) [plate 3.18]. His direct engagement with the audience created a bridge between the real and the imagined, inviting the audience to realise his dream of a future English South Africa.



**Plate 3.18** 'Rhodes doffing his hat', detail from *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

In common with eighteenth century English satirists, such as Hogarth, Ford devised his characters in relation to vignettes that offered caustic social critique. However, in contrast to these satirists, who were concerned primarily with 'sending up' the mores and pretensions of the political elite and aristocracy (Quennell 1955), Ford painted a favourable picture of Cape Town's English elite, and supported its ascendancy through his admiring portrayal of Rhodes. Importantly, Ford's elevation of the English was undertaken in conjunction with his denigration of the Afrikaners, and in particular President Paul Kruger the Afrikaner leader of the Transvaal Republic (1883-1900) who he situated outside the city's inner circle. At a time of intense conflict between the two cultural groups the painting's championing of Rhodes would have informed the museum's visitors of its clear partisanship towards the English.

Rhodes was extremely popular with English settlers in the Cape, and became more so posthumously when he took on the role of the sacred ancestral leader (Wheatcroft 1985: 139-145). In contrast, in the aftermath of the Boer War, he was vilified by large sectors of the Afrikaner community. In the eyes of many Afrikaners, Rhodes betrayed the notion of a future white South Africa through his participation in the Jamieson Raid (1895), which many Afrikaners viewed as treacherous (ibid.). During the raid, which took place four years before *Holiday Time in Cape Town* was painted, Rhodes and several other mining magnates, including three who would later become SANG's patrons: Lionel Philips, Abe Bailey and Alfred Beit, conspired unsuccessfully to overthrow President Kruger with the intention of gaining control of the Transvaal gold mines (ibid.: 172-180).<sup>3</sup> Following the failure of the raid Rhodes was disgraced and forced to resign as Prime Minister of the Cape (ibid.).<sup>4</sup> His positive portrayal in three images in *Holiday Time in Cape Town* can therefore be readily interpreted as a means of rehabilitating his tarnished public image.



**Plate 3.19** 'Rhodes statue', detail from *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

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<sup>3</sup> The Jamieson Raid was intended to ferment an uprising of the Uitlanders (mainly ex-patriot English workers settled in the Transvaal), who the Randlords thought would assist them to take control of the mines (Wheatcroft 1985: 172-180). However, broad support for the raid did not materialise, which led to its failure (ibid.).

<sup>4</sup> The weight of approbation that fell on English-South Africans at this time is signalled by the fact that Rhodes and Lionel Philips only narrowly escaped execution (Wheatcroft 1985: 180). The raid generated continued mistrust between the pro-English mining magnates and the Afrikaners, who hitherto shared parliamentary control. It also destabilised broader Afrikaner and English relations and was instrumental in causing the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) (ibid.).

In addition to the image of Rhodes ‘doffing his hat’ [plate 3.18], he was presented immortalised in sculptural form as the hero of the white working classes, with a cloth-capped man reaching out in deference to touch his statue [plate 3.19]. He was also depicted as the polished parliamentarian strolling across the scene [plate 3.20].



**Plate 3.20** President Paul Kruger, third from left and Rhodes, third from right, detail from *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

In deliberate contrast Kruger was depicted standing passively in a dusty ill-fitting suit among his Afrikaner supporters [plate 3.20]. Kruger’s image bore resemblance to photographs taken at the time, but his slovenly appearance was given racial significance through his representation as the dirty/primitive, anti-progressive ‘Boer farmer’. The liminal status of the ‘Boer’ was accentuated by the looseness of the paintwork in Kruger’s portrait, which suggested he was subject to cursory treatment by the artist and by association viewed as a negligible presence in both the painting and the state. In contrast to Kruger’s depiction, those of Rhodes and his English compatriots were detailed and crisp. In creating this duality Ford reproduced tensions between an English (urban) and Afrikaner (rural) identity and crafted English heritage as the invisible marker of white ascendancy – *Holiday Time in Cape Town* thus echoed the narrative of progress in the décor from the farm to the mine, which conflated industrialisation and urbanisation with civilisation and progress.

In the recent aftermath of the Boer Wars and the Jamieson Raid, the painting’s posthumous rehabilitation of Rhodes could not have signalled anything other than contempt for the Afrikaner and support for the English elite. Ford’s painting enhances the message in the décor of a transition from Afrikaner to English rule. Importantly, its

representation of an English Cape (through Rhodes' elevated stature) also supplanted the Afrikaner fantasy of the Volk (homeland) with a vision of South Africa as the English home.

## The railway and the interior

The painting's allegiance to an English South African identity was further activated through its emphasis on the railway [plates 3.21 and 3.22]. Early twentieth century Capetonians would have been acutely aware of the central role railways played in the economic success of their city, as they were routed specifically to enable the products from the mines to be brought quickly to the city for sale overseas (Bickford-Smith 1995). The central position of the railway in the painting therefore drew oblique attention to the mining industry and by association to the English who were its main investors (Davies, O'Meara, Dlamini 1985: 15).



**Plate 3.21** 'The Cape to Cairo Railway station'

**Plate 3.22** 'A train entering the landscape at the far right of the picture plane', details from *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899) (photographs by Catherine Hahn)

As well as drawing attention to the source of English wealth the specifics of the train's representation in *Holiday Time in Cape Town* linked the railway with white expansion: firstly by placing the railway terminal at the centre of the city [plate 3.21] and secondly by showing a miniature train moving towards the painting's edge [plate 3.22]. Together these vignettes evoked a land beyond the plane of the painting that was also the realm of whites. Examining images of rail travel in America in the late nineteenth century, Berger notes that the steam engine provided one of the most potent symbols of white

progress by being routinely used to depict ‘advancing white civilisation while marginalising racial minorities’ (2005: 123-172).

In *Holiday Time in Cape Town* the use of the Cape to Cairo railway, made an explicit connection with the imperial project. The choice to bring life to Rhodes’ envisaged but never fully realised railway line across Africa, materialised his dream of an Africa ruled by Englishmen, as outlined in the famous line from his will: ‘If there be a God, I think that what he would like me to do is paint as much of the map of Africa British Red as possible’.<sup>5</sup>

Notably, in *Holiday Time in Cape Town* Rhodes’ dream of a world ruled by England was altered so as to shift the site of power to Cape Town. This change was engineered through the treatment of the railway station, which was utilised on the one-hand to signify white expansion into the interior and on the other to symbolise the return journey *home* – with the white travellers leaving the station’s grand entrance to the excitement of their children [plates 3.23 and 3.24]. In its representation of Cape Town as the place of homecoming, as opposed to England, the painting framed the city as the white Englishman’s new home.



**Plates 3.23 and 3.24** ‘Whites leaving the station’, details from *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899) (photographs by Catherine Hahn)

When the permanent décor is considered through the tropes used in *Holiday Time in Cape Town*, its affiliation with an English-South African identity, as opposed to a homogenous white identity, is brought into focus. The propensity of images in the décor

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<sup>5</sup> Cecil Rhodes Last Will and Testament 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1877 (quoted in Wheatcroft 1985: 140).

that related to trade and industry indirectly signalled the prosperity of the English run Cape and thereby affirmed the role of the English in South Africa. However, the heavily coded and controlled treatment of subjects by race throughout the décor meant its narrative was simultaneously sympathetic to a wider white view.

## Urban threat

In common with SANG's broader décor, the depiction of the city in *Holiday Time in Cape Town* presented a fictitious space of whiteness, quite different from the complex reality of the city outside the museum's doors. In 1900, when the painting was completed, Cape Town was a port city and South Africa's major trading post, filled with a mobile and porous population whose permeability made for flexible identity positions and multiple allegiances (Giliomee 1995). This was demonstrated by the largest population group in the Cape being defined as 'coloured', a term that incorporated people from multiple mixed ethnicities, among them those of South Asian, Khoi San, West African and European descent (ibid.: 205).

In order to present Cape Town as a white space the painting staged its inhabitants by race, with whites represented as the city's natural citizens and black people as strangers, a division that resonates with Goldberg's description of racial geography in *Racist Culture*:

Citizens and strangers are controlled through the special confines of divided place. These geometries – the spatial categories through and in which the lived world is largely mapped, experienced and disciplined – impose a set of interiorities and exteriorities (1993: 186)

The notion that whites were the 'interior' inhabitants of the city and black people its 'exterior' was realised in the painting through the physical displacement of black people, who were clustered on the right hand side of the image in the 'worst part' of the city. The undesirable whites depicted in this port-side section of the city testified to its negative associations [plate 3.25].



**Plate 3.25** 'The worst area of the city', detail from *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

For example, one image showed a white street prostitute standing in an alley below a sign reading 'Hotel one and all'. The 'high-class' of her customer, inferred by his top-hat, reinforced her 'fallen' status [plate 3.25, top centre]. Another image showed a drunken white woman in a bowler hat surrounded by drinking men, her deviation from female norms was underscored by her adoption of the man's hat and masculine swagger [plate 3.25, bottom right]. In both instances the women's transgressions separated them from polite society.

Following Dubow, in *The Elaboration of Segregationist Ideology*, the inclusion of black people among whites would have reinforced the undesirable connotations of this area merely through their presence (1995). The work also reproduced prevalent eugenicist discourse from the time by staging the city as a danger point for unsophisticated black people, as outlined by Dubow:

In the view of many [whites], Africans were "naturally" part of the land. Cities were portrayed as an "alien environment" for which they were supposedly not yet ready. The urban environment was commonly described as the site of vice and immorality, "influences far too potent for his [the African's] powers of resistance" (Dubow 1995: 155)

In the painting the idea that black people were not suited to the metropolis was conveyed through an image of a poor, rural family, their poverty indicated by their bare feet and bundles on their heads [plate 3.25, left]. The rendition of the ‘shoeless native’ framed its protagonists as simplistic and naïve and as such unsuited to the urban environment, an idea reinforced through the mimicking of their movements by an accompanying dog. The displacement of black people in the image was underscored by the transience of the figures, whose movement through the scene indicated they would shortly be departing from it.

The idea that black people needed to be placed outside the city for their own protection supported an emerging white discourse that cast the presence of the black population in Cape Town as a threat to public health and by extension to the Darwinian concept of progress (Swanson 1997). In *The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony 1900-1909* (1997),<sup>6</sup> Maynard Swanson describes how the forced removal of African people from the city of Cape Town was accomplished by recourse to biological and bodily imagery that rationalised racial segregation. In order to enforce the idea of difference, white Cape Town councillors depicted Africans as ‘festering hordes’ and ‘raw natives’ who represented a direct threat to ‘civilised society’, enabling the council to forcibly separate black people from the city ‘lest they corrupt or be corrupted’ (ibid.: 35).

## Black women

The distinction between portrayals of whites and blacks reached its apogee in an image of a black street prostitute in pink stockings and a Victorian dress [plate 3.26]. Her western dress amplified her licentious behaviour by linking it to decorous white society. The prostitute was presented next to a shoeless, topless black woman carrying a baby – whose presence appeared intended to either signify the other woman’s corruption, in contrasting the prostitute’s western clothing with that of the innocent ‘native’, or to imply the rural woman’s own corruption through prostitution, a reading supported by the signpost ‘Hotel one and all’.

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<sup>6</sup> First published in 1977 *Journal of African History* (18) Cambridge University Press.



**Plate 3.26** 'Women in the worst area of the city', detail from the *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

A further relationship was created through the juxtaposition of the black prostitute in the pink stockings and bustle with the white prostitute in the blue skirt. The black woman's full figure sat within the bounds of 'normal' body-shapes but became a lesson in dislocation when framed in relation to that of the slim white woman. In western art exaggerated facial features and fuller figures have been deliberately deployed in images of black women to provide a negative contrast against white women (Puwar 2004: 25). The different treatment of the characters chimes with portrayals of black servants 'dressed up' in imitation of their white female mistresses. Using a popular nineteenth century painting as her guide, Nirmal Puwar, in *Space Invaders*, describes how the black maid dressed up in her mistresses clothes was a popular trope among well-to-do whites, who used it to fashion the 'lady of the house's' identity 'in contradistinction to the body of the black maid' – who was seen as a negative mirror against which to illuminate the white woman's 'beauty' (2004: 25).

In *Holiday Time in Cape Town* the black prostitute's full body and Victorian costume also offered a deviant allure, signified in the contrast between her voluptuous physique and that of the almost flat-chested white prostitute. Although the black subject was presented as deviant, in both looks and behaviour, this deviance was framed as sexually desirable through her occupation. Arnold describes how white colonial artists situated

black women as sites of ‘cultural conflict’ (1996). The imagined ‘otherness’ of the women was used to indicate their “‘primitive” sexual appetite’ and ‘promiscuity’, which made them into ‘objects of (white) male fantasy’ (1996: 25-26).



**Plate 3.27** ‘Naked woman with opera glasses peering at white swimmers’, detail from *Holiday Time in Cape Town* (James Ford 1899) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The idea of a black primitive sexuality was developed in the image of a naked black woman to the bottom right of the scene [plate 3.27]. The woman was portrayed as a sexual predator and voyeur peering through opera glasses at naked white men swimming in the sea. The white swimmers’ nudity was legitimated by their masculinity and engagement in a physical activity. In contrast, the woman’s lack of clothing was given no explanation beyond her sexual interest in the swimmers, which took on connotations of illegality in the approach of a policeman to her right.

In common with the shoeless woman with her breast exposed [plate 3.26], the woman’s nudity would have been rationalised by whites as tribal in the rural environment. However, in the urban context she was reduced to the licentious ‘savage’ in need of societal control (with the play being on the fetish inverted as the voyeur). The woman’s nakedness denied her the right to be admitted to the city and validated her containment by the white authorities – as embodied in the role of the white policeman. The intended

humour used in this instance gave the artist licence to expose the woman's nudity to public view hereby heightening her deviant allure.

## Conclusion

SANG's permanent décor adhered to the structure and decorative design of the prototypical public art temples of Europe, yet, the message delivered through SANG's décor signalled the museum's allegiance with the political house. In common with the European public museum, SANG emphasised its connection with the state, but it turned away from the European museum's equation of civilisation with high culture and high culture with 'virtuous government' (Duncan and Wallach 2006: 63). Instead, SANG's décor validated the South African white working-man's perspective through an easy-to-read ensemble of images that equated working life and industrialisation with civilisation and national progress, situated in a racial hierarchy with the English-South African male at its head. The décor's emphasis on sites of employment and physical labour drew attention to the gallery's interest in the nation's commercial success and its desire to applaud the emergence of a local 'aristocracy' in the shape of the white 'self-made man' – epitomised by the archetypal English mining magnate Cecil Rhodes. Thus, the museum privileged the political view over the aesthetic and the local over the universal.

It is worth returning at the end of the chapter to the purpose of the museum's décor, which is to serve as a permanent reminder of the museum's intent. While the stories told by art works are open-ended and subject to many interpretations, the didacticism of SANG's décor and the fact that it was built into the museum's walls presented its story as immutable. On my last field trip in 2010 all of the elements of the permanent décor discussed in this chapter remained in situ, with the exception of the murals in the first display hall and the image of the mine in the *Lieberman Hall* (Proud 1999: 10, 158). Although the absence of these works means the museum's original linear story from the farm to the mine is no longer apparent, the décor continues to perpetuate a vision of a world harmonised by racial division and white power, and one in which history began with white settlement. By telling its story as 'history' the décor feeds into the white collective memory where its narrative exists as a nostalgic truth. Evidenced by two white guides, who when I asked them on tour in 2006 what the panels referred to informed me that they told the 'story of South Africa'. One of these guides went on to

tell me that visitors frequently assume *Holiday Time in Cape Town* provides an accurate representation of Cape Town's past, despite its clear depiction of a white city (Staff Member H 1/09/06 and Staff Member I 22/08/06, various). Thus the painting displaced the black population in the visitors' psyches and replaced them with whites.

One of the main reasons SANG's permanent display had such an impact on the gallery in its early years was that the museum lacked a stable art collection. However, the décor's masculine narrative was only fully realised in the 1940s when the museum replaced its disparate art collection with gifts from its mining magnate patrons.

## Chapter Four:

### The Civilised-Brute

To speak of patriarchal dividend is to raise exactly [the] question of interest. Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend ... Men are much more likely to hold state power (Connell 1995: 82)

In early twentieth century South Africa the mining magnates shaped the terms of white masculinity, which fed into the art collections they bequeathed to SANG between 1930 and 1949. The mining magnates were widely known as Randlords, a term that drew attention to their source of wealth from the minefields of the Rand and their stature as some of the most influential men in the world in the first half of the twentieth century. The significance of the Randlords' art collections relates to their contents as well as their donors' collective power.

The Randlords' involvement in South African cultural life is encapsulated in the concept of the civilised-brute, a term I have coined to describe the emergence of an aggressive masculinity in high art culture. Similar constructions of hegemonic masculinity have been identified in other contexts in South Africa, in particular, in the development of Afrikaner nationalism (Norval 1999) and more specifically in the male domains of the public school, cadets, sports club and army (Morrell 2001; Conway 2012). Analysis of the Randlords' art collections adds a further dimension to this body of research as its content reveals a rough masculinity that, in tandem with the décor, turned SANG into a hyper-masculine realm.

The involvement of a primarily English cultural site in the construction of a rough patriarchal identity is important. It supports research undertaken by Patricia Hayes (2000) and Robert Morrell (2001), which challenges the idea that emphatic manifestations of white masculinity were restricted to the Afrikaner community, such as in literature (mentioned in chapter one) that situates South African masculinity in relation to the Afrikaner's pursuit of the Volk (homeland) (Tatz: 1962; Moodie 1975; Furlong 1991). In *From Boys to Gentlemen* (2001), Morrell describes how a hyper-masculine culture emerged among South African English men in response to the

colonial environment which informed their political, cultural and commercial dealings (Morrell 2001). Hayes outlines in *Britain and the Empire* how this translated into a violent masculinity that ‘had implications far beyond its functionality’ enforcing dominance and hierarchy through its excess (Hayes 2000: 348).

In order to appreciate the extent of the Randlords’ impact on SANG an awareness of their pivotal role in South African life is required. The first section of the chapter, *Mining Magnates and Masculinity*, explores how the myths surrounding the Randlords validated the role of the civilised-brute. The second section, *The Mines*, investigates the Randlords’ involvement in the mining industry and the mines’ impact on South Africa’s political and cultural life. Section three, *The Makings of a Masculine Space*, describes how the Randlords’ bequests displaced other collections at SANG. The fourth section, *Women, Land and Leisure*, goes on to examine the specifics of their art collections. Comparative analysis of their collections and those in national museums in England reveals a brutal whiteness in SANG’s display.

Analysis of the Randlords’ bequests is hampered by a lack of information on the pre-1948 gallery collection. For his PhD thesis, *Old Masters and Aspirations: The Randlords, Art and South Africa* (1997), Michael Stevenson undertook extensive research on the Randlords’ collections. He found that only one of these bequests, donated by Alfred Beit in 1908, was catalogued during the benefactor’s lifetime and he was therefore unable to determine the exact contents of the gifts (ibid.: 20-21). The paucity of information on SANG’s collection was exacerbated by an un-catalogued sale of work in 1947. In *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine* (2006), Jillian Carman identifies that all but three of the works from SANG’s original holdings were de-accessioned in this sale (2006: 14).<sup>1</sup> Evidence of the contents of the Randlords’ bequests therefore relies in part on Stevenson’s work and in part on my own research. This includes documentation of current works held by the museum and a review of newspaper articles, annual reports and museum catalogues that pertain to past collections. I was also granted valuable assistance by museum staff, in particular the curators Haydon

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<sup>1</sup> In 1947 129 paintings were sold whose provenance and relationship to individual patrons was not recorded (Carman 2006: 14), as a result there are large gaps in knowledge pertaining to the pre-1948 collections. For example, the specific contents of the first bequest of 45 paintings given by Thomas Bayley in 1871 remains unknown (Dolby in interview 2006).

Proud and Joe Dolby. From these various sources I was able to establish the character of individual bequests, though not their precise content.

Information about the Randlords' lives has been garnered from texts and newspaper reports written about them while they were alive (found through an extensive trawl of newspaper articles held in the South African National Library). The following Marxist literature: Harold Wolpe *Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power: From Segregation to Apartheid* (1972); Dan O'Meara *Volkskapitalisme* (1983) and Davies, O'Meara and Dlamini *The Struggle for South Africa* (1985), has also provided vital information on the mines.

## Section One: Mining Magnates and Masculinity

They loved their horses and their shares,  
They loved the diamonds on their wives,  
They loved their wines and carriages,  
They loved their wealth; they loved their lives  
(White 1911 quoted in Rosenthal 1959: 68)

Extensive arguments have been put forward to suggest the Randlords, like other industrial patrons, acquired the accoutrements of wealth to expunge their humble origins and conceal the source of their fortunes (Stevenson 1997, 2007; Carman 2006). Conversely, I suggest the Randlords actively cultivated their reputations as civilised-brutes and, as a consequence, instrumentalised the link between their art collections, hegemonic masculinity and economic capital. It is worth taking the time to explore this difference in opinion as it provides for a better understanding of how the Randlords informed South African public life.

In his thesis on the Randlords' art collections Stevenson examines the relationship between their commercial success and their acquisition of cultural goods (1997 13-16). Drawing on Bourdieu (1996), Stevenson argues that the mining magnates transferred their financial capital through patronage into symbolic capital (*ibid.*: 13). By moving capital to art Stevenson maintains the Randlords sought to conceal the negative origins of their wealth on the mines and as a direct consequence gained entry to the upper strata

of English society (ibid.: 228). As evidence of this transition he notes that the majority of the magnates were awarded knighthoods or baronetcies during their lifetimes for their 'services to empire' (ibid.: 228-229). Likewise, Carman argues that the Randalords' gift giving was motivated by a collective desire to transcend their social backgrounds. According to Carman the Randalords' background as 'self-made men ... mostly of Jewish-German origin' meant they had a 'poor public image' in England prior to their acts of patronage (2006: 44). As a result of their 'collective foreignness', she suggests the Randalords had a lack of self-esteem that prompted their conspicuous expenditure and philanthropy in a quest for 'access to the upper-classes' (ibid.: 44-46).<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to Stevenson and Carman, I concur with Paul Emden, *Randalords (1935)*, who argues that the Randalords' were less motivated by the desire for acceptance by the English elite than by an interest in asserting their autonomy. The period of mineral discovery from 1890 to 1940 heralded dramatic social change in the upper strata of English society precipitated by tensions between old and new money. These shifts provide a cogent explanation for the Randalords' conspicuous and sometimes flamboyant use of money.

Evidence that the Randalords were not motivated by the need for English approval is provided by their failure to conform to English norms in matters of taste. In his book *Other Men's Millions (1959)*, Eric Rosenthal uses Arnold White's detailed inventories of the Randalords' expenditure, taken in 1910, to demonstrate how the magnates' ostentatious spending was in direct contrast to the discreet spending patterns of the English elite (1959: 68-69). Despite concentrating on similar items (art collections, houses, cars and wines) Rosenthal found that the Randalords exhibited uniformly 'vulgar tastes' in contrast to their English counterparts (ibid.). Through analysis of first-hand accounts Stevenson corroborates Rosenthal's findings, noting that the Randalords were 'uninformed and culturally unsophisticated individuals' (1997: 33). Stevenson perceives the Randalords' vulgar taste as proof of their flawed attempt to gain favour with the English elite (ibid.:1). While this might apply to some of the Randalords, I would suggest

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<sup>2</sup> Carman's finding regarding the Randalords' ethnic origins stems from her focus on the period from 1890 to 1910 when the majority of the Randalords were of Jewish-German origin. Following this period the Randalords' backgrounds became much more diverse (Stevenson 1997; 2, 26). For instance, SANG's patrons, Sir Abe Bailey and Sir Edmund Duncan, were both Christians of English origin (Proud 1999: 15; Proud and Tietz: 2001: 2).

that it was more indicative of their desire to assert newly-moneyed tastes. This interpretation is supported by the Randlords' extreme wealth, which meant they were not forced to conform to the expected norms of upper class English society and had no specific need for its approval. Emden writes:

These new-rich, the source of a great part of the wealth of London, stepped into the foreground, not merely because they aimed to be in the limelight, but because they had become so important. The Rand had become so strong, so powerful, that the South African gold had changed the face of England, and first and foremost the views and prejudices of society (1935: 236)

Emden's evaluation of the period coupled with Rosenthal's description of their spending patterns indicates the Randlords had the freedom and inclination to promote their own tastes. An assessment born out in the actions of other newly rich industrialists, such as Henry Tate whose taste in highly illusionistic, naturalistic imagery was reflected in his collection (Taylor 1999: 104-107).

## Independence and power

The Randlords' involvement in the mines appears to have prompted their pursuit of autonomy. Rather than hide the source of their wealth many of the Randlords revelled in their status as mining magnates and in the associated identity of the civilised-brute. An identity supported by a body of literature that romanticised their role on the mines.

Following the discovery of precious minerals in South Africa, the mine became linked in the public imagination with the exploits of the Randlords who were immortalised in mine literature as *the* principle characters of the imperial myth. To dramatize their stories the authors of the 'mine texts' adopted similar tropes to those used to describe the 'wild-west' in North America. In the mine stories speculators were cast as intrepid explorers who had to overcome the challenges of the physical environment and 'native' opposition to gain their spoils. The following books are representative examples: *The Gold Mines of the Rand* (Hatch and Chalmers 1895), *To The Cape for Diamonds* (Boyle 1873), *Reminiscences of Johannesburg and London* (Cohen 1924), *Gold Fever* (Nesbit 1936), *The City of Gold* (Young 1939) and *Out of the Crucible: Being the Romantic Story of the Witwatersrand Goldfields and of the Great City which arose in their midst*

(Chilvers 1948). The stories told in these books resonate with Robert Connell's depiction of aggressive colonial masculinity which was used to justify violence in the pursuit of wealth (1995: 80-81). For example, *The City of Gold* begins with its principle character riding 'straight as an arrow ... over the moon-silvered veld' (Young 1939: 30). The protagonist goes on to triumph over multiple adversaries including the 'menace of unconquered tribes' and Boer opposition before he metaphorically passes the reins to his son, who makes his fortune in the 'City of Gold' (ibid.: 888).

The representation of the Randlords in these novels as rough colonial men was reproduced in the South African press, most of which was owned by the magnates (Mervis 1985). For instance, SANG's patron, Davis, was referred to repeatedly in the local press as 'The Napoleon of Rhodesia', a nickname it was suggested he had 'earned' for his 'ruthlessness in business' (Proud 1999: 16). Similarly, Bailey was described as 'a strange character, rough, devoid of delicacy or refinement, and adamant in his business dealings' (Cohen, L. 1924: 29), and in his obituary as 'rugged, individualistic, blunt and irascible' (*The Cape Argus* 1939).<sup>3</sup>

By adopting a rough identity the magnates were able to assert their independence from the English and romanticise their ruthless business dealings. The cultural distinctions put in motion here reflect an interest in garnering white South African support. Writing about the 'men who applied force at the colonial frontier' Connell describes how their rejection of 'customary social relations' made it 'difficult for the imperial state to control them' (2010: 186-189). The Randlords' identification as 'frontiersmen' therefore improved their reputation with white South Africans as it earned them grudging respect (Wheatcroft 1985: 181). Arguably the approval of white South Africans meant more to the Randlords than improving their relationship with the English, as the support of local whites was imperative for their economic success (ibid.: 181, 219-220).

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<sup>3</sup> 'Sir Edmund Davis Dead' *The Cape Argus* Wednesday 15th February 1939 p.8, newspaper archive, South African National Library.

## South African whites

There were far more losers than winners on the fields  
(Wheatcroft 1985: 54)

The Randlords' huge economic success required tactful negotiations with the South African whites who worked on the mines. In the 1870s the discovery of precious minerals in South Africa precipitated a 'gold rush' in which thousands of people converged on the Rand in search of fortunes. The mines were initially rudimentary and people either dug at surface level with picks and spades or panned the river beds. However, the greater riches available below the surface quickly led investors with capital to the region (ibid.: 8-10). In order to control production these investors (who would shortly be known as the Randlords), bought up small mining claims and consolidated them into vast concessions (ibid.). As a result of this investment by 1890 the bulk of the mine-workers had no access to the fortunes generated by the mines (Davies et al.1985: 7) and the 'South African adventure' of mineral discovery came to an abrupt end (Emden 1935: 236).

In the first decade of the twentieth century the disappointment experienced by the white miners, at the curtailment of their 'dreams of gold', coupled with their racist 'frontiersmen mentality' led them to call for 'whites only' work and to undertake a series of protracted and violent strikes that continued for the next twenty years (Wheatcroft 1985: 249-251). Capitulation to the miners' demands would have economically disadvantaged the mining magnates who instead offered white workers the compromise of elevated employment and better pay (ibid.). This act of compromise was eventually instituted in law through the *Mine Legislation Act* of 1926, which made 'skilled and managerial' positions 'whites only' posts (ibid.: 251). The elevation of the white workforce benefitted the Randlords far more than their white employees, as it meant the vast majority of the positions on the mines were henceforth the preserve of lower paid black workers (ibid.).

Despite the compromise being a somewhat pyrrhic victory for the white workers, it did affirm their power over the black workforce, as on paper at least, it turned even the lowest paid and unskilled whites into managers and overseers (ibid.). The elevated position of whites on the mines diminished the class and cultural boundaries between

them by giving them the appearance of a composite group (Davies et al. 1985: 16-17), as a consequence shared aspirations emerged among the white miners that distanced them from the black workforce and provided an incentive to enforce ‘white rule’ (ibid.: 6-8, 12). The social values that emerged with this increase in power fed into the culture of the civilised-brute, as they conflated elite white culture with aggression.

## Section Two: The Mines

In order to understand the Randlords’ influence over South African life, and by extension the significance of their support for SANG, it is essential to look more closely at the mines. By 1942 almost all of SANG’s fine art collection was derived from money from the mining industry, with the exception of two early bequests by Butterworth Bayley and Alfred De Pass [table 4.1].

**Table 4.1** The Source of SANG’s Patronage

Year gift received	Patron	Main source of funds
1871	Butterworth Bayley (1810-1871)	Farm estates and breeding racehorses (Dolby 1981: 31)
1908	Alfred Beit (1853-1906)	Various mining concerns, including the British South African Company (Wheatcroft 1985: 272)
1928, 1929	Alfred De Pass (unknown-1952)	Inherited wealth from shipping and sugar plantations (‘Rozilida’ 1935: 3 ‘Cat box’ SANG archive)
1930	Lady Florence Phillips, financed through her husband Sir Lionel Phillips (1855-1936)	Gold and diamond mines (Wheatcroft 1985: 277)
1930	Lady Max Michaelis, financed through her husband Sir Max Michaelis (1860-1932)	Gold and diamond mines (Wheatcroft 1985: 276)
1932	Lady Max Michaelis, financed through her husband Sir Max Michaelis (1860-1932)	Gold and diamond mines (Wheatcroft 1985: 276)
1935	Sir Edmund Davis (1862-1939)	Various mines, including copper, zinc and coal (Proud 1999: 16)
1942	Sir Abe Bailey (1864-1940)	Gold and various other mines, farm estates and breeding race horses (Proud and Tietz 2001: 21)

Post-apartheid, SANG drew attention to the relationship between the mines and the Randlords in its exhibition catalogues (Proud 1999; Tietz 2001). However, this relationship was ignored in its displays. In this respect the gallery followed the ‘convention’ of ignoring provenance when this touched on difficult pasts (Duncan

1995: 83). In order to understand the connection between the museum and the mine it is important to recognise that the conditions on the mines were well known to the general public when the Randlords gave their bequests. The mine would have therefore provided a backdrop to public appreciation of the gallery's display.

## The compound

Sanctioned violence was a prerequisite for the structure of inequality and mass dispossession that was wrought through the mining industry. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the compound system, which was introduced in mines across Southern Africa in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In order to yield maximum financial returns black miners were effectively held captive on the compound for the duration of their contracts, as Nesbit recollects in his memoir, *Gold Fever* (1936):

The tens of thousands of African labourers who were quartered in the compounds were not allowed to go beyond the limits of certain boundaries during the term of their service [normally] a year, eighteen months or two years (ibid.:188)

Having denied black miners freedom of movement a maximally coercive system was introduced on the compounds to ensure their control. Within this environment forced labour and systematic physical chastisement were normalised.<sup>4</sup> In his detailed explication of the compound system, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933* (1976), Charles Van Onselen writes:

The compound provided the framework for the total exploitation of the black workers. It was the compound ... which denied Africans the right to respond to 'market forces' and sell their labour to the best market. It was the compound, with its state-sanctioned system of industrial violence, which converted reluctant and forced labour into forced production (ibid.: 157)

The Randlords rarely acted in a 'hands on' capacity on the mines, nevertheless, they were directly implicated in their violence – attested to by the 'Disciplinary Measures' that were instituted on all of the mines, which included: whipping, denial of food,

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<sup>4</sup> Whites experienced hardships on the mines, but rarely faced their more draconian measures, which were generally reserved for black miners. See Nesbitt (1936) and Van Onselen (1976) for detailed analysis of the differential treatment of black miners on the mines in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

forced work and execution (ibid.: 1976: 45, 69 and 145; Donaldson 1993: 643-657). The Randlords made their contempt for the black workforce a matter of public record. For example, in Parliament in 1891 Sir Lionel Phillips (one of SANG's earliest patrons, through his wife Lady Florence Phillips) called for co-operation from the government to secure 'our principal supply of n\*\*\*\*\*s' (quoted in Wheatcroft 1985: 130-131). Two decades later in 1910 Bailey (the last of SANG's major patrons) raised concerns in Parliament about the 'problems' the mines experienced when 'handling' and 'receiving ... *our natives*'.<sup>5</sup>

The Randlords' portrayal of black miners as objects of trade was fully realised in Bailey's newspaper *The Rand Daily Mail*, which recorded miners' injuries and deaths on a weekly basis in the *Mine Injuries Reef List*. The lists, situated on the financial pages side by side with the stocks and shares, gave the impression that mine injuries and deaths were stock losses. A reading reinforced by black miners being referred to, as either 'Bantu', 'Native' or 'Boy' or by their mine number, not by their name, as in the example from the 5<sup>th</sup> January 1910 list (the original spelling and punctuation have been retained):

Springs Mines, Ltd. – January 10: Native fractured leg and skull Killed.

Brakspan Mines. Ltd. – January 8: Native killed. Struck by truck.

Modderfontein B Gold Mines. Ltd. – January 8: Native, loss of right hand and injury to left eye.

Boy broke open magazine, extracted stick of gelatine, which exploded in some way unknown.

Native No. 252806, concussion of brain. Fall of piece of timber.<sup>6</sup>

The dehumanising treatment, forced captivity and integral use of violence against black workers on the compounds, led Van Onselen to draw a direct analogy between the mining industry and slavery (1976: 85-88). To illustrate the systematic brutality of the mining industry he details specific punishments carried out on the Wankie Colliery (in Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia) during the time when SANG's patron Davis was its chief Director and largest investor (ibid.). These include a 'whipping of fifty-six lashes' in 1912 for a person found 'guilty of loafing' – a 'crime' considered inexcusable on the

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<sup>5</sup> *Rand Daily Mail* Wednesday January 26th 1910 p. 8; 'Mine Problems' 19<sup>th</sup> February 1910, newspaper archive, South African National Library, my emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> 'Reef List' *The Rand Daily Mail* 5<sup>th</sup> January 1910, newspaper archive, South African National Library.

mine because of its link to loss of production (ibid.: 145). Significantly, the Wankie Colliery covered a 400 mile expanse, which made it all but impossible to escape from and the miners had no formal means or ‘right’ to complain (ibid.: 87-88).

Along with their violent attributes the mines were also typified by neglect. In its infancy, inadequacies in food, safety standards and hygiene were all integral features of the Southern African mining industry, this coupled with physical abuse led to extensive loss of life. Conservative estimates of deaths on the mines in the first decade of the twentieth century range from between one in ten to one in twenty miners (Meli 1988: 3). A far greater number died later from mine related diseases – in particular from mine phthisis, which affected approximately 32% of miners in the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

In order to combat the impact of deaths and ensure a continuous flow of cheap labour to the mines, the Randlords introduced systems and legislation that were the precursors to apartheid (McClintock 1995: 226). These systems included: land reclamation, pass laws, forced labour, hut taxes and the expropriation of cattle (Martin and Johnson 1983: 49). The engagement of whites at all levels of these systems, and their complicity in the abuse of the black mining population, set the terms for a systemically violent and racist society.

### Section Three: The Makings of a Masculine Space

The elevation of the white male work force and the disenfranchisement of the black population helped shape a brutal white culture, which was given further impetus by the Randlords’ investment in South African museums. One of the main ways the Randlords contributed to the development of white South African identity was through their patronage of SANG. The Randlords’ impact on SANG is demonstrated by distinctions in the gallery before and after they gave their bequests, which show they masculinised the museum and in the process pushed white women and black people to its cultural margins.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A pulmonary wasting disease, which at that time had no cure. ‘Transvaal Chamber of Mines’ (171-173) *The Argus Printing Publishing Ltd.* 1913 Economic Commission. South African National Library.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Morrell discusses a similar process that occurred in South Africa’s public school system, in which boys learnt to perform their masculinity in anticipation of leading societal roles (2001: 48-49).

The remaining records indicate that when SANG opened in 1930 it contained an eclectic body of craft items accompanied by a small poor quality European fine art collection and regular displays of South African fine art, by both professional and amateur artists [Table 4.2].<sup>9</sup> As mentioned in chapter one, home-craft initially featured heavily in SANG’s collection. In the early 1930s Lady Florence Phillips (wife of Lionel Phillips) used her position on the gallery board to promote home-craft and loaned the gallery her lace and needle-craft collections (Carman 2006: 35). Phillips was a chief proponent of the arts and crafts movement and her influence remains visible in the emphasis on craft at *The Johannesburg Municipal Art Gallery and Museum of Industrial Art*, which she established in 1912 (see Carman 2006 for a detailed discussion).

**Table 4.2** SANG’s Original Content

Year gift received	Patron	SANG’s content c. 1930
<b>1871</b>	Butterworth Bayley (1810-1871)	45 oil paintings most from England and Holland
<b>1908</b>	Alfred Beit (1853-1906)	Plaster copies of Greek and Roman statues (unknown quantity)
<b>1928, 1929</b>	Alfred De Pass (died 1952)	Prints and etchings (unknown quantity) <sup>10</sup>
<b>1930</b>	Lady Florence Phillips, financed through her husband Sir Lionel Phillips (1855-1936)	Lacework and needlecraft (on loan)
<b>1930</b>	Unknown provenance	Miscellaneous craft loaned to the gallery for the opening
<b>1930</b>	Lady Max Michaelis, financed through her husband, Sir Max Michaelis (1860-1932)	53 Old Master drawings (on loan, moved to Bertram House in the 1940s) (Stevenson 1997: 236, 237)

SANG placed a premium on women’s work, indicated by the emphasis on ‘female’ crafts such as needlework and lacemaking in its early displays (Carman 2006: 71). The presence of female home-craft in the gallery had political import, as it signalled white women’s active participation in shaping the colony, in an environment where making a home to be proud of conferred status on white women as culture makers and helped

<sup>9</sup> *The Art Gallery* 24th March 1931. ‘News cuttings’, SANG archive (no newspaper name listed).

<sup>10</sup> ‘De Pass collection’ 1931 p. 25 ‘Catalogues’ SANG archive.

stabilise the community (ibid.: 65). It is unclear from remaining records whether SANG, like *The Johannesburg Gallery*, incorporated a 'Native work section' (ibid.: 106, 341). Nevertheless, the presence of home-craft at SANG would have drawn comparisons between the gallery's collection and craft work by black practitioners shown elsewhere in Cape Town, including the *South African Museum* (SAM). Hence, despite its colonial overtones, the presence of craft would have demonstrated aspects of cultural congruity between white and black South Africans, as well as between local women and men. Similar relationships were encouraged through SANG's annual South African fine art displays. Each year between 1930 and 1939 SANG hosted a large exhibition of South African fine art, which included works by amateur, student and professional artists. These exhibitions provided opportunities for little known and diverse artists to display their work. Importantly, they also provided a platform for South African modernists, including white female painters, such as Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser and Bertha Everard, and at least one black artist, Moses Tladi, who was represented in the 1931 'South African' exhibition by two modernist landscape paintings.<sup>11</sup>

As might be anticipated, given the development of art museums elsewhere, by 1935 SANG had replaced its craft-work collection with fine art. What was perhaps more surprising, was that it accompanied this shift with a reduction in South African fine art, which it replaced with the Randlords' European collections.

## Anti-modernism and the turn to the Randlords' art

The decrease in South African fine art at SANG can be partly attributed to the Randlords having flooded the gallery with bequests and loans of European fine art that were primarily English in origin [table 4.3]. However, it could be assumed SANG would find a balance between displaying local art and the Randlords' bequests. The main reason why this did not occur, is that SANG's assistant directors, John Wheatley and Edward Roworth, who ran SANG in a part-time capacity from 1930 to 1948, vehemently opposed modernist art to the extent that they actively championed the Randlords' (older) European collections over South African painting. As a consequence

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis 'Contemporary National Art' *The Cape* December 11th 1931 p.1, 'Exhibition of SA' *Cape Times* 7th December 1931. 'News cuttings', 1904-1983, SANG archive.

of the assistant directors' involvement the museum moved from showing local white female and black artists to an almost entirely European white male spread.

**Table 4.3** Randlords' Gifts

Year gift received:	Randlord Collection	Randlord's bequests, gifts and loans and their contents
1871	Butterworth Bayley	45 paintings (majority sold in 1947)
1908	Alfred Beit	Plaster copies of Greek and Roman statues (Paris 1953)
1928, 1929	Alfred De Pass	Prints and etchings (unknown quantity)
1930	Max Michaelis	53 Old Master drawings (Stevenson 1997: 236, 237)
1932	Max Michaelis	59 Dutch and Flemish paintings (Stevenson 1997: 236, 237, 257)
1935 - 1938	Edmund Davis	British paintings, drawings and sculptures (approximately 64 works)
1942	Abe Bailey	English sporting pictures, British portraiture and others (800 art works, including at least 400 paintings)
1949	Alfred Beit	British, Spanish, Dutch and Flemish paintings (loan from 1949-1954)

In 1939 the gallery board took a unanimous decision to remove South African fine art exhibitions from SANG, with the explicit rationale of ensuring that the 'permanent art collections' given by the Randlords were not disrupted by visiting works.<sup>12</sup> Following public complaints the South African exhibitions were reintroduced in 1941, but with the proviso that they would be restricted to a single display hall and shown on a temporary basis (*ibid.*). The stipulation meant that throughout the 1940s the Randlords' European collections occupied eight of SANG's nine displays halls and South African art only one (*ibid.*).<sup>13</sup>

The decision to remove South African art was obliquely raced. Wheatley and Roworth's strong anti-modernist views can be traced to a protectionist stance rooted in the notion that South African culture should be closely aligned with conservative European traditions, which they related to the sustenance of nationhood, and not with local African culture.<sup>14</sup> Their viewpoint was illustrated in a public speech given by Roworth

<sup>12</sup> 'Exhibitions in the National Gallery' Krige, D Secretary *Cape Argus* January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1941 (n.p.) 'News cuttings', SANG archive.

<sup>13</sup> It is unclear whether this stipulation was ever formally withdrawn and European art continued to dominate the gallery until the late 1980s.

<sup>14</sup> Bokhurst 1972: 3, 1972 Gallery Report, 'Reports', SANG archive.

at SANG in 1941 where he described modernism as a ‘vile corruption’, which would eventually lead to ‘degeneracy in the whole life of a nation’.<sup>15</sup>

The assistant directors’ stance was met with widespread condemnation by South Africa’s artistic communities, who perceived it as a retrogressive and self-limiting step<sup>16</sup>, both because it meant modern South African art was displaced by historic European art and because it reduced the diversity of the display (ibid.). There were also complaints that the gallery overlooked the Afrikaner population in favour of the English (Yoshiara 2005: 33-34). In choosing the Randlords’ bequests over other art, the gallery further politicised its display by becoming aligned with specific private interests.

### The patrons’ space

The large size of the Randlords’ collections provided Wheatley and Roworth with the needed excuse to remove modernist art from the gallery and enabled them to acquire a credible historic art collection. However, it also reduced the assistant directors’ power, as the absence of competition within the gallery meant the Randlords could dictate their own terms. By championing the Randlords’ interests SANG effectively operated as their domain, and thereby lost its ability to act as a public structure.

Writing about the implications of private patronage on public institutions, Duncan explains that restrictions placed on donors’ gifts turn the museum ‘into a series of separate, jealously guarded terrains’, which she describes as ‘princely realms’ (1995: 60- 61). These restrictions curtail the museum’s public function by inviting the visitor ‘to admire the possessions of a particular family or individual important enough to claim a semi-private precinct’ (ibid.). The treatment of the museum as a donor memorial therefore threatens its public status and in the process risks it becoming divorced from its ‘integrity as a civil ritual’ (ibid.: 61-62). This concern was realised at SANG in 1941 when Sir Abe Bailey offered his bequest with the stipulation that it be:

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<sup>15</sup> Neville Lewis *Nazism in Art* Cape Argus Friday, September 27<sup>th</sup> 1940 (n.p.). ‘News cuttings’, SANG archive.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Kept as one collection in the New Art Gallery [SANG] Cape Town and to be exhibited as a whole under the name of [the] Abe Bailey Collection. If the New Art Gallery cannot accept the collection as a whole my Trustees shall give the said collection in whole or in part on loan to any gallery or galleries in South Africa ...<sup>17</sup>

The size and status of the bequest guaranteed the gallery would comply with the stipulations. The gift amounted to over 400 art works, which in 1941 represented more works than SANG's entire collection and it contained prestigious paintings by Gainsborough, Reynolds and Stubbs (Proud and Tietz 2001). The gallery was extended by four rooms to house the collection, and Bailey's name was used in the room titles where his works were held (ibid.). The use of the benefactor's name in these rooms was then extended to the other collections meaning the rooms became associated with their patrons as much as the art.<sup>18</sup>

## The gentlemen's club

Partitioning the museum into distinct 'realms' of patronage interfered with SANG's ability to function as a public space, yet it ensured the integrity of the individual collections. Unlike western museums, which concealed their donors' 'standard cut-throat, labour-exploiting practices' behind a chimera of civility (Duncan 1995: 83), SANG gave access to its patrons' hyper-masculine tastes. The revelation of these tastes evidenced that rather than seeking the approval of polite English society the Randlords revelled in their 'rough and ready' reputations.

The overt representation of white masculinity and working life in the museum's décor was complemented by an abundance of images in the Randlords' collections that were intended for heterosexual male consumption, namely, images of women (both clothed and nude) and of sporting life. These images are likely to have been more popular with local white males than women's art or the 'high art' content of European art museums, and at the same time less appealing to women. According to John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* the presumed audience for the nude was always the male who was framed as her 'sexual-protagonist ... spectator-owner' (1972: 56).

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<sup>17</sup> Waterson 1941: 71, 'Reports', SANG archive.

<sup>18</sup> Paris 1950: 5 'Gallery leaflet', 'Items other than catalogues', SANG archive.

SANG's emphasis on the Randlords' hyper-masculine tastes meant it promoted itself more like a gentlemen's club than a gallery. The sense that one was entering a realm of masculinity would have been enhanced by the gallery's dim lighting and dark flocked walls<sup>19</sup> which, when combined with the subject material, would have summoned further associations with the gentlemen's club. Despite not offering the 'traditional attraction of club life' namely 'immunity from female company' (Hattersley 1959: 41) SANG promoted the concept of fraternity through the access it accorded its audience. Unlike exclusive gentlemen's clubs in Cape Town, which denied membership to 'commercial men' (Morrell 2001: 115), everyone had the right to enter SANG including the low-waged and unemployed. In enabling its audience to imbue the atmosphere of the gentlemen's club SANG offered a more inclusive dimension to the Randlords' 'realms'. Coming into contact with art works with manly appeal in this environment would have elicited a sense of intimacy and camaraderie amongst white male audience members, as if entering a realm of secrets. In this respect the museum would have retained the exclusivity of the club, as benefit from membership is at least partly derived from awareness that others are excluded (ibid.: 114).

SANG's decision to narrow the focus of its display, and the Randlords' consequent ascendancy, brought the metaphor of the political house into play. The division of the museum into distinct realms forged a link between the Randlords' commercial ventures and the museum, which reinforced SANG's political role. Whilst the invitation to view SANG as a gentlemen's club, encouraged the male audience to view the gallery as an intimate homely space.

## Section Four: Women, Land and Leisure

The Randlords' collections gave vision to their hyper-masculine tastes. My examination of the Randlords' gifts concentrates on *The Sir Edmund Davis Collection* and *The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest*. These bequests are generally considered to be representative of the Randlords' donations to SANG. This is in part because the majority of the other collections were accessioned or moved to alternative spaces in the late 1940s (Dolby

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<sup>19</sup> 'National Gallery Exhibition' *Cape Times* Friday December 18<sup>th</sup> 1936. 'News cuttings', SANG archive.

1981: 31-33).<sup>20</sup> It also reflects the importance of these bequests to the gallery. *The Sir Edmund Davis Collection* is deemed by SANG to have had the greatest artistic merit and *The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest* is by far the largest in size (Proud 1999; Proud and Tietz 2001). Of all the collections these best realise the concept of the civilised-brute – in Davis’ case through the predominance of the risqué nude and in Bailey’s case the sporting life. So as to not artificially extend the gap between the Randlords’ collections and those in Europe it is important to acknowledge that there were multiple commonalities between them, but that the prevalence of particular masculine themes was notable at SANG.

## The modern nude

In 1935 and 1938 Lady Mary Davis donated works of art from the collection of her deceased husband, Edmund Davis, to SANG. Of all the Randlords Davis had the most developed interest in art. An amateur artist in his youth, in later life Davis became actively involved with the artists whose work he purchased – to the extent that he developed an artists’ residence and housed two artists, Charles Ricketts and his partner Charles Shannon, in his own home (Proud 1999). Although full details of the works donated to SANG from the Davis collection are not available, what is clear from surviving material is that Davis had a fairly narrow ‘connoisseur’s’ interest in decorative and symbolist art, with a penchant for the female nude (ibid.). His interest in the female form is demonstrated in the 1999 exhibition catalogue for a major retrospective of his collection: *The Sir Edmund and Lady Davis Presentation*. In the catalogue nineteen of the forty art works contained female characters as their principle subject. Of these, eleven were nudes or semi-nudes – the other twenty-one works consisted of landscapes, cityscapes and one male nude (Proud 1999).

The large number of female nudes in Davis’ collection was not atypical of its time. The influx of new money into the English art world loosened ties to old conventions including the hitherto ‘strict code of bourgeois morality’ (Smith 1996: 71). As a result there was an increase in the number of nudes in the public sphere (ibid.). However, the types of nude in the Davis collection differed from those generally hung in English

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<sup>20</sup> The largest bequest to be removed was the Michaeils collection of over one hundred paintings and drawings, which was rehoused in Bertram House in the late 1940s (Stevenson 1997: 236, 237).

museums, which gave rise to a dichotomy between the English and South African art worlds.

## The English nude

In her detailed book on the mores of the English nude, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art*, Alison Smith argues that although the nude became more popular with industrial patronage most nudes in English public museums continued to conform to strict standards and ‘moral conventions’ (1996). In contrast, Davis’ nudes, whilst retaining a commitment to a conservative artistic style, tended towards the risqué.<sup>21</sup>

English museums used academic, historic and mythological constructs to justify the inclusion of the nude image. In his influential book *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (1957) Kenneth Clark describes how the nude was ‘controlled’ through adherence to the classical form (ibid.: 133). This control mechanism was considered necessary as it ‘trained’ the male gaze towards contemplation and away from an ‘incentive to action’ (ibid.: 99-100). In order to achieve the classical nude artists employed a number of stylistic devices. If the nude was depicted standing up one of her legs would be slightly inverted and if lying down she would be presented lengthways resting on her side. Her pudenda would be stripped of traces of hair and genitalia, or covered by her hand or a piece of light drapery. The nude’s eyes were also generally averted and her expression one of ‘modest contemplation’.<sup>22</sup> Together these devices signalled the nude’s unobtainability and sacred identity (ibid.).

Importantly, adherence to these conventions erased the relationship between the artist and model, as it presented the nude as an ideal type rather than as a real person. By negating intimacy the classic female nude became a cypher for the male’s restrained desire, serving to symbolise his civility through her control (Pollock 2000: 143). Attitudes to the nude became more permissive in twentieth century England, but the ‘controlled’ nude retained its privileged position in its museums (Smith 1996: 95).

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<sup>21</sup> Whilst some nudes in the European museums could be classed as risqué these were overwhelmed by those that fit the traditional mould (Smith 1996).

<sup>22</sup> See Zucher 1963 for a comprehensive range of examples.

## The erotic

In contrast to the classical nude in English museums, a number in the Davis collection strayed into the realm of the erotic.<sup>23</sup> The public display of these ‘vulgar’ nudes gave strength to the idea that the gallery behaved like a private gentlemen’s club, which as Smith identifies, was the one place in respectable social circles that the naked subject could be viewed without censure (1996: 95, 120, 232). Davis’ nudes would have had particular significance in South Africa, where their confluence of the erotic with the ideal – the naked with the nude – served as a perfect accompaniment for the civilised-brute. Here exemplified by two works: *Pastoral* by Phillip Connard (c.1910) and *The Sirens* by Maurice Greiffenhagen (1920) (ibid.: 45-55).



**Plate 4.1** *Pastoral* (Phillip Connard c.1910)  
(photograph courtesy of SANG)

In *Pastoral* the nude figure was situated as part of a wider scene in a public park surrounded by fully clothed characters. The unusual setting provided an apt backdrop

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<sup>23</sup> The exact content of the collection is unknown, but at least six of the works that remain in the collection fall within this category.

for the model's unconventional pose, positioned with her body straight on to the viewer, her left leg raised and bent at the knee [plate 4.1].

The pose hinted that it was only the shadow and slight tilt of the nude's knee that prevented the audience from being able to see between her legs. The implied eroticism of her pose was accentuated by staging her next to three clothed women, whose presence signalled the nude's deviant behaviour and turned the male audience into her co-conspirator as the only party privy to her exposure. The sexual charge of the painting was heightened through the nude's position with one foot dangling in a stream. Here, the allusion to water based expressions: 'testing the waters', 'getting one's feet wet' and 'putting a toe in the water', would have teased the audience with its presentiment of sexual risk.



**Plate 4.2** The Sirens (Maurice Greiffenhagen 1920) SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The second erotic painting, *The Sirens*, also contained a water based theme. Its title referenced the sea-nymphs in Homer's *The Odyssey* (part xii), whose singing sexually transfixed the sailors and lured them to their deaths in the sea (Proud 1999: 98). In Greiffenhagen's work the ship crashes into the waves behind the sirens, while a central siren fixes her gaze on the audience [plate 4.2]. The sexual charge of the work, like *Pastoral's*, was produced through the tension between the nude and her intended male

viewer, with the siren's lustful gaze metaphorically encouraging her audience to 'crash against the rocks'.

Significantly, the sexual allure of *The Sirens* arose from changes made to the painting prior to its arrival in South Africa. Writing about *The Sirens*, Haydon Proud, SANG's curator of historic fine art, describes alterations that were made to the painting after it was shown at the Royal Academy in London in 1919 [plate 4.3]. By comparing *The Sirens* in its present form to a black and white photograph of the work taken in 1919 Proud identifies significant changes that were made to the central character including to the 'disposition of her head' (Proud 1999: 98). Proud does not explore the implication of these alterations, but a cursory comparison of the existing work with the Royal Academy version reveals that the modifications enhanced the sensuality of the pose.



**Plate 4.3** Photograph of Maurice Greiffenhagen's *The Sirens* prior to changes (photograph courtesy of SANG)

In the Royal Academy's version of the painting the siren at the centre of the work smiled at the audience in a friendly and apparently open manner. In contrast, in SANG's version her head and shoulders were tilted back, her lips slightly parted, and her eyes shifted from a straightforward stare to a sideways glance. The heightened sensuality of the siren was extended through further modifications to the nude figure on her right, whose body posture was altered from a passive to active pose so that her hand turned towards the audience. The overall effect of these changes was to alert the audience to

the sirens' desire for male physical contact. The painting's erotic charge was compounded by the expressionistic brushwork Greiffenhagen employed in his adjustments, which brought a new urgency and immediacy to the work.

## The naked and the nude

In the context of the art gallery, the transformation from the traditional English nude to SANG's 'naked' nude shifted the gaze from disinterested pleasure (and the bourgeois) to blatant sexuality (and the brute). In acting in this way, the works in the Davis collection chimed with the hyper-masculine desires of the settlers not the aesthete interests of the English art elite. The images were further sexualised through attention drawn to the person behind the nude in a portrait of a famous clothed life model, *Ethel Warwick* by James Whistler (1900) (Proud 1999: 139-140). Her inclusion disrupted the 'moral convention' of the anonymous nude by giving name and substance to its subject (Smith 1996: 25-33, 218-223). That life models were commonly prostitutes and generally assumed to be the lovers of their painters gave weight to this disruption (ibid.).



**Plate 4.4** The Morning Toilet (Charles Shannon C.1930) SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

'Preparatory drawings' were also included in Davis' gift, though it is unclear whether these were displayed. These images (which in England were the preserve of private displays) would have drawn direct attention to the person behind the nude, such as in the sketch for *The Morning Toilet* (no image available) in which an undressed model was depicted sitting on a bed brushing her hair [plate 4.4].

In *Differencing the Canon* (2000), Griselda Pollock examines the differences between the naked and nude subject. She argues that the naked female is invested with the authority of a real person (whilst the nude is not) and therefore should be viewed in a more positive light (2000: 116-122). Extending her point Pollock contends representations of naked women disrupt the canon through their demand for specificity:

The marks of a lived body, a specific body, that is specifically a lived female body, disrupt what the aesthetically fashioned signs of a selectively idealised nude attempt to refuse: a feminine subject in its history (ibid.: 144)

Pollock's interpretation of the naked portrait as a liberation from the confines of the idealised nude holds appeal. However, at SANG the insertion of female nakedness into a male orchestrated setting curtailed the power of its female subjects as the naked sitters were cast as the white male's muse. Indeed, the nakedness of the subjects in SANG's collection closed the gap between the unobtainable ideal and the real female behind the image in such a way that it extended the male sexual fantasy, as it suggested the subjects were inviting the male to take action beyond the contemplative gaze. In her book, *Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (1992), Lynda Nead identifies that the move from nude to naked imagery shifts the focus from 'the sublimation or transformation of sexual drives' to a 'pornography' that incites the viewer to act (ibid.: 28).

The fact that SANG grouped its collections by gift rather than by type of work means we can presume the nudes in the Davis collection were displayed alongside portraits of clothed women. The consequent confusion between nudes and subject specific portraits would have created a sexually charged terrain as it metaphorically undressed the subjects that were clothed and, in some cases, put names to those that were naked.

## The correct site of fantasy

In the South African context the nudes in the Davis bequest had racial, as well as gendered, connotations as they positioned white women as the correct sexual partner for the white male. In early twentieth century South Africa the white male obsession with miscegenation was deliberately countered by an investment in white females as the ‘continuators of racial purity’ and the appropriate site for white male sexual fantasy (Brauer 2008: 7). In *Art, Sex and Eugenics*, Fran Brauer finds that the white nude ‘instrumentalized eugenics’ as she made it seem ‘normal and natural to desire to have sexual contact with the delectable [white] body for “rational procreation”’ – in contrast to the ‘illicit’ black body of colonial fantasy (ibid.). The pornographic elements of Davis’ nudes would have heightened identification with their white female subjects by encouraging a penetrative rather than contemplative gaze.

Framing white female characters as the objects of male conquest affirmed the racial and gender divisions of the colony. By placing white women in the bedroom the works perpetuated the colonial stereotype of the woman in the house and the man in the world. An idea fully realised in the *Sir Abe Bailey Bequest*, which represented the ‘great outdoors’ as the sole preserve of white men.

## Sport, land and conquest



**Plate 4.5** Detail from *Firetail with his Trainer* by the rubbing-down house on Newmarket Heath (George Stubbs 1773) SANG (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The emphasis on sport in the *Sir Abe Bailey Bequest* meant SANG had the largest ‘sporting art’ collection of any public art museum in the world,<sup>24</sup> and indeed is still believed to do so (Tietz 2001: 20). The bequest was dominated by images of male sports and rural life and 300 of the approximately 400 paintings in the collection contained sporting themes (ibid.). The Bailey bequest had a major impact on SANG when it entered the gallery, because it meant almost half of the gallery’s collection made reference to sport. This focus made SANG unusual for a national art gallery, as sporting art was not (and is still not) a well-regarded genre.

According to Stephen Deuchlar, *Noble Exercise: The Sporting Ideal in Eighteenth Century Art*, in England, only George Stubbs’ paintings of horses [plate 4.5] were considered to have been sufficiently accomplished to have ‘elevated a humble subject to fine art’ (1982: 7). Otherwise, sporting painting was considered to be ‘an inferior category of art’ and not fitting for a national museum (ibid.). The lowly status accorded to sporting painting in Europe meant it, like the risqué nude, was more likely to be found in the gentlemen’s club than the gallery (ibid.).

The majority of the paintings in the *Sir Abe Bailey Bequest* were by unknown artists, giving further credence to the idea that they would not be suitable for a national fine art museum in Europe. Indeed, a review in the *Burlington Magazine* before the collection left England in 1941 concluded:

The strictly artistic value of many of the pictures concerned is not great, though their interest as illustrating the manners and customs of the times is almost never failing<sup>25</sup>

The narrative aspects of the works and their naïve style would have made them unsuitable for national art museums in England, whereas these same qualities made them accessible and popular in South Africa. In 1947, the Cape Town press described the collection as ‘heart-warming Roast Beef of Old England’,<sup>26</sup> a depiction that tapped into a collective idea of home through its nostalgic rendering of the mother-country.

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Sir Abe Bailey’s Pictures’, *The Telegraph* cited in *Cape Times* July 14th 1942. ‘News cuttings’, 1904-1983, SANG archive.

<sup>25</sup> Wilmot 1941: 77, *Burlington Magazine*, ‘News cuttings’ SANG archive.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Fascinating works by English Masters’ *Cape Argus* Wednesday March 5th 1947. ‘News cuttings’ SANG archive.

The personal relationship that the sporting subject matter aroused between the audience and collection also promoted the colonial way of life.

### Colonial 'sporting life'

In England the collection's focus on sport would have made it the subject of denigration conversely in South Africa it confirmed the hegemonic masculinity of the colonial male. Deuchlar identifies how the sporting genre gained negative associations in England through its patrons' engagement with sporting life which was considered to be incompatible with being an 'art connoisseur' (1982: 7-8). In the eighteenth century this idea developed from the notion that sport led to uncouth behaviour and 'excessive and impolite indulgence' (ibid.: 8). The low status of sporting art in England was tied to the same impulse that made English art museums reject the 'naked' subject: namely that the works inspired their viewers to take physical action (ibid.). In the colony these same 'uncouth' aspects of the work would have accorded them potency as they affirmed the identity of the 'vigorous' white South African male.

Sport played a major role in colonial South Africa where it was perceived as an important mechanism to level class and cultural differences between white men. Morrell identifies that in Britain the rigid class system negated upper class involvement in a range of sports, where conversely, in the colony 'sport could weld men together across class' through its creation of shared masculine values (2001: 79, 94). In the colony, he writes:

Sport provides the context in which boys measure themselves (literally and figuratively). It is also the site in which certain masculine values are created ... Sport thus becomes important for reasons beyond the game (ibid.: 79)

Bailey, along with the other Randlords, was instrumental in developing sport as an intrinsic feature of colonial life. The Randlords built sports facilities and clubs near the mines, which helped to promote camaraderie between white men (Anon. 1910: 16). Bailey also financed South Africa's largest racecourse and was one of the country's major race horse breeders (Tietz 2001: 2).

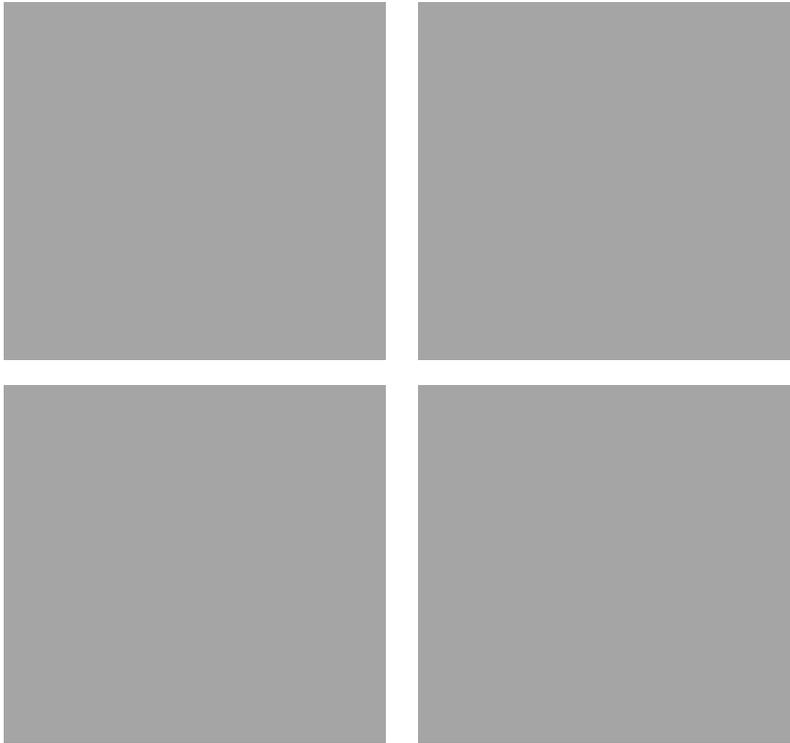


**Plate 4.6** Lovely Rosa, By Tolgus out of Napoule, Won Oaks Stakes Epsom (A. Munnings 1936), SANG (photograph by Catherine Hahn).

Bailey's personal investment in this arena is demonstrated in the paintings he had commissioned to record his favourite horses with their lineage and racing achievements set out on the frames [plate 4.6]. These works were bequeathed to SANG along with the rest of his collection, which produced a further link between the museum and colonial life. Bailey was also a keen participant and promoter of blood sports evidenced in his regular hosting of fox and jackal hunts across 80,000 acres of his land, some of which lasted for many days (Rosenthal 1959: 178; Tietz 2001: 21).

## The kill

The hunt featured heavily in Bailey's collection, creating a link between white South African manhood and sport that affirmed the settlers' brute masculinity. In the colony this process was achieved through the conversion of the 'un-gentlemanly' aspects of sport, related to its rough disposition and provision of pleasure and entertainment, into positive attributes



**Plates 4.7, 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10** Clockwise from left: Taking a Stream (Charles Henderson 1682); Pheasant Shooting (Sartorius no date); Crossing the Railway (John Herring no date); The Celebrated Captain Mitton ... (H. Alken no date) SANG (photographs by Catherine Hahn)

Violent sport is identified by Connell to have performed an important function in colonial life as part of the social process of ‘becoming a man’ and ‘judging one’s degree of masculinity’ (Connell 1987: 84-85). This role is amply demonstrated in Bailey’s collection through the preponderance of images that represented man pitted against nature: physically taking the land; fighting against bad weather and making the kill [plates 4.7- 4.10]. The physicality of these images resonates with the stories in the mine literature, which represented the mine speculators’ as battling to take control of a hostile terrain.

The aggressive masculinity of the works is best evidenced in images of men with their horses, which dominated the collection. The horse, and in particular the horse chase, is one of the key features of sporting paintings and is closely linked to the concept of war (Deuchlar 1982: 15). Indeed, until the twentieth century ‘good horsemanship’ and the pursuit and capture of animals were viewed as ‘essential ingredients’ of European

conquest (ibid.). The focus on the horse in Bailey's collection had a further resonance in the South African environment where riding, hunting and learning to shoot were an intrinsic part of the young white male's 'coming of age' and operated as a means to register white manhood (Morrell 2001: 79). In the colony, the close relationship between the settler, horse and gun would have encouraged white men to identify with this aspect of the collection, in particular as 'the horse and gun' served as the 'major distinguishing feature between the coloniser and colonised' (ibid.: 81).

## The land

Although presumably unintended, the focus on the countryside and farm in Bailey's bequest operated as a visual adjunct to an emerging rural identity that extended the settler narrative of the urban and industrial white 'working man', set out in the museum décor, into the rural environment. Where mining provided funds and a rationale for white settlement in South Africa, farm expansion created a visible testimony to white rule.

Prior to the twentieth century white agricultural industry was rudimentary in the Cape Colony, with only 12 acres of land cultivated in every 12,000 (Knowles 1936: 12). In the early 1900s The Cape Administration offered financial incentives to whites to take up farming (ibid.). Consequently, by 1920 agrarian products made up a significant proportion of South Africa's exports (ibid.: 8, 159-202). In 1930 the depression drove the price of agricultural land down creating the impetus for the Randlords to divest funds from the mining industry to the land (Union of SA 1930: 122).<sup>27</sup> For example, by 1935 Bailey had acquired over 400 miles of farm estates in the Hantham District (Tietz 2001: 21). Mechanised farming in the early twentieth century further facilitated white ownership of land, which increased the white presence outside urban areas and served as a bulwark against black incursion (Davies et al. 1985: 11-13). The multiple images of white owned land in SANG's collection inadvertently affirmed this pursuit.

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<sup>27</sup> In 1930 South African exports, in order of value, were: gold, bullion, wool, diamonds, maize, coal, fruit, sugar and sheepskins (Union of SA 1930: 122 from the Official year book of the Union of South Africa, chap. xviii). South African National Library.



**Plate 4.11** Tiberius (A. Munnings 1935) SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

In *Political Landscape: The Art History of Nature* (1994), Martin Warnke describes how the division of the land into fields in landscape paintings evokes the boundaries of the ‘colonial map’ and bears witness to the owner’s hold over ‘his territory’ (ibid.: 9). Unlike colonial landscapes (such as those in the décor) which were populated with black labourers, the origins of Bailey’s art works in England meant they typically represented an empty landscape presided over by a solitary white male landowner [plate 4.11]. In his analysis of American landscape painting Albert Boime explains how artists frequently deployed these figures as surrogate viewers who were used to represent man’s power over the natural world (1991: 21). In South Africa the reproduction of this trope stood as testament to white expansionist thought.

## The Afrikaner

As well as metaphorically dispossessing the black populace, the English landscapes in Bailey’s bequest destabilised the relationship between the Afrikaner and the land. Prior to the twentieth century the Afrikaner was widely considered by whites to be the owner of the pastoral scene whilst the city was conceptualised as English. A distinction illustrated in the split made in the painting *Holiday Time in Cape Town* between the Afrikaner peasant, represented by Kruger, and the urban Rhodes (see chapter three).

The Afrikaners' claim to the land was derived from the fact that they owned most of the white settled farmland in South Africa (Davies et al. 1985: 15). Their interest in farming stemmed from the 'unique and tangible relationship' that the Dutch had with the land, which was evidenced in their landscape painting tradition (Jensen-Adams 1994: 40). In *Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting*, Ann Jensen-Adams identifies that images of the farm and countryside were the most popular art works in Holland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and were collected by all classes of people (ibid.: 39-40). She traces the origins of this attention to the fact that peasants in Holland had a vested interest in the land, as the poor quality of Dutch soil, which was in many places peatbog and dune, dissuaded prospective lords from laying claim to it (ibid.: 42). Consequently, the major part of Holland was available for peasants to 'communally create and personally own' (ibid.). When Dutch settlers arrived in South Africa they took their identity rooted in the soil forward into new myths of settlement that culminated in the Great Trek of 1838 with its narrative endpoint in the farmsteads of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

The emphasis on the English landscape in SANG's imagery on the one hand supported the Afrikaner tradition through a concentration on white rural scenes, but on the other challenged the tradition through a focus on English held land. The fact that there were approximately 300 works in the collection of this type made an emphatic statement of their English origins. The Englishness of the paintings was underscored by their representation of idealised English farmland, domesticated by neat hedgerows and fences. The images replicated changes occurring in the Cape landscape that were a product of English investment in the land (Tietz 2001: 10). This aspect of the work created an iconography of enclosure that potentially excluded Afrikaners from its gaze (ibid.). In doing so it extended the meta-narrative provided in the décor of an English run city, by casting both the urban and rural environments of the Cape as an English terrain. However, despite this challenge to Afrikanerdom the collection's resonance with the settlers' way of life meant it ultimately championed a unified white male gaze.

## Conclusion

In the early 1930s craft and South African fine art, which offered complex and in some cases inclusive understandings of the nation's art, were subsumed by the mining magnates' collections. The displacement of competing claims to the canon did not result in SANG adopting the temple model instead, the Randlords collections promoted hegemonic masculinity, which came to define the gallery between 1935 and 1949.

The Randlords did not use their collections to expunge their 'capitalist selves' in the same way that the industrialists had in the west (Duncan 1995: 83-84). Rather, they revealed in their collecting taste evidence of the brute sensibilities that earned them their fortunes on the mines. The sporting images and nudes in the Randlords' collections, in tandem with the 'working life' images in the décor, created and applauded the 'rough' identity of the white settler male and encouraged him to feel at ease in the gallery.

In this rough and ready terrain one can see the fundamentals of SANG's role as a political house. The sub-division of the museum into 'princely realms', each dedicated to an individual Randlord, reflected the magnates' standing as the country's richest and most politically influential men and drew a direct connection between the gallery and mine. On the one hand this division valorised the settler male and on the other presented the museum as the Randlords' home – a space dedicated as much to their sensibilities and ideologies as to art. When apartheid was introduced in 1948 this masculine model was overhauled so as to encompass the whole white family.

## Chapter Five:

# The Apartheid Gallery

The advent of apartheid in 1948 brought a plethora of changes to the gallery, which included the rearrangement of the collection as an instructional pathway. In adopting new modes of representation SANG took on characteristics of the European public museum, in the sense that it had a ‘primarily governmental’ orientation:

As such, it [was] concerned not only to impress the visitor with a message of power but also to induct her or him into new forms of programming the self, aimed at producing new types of conduct and self-shaping (Bennett 1995: 46)

Through its path of instruction SANG became a forum through which the white audience performed South African citizenship. By applying Richard Dyer’s wide-reaching account of the development of whiteness to this context I demonstrate how the performance of nationalism at SANG during apartheid encouraged whites to perceive themselves as a singular unit sharing a similar set of goals and values (1997: 2, 3). The changes introduced to SANG in the early years of apartheid were instrumental in taking forward the ideals of the state, and activating the second stage of the museum’s development as a political house, in which it moved from being a site dedicated to the white male to one that embraced the white family. In implementing these changes the museum shifted its vision from the male settler to the citizen comfortable and safe in their surroundings. In undergoing this transformation SANG made a concerted effort to engage with female and child visitors and with Afrikaner as well as English whites. It was during this period that SANG came to house the whole white family.

In order to achieve its new remit SANG merged the administrative features of the European museum model with those of the wider entertainment industry. Unlike the ‘high-brow’ national fine art museums of Europe, whose intentions to uplift the public frequently resulted in ‘dry’ displays (Greenhalgh 1989: 84), SANG integrated elements from the world of education, pleasure and entertainment to capture local interest. SANG introduced participatory strategies similar to those used at the cutting-edge *Museum of Modern Art* (MOMA), New York, and in Europe’s Expositions, which enabled it to

deepen its relationship with the white family. The gallery's integration of populist measures with those of the western art museum seduced whites into performing the role of citizen rather than coercing them to do so. As a consequence, SANG created a white dominion that would later prove difficult to disrupt as it was both compelling to white audiences and fashioned as normal practice.

The first section of the chapter, *Unifying Practice*, explores the link between the Nationalist Party's political agenda and SANG's reconstitution as a path of instruction. The second section, *Instruction, Pleasure and Refreshment*, examines the introduction of entertainment and educational initiatives that drew white women and children into the museum's auspices and recreated the gallery as a space for the white family. The third section, *Creating Difference*, examines how the museum operationalized the separate development policies of the apartheid government by splitting art works by race.

As the primary changes to the museum during apartheid relate to its administrative processes, design and display, the focus of my research has been on documentary evidence from the archive rather than on the collection. Material for the chapter was garnered from the SANG archive; the archive of the South African National Library and The Hyman Kreitman archive in Tate Britain, London.<sup>1</sup> I have relied on gallery reports, letters, exhibition catalogues, photographs and newspaper articles as primary sources of information and, where needed, have sought further information and clarification from museum staff who worked at the gallery during the apartheid years. As many of the changes introduced to the gallery were not recorded in images, I have had to rely primarily on written accounts for their description. The majority of the changes discussed were introduced during the tenure of SANG's first Director, John Paris, from 1948 to 1962, consequently, the chapter focuses on this fourteen year period.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Hyman Kreitman holds extensive material on the 1948-49 *South African Art Exhibition*, which was a seminal exhibition in South Africa's art history and was organised and shown at SANG.

<sup>2</sup> SANG's Directors up until 1988 are as follows: John Paris 1948-1962; Von Moltke 1962-1963; Bokhurst 1963-1973; Du Ry 1973-1975; Raymond van Niekerk 1975-1988 - the gallery was then closed for three years for refurbishment (Dolby 1981: 47 *The Lantern*).

## Section One: Unifying Practice

Very little academic research has been undertaken on SANG's practice during apartheid, apart from that by Yoshiara and Qanita Lilla who explore it as historic context for their academic studies. Yoshiara rightly identifies the first decade of apartheid as the period when SANG moved from being an English South African institution to a white South African institution that actively promoted the concept of the white nation (2005: 37). She traces this shift to the introduction of apartheid and the increased involvement of the government in the museum (ibid.: 22-50). Viewing apartheid as being imposed on SANG from above, she surmises that by the late 1950s 'the interference of apartheid ideology on gallery policy and practice' was sufficient to curtail Paris' 'autonomy' (ibid.: 40). Similarly, Lilla in her Masters dissertation, *The Advancement of Art: Policy and Practice at the South African National Gallery 1940-1962*, perceives apartheid to have been foisted on the museum as a consequence of the (English) liberals losing their tussle with the state (2004: 105). In her research the Director is presented as the exemplar of 'Cape liberalism' pursuing 'inclusivity' against a backdrop of oppressive Afrikaner Nationalism (ibid.). Yoshiara questions whether Paris sought 'inclusivity' to the degree that Lilla maintains, but does not pursue this query in any detail as her study focuses elsewhere (2005: 40).

In this section I dispute the notion that SANG's raced agenda was imposed externally by the apartheid state. I argue that it was in fact the inter-relation between the state's racist agenda, the English Director's concerns and existing practices in the museum that created the circumstances for SANG's movement from a Randlord focused masculine space to a space orientated around the white family. If the apartheid government had imposed its aggressively pro-white approach upon a resistant gallery it is anticipated it would have been met by hostility or even dissent. Whereas SANG not only integrated government ideology into its own practice but developed on it, turning itself into a potent propaganda vehicle for the state. Indeed, the fact that changes in SANG's practices were generated for the most part from within the museum explains why it was so successful in promoting the state's aims<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> During his directorship Bokhurst (1963-73) did raise some objections to aspects of state control and

## A government for whites

The main reason why SANG was able to absorb government policy so easily was that the Nationalist Party (NP) of the 1940s was less pro-Afrikaner than hitherto and importantly less abrasively anti-English. In the mid-1940s the NP's desire to capture the white vote prompted it to tone down the Afrikaner rhetoric that had initially made it popular, and reinvent the tenuous two decade old 'unity' between the English and Afrikaners as an enduring legacy built on white nationalism (Golberg 2002: 208).<sup>4</sup> The NP's 1948 election manifesto exploited the notion of a single white race in order to galvanise English South Africans to adopt its apartheid agenda:

We can act in only one of two directions. Either we must follow the course of equality, which must eventually mean national suicide for the white race, or we must take the course of apartheid through which the character and future of every race will be protected (quoted in Le May 1995: 202)

Fuelled by additional English support the NP won the 1948 election on an apartheid platform and then went on to win successive election victories throughout apartheid – only losing in the first democratic election in 1994 (Barber 1999: 134-138). The political shift from an 'anti-British ... anti-African phase' into a solely 'anti-African phase' gave impetus to the shared project of nation building and brought English South Africans into the fold (Cornevin 1980: 74).

## The government's agenda

Apartheid brought with it an immediate and total re-evaluation of public space, which was henceforth conceptualised as an active force in the pursuit of civic duty (O'Meara 1996: 63). In the process of this re-evaluation museums were brought under government

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attempted to lessen its impact on the gallery. For example, he requested better working conditions for black staff and training opportunities for black artists (1971). However, by the time he took up office apartheid was well-established in the museum and there were no major changes in its practice until the 1980s (discussed in chapter six).

<sup>4</sup> The Afrikaner and English communities had an acrimonious relationship evidenced in the two Boer wars (1880-81 and 1899-1902) and continued to refer to themselves as separate races into the 1930s (Cornevin 1980: 63,74; The Cape Argus Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> August 1936, newspaper archive, South African National Library).

control and came to valorise the state's agenda over that of either their patrons or the public.

SANG did not separate its audiences by race, and was therefore not eligible for the small additional stipend that the government made available to segregated museums (Bokhurst 1971). However, my research indicated that in all other respects the gallery was an apartheid institution. It was fully funded by the government throughout apartheid; had government members on its board and had staff selected with government approval (Staff interview 11/10/1996). It also had segregated facilities, including 'wash rooms', and the employment of staff was structured by race with white employees occupying all positions of authority and black staff holding menial positions with no permanent contracts, bonuses or holiday pay (Bokhurst 1971; Honikman 1970: 4-6, 10)<sup>5</sup> As part of its contractual obligation to the apartheid state the museum was also subject to government reviews and rigorous inspections were undertaken by government officials on an annual basis. These checks included examination of art works for possible 'contraventions' of apartheid legislation, which according to a senior staff member meant the gallery generally complied with the expectations of the state (Staff interview 11/10/1996).

The government's perception of what constituted the correct operational mode for SANG broadly reflected the practices of European art museums, which sought to create coherent narratives of state, illustrated in the findings of a report commissioned by the government into SANG's practices in 1947. The report, conducted by J. Stratford The Department of the Interior Commissioner, identified a series of 'shortcomings' at the gallery, which included its primary emphasis on the Randlords' collections; its failure to centre South African art; the unsystematic hang and the absence of a 'path of instruction with regard to developments in art in various parts of the world' (1947: 6).<sup>6</sup> Stratford ended his report by recommending that SANG address these 'shortcomings' through the adoption of instructional practices used in English museums and named the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery in London as examples of best practice (ibid.: 11).

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<sup>5</sup> The National Gallery of South Africa Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year April 1967 to March 1970 - three years, 'Reports', SANG archive.

<sup>6</sup> Department of the Interior Commission 1947, 'Reports', SANG archive.

To turn the gallery from a place that lauded the individual Randlords into a pedagogic complex along English lines required the appointment of a full-time salaried Director (to replace the part-time Assistant Directors Wheatley and Roworth) (ibid.: 9). Since one of the government's primary concerns was to adopt a museum system that replicated the European/English model a decision was taken to advertise the role overseas and to emphasise the need for expertise in western rather than South African art (1948: 4).<sup>7</sup> The government's expectation was made explicit in the wording of the job advertisement, which stated applicants were 'required to have *experience* of classical and contemporary art', in contrast to an '*interest* in the art of South Africa' (my emphasis).<sup>8</sup> Following this selection process, it is unsurprising that John Paris, an Englishman, was employed as the gallery's new Director.

Paris was an auspicious choice as his past experience as Assistant Director at The Walker Gallery in Liverpool helped him to realise the government's educational vision with an innovative flair. Paris' *curriculum vitae* revealed significant experience in English museums, thus fulfilling the government's desire to employ someone with a classical European art background. He also had extensive knowledge of experimental museum practice through The Walker Gallery, which had a reputation for pioneering work in the museum sector and considerable success in appealing to a working-class audience.<sup>9</sup> Paris' past experience provided an invaluable resource to SANG as it enabled him to reconcile the government's two apparently contradictory aims. Firstly, to provide a museum on the European public model, which, as Bourdieu describes in *The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic* (1996), was constructed so as to suggest the work of art was in and of itself important and therefore a product of the 'pure gaze' (1996: 203). Secondly, to promote the white South African state by encouraging broader white audiences to experience the museum as an affirmative and inclusive white realm. In order to meet these objectives Paris deployed strategies from the temple for political ends.

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<sup>7</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal year 1947-48, 'Reports', SANG archive.

<sup>8</sup> 'Director Sought' Advertisement, *Cape Times* 15<sup>th</sup> May 1948, 'News cuttings' SANG archive.

<sup>9</sup> 'New Director of Art Gallery' *Cape Times* 29th January 1948, 'News cuttings' SANG archive.

## Creating chronology

Paris instituted the requested path of instruction through his strategic use of the museum's architecture. In the process he dismantled the hyper-masculine bequests given by the Randlords and put them back together in a way that foregrounded national heritage.

SANG was designed on European principles as a series of interlocking display areas framed around a central courtyard. Before apartheid this design was largely ignored in the arrangement of the display. For example, the permanent décor was intended to tell a chronological story of 'working life' but was not presented in a linear fashion.

Similarly, the art collection was set out in relation to the Randlords' bequests rather than by type of art or practice. In order to move away from an understanding of the gallery as a series of discreet realms of patronage Paris reconceptualised the space as a progressive journey through nations and time.

The chronological arrangement enabled the museum to function as initially intended: taking the audience on a 'processional route' around the building, room by room from left to right 'coeval with the physical compass of the gallery' (Taylor 1999: 150). In *Art for the Nation* Brandon Taylor describes the ideological principles that underpin this design. The harmony between the 'clockwise' direction of the display and the design of the gallery is calculated to act subconsciously on visitors to encourage them to follow the museum's path and adhere to its intended way of viewing (ibid.: 50-51). Within this framework the audience is invited on a journey through art history that is intended to mirror, in visual terms, the progress of society. Bennett explains how the pedagogy comprised by this technology saturates the routines of the visitor 'as the lesson of art's progress', which takes the form of an 'itinerary that the visitor [is] obliged to perform' (1995: 44):

The visitor at such a museum is not placed statically before an order of things whose rationality will be revealed to the visitor's immobile contemplation. Rather locomotion – and sequential locomotion – is required as the visitor is faced with an itinerary in the form of an order of things which reveals itself only to those who, step by step, [] trace its evolutionary development (ibid.: 43)

SANG's redesign as a processional route had particular significance for a white South African audience as it took them on a journey from their countries of origin in the European 'founder nations' through to the central display hall dedicated to contemporary South African art [plate 5.1].

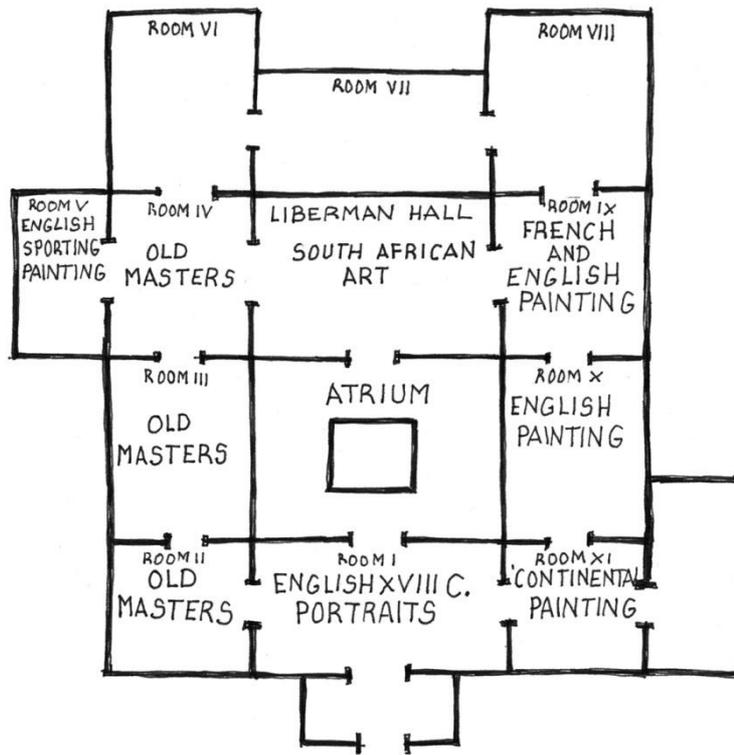


Plate 5.1 Map of SANG c.1960  
(map by Catherine Hahn)

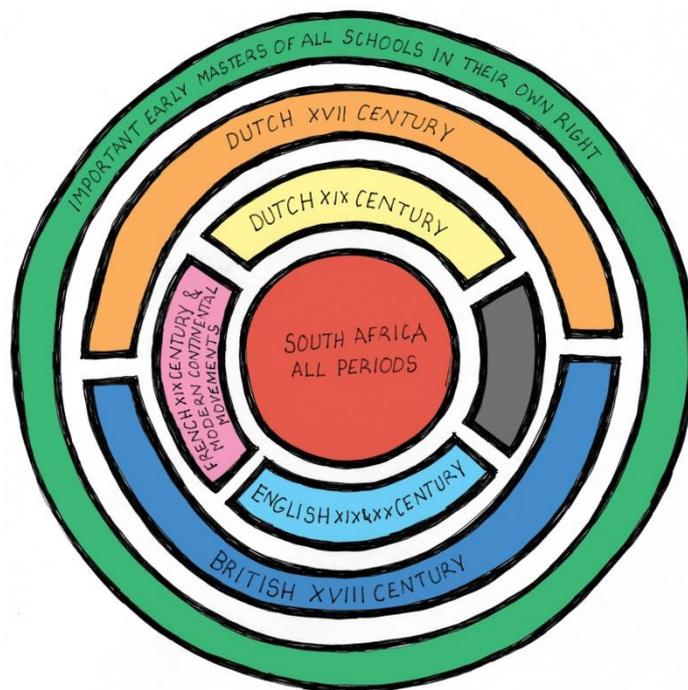
Using Paris' description of the gallery's layout in 1950 and the 1961 museum guide book as reference, I determined that the left side of the gallery became a showcase for the 'Old Masters' in the European collection and the right a space for displaying later European art. Both sides of the museum were further sub-divided by national tradition, and the gallery's central room, The Liberman Hall, was re-dedicated to South African art.<sup>10</sup>

## Heritage and pride

SANG's chronological display brought historic order and white cultural inclusivity to the collection. The new format masked inadequacies in the collection, by enabling small

<sup>10</sup> Museum guide-book 1961 'Items other than catalogues' SANG archive.

numbers of work to be viewed as surrogates of wider practice. In *The Predicament of Culture* James Clifford describes how the operational status of the ‘historic model’ invests art with the power to act as an exemplar of other similar works, enabling whatever fragments of a tradition are on display to act as its consecrated representatives (1988: 230-231). SANG’s rearrangement was therefore able to negotiate gaps in its collection, such as in French and Italian painting, by enabling a few works to serve as emblems of national cultures. Accordingly, despite the ongoing predominance of English art works, all whites were encouraged to feel their heritage was represented in the display. Proof of which can be found in the 1961 museum guide-book. Although the collection remained uneven, the ‘Colour wheel’ at the centre of the guide-book presented the gallery as being made up equally of Dutch and English art, with smaller sections dedicated to the other European ‘founder’ countries [plate 5.2] – hereby demonstrating the museum’s ability to portray itself as a ‘single and cohesive nation’ made up of European parts (Yoshiara 2005: 42).



**Plate 5.2** ‘Colour Wheel’ SANG 1961 museum guide-book, SANG archive (drawing by Catherine Hahn)

Importantly, the chronological display deliberately retained a visible link to the Randlords’ bequests. At the level of personal authority the rearrangement of the museum by nation divested the patrons of their power. However, Paris chose to retain

the Randlords' names in the room titles, which meant they continued to act as signifiers of the museum story.<sup>11</sup> For example, Room I was retitled 'English XVIII century portraits from Abe Bailey collection'; Rooms II and III as 'The Beit collection of Old Masters' and Room XI as 'Nineteenth century continental paintings and sculpture from the Alfred de Pass collection' (Paris 1950: 5).<sup>12</sup>

The retention of the Randlords in the chronological system was significant. It co-opted the patrons into the new story of the nation where they metamorphosed from self-interested parties overlooking their individual artistic fiefdoms into public-spirited philanthropists advancing the interests of white national culture. The development in the Randlords' role enabled SANG to perform in the same manner as museums in Europe. Duncan identifies how the shift in Europe from 'princely' to public collections changed museums from signifiers of 'luxury and status' tied to individual patronage into repositories of 'spiritual treasure' (Duncan 1995: 27). From this point on SANG's bequests were therefore able to relay 'the heritage and pride of the whole (white) nation' (ibid.). The rearrangement of SANG's display gave impetus to the white nation building project through its acknowledgement of the audience's white heritage across western Europe. Meanwhile the Randlords' continued presence in the gallery gave added relevance to the collections of the 'founder nations' by associating them with the 'generosity' of local patrons and a South African legacy.

## Moving towards the light

The museum's arrangement encouraged visitors to adopt the role of the white citizen moving through the story of their ancestry to the present day. This structure provided another means to veil inadequacies in the collection, as it enabled the museum's small South African art collection to read as if it had inverse status in proportion to its size. Importantly, the arrangement also suggested South African fine art was the apogee of the European tradition. Here, again SANG borrowed from the national museums in Europe, which almost always staged their own works at the centre of practice (Duncan and Wallach 1980; Bennett 2007: 168).

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<sup>11</sup> The decision was likely to have been predicated on the stipulations in the Bailey bequest discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>12</sup> 'Gallery leaflet', 'Leaflets', SANG archive.

In 1950 Paris confirmed the singular importance of South African art through his renovation of the gallery. Following the example of the Walker Gallery Paris redecorated the rooms from dark to light. The historic rooms were papered in dark reds and greens; the modern and contemporary European rooms painted in muted pinks and the *Lieberman Hall* for South African art painted dove-grey.<sup>13</sup> The contrast between the colours of the rooms created a physical disjuncture from the power orientated ‘historic’ rooms, papered in dark flock, to the light and airy spaces of the modern displays. Bennett identifies that this transition has been used by western museums to mirror the enlightenment project with the visitor ritually assuming the identity of the bourgeois citizen moving along a pathway from darkness to light (Bennett 2007: 167). In SANG’s case the shift in tone also symbolised the settler’s journey from the world of the civilised-brute, evoked in the retention of the gentlemen’s club style atmosphere of the historic space, to that of the white citizen in the modern display.

The sense that the visitor was entering a more inclusive, less-gendered, white era was enhanced through the special treatment accorded to the *Lieberman Hall*. To complement its grey walls the paintings in the hall were rehung in simple wooden frames and lattice ‘hanging’ stands were introduced to increase the level of light.<sup>14</sup> The arrangement, which mirrored the minimalist gallery décor of Europe and America, emphasised the modernity of the South African fine art collection. This was a deliberate strategy, which Paris contended demonstrated the *Lieberman Hall* was ‘in more than one sense ... the centre for the display of the artistic achievements of our country’ and a forum to evidence ‘how far the development of South African art has been taken’.<sup>15</sup>

The modernity of the hall was matched by its artistic content, which unlike the almost entirely male spread of art work in the historic display, contained significant numbers of female artists. By 1950 this included work by Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser along with other white modernist artists, who under the previous anti-modernist regime had been largely excluded (Paris 1950).

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<sup>13</sup> *Effective rearrangement of National Gallery Treasures* Cape Argus 1st September 1950 ‘News cuttings’ SANG archive.

<sup>14</sup> South African Room in the gallery has been entirely rearranged Cape Times 5th November 1956, ‘News cuttings’ SANG archive.

<sup>15</sup> Colour Chart Illustrating Policy of the South African National Gallery Published by the Trustees SANG no date 1961 ‘Items other than Catalogues’ SANG.

Taking the gallery as a whole it was the modern display rooms, and in particular the *Lieberman Hall*, which were most congruent with the ideals of the white state. Having become less gendered and more cosmopolitan the modern decoration and layout told the white audience that the gallery was designed to nurture and embrace them as its citizens, female as well as male. In this respect the *Lieberman Hall* acted as a metaphor for the spacious, modern society that apartheid had 'achieved' for its white citizens, a safe haven untouched by the realities of segregated South African life.

## Section Two: Instruction, Pleasure and Refreshment

The new design was complemented by education and leisure initiatives that further aligned the museum with its white citizenry. In order to achieve greater control of the cultural arena one of the first acts of Parliament that the Nationalist Party took in 1948 was to incorporate arts and science into the *Department of Education*.<sup>16</sup> In 1949 a commission was set up by the new *Department of Education, Arts and Science* to align state-aided institutions, which included SANG, with the concerns of the apartheid regime. Based on the findings of the commission the government issued an arts policy with a directive that cultural institutions initiate educational practices, as part of this report there was a specific recommendation that SANG:<sup>17</sup>

Become an institution through which the Department of Education may implement a system of satisfactory instruction in art appreciation for the whole country at the levels of University, School and Adult Education (1950: 104)

Drawing on this recommendation, and extending its brief, the gallery introduced an extensive education programme. SANG's pedagogic measures included: a comprehensive guide system; catalogues and the use of instructional exhibitions that focused on a particular style of art or mode of practice. These initiatives were supported by the introduction of a print room, drawing exhibitions and a library that provided

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<sup>16</sup> Within a few months of the NP coming to power a deputation was delivered to President Malan calling for the government to play a greater role in cultural matters and to set up a *Department of Education Arts and Science*. *Ministry of Arts* Cape Times 6th July 1948, newspaper archive, South African National Library.

<sup>17</sup> Government engagement with the gallery came with material benefit, with an additional interim grant of £3,246, 'pending the findings of the Commission and such action as the Department should make upon them.', 1950: 3, The National Gallery of South Africa Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year 1949-50 Director Paris, J. Cape Town 1950 20th report, 'Reports' SANG archive.

further learning resources.<sup>18</sup> The gallery also produced its own publications including a series of guides, a pamphlet on the Beit collection and a series of monographs to accompany the permanent display.<sup>19</sup> In order to extend the museum's reach these changes were introduced in conjunction with capsule exhibitions that toured other regions in South Africa including the 1950 *George Centenary Exhibition*.<sup>20</sup>



**Plate 5.3** Mr R.K. Hallack explains to a group of pupils the finer points of a painting in the National Gallery today.' Argus 29/06/1949 ('Newscuttings 122A' SANG archive)

In putting its education programme together SANG paid particular attention to the needs of white children (Staff Member A 2006: 149). Evidence of the gallery's interest in white children's education is provided by the introduction of weekly tours for white Cape Town schools, such as a class from Rondebosch Boys High School whose trip in 1949 was recorded in a local newspaper [plate 5.3]. The tours became advertisements for further white attendance and were maintained through to the late 1980s when it was still 'unusual' for a 'non-white school' to be in the gallery (ibid.: 161).

The raft of educational measures introduced by SANG in the 1950s and 60s, particularly the travelling exhibits and work with schools, accorded wider access to the white population. The emphasis given to white children's learning was particularly notable as in Europe childhood exposure to fine art was most commonly the preserve of

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<sup>18</sup> 'New Director's Plans for Art Gallery' *Cape Times* 11<sup>th</sup> February 1949 'News cuttings' SANG archive.

<sup>19</sup> 'Reorganizing the S.A. National Gallery' *The Cape Times* 27<sup>th</sup> September 1949, 'News cuttings' SANG archive.

<sup>20</sup> *Art Exhibitions to Tour Union Cape Times* December 9<sup>th</sup> 1950, 'News cuttings' SANG archive.

the middle and upper-classes (Bourdieu 1996: 68-69). Conversely, in South Africa white children of all class backgrounds were encouraged to feel at home in the gallery. The museum's investment in white children supported white families to see the museum as their natural habitus and helped develop a shared cultural lexicon that could be passed through generations as artistic appreciation (ibid.).

## To play and learn

One of the main reasons for SANG's success *in loco parentis* was that it did not seek to educate its young charges through emulation and instruction alone, but placed a primary emphasis on self-discovery and fun.

One of the main initiatives that encouraged children to feel at home in the gallery was the introduction of the *Touch Gallery* in 1960. The *Touch Gallery* was initially intended to facilitate blind audiences by giving them a 'hands on' experience of the art, but was so popular with child visitors that by 1965 it had become an integral feature of the display – with signs informing audience members which works they were allowed to touch (Staff Member A in conversation December 2006). The success of the *Touch Gallery* led to the introduction of further child-friendly displays including the *Tactile Tunnel* (Peter Cazalet 1981), which set the audience on specific paths within the gallery through which they were exposed to sensory and emotional stimuli.<sup>21</sup>

SANG's participatory approach had much in common with the children's art programme at the progressive and experimental *Museum of Modern Art* (MOMA), New York. Perhaps unwittingly, Paris replicated MOMA's notion of art as a tool for preparing children for citizenship. Briley Raussman, in *The Laboratory on 53rd Street*, describes how MOMA opened in 1929 with the objective of connecting contemporary art to the daily lives of people (2010: 451). To this end its Director of Education, Victor D-Amico (1937-1969), introduced a child-centred pedagogic programme that included the *Children's Art Carnival* (1942-1969). The carnival was a hands-on environment, which was intended to prepare the child, through play, for their role in the democratic society (ibid.: 452). In MOMA's case this was thought to be achieved by giving

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<sup>21</sup> Brigid Ibell 'Around The Gallery Tactile Tunnel' *Cape Argus* 15/06/81 p.3 'News cuttings', SANG archive.

children the opportunity to ‘assume adult roles usually denied [them] in real life’ (MOMA, Bulletin, 1951: 12, quoted in Rasmussen 453).

SANG’s harmonisation of free-play and instruction provided a similar experience to MOMA’s initiative. The *Touch Gallery* and *Tactile Tunnel* invited children to engage with the gallery as if it was an adventure playground in which they were free to touch and run. At the same time the demarcation of the museum into unregulated and regulated spaces (of free-play and untouchable ‘masterpiece’) ordered their experience in a way that mirrored the museum’s progressive journey. As a consequence, the museum had underlying political value as a medium for drawing white children into the state.

White adult audiences were similarly encouraged to engage with the museum through multi-layered interactive displays, which in their case appeared designed to engender community spirit and a shared sense of whiteness. Again, SANG’s practices bear comparison with those at MOMA, which progressed from teaching the child to teaching the family. Raussman describes how a television programme initially used by MOMA as a teaching aid for children expanded its remit in 1953 to include the parent-child relationship, as indicated by its new title *Art for the Family* (2010: 457). In introducing this programme the notion that the museum prepared citizens for their role in society was extended to the family. Similar pedagogic tools were introduced at SANG that co-opted whites of all ages into the white state.

For example, in 1953 *Requests from the Reserve Collection* was created in response to the public charge that some of the gallery’s most popular art works had disappeared into the vaults (Sibbert 1953<sup>22</sup>). The exhibition eschewed the role of the ‘expert curator’ in favour of audience choice, facilitated through public requests to view works held in storage (ibid.). The ensuing exhibition, although considered by local art critics to be without artistic merit<sup>23</sup>, would have stimulated a collective white nostalgia for ‘lost’ and long forgotten works as well as giving the white audience power over the gallery.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Arrogance and Art’, *The Cape Times* 9th April, ‘News cuttings’, SANG archive.

<sup>23</sup> van Esshe ‘Public No judge of Art’ *The Argus* 4th April 1953 described the exhibition as having only sentimental value ‘News cuttings’, SANG archive.

<sup>24</sup> Although black audience members could make requests the art works in storage were exclusively by

Another example of SANG's participatory approach was *The Surprise Room*, which was introduced in 1957 to show abstract and expressionist art.<sup>25</sup> Encouraging the white audience to feel a kinship with modern art was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the museum's education programme. The audience were relatively underexposed to contemporary art movements as a consequence of the previous Directors' anti-modernist stance and the gallery's adherence to the Randlords' tastes.

In 1957 *The Surprise Room* exhibited Fazzini's sculpture of 'a victim of the Hiroshima atom bomb' *The Screaming Man* (n.d.) alongside two abstract paintings.<sup>26</sup> The juxtaposition of abstract art and a rough-hewn image of a Hiroshima victim, served to introduce the audience to modern developments in art and its, sometimes, political content. Cleverly the use of the 'Surprise Room' title alerted the audience to the fact that they might find the work unnerving, thus encouraging them to explore the work without fear of being judged for their inexperience or unease. The gallery's consideration for those with little prior exposure to modern art contrasted with the approach taken in European art temples, which frequently mystified engagement with modern art through minimal, esoteric labelling, thereby excluding less cultured audiences (Bourdieu 1995: 49).

Both exhibitions drew their audiences into a collective experience that went beyond art training to frame them as active, thinking citizens.

## Nostalgia

The most successful way in which SANG brokered white community cohesion was through its evocation of a collective nostalgia for a shared South African past. Throughout apartheid SANG summoned this nostalgia through its recourse to an imaginary English-Afrikaner history. From the beginning of Paris' directorship until the late 1980s the anniversary of van Riebeeck's arrival in the Cape, in 1652, was commemorated every year at SANG as part of the *van Riebeeck Festival*. Prior to

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white artists until 1968, with the exception of a handful of African sculptures (see section three).

<sup>25</sup> 'Surprise Room' *The Cape Argus* 15th June 1957 News cuttings, 1904-1983, English language, compiled by J. Minicki and other librarians, SANG Archive

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

apartheid the advent of van Riebeeck's arrival was, for two and a half centuries, considered to be an Afrikaner event symbolising the first stage of the Dutch South African journey to 'the promised land' (Cornevin 1980: 54-60). From 1948 onwards this understanding of the arrival was expanded to encompass a broader narrative of 'white settlement'. For example, in the 1952 third centenary exhibition historic Dutch and English paintings were hung on separate wings, so as to allude to two separate yet unified cultures.<sup>27</sup> The presentation of van Riebeeck as a shared cultural icon and the equal space allotted to Dutch and English historic work in the 1952 display fused nineteenth century English settlement with the seventeenth century Huguenot/Dutch arrival.<sup>28</sup> Hereby suggesting whites shared a common heritage that stretched back centuries. SANG's re-conceptualisation of van Riebeeck's arrival as a white affair corresponded with the NP's shift in 1948 from a rhetoric of 'Afrikanerdom' to a wider conception of white nationalism premised on the 'basic tenets of Western Civilisation' (Golberg 2002: 208), evinced in the 1952 *van Riebeeck Festival* strap line 'we build a nation'.<sup>29</sup>

In 1975 SANG hosted its most elaborate commemorative exhibition, *One Hundred Years Ago*, which used the gallery's history as a site of nostalgia and tapped, more subtly, into the same tropes as the van Riebeeck exhibitions. *One Hundred Years Ago* was designed to mark the opening of the Cape Town Art Gallery on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1875.<sup>30, 31</sup> In the display authenticating elements provided an experience akin to a performance, in which audience members were co-opted into playing imaginary visitors from the museum's past.

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<sup>27</sup> *Some Paintings of the English School* Paris 1952b: 3 'Cat Box' SANG archive.

<sup>28</sup> The Dutch/Huguenot ancestors of the Afrikaners arrived in the Cape in 1652 and the English began to settle in 1820. The communities had an acrimonious relationship from the start, which was evidenced in the two Boer wars (1880-81 and 1899-1902), in which the Afrikaners fought against British imperialism, which culminated in the English setting up concentration camps in which approximately 25,000 Afrikaner women and children died (Cornevin 1980: 63, 74). Throughout the 1930s South African newspapers continued to refer to the Afrikaners and English as separate races (The Cape Argus Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> August 1936), 'News cuttings', SANG archive.

<sup>29</sup> *van Riebeeck Festival Catalogue* (Paris 1952a: 3), 'Cat Box' SANG archive.

<sup>30</sup> Van Niekerk, R. August 1978 *Victorian Paintings from the Permanent Collection* 'Cat Box' SANG archive.

<sup>31</sup> The exhibition catalogue, *A discussion on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and John Ruskin* (1975) described in detail the English art scene in Victorian England, including the Wallace collection display in London (Leigh and Bull 1975:1, 3) 'Cat Box' SANG archive.

Seeking interest rather than verisimilitude the organisers deliberately ignored the ‘poor quality’ of the original exhibition and instead created a ‘Victorian’ setting filled with the ‘best’ of the gallery’s older work.<sup>32</sup> In order to create historic ambience the works were presented in ways that were intended to ‘jar’ with ‘modern tastes’.<sup>33</sup> This included hanging copies ‘indiscriminately with originals’ and placing art works at irregular levels, some close together and others far apart (ibid.). The unfamiliarity of these reconstructive strategies would have disorientated viewers and in doing so created a sense of time slippage and by association historic authenticity (Sorenson 1989: 65). These historicizing strategies were further supported by a reproduction of the catalogue from the original event, which encouraged visitors to interact with the exhibition as if they had travelled back in time.<sup>34</sup> Through its historicizing approach *One Hundred Years Ago* overlaid the museum’s linear format with a further progressive journey. Having experienced disorientation in the ‘early’ gallery the visitor would have felt a distinct difference on entering the contemporary exhibition space, where the recognisable mode of display would have engendered feelings of familiarity and belonging.

Here, SANG’s practice contrasted with that of European art museums which by the 1940s had largely shed populist agendas in favour of ‘the formation of a public of discriminating adults’ (Taylor 1999: 167-202). As a result they concentrated their attention on ‘high art’ and the middle-classes rather than drawing in the masses (ibid. 175). Paris’ work at the Walker Gallery would have made him acutely aware of this dynamic. It is therefore clear he made an active choice, in line with the South African government’s expectations, to draw on popular and political influences in his pursuit of the white South African citizen. In the process he created a space that was more socially orientated and flexible than its European counterparts, and more interested in engaging with its public than in art and the ‘pure gaze’.

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<sup>32</sup> van Niekerk August 1978: 1, *Victorian Paintings from the Permanent Collection*, ‘Cat Box’ SANG archive.

<sup>33</sup> Leigh 1975: 1, A discussion on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and John Ruskin, ‘Cat Box’ SANG archive.

<sup>34</sup> *One Hundred Years Ago*, ‘Catalogues’, SANG archive.

## Audience participation

The gulf between SANG and the art temples of Europe was further extended with the introduction of leisure pursuits. Alongside educational exhibitions and resources SANG introduced modes of engagement in the 1950s which did more to collapse the boundaries between low and high culture and entertainment and art. Paris heralded these changes with the exhortation that the gallery should be seen as ‘a meeting place for instruction, pleasure and refreshment and not as a place where people must conscientiously walk tip-toe and stare at paintings’.<sup>35</sup> To this end, he introduced a café, organised talks, conferences, interactive exhibitions and music recitals.<sup>36</sup> These events offered opportunities for visitors to engage with each other and perform as participatory citizens.<sup>37</sup> The introduction of food was particularly significant as it encouraged audiences to view the gallery as a place to spend a day out, which increased the time visitors spent in the gallery. Again SANG appeared to have more in common with the Expositions than with the fine art museums of Europe, such as the French museums Bourdieu and Darbel studied, which typically engaged visitors for less than an hour (1991: 37-38). This extended visiting period was significant as the longer amount of time a visitor spends in a museum the greater the influence it has on them (ibid.).

In 1971 the idea of the gallery as an entertainment complex was fully realised when SANG added regular film shows to its remit. The film programme covered a diverse range of material from Hollywood classics to documentaries on ‘religion and mountain climbing’ (Dolby 1981: 41). The introduction of popular films was an important development as until 1976 there was no television in South Africa and the bioscope (cinema) was the main pastime for Capetonians (Burns 2000). The film programme therefore provided one of the primary means of engaging the white family.

## The flaneur

Through its innovatory practices the gallery came to act as a social gathering point and part of the white citizen’s social calendar, attested to by the content of regular articles in

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Tip-toeing will go’ *The Cape Times* 10th September 1953, ‘News cuttings’ SANG archive.

<sup>36</sup> ‘New Director’s Plans for Art Gallery’ *Cape Times* 11<sup>th</sup> February 1949 ‘News cuttings’ SANG archive.

<sup>37</sup> ‘To Explain Works in Art Gallery’ *The Cape Times* 12th November 1956 ‘News cuttings’ SANG archive.

the Cape press [plates 5.4-5.6 are representative examples]. The majority of the newspaper articles were accompanied by large photographs that focused on SANG's visitors.<sup>38</sup> Most of the images were of women, dressed in elegant suits and hats – some accompanied on their visit by the Directors. The photographs generally staged their subjects smiling towards the camera and less frequently towards indistinct paintings.



**Clockwise from bottom right: Plate 5.4** 'Art Gallery Lecture', caption: 'Mr John Paris gave a most informative talk to members of the Association of University Women to the National Gallery last week. Here he is with (left to right) Mrs. J. Pollock, president, Miss M. Howie, hon. Treasurer, and Mrs. D. V. Klosser, hon secretary. Afterwards members had tea together in the Botanical Gardens' (Cape Argus 14th March 1950)

**Plate 5.5** 'Exhibition in the National Gallery', caption: 'Mr Maurice van Essche [Assistant Director] discussing a picture with Mme. E Haimet (right), wife of the French Consul in Cape Town, and her daughter, Mlle. Claude Haimet, at the opening of the exhibition of reproductions of modern French paintings in the National Gallery on Thursday' (Cape Times 25th March 1950)

**Plate 5.6** 'Mr and Mrs John Paris meeting the president of the Board of Trustees' (Cape Argus 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1952) ('News cuttings' SANG archive')

The focus on the audience in the photos was replicated in the captions, which signalled the participants' importance by including their full names. In contrast the captions frequently gave only fleeting acknowledgement to the art or sometimes didn't mention it at all, such as in 'Art Gallery Lecture' [plate 5.4]. The emphasis on the audience

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<sup>38</sup> All of the images I viewed in newspaper articles at SANG were of white visitors 'News cuttings' SANG archive.

continued into the texts, which often included long lists of exhibition attendees and very few references to the paintings and displays. From these distinctions in treatment it is clear viewing art was considered less important than the experience of seeing other people and being seen.

The celebrity style images of fashionably dressed attractive white female visitors offered the gallery an air of glamour and perhaps an inducement for the male visit. In particular as young single women were frequently staged at the midpoint of the photographic picture-plane with the male Director posed as their proprietorial guide [5.4-5.6 above]. In these instances the images created the impression that the white female visitor had been substituted for the female subject of fine art. Bennett's research on European Expositions provides a relevant correlation here. He notes that their visitors spent a fraction of their time looking at the displays and instead:

Went again and again ... for the express purpose of relaxed strolling, for seeing and looking, everyone a *flaneur*, but a *flaneur* on the move, constantly open to the casual glance of other strollers (2007: 227)

The creation of a space in which the public was included among the exhibits replicated the civilising technologies of the Exposition. It provided a space for visitors to display to each other 'in the form of pleasurable practice, those codes of public civility to which they [had] become habituated' (ibid.: 226-227).

## A stroll in the park

Performance of white citizenship at SANG was extended through the gallery's location in *Company's Garden*. As newspaper articles recount, trips to the gallery frequently included time in the park. For instance, the picture caption for the 'Art Gallery Lecture' informs the reader that SANG's visitors ended their visit having 'tea together in the Botanical Gardens' [plate 5.4].

Consideration of the relationship between the gallery and the surrounding gardens reveals a shift in the cultural landscape following the museum's time under the Randlords. In its prior incarnation as a place of private patronage the gallery was situated as a male bastion against the outside world and as a consequence was distinct

from its environs. In contrast, SANG's new role as a space for meeting, leisure activity and public display, provided a near seamless association with the park – whose dramatic central walkway, botanical gardens, aviary, fountains and lawns offered an accompanying stage for performing whiteness. Connecting the museum to the garden added depth to the understanding of SANG as a white space, as throughout apartheid black people were banned from 'loitering' in the garden or sitting on the white designated benches (le Roux 2005: 2). The demarcation of the garden as a white zone meant that those entering SANG would first have to negotiate this white terrain. It is therefore understandable that black visitors recounting their experience of visiting SANG during apartheid frequently linked their experience of alienation walking through the garden to their experience of the museum (Voyiya and McGee 2003).

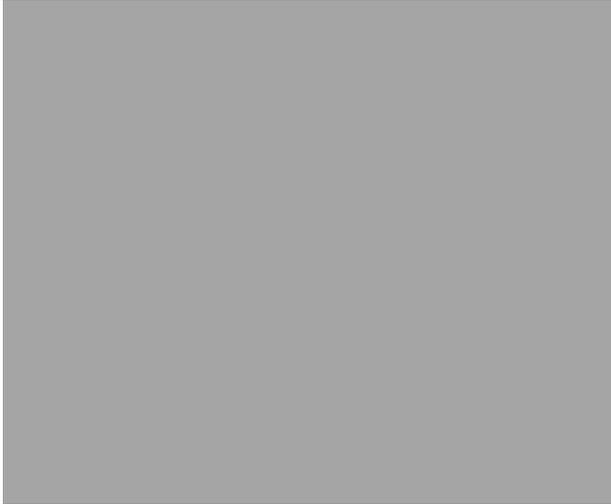
### Section Three: Creating Difference

During apartheid SANG contained art by black people, but the treatment of black subjects was not comparable to that of whites. The particulars of this distinction conveyed the political message that SANG remained a white house. Until almost the end of apartheid, SANG continued to concentrate its efforts on developing and sustaining a relationship with the white audience, as a consequence its frames of reference were attuned to white needs and interests. Within the context of the apartheid state these interests encompassed managed black inclusion. As Goldberg recounts in *The Racial State*, apartheid was first and foremost a 'white supremacist' ideology 'premised upon the demands and imaginaries of white domination' (2002: 208). Consequently, it required the 'controlled presence' of black participants (ibid.). A primary tenant of apartheid discourse was that racial groups should restrict their interests to 'their own' practices and 'biologically distinct' cultures (Cornevin 1980: 30-33). SANG was instrumental in giving vision to this concept, in the first instance through its emphasis on European and white art, and in the second, through its selective inclusion of work by black artists, whose presence was heavily policed.

#### Modernist art

Until the late 1980s work by black fine artists was almost totally excluded from the gallery. Indeed, the only black painter whose work was purchased prior to that was the

modernist South African artist George Sekota. Sekota's work, including *Sixpence a Door* [plate 5.7], was first shown in the gallery in 1949, as part of the visiting *South African Exhibition of Fine Art*, and was then purchased by the gallery in 1968 (Staff Member A field notes 2006).



**Plate 5.7** *Sixpence a Door* (Gerard Sekota no date), South African Art Exhibition Catalogue 1948, SANG archive (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

It is important to recognise that the gallery's general failure to show black fine artists did not reflect the realities of the Cape art world, where a burgeoning black fine art scene ran alongside more traditional African practices (Elgar 2007; Kolane 1995). Significantly, the absence of black fine artists at SANG was accompanied by an increase in works that included black subjects. One of the most notable features of black inclusion at SANG during apartheid was that for the most part it manifested as a black presence in white artists' work (similar to how white women were initially introduced to the collection as the subjects of white male painters). The primary reason for the growth in black subjects was that the most well-known white artists in South Africa, including the modernist artists Irma Stern and Alex Preller and the more traditional Neville Lewis, frequently used black models for their work.

Some of these painters provided sentimentalised renderings of Africa, as exemplified in the hyperbolic description of modernists, in the catalogue for the *South African Exhibition of Fine Art*, as artists who 'filled their canvases with the sunshine and breathtaking colours of the South African veld, with the fascinating types of the Bantu tribe,

and with the elephants and antelopes of unspoilt Africa'.<sup>39</sup> Other artists, including Stern and Lewis, gave recognition to the individuality of their black subjects [plates 5.8 and 5.9].



**Plates 5.8 and 5.9** Left: Asandi Girl (Irma Stern n.d.). Exhibited SANG 1949-50.  
Right: Blind Malay (Neville Lewis n.d.) Exhibited at SANG 1961  
(photographs by Catherine Hahn)

SANG's inclusion of works with black subjects challenged the notion that during apartheid the museum existed in a closed white world. However, the absence of paintings by black painters, also activated the concern, raised by Hall and Metcalf Jr., that whites were being made the 'African authority' (1994: 9). The idea of a white 'African authority' was reinforced through the gallery's bounded inclusion of work by black sculptors who employed 'traditional' African techniques and were the only black artists to have works regularly included in exhibitions during the apartheid era.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Egeland 'South African Art Exhibition Opened' *South Africa* September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1948 p.236 'News cuttings' SANG archive.

<sup>40</sup> Breuil. A. Introduction in Paris, J. Transcriptions of Rock Painting. Cape Town National Gallery of South Africa 1951 'Cat Box' SANG Archive.

## An artistic cul-de-sac

From 1950 African sculpture was included in SANG's displays. Paris had the atrium cleared of Roman and Greek plaster casts and exchanged for 'examples of Prehistoric Bushman and indigenous Native Arts',<sup>41</sup> in order to show:

The arts of those people who inhabited the land before the European settlements and therefore begin the art history of the Continent ... it being realised that although South Africa in its present form is comparatively new in its culture, it is also in many respects the cradle of cultures<sup>42</sup>

The replacement of the European casts with 'prehistoric' African work was hugely significant as it meant the museum departed from the 'short-view' of western art history beginning with Greek and Roman antiquity and instead drew attention to far older local produce. However, Paris' characterisation of African art as being by those who inhabited the land 'before' Europeans was misleading as the display contained works by contemporary black artists (ibid.). Likewise, his reference to the 'cradle of cultures' associated African art with artistic infancy. Moreover, these art works were housed differently from the rest of the display. The sculptures were placed in the atrium, rather than the main display halls, which dislocated them from the rest of the collection. In the process it severed the line of continuity from the 'ancient' to the modern by segregating African art from art history proper. The severing of African art from the museum proper was assured through the lack of recognition given to it in the museum's 'Colour Wheel' (1961) (discussed in section one). The artistic cul-de-sac foisted on these works chimes with colonial exhibitions of African art described by Annie Coombes in *Reinventing Africa*, which were deliberately designed to put African culture on display as a discreet entity, in order to naturalise 'an arbitrary racial hierarchy' (1994: 192).

## The modernist display

African art was primarily displayed at SANG as the precursor to white modern art. The resultant displays offered an opportunity to view European and African art works in the

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<sup>41</sup> ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Paris 1952: 5-6, 'Exhibition of XVII Century Dutch Painting Van Riebeeck Festival Cape Town National Gallery of South Africa', 'Cat Box' SANG archive. (Paris 1952: 5, 6)

same space, but the boundaries between the traditions remained tightly drawn. For instance, Paris was careful to distinguish the English artist Henry Moore from local black sculptors in the *Henry Moore Sculpture Exhibition* (1952), stating: ‘in spite of certain similarities of form ... primitive and archaic art and the art of modern times are poles apart ...’ as ‘primitive art’ exists solely to express ‘the accepted values of tribal society’ (Paris 1952: 3).<sup>43</sup>

In its liminal inclusion of African art SANG again took its lead from what were considered to be the more advanced and experimental sites overseas. For example MOMA, which housed the world’s largest modernist collection, compartmentalised its work into strict developmental stages from the African ‘primitive on’ (Duncan 2009: 104). Similarly, the 1948 exhibition, *40,000 Years of Modern Art: A Comparison of Primitive and Modern*, hosted by the ICA in London, provided a small ensemble of African art in the basement, so as to offer an opportunity ‘to trace correlations between the “primitive” and the “modern”’ (Taylor 1999: 196).

SANG’s use of African art as the precursor to modernism corresponded with western museum practice, yet took on a particular significance in the South African environment. According to Sharp, museums that hosted traditional African art in South Africa effectively took on the role of the ‘benevolent trustee’ of the ‘proto-nation’s’ heritage (1988: 91). In the South African context the display of African art vindicated separate development policy through the rationale of cultural protection. A role discernible in the advice SANG gave to white audiences on how to view African art, which centred on the ‘need’ to preserve its authenticity. For example in the catalogue for the exhibition, *African and Christian Sculpture from the Irma Stern Collection* (1955), Paris contended that Europeans could be profitably influenced by African art, but intimated the same should not happen in reverse, warning the (white) audience to be careful:

When we insist on our interpretations ... The African shows great surprise when we explain our feeling to him, and is only too ready to destroy his traditional sculptor’s skill by pandering to our two

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<sup>43</sup> Paris 1952: 3, *Henry Moore Sculpture Exhibition*, ‘Cat Box’ SANG archive.

dimensional tastes and flat pictures (look at the tourist objects he now produces)<sup>44</sup>

Here, the paternalistic representation of the unsophisticated African at risk from contact with the European made clear that despite being included in SANG's exhibitions black artists were not the desired audience for the gallery's art.

## Extinguishing hybridity

Significantly, the distinction constructed between white and African practice was extended to all peoples other than white, lending support to the argument that SANG materialised the state's separate development policy. SANG's support for segregated cultural practices manifested most obviously in its discrepant treatment of Malay and 'coloured' art.

In 1955 the gallery held an exhibition of Malay art entitled: *Exhibition of Handwork and Craftsmanship*.<sup>45</sup> In the exhibition catalogue specific attention was drawn to the distinctive 'character' of the 'Cape Malay' who was suggested to have:

Retained a physical and mental affinity with that far ancestry, and in manner and mode of living reflected their Oriental heritage, with its suggestion of high standing and dignity<sup>46</sup>

The author of the catalogue, M. K. Jeffreys, used her affirmation of the Malay's unique 'high standing' culture as a contrast to what she described as the culture 'lacking in the coloureds'.<sup>47</sup> Her assertion rested on the notion that the dual racial heritage of 'coloured' Capetonians impacted negatively on their art (ibid.). Jeffreys' championing of the Malay's singular ethnic identity, culminated in her hope that the exhibition would stimulate 'a renewed consciousness' in the Malay for 'what is their own' (ibid.: 2, 3).

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<sup>44</sup> Paris 1955: 4 African and Christian Sculpture from the Irma Stern Collection, National Gallery of South Africa, 'Cat Box' SANG archive.

<sup>45</sup> Jeffreys 1955 *The Cape Malays A Brief Commentary* by Miss M.K. Jeffreys Cape Town National Gallery of South Africa, 'Cat Box' SANG archive.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

One explanation for Jeffreys' disparagement of 'coloured' culture (in contrast to Malay) is that a close biological and cultural link existed between white and 'coloured' people in South Africa. In the 1950s families with different racial origins were still prevalent in the Cape and the majority of the population was of mixed heritage. It was only in 1927 that the *Immorality Act* made it illegal for unmarried people to have interracial sex and 1948 when the *Mixed Marriages Act* prohibited all interracial sexual relations (Morrell 2001: 262). The permeable boundaries between racial groups threatened white sovereignty, leading to emphatic denials of areas of congruity between white and 'coloured' cultures (ibid.: 262-263). Jeffreys' refusal to recognise 'coloured' culture on the same terms as white appears congruent with these concerns as she framed it against her affirmative description of the Malay's distinct culture.

The idea that the gallery sought to distance white culture from 'coloured' was supported by Paris' actions outside of SANG. In 1953 Paris was invited to open an exhibition of 'coloured' fine art at the Zonnebloem College in Cape Town. Paris used his speech, which was recorded in the *Cape Times*, to refute the possibility that the 'coloured' community could find positive attributes in their hybrid ethnicities,<sup>48</sup> In his speech Paris described 'coloured artists' as having a 'particularly tenuous' position in the art world as they were 'devoid of an art tradition' because their roots lay in 'two worlds'.<sup>49</sup> In order to overcome what he postulated as a serious deficit Paris enjoined 'coloured' artists to become a 'Coloured people' which he asserted would only be achieved when the 'Cape Coloured house was as much a part of Coloured life as the palazzo was of the life of the 16th-century Venetian'.<sup>50</sup> Paris' decision to use the Venetians as his example, accentuated the divide between the 'Coloured house' and the palace and the implied uncultured 'coloureds' and high cultured Europeans.

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<sup>48</sup> *Lack of Adventure in S.A. Art* Cape Times 21st October 1953 'News cuttings' SANG archive.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



**Plate 5.10** Article title: 'Eager Students at Art Classes for Coloured'  
(‘Newscuttings’ SANG archive)

There is no record of the art shown in the 1953 Zonnebloem exhibition, but it is anticipated that it mirrored fine art exhibitions by white artists. The art training ‘coloured’ children received in the apartheid school system was in ‘Western European and North American Art’<sup>51</sup> and a newspaper article from 1947 details the widespread involvement of ‘coloured’ students and artists in fine art groups and initiatives in the Cape [plate 5.10].<sup>52</sup> Paris’ refutation of ‘coloured’ culture on the basis of its ‘two world’ origins therefore hints at a defensive stance based on the perceived threat from ‘coloured art’ to the sanctity of the white display and by extension the apartheid state.

## Conclusion

The first decade of apartheid (1948-58) saw SANG develop its unique character as a white South African space. The era saw a marked increase in formalised power at SANG, exemplified in the introduction of an instructive layout and educational scheme. At the same time the museum offered itself as a participatory experience. SANG’s adoption of practices akin to those in progressive modern art museums and the education and entertainment industry enabled it to effectively engage with the wider white family. Taken together these strategies led to a significant increase in visitor

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<sup>51</sup>The apartheid education system provided art training based on racial group. ‘Coloured’ schools received instruction that was less well funded, but along the same lines as white schools, with the exception that some white pupils specialising in art received an expanded curriculum that touched on modern and African art alongside their European training. In contrast African schools had no funding for art lessons, although students frequently took classes outside school (Honey 1986).

<sup>52</sup> A description of the extensive engagements of black adults in fine art groups was discussed in ‘Eager Students at Art Classes for Coloureds’, which described one Cape Town fine art school with over 300 weekly participants, Cape Times 8th October 1947 ‘News cuttings’ SANG archive.

numbers. In 1941 there were 109,500 visitors, in comparison to 123,500 in 1950 (Paris 1951: 7). This marked a 14,000 increase in visitors over nine years, despite a significant decrease in the population of the Cape over the same time period, due to soldiers returning to their home towns after the Second World War (Paris *ibid.*: 7). The gallery's Assistant Director, Sibbert, attributed this increase directly to the introduction of the new education and display strategies (1950: 3).

It has been shown the SANG's first Director, Paris, utilised technologies borrowed from the temple and more experimental museums to promote and extend apartheid's reach into the cultural sphere. It was during this period that SANG consolidated its distinction from the temple model and set itself up as a white political home. SANG's participatory approach meant the state's political concerns were quietly and pleasurably written into the museum experience and by extension the consciousness of the white audience. The Randlords' collections and the décor provided a backdrop to this experience that rewrote South Africa's divided history as one of naturalised white rule. Black artists and visitors were invited in to the gallery, but their experience was one of liminal inclusion. The presence of black people was at least partly intended to suggest the notion of a natural racial order: each race was restricted to representing 'their own' culture with the exception of whites whose heterogeneity marked their advance. Thus, SANG's white audience were framed as the gallery's owners and the black audience, as restricted guests.

## Chapter Six:

# Resistance and Change

A jagged fault-line cuts through recent South African history. It is a year, 1976, the year the children of Soweto decided to resist their oppression. Peaceful protest was met with police gunfire, and soon Soweto was aflame. The furious sparks set the rest of the country alight; hundreds died, thousands fled. In the space of a few months, things in South Africa had changed forever (Williamson 1989: 8)

Between 1948 and 1975 SANG's position as *the* national gallery went almost unchallenged. Its established reputation, sizable fine art collection and cohesive infrastructure accorded the gallery credibility as a national site, whilst SANG's educational and leisure activities made it accessible to a broad white audience. However, in the decade following the Soweto riots of 1976 SANG's sheltered white world was turned on its head. The riots precipitated mass protest against the state and spilled over South Africa's borders into international debates centred on the wrongs of apartheid. In the resultant climate of insurrection and oppression cultural resistance emerged as a potent force, and with it new and challenging forms of art. In this context of competing claims to culture SANG's role as a conduit for white hegemony was exposed and the gallery was forced to adapt its *modus operandi* to retain its credibility as a national site.

This chapter focuses on the impact of cultural resistance on the gallery between 1976 and 1994. The first section, *Art as a Weapon of the Struggle*, explores how the resistance movement and the cultural boycott impacted on South Africa and how SANG responded to the ensuing external pressure. The second section, *Bringing the Outside in*, examines how the employment of black professional staff created tensions at SANG that served as stimuli for change. The third section, *Agents for Change*, investigates the specific practices that black staff introduced to SANG in the early 1990s and the impact of these practices on the space.

The chapter relies heavily on evidence gathered from interviews. I conducted ten interviews with gallery staff, past and present that fed into this chapter: three with

education officers, two with assistant curators, three with curators and two with volunteer guides. Nine of the interviews were recorded via dictaphone and one with notes. Further information was derived from texts pertaining to resistance art and gallery texts related to staffing and the Education Department. The gallery was closed from 1991 to 1993 for refurbishment, analysis therefore relates to the periods when it was open, from 1976 to 1991 and 1993 to 1994.

## Section One: Art as a Weapon of the Struggle

In her renowned book *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1989) Sue Williamson traces the impact of cultural resistance on the wider community and its influence on the production of political art. In doing so she reveals the critical role resistance art and the cultural boycott played in furthering the movement towards democracy. Further contributions to this field of research have been made by cultural theorists (Richards 1991, Koloane 2000, Mdanda 2000 and Peffer 2009) who have explored different facets of the resistance art movement and their bearing on the community. The research is revealing and imperative. Yet, its focus on community practice means it does not provide detailed analysis of how the boycott and resistance art impacted on state museums including SANG. The gap in research reflects ‘multiculturalism’s traditional’ interest in studying the ‘margins’ of society rather than its ‘social centre’ (Kincheloe 1999: 14), and the fact that government funded sites have been widely perceived as impenetrable monoliths and therefore only capable of superficial change.

The gap in analysis of state institutions during the latter years of apartheid has been brought into sharp relief by a focus on these sites at the onset of democracy, which is considered by many to be the point in time when South Africa’s museums underwent their most significant change. For example, Grundlingh (2009) and Dubin (2009) propose that the state’s museums were fundamentally altered through democracy as it unseated previously fixed norms and power structures. The moment of democracy is important in South Africa, not least because of the rights it accorded all South Africans, but it should not be seen as *the* moment that transformation occurred in South Africa’s apartheid museums.

In his essay on collective memory in South Africa, *Dynamics of Distortion in Collective*

*Memory*, Michael Schudson suggests the emphasis on the moment of democracy has repressed conflict in the interest of ‘togetherness’ (1995: 353). He notes that by focusing on democracy researchers have ignored the racial tensions through which institutional change occurred (ibid.), as a consequence, the false impression has been created that transformation was achieved in South Africa through white and black co-operation in the pursuit of common goals (ibid.: 353-354). Black agency risks being diluted in this story of co-operation as whites are cast as the willing supporters of black liberation rather than, as was more frequently the case, opposed to change (ibid.: 353). In this process racial fissures and inequalities have been ‘papered over’ in the interests of ‘national unity’ (de Kok 2002: 57-74). Critical evaluation of the role that conflicting forces played in shaping SANG prior to the end of apartheid is therefore required. This critique enables identification of the processes that led to institutional reform and the obstacles they encountered.

## Pressure to change

Art cannot exist without society. There can be no line separating the artist from his community. The progressive effect of art on society gives rise to cultural growth (Basil Dube ‘Readers Comment’ *The New Nation* 3rd September 1987 – reproduced in *Resistance Art* Williamson 1989: 9)

To understand how SANG became a site of conflict in the late 1980s requires awareness of the context in which this tension emerged. In the 1970s and early 1980s large sectors of the community were galvanised into political action by state oppression. Out of this process art came to be viewed as a ‘weapon of the struggle’ (The Poster Book Collective 1991: 3). The resultant political art movement gained impetus from government efforts to suppress it. In 1979 the government made a clumsy attempt to deal with student protests by banning cultural groups alongside other organisations (Sachs 1988: 24). In response a conference was held in Cape Town entitled *The State of South African Art* (1979), which called for a boycott of all state-sponsored art exhibitions and institutions (ibid.). In December 1980 the international community demonstrated its support for South African cultural activism by ratifying the cultural boycott in the United Nations General Assembly and commending black South African organisations for ‘courageously and effectively’ demonstrating against those who defied the boycott, stating: ‘collaboration with the ruling power in South Africa ... when there

is national resistance by the oppressed people – is involvement with apartheid’ (Reddy 1984: 1). International support for the cultural boycott raised the profile of art activism and by the early 1980s resistance art had become integral to the liberation struggle (Mdanda 2000: 194).

Crucially, during this period public museums lost their value as central conduits for art as they were not seen as relevant to emerging artistic practices (ibid.: 10-11). The heightened profile of the resistance art movement led thousands of people to take up creative enterprises under its auspices and prompted the emergence of numerous non-governmental organisations to cater for their needs (Mdanda 2000: 8-11, Koloane 2000). There was a general consensus among new art practitioners that the objects they produced in this politicised forum were not intended for ‘the art-market’ and that the media they used, such as posters and t-shirts, fell outside of what would traditionally have been seen as art (Berndt 2007: 70). For example, some of the most iconic resistance art images were political posters, such as Dikobe Martins’ black and white image of the Black Consciousness leader Steve Bantu Biko who was murdered by the police in 1976 [plate 6.1].



**Plate 6.1** ‘Steve Bantu Biko’ poster (Dikobe Martins 1977)

Artists in the resistance movement who retained a commitment to fine art also frequently chose to prioritise ‘the struggle for control of the means of communication over the struggle for a place in the terrain of art’ and as a consequence did not view the established art world as a suitable vehicle for their art practice (Berndt 2007: 15). The rejection of traditional institutions was most noticeable in the few instances where white college educated fine artists aligned their practices with the struggle. For example, Gary Van Wyk conceptualised his figurative paintings as a ‘street art project’, which he intentionally created on a scale suitable for use as banners at political meetings rather than as fine art for a gallery (Williamson 1989: 117). Similarly, Manfred Zylla refuted the rarefied understanding of art as ‘masterpiece’ by creating interventionist work (ibid.: 105).<sup>1</sup> Like Van Wyk, he did not engage with state museums, but instead displayed at the Community Arts Project (CAP). In 1982 Zylla staged an art event at CAP entitled *Inter-Action* in which he invited audience members to ‘paint over’ his art works (Walter accessed 15/07/15).<sup>2</sup> The political nature of Zylla’s art projects was evident in a participant’s response as follows:

Manfred had had to sacrifice his images as ‘art work’ to make way for the people ... He showed us through his act that a real change in values means a deep change in attitude, and that we are all going to have to give up a hell of a lot to change our habits and values in uncountable ways if we want to create a truly democratic social order (art participant interviewed by Williamson 1989: 105)

The idea of art as ‘social conscience’ captured the public imagination and brought value to it beyond the museum. SANG’s increasing irrelevance under these circumstances was compounded by its association with the state and by the terms of the boycott, which discouraged engagement with it. Local newspapers with black readerships, such as *South* and *New Nation*, ran critical articles on the gallery<sup>3</sup> and independent cultural organisations, such as CAP and the District Six Museum, publically refused to engage with it (Staff Member A 2006: 19-26).

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<sup>1</sup> See Sue Williamson 1989 for detailed discussion on these artists and images of their works.

<sup>2</sup> Zylla produced a catalogue of the event, which was seized by the police on its first copy and subsequently banned (Walter 1999 *Manfred Zylla* by Starship=Magazine.org accessed 15/07/15).

<sup>3</sup> 1980s various – SANG ‘newspaper-cutting’ micro-fish archive.

## Representing whiteness and breaching the boycott

Widespread antipathy towards SANG as an apartheid museum was given impetus by the gallery's initial response to the struggle, which was to seek refuge in a protectionist white stance. Annual reports produced by SANG in the 1980s indicate it initially responded to the changing political climate by repositioning itself as a white enclave. It achieved this aim via the development of its core white South African and European collections. By paying overt attention to the heritage value of art SANG moved away from its previous manifestation as an innovative site towards a traditional standpoint in which white patriotism played a principle role. Part of the reason for this new emphasis appears to lie with the taste of its Director, Raymond van Niekerk (1975-1988), which was described by a member of staff as 'distinctly conservative' (Staff Member A 2006: 244). However, van Niekerk's personal interest in traditional western art does not wholly explain the gallery's investment in white artists. Rather, the specifics of the gallery's investment indicate staff sought refuge from the turmoil outside the museum by responding as 'whites in a crisis' through the adoption of a 'right-wing code' (Kincheloe 1999). Kincheloe describes how the pressure experienced by 'white patriots' when faced with opposition encourages them to adopt a defensive position, which becomes the reactionary signifier of their 'new self' (ibid.: 7). SANG's white staff members are unlikely to have identified themselves as 'white patriots', nevertheless, the actions they took on behalf of the gallery served as white counter-propaganda to the art activism outside.

## Corralling the wagons

SANG's defensive position manifested most obviously in its focus on modernist South African and English art, which cemented its bond with England and the wider 'white family'. The museum hosted two major retrospective exhibitions of the modernist South African artists Maggie Laubser and Walter Lappiss (Staff member A 14/11/2006: 51). The South African modernists were linked with English establishment figures through substantial purchases of work by academic English painters who had trained at the Royal College in London and/or The Slade. These included: Ronald Kitaj, David Hockney, Lucien Freud, Frank Aurbach, Gary Wragg and Michael Porter (Staff member A 14/11/2006: 41, 96). The introduction of works by respected members of the English

art establishment to SANG bolstered the reputation of the white South African artists, as it drew attention to their shared heritage in ‘painterly’ figuration.

As well as strengthening its ties with England SANG foregrounded its Dutch heritage by placing Jacob Pierneef’s woodcuts in a privileged position in the front hall for the first time (Proud 2000: 51-52). According to the curator of the historic collection the unique positioning of Pierneef’s work was intended to signal the artist’s singular status as ‘the South African tome’ (Ibid.). The position of the work also lent support to Afrikaner ideology as Pierneef is widely credited as being the creator of ‘the mythology of Afrikaner Nationalism’ (ibid.: 42). This role was ascribed to him because of his commitment to the Afrikaner cause and outspoken nationalism, which was typified by his expression: ‘You must travel with your own people on the ox wagon’ (Peffer 2009: 225). Pierneef composed his landscapes specifically to represent South Africa as the Afrikaner’s chosen land. For example, *Tree Trunks*, owned by SANG, accorded the viewer entry to a foreboding landscape being brought under control by colonisation, through its central motif of the ‘straight-backed’ tree (ibid.: 225) [plate 6.2].



**Plate 6.2** Tree Trunks (Jacob Pierneef n.d) SANG  
(image courtesy of SANG)

The white patriotism engendered through the placement of Pierneef's art works in SANG's front hall was enhanced by the re-arrangement of Sir Abe Bailey's sporting collection along the full length of the back hall (Proud 2000: 51-52). Top and tailing the gallery with these masculine images metaphorically corralled the rest of the collection under their gaze. Here, as in the gallery in its early stage of development, the 'magisterial' presence of the colonisers served as a barricade against black participation.

## Breaking the boycott

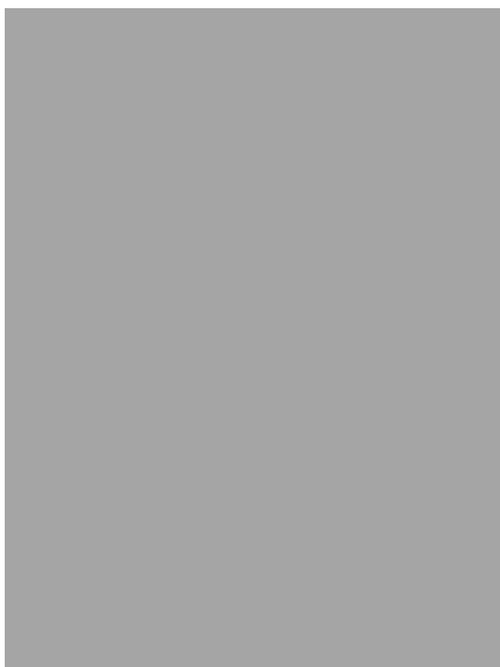
The gallery's re-arrangement around hyper-visible white themes can best be interpreted as a protectionist stance developed out of the perceived threat of black encroachment (as it was when the gallery first opened) – an interpretation lent support by the gallery's response to the cultural boycott. Rather than adhere to the boycott, and restrict its purchases to South African produce, SANG initially treated international sanctions as an obstacle to overcome. A senior white staff member described breaking the boycott in its first year as if were a personal and institutional achievement, which he framed as 'testimony to the enterprise, enthusiasm and dedication of the gallery staff' (Dolby 1981: 49).<sup>4</sup> Likewise, another white staff member recounted breeches of the boycott in positive terms as the precursor 'to buying some very important work' (Staff Member B 2006: 23). The conflation of sanction breaking with the success of the staff team brought white partisanship into play. The purchase of the work and its prominent position in the gallery undermined the anti-apartheid movement as it created the misleading impression that the boycott had been ineffectual.

While my interviews with white staff demonstrated they supported the apartheid government's stance on the boycott, they also revealed these staff members had an active interest in the cultural practices occurring outside the museum. The apparent contradiction in this stance suggests white staff members sought to resolve their adherence to state values through their commitment to an idea of an independent art world. For example, three white staff members described Ricky Burnett's group exhibition *Tributaries* as a watershed moment in South African art history despite the exhibition seemingly challenging the government's aims. *Tributaries* (held in

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<sup>4</sup> *A Short History of the South African National Gallery* p. 37-50, Lantern Magazine 1981 Catalogue Box 'South African National Gallery' in SANG archive.

Johannesburg in 1984) consisted of craft works made by black people from Mapululand and Limpopo and fine art made by formally trained white artists (Martin 1994). Placing these works on the same cultural platform challenged the apartheid hierarchy of superior white fine art and inferior African craft (ibid.: 20). Staff interest in the world outside the museum was also demonstrated in 1980 when SANG hosted a small exhibition of works by contemporary black artists from *Fuba* community art project and subsequently purchased a number of the works (van Winsen 1982: 3).<sup>5</sup>



**Plate 6.3** Triptych (Paul Stopworth 1979)  
(image courtesy of SANG)

In addition to these art works the gallery purchased a handful of carefully selected political art works by white fine artists, including Paul Stopworth's famous *Interrogators* (1979) [plate 6.3]. The painting portrayed the policemen implicated in the murder of the black activist Steve Biko in 1976 and was therefore clearly situated outside the realms of government approved art (evidenced by the gallery's decision to rename *Interrogators* as the less conspicuous *Triptych* when it was purchased in 1979) (Staff Member A fieldwork notes 2006). While these actions demonstrate white staff were not cut off from the wider cultural sphere their interventions were too small to

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<sup>5</sup> The National Gallery of South Africa Annual Report 1981-1982 (The National Gallery of South Africa Annual Report of the Board of Trustees April 1981 to March 1982 no.46 SANG Archive 'Gallery Reports').

disrupt SANG's main focus on modernist white South African and academic English art, in particular as the gallery appeared committed to expanding this white fare through breaches of the boycott.

## Carrot and stick

SANG's protective stance continued until the mid-1980s when further increases in international pressure coupled with the heightened status of resistance art encouraged it to adapt its practices to the changing world. The cultural boycott was so successful that by the mid-1980s many of those who had previously represented themselves as SANG's partners were no longer willing to loan or sell it work. The physical and psychological success of the initiative was compounded by the trade boycott, which led to a fall in the Rand, thereby raising the cost of foreign art to a prohibitive level (Dolby 1981: 42).<sup>6</sup> In this climate SANG's strategy of displaying modern European art to validate local white fine art practice became untenable as it was no longer possible to rely on buying or borrowing art from overseas (ibid.). Indeed, SANG's Annual Report of 1989, shows that over the preceding two years the gallery had been unable to host a single exhibition 'from abroad'.<sup>7</sup> At the same time that the gallery was finding it difficult to buy art work from outside South Africa resistance art was becoming established on the international stage as the definitive 'South African Art' (Williamson 1989). Even though the gallery appeared willing to buy resistance art works (as evidenced by its previous purchases) it was only when the government introduced its reform agenda that this ambition was realised on a wider scale.

Under PW Botha (1984-89) the National government altered its response to the revolutionary climate of the mid 1980s and instituted a two-pronged programme of repression and reform. The government's main intention was to defend the state, especially the position of whites (Barber 1999: 243). To this end the government introduced moderate changes that signalled its willingness to engage with the black population whilst implementing aggressive tactics to retain control (ibid.). Given that the government's intention was to be seen to have changed, without meaningfully

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<sup>6</sup> *A Short History of the South African National Gallery* p. 37-50, Lantern Magazine 1981, 'Catalogue Box - South African National Gallery' in SANG archive.

<sup>7</sup> 1989 SANG Annual Report p. 3, 58-59 'Gallery Reports' SANG archive.

addressing inequalities, it is unsurprising that its reform agenda coalesced around the most visible aspects of culture and, in particular, the practices of state museums, which it sought to portray as independent and inclusive (ibid.: 259).

Detailed analysis of the impact of the state on art institutions in America has been undertaken by Howard Becker in *Art Worlds* (1982). His research reveals that even the most oppressive governments hide their personal agendas behind practices of museum 'inclusivity' when they need to preserve 'public order' (1982: 165-191). Becker describes the practice of 'tacit inclusivity' as a classic approach adopted by the state, which frequently determines its power, not through censorship, but through largesse, which enables it to present itself as culturally developed and sophisticated while retaining 'behind the scenes' control (1982: 165). In South Africa this approach can be seen in the government's differentiated response to art activities in different locations.

The South African government's increasingly relaxed attitude to SANG and other public institutions contrasted with its harsh behaviour elsewhere. As a member of the Johannesburg Poster Book Collective recalls, the government's implementation of draconian crackdowns on the cultural practices of the mass movement in the mid-1980s occurred at precisely the same point in history that it was 'grudgingly' beginning to use the 'language of resistance' within state sponsored sites ('Poster Book Collective' 1991: 157). Proof of this distinction is provided in the treatment of the handful of art works in SANG's collection that fell within the auspices of resistance art. Rather than censor these paintings the senior government officials from the Department of National Education, who inspected the gallery annually, allowed them to stay on the basis of 'artistic merit' (Staff Member A 2006: 14). In contrast, under the auspices of the Publications Control Board wearing a t-shirt with a political design in a public space could result in arrest and detention (Williamson 1989: 93). Similarly, the production of political images, including posters and political graffiti, carried a sentence of two years in prison (ibid.: 97).

These double standards in part reflect the different contexts. The national art museum's audience would have been considered unlikely to engage in public disorder, and was therefore relatively 'safe' to expose to political art, whereas in the community political art presented a *real* challenge to state control (Williamson 2000: 36). Indeed,

Williamson, discussing the government's response to her own work, writes that it considered art to be 'impotent until it hit the outside world' beyond the 'semi-hidden confines of the gallery' (ibid.: 36-37). The inclusion of political art in the national art museum also enabled the government to show-off its 'liberality' to the international and white audiences who it most wanted to convince of its 'reforms'.

Awareness of the museums' diminishing power coupled with the need to present the country as undergoing change offer an explanation for the government's decision in 1988, at the height of state oppression, to introduce a 'system of framework autonomy for non-profit institutions'.<sup>8</sup> Despite the spurious rationale for its introduction, the new system enabled state museums to function as independent bodies and not, as hitherto, as an 'extension of the Public Service'.<sup>9</sup> Two significant changes were introduced at SANG in the wake of this decision, firstly it appointed a new Director, Marilyn Martin, to replace van Niekerk, and secondly it introduced black professional staff. Martin's appointment in 1990 was viewed with suspicion by many in the anti-apartheid movement, because of her prior employment as the Chairman of the South African Society of Artists (SASA), a government funded position, and her stance on the cultural boycott, which was that it posed a 'communist threat' to artistic freedom (Powell and Richards 1989: 27).<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Martin played a significant role in the diversification of the gallery, most particularly through her decision to expand the museum's staff base by employing black professional staff.

## Section Two: Bringing the Outside in

The gallery's inclusion of black professional staff extended black participation at SANG and left a lasting legacy on the museum. However, the initial experience of black staff was one of alienation. This section explores the divergent experiences of black and white staff and how these differences created tensions that served as a catalyst for change.

It is important to note that although my research revealed racial antagonisms at SANG

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<sup>8</sup> 1990: 10 Annual Report 60 'Gallery Reports' SANG archive.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> In Peffer (2009: 94-95).

there were also affirmative relationships between black and white staff members and all of the white staff I interviewed described the inclusion of black staff as a welcome and necessary change. Nevertheless, my interviews with staff members demonstrated a clear divide in their perception of the museum by race, which led to distinctions in how they negotiated their roles.

## Dissonant bodies

In 1989 SANG employed its first professional black staff member in the education department. He was joined by a further two black staff members in 1993.<sup>11</sup> For these staff members the gallery experience was one of discord and alienation. Puwar, writing in the context of the British establishment, provides a detailed exposition of the estrangement ‘racialised minorities’ experience in state institutions when they take up positions that were previously occupied by whites (2004). In her study she describes how the provisional position of black individuals is situated against naturalised white occupation:

Social spaces are not blank and open for any body to occupy. There is a connection between bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time. While, all can, in theory, enter, it is certain types of bodies that are tacitly designated as being the ‘natural’ occupants of specific positions (2004: 8)

Those who do not fit the somatic norm in white institutions, Puwar argues, effectively serve as trespassers, who she terms ‘space invaders’ as a consequence of their explicit state of un-belonging (ibid.). Similar circumstances at SANG were problematized by the political unrest. The boycott, and surrounding tensions, meant the gallery was neither secure in its white identity nor protected from the criticism of outside forces. In this environment black staff members experienced a double sense of dislocation, on the one hand cast inside the museum as dissonant bodies and on the other perceived by those outside the museum as complicit ‘insiders’ (Staff Member E 14/11/06: 19-26). The tensions encountered by black staff outside the museum reflect the seriousness with which the cultural struggle was taken and the widely held perception that working for government backed institutions was tantamount to working for the enemy (Berndt 2007:

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<sup>11</sup> One of these staff members was African in origin and the other two ‘coloured’.

15). Although only one black staff member recounted experiencing open hostility to their role all those I spoke to expressed a sense of discomfort in working at the site.

## White staff experience

Tellingly, in contrast to black staff, white staff members described their experience of working in the gallery as if it were largely unencumbered by apartheid. For instance, one of the white staff members I interviewed described the gallery during the 1980s as having been dislocated from the state (Staff member A 14/11/06: 160). He supported this viewpoint with the conjecture that the gallery had been far less involved with the government than ‘other institutions’ and as a consequence had not been as affected by apartheid (ibid.). The staff member elaborated his point by making reference to the liberalism of SANG’s staff:

The people who were working here in the eighties if you had been let’s say conservative ... politically this would not have been a very conducive environment to work in (Staff member A 14/11/06: 161)

The staff member’s recollection of SANG as a politically liberal, independent environment was shared by another white member of staff who leaned behind his desk during my interview to pull out a multilingual sign on which SANG’s opening times were stated in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. To the staff member the sign, which hung in the gallery vestibule throughout apartheid, symbolised the ‘fact’ the gallery had never segregated its audience by race and by extension was accessible to all audience members (Staff Member B 2006: 22). The white staff members appeared keen to present SANG as an inclusive institution during apartheid. Yet their portrayals were riddled with contradictions. For instance, one of the staff members above recalled in interview that ‘there were not, sort of, black and white or cut off areas [in the gallery]’, but then went on to describe how it would have been ‘very unusual’ for a ‘non-white school’ to be in the main gallery, except on rare occasions as part of a ‘coloured group’ (Staff Member A 14/11/2006: 149, 161). The inconsistencies in the white staff members’ recollections suggest they struggled to acknowledge that SANG was not a value neutral space during apartheid, which provides a partial explanation for why they did not effectively challenge the raced status quo.

## The white wing

Between 1992 and 2000 the curatorial team was entirely white and the education department almost exclusively black. The hierarchical division between the roles of educational and curatorial staff at SANG was congruent with international museum practice, but was exceptional in that it was predicated on race. The white curators had access to all of the collections, whereas the education officers' focus on educational exhibitions meant they only had direct contact with 'low end' art works that were deemed suitable for educational initiatives rather than the more prestigious pieces in the main display.

The distinction between the teams was underscored by geographic boundaries. In contrast to the white curators, who were situated in a corridor in the main gallery, the education team was housed in the annexe in the Human Resources Building, which could only be reached through an un-pedestrianized car park (Staff member E field notes) [plate 6.4]. The unadorned front of the Human Resources Building and its drab entrance-way provided a stark contrast to SANG's grand facade, replete with its stepped ascent, landscaped gardens and fountains. As a consequence, working in the annexe lacked the validation and status of employment in the main halls.



**Plate 6.4** The annexe (2006)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

An ex-staff member who worked in the annexe in the 1990s recalled how black employees perceived the divide between the buildings as a physical and psychological segregation, evidenced by their nickname for the curatorial section, which they referred to as the ‘white wing’ (Staff member E field notes). Along with its racial connotations, the term ‘white wing’ amalgamates West-Wing’ and White House, thereby aligning the curators’ area of the museum with governance and power and emphasising the unequal relationship between the two departments. The geographic division was reinforced through the expectation that staff would cater to the needs of ‘their own’ racial group. This meant that despite gaining access to the museum during apartheid, black staff were rarely invited beyond the periphery of practice.

The curatorial staff team was established so that each white curator had responsibility for a separate art collection. The similarities between this division and the Randlords’ prior dominion over ‘princely realms’ was signalled by a white staff member who referred to the curators as ‘keepers with a dynasty’ (Staff member A 2006: 111). As well as conferring status on the curators the division of the gallery into specialist realms enabled the museum to continue offering itself as a path of instruction, as it meant each curator became an authority on a particular type of art. The curators were responsible for teaching the specific features of *their* collections to the white volunteer guides, who were in turn tasked with passing this information to the white audience (Staff member A 14/11/2006: 83, 125). By this means the curators disseminated expert knowledge and cultural capital to the wider white public (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991: 39).

In contrast to the curators’ specialist roles the black education officers were expected to be ‘Jacks of all trades’ and were charged with catering for all of the black audience members’ needs (Staff member A 2006: 125). As a result black audience members risked being treated as an amorphous entity. This was demonstrated in the assignment of black staff to black visitors regardless of what language the black audience members spoke or the nature of their request (Staff member C 2006: 40, 44-46). A staff member described how the different treatment of black staff fed directly into audience experiences:

I mean [white] people would come with a particular query and it might be referred to a curator, something that relates to the library would be referred to the library, which was not the case when someone black came, they would take that person to me (Staff member C 2006: 46)

The expectation that the three black staff members would be able to cater for the various needs of black visitors anticipated a lower level of engagement with these audiences and a lower number of black visitors than whites. As the staff member above indicated, the arrangement also presumed black audience members would be less discerning than whites and not in need of the same individual care (Staff Member C 2006: 44-46). The hierarchical divide was further enhanced by the expectation that black school trips would be catered for almost exclusively in the annexe rather than the main site where white trips were facilitated (Staff Member A 2006: 149). It was therefore possible for a black visitor to visit SANG for the day without entering the main halls or viewing its collection (ibid.). The absence of black participation at the centre of SANG's practice and the heavily controlled nature of black inclusion helps explain why SANG has not been extensively analysed by those looking for transformations wrought by the cultural resistance movement prior to the end of apartheid. However, there were areas of significant change.

### Section Three: Agents for Change

Black participants were disenfranchised by the gallery. However, the hierarchical division between white and black staff had further implications that ultimately yielded positive results. Whilst the peripheral location of SANG's black staff barred them from taking up the position of the 'somatic norm' and consequently of being authenticated insiders (Puwar 2004: 11-12), their 'outsider' status gave them access to a semi-independent realm unfettered by the expectations of the institution. As Gilroy writes, where those on the 'inside' of institutions find themselves 'tightly shackled into relationships of dependency' those on the periphery are able to act more independently and thus in more experimental ways (1993: 97-100, 110-112).

The education officers' responsibility to expand the museum audience coupled with their alienation in the gallery encouraged an alliance with the resistance art movement

and community art practice, supported by their role as ‘Jacks of all trades’ which fostered a holistic approach to art. To garner interest in art the education officers ran art workshops in schools and community centres in the black townships surrounding Cape Town (Staff Member C 2006: 25). To broaden access they ran additional sessions for teachers, in which they adopted a collaborative approach that enabled them to build on local experience.<sup>12</sup> In this respect their practices mirrored the progressive education philosophy espoused by the Brazilian educational theorist and socialist Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, who was popular in South Africa at the time (1972). Freire, in his work on grassroots teaching, describes education ‘for liberation’ as a process whereby the educator and educated reach ‘conscientization’ or real-consciousness (1972: 35). At the basis of his philosophy is the notion of reciprocity in which the person teaching is also conceived of as a person learning. In this conception of education the educator and educated become ‘subjects in the task of ‘unveiling reality’ and by this means empowered to alter their own situations (ibid.).<sup>13</sup>

The guides’ adoption of an ‘education for liberation’ approach is discernible in the education exhibitions they hosted in the annexe, which comprised of art produced in the workshops (Staff Member C 2006: 27). The introduction of audience members to the gallery through their own art production is significant as it gave them a degree of purchase within the museum that would not have otherwise occurred. By establishing art workshops near to people’s homes participants were also encouraged to draw more closely on their own experiences and use artistic media with which they were familiar. As a result different artistic methods were brought into the museum including those that utilised craft techniques, such as applique, knitting and crocheting, and works made from inexpensive material such as ‘found-objects’, lino-cut and cardboard (Maurice 1993: 8).

Alongside the introduction of broader artistic practices the exhibitions exposed SANG’s audience to ideas that resembled those produced under the banner of resistance art. These ideas were animated by the concerns of the groups in which the art was created, such as women’s and old persons’ groups and mental health projects (ibid.). None of the

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<sup>12</sup> Information derived from interviews with SANG staff Sept-Dec 2006.

<sup>13</sup> In South Africa by 2000 this philosophy had become a popular means of promoting self-help and therapeutic initiatives, which diffused its revolutionary vigour, but in the early 1990s when the Education Officers were at their most active retained its potency as a radical mode of teaching (Edgar 2009).

exhibitions shown in the annexe prior to the end of apartheid were overtly political, but many engaged with political themes. For example, *The Weather Report's* (1993), title referred to the political 'climate' and contained work that raised social concerns, such as images of police brutality and black poverty (Staff Member C 2006: 30).

In the process of opening up the museum to a broader public the exhibitions reduced black antagonism towards SANG. For instance, CAP and the *Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture*, which had previously avoided involvement, lent their support to annexe exhibitions in the early 1990s (ibid.). The education exhibitions also encouraged white audiences to see diversification as a benefit to the museum rather than as a threat. According to the museum's Director, Martin, mixed craft and fine art exhibitions were initially met with disapproval and contempt by SANG's 'traditional stakeholders', but they gradually came to accept them as a positive addition through exposure to the shows (1997: 18). Widespread interest in the exhibitions led to an increase in audience numbers, which in turn prompted the gallery to move the displays from the annexe to the main halls in 1993 where it hosted them as part of the 'holiday itinerary' (Staff Member A 14/11/06: 142). The decision to display the exhibitions in its main rooms during the peak visitor period was a crucial advance that created the potential for embedded change.

## Picturing our world

In 1993 the first of these exhibitions *Picturing Our World: Contemporary Images of the Western Cape* was shown in SANG's main halls. As this was less than a year from the end of apartheid it should not be construed as a radical act of political activism. Rather, it can be seen as a demonstration of the cumulative impact of the resistance art movement, the boycott and black museum professionals on the gallery, situated in the broader context of national change. The content of the exhibition was not groundbreaking as it followed in the path of SANG's education exhibitions, in particular *Panels by the People of Cape Town* (1993), which showed in the annexe earlier in the same year. However, *Picturing Our World* was a landmark event in the gallery's history, as it brought this type of exhibition into the main museum space for the first time. It was also the first co-production between the education and curatorial department.

*Picturing Our World*, which took its concept and form from *Panels by the People of Cape Town*, presented art from different social perspectives based on the topic ‘Cape Town where I live’. The exhibition challenged the authorised view of Cape Town from the postcard perfect ‘white side’ of the city by drawing attention to the city’s construction as a raced space and providing images from the other side of the mountain, created in the black townships of the ‘Cape flats’ (Maurice 1993: 7-9).

*Picturing Our World*’s interest in decentring normative understandings of Cape Town tallied with the changing concerns of the resistance movement. Drawing on the 1987 conference *Culture for Another South Africa*, Colin Richards describes how resistance to the forces of apartheid shifted in the late 1980s to include a ‘cultural struggle for the control of representation of South African history and identity’. A shift motivated by the perceived need to move away from ‘art as a weapon of the struggle’ (Sachs 1990) in order to ‘achieve something “truly” South African’ (Richards 1991: 119). Where apartheid had placed black identity ‘beyond context and history’ the main challenge in the movement towards democracy became to ‘uncover history and recover tradition’ (ibid.: 130).

## Cape of Storms



**Plate 6.5** Cape of Storms (Billy Mandini 1988) SANG permanent collection (image courtesy of SANG)

The most significant contribution *Picturing Our World* made to diversifying SANG's practice was centring the black fine artist Billy Duyisele Mandini. Mandini was the only artist to be represented by three works in the exhibition and was given extensive attention in the catalogue, which treated his art works as the 'master-pieces' of the display (Maurice 1993). Foregrounding Mandini's work gave black audiences privileged access to the show. Firstly, because it placed a black artist in a position previously reserved for whites. Secondly, it drew attention to linocut, an art form which was commonly associated with black artists (because of its low cost and reproducibility) and, thirdly, gave voice to a political narrative that black audiences would more readily identify with than whites. It also drew attention to the presence of black fine artists in the South African art world. Hitherto black and white artists were generally defined in the authorised South African art world by their distinctions rather than their commonalities. For example, *Tributaries* (1994), though displaying black and white artists together, arranged work by the binary black craft/white fine art divide. The gallery's endorsement of black fine artists, through its centring of Mandini, therefore marked a significant departure from prior practice.

In *Cape of Storms* [plate 6.5] Mandini's translation of woodcutting techniques onto lino drew comparison with the Afrikaner Nationalist artist Jacob Pierneef. Further links to the Afrikaner tradition were provided in the image of settler sailing ships in Table Bay, which made reference to early settler iconography. These symbols of Afrikanerdom were offset against signifiers of apartheid (a 'whites only' sign, a tribal spear and a tyre), which brought the racial tensions in Cape Town to the fore.

The tyre, associated with 'necklacing' (the vigilante practice of killing alleged police informers by placing a petrol filled tyre around their body and setting it on fire) was presented as the focal point of the work where it replaced the Victorian scroll in the hands of two black cherubs. Here, Mandini's symbolism resonates with Jean Paul Sartre's description of Richard Wright's work, whereby he created a 'double simultaneous postulation where each word refers to two contexts; two forces' (Gilroy 2004: 146).

The alignment of the black cherubs with the tyre and ship was both provocative and portentous. On the one hand the work suggested that the symbols of colonial oppression

and violent responses to it were being carried into the 'heavens' so as to divest the Cape of its ugly past. On the other hand the position of the tyre like a halo at the apex of *Cape of Storms*, resting directly above the settlers' ship, hinted with macabre humour that its black purveyors may yet seek revenge. In the 1980s 'necklacing' had become the subject of widespread critical attention – having been notoriously linked with Winnie Mandela's 'with our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country' speech,<sup>14</sup> thereby increasing the work's sinister charge.

*Cape of Storm*'s macabre play with white authority was given further life through the particulars of the cherubs. As in Kara Walker's famous imagery of antebellum America, the use of silhouette accorded Mandini's figures an anonymity that gave them licence to speak the 'unspeakable'. In Walker's case the deployment of silhouette gave rise to a cast of racial phenotypes who enacted sexual and physical abuse. In contrast, Mandini's roughly hewn angels spoke to the potential of black violence without reducing the imagery to caricature. Mandini raced his characters by the simple method of inverting his lino-cut so as to make black angels out of white. In the transmutation from the white to black cherub Mandini refuted the traditional binary of the white angel/black devil, whilst re-creating this trope through the actions of his black angels (Kincheloe 1999: 4). Although it might be stretching a point to suggest his artistic inversion turned the angels into 'black imps and devil's' (ibid.) their presentation as potential 'necklacers' lent them similar intent. A reading supported by the fine art tradition, which splits its subjects into the good 'radiant white' and the bad 'opaque black' (Dyer 1997: 115). Mandini's manipulation of the racial binaries of western art was extended through his representation of the cherubs' eyes as blank sockets, which rendered their faces as masks. The phantasmagoria that this prompted of an unidentifiable black threat was replicated in another of his works in the exhibition: *Homage to Township Art* (1989) [plate 6.6].

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<sup>14</sup> The speech was made at a public rally in Munsieville, 13th April 1986.



**Plate 6.6** Homage to Township Art (Billy Mandini 1989)  
SANG permanent collection (image courtesy of SANG)

In *Homage to Township Art* Mandini depicted a giraffe being ‘necklaced’ by skull-faced cherubs wearing pointed party-hats. According to the exhibition’s co-curator Emile Maurice the picture was created in response to the killing of a giraffe for a braai (barbecue) and served as an ‘agitation for the environmental lobby’ (1993: 10). The picture also carried an alternate reading in its title, which presented necklacing as township art. In *Homage to Township Art* the cherubs in their party-hats offered a celebration of black misrule, supported by the Goyaesque depiction of the giraffe’s burning head. As such the work, in common with *Cape of Storms*, spoke sardonically to the potential for a violent black corrective to white rule. The title also drew attention to the work’s refusal to conform to tourist-driven expectations of township art. Again Mandini created a double entendre, this time through an image that both served as an aesthetic object and critically challenged the concept of township art.

The term township art gained derogatory connotations in the 1960s, when it became inextricably linked with white buyers from South Africa and overseas (Koloane 2000: 20-21). Work that fell into this category commonly centred on crowded, colourful township scenes, which adhered to a stylistic formula deployed to maximise saleability (ibid.: 22). Importantly, the art works that proved the most popular with white buyers, and were therefore the most repeated, provided images of the township with the ‘unpleasant and painful aspects of community existence removed’ (ibid.). As David

Koloane, identifies, in his essay *Postapartheid Expression and a New Voice*, to be a financially successful ‘township artist’ one had ‘to produce sanitized, virus-free variations’ of community life that gave the appearance apartheid worked for all (ibid.). Mandini’s visceral rebuttal of the fantasy of the hermetically sealed township pointed to the limitations of a genre removed from the realities of South African life. The presentation of *Homage to Township Art* in *Picturing Our World* offered a new and critical way to think about the Cape art scene and township life.

## Conclusion

Resistance art and the cultural boycott had a significant impact on the gallery. At first they encouraged it to adopt a defensive white position and then, through a mixture of government policy and staff interest, prompted it to change. The resultant employment of black professional staff enabled SANG to expand its influence to the black communities. As ‘Jacks of all trades’ the education officers opened up entrance routes to the gallery for black artists and audience members and expanded the gallery’s practice to include craft and community initiatives. The museum’s ability to adapt to these practices reflected its role as the political house, which made it tolerant of non-fine art objects and flexible enough to put some of its permanent collection into storage to make way for other art. The introduction of black professional staff and the consequent presence of black art makers in the annexe and work by black artists on the walls, indicated ownership of the house could potentially change hands. *Picturing Our World*, in particular, signalled the potential for change through its appeal to the experiences and political interests of black audience members. Importantly, by placing Mandini’s work at the centre of its display *Picturing Our World* presented a black artist in a position of power previously reserved for whites. The exhibition’s location in the main museum halls stood as testament to the education department’s deconstruction of SANG’s white view.

After apartheid a mixture of economic constraints and the retention of an all-white curatorial team meant the gallery did not transform to the extent anticipated by the advent of democracy and the state’s advocacy of racial equality. Twenty years after *Picturing Our World* closed Emile Maurice returned to the gallery, in his capacity as an ex-education officer, to sit on a panel discussion for a new exhibition: *Uncontained*:

*Opening the Community Arts Project Archive* (2013). The exhibition showcased work from SANG's collection by black artists that had not been displayed since the end of apartheid including Mandini's *Cape of Storms*. Exploring the implications of this art work being banished to the archive, Maurice concluded black resistance artists had not been given 'proper recognition and credit' for their significant 'contribution to the story of South Africa' (2013).<sup>15</sup> The gap in SANG's South African art history was lent pathos by the fact that Mandini and a number of the other artists shown in *Uncontained* had died in the twenty year period following *Picturing Our World*. Although not explicitly stated in the panel discussion there was a hidden suggestion that the absence of their work from SANG's displays correlated with an increase in white staff and decrease in black staff after the end of apartheid – having lent the keys to the house to black staff it now appeared that the white staff had taken them back.

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<sup>15</sup> Panel Discussion '*Uncontained*' January 2013, SANG, Iziko.

## Chapter Seven:

### Facing the Past

The institution proclaims its commitment to reconstruction, taking both a visible and a vocal position as challenger to the status quo, but reconstructive power is not shared let alone given over to the majority black populace (McGee 2006: 192)

In 1994, following the success of the education department's exhibitions, SANG acquired a large collection of resistance art. Through an emphasis on political art works and socially-themed displays SANG promoted itself as a vehicle for the new South Africa. Its championship of democratic processes was given value through the diversity of the art works on display, however, it remained largely under the control of white 'stakeholders and decision-makers' (McGee 2006: 190, 192). The potential implication of white 'ownership' of the museum is pursued through a case study of the exhibition, *Facing the Past: Seeking the Future* (2006), which reveals the retention of white staff led to the promulgation of a white point of view. Although SANG's white proprietors appeared keen to serve as welcoming hosts they frequently swept difficult or unresolved issues under the carpet and cherished familiar art works and audiences.

The first section, *Terms of Reference*, asks why following the end of apartheid white staff remained in charge of curatorship at SANG when the museum was publically committed to redress. In answering this question attention is brought to the wider failure to address white hegemony in South Africa's established museums. The second section, *Politics, Art and a White Lens*, explores the implications of retaining white gatekeepers through examination of the political discourse in *Facing the Past*. The third section, *White Artists and the Canon*, continues this exploration by investigating how the white guides negotiated artistic content in the display.

Information for the first section is derived from gallery reports and interviews with key staff members. Evidence for the case study has been gathered directly from the exhibition, including site maps, drawings and photographs of art work. Low lighting in the right-hand section of the exhibition hall prohibited the use of photography – where possible I supplemented this gap through archival images and sketches. My image-

making was complemented by attendance of three guided tours, which I taped and transcribed. One, The Friends of SANG tour<sup>1</sup>, was run by the exhibition's white curator, Joe Dolby, the other two tours were run by white volunteer guides<sup>2</sup>. Apart from the fact that the audience on The Friends of SANG tour was more vocal and engaged, all of the tours followed a similar format and the audience responded in comparable ways, suggesting the tours I attended reflected general practice.

## Section One: Terms of Reference

In 1996 SANG's Director, Marilyn Martin, committed the gallery to diversification, with the precursor that: 'we understand that redress only occurs when individuals and groups are empowered to represent themselves' (1996: 2)<sup>3</sup>. Martin's intention to diversify the gallery was underpinned by the Department of Arts and Culture (DACT) White Paper, which demanded cultural sites that received government funding 'ensure the correction of historical and existing imbalances'<sup>4</sup>. This demand was made with the explicit expectation that institutions would use 'affirmative action' where needed to employ black staff (ibid.). Yet despite SANG's desire to change, and the permission it was granted by the government to use positive discrimination, it did not redress the racial imbalance in its staff team.

The lack of black curators at SANG was situated within a wider absence of redress in South African museums. In 1999 the government set up an umbrella organisation, Iziko Museums of Cape Town, to oversee public museums in the Cape. Analysis undertaken by Iziko revealed a gap in power sharing at SANG and the other museums within its remit that remained unaddressed ten years after democracy. The 2003/4 Annual Report issued by Iziko lists employment figures by race for the thirteen institutions under its control. Data extrapolated from this report demonstrates wide discrepancies in employment positions by ethnic background, as set out in table 7.1<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Friends of SANG was set up with the express purpose of supporting the gallery and extending its collection. Members of the Friends pay an annual subscription and in return receive free entry to exhibitions and exclusive gallery talks - the talks follow the same format as the regular tours, but offer the Friends individual attention (field notes December 2006).

<sup>2</sup> There were no black volunteer guides working in the gallery during my fieldwork periods.

<sup>3</sup> Paper presented by Martin at Fault-lines Conference, 5th July 1996, SANG archive.

<sup>4</sup> *Arts, Culture and Heritage* Pretoria 4th June 1996: 8 'Reports' SANG archive.

<sup>5</sup> The information for the table was taken from the data provided in the Iziko Museums of Cape Town

**Table. 7.1** Iziko Permanent Employees by 'Post Level' and Ethnic Background (2004)

'Post Level' of Permanent Employees	Ethnic Backgrounds*			
	African	'coloured'	White	Total
Senior Management	0	2	5	7
Professionally Qualified, Experienced Specialist and Mid-Management	0	4	26	30
Skilled Technically and Academically Qualified Workers, Junior Management, Supervisors, Foremen and Superintendents	7	32	34	73
Semi-Skilled and Discretionary Decision Making	18	43	6	67
Unskilled and Defined Decision Making	0	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>179</b>

\*The survey identified black staff as either African or 'coloured', no staff members identified themselves as Indian.

For example, of the thirty-seven posts that wielded the most power in the institutions (Senior Management and Professionally Qualified, Experienced Specialist and Mid-Management staff) thirty-one were occupied by whites, six by 'coloured' staff and none by Africans. In contrast, of the sixty-nine roles with the least power: ticket sellers, guards and cleaners (in the table separated into Semi Skilled and Discretionary Decision making and Unskilled and Defined Decision Making roles), forty-five were filled by 'coloured' staff, eighteen by Africans and six by whites. The uneven spread of staff meant black employees were disproportionately represented at the bottom of the museum hierarchy, by more than ten black workers to every white, whereas at the top there were more than five whites to every black staff member. White retention of powerful jobs in the museum sector follows a broad pattern of inequality in South Africa, where 70% of senior management roles remained in white hands in 2000, despite whites comprising around 9% of the population (Steyn 2001: 155).

A breakdown of figures by museum was not provided in Iziko's 2004 report, but my experience of SANG indicates its racial profile was congruent with the other institutions under Iziko's umbrella. For example, all of its curatorial positions and its Directorship remained in white hands between 1994 and April 2009. In contrast, the vast majority of the paid floor staff (cleaners, guards and cloakroom attendants) were black. In 2000 the education department was reduced to a one person role, further decreasing the number

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Annual Report, and represents a truncated version of its material that I have adapted to engage specifically with the concerns of this study (2003/4: 33, 34), 'Reports', SANG archive.

of black professional staff in the gallery. It is worth noting that following Marilyn Martin handing in her resignation, in May 2009 the gallery appointed, Riason Naidoo, as its new Director. Although my research does not cover his time in office, the appointment of someone, who defined himself as Indian and black, to the museum's most senior role brought diversification to the gallery. However, in 2014 the government took the unprecedented decision not to extend his contract beyond the initial five years<sup>6</sup>.

The Group Areas Act (1950) provides a partial explanation for the continued racial imbalance of staff at SANG as it led to the creation of a large white and smaller 'coloured' neighbourhood close to the gallery that informed its demography. The demographic of the Western Cape also played a role as Cape Town is the only metropolis in the country where the African population is not the majority population group – although in 2007 it was still almost double that of the white population<sup>7</sup>. However, the most compelling explanation for the disproportionate number of white professional staff at SANG was that the white staff members already employed by SANG did not move on after apartheid.

The terms of democracy that were brokered between the ANC and the outgoing Nationalist government secured white public sector posts that would have otherwise been threatened by an incoming government seeking greater social parity<sup>8</sup>. Job security coupled with a depressed labour market left little incentive for white staff to seek alternative employment. These circumstances meant that the majority of the white curatorial team who were employed by SANG during apartheid were still in place in 2009. When the curatorial team expanded in 2000 it employed two further white curators.

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<sup>6</sup> Naidoo vowed to fight the decision in court. At the time of writing the outcome remains unclear (Tham, M. 'Blood on the Walls as South Africa's national gallery axes first black Director' Guardian Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/16/blood-on-the-walls-as-south-africas-national-gallery-axes-first-black-director> accessed 10/05/15.

<sup>7</sup> In 2000 the South African population was 72% African, 13% 'coloured' and 13% white (Lam et al. 2012; 6). In contrast, in 2007 in Cape Town and its environ, the population was 44% 'coloured', 35% African and 19% white (2007 census – 2007 Community Survey Analysis for Cape Town, Small, K p. 6-7. 2008 Strategic Development, GIS Department).

<sup>8</sup> The 'sunset clauses' negotiated between the Nationalist Party and the ANC guaranteed most public sector employees continued employment through the ANC's first term in government (Ferree 2011: 13, 14).

## Curatorship

The reason why SANG did not recruit black staff for the two additional curatorial posts is largely explained by the significance it placed on academic accomplishments. McGee identifies that the absence of black staff in South African museums stems primarily from the expectation that new staff conform to ‘western notions of professionalization’ (2006: 190), an attitude that is evident in Martin’s explanation for the absence of black staff at SANG in 1999:

South Africa lacks the black researchers in the fields of arts and culture, art historians and curators who can fulfil the task of reconstituting and reinterpreting history, art history and aesthetic production (1999: 2)<sup>9</sup>

Martin’s assertion that South Africa lacks black practitioners capable of ‘reconstituting and reinterpreting’ art history stems from an assumption that museum staff in professional roles should have academic credentials. Proof of this expectation was provided in SANG’s job descriptions, which stipulated that formal academic training was required, even when applying for entry-level posts. For example, the advertisement for the trainee curator post in 2004 required applicants to have ‘a degree in Fine Art or Art History’ (Goniwe 2008: 1). The expectation that new staff should match the professional background of existing staff, in all respects but colour, has been used in England to restrict potential applicants to what Puwar has described as a ‘known pair of hands’ (2004: 122). However, in the South African context SANG’s entrance criteria were too narrow to generate a competitive pool of black applicants. In this instance the selection criteria appeared to indicate a reliance on white historic precedence rather than an interest in managed inclusion.

During apartheid Fine Art and Art History degrees were only available in white universities. The requirement that new staff should hold a degree was therefore closely related to discrimination, not only in terms of the job description, but also in the chain of educational routes set out as the basis for recruitment. Universities that were designated ‘white’ under apartheid remained disproportionately so following democracy

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<sup>9</sup> Extract quoted in McGee (2006: 190), full article, March 1999, *Isintu* foreword by Marilyn Martin <http://media1.mmeb.co.za/iziko/sang/exhib/2000-pre/isintu/mm.htm> date accessed 12/08/2015.

as the majority of black students did not achieve ‘Matric Exemption’ (the South African equivalent of the French Baccalaureate), which was the standard required to study for a degree (ibid.). For example, in 2006 only 12% of African students who ‘completed senior school’ passed Matric in contrast to 50% of all white school leavers, as a consequence only a tiny proportion of black school leavers registered for and obtained degrees (Myburg 2007).. Indeed, in 2007 only 1.7% of the 25-29 year-old African population had a degree, in comparison with 16% of whites in the same age group (Lam et al. 2012: 5). Under these circumstances the small pool of black students who had the necessary requirements to enter university gravitated towards subjects with the greatest likelihood of academic and economic success, further limiting the number of black applicants for Fine Art and Art History degrees (ibid.).

The low numbers of academically educated black South Africans and their self-de-selection from the arts lends support to Martin’s contention that South Africa lacked ‘black researchers in the fields of arts and culture’ (1999: 2), particularly as the majority of the black art practitioners who followed an academic route went on to become successful artists (Perryer 2004). However, on the online forum Artthrob the artist and academic Thembikhosi Goniwe identifies that there were numerous black South African art practitioners who could be considered to have the requisite experience to work at SANG.<sup>10</sup> Challenging Martin’s rationale for the lack of black curators at SANG, Goniwe pointed out that the majority of black art professionals in South Africa received their training through workshops and community art centres, such as the Community Arts Project (CAP), Nyanga Art Centre, Ruth Prowse and Fuba (ibid.: 1). These institutions did not provide degrees. However, they did expose their students to a wide range of art and exhibition strategies and encouraged them to develop independently as art practitioners<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, these centres brought participants into contact with ‘community’ practices that the education officers had previously found effective in drawing in new audiences to SANG (as discussed in chapter six). The centres therefore provided a potentially rich source of new talent.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.artheat.blogspot.com.2008/08/beeline.html> accessed 8/09/10.

<sup>11</sup> See Kolane for a detailed description of the role of community centres in furthering black art education in South Africa (1999).

A possible reason why SANG did not seek applicants from community art centres is that its priorities significantly shifted after the onset of democracy. In the 1980s, in the wake of the resistance art movement, the gallery used grassroots education initiatives to engage with previously marginalised communities. Having established a relationship with these communities SANG returned to a focus on curatorship in the late 1990s (Staff Member C 2006: 55). SANG's renewed interest in curating formed part of a wider international phenomena, which as Keith Piper identifies in *Wait, Did I Miss Something?* arose from the concern to cater for the increasing numbers of artists who were being invited to participate in the museum from the periphery (2005: 39-40). The incorporation of a broader range of artists necessitated the interpretation of an ever more complex array of work, which led to a preoccupation with the expert interpreter (ibid.). Therefore, at the same time that black artists were being invited to participate in the museum there was a somewhat paradoxical increase in the reading of their works by white curators.

## Apprenticeships

At SANG the increase in white curatorship was accompanied by the development of a trainee curatorship programme for black staff. With the exception of the staff members who occupied the education department role all black professional staff who were employed by SANG between 1994 and 2006 were part of the apprenticeship programme. The initiative was funded by the Standard Bank's Traineeship Programme, which offered one year museum internships to people from 'historically disadvantaged backgrounds' to equip them to take on leadership roles.

The Traineeship Programme would be anticipated to provide a useful 'stepping stone' to becoming a curator. However, despite offering relevant training, SANG's apprenticeships did not result in black staff members being offered curatorial positions in the museum. Firstly, because white staff did not vacate the existing curatorial roles and secondly, because the only posts that did become available were given to white applicants<sup>12</sup>. As one black ex-member of staff succinctly summed up 'the assistant curator always stays the assistant and is always black' (Staff Member E 2006: 12)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> The Standard Bank funded traineeships with the explicit assumption that they would lead to permanent positions. An assumption that had its basis in past museum practice when white staff members advanced

The absence of 'move-on' in the curatorial team meant the assistant curator's time in the gallery was restricted to the twelve months of their apprenticeship, reducing their proprietorial claim on the space. The temporary nature of the assistant curator's role was replicated in that of the education officers, who were employed on a series of temporary contracts (Staff Member G 2006: 4). The transient position of black staff members, in contrast to the permanent employment of whites, produced conditions analogous to those under high-apartheid when only white staff members were employed by the gallery on a permanent basis with full employment rights<sup>14</sup> and when whites had overall responsibility for the gallery.

SANG made attempts to raise the status of black professional staff and to provide opportunities for advance. Most notably in 2006, when responsibility for a major exhibition, *Second to None*, was assigned to a black assistant curator (discussed in chapter ten). However, prior to this there was only one non-education exhibition, *Isintu* (1999), which was curated by black curators. In this instance the curators were brought in from outside the museum at the instigation of the exhibition's Australian organisers<sup>15</sup>. The fact that there were only two temporary black professional staff members employed at SANG at any one time meant that, with the exception of the education displays and *Second to None*, black staff had minimal influence on the museum post-apartheid.

## White Africans

Senior white staff indicated that the lack of black professional staff was an issue that should be addressed (field notes 2006, 2010). Yet, they also presented themselves as being able to effectively display black culture, thereby potentially disposing of the need for black staff. In 2006 Martin, in her role as the Director, and Carole Kaufmann, as the curator of African Art, were asked in interview by Katherine Goodnow, in *Challenge*

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from the education officer's role to the role of curator (Staff Member A 14/11/06: 127).

<sup>13</sup> I was informed by a member of the staff team that prior to the end of apartheid white applicants were also employed in traineeship roles. In these instances they generally went on to become curators, as had happened to this member of staff in the 1980s (field notes 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Honikman 1970: 10, South Africa Annual Report of the Board of Trustees for the Fiscal Year April 1967 March 1970 - three years, 'Reports', SANG archive.

<sup>15</sup> *Isintu* was an Australian South African collaboration, which showcased works by indigenous and black artists. The Australian team made black curatorship a pre-condition of their involvement, and consequently, SANG employed two temporary black curators (Grundlingh and Voyiya 2001), *Isintu*, 'SANG catalogues', SANG archive.

*and Transformation*, whether they felt being white had a detrimental impact on how they accomplished their role (Goodnow, Lohman and Bredekamp 2006: 174). Both replied in the negative, with the explanation that they were African:

When I go to Senegal – I was there three times last year – my presence is valued as an African, as a person who lives here, who has lived and worked on the continent all her life and not as a black person who was brought up in Switzerland ... Because that person is less African than I am, because of experience. Because one is not what the colour of one's skin is, one is the colour of one's experiences  
(Martin in interview with Goodnow 2006: 174)

I don't see any problems, I am a third generation African. My family comes from the Congo and the Eastern Cape and my father is a Xhosa speaker ... I see myself as an African and I love African art and I love the insight, the richness it gives me into African cultures and the doors it opens for me to form really great bonds of friendship with people from all over Africa ... My circle mirrors the demography of Africa ... I feel like an African ... I am African ... it is not a problem for me. I am not sure what other people's views would be on that  
(Kaufmann in interview with Goodnow 2006: 174)

As with a growing number of white South Africans, Martin and Kaufmann define themselves as African. This shift in self-definition can be viewed as a positive development, as it replaces previous white investments in a European identity. However, in negotiating this role Martin and Kaufmann did not acknowledge that the colour of one's experience in South Africa is largely dictated by the colour of one's skin – to the extent that being a white African cannot deliver a comparable experience to living as a black African. Martin's assertion that she was more African than a black person growing up in Switzerland was particularly problematic as she made it at a time when black African curators who lived in Europe and America had begun to establish reputations in South Africa that had the potential to challenge the white staff members' privileged roles (Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor are prominent examples).

Self-interest does not neatly apply to Martin and Kaufmann's arguments as they appeared committed to expanding SANG's artistic remit and its terms of display. However, the manner in which they represented themselves as African effectively sidestepped the need to employ black professional staff.

The presence of an all-white curatorial team and the reduction in size of the education department meant that SANG's exhibitions post-apartheid were almost exclusively curated by white staff. The curators frequently sought advice from 'local-experts' on African art displays and on specialist exhibitions, such as those concentrating on HIV/AIDS, and in this way opened up the museum to other decision makers. Nevertheless, white curators remained at the helm of almost all of the exhibitions and consequently performed as the chief authority on the nation's art. Explication of SANG's exhibitions also remained in white hands, with white curators passing information on the displays on to white volunteers who provided the primary interface with the public.

The white curatorial team had a degree of diversity. Four of the six members, including the Director (who acted as an occasional curator), were women, at least one staff member was gay and at least two were born and raised in countries adjacent to South Africa. The diversity of the team undoubtedly brought multiple perspectives to bear, but analysis of 'museum talk' also revealed similarities that amounted to a collective white voice. Looking back at the education department exhibitions, one can see that the gallery's failure to employ black curators on a permanent basis slowed its advance.

## Section Two: Politics, Art and a White Lens

In this section I explore the 'political talk' surrounding *Facing the Past*, looking first at its narrative context and then at specific themes within the display. A single case study does not provide evidence of wider museum practice. Nonetheless, analysis of the discourse that emerged from *Facing the Past* does point to a shared political outlook that could be interpreted as a pervasive white point of view. The narratives told by the white staff members resonated with those in the gallery décor, in that they were predicated on an idealised imagined future rather than the reality. Most of this discourse sat within the 'feel-good' story of South Africa's fledgling democracy that captured the imagination of the international community.

*Facing the Past* was conceptualised around the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Through public testimony of abuses it was anticipated the TRC would provide 'as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of

human rights' that had occurred in South Africa between March 1960 and December 1993 (Holiday 2002: 46). The optimistic hope of the TRC was that in exposing violations it would acknowledge the country's past and 'move on' (Ross and Reynolds 2004: 110-11)<sup>16</sup>. *Facing the Past* was the third exhibition at SANG to deal with this theme having been preceded by *Mute Testimonies* (1998) and *Can't Forget, Can't Remember* (2001). The prevalence of TRC based exhibitions at SANG reflects the commission's significance in South African life and its suitability as source material for the multicultural narrative that the gallery sought to relay. The theme also gave SANG an opportunity to showcase its resistance art collection.

## The TRC story

The exhibition was set out as a journey in three sequential sections. The journey followed the master narrative that dominated public representations of the TRC, in particular the sense of hope that it engendered [plate 7.1]. The first and largest section, to the left of the entrance, foregrounded South Africa's divided past through images of the brutalities perpetrated at the height of the 'unrest'. In the section resistance art was foregrounded, including seminal works by Paul Stopworth (*Triptych* 1979) and Kevin Brand (*Nineteen Boys Running* 1988), which drew attention to the murder of the black consciousness activist Steve Bantu Biko by the security police in 1976. It also included rare pieces, such as Thami Mnye's surrealist crayon and charcoal drawing (*There goes a man deep in sorrow, like the river underground* 1972), which took on added significance in 1985 when he was killed by the South African Border Defence Force in Angola while fighting for Umkhonto We Sizwe (the armed wing of the ANC).

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<sup>16</sup> Perpetrators were offered amnesty from prosecution for their disclosures at the hearings and victims were given symbolic financial compensation (ibid.).





The second section suggested the country needed to name apartheid's 'guilty acts' in order to move on. This theme was elucidated by a lithograph *Sleeping dog's lie* (Colin Richards 1996). The art work's title drew attention to the fact that any failure to deal with the issues of the past, i.e. 'by letting sleeping dogs lie', would result in further misdeeds. The third and final section offered a romantic depiction of a united South Africa with Nelson Mandela as its figurehead. In culminating in a message of national unity the exhibition supported the triumphalist 'chimera of reconciliation' that the journalist Xolele Mangcu identified has become South Africa's 'biggest cultural export'<sup>17</sup>. By paying attention to the narrative in the last section one can see that despite the exhibition naming apartheid atrocities it side-stepped ongoing inequalities in the democratic state and left issues of race unresolved.



**Plate 7.2** The Presidential Inauguration (Jackson Nkumanda 1994) SANG (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The final section of the exhibition focused on Mandela in the early euphoric stage of democracy. The section contained three images of Mandela circa. 1994: *The Presidential Inauguration* [plate 7.2], *Nelson Mandela delivers his first public speech in 27 years on the day of his release, City Hall, Grand Parade, Cape Town, 11.02.1990* and *The Inauguration of Pres. Nelson Mandela*<sup>18</sup>. The works traced Mandela's journey

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<sup>17</sup> 'Past Forgotten in Rush to Satisfy International Cultural Elites' *Sunday Independent* 28th May 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Artists in respective order: Jackson Nkumanda (1994), Chris Ledochowski (2004) and Harold Mettler (1994).

from prison to President and in doing so echoed the nation's journey from tyranny to democracy. In the largest work in the section *The Presidential Inauguration* (Jackson Nkumanda 1994) the homage to Mandela was extended to F. W. de Klerk (President of South Africa from 1989 to 1994) who was represented holding hands with Mandela whilst six aeroplanes pumped out the colours of the 'rainbow nation' above their heads [plate 7.3]. The 'rainbow nation' was used by the ANC as a 'dramatic metaphor' that simultaneously referenced a 'divine peace-offering following the storm, the promise against its recurrence, and a spectrum of colours united into the whole' (ibid.).<sup>19</sup>



**Plate 7.3** Detail of 'aeroplanes' in *The Presidential Inauguration* (Jackson Nkumanda 1994) SANG (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Joining Mandela with de Klerk as symbols of national and racial unity was potentially divisive. On the one hand de Klerk was lauded by those, mostly white people, who saw him as the negotiator of peace without bloodshed and as a worthy recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize (Malan 2010). On the other hand, he was viewed as a malevolent influence by those who held him responsible for the brutalities enacted by the police and army under his control during the final five years of apartheid, during which time many of the worst atrocities were committed (Govier and Verwoerd 2004).<sup>20</sup> He was also viewed

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<sup>19</sup> The concept of the 'rainbow nation' was introduced by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1995, when he described the people of South Africa as the 'Rainbow children of God' (Law 2000: 17).

<sup>20</sup> It is anticipated that this opinion was held mostly by black people. There was also a significant number of Afrikaners who would 'never forgive' de Klerk for what they saw as a betrayal of their country for his negotiations with the ANC (Malan *F.W. de Klerk: A Hero of Our Time* 3rd February 2010).

with contempt by many South Africans for his refusal to fully engage with the TRC process, which at one point brought Tutu, who was convening the process, to tears.<sup>21</sup>

Staging de Klerk hand in hand with Mandela in the final section of the exhibition meant SANG did not pick up on concerns that had been raised in relation to perceived failures of the TRC. Researchers reflecting on the TRC process have indicated that the desire for a successful resolution to centuries of colonial oppression has meant psychological catharsis has been privileged over more detailed scrutiny of the terrain (Holiday 1992; Ross and Reynolds 2004; De Kok 2002; Mamdani 1996). The notion of a peaceful transition to democracy has resonance with all South Africans. Yet, ultimately the TRC spoke most eloquently to whites, to whom it offered the sanctuary of being seen as partners in the democratic process without having to address ongoing societal inequalities (Law 2000; Gqola 2001). This concern was taken forward in a further work in the last section of the exhibition that continued on the theme of national unity.



**Plate 7.4** Unification (Vuyisane Mgijma 1991) SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

*Unification* (Vuyisane Mgijma 1991), the third from last image in the exhibition,

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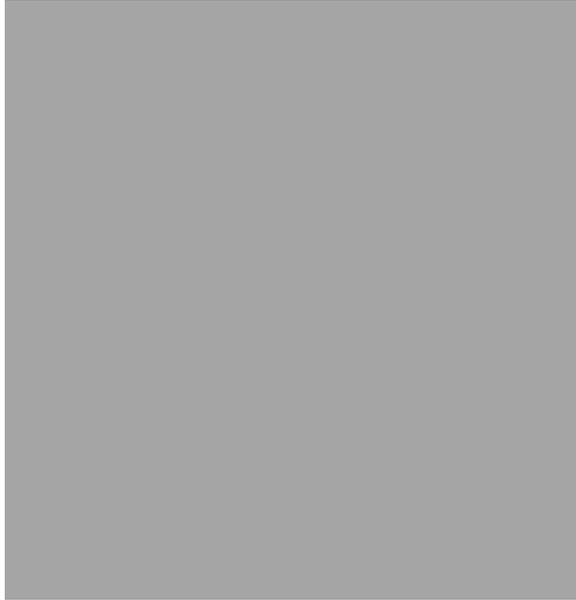
<sup>21</sup> Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd provide a detailed account of de Klerk and Tutu's encounter in *The Promise and Pitfalls of Apology* (2004).

provided an idealised landscape that could be considered to fall under the umbrella of township art, which, as Kolane describes, represents the black homestead with its 'unpleasant and painful' aspects removed (2000: 22) (discussed in chapter six) [plate 7.4]. *Unification* was emblamatized in the art work through an image of an adult hugging a group of children and people shaking hands, flanked by wild animals whose presence implied the harmonisation of man and nature. The curator used the image as a message for all South Africans:

We need to unify the people the land and nature and we actually have to have a holistic unification ... you need a holistic vocation and that would be the way forward, the way forward to a new South Africa (walking tour Staff Member A 6/08/06: 221)

The image, and the curator's appeal on its behalf, would have resonated with many whites who identified the township as a 'virtuous location' by way of its association with the 'grassroots community' (Mindry 2001: 1189). In her PhD *Creativity, Community and Selfhood*, Rhoda Elgar describes how the appeal to community, or Ubuntu, has taken on the characteristics of fetishism amongst some liberal whites (2007: 51), who invest black Africa with an 'indigenous source or means of living harmoniously' that enables them to 'bypass western concepts of individualistic liberalism in nation-building projects' (ibid. 50). By summoning this African spirit whites evoke 'an idea of a pure "African" form of selflessness' (ibid.).

It would not be accurate to say that Mgijsma's art work fetishised the township. However, the curator's staging of the image as a symbol of national unity, replicated the concern Kolane raises about 'township art's' construction of an unthreatening universe shut-off from whites (2002: 21-22). The lack of a white presence in the work, and its situation in the black township, created a future in which the racial, geographic and financial boundaries between people remained, but self-fulfillment had been achieved. Here, the exhibition premised change on a symbolic or emotional transition rather than on the redefinition of physical space.



**Plate 7.5** Illustration of detail from *The Kiss* (Tracey Rose 2001) SANG  
(drawing by Catherine Hahn)

A different, embodied, vision of unity was provided by *The Kiss* (Tracey Rose 2001), with which the exhibition ended [plate 7.5]. In a homage to Rodin's *Kiss*, the photograph portrayed a naked couple of different racial origins in an intimate embrace<sup>22</sup>. The fact that the artist Rose, who is mixed-race, played the role of the 'white woman' and her gay art dealer the role of her heterosexual lover disrupted the simple binaries that preceded it in the show. In his essay, *The bearable lightness of Tracey Rose's 'The Kiss'* (2004), Ashraf Jamal notes that at the heart of Rose's practice is 'the realisation that no identity is binding':

Each and every attempt to pin something or someone down reveals the shadow and the act of a radical human heterogeneity ... the tidy polarities we set between black and white, man and woman, could never fit the flux (Jamal 2004: 107)

On my tour the guide brought Rose's interest in heterogeneity to the fore, when he told the audience '[*The Kiss*] is not actually what you think you see'. At the same time he presented the photograph as evidence of 'something we can actually do now' (walking tour Staff Member H 2006: 414). By drawing attention to the work's complexity the guide reminded the audience that they may continue to see in black and white. In doing

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<sup>22</sup> *Kiss* was prominently positioned in *Decade of Democracy* (SANG 2005) and was the cover illustration for its catalogue of the same name.

so he responded to Nuttall's request that cultural workers illuminate racial intersections rather than fixate on polarities (2009.: 10).

Although elements of the exhibition, such as the inclusion of de Klerk and *Unification*, appeared to speak most keenly to a white audience, the exhibition included all South Africans in its optimistic scope. The exhibition's narrative can therefore be seen as an attempt to bring South Africans together under one roof.

## Deflecting blame

A separate and more distinctly white narrative emerged when the guides talked about the politics behind particular works in the display. Discussing exhibits that represented atrocities committed by whites during apartheid, the guides provided a discourse that appeared to justify or minimise acts of harm. For example, one of the guides described the killings of school children in the 1976 Soweto revolt (referred to in *The Death of Hector Peterson*, Rose Kgoete 2002) as follows:

The police sent military tanks with young inexperienced people, and when they saw these kids coming, the police realised they were coming not only from one direction but from *all* directions. Because the police were being surrounded they lashed out and pulled out their guns and shot them, and Hector was first to be killed  
(walking tour Staff Member I 2006: 121)

The way the description was phrased and delivered by the guide (in quick, sharp bursts) evoked a sense of urgency and claustrophobia. The gathering of the 'kids' on mass, coming from 'all directions,' to surround them, implied the police had little or no choice but to violently respond. A reading that was supported by the term 'lashing out', which indicated the police were reacting instinctually to an impossible situation, rather than taking part in a deliberate act of killing. The guide's description corresponded with accounts provided in the apartheid media at the time of the Soweto uprising, which emphasised white inexperience and the militant aggression of the black youth (Kane-Berman 1978: 29-30). However, it did not correspond with the accounts of eye-witnesses to the events of the 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976 who 'contended that the police had opened fire 'without justification' or warning on a crowd of children, who were 'quite quiet when the first shot was fired' and only began to riot after the killings (ibid.: 31).

Thus, the presentation of the children's behaviour as the catalyst for the police response deflected blame for the massacre from the white police officers to the black children.<sup>23</sup> The reversal of blame was reinforced by the guide's use of the terms 'young' and 'inexperienced', which they appropriated from the children and used for the police.

The same guide used a similar role-reversal to discuss *Nineteen Boys Running* (Brand 1988), which depicted children murdered in the 1985 Langa Massacre when the police again shot indiscriminately into a funeral procession and killed upwards of twenty mourners (Vergunst 1990/1: 1)<sup>24</sup>:

At the height of the police state, three constituted a crime, so if a crowd were together and the police came to a gathering the young blacks just ran in all directions, so this is about that (walking tour Staff Member I 22/08/06: 208)

In common with the representation of the 16<sup>th</sup> June, the depiction of mourners as 'young blacks' running 'in all directions' created an atmosphere of potential threat and panic with a resultant police reaction. A similar explication of the event by the curator indicated this was an institutional rather than individual response:

It was a peaceful procession, but it *turned* violent and in the end something like twenty people were killed and something like seventy people were injured (walking tour Staff Member A 6/08/06: 181)

Here, the curator abstracted the police action so as to present the event as if it had spontaneously erupted into violence. The white staff members' responses to the atrocities depicted in the art works indicated they sought to diminish the responsibility of the police and, by extension, perhaps lessen the burden of white responsibility. In *Across the Divides of Perception* (2004), Karin Lombard describes white avoidance of blame for apartheid era acts as a common occurrence in South Africa. Through an examination of the findings of national studies conducted in 2000 and 2002 Lombard discovered broad differences in the perspectives of black and white South Africans,

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<sup>23</sup> In his definitive account of the uprising, *Soweto: Black revolt, white reaction* (1978), John Kane-Berman identifies that between June 1976 and October 1977 approximately 700 people were killed, the vast majority by the police and most of them children (Kane-Berman 1978: 28-29).

<sup>24</sup> 'Kevin Brand *Nineteen Boys Running*', internal art text held in 'Recent Acquisitions 1990-91', SANG archive.

with the majority of white people unwilling to acknowledge their culpability in apartheid (2004).<sup>25</sup>

Whites gain clear material benefits from diminishing apartheid acts and may also derive psychological safety from not delving too deeply into the past. Vron Ware and Les Back, in *Out of Whiteness* (2002), identify that whites have sought to ‘civilise the history of white supremacy in the mistaken belief that this is the only way that “white people” can take their rightful place at the table of multiculturalism’ (2002: 14).

In the exhibition the desire to distance white audiences from difficult truths conflicted with the TRC’s aim, in the words of Tutu, ‘to look the beast in the eye’ so as to ‘open the wounds’ and not allow them ‘to fester’<sup>26</sup>.

### The ‘black menace’

As well as distancing whites from violent acts, the guides used themes in the art works to represent apartheid as if black people held some responsibility for it. A pertinent point made by Lombard in his study is that white avoidance of blame has frequently been accompanied by a desire to shift responsibility for past misdeeds onto black people (2004). White deflection was discreetly signalled in the exhibition in the guide’s representation of children coming from ‘all directions’ at the police and in the description of a ‘peaceful procession’ that suddenly ‘turned violent’. It also manifested in more direct ways. For example the curator attempted to rationalise the police brutality depicted in Stopworth and Brand’s work by placing Steve Biko’s murder in the context of a perceived black threat:

We have very short memories, of how tense things were in the early 90s and how many people were thinking of bloodbaths and I heard people were going to take over *my* house and there was tension and of course there was an incredible amount of violence (walking tour Staff Member A 2006: 7)

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<sup>25</sup> Lombard found white people were unable to see their own involvement in apartheid and unwilling to make recompense. For instance, in 2002, only 22 % of whites agreed with the statement ‘In the past, whites profited greatly from apartheid, and most continue to profit today’ in comparison with 74 % of black people (ibid.).

<sup>26</sup> Fern Britton Meets Desmond Tutu 28/03/2010 BBC1.

The curator's description of his feelings during apartheid offered an insight into how whites internalised the 'black threat', which in turn created a platform of shared understanding among the white audience members, who nodded in recognition at his portrayal of potential 'bloodbaths' and the risk to his home. Although the curator countered his description by making it clear he thought Biko had been murdered by the police, he went on to affirm his view of a black threat, by stating he did not 'know whether people would necessarily have seen the interrogators as the evil ones at that time' (2006: 41). Assuming that the 'people' the curator referred to were white, this statement further reduced the burden of white guilt through the inference that white police brutality might have been viewed as a necessary response to black activism. Another way in which the curator distanced the white audience from acts of violence was by representing these acts as part of the black cultural experience:

I think it's part of their history part of their lives. We, in another community, it's still something else, something we don't get involved in (walking tour Staff Member A 2006: 127)

The curator's use of the communal 'we' for whites severed the violence experienced by black people during apartheid from its white causation and naturalised violence and violation as part of the black community experience. Kincheloe hazards that a focus on black violence in situations where whites hold power is advantageous to whites as it suggests 'being white' is 'no different than being any other race or ethnicity' (1999: 8), as such it severs 'white people's privileged social location from the historic patterns of injustice' that gave them their power (ibid.). The guides' failure to engage with white responsibility for apartheid was problematised by the exhibition's staging of whites as active partners in the multicultural society, which cast whites in a positive light.

### Section Three: White Artists and the Canon

Perhaps unintentionally, the white guides concentrated predominantly on the works of white university trained artists, as a result the guides extended the notion that the exhibition was a product of a unified white gaze. The weighted value placed on these artists meant the diversity of the exhibition programme was not fully animated.

The guides' focus on academically trained white artists can be partly attributed to their

reductive understanding of the field. In his book *Nationalism* (1997), Craig Calhoun identifies that the absence of new gatekeepers in museums means these institutions frequently promote themselves as poly-variant, while failing to account for the ‘richer more diverse and ‘promiscuously cross-cutting’ factors at play (1997:18). Marstine explains that this occurs because the museum’s traditional gatekeepers ‘naturalize their policies and procedures as professional practice’ through decisions that are underscored by ‘underlying value systems that are encoded in institutional narratives’ (2006: 5).

The guides’ reliance on established understandings of practice conflicted with the notion that academic training would prepare them to mediate a diverse range of art. This is not surprising as Art History and Fine Art degree courses during apartheid, on which the majority of the white curators I spoke to received their training, were based almost exclusively on western ‘European’ practice (Staff Member A 2006: 75). The trickle down impact of this training was evident on tours of *Facing the Past*, in which the white curator and volunteer guides concentrated on four white academically trained artists: Jane Alexander, Paul Stopworth, Kevin Brand and Colin Richards [plates 7.6-7.8, 7.10].

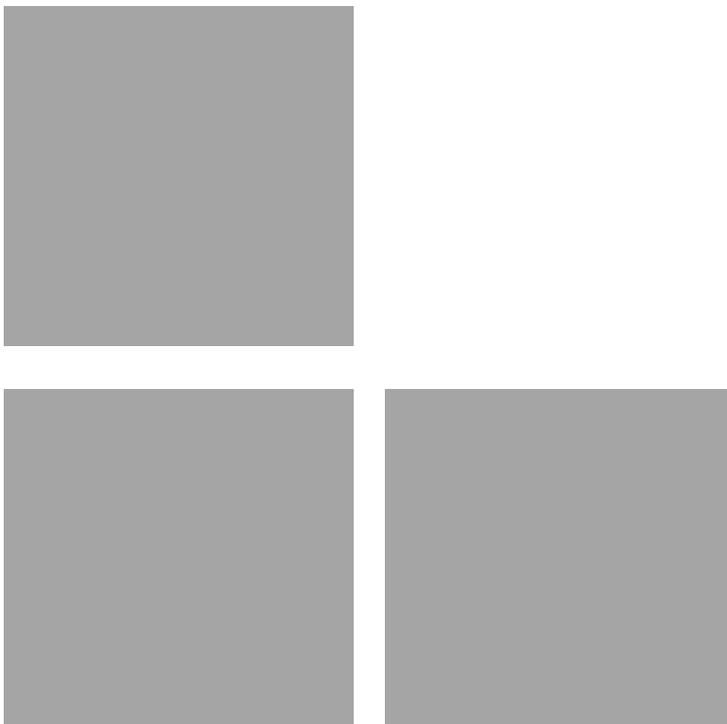


Plate 7.6, 7.7 and 7.8 Details from: top left: Triptych (Paul Stopworth 1979),

top right: *Nineteen Boys Running* (Kevin Brand 1988), bottom: *Veronica Cloth* (Colin Richards 1996)  
(images courtesy of SANG)

On the three tours I attended the works of these artists were discussed for a longer period of time than the work of the other twenty-seven artists in the exhibition combined (eleven of whom at least were black). The most popular work, Alexander's *Butcher Boys*, was discussed for twenty minutes on one of the tours, which lasted one hour and fifteen minutes, and ten minutes on the other two tours, which lasted just over an hour. In comparison, the most extensive discussion on the work of a black artist, Rose Kgoete's *The Death of Hector Peterson*, lasted approximately five minutes on the two tours in which it was discussed.

The works of the four white artists incorporated what Oskar Batschmann defines as the four 'criteria for recognition' of 'important' western art, making them likely candidates for appreciation (1997: 226). Batschmann, in his research on the contemporary art market, *The Artist in the Modern World*, identifies the criteria needed for appreciation as follows: western values of quality and concept; originality; repetition through a recognisable signature style and current relevance in global terms (ibid.: 224-226). 'Western' notions of quality and concept were demonstrated in the works of three of the whites artists through their close observation of the human figure and in the fourth through their post-modern combination of image and text. The artists also had a 'signature style': in Stopworth's *Triptych* (1979) the monochrome flat 'inhuman' quality of the paintwork; in Richards' *Veronica Cloth* (1996) the photocopied text on cloth; in Alexander's *Butcher Boys* (1986) the use of human torsos inter-sliced with animal horns and bone and in Brand's *Nineteen Boys Running* (1988) the rough handling of a repeated image of a boy encased from the waist down in a wooden block. In each case the style of the art works was similar to other works created by the same artist – framing them within the distinctive style of the artist's oeuvre. By adhering to the criteria above, and incorporating timely political themes, the artists achieved Batschmann's fourth criteria of global relevance.

The works of the four artists were undeniably culturally relevant, and contained rich aesthetic and narrative content, but there were multiple commonalities between their works and others in the exhibition which brought into question why they were being singled out for special attention. This included works by academically trained black

artists with international reputations, such as Billy Mandini's, *Fire Games* (1985) [plate 7.9], and Willy Bester's, *Challenges Facing the New South Africa* (1990) [no image available]. In common with Brand, both artists relied on a mix of materials and roughly applied acrylic paint to convey a sense of immediacy and urgency in their township dystopias.



**Plate 7.9** *Fire Games* (Billy (Duyisile) Mandini 1985), foreground  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

One reason these artists may have been relatively overlooked was because their work lacked the physical scale and cost of their white equivalents, and the consequent western notion of 'professionalism' that attended these attributes. The materials used by the four white artists were expensive and their works required specialist tools and technical knowledge to make them. In contrast, the majority of the works made by black artists in the exhibition, including Mandini and Bester, were created from inexpensive materials, such as found objects, print, photography, pastels and collage, which evidenced what Oliphant and Roome refer to in *Artmaking in South Africa* as the 'resourcefulness born out of necessity' of South Africa's black artists (2000: 173-178). The difference between the works was amplified by their respective size [plate 7.10].



The areas highlighted in pink in plate 7.10 provide a rough indication of the exhibition space allocated to the works of the four white artists. Stopworth and Richard's works represented twelve of the thirteen images in the first section and Alexander and Brand's sculptural pieces covered most of the available floor space. The large scale and number of these works, in comparison to those of the black artists in the show, created an authoritative presence that resonated with works on the global stage, such as those presented in the international Biennales.

## The masterpiece



**Plate 7.11** *Butcher Boys* (Jane Alexander 1986)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The physical presence of the white artists' work, coupled with the attention paid to them on the tours, encouraged the viewer to see them as canonical and the other works as their supporting cast (Brawne 1982: 49). This hierarchical division was concretised through the guide's representation of Alexander's *Butcher Boys* as the masterpiece of the display [plate 7.11].

*Butcher Boys* was situated at the entrance of the European display hall where it was staged as the portal to the rest of the collection. *Butcher Boys* consisted of three life-size male figures, dressed in cricket boxes, sitting on a wooden bench. The tableau conjured

the camaraderie of the male ‘locker room’, which took on violent overtones through the title ‘Butcher Boys’ and the duality of its hybrid figures. Each of the male characters was effectively ‘disfigured’ through the integration of animalistic attributes, including blank black eyes and ears made from animal horns and bone. The realism of the three life-size images provided a cogent link between current practice and the western tradition in the next room. The association made between the collections helped draw the historic European display into modernity and at the same time signalled the gallery had new icons.

The extended time that the guides spent discussing *Butcher Boys* and its central placement in the exhibition demonstrated its status as the masterpiece. The work’s significance was further signalled by the guides’ choosing to begin their tours with it, despite the fact that it wasn’t situated at the start of the exhibition. One of the guides explained their decision to circumvent the narrative flow of the display to start with *Butcher Boys* as follows:

I’ve had people say to me ‘forget the rest of the gallery I want to spend the whole time just talking about the *Butcher Boys* ...

... I always start with the *Butcher Boys*, because it’s one people can’t take their eyes off (walking tour Staff Member H 01/09/06: 122, 337)

The guide’s representation of his decision to start the exhibition with *Butcher Boys* as if it were the audience’s choice, stoked the audience’s interest in the sculpture by suggesting they had already invested in it. His approach mirrored museum strategy in Britain where displays are frequently introduced through a work that acts as an ‘advanced organiser’ (2000: 138). In *The Quality of Visitors’ Experiences in Art Museums* (2000) Phillip Wright describes how ‘good’ exhibitions begin with a device to ‘set people thinking about what they are going to see’ (ibid.: 138). By using an ‘advanced organiser’ Wright maintains the ‘psychological barriers’ are reduced, ‘which affect visitors’ attitudes and behaviour’ (ibid.: 139). *Butcher Boys* performed this task well as it was one of the few works discussed by the guides in the exhibition whose subject-matter was not tied to a specific event. Thus, audience members were able to imbue it with their own ideas – as illustrated in extracts of conversations from two separate tours below:

Tour guide: What do you think the work means?

Audience member A: There [are] also other meanings for the word boys, like boys together, like rugby ...

Audience member B: I think there's an element of adolescent behaviour?

Audience member A: There's an element of irresponsibility ...

(Staff Member A with audience members on walking tour 6/08/06: 87-95)

Tour guide: What do you think you're looking at?

Audience member C ... They were thugs?

Tour guide: But what sort of men?

Audience member C ... white violent men ...?

Tour guide: Yeah and develop that ...

Audience member D: They could be thugs ... [or] these could be the victims of what was happening?

(Staff Member H with audience members on walking tour 01/09/06: 369)

The open-ended style of questioning used by the guides encouraged audience members to seek their own 'meaning' for the sculpture and thus deepen their relationship with it.

## Hector Peterson

It was anticipated that the spirit of enquiry engendered by *Butcher Boys* would feed into the rest of the display. However, this intention was brought short by the mode of explication that the guides used when discussing Rose Kgoete's embroidery *The Death of Hector Peterson*. The potential consequences of differentiating white artistic practice from black was brought to life in the guides' representation of Kgoete's work [plate 7.12], the most discussed work by a black artist in the display. Positioned on the wall to the right of *Butcher Boys*, *The Death of Hector Peterson* referred to the murder of the schoolboy Hector Peterson by the police at the start of the Soweto uprising (discussed in the previous section in relation to the guide's description of the police 'lashing out'). In Kgoete's work the image of Peterson, dying in a fellow pupil's arms, was presented as part of an evolving scene in which small cameos represented events as if unfolding across time.



**Plate 7.12** The Death of Hector Peterson (Rose Kgoete 2002)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

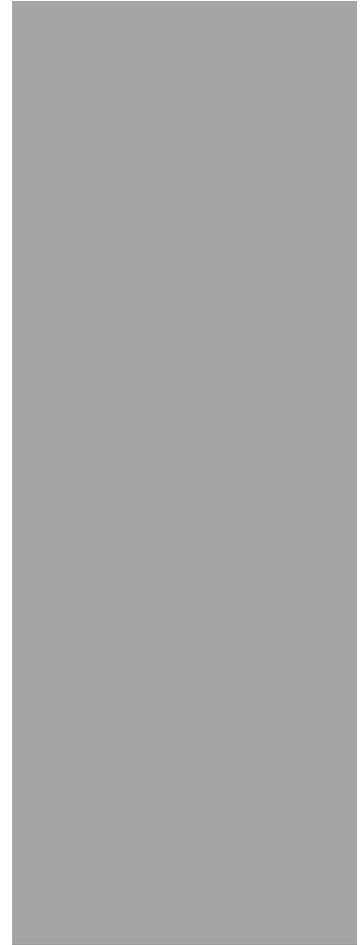
The different sizes of the figures in combination with the style and content of the work presented it as if it were telling the story of the uprising from a child's perspective. The contrast created between brightly coloured 'childlike' imagery and 'adult' subject matter brought the notion of curtailed innocence to the fore. This notion was compounded by the recurring motifs of plants, flowers and petrol bombs, which formed a visual oxymoron for the life of the 'child-activist'. In combination these features served as homage and eulogy to the child activists of the 1970s.

On the two tours in which *The Death of Hector Peterson* was discussed its content was treated as a 'history lesson' facilitated through closed (as opposed to open-ended) questions. For example, one guide targeted audience members with a series of factual questions about the political event the work referred to: 'What happened here? ... Who is this? ... Why did they march? ... Who were their teachers?' (walking tour Staff Member I 2006: 112-122). As the work related to an actual event it appeared logical that the guide was directional in their approach. However, their use of closed questions provided a direct contrast with the more subtle questions that the guides posed in relation to *Butcher Boys*, such as 'What do you think the work means?' and 'What do you think you are looking at?'.

A similar strategy was used by the second guide who presented Kgoete's work in the context of the Soweto uprising, as follows: 'people, learners these days, have to be reminded of the ... Bantu education system' and 'black school children ... being forced to have at least 45% of their school curriculum through the medium of Afrikaans' (walking tour Staff Member H 2006: 122). Again, the pedagogic approach employed by the guides offered valuable contextual information. However, their emphasis on learning facts meant they focused on external social factors rather than the child-centred perspective of the work.

Although child-activism was only fleetingly discussed by the guides, it was given significant attention in the exhibition through the inclusion of Kgoete's and other child-centred works. For instance, *Fire Games* [plate 7.9] depicted a children's board game in which the game pieces had been replaced with military hardware, casspirs (armoured police vans) and gun turrets and *Challenges Facing the New South Africa* included a water pistol that had been painted to represent an AK47 assault rifle [no image available].<sup>27</sup>

These works were given added poignancy by the inclusion of the almost life-size sculpture *Stompie* (Tyrell Appolli 1991) [plate 7.13]. Made from a single piece of twisted wood, *Stompie* paid homage to the child-activist and possible police-informer Stompie Moeketsi, who was murdered in December 1989 by members of the Mandela United Football Club (widely assumed to be Winnie Mandela's bodyguard). In Appolli's sculpture Stompie was presented holding one fist straight up above his head the other raised to the side, concurrently conjuring the crucifixion of Christ and the ANC freedom salute. Here, as with *The Death of Hector Peterson*, child activism was portrayed as an act of heroism and as a loss of innocence.



**Plate 7.13** Illustration of Stompie (Tyrell Appolli 1991), (drawing by Catherine Hahn).

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<sup>27</sup> Within the resistance art movement images that explore child activism form a sub-genre of their own, explored in detail by John Peffer in his book *Art and the End of Apartheid* (2009).

The images raised provocative connections in the context of South Africa's ongoing and unresolved relationship with the violence and abuse of children. Yet, these potentially challenging themes were not discussed on the tours, which instead focused on *The Death of Hector Peterson's* relationship to other embroiderers.

## Embroidery

The guides appeared keen to elicit interest in Kgoete's work by linking it with a wider craft tradition. However, their intentions were limited by their reliance on assumptions born out of the craft/art divide. SANG's distinctive treatment of *The Death of Hector Peterson* and other cloth based works indicated that although willing to include works that had previously been excluded the gallery was unable to translate this inclusion into equality of representation through its regular staff. The guides' presentation of craft workers as outside of regular museum practice and as additional to, rather than intrinsic to, the history of art, supports Bennett's finding that attending to the previously excluded by allowing them access to the institution does not automatically address the culture of the institution and its 'historical role in reproducing social inequalities' (1998: 50).



**Plate 7.14** The Road to Democracy (Given Makhubele 1995)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

In South Africa needlecraft was historically devalued through its association with women and ‘non-Europeans’ (Pollock 2000: 24), which made it a potent medium for political expression (Schmahmann 2003). Many works in the needlecraft genre, including *The Death of Hector Peterson*, were sewn directly onto the traditional women’s scarf or djardiki – commonly used to carry babies and small children. The deployment of the scarf as a canvas created a tension between the traditional expectations of women, as mothers and childbearers, and those of the political artist. For instance in *The Death of Hector Peterson* the djardiki served as a backdrop to images of children at war. In this instance the scarf, with its protective implications, was turned into a testimony of childhood lost.

The guides drew attention to the history of needlecraft by identifying the traditional use of the djardiki, and by drawing comparisons between Kgoete’s work and other needlecraft in the museum: Given Makhubele’s beadwork *The Road to Democracy* (1995) in the same show [plate 7.14] and Selina Makwana’s embroidery *Adam and Eve and the Big Fish* (2002) in room four. The comparison was helpful as it located Kgoete’s work in regard to the broader needlecraft tradition and alerted the audience to the politicisation of the genre. Importantly, it also revealed the value of needlecraft as an artistic medium by identifying that multiple works had been purchased for the national collection. However, the guides’ limited knowledge of the oeuvre offered minimal scope for these conversations to develop.

## Art and craft

Within the talks Kgoete’s work was described on broad terms as rural craft. The quotes beneath from guides on two separate tours are representative examples:

What you find in this production is groups of people, usually ladies in rural areas, they band together and make works that they don’t necessarily, I think, regard as works of art, and certainly not for a national [space]. I don’t think that they view [their work] as being fine art ... It’s something they learn to do together. It’s embroidery not a painting – it is a group effort (walking tour Staff Member A: 124)

They were told to embroider ... tourists will buy the embroidery and *they* are very good at embroidery (walking tour Staff Member I: 110)

Many ‘craft workers’, including embroiderers, do work collectively and some may not consider their work as art. However, a guide book in the gallery shop indicated this was not the case for Kgoete who worked as a lone artist; had an established national reputation and was represented in numerous art collections including SANG and the African Bank (Schmahmann 2003: 43, 45, 90)<sup>28</sup>. The guides’ depiction of needleworkers ‘banding together’ to make work, therefore in her case incorrectly activated the western dichotomy of art as an individual activity and ‘craft’ as the collective (Pollock 2000: 24). The guides’ descriptions of the needleworkers as ‘ladies’ working in ‘rural areas’ produced further alienation, as it assigned them to an unnamed geographical site removed from the centre of artistic practice. The notion that they produced work because they were ‘told to’ for the tourist market, also undermined their status as artists as it indicated they made work to order and not as part of a creative process.

*Hector Peterson’s* treatment on the tours, as part of a collective exteriorised practice, was exacerbated by the lack of attention paid to how it was made. Apart from the description of the djardiki, the guides made no mention of the craftsmanship involved in beadwork or embroidery. In contrast, the creative process formed a central component of the discussions on works by academically trained white artists. In these instances the dialogue appeared intended to facilitate entry to the canon. For example, one guide used Greek mythology to explore the human/animal interplay in Alexander’s *Butcher Boys* (walking tour Staff Member H 01/09/06: 71), while another compared the work’s sculptural qualities with Michelangelo’s statue of Moses – a comparison aided by the greyness of the casts, which called to mind the anatomical busts of the academy (walking tour Staff Member I 22/08/06: 103).

Small details in Alexander’s work were responded to with the intimacy of loved items. For instance, a guide provided a vivid and personal description of the construction of the figures’ eyes:

They’re not glass eyes because if they were glass eyes you would be able to make eye contact as glass eyes let you. [Alexander] said she

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<sup>28</sup> Brenda Schmahmann conducted research on South African embroiderers and found that by 2002 many had chosen to work as individual artists, situated within the framework of a broader art community, such as the *Mapula Project* which had 80 active members including Kgoete (2003: 45, 90).

had made the sockets for the eyes and she went to Japan, and made lacquer, which you paste ... from trees. And she then put lacquer and black colour and lacquer, until she filled each socket and when they looked like eyes she stopped and she let it sit (walking tour Staff Member I 22/08/96: 95)

The detailed outline of the processes involved in making a small but significant element of the sculpture (including the trip to Japan for materials) gave the audience insight into Alexander's artistic practice as a professional artist and her labour intensive craftsmanship. The intimate relationship created between the audience and *Butcher Boys* was repeated in descriptions of how, *Veronica Cloth* and *Nineteen Boys Running* were made, which claimed these objects as the cherished content of the house.

## Conclusion

Though ostensibly multicultural *Facing the Past* carried a white refrain. The political theme of the exhibition indicated it would look back at South Africa's recent history with a critical eye, an intention that was partly achieved through the curator's choice of work. Yet, what emerged from the gallery's reliance on white guides was a reluctance to engage with some aspects of the past, in particular, it seemed, where these reflected less positively on whites. There was also an over-focus on white professional artists and fine art discourse, which appeared to reflect the experience of those interpreting the display. By conjoining aspects of the temple (namely an aesthetic discourse and hierarchy) with the regular political discourse of the gallery the exhibition affirmed white practice on western terms. Conversely, the framework situated craft works by black artists as additional to, rather than intrinsic to, the gallery's practice.

The retention of an all white curatorial team and white guides meant that despite the gallery showing an eclectic mix of work and challenging subject matter the full potential of SANG's political collection remained unrealised. Indeed, it could be argued that the advances made by the black education officers in the early 1990s were put back post-apartheid. Comparison of the centred inclusion of Billy Mandini's provocative *Cape of Storms* in *Picturing Our World* (1993) (discussed in chapter six) and the emphasis on white artists in *Facing the Past* (2006) supports this contention.

## Chapter Eight:

### New Life for Old Masters

Given the changes that have occurred outside and within SANG since the onset of democracy it is not surprising that in 1995 its historic fine art collection was perceived by some observers to be a problematic and anachronistic reminder of the museum's imperial past. A viewpoint summarised by the feminist art critic Linda Nochlin who contextualised SANG's historic display as a collection of 'worthlessly enshrined relics' symbolising 'colonialism's contribution to the great western tradition in South Africa' (quoted in Proud 2001: 3).<sup>1</sup> In 2006, discussing the ongoing 'problem' of SANG's 'historic collection' McGee concluded what was at stake was the 'shape of social memory as constructed by cultural objects and legitimised by cultural institutions' (ibid.: 187-188). Discussing the potential benefits of SANG selling some its historic collection, McGee concluded it was unlikely to do this, but warned that if it continued to justify its 'exhibition priorities on the basis of its past collections' it risked remaining a 'flawed "white institution" with good intentions' (ibid.: 188). Conducting fieldwork at SANG the year McGee's findings were published I found SANG had significantly revitalised the display. Combining strategies from the temple and the political house, SANG had on one hand reinforced the link between European art and the gallery and on the other opened up the collection to sustained critique.

The energy generated by the historic display challenged the notion that it represented an amalgam of worthless relics. At the same time the strategies used in its redevelopment brought into question whether it was shifting 'the shape of social memory' or reaffirming a white point of view. This chapter investigates how SANG renegotiated its historic fine art collection post-apartheid and its implications for more inclusive practice. The first section, *Reduction and Renewal*, looks at how the reduction in allocated space for SANG's historic collection was offset by the redesign of the historic rooms. The second section, *Fabricating Change*, examines how SANG attempted to devolve power from the historic collection through the insertion of contemporary objects and narratives in the display. The third section, *The Influence of the Early*

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<sup>1</sup> From Nochlin's article: *Learning from Black Male* in *Art in America* 83, March p.91 (quoted in Proud 2001: 3).

*Patrons*, explores how the gallery reaffirmed its relationship with the Randlords.

My examination is informed by case studies of exhibitions hosted at SANG between 2001 and 2008: *Fabrications: Fashion, Dress and Drapery in Artworks from Our Collections* (2006); *Romantic Childhood: Thomas Gainsborough's 'Lavinia' in the Sir Abe Bailey Bequest* (2006-2008) and *The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest: A Reappraisal* (2001-2002). I created maps of *Fabrications* and *Romantic Childhood*, which included sketches of art works in the exhibitions. Drawing played a particularly important role in coming to an understanding of these exhibitions as it illuminated their multiple layers of meaning. I also attended two walking tours of *Fabrications* and *Romantic Childhood* with two separate guides.

## Section One: Reduction and Renewal

In 1994 SANG restricted its display of historic European art to two dedicated exhibition halls. The reduction in space allocated to the European collection effectively freed up the rest of the gallery for other types of work. The shift in the allocation of space provided a powerful mechanism to signal the museum's transformation, as indicated by the then Director, Marilyn Martin:

From the early bequests of inspired patrons whose collections reflected their personal tastes and the country's colonialist history, the institution has changed to one that acknowledges and celebrates the multiplicity of cultural manifestations in South Africa (2003: 17)

Martin's depiction of the museum as a place that embraced multiplicity was given credence by the particulars of the reduction in the historic display. When the museum reduced the space available to historic fine art they also removed the majority of the historic white South African art from the display, including works by the Afrikaner nationalist Jacob Pierneef and the modernists Maggie Laubser and Irma Stern. The removal of these art works dissolved the link between the historic European fine art collection and apartheid era white South African fine art. Subsequently, it enabled the gallery to divest itself of much of its colonial and apartheid baggage and introduce other art, including African and contemporary collections to the display. The changes in the gallery therefore opened the way for significant de-territorialisation. However, the

creation of a demarcated zone for historic European fine art meant this collection was situated as routine museum orthodoxy.

## Historicising schemes

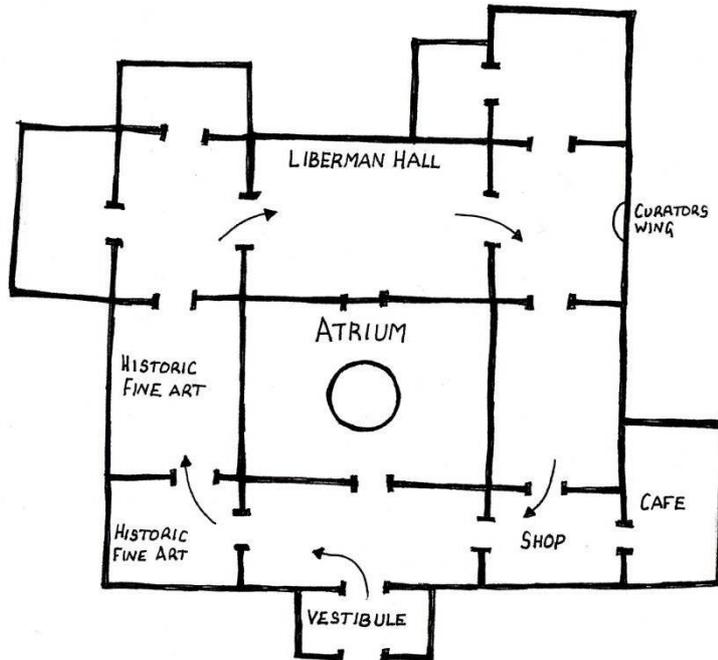


Plate 8.1 Map showing arrangement of SANG 2006  
(map by Catherine Hahn)

From 1994 to 2009 historic European fine art was exhibited in two permanent display halls to the left of the entrance hall [plate 8.1], in contrast, all of the other collections and visiting exhibitions were housed in transitory displays in non-dedicated rooms. The deep engagement with the European collection that this arrangement encouraged was accentuated by the longevity of the displays. The European fine art displays were typically hung for between two and three years whereas other exhibitions were generally shown for short periods of between three to four months.<sup>2</sup> The division replicated common practice in English and American museums. In these museums contemporary art was usually exhibited in fast turnover displays that signalled the dynamism and vitality of new art (Serota 2000). Conversely, historic displays were presented as fixed entities that alluded to the timeless masterpiece (ibid.). The position

<sup>2</sup> The entrance hall was an exception in this respect as it served as the introductory space to the gallery and hosted shows for extended periods of a year or more (Staff Member B 2006: 14).

and presentation of SANG's historic European collection meant it provided a portal to the rest of the gallery. Thus, it served as *the* conduit through which the audience came to understand other art.

The distinctive treatment of the European collection was extended through the introduction of a display model in the historic rooms that emulated traditional western modes of display. It should be noted that this mode of representation was not the only choice available to the museum, as Charles Saumarez-Smith outlines in *Museums, Artefacts and Meanings*:

There is a spectrum of strategies for the presentation of artefacts ranging from the most abstract, whereby the artefact is displayed without any reference to its original context in time and space, to the most supposedly realistic, whereby there is an attempt to reconstruct a semblance of its original setting (1989: 20)

Despite an array of display models being available, Saumarez-Smith identifies that established museums invariably reproduce the 'historic model' when showing historic European fine art, as it enables them to signal the prestige of the collection by keeping traditional values intact (ibid.: 19-21). In SANG's case the adoption of the temple display model represented a return to a fictive past, as it suggested the European collection had always been arranged in this way. Thus the collection gained in prestige and heritage value what it lost in size.

## Décor and display

The particulars of the re-design of the historic rooms indicated the esteemed position of the European collection. In 2000 SANG had its historic display rooms re-fitted in the style of the grand domestic interior, lined respectively in green and blue linen that was ordered specifically to measure from Scotland (Staff Member A Fieldwork notes 10/10/06) [plate 8.2]. The introduction of linen at prohibitive cost signalled the historic collection's worth, in contrast to the pedestrian use of white and grey paint in the other display halls, and therefore provided an additional means to relay its importance to the public.



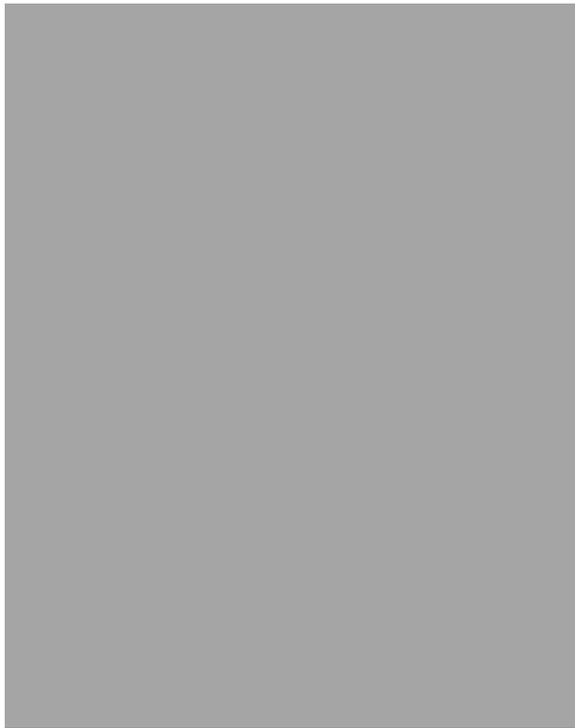
**Plate 8.2** Blue linen wall lining with plinths and panels painted to match in Old Masters – New Perceptions (2004) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

SANG's use of natural linen was pertinent. Linen has provided the backdrop for art works in western fine art galleries for over a hundred years and therefore informs the audience of the special relationship between fine art and western museology. In *The Museum Interior*, Michael Brawne, describes how the workmanship required to produce linen confirms it as a 'quality surface' on which to hang fine art and in particular works in oil – as its subtle, slightly uneven surface resonates with the brush stroke and warp and weave of the canvas (1982: 49). Multiple screens and pedestals complemented the colour scheme of the linen walls, painted in Georgian blue and green or in 'ox blood red' (Staff Member A fieldwork notes 10/10/2006). The decision to use colours associated with the traditional art museum and the 'princely collection' for the walls and furnishings reinforced the notion that the rooms conveyed the museum's heritage. The close relationship between the display halls and the historic art was further signalled through the traditional picture frames. Brawne traces the origins of the picture frame to the Renaissance, when works were accorded distinction through their placement in designated areas in the church or house, thereby alerting the worshipper or audience to their iconic status (1982: 20). In the late Renaissance these areas were replaced by the decorative frame, which became a 'signpost' to the work's worth (ibid.). At SANG the decorative elements in the frames reflected the style of the room and the gallery's neo-classical architecture, whilst their ornamental features and repeat patterns resonated

with elements in the décor, creating symbiosis between their subjects and the space.

## Illuminating whiteness

The close relationship between the historic art works and the gallery extended to the white subjects of the works. The notion that whites were the natural inhabitants of the gallery was reinforced through the lighting used in the fine art display [plate 8.3].<sup>3</sup> In his research into ‘whitening’ practices in western fine art Dyer identifies how ‘lighting’ emerged in the western tradition as part of an apparatus designed to illuminate white subjects and construct them as the embodiment of the ‘pure’ ideal (1997: 72, 89-94). The use of dark grounds formed part of this apparatus as it offered a backdrop that enhanced the subjects’ whiteness (ibid.).



**Plate 8.3** Portrait of Florence, Lady Phillips (Giovanni Boldini c.1920) in *Fabrications* (2006) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Dark grounds have been used for historic work at SANG since the 1930s, but their

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting here that in order to photograph in the dim light of the fine art rooms without a flash, in line with gallery regulations, I had to heighten the exposure, which made the images lighter than in reality and they therefore do not evidence the full effect of the grounds and lighting on white subjects.

potential for racial bias was only made visible post-apartheid through the inclusion of images of black people.<sup>4</sup> The illumination of white subjects accorded them a singular presence in the historic display that acted in reverse for black subjects, whose portraits against dark walls receded into the background. An effect compounded by the use of low lighting, which was intended to protect the works, but also served as a historicising strategy evoking the restrained illumination of gas lamps. As with the dark grounds, this use of light favoured white faces as it singled them out and cast them as an ethereal timeless presence.

## Division by design

The sense that the space disenfranchised black subjects was reinforced by the fact that the majority of the portrayals of black people in the historic rooms were in modern (rather than historic) works, which were subject to differentiated treatment. As would be expected, oil paintings predominated in the European rooms. During my fieldwork period in 2006 these works occupied all of the main walls. In contrast, prints, photographs and modern imagery, were placed on temporary screens, where they were either invisible from the entranceway or ‘skied’ above eye-level. The distinction created between the art works produced a hierarchical dichotomy ‘between the major volume and its minor subdivisions’, which mirrored the divide introduced in western museums in the nineteenth century to inform the audience which works were most ‘worthy’ of attention (Brawne 1982: 49).

**Table 8.1** Images of white and black subjects in Fabrications and Romantic Childhood (2006)

Year	Exhibition title	White subjects		Black subjects	
		Paintings (on walls)	Photographs (on screens)	Paintings (on walls)	Photographs (on screens)
2006-2008	Fabrications	58	5	2	6
2006-2008	Romantic Childhood	25	8	0	2
	Total	96		10	

<sup>4</sup> As discussed in chapter five, during apartheid images of black people were either present in works by white South African artists in the Libermann Hall or in African sculptures in separate displays.

The hierarchical arrangement of *Fabrications* and *Romantic Childhood* divided works by race [Table 8.1]. In total the two exhibitions contained ninety-six images of white subjects, eighty-three of which were displayed on the walls and thirteen on the screens [see plates 11.4 and 11.6 for details of the images on the screens, pages 345 and 347]. In contrast, the exhibitions contained ten images of black subjects, two of which were hung on the walls and eight on the screens, meaning that the works containing black people were disproportionately side-lined.

It is important to note that outside of the historic fine art display there was generally less division by race. As described in chapter seven, SANG's contemporary exhibitions contained a large number of works by black artists. There was also a monograph exhibition by a black artist, Gerard Sekoto (2006), hosted during my fieldwork period in 2006. However, the placement of works by black artists in temporary settings offered a very different experience to that provided by the two permanent display halls, where fine art by white artists was accorded a unique status as *the* history of art, and by extension its white subjects were presented as *the* subjects of history.

## Section Two: Fabricating Change

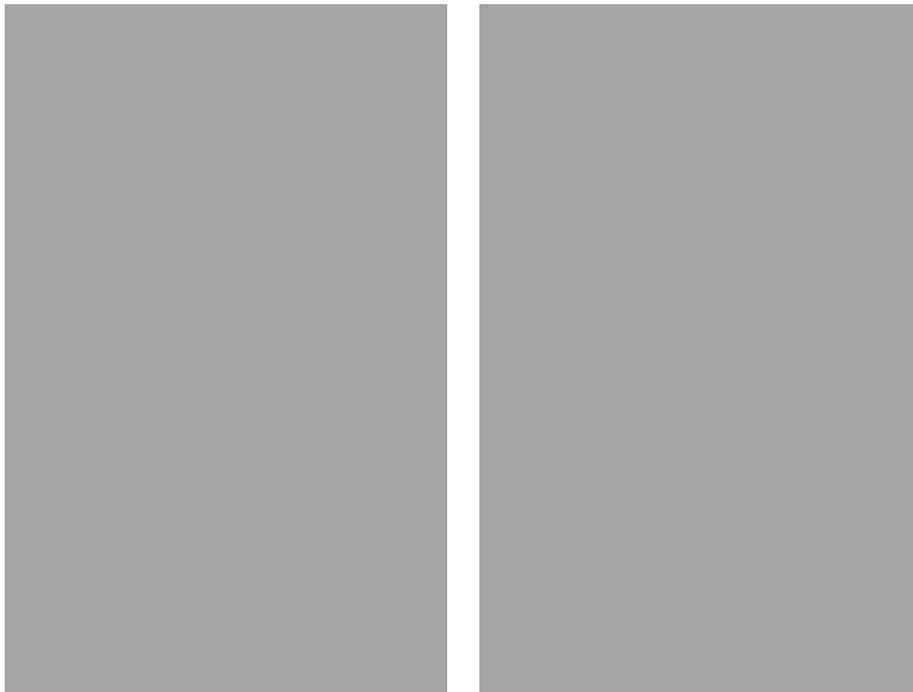
Between 2000 and 2005 the exhibitions in the European rooms adopted the format of traditional western displays. For example, in 2004 SANG hosted *Old Masters: New Perceptions*, which showed European fine art from 1600 to 1900, including carvings, tempera and oil, arranged around developments in Christian iconography. In contrast, the two exhibitions introduced in 2006, *Fabrications* (2006) [plates 11.2-11.4] and *Romantic Childhood* (2006) [plates 11.5-11.6], presented their content as critical social text. Investigation of *Fabrications* and *Romantic Childhood* shows that despite SANG appearing to have adopted the temple model complex political elements were at play.

*Fabrications* explored the significance of drapery within European painting, both as a symbolic feature of the work and as a means to articulate gendered and racial themes in western fine art. *Romantic Childhood* examined changing perceptions of childhood within the context of gender, class and racial inequalities. Through an examination of *Fabrications* and *Romantic Childhood* I consider the significance of the use of revisionist practices in SANG's historic displays and their capacity to disrupt

established hierarchies. In taking this approach I remained cognisant of the fact that SANG had only recently created its historic display and that its exhibitions were therefore involved in myth construction as well as deconstruction.

## Unveiling the nude

The linear framework, which SANG introduced during apartheid to affirm white cultural practice, was reintroduced in *Fabrications* with disruptive elements staged as ‘stopping points’ along the way. These critical interventions challenged the display’s mode of representation and drew attention to the artificial nature of western museum conventions. By informing the audience that the strategies used were ‘necessarily artificial’ the additional elements heightened the spectators’ awareness of the means of representation and involved them in the ‘process of the display’ (Saumarez-Smith 1989: 20).



**Plate 8.4** Hour of the Bath (Sheila Nowers 1994), SANG on the left (photograph by Catherine Hahn), created as a variation of **Plate 8.5** The Bather (Jean Ingres 1808), on the right

The left hand wall of *Fabrications* was dominated by oil paintings of white women, many in various states of undress. The sexually charged play between cloth and body

spoke to an idealised version of the female form and the gaze of the male artist-audience. However, the well-worn theme of the woman as the submissive object of man-made art was challenged from within the display by the inclusion of two images of white men among the other works. The insertion of these male ‘misfits’, served to make the traditional boundaries of the female nude visible. One of these paintings, *Reclining Male Nude* (Duncan Grant n.d.), depicted a naked man in a traditionally female supplicant pose, the other, *Hour of the Bath* (Sheila Nowers 1994), provided an inverted image of the French artist Jean Ingres’ work *The Bather* (1808), with the male taking the place of the female nude: his broad back alerting the audience to his presence [plates 8.4 and 8.5]. The insertion of *Reclining Male Nude* and *Hour of the Bath* into the line of female nudes highlighted the selectivity of the male gaze.

By exchanging the white female for the white male subject the works challenged the dominant order of the canon by recasting the (male) protagonist as the sexual object. Karp and Wilson use their essay *Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums* to champion the insertion of critical elements in historic art displays, adhering to the notion that what museums put on view says a lot about them, but that ‘what they don’t put on view says even more’ (1996: 255). The inclusion of the ‘male works’ informed the audience that SANG wanted to engage critically with the canon and illustrate ‘the political nature of the artistic process and the degree to which its politics [could] be transformed from an imposition into more of a contest’ (ibid.: 267).

## Black subjects and the uncovering of harm

On the right hand side of the gallery two paintings of black women provided a further critique of the display. One of these works, *African Corporate Em-brace II* (Diane Victor 2003), was shown facing *An Afrikaner Architect from Pretoria and his Family* (Elizabeth Riding 1991). In *Corporate Em-brace* an anonymous black woman was depicted with sunken features, eyes closed and head turned to the side in what appeared to be either corsetry or medical bandages [plate 8.6]. In the work, the woman’s breasts were exposed and pushed up and out from the binding running between them. Her pubic region was emphasised by a slit in the material that signalled the gap between her labia, whilst ‘bandages’ wrapped around her neck and wrists evoked the bondage of the slave market. By conjoining sex and slavery Victor conjured the woman as fetish object – a

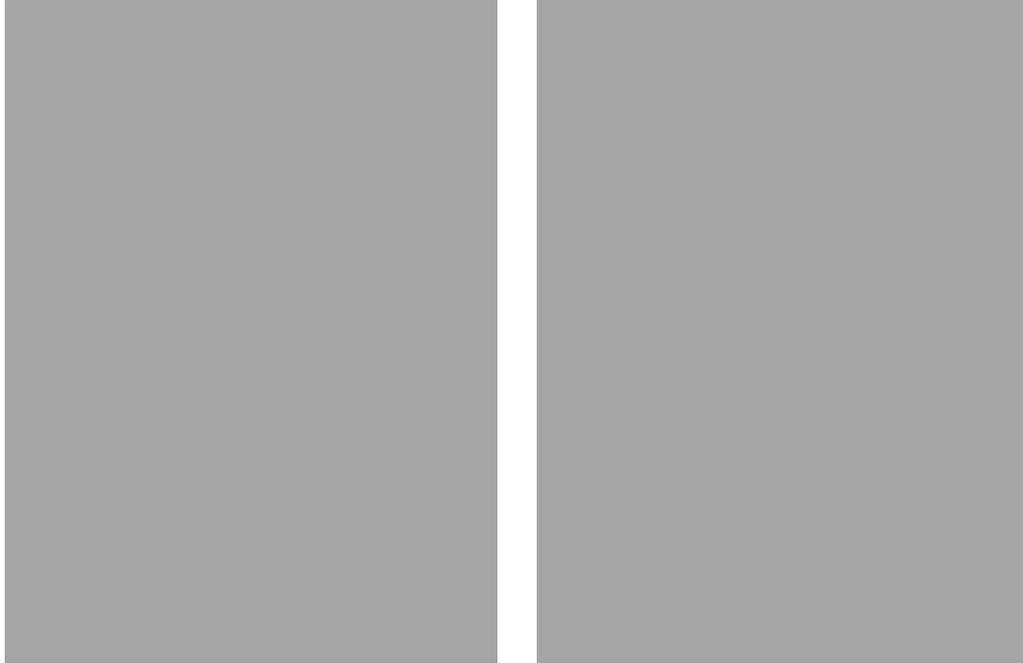
position reaffirmed through the whiteness of the bandages against the blackness of her flesh, which forced the subject back into the work and projected the instruments of her control forward.



**Plate 8.6** Far left: African Corporate Em-brace II (Diane Victor 2003)  
and far right: An Afrikaner Architect from Pretoria and his Family (Elizabeth Riding 1991)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

On the adjacent wall to *Corporate Em-brace*, *An Afrikaner Architect* provided a contrast to the debasement of the black subject through its depiction of the white elite. The difference was emphasised by the fact that *An Afrikaner Architect* was the only work in the exhibition conspicuously located in the apartheid era. The painting offered an image of the archetypal upper middle-class white family from the 1980s, with the wife leaning into her husband; their children and dog situated at their feet and their art collection surrounding them. Offsetting the victim-status and forced eroticism of *Corporate Em-brace* against the trappings of wealth and status, *An Afrikaner Architect* offered an oblique reference to the human cost and exploitation of apartheid.

## Raising the curtains on the past



**Plate 8.7** Left: *The Muse of History* (Helmut Starke, 2001) (photograph by Catherine Hahn), **Plate 8.8** Right: detail *The Art of Painting* (Johannes Vermeer c.1664) National Gallery, London

In a second tableau, Helmut Starke's painting *The Muse of History* (2001) used a similar strategy to Nowers' re-gendering of Ingres' *The Bather*. In Starke's painting the white female subject in Johannes Vermeer's *The Art of Painting* (c.1664) was supplanted with a black woman in 'tribal' clothing, breastfeeding her child, her other breast exposed [plates 8.7 and 8.8]. Awareness of the dislocation of the woman in *The Muse of History* alerted the audience to the absence of imagery of black women in fine art portraiture and, less prosaically, to their 'use' as white men's 'substitute wives'.

*The Muse of History* was presented as a revelatory scene with a drawn curtain to the fore. The use of the curtain, a common visual device in fine art imagery, was replicated in images to its left and right: Emmanuel De Witte's *Interior of the Oude Kerk Amsterdam* (circa 1650) and James Ford's *Holiday Time in Cape Town in the Twentieth Century* (1894) (discussed in chapter three). Within the context of the exhibition the curtains in these works related to the theme of fabric and the notion of its use as something that can both reveal and conceal. The placement of *Holiday Time in Cape*

*Town*, with its raced vision of Cape Town, next to *The Muse of History* suggested the curtains were metaphorically opening up to reveal the racism of South Africa's colonial past. By drawing attention to the stereotyped depiction of black people in *Holiday Time in Cape Town* this mode of representation offered the first challenge to the painting's sovereignty in the gallery. Where it usually acted as a memorial to an idealised white city, in *Fabrications* the painting signified SANG's complicity in proselytising racial ideas and its nurturing of white South Africa's obsession with the black female body.

## Copy-cat art

Starke's *The Muse of History* and Nowers' *Hour of the Bath* critiqued the racial and gender biases of received art history by throwing the contents of other work into relief. The 'copy-cat' methods employed by these artists placed them within a growing tradition of pastiche that is worth discussing here in order to ascertain the extent to which these types of practice are able to deliver change.

Jo Anna Isaak, in *Feminism and Contemporary Art*, describes how the fashion for editing and sampling historic works by western male artists emerged from a feminist concern to undermine the male enlightenment project (1991: 51). The reproduction of western works was viewed as a way to deny the 'authenticity' and associative 'value' of the original (ibid.). In *Rebels, Mystics and Outcasts*, Joanne Cubbs suggests this 'copy-cat' model has since developed to the extent that 'a significant part of the art world has come to adopt postmodernism's critical project' in order to 'dismantle the monolithic myth of modernism' (1994: 83). Widespread 'borrowing' by artists using 'imitative tactics of appropriation' has challenged the 'notions of authorship, originality and genius upon which the outsider mythology of Romanticism [was] founded' (ibid.: 83, 84). The humour in many of these reproductions, including those in *Fabrications*, also makes fun of the original art works and thus metaphorically removes them from their pedestals.

These tactics of appropriation have enabled the canon to be scrutinised but have not dismantled it. Set against the power of traditional fine art, new and imitative art practices frequently appear inferior in quality. The inferiority of the copies was illustrated in the contrast between Starke's cursory handling of acrylic paint in *The*

*Muse of History* and the layered silkiness of Vermeer's original oil painting, *The Art of Painting*, which although not present was signified by its 'copy'. Further, when 'copies' are used to raise awareness of the social tropes enacted in historic works, they generally relate to mono-dimensional issues. The 'mosaic of voices' in ordinary art works are therefore frequently overlooked in 'copies', giving them the appearance of poor facsimiles (Herwitz 1993: 289).

## Repeating harms

The capacity of revisionist and new works to enact change in *Fabrications* was hindered by the design of the display. As mentioned in the previous section, the use of a hierarchical divide between painting and photography created a racial split in the exhibition, which meant the majority of the images of black people appeared in photographs hung on the temporary display screens. In contrast, the only images of black people on the walls were those in: *The Muse of History* and *Corporate Em-brace*. As a result, works containing affirmative portraits of black people, such as those by Bernie Searle and David Goldberg, were inadvertently marginalised, while *Corporate Em-brace* and *The Muse of History* (as paintings) were foregrounded. These paintings signalled the absence of images of black women within the western canon and their physical exploitation in South Africa, yet their presence also risked re-instilling the prejudices that they were intended to dispel. The artists' renditions of their subjects as types rather than autonomous personalities (both with their breasts exposed) reproduced common stereotypes. As Martin Berger maintains, the use of dehumanising imagery may re-inscribe prejudice even when it is intended to critique it:

Dehumanising stereotypes, wherever they are produced, argue subtly but persistently to individuals belonging to the dominant culture that certain classes of people differ from themselves and, more ominously, that those people are less than human (Berger 2005: 133)

*The Muse of History* and *Corporate Em-brace* cast their black subjects as imposters in the white space. The depiction of the sitter in 'tribal' attire in *The Muse of History* dislocated her from her setting in the artist's studio and the woman in *Corporate Em-brace* was represented in a way that appeared alien in the fine art arena. Undressed apart from bandages and tilted up from the horizontal, the woman was posed as if waiting to be inspected rather than

admired. As such she served as the object, rather than the subject, of the art work. As stated previously, the difference in treatment between these images and various other nudes and portraits in the exhibition would have been compounded by the privilege accorded to the white subjects through the dark décor and dim light. Together these processes exacerbated the museum's stereotypes by replaying them.

## Revealing process in the mode of display

Like *Fabrications*, *Romantic Childhood* was framed as a revisionist display. In its case rather than use 'copy-cat' imagery the historic works themselves were used as the basis for critique. At first glance *Romantic Childhood* appeared to follow the strict precepts of the linear display with the room divided into thematic realms, each delineated by its title on the wall. However, the guided tours provided evidence that the layout was intended to encourage a political reading, with a particular emphasis placed on garnering the attention of young audience members.

The gallery's education officer informed me *Romantic Childhood* was used as a starting point on school tours as a means to orientate children to the rest of the gallery (I had the opportunity to observe this first-hand on fieldtrips). The exhibition therefore provided a first point of contact for many children who visited SANG. The multi-layered content of the display encouraged audience members to adopt a questioning approach to art, which was made more pertinent for children by its child focused theme. Through this exhibition, the museum reaffirmed its commitment to making the education of children a paramount concern. As a consequence, the exhibition resonated with Paris' work at the beginning of apartheid (discussed in chapter five) when he attempted to engage with the 'whole family'.

## Lavinia the maid

The layout of *Romantic Childhood* invited the audience to consider *Lavinia* as the masterpiece of the display [plate 8.9]. Painted by the renowned English painter Thomas Gainsborough, *Lavinia the Milk Maid* (1786) was positioned in the traditional place of the 'masterpiece' at the centre of the left-hand wall. The painting's stature was further signalled by the placement of smaller paintings to either side of it and by the title of the

exhibition written directly above it on the wall in gold paint. Below the painting a text board entitled: *Thomas Gainsborough: Images of Childhood*, provided detailed information on Gainsborough paintings in European museums, which informed the audience of the art work's western provenance and established its value on western terms. Significantly, the text board was the only one used at SANG during the two-year period the exhibition was hung. These 'props' alerted the audience to the painting's stature as the masterpiece. At the same time the guides indicated its presence was intended to expose more complex readings in the display, not merely to aggrandise *Lavinia*.



**Plate 8.9** Lavinia the Milk Maid at the centre of the left hand wall in Romantic Childhood: Thomas Gainsborough's *Lavinia* in the Sir Abe Bailey Bequest (2006) SANG (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Standing before the work the guide first described *Lavinia* as one of Gainsborough's 'masterpieces' and then drew attention to its social content. The guide informed the audience that the child posed for *Lavinia* was in fact a boy who had been dressed as a 'milk maid', so as to enhance the pathos of the image and give greater weight to its poverty related theme (Walking tour Staff Member I 2006: 202):

Gainsborough is painting this little boy to show you he is aware that there are poor people in the world. He doesn't have one sleeve, no shoes and a bowl (ibid.: 203)

The guide's description alerted the audience to the work's use as an advertisement for the 'charitable cause' (Borzello 1987: 21-31), a use evident in the artist's deliberate manipulation of the audience's pity through his rendition of the shoeless 'girl' apparently working late into the night. The guide's presentation thus staged the painting as an eighteenth century precursor to nineteenth century social realist painting, which 'thrust ... the problem of the poor' into 'dinner parties' and 'Downing Street' (ibid.: 22). As well as alerting the audience to Gainsborough's role in raising the profile of childhood poverty in English society, the guides drew attention to the complicity of Georgian artists in the then commonplace abuse of working children. The guides achieved this aim by describing how the children used to model for *Lavinia* and the image to its right, *Master Knipe* (Andrew Geddes n.d.), had tuberculosis at the point their portraits were created (a fact they substantiated by drawing attention to the red flush of the models' cheeks) (Staff Member I 22/08/06: 210). The suggestion that the children were not well enough to have posed for these paintings created the impression that their relationship with the painters was one of exploitation (ibid.).



**Plate 8.10** Panel of photographs to the right of the display on the back of the screen in *Romantic Childhood 2006* (photograph by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2006)

The use of *Lavinia* and *Master Knipe* as cyphers to discuss the polemical role of portraiture of the poor in eighteenth and nineteenth century England was taken forward in *Romantic Childhood* through imagery that drew attention to poverty in twentieth century South Africa. On the back of a screen, placed so that the viewer had to ‘find’ the works, were a series of photographs depicting different aspects of ‘South African life’ [plate 8.10]. These included a single image of a ‘poverty stricken’ black child. In the untitled photograph a dishevelled, shoeless, ‘coloured’ girl mirrored the presentation of *Lavinia*’s portrait in both its subject and journalistic style [plate 11.6, page 347].

By re-enacting Gainsborough’s image the photograph transposed its scene of rural deprivation to the urban township. Rather than being lavishly hung at the centre of the display the work’s placement, unlabelled, on the back of the gallery screen lent poignancy to its depiction of poverty by, perhaps unintentionally, framing its subject as the ‘forgotten’ poor. By bringing the exhibition’s social narratives to the surface these images linked western art history with local stories of poverty and exploitation.

## Forbidden fruit

The theme of childhood exploitation was amplified in a series of sexualised representations of girls by male artists to the right of the entrance. Under the wall heading *Erotic Innocence* the oxymoron of the title played out in five paintings of young female muses including: *The Captive* (Alexi Alexeivich Harlamoff c.1900) [plate 8.11], *Forbidden Fruit* (James Shannon 1898) and *The Lost Bird* (Marcus Stone 1883). The title *The Lost Bird* alluded to the fact that its young subject had lost her virginity, in its evocation of the Victorian expression the ‘bird has flown the cage’ (Staff Member I 22/08/06: 200) [plate 8.12 map overleaf]. Conversely, *Forbidden Fruit* indicated its sitter was the object of the artist’s unfulfilled sexual desire.





**Plate 8.11** *The Captive* (Alexi Alexeivich Harlamoff, c.1900) SANG  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

In *The Captive*, the paedophilic connotations of the work were signalled through the representation of the girl as a potential seducer, making direct eye contact with the audience as if to vindicate her abuse [plate 8.11]. The double-meaning of the title presented her both as the artist's captive and as holding him captive through her beguiling gaze.

The trope of the 'bad girl' in *Erotic Innocence* was compounded by its staging alongside a display entitled *Holy Innocence*, which contained images of white girls praying [plate 8.12 – areas highlighted in green]. The Madonna/Magdalen dichotomy created by this juxtaposition was given modern relevance through a 1950s studio portrait, shown on a display screen. In the portrait a young white girl unwittingly mediated the Magdalen trope through her pose clutching an apple, or the 'forbidden fruit' [plate 11.4]. The exhibition thus gave an insight into how the gendered stereotypes embedded in western art history continue to replay in modern life. At the same time, the sexualised images of white girls and young women risked reproducing stereotypes that the exhibition sought to disrupt, in a similar way to the images of black women in *Fabrications*.

The inclusion of critical material across the historic exhibitions appeared to refute the idea of the pristine masterpiece and with it the sanctity of the canon. The displays therefore indicated they had challenged SANG's allegiance to canonical western history. Yet, this disruption needs to be seen in the light of the fact that the historic display had only recently been created and that the temple type practices it alluded to were not the museum norm. For the most part the historic European exhibitions therefore failed to deal with the particularities of the gallery's raced and gendered history, which privileged white, English male subject matter and stories over aesthetics and form. Instead the displays critiqued a simulacrum of the western canon. As a consequence the racial and gendered revisions became critiques of universalising museum principles and wider prejudice, not criticisms of the museum's practices per se. This is with the exception of *Fabrications*' treatment of *Holiday Town in Cape Town*, which did present the gallery as if it were complicit in its narrative by highlighting its racist content and ongoing display.

Nevertheless, *Fabrications* and *Romantic Childhood* demonstrated SANG's awareness of the fictive boundaries surrounding western art history and the gallery's commitment to illuminating the exclusionary precepts on which fine art was built. The exhibitions also promoted different ways of looking at famous paintings. The political mode of display demonstrated SANG's continued distinction from museums in Europe with historic collections which remain committed to the historicizing canon. Taking the National Gallery in London and the Louvre in Paris as prototypical examples, one finds their main halls are dedicated to 'important' works of art that assume 'a fixed canon of value' and leave 'relatively little room for manoeuvre' (Barker 1999: 88). In these institutions reinterpretation of the art work has generally taken place outside of the main halls in subsidiary spaces, such as in the *Making and Meaning* exhibitions at the National Gallery in 1997 which was hosted away from the main display (ibid.: 97).

However, despite the inclusion of black subjects in SANG's historic exhibitions their presence remained characterised as 'other' – either through their stereotyped depiction or their relegation to the screens. Paradoxically, by appearing to unsettle the canon the exhibitions thus provided a rationale for the continued existence of the historic fine art display, which meant that whiteness and fine art were inadvertently revalorised.

## Section Three: The Influence of the Early Patrons

**Table 8.2** Randlord Exhibitions between 1995 and 2009

Year	Exhibition title
1995	The Alfred de Pass Presentation to the South African National Gallery
1999	The Sir Edmund and Lady Davis Presentation: A Gift of British Art to South Africa
2001-2002	The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest: A Reappraisal
2005	New Light on Old Masters – conservation of Sir Abe Bailey Bequest
2006-2008	Romantic Childhood: Thomas Gainsborough’s ‘Lavinia’ in the Sir Abe Bailey Bequest
2008-2009	The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest

The reintroduction of the patrons into SANG’s displays brought further legitimacy to the historic fine art collection and by extension the white subject. The reduction in power of the Randlords’ bequests during apartheid went into reverse post-apartheid when they were reclaimed as a dominant force in the gallery. A reversal evidenced by the number of exhibitions that cited the Randlords’ names in their titles from 1995 to 2009 [table 8.2].

Between 1995 and 2009 SANG put on six exhibitions that paid tribute to individual Randlords. Of these, four exhibitions were dedicated to Sir Abe Bailey (in acknowledgement of his singular role as the gallery’s largest patron) and one each to Alfred de Pass and Sir Edmund Davis, along with his wife Lady Davis. The majority of these exhibitions were hosted for more than a year and a number for two years, thus for eight of the thirteen years following the advent of democracy the Randlords had a significant, named presence in the museum. Using the Randlords to navigate the collection had three important implications. First, it provided a further rationale for the inclusion of European fine art work in the gallery. Second, it re-privatised the historic section of the museum (by framing it as the donor’s space) and third, it drew attention to the gallery’s colonial legacy without addressing the negative impact of colonial practice.

The recognition given to the Randlords fits in with the general movement in western museums in the late twentieth century to give precedence to donors – with a consequent

return to an understanding of the display space as a ‘memorializing ritual’ (Duncan 1995: 68-69). The trend turned the public museum into a semi-private realm reversing what was previously considered the remit of the modern museum, namely to transform ‘private’ works into public property (Saumarez-Smith 1989: 6).

The singular attention paid to donors within the museum has meant the ‘memorial-seeking rich have gained ground over the rights of the citizen’ (Duncan 1995: 70). In her seminal work *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, Chin-tao Wu describes how the commercialisation of European and American public galleries in the 1980s led them to make themselves as attractive as possible to potential donors (2002), as a consequence these museums have become less committed to the idea of the museum as a ‘democratic, public space’ (Duncan 1995: 70). At SANG the prominent position of the donors took on racial significance as it reinserted the white colonial patron at the centre of the display.

## The Bailey dynasty

At SANG the focus on the early patrons is partly explained by the presence of the *Sir Abe Bailey Bequest* and the involvement of Bailey’s descendants who have retained a vested interest in his collection. Since SANG’s inception Bailey has held a singular role in the gallery both as its largest donor and because of the restrictions he placed on his bequest, which meant it either had to be shown by SANG or returned to his estate for allocation elsewhere (discussed in chapter four). The stipulations on his bequest have ensured its continued presence in the gallery and have perhaps given impetus to SANG’s decision to retain a permanent fine art display. Importantly, the bequest has also encouraged Bailey’s heirs, who remain the guardians of his estate, to engage with the gallery.

Between 1995 and early 2009 the role played by the Bailey family in the gallery steadily increased. Perhaps not coincidentally their increased engagement coincided with the Randlords’ rise to prominence in gallery exhibitions. Although I wasn’t able to interview any family members (despite requests), I ascertained how the bequest was administered from interviews with staff members and exploration of the displays. These sources revealed that after the end of apartheid Bailey’s trustees took on a role in the

gallery that went deeper than merely discharging a duty to the estate, which would have been restricted to checking that the works in the Bailey bequest were on display and maintained in good condition (Staff Member B 2006:15). Instead, the relationship between the family and the gallery appeared to closely resemble the partnerships between the relatives of patrons and western donor memorials, through which families kept their ancestors' memories alive (Duncan 1995: 95-99). For example, the trustees released money for the development and maintenance of a website dedicated to Bailey and his collection and provided funds for conservation work across the fine art display (Staff Member B 2006: 12-15). They also gave money to support a large-scale exhibition dedicated to Bailey in 2001, and to produce a lavish full-colour catalogue that was part funded by the estate (Proud 2001). These interventions suggest that Bailey, and the other Randlords, would not have had the level of exposure that they had in the gallery post-apartheid without the involvement of his family. Nor would Bailey have maintained his central stature.

SANG benefitted from the relationship with Bailey's family as it meant it was able to divest its scant funds to other areas of practice (Staff Member B 2006: 15). The Bailey family also profited from the interaction as it enabled them to concretise Bailey's 'existence in the memory of the living' and by extension give recognition to themselves as Bailey's descendants (Duncan 1995: 84). Duncan has identified that a common feature in the 'life' of 'donor memorials' is that the family becomes 'sacralised' by their proximity to the collection (ibid.: 84). Whilst it may not have been Bailey's family's intention, it is fair to suggest that their links with the gallery enhanced their status, as it accorded them the means to pass cultural, economic and symbolic capital from one generation to the next (Bourdieu 1984: 228).

As well as strengthening the bond between the Bailey dynasty and the gallery, the continued emphasis on the Randlords reawakened ties between the gallery and the white South African community through its recognition of the Randlords' contribution to South African life. Duncan outlines how donor spaces not only idealise individuals and their families, but 'also speak for a class outlook that measures the worth of individuals by the status of their (collective) ancestry' as they 'actively recycle social identities of the past for the benefit of the living' (1995: 68). Given the racial inclusions/exclusions at play in SANG, the valorisation of its patrons is best understood as an affirmation of

white South African ancestry, illustrated in a brief case study of *The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest: A Reappraisal* (2001).

## A homely space

The 2001 exhibition was the most developed of the Randlord displays, and it was here that the themes of the donor memorial and white South African heritage were most fully realised. Most of the works in *The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest* came from Bailey's sporting collection and included works with which he had a personal connection, such as two paintings of his favourite racehorses. The art works were staged alongside carved wooden furniture, porcelain tableware and a fox in a glass cabinet. The familiar quality of these objects, situated alongside art works commissioned by Bailey, framed them as if they were his personal effects rather than inanimate museum pieces. The intimate setting was further personalised by the inclusion of a 'scrap-book' style display wall. The wall contained multiple small paintings and photographs of the countryside, including sport and hunting scenes, with Bailey's portrait as their centrepiece. In this photographic montage an association was created between Bailey and the 'sporting life' and Bailey and his South African home. Staging the collection in this way would have served to remind the audience of white South Africa's sporting legacy and Bailey's significant place within it (discussed in chapter four).

The recreation of Bailey's 'life' within the auspices of the modern gallery was theatrical, offering a vision of the past that was both real and extraordinary. The conflation of Bailey with his collection, in the inclusion of his self-portrait, art commissions and household items invited the audience to view the space as a source of 'homely' biographical information [plate 8.13]. Concurrently, the placement of these items in a formal setting suggested they, and their benefactor, should be treated with reverence.



**Plate 8.13** Display layout in *The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest: A Reappraisal* (2001)  
(drawing by Catherine Hahn)

The play between the personal and reverential is a classic aspect of the donor memorial. Personal elements of donor displays are counteracted by the retention of museum conventions which operate to distance the viewer from the objects and invite their respect (ibid.: 89). For instance, although memorial exhibitions frequently include chairs, Duncan notes that there is always a clear expectation these will not be sat on, as the audience is positioned as if ‘calling on ... the donor and his ancestors, but hardly on equal terms’ (ibid.: 74). The distancing strategies of the donor memorial were replicated in the Bailey exhibition through restricted access to household items, such as a fox in a glass display cabinet. However, the exhibition’s rendition of Bailey as a ‘self-made man’ also brought a personal and accessible dimension to the display as it made an oblique reference to the white South African ‘everyman’. This sentiment was enhanced through the inclusion of un-ostentatious period furniture, such as a set of comfortable armchairs, which gave the room a homely ‘lived-in’ feel.

Significantly, the museum’s rendition of Bailey’s life rekindled white nostalgia, without the corollary of a counter-critique. The sanitised representation of Bailey retained the

‘character of enterprise in the white male’ (Dyer 1997: 15), while ignoring the historic context out of which this role was born. For example, Bailey’s part in the mining industry was touched on in the catalogues,<sup>5</sup> but wholly absent from the exhibition. Similarly the exhibition’s emphasis on Bailey’s personal life and sporting art collection evoked the settler myth with the racist elements of this heritage removed. The promotion of a hermetically sealed vision of the archetypal settler male invited the white audience to reimagine their own colonial heritage with its difficult elements removed. Jordanova recounts that despite museum audiences being aware on one level of the ‘artificial, fabricated nature’ of ‘simulacrum of the past’ on another they ‘assent to the historical authenticity and reality of what they see’, in particular when they can relate to its imaginings (1989: 25). In *The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest* the white audience were offered a vision of the past which was partly familiar, and a myth of white benevolence with which many would have liked to agree.

## Conclusion

The reduction in space allocated to European art potentially opened up the museum to alternative claims, while the revisionist elements included in SANG’s historic exhibitions between 1995 and 2009 provided opportunities for critical viewing. The changes reinforced SANG’s difference from national art museums in Europe and America, which for the most part remained committed to the twin notions of authenticity and authority (Saumarez-Smith 2009: 17). However, the gallery not only recommitted itself to a western understanding of historic art, but strengthened this relationship through its development of a new European historical display space. The message this relayed was that fine art alone was worthy of its own space and sustained critical attention. Ironically, the revisionist aspects of the historic exhibitions brought life and rigour to the historic display thereby energising, rather than destabilising its dominant position

SANG’s centring of the western canon (by white artists of white subjects) recreated the historic binary between white and black people, both in its hierarchical arrangement and in its reconfirmation of (white) fine art and culture. Although images of black people

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<sup>5</sup> Catalogues for Bailey’s and Davis’ exhibitions mentioned the collections’ funding from the mines, but focused primarily on the Randlords’ personal biographies and collections (Proud 1999; Tietz 2001).

were featured in the fine art display congruence was drawn between European fine art, white kinship and the gallery through their differentiated mode of display. The gallery masked its past political practice through the implication that it operated as a temple prior to its post-apartheid reform. Consequently, the gallery's historic roles, as the home of the civilised-brute and the white South African family, were obscured by a vision of universal whiteness.

## Chapter Nine:

### African Art

To have a part of a collection called ‘African Art’ in Africa, in South Africa, is hugely problematic (SANG staff member A 2006: 447)

The term African art continues to be widely used in South African museums to refer to work that is made by black artists in a ‘traditional’ context: namely work that has rural associations; is utilitarian in function and can be ascribed to a specific region, tribe or clan. Naming only these works African has denied other produce made by Africans access to this authenticating category, whilst importantly denying ‘traditional’ African art entry to the centre of artistic practice (Goldberg 1993: 164).

The concept of an African art collection in South Africa is a paradox that has been exacerbated by the historic division of European and African cultural produce into fine art and anthropological/ethnographic sites. Whilst SANG has historically been the home of white cultural products, the South African Museum (SAM) has housed African art and craft. Situated less than one hundred metres from SANG in Company’s Garden, SAM began collecting African art and artefacts in the nineteenth century and has amassed thousands of African objects since this time. In contrast, up until 1994 SANG had less than sixty ‘so called’ African art works in its collection, which it used primarily to illustrate the path of European modernism (Martin 1996).<sup>1</sup>

During apartheid SAM’s geographic proximity to SANG strengthened the gallery’s position as a white political house, as the juxtaposition of the two museums supported the mechanisms of government legislation (Webb 1994: 20-24). SAM’s representation of the African as a primitive, amorphous entity provided a strong contrast with SANG’s narrative of rightful white citizenry, thereby promoting separate development and naturalising white rule.

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of these works were purchased in the late 1960s and 70s to demonstrate the ‘influence of African art on 20<sup>th</sup> Century [western] sculpture’. To this end small bronzes from West Africa were purchased alongside a number of sculptures from other African countries (PAM 709 6. FOR The West African Collection).

The fact that SANG only began to include African art works in any number after apartheid means SAM remains this work's de facto home. The popularity and longevity of SAM's African displays is demonstrated in its audience numbers. For example, in 2004 SAM had more than four times as many visitors as SANG (176,884 in comparison to 39,924).<sup>2</sup> The proximity of the sites and SAM's high status and visitor numbers indicated that many members of SANG's audience would come to view its African art works through the prism of SAM's displays.

Taking as a given the notion that SANG, as the national art museum, ought to show African art, this chapter looks at the potential consequences of SAM remaining African art's home. In the process the chapter looks at the representational strategies for viewing African art that have been deployed at both museums.

The first section, *The Primitivising Gaze*, discusses the anthropological mode of discourse used at SAM and the museum's depiction of the Khoisan (the 'first people' of Southern Africa) as the primitive and spectacle. The second section, *Miscast*, examines a ground-breaking and controversial exhibition hosted at SANG in 1996: *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of Khoi and San History and Material Culture*. *Miscast* attempted to undermine SAM's primitivising gaze by revealing the colonial brutality behind its displays. Although the exhibition raised important concerns about the Khoisan it also attracted criticism for its reduction of 'the "Bushman" [to] consumable ethnographic artefact' (Abrahams 1996: 29). Section Three, *African Prologue*, explores adaptations in museum practice at SAM and SANG that emerged out of the furore surrounding *Miscast*. SANG's role as a political house is shown to have provided it with the capacity to accommodate African art, as it enabled it to incorporate the 'life worlds' of functional objects in displays.

My examination provides the first comparative analysis of 'everyday' museum practice at SANG and SAM. Hitherto, comparison of the two sites has focused almost exclusively on polemic elements in the contentious exhibitions: *The Bushman Diorama* at SAM (1976-2001) and *Miscast* (1995) at SANG. Consequently, spectacular controversy has been highlighted at the expense of mundane museum practice.

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<sup>2</sup> Bredekamp 2004: 37-38, Iziko museums of Cape Town, Report 2003/2004, 'Reports', SANG archive.

Most of the data for this chapter was derived during detailed fieldwork at SAM in 2006 and 2010 when I mapped, photographed and drew SAM's *African Studies Galleries* and the exhibition *IQe and the Power of Rock Art*. Creating the images inadvertently provided an opportunity to observe visitor interaction in the space. By combining visual and observational methods I was able to determine that the ethnographic mode of display deployed at SAM had a direct impact on audience reception. In addition, I draw on detailed research on *Miscast*, which received substantial critical attention (Enwezor 1999; Atkinson 1999; Coombes 2004) and on more recent exhibitions at SANG, *Musuku* (2000) and *Ilifa Labantu* (2005). Continuity in the thesis has been retained by referring to all exhibitions in the past tense, despite the fact that SAM's exhibitions were still on display at the time my fieldwork was completed.

## The African Studies Galleries

SAM opened in 1825 and is the oldest natural history museum in South Africa. The museum was designed to contain dioramas of the natural habitat; illustrations of South Africa's flora and fauna; stuffed animals and animal skeletons as well as a large display dedicated to African culture. The 'modern' African displays at SAM date to the 1970s when the three *African Studies Galleries* were introduced.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2001 one of the displays, *The Bushman Diorama*, was closed by Iziko's CEO, Henry Bredekamp, as a result of public complaints and his own concerns, as a person of Khoisan ancestry, that the exhibit had the potential to cause harm through its reductive depiction of the Khoisan in a life-size scene of a 'Bushman' hunt (Dubin 2009: 59, 78). The other two *African Studies Galleries* remained open to the public, in part because their small scale and scientific framework meant they did not generate the same level of criticism from the public and in part because of a sustained campaign by the tourist industry to keep them open.<sup>3</sup> Although *The Bushman Diorama* attracted more negative publicity, the remaining exhibitions provided similarly reductive and stereotypical readings of their African subjects. Significantly, by foregrounding tribal

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<sup>3</sup> Iziko's CEO, Henry Bredekamp, was visited shortly after the closure of the diorama by Cape Town tour operators who 'threatened' they would take SAM off their routes, unless the rest of the ethnographic section remained, as they considered 'its offerings of "real" tribesmen' were what the tourists came to see (Goodnow 2006: 42).

(stable) communality, rather than political (unstable) community, the museum ignored shifts and transitions in African art and by association its transformative capacities.



**Plate 9.1** Nama Camp

Exhibition text reads in part as follows: 'This display depicts a late nineteenth century herder camp ...The diversity of household goods reflects a transition from nomadic pastoralism to a more settled way of life'

The African Studies Gallery, SAM,

(photograph by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2010)

The two remaining *African Studies Galleries* focused on black 'tribal' heritage within tableaux that included life-size painted casts of people, artefacts and art objects [Appendix, plates 11.7-11.9]. Three of the exhibits were set up to suggest 'real-life' encounters, the most developed of which, the *Nama Camp*, presented a full-size hut [plate 9.1]. The majority of the other cabinets in the exhibition used detailed texts and artefacts to elucidate specific aspects of custom and practice. These elements were intended to frame their exhibits as 'real' manifestations of African culture, which was underscored by the exhibition's placement of the white expert in a central role.

## The white expert

Within the *African Studies Galleries* the white expert held a seminal role through a cabinet dedicated to the anthropologist Margaret Shaw (1911-2002) [plate 9.2]. Shaw, who was responsible for the construction of the exhibition, was given credit in the display

text for the introduction of: ‘A system of ethnographic classification that remains in use today’. The cabinet on Shaw’s work concentrated on her personal journey. Two large portrait photographs of Shaw, one as a young woman the other older, created the impression she had been engaged in the field of anthropology throughout her life. The photographs were accompanied by four smaller images that represented her work ‘in the field’.



**Plate 9.2** Margaret Shaw 1991 – 2002, The African Studies Gallery, SAM, (photograph by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2010)

The way Shaw was posed in the group photographs made clear she was intended to be viewed differently from the Africans on display. Her position, leaning over to observe someone work, and the text accompaniments situated her as the ‘expert’ rather than participant, such as in ‘Watching the making of ostrich-eggshell beads, near Tsumkwe, northern Namibia, 1975’. Tools of the archaeological trade: journals, scales, a magnifying glass and text books laid out at the bottom of the cabinet leant further scientific veracity to Shaw’s expert role, complemented by a detailed description of her ‘pioneering work on material culture’.

Bennett describes how white authority is frequently affirmed in natural history sites through the emphasis on the white expert (2004: 55). Centring the white anthropologist represents whites as the rightful authority on African culture and as such invests them with the power to delimit black practice (ibid.). At SANG a similar white authority was

in operation in the wooden panels through their stories of white bosses and a willing black workforce (discussed in chapter three).

In the *African Studies Galleries* white authority was further affirmed through the relative invisibility of whites. Goldberg points out, in specific relation to SAM, that whites are ‘notable by their explicit absence’ although their ‘explanations adorn the walls’, confirmed by the fact that, apart from in the Shaw cabinet, whites were otherwise visibly absent from all of the gallery displays (Goldberg 2002: 160). Drawing on Said (1978), he describes how the type of naming and knowledge construction that was used in SAM’s displays was designed to ‘deny all autonomy to those so named and imagined, extending power, control, authority and domination over them’ (ibid.: 150).

Dominating forms of categorisation were present in all aspects of the display, but were most in evidence in the treatment of the Khoisan who were contextualised as the living embodiment of the ‘primitive’. This treatment forms the basis of the extended case study below, which elucidates the key concepts deployed in the *African Studies Galleries*. The study pays particular attention to de-politicised and demeaning representations of Khoisan culture at SAM, which serve as the backdrop to SANG’s exhibition, *Miscast*, which is discussed afterwards.

## Exhibiting Khoisan culture

In 2010 the derogatory term ‘Bushman’ was still evident in the *African Studies Galleries*, as a by-product of their 1970s design. Unless quoting directly from the text the term Khoisan is deployed here, rather than ‘Bushman’, as the term Khoisan is now widely used (including as a self-nominative category) to describe the ethnicity of people whose backgrounds sit within the rubric of South Africa’s ‘first nation people’ (Coombes 2004: 208-209).<sup>4</sup>

Each display cabinet, with the exception of the one dedicated to Shaw, included African cultural artefacts. These artefacts were either labelled according to tribal affiliation, such as: *The Southern Nguni*; *The Swazi* and *The South Sotho*, or cultural practice, such as: *Clothing and Ornament*; *Fertility and Prosperity* and *Fighting, Initiation and Goodwill*. The display was divided into two areas, one concentrating on Khoisan culture, the other on the customs of African ‘tribes’. In all cases the descriptions of works within the exhibition were, as Coombes describes in *History after Apartheid*, ‘ridiculously reductive and inadequate to the task of describing the complex kinship patterns of diversified and heterogeneous communities with different political and geographical affiliation’ (2004: 208-209). The treatment had a particular impact on the Khoisan. Their geographic separation from the other tribal groups and placement at the back of the display created a sense of evolutionary progress from the Khoisan, in the role of ‘hunters and gatherers’, to the ‘more developed’ cultures of the other black groups. This sense of a frozen journey was underpinned by the particulars of the display, which held the Khoisan in pre-history in perpetuity.

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<sup>4</sup> Some people of Khoisan heritage define themselves as ‘coloured’ or Cape Malay, in particular those with mixed ethnicities (Mitchell, F. 2010: 3 *Khoisan Identity* SAHO Public History Internship, ‘Reports’, SANG archive.



In the first cabinet in the Khoisan area of the display, *Clothing and Ornament*, two female figures were posed in loincloths, one sitting and the other crouching on a rocky surface [plate 9.3]. One of the women was depicted biting the edges of an ostrich egg bead to make it smooth, the other drilling a hole in a piece of eggshell with a stick. This method of crafting beads became obsolete in the mid-twentieth century, through the introduction of hand machinery. Nevertheless, the exhibition text portrayed this mode of production and its cultural significance as if it continued into the present day:

Women, particularly love ornament. Bits of root or red seeds and horns are used, as well as plaited grass or animal hair and bands of leather. Above all they use the disc beads that they make themselves of ostrich eggshell

The archaic picture that the text conjured set the Khoisan aside from the urban world. The same reductive strategy was reproduced across the display in texts that described the Khoisan generically as ‘Bushmen’ and framed them in relation to stereotypes such as gender specific rural roles. For example, the *Clothing and Ornament* exhibit contained the following text:

Men wear a three-cornered loincloth and women a small apron ... a cloak is worn for warmth; women sometimes tie it to form a pouch to carry home food

Alongside the representation of fixed gendered roles, the text depicted people of Khoisan origin as if they remained a nomadic community into the twenty-first century:

In the dry season the Bushmen move about in small family groups and their dwellings are no more than rough shelters against the wind. During and after the rainy season, however the families gather and settle in the vicinity of water

Whilst the return of ancestral lands post-apartheid enabled some people of Khoisan heritage to adopt semi-nomadic lifestyles, for the most part, people of Khoisan heritage are integrated members of the wider, settled South African community (Besten 2005). The museum’s representation of the Khoisan therefore refuted the realities of their lives in the present day and ignored the intersection of their culture with others.

## Khoisan art

Importantly, the representational devices used to display Khoisan culture detracted from the art and craft objects in the display, which were represented as evidence of the Khoisan's lifestyle rather than as works of art. Situated around the central figures, and frequently obscured by them, various beads and pieces of worked cloth were exhibited, on stands, on the floor or pinned to the walls. These works were framed on hessian, which was intended to give the exhibition a 'natural feel', but also merged the art and craft works into the background of the display making them appear as if they had little intrinsic significance. Short index cards accompanied the works that provided no context in terms of who made them beyond group identity. This absence might have been anticipated for historic works whose makers have long been lost to time, but was replicated in twentieth century art and craft works, whose provenance is likely to have been known to the museum. The lack of information on cultural objects made by the Khoisan indicated SAM did not consider 'naming' or authoring their works as a priority. This inference is supported by the museum's generic treatment of works from different periods and regions which were collapsed into the same categories of representation, such as in the label: 'Aprons' [plate 9.4].



**Plate 9.4** Aprons (Nharo) The African Studies Gallery, SAM  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2010)

The use of generic labelling follows a format frequently used in ethnographic exhibitions in which 'Objects are commonly selected as representative, rather than unique, examples' (Lidche 1997: 172). By means of being grouped together in ethnographic categories cultural objects are reduced to an 'imitation of reality' the effectiveness of which relies to a high degree on 'selectivity and construction' (ibid.). At SAM the main effect of objects being used as signifiers of wider cultural themes is that it obscured their aesthetic qualities.

Each cabinet was accompanied by texts that were intended to give an overview of the display. The texts were printed on tan coloured sheets accompanied by illustrations and hazy sepia photographs. The 'parchment' like quality of the texts gave them the appearance of historic documents, which along with the tools of the archaeologist's trade in the Shaw cabinet, created the impression of viewing a real experience, transcribed for posterity.

The yellowing 'parchment' and use of old photographs reinforced the notion that the practices viewed were static, or slow changing, and therefore situated outside of the modern, progressive art world. The text extended this idea to suggest that the Khoisan were not merely static in matters of art, but irrevocably retrogressive, stating: 'Bushman art today is confined to the decoration of useful object' as the 'Bushmen' who 'used to paint on the rocks ... no longer survive' [plate 9.5].





**Plate 9.6** The Lydenburg Heads AD 500 – 700, The African Studies Gallery, SAM (photograph by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2010)

Significantly, the lack of importance ascribed to art works in the *African Studies Galleries* meant critical pieces in Southern African art history, including the *Lydenburg Heads* (AD 500-700), were given cursory attention. The *Lydenburg Heads* are the oldest Iron-age sculptures to have been found south of the equator<sup>5</sup> [plate 9.6]. The seven terracotta heads, named after their place of discovery, were excavated from the Lydenburg site in eastern Transvaal in 1957 and subsequently moved to the *African Studies Galleries*. Although acknowledged as important artefacts through a dedicated display cabinet, the dilapidated condition of their 1970s display, which included a photographic background and faded map, gave little indication of their cultural value or material worth. The seminal position of the *Lydenburg Heads* in Southern African art history was also masked by the concerns of the display, which focused on their (white) finder and geographical location not their artistic properties.

## Bodily assaults

As well as diminishing the impact of the art objects, the *African Studies Galleries'* hermetic representation of Khoisan culture failed to recognise the abuses inflicted by European colonisers on the Khoisan. In direct contrast to SANG, which conjoined

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<sup>5</sup> Thematic Essay: Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, Department of Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/lyde/hd\\_lyde.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/lyde/hd_lyde.htm) accessed 10/10/2006.

politics and art, SAM represented the Khoisan as a pure and primitive people placed outside the time continuum and, by extension, the colonial experience. As a consequence, the ‘reprehensible’ treatment that the Bushmen received ‘at the hands of Europeans’ was disregarded (Dubin 2009: 61). The abuses inflicted on the Khoisan by European colonisers included attempts to ‘exterminate’ them in the nineteenth century and colonial legislation that made it legal to ‘hunt’ them into the twentieth century (ibid.: 61-62). There were also individual atrocities, such as the creation of ‘tobacco pouches from the breasts of murdered Bushman women’ (ibid.).



**Plate 9.7** ‘Bushman boy playing the //ha’. Life cast taken at Tokai 1910, The African Studies Galleries, SAM (photograph by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2010)

Notably, though it did not acknowledge the brutal intersection between the Khoisan and the colonisers, the exhibition symbolically perpetuated Khoisan suffering through its inclusion of painted life casts. The audience was alerted to the presence of these casts by small plaques situated within the cabinets [plate 9.7]. Between 1920 and 1940 SAM’s modeller, James Drury, created sixty-eight casts of Khoisan men, women and children, many of whom were being held in British South African prisons (Davison 1993.: 171). Most of the Khoisan prisoners, if not all, had no choice about whether to have their casts made, and in some cases received serious injuries (ibid.). No reference was made

within the exhibition to the casting process or the harm it caused to its protagonists.<sup>6</sup> However, this abuse was well documented in academic museum circles. For example, Patricia Davison, SAM's Director, describes how the hot plaster Drury applied to the models' bodies sometimes resulted in severe burns (ibid.: 169-171). As well as being physically dangerous the process of casting was also demeaning and abusive. Drawing on a medical journal in the museum archive, Pippa Skotnes identifies the ill-treatment of Khoisan women at the hands of Drury during the process of being cast (Coombes 2004: 217). In the journal, Drury, along with a colleague, M.R. Drennan, purported to have 'exposed' the 'difference' between Khoisan women and those of European extraction through what they described as an 'examination', but which was actually a serious sexual assault that included the men using forceps to 'pull out' a woman's '*labia minora*' (Drury and Drennan).<sup>7</sup>

The sanctioned sexual abuse and dehumanisation of the woman was not authorised within the museum's public account, but did sit as a silent witness to visitor reception of the figures. Of the sixty-eight casts made by Drury, eight remained on display throughout my fieldwork including the figure of a boy playing music and five of women, from young to old, in various states of undress. The visitors I observed during my research in the *African Studies Galleries* appeared more interested in the figures than in any other aspect of the display. Their interest was evidenced by the extended time they spent viewing the casts, posing for photographs alongside them and making comments that related almost exclusively to them.

The attention given to the figures did not appear to bring greater knowledge to bear on their subjects, but rather cast them as curiosity and spectacle. In some cases this led visitors to make a link between the Khoisan and exhibits of the animal world represented elsewhere in the museum. For example, on one of my fieldtrips a white child visitor appeared to conflate the figures with the animal exhibits in the adjoining room when he asked his parent: 'Are they stuffed?' (Field notes 9/01/2010). Linking the figures with taxidermy also brought associations with death, as noted by Coombes:

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<sup>6</sup> *The Bushman Diorama* contained exhibits that explained how the casts were made, with the intention of giving scientific veracity to the display. Following its closure in 2001 the only direct references to the casts within the exhibition space were on the exhibit labels.

<sup>7</sup> An extensive extract from Drury's diary is printed in Coombes, which was sourced from Skotnes' unpublished manuscript *The Politics of Bushman Representations* 1996 (Coombes 2004: 217).

The physical traces of human contact and the flesh of human beings that have since died in often demeaning and distressing circumstances ... poses ... [a] visceral association with death and dissection (2004: 222)

The connection made between the Khoisan and the dead reinforced the idea that they were a people lost to time. As well as raising the spectre of the primitive and the macabre, the presence of female nudity situated the casts as sites of sexual fantasy. On my fieldtrips I witnessed numerous visitors making vulgar jokes about the exhibits with particular regard to the women's bare breasts. For instance, one group of four white visitors talked about how the woman biting the ostrich egg 'should have worn a bra' (Field notes 15/01/10).

The white visitors' responses evoked the early twentieth century 'European obsession' with African women who were represented as 'the racialized and anatomically grotesque "Other"', a portrayal that invited 'both fantasy about, and objectification of, its female victims' (Jacob 2010: 40-43). In Europe and South Africa Khoisan women have a particular history as the object of sensationalist white sexual interest. This interest focused on the women's perceived body shape and in particular the steatopygia (extended buttocks) of some Khoisan women, which coalesced around Saartje Baartman in the nineteenth century (Arnold 1996: 25). The inference drawn from Baartman's display was that the "'primitive" sexual organs' of the Khoisan corresponded to a "'primitive" sexual appetite', which in turn translated into a white fantasy of 'sexual availability' (ibid.: 26). Drury's obsession with the genitalia of his models and an over focus on black women in his display suggests he too had a pornographic investment in his subjects, which resonated in the vulgar responses of visitors to the display. The voyeuristic interest in the casts (as indicated by laughter and inappropriate engagement) drew further attention away from the art, as it meant that once the figures had been discussed and/or photographed the audience moved away.



SAM's representation of the Khoisan was particularly demeaning nevertheless it is important to acknowledge that the *African Studies Galleries* applied a reductive approach to black subjects in all areas of the display. For example, crass phenotypes were deployed in a cabinet dedicated to 'beer-drinking' in which the audience was told 'Like all the Bantu speaking people the Basotho make beer'. Life-size models were also incorporated in culturally insensitive ways. For example, the *Bantu Initiation Rights* cabinet included a central masked figure who became another focal point for audience attention [plate 9.8]. The model of a 'Xhosa initiate' was attired in a palm leaf headdress and skirt with his body painted blue. On my fieldtrips I observed several groups adopting his pose and laughing and on one visit saw two adult groups having their photographs taken with 'him' their arms and one leg raised (Fieldtrip 17/01/10). Again, this suggested that the figure operated as a form of entertainment or spectacle for viewers, which trivialised tribal ceremony.

Writing about the ethnographic museum, Lidche describes the objectification of human subjects as the means by which 'the coloniser/seer/knower' makes themselves 'separate and distinct from the colonised/seen/known' (1997: 199). At SAM the reductive depiction of black culture, situated against the white 'expert' in her separate case, served as a reminder of the apartheid context in which the exhibition was created, when stereotyped representations of black people would have helped whites experience their authority.

## Discreet revisions

In the advent of democracy efforts were made to add critical elements to the display, but these were insubstantial. The 'revisions' took the form of a series of A4 photographs of 'modern African life', including images of taxi stations, Khoisan soldiers and women shopping, that were intended to question the fixed representations in the display. These images were supported by a noticeboard, entitled '*Out of Touch?*', which asked visitors to consider the limiting context of the display through a series of statements and questions:

*Do these exhibits create the impression all black South Africans live in rural villages, wear traditional dress and use only handmade utensils?*

*What* about those people who live and work in towns, travel abroad or become industrialists? *Do* they not challenge conventional ethnic stereotypes?

African culture is not static. *Why*, then are many labels in the gallery written in the present tense, as if time had stood still?



**Plate 9.9** 'Out of Touch?' Display board at the back of the display hall, The African Studies Gallery, SAM (photograph by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2010)

The photographs and text board challenged the fixity of the display but their intervention was too slight to disrupt its intention. The A4 photographs were positioned so that they did not obscure the main exhibits, as a consequence, I observed that they were frequently overlooked. Similarly, the noticeboard was tucked away at the back of the exhibition hall and I did not notice anyone reading it on my field trips, including those visitors who attended gallery tours [plate 9.9]. The use of sellotape to fix the A4 photographs to the front of the display boxes and the choice to place the critical text on a movable board gave the impression that these critiques were impermanent and therefore of less significance than the content of the permanent display. The interventions therefore did little to disrupt the display's representation of African culture as primitive and set aside from modern life or to undermine its focus on the spectacle. The revisions also failed to bring the art and craft work in the exhibition to the fore.

## Section Two: Miscast

A more substantial challenge to the authority of the *African Studies Galleries* was provided by the exhibition *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of Khoi and San History and Material Culture*, which was held at SANG in 1996. The exhibition illuminated the practices behind negative portrayals of the Khoisan, with the intention of alerting the audience to the abuses upon which these practices were built. *Miscast* was designed and curated by the white artist Pippa Skotnes and became the most well-known and controversial exhibition in SANG's history.<sup>8</sup> In this section I explore the themes of the exhibition and the criticism it received, which led to changes at both SANG and SAM.

*Miscast* was conceptualised as an artwork/installation through which Skotnes explored the objectification of the Khoisan people, which emerged with the arrival of the early Europeans in South Africa. An arrival she identified with Khoisan 'loss of life ... multiple language death and cultural genocide' (1997). In order to give vision to her concerns Skotnes borrowed works from SAM's storage facility which she integrated with images of 'harm' within her art installation at SANG. I was unable to reproduce photographs of *Miscast* to aid discussion and have therefore relied on written descriptions of the works.

The brutal themes of the exhibition were best exemplified by its two largest installations. The first of these was situated in the Liberman Hall and contained sections of Khoisan body casts from SAM's archive in their unpainted state. The white/grey casts, taken from various parts of the body, which included the torso and groin, were situated on individual plinths set out in a circle in the centre of the hall. In their unpainted and dislocated state the casts were open to multiple readings as: relics of a real human past; renditions of the ideal Greco-Roman form and body-parts from the morgue. Together these readings alluded to the humanity of the Khoisan and the brutalities enacted on them by both the colonists and by Drury, in his act of casting them. Interpretation of the casts as sites of harm was compounded when audience

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<sup>8</sup> Skotnes, a white artist and lecturer had a sustained interest in the heritage and culture of the Khoisan and had established herself as an artist by making copies and adaptations of rock paintings. This included the art book *Sound from the Thinking Strings* (1991), whose images were shown at SAM in 1991. Skotnes' art background was also steeped in conceptual practice, which she brought to bear on her exhibition.

members approached the works and were confronted with written texts that graphically recounted the oppression and abuse inflicted by the colonisers on the Khoisan. The second gallery hall gave further access to colonial brutality through a floor work which stretched across the room. The work consisted of derogatory nineteenth and early twentieth century texts and images about the Khoisan. For example, the material included descriptions of the Khoisan as ‘animals’ and pictures of what were described as ‘unusual characteristics of Khoisan anatomy’ including images of people’s genitalia (Lane 1996: 7-8).

In *Breaking the Mould?* (1996), Lane found that audience members across ethnic origin felt the exhibition offered a thought provoking and emotional connection with issues with which they had hitherto not engaged (ibid.). She found that white visitors in particular benefitted from the exhibition through an increased awareness of their ancestors’ role in perpetuating Khoisan abuse (ibid.: 8). Skotnes encouraged this response in white audience members through her representational mode which required close contact with the work. For example, the spread of work across the floor in room two gave the viewers no choice but to walk across them to reach the next hall. The layout thus confronted (white) viewers with their ancestors’ complicity in the Khoisan’s mistreatment: by ‘walking all over them’ (ibid.).

From its representational mode it seems likely that Skotnes conceptualised her exhibition with a white audience in mind. To this end, the exhibition had the positive outcome of raising awareness among whites of their antecedents’ exploitation of the Khoisan. However, the corollary of this focus was that it re-staged Khoisan suffering without appearing to take cognisance of how the Khoisan, or the broader black audience, might feel. This apparent oversight proved the greatest point of controversy in the display.

### If you had known

On the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1996, the night after the public opening, over four hundred people of Khoisan origin attended a public debate held at SANG.<sup>9</sup> The debate was advertised as a broad discussion on the exhibition, but became a forum to raise complaints. One

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<sup>9</sup> In total over seven hundred people attended the event (Martin 1996: 7).

participant, quoted by Abrahams, appeared to speak for many when she stated: 'If you had known our culture you would not have done this thing' (1996: 7). Most of the negative responses to *Miscast* derived from its re-staging of victimhood as art through the images on the floor and body casts (ibid.). In *Reframing the Black Subject*, Okwui Enwezor rightly suggests that the exposure *Miscast* gave to the exploitation of the Khoisan did not take into account the sentience of its 'victims' as it did not acknowledge the perspectives of the Khoisan and the wider black audience (1999: 393). Enwezor refers disparagingly to what he describes as Skotnes' role as the 'intimate outsider' (1999: 391). Critiquing the use of this term by Susan Vogel (who uses it affirmatively to discuss European curators and ethnographers in *Africa Explores* 1991) Enwezor maintains that Skotnes' failure to anticipate the feelings of black participants was rooted in the apartheid era expectation that whites speak for blacks (ibid.: 379). From this experience, he suggests, whites have learnt that they are an unimpeachable authority on the 'colonial native' and therefore struggle to imagine a different point of view (ibid.).

Skotnes rebutted the criticism that she was speaking for the Khoisan by contending that her 'research subject was not the Khoisan' but rather 'European colonial practice and interaction with indigenous communities' (Skotnes 1996: 1). She further asserted 'it was never my intention to represent or speak for anyone' (ibid.). The exhibition's focus on the dehumanisation of the Khoisan by the colonisers (and SAM's complicity in this through the display of Drury's casts) gives support to Skotnes' interpretation of her intent. However, the works shown in SANG's exhibition provided specific details and images of abuse against the Khoisan, who did not have control over these representations. Therefore, in this respect, the exhibition *did* make the Khoisan its subject.

Complaints about *Miscast* were raised by relatives of those whose casts were on display, as well as other members of the public. This included a man from Smitsdrift who used the forum on the 15<sup>th</sup> April to talk about the 'dishonour' his grandfather had felt in being taken to Cape Town to have his cast made and of his own sense of shame on viewing the casts (quoted by Yvette Abrahams of the *!Hurikamma Cultural Movement* (IHCM) 1996). Enwezor contended that in this instance Skotnes had failed to recognise and appreciate that the relatives of people whose images were in the display,

and people of Khoisan heritage, may have been violated by her decision to re-stage their history (1999: 393).

## Re-staging art

The criticism levelled at *Miscast* was relevant and vital, however its emphasis on sensationalist aspects of the exhibition meant it did not pick up sufficiently on how the exhibition staged Khoisan art and culture. This was a significant omission as it suggested that in *Miscast*, as in the African Studies Galleries, a focus on spectacle had drawn attention away from the art work on display.

*Miscast* contained large numbers of art works and artefacts made by members of the Khoisan community, which were interspersed with other imagery throughout the display. In the central display hall internally lit cabinets in red, black and grey contained objects from SAM's collection of Khoisan art. These included carvings, pierced ostrich eggs and musical instruments. The art works were punctuated by black and white photographs of the Khoisan that depicted graphic imagery of abuse including public hangings and decapitated heads. Although the display accorded space and attention to the cultural objects, the upsetting nature of the imagery around them all but refuted their association with art. For example, the close-up photographs of decapitated heads revealed the personalities of those who had died and, in their expressions, the traumas experienced in their deaths. Alongside the images the art works acted as traces of the deceased's lives, and as such became imbued with the same emotional resonance as the remnants of Jewish life (hair, teeth and clothing) presented in Holocaust museums. However, the depiction of these art objects as conduits for Skotnes' own art meant their context differed from that of imagery in Holocaust museums, where a 'bare realism' was instituted so as to reduce the risk of trivialising or sensationalising content (Zelizer 2001: 45). In contrast, slipping between the genres of conceptual art and atrocity, Skotnes stripped the objects of their social and aesthetic dimensions, which risked turning the exhibition into a performance of abuse. In other display rooms there were watercolours by Khoisan artists and contemporary photographs of Khoisan life that were not accompanied by images of harm. Yet, little attention was drawn to these images in the debates surrounding the show, hereby suggesting they were overshadowed by its sensational themes.

Skotnes' representation of African art works and the borrowed objects from SAM in her own art exhibition was made more problematic by the fact that black people did not share her level of access to these cultural objects. Indeed, it had only been two years since the education officers held their first exhibition at SANG and there were no black curators employed by SANG throughout the 1990s.

## A forum for debate

The concerns raised about *Miscast* led SANG's Director, Marilyn Martin, to contend that the exhibition had demonstrated to her that 'everyone has the right to choose his or her identity and self-definition'.<sup>10</sup> She went on to make a public apology on behalf of the gallery to those 'individuals and groups in the community who were hurt and angered' by the show.<sup>11</sup> She also acknowledged *Miscast* had 'offended and alienated many South Africans'.<sup>12</sup> Martin's apology indicated that the exhibition and its negative reception had made the gallery more aware of the impact of its practice and consequently more amenable to change. The museum's increased commitment to its public was demonstrated a year later in 1997 when it agreed to a request by Khoisan cultural groups to host a public forum in the gallery annexe on Human Rights Day (21<sup>st</sup> March). The meeting called for the repatriation of Saartjie Baartmaan's remains and was attended by roughly one thousand people (Martin 2009: 152).

## Section Three: African Prologue

Following the furore over *Miscast*, SAM and SANG adopted various new approaches to African cultural produce, these included: attempts by SANG to increase the number of African displays; a greater emphasis on African art at SAM and an increased involvement of tribal members in decisions about display. This section explores the relative success of these initiatives and their capacity for inclusion.

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<sup>10</sup> *Negotiating the Way Forward* September 7<sup>th</sup> 1996.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Bonani Director's message 1997.

In 1994 SANG doubled the size of its African collection with the purchase of sixty-one new works.<sup>13</sup> Although SANG intended to expand further competing pressures on the government meant it did not receive adequate acquisition funds (Martin 1997: 6). From 1984 to 1997 SANG's acquisition budget remained static at R200 000 (in 1997 the equivalent of £27,190) and then for the next two years dropped to zero, with an expectation that the gallery would seek external support.<sup>14</sup>

In order to address the gaps in its African collection, SANG sought to borrow work from SAM. As both museums had been situated within Iziko since 2000, staff at SANG assumed there would be greater collaboration and resource sharing between the sites. However, once they went into partnership SANG found it more difficult to borrow work from SAM than it had previously. Competition between the institutions and protectionism appears to have entered this process.<sup>15</sup> In interview a staff member at SANG told me SAM considered African art work to be its domain and it was therefore unwilling to allow SANG to display works from its collection (Staff Member L 2006:175-179). According to the staff member SAM went so far as to 'lodge a complaint about the fact that [SANG] was showing African art' on the basis 'that this causes confusion and institutional overlap' (ibid.: 175). SAM also made repeated requests for SANG to move its archive storage of African art across to SAM (ibid.). SAM's uncompromising stance demonstrated its proprietorial claim to African art.

As a consequence of SAM's actions, and the small size of its own collection, SANG produced very few African exhibitions across the first fifteen years of democracy (1994-2009). Indeed, there were long periods, some stretching more than six months, when no African art was displayed. A staff member described to me in interview how:

There is never a space, never a space. She [Martin] tries to have us at least one African exhibition up over Christmas, always, but if you look at the list we've got where is the African? (Staff Member L 1996: 223)

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<sup>13</sup> These objects were mainly of inexpensive household items at a total equivalent cost of £30,000 (Martin 2001: 2 *Head North, Iziko*, 'Reports' SANG archive).

<sup>14</sup> When SANG's acquisition budget was reinstated in 2000, the perceived need to address gaps in other areas meant only a small portion of the fund was available to African art (Martin 2001: 2-3 *Head North, Iziko*, 'Reports' SANG archive).

<sup>15</sup> Previously SAM let two white artists borrow work for exhibitions at SANG, Michael Payne *Face Values* (1993) and *Miscast* (1996), which in Payne's case included the museum's most esteemed possessions the *Lydenburg Heads*.

The infrequency of the African displays meant viewers were unable to develop a relationship with African art work at SANG on par with that at SAM, or equivalent to that of its European collection. A distinction compounded in 2000 by SAM's decision to extend its African art display through a new permanent exhibition: *IQe the Power of Rock Art: Ancestors, Rainmaking and Healing*. The main consequence of SAM strengthening its connection with African art was that it confirmed itself as the expert in this arena. Given its ongoing role as a natural history site, this can be viewed as a retrogressive step. Yet, its new display offered visitors an opportunity to view hitherto rarely displayed African art and paved the way for wider collaboration with source communities.

## IQe the Power of Rock Art



**Plate 9.10** 'The Power to Heal' IQe the Power of Rock Art, SAM  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2010)

*IQe* was an important addition to SAM. It occupied the museum's central display hall and two adjacent rooms [plates 9.10-19.11], the latter of which led into the *African Studies Galleries*. Part art exhibition, part simulacra, *IQe* showcased the museum's rock art collection. The focus on artistic content in *IQe* marked a significant departure from the focus on spectacle in the *African Studies Galleries*.

The main rock art exhibit included the famous Linton panel of humans and antelopes painted in red and white (c. 18<sup>th</sup> century). The rock art exhibit was presented in a cabinet that ran the length of the main hall [plate 9.10]. The art works were positioned in the glare of direct spotlights set against a dark ground and were accompanied by a host of supporting texts. The additional material included detailed descriptions of the history of rock art, a timeline of significant finds (that spanned 80,000 years of production) and a cabinet dedicated to the raw materials and pigments used in rock paintings. These contextualising strategies helped draw the audience’s attention to the rock art exhibits, as witnessed on each of my visits by the weight of visitors clustered around this area of the display.

*IQe*’s success as a vehicle for engaging people with rock art did not come without negative consequences. For example, the exhibition reasserted the link between the Khoisan and the natural habitat through ethnographic strategies that echoed those applied in the *African Studies Galleries*. These strategies included dim lighting, a simulation cave and a video projection of a tribal dance, *Igwe*, which together created a mythical ‘African’ atmosphere [plates 9.11 and 9.12].



**Plate 9.11** ‘The Cave’ and **Plate 9.12** Still from ‘Igwe’, *IQe the Power of Rock Art* (2010) SAM (photographs by Catherine Hahn Jan. 2010)

Marilena Alivizatou in *The Politics of ‘Arts Premier’* (2008) identifies that immersive environments, of the type used in *IQe*, remain popular for the display of African art (2008). Using the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris as her example, she describes how it deploys dark walls, spotlights, ‘images of tropical vegetation’ and the ‘sounds of nature’ to create the sensation of entering ‘the jungle’ (ibid.: 50). *IQe* avoided most of the

clichés of the ‘dark continent’ used in the Musée du Quai Branly, but did offer the audience a similar encounter with ‘primeval human truth’ (ibid.: 49-50). For instance, the use of red walls, dim lighting and a cavernous hall summoned a womb-like chamber of nameless mystic origin.

Further associations with ethnographic museum practice were evident in *IQe*’s foregrounding of the joint work of the white linguists Dr Wilhelm Bleek and Dr Lucy Lloyd. In a cabinet to the right of the entrance of the main hall, the linguists were included by means of almost life-size photographic portraits and a supporting text that represented them as experts on the Khoisan language. As *IQe*’s artistic remit did not require their presence it can be assumed the linguists, like Margaret Shaw, were included because of the traditional expectation of seeing whites as the authority on African culture.

Problematically, Lloyd’s involvement with the Khoisan was represented in positive terms, despite evidence being widely available to the contrary. In the exhibition her documentation of the San language was described as ‘one of the only truly collaborative projects of colonialism, and the /Xam’s final act of resistance’, when in most cases the subjects in Lloyd’s study were prisoners and therefore could not be considered as collaborative partners in her research (Goodnow 2006: 57-58). Bleek also paved the way for Drury’s cast making, as it was his daughter, Dorothea Bleek, who identified ‘examples of “pure Cape Bushmen”’ from the linguists’ study for Drury to cast (ibid.).

## Ethnic revivalism

On the surface *IQe*’s reliance on anthropological tropes would appear incompatible with input from the Khoisan community. Yet the exhibition was developed in close consultation with *The Iziko Rock Art Exhibition Project Reference Group*, which represented over twenty indigenous San communities, who along with Carole Kaufmann, SANG’s white curator of African art, designed the display (Goodnow et al. 2006: 214).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Although Kaufmann held ultimate control of the exhibition, Khoisan members of the reference group extended the planning and implementation process and suggested additions that led to a more multi-

One explanation for Khoisan involvement in *IQe* is that the exhibition's strategies contained political intent. In her article *Khoisan Revivalism* Anthea Garman describes how the Khoisan's role as the 'first indigenous people of Africa' has become a 'lucrative commodity', as 'cultural authenticity' has enabled them to access land claims and has provided economic opportunities through the tourist industry (2001: 41).<sup>17</sup> For many in the Khoisan community ethnicity has also become 'a distinct, tangible biological entity around which to mobilise' (Dubin 2009: 258).

The upsurge in interest in ethnicity amongst the Khoisan forms part of a wider interest among black South Africans in reclaiming heritage in the aftermath of apartheid. Although the majority of black South Africans have continued to identify their political allegiance with the ANC, many have also expressed an affinity with the tribe (Johnston 2014: 46). Interest in the tribe has been fuelled by the emergence of a 'populist African vernacular style' that is sufficiently syncretic to appeal to adherents from both non-tribal and tribal backgrounds (ibid.)<sup>18</sup>

The revival of ethnic claims has been nourished by a museum culture that having historically separated work by tribe has found it easy to continue in this way. In 2008 SAM's Director, Davidson, described how 'The classificatory divisions' in SAM's collections continued to follow 'those old apartheid categories like The Zulu, and The Xhosa, and The Bushmen' (quoted in Dubin 2009: 257). Similarly, at SANG art works continued to be acquired by 'group', demonstrated by a staff member who described the selection process in 2006 as being:

By languages, ethnic groups, that kind of thing, or you can look at regions ... with very strict divisions everything has to fit into either San or Zulu or ... (Staff Member L 2006: 40, 44)

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levelled display (Goodnow 2006: 214). In contrast, according to Alivizatou, the Musée du Quai Branly did not consult with any 'native groups or tribal representatives' (2008: 52).

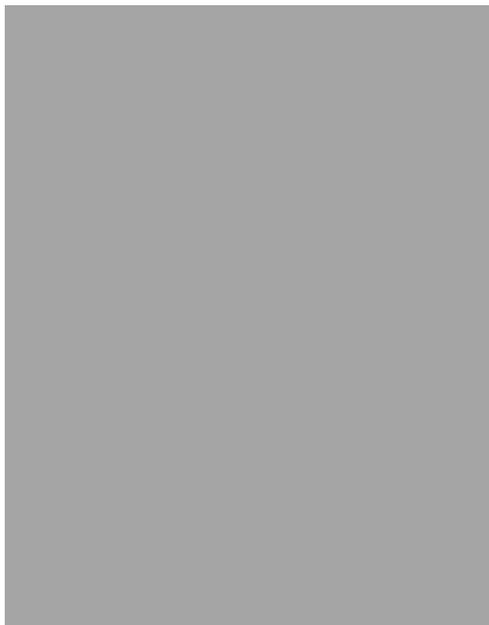
<sup>17</sup> *The Rhodes Review* 2001: 41-42, Cape Town, South African Library.

<sup>18</sup> One reason for the resurgence in tribalism was the perception that democracy had not fully delivered on its promises. The fact that 'the nation' was used during apartheid to assert the dominant position of the white community made many South Africans suspicious of calls to a single community allegiance (ibid.: 5). In part to allay these concerns, and in part to recognise the country's diversity, the ANC embraced multiplicity through its recognition of eleven 'national languages' (ibid.: 7-8). Tribal privilege was also written into law through The Communal Land Rights Act, which gave 'traditional councils' authority within areas previously assigned as apartheid 'homelands', and The Traditional Courts Bill, which allowed legislation predicated on 'tribal practice' to be used in these regions (Claassens 2013: 71-92). A lack of redistribution of land and resources further bolstered ethnic identity claims, as it left the apartheid era 'Bantustan' boundaries and their chiefdoms fairly undisturbed (ibid.: 42).

Although tribal divides remained after apartheid these took on a new value when seen as ancestral works, evidenced in the extensive involvement of members of the Khoisan in the development of *IQe* and in the glowing testimonials they provided on the exhibition (these, and comments by other audience members, were shown on a television screen in the first hall of the display).

## New voices

SANG's exhibition strategies in relation to African art differed from SAM as they tapped into the wider interest in politics in the gallery. This can be seen in *Ilifa Labantu (Heritage of the People): Acquiring African Art (1994-2004)* (2005), which employed large text boards and photographs to illuminate different aspects of SANG's African collection. In its case the resurgent interest in the tribe was used in more complex ways than at SAM. *Ilifa Labantu* was situated across two gallery halls.



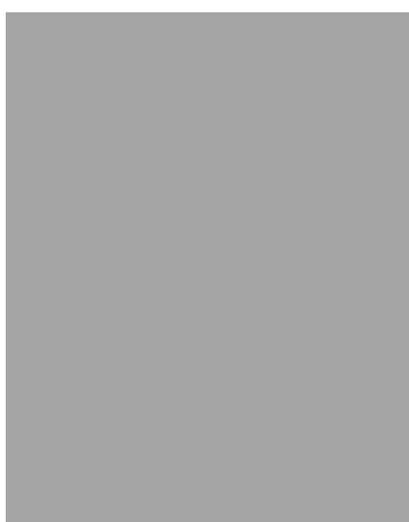
**Plate 9.13** 'Natal Water Police' Ilifa Labantu, SANG  
(image courtesy of SANG)

For example, *Ilifa Labantu*'s main jewellery display was introduced through a large photograph of 'The Natal Water Police' [plate 9.13]. The image drew attention to the 'colonial requirement that Africans in urban areas cover their bodies from "neck to knee"', and at the same time demonstrated how individuals resisted the 'dress code' by

wearing beads (exhibition text, Klopper 2000). By naming practices that were shaped (but not dictated) by colonial legislation the image testified to the durability of African cultural practices in hostile territory.

By introducing the beadwork exhibit with an eye-catching image of men, the exhibition capitalised on SANG's reputation for showing beadwork in interesting ways. In 1994 SANG established its reputation as an expert in the beadwork field through the exhibition *Ezakwantu: Beadwork from the Eastern Cape* (1994), in which beadmaking and bead wearing were foregrounded (Staff member L 2006: 90-97). In 2006 gallery staff were seeking to further consolidate the influence of the beadwork collection by setting up a permanent place of residence for beadwork at Bertram House, positioned close to SANG in Company's Garden (fieldwork notes Dec. 2006).

*Ilifa Labantu's* social narrative appeared to have been stoked by popular aspects of tribalism, such as its 'freely expressed masculinity' and 'angry politics', that have been identified as having a particular attraction to men (Johnston 2014: 46). For instance, the exhibit, *Umkhonto Wesizwe, Spear of the Nation*, contained a large colour photograph of Nelson Mandela taken in 1994, which was used to draw attention to the weapons on display [plate 9.14]. In the photograph Mandela was shown in traditional ceremonial clothing 'carrying the insignia of a chief of the royal Thembu lineage' and holding a spear and ceremonial knobkerrie (fighting club) (exhibition text, 2005).



**Plate 9.14** 'Umkhonto Wesizwe' Ilifa Labantu, SANG  
(image courtesy of SANG)

The depiction of Mandela in the role of chieftain was, according to the exhibition text, intended to recognise ‘the central role of traditional leaders in political resistance’.<sup>19</sup> This idea was reinforced through the exhibit’s title, which referred to both the armed wing of the ANC (Umkhonto Wesizwe) and the weaponry in the exhibit [plate 9.15]. The display text provided an extensive description of King Shaka Zulu’s military successes in the nineteenth century and the subsequent formation of the Zulu Kingdom. The link made between the historic Zulu wars and the ANC’s armed struggle against apartheid moved beyond the (white) comfort zone of the ‘rainbow nation’ to reclaim the militancy of South Africa’s black past and its emancipatory potential. This point was reinforced through the exhibit’s conflation of Mandela with Shaka Zulu the ‘Warrior King’.



Plate 9.15 ‘Fighting Spear’, Umkhonto Wesizwe, Ilifa Labantu 2005 (drawing by Catherine Hahn 2006)

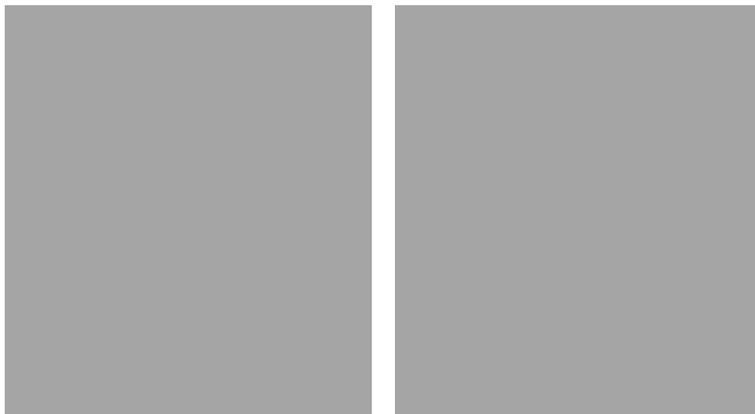
Yoshiara examined audience responses to *Ilifa Labantu* as part of her PhD, *Museums in a Diverse Society*, and found black visitors responded particularly positively to the exhibition (1995: 129). Many of them expressed their interest in it in terms of cultural pride, for example stating they liked it because: ‘I am black’, ‘I am Zulu’ and ‘this is [an] honour’ (ibid.: 129). Yoshiara found *Ilifa Labantu*’s visitors also ‘noticed the difference between its display strategy and ‘common methods used in culture-history museums’, as it encouraged them to view its content as socially situated art works not as ‘anthropological specimens’ (2005: 183-184). Yoshiara found this understanding extended to visitors who had a preconceived idea that an African exhibition would be ‘scientific’ and ‘anthropological’ and thus indicated their preconceptions were challenged by its mode of display (ibid.). Yoshiara did not explore the audience’s response to *Ilifa Labantu*’s scenes of black empowerment and resistance. However, it is anticipated these political stories created a pathway into the display and enabled it to act as a source of cultural pride, in particular for men.

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<sup>19</sup> Quote from Omoni (1982: 81) in exhibition text (2005).

## Performing culture

At SANG the most tangible way in which political notions of tribal culture influenced museum practice was through exhibition opening nights. The incorporation of ritual elements in SANG's openings confirmed the relevance of tribal heritage in contemporary South African life. It also challenged the museum's European and white heritage by reconfiguring the space as one in which black people dominated the discourse (on my visits the African openings were the only occasions when black audience members were in the majority). As indicated in the opening for *Ilifa Labantu*, which incorporated twenty-six Sangomas (traditional healers and 'spiritualists') who undertook ritual cleansings throughout the gallery as a means of claiming the space for the works on display (Staff Member L 2006: 424). The Sangomas' engagement presented the art works as sacred objects, whilst creating a political relationship with the gallery – as if 'cleansing' it of its white past would make the museum 'pure' enough to house the display.



9.16 and 9.17 Opening of Musuku 24/09/2000 (images from visitors' book, courtesy of SANG)

The opening for an exhibition of Venda gold works, *Musuku: Golden Links to our Past* (2000), provided a similar opportunity for the physical reclamation of public space. During the opening a large dancing circle took the exhibition celebration into Company's Garden [plates 9.16 and 9.17]. In doing so the audience reaffirmed the link between the museum and its environs and between the tribe and the land. At the opening for *Musuku*, King Tshivahase used his speech to provide information that was missing from the colonial record, including the fact that the forefathers of the Venda were 'amongst the first groups to dig Musuku [gold] at Bambandyanalo and Mapungubwe' prior to the arrival of the Europeans (ibid.). Tshivahase's account

destabilised the myth that mining began with colonisation, as indicated in the gallery décor, and brought historic significance to the art on display.

As well as building relationships with the tribe *Musuku* redrew connections between the gallery and the mining industry, through its sponsors, AngloGold. The mining conglomerate made its presence felt in the gallery through the AngloGold name and logo, which appeared on the exhibition advertisement, billboard and catalogue (2000). Although *Musuku*'s link with the mining industry could be seen as retrogressive, overall the exhibition appeared to have had a positive effect, as outlined by SANG's staff in the catalogue:

[*Musuku*'s] acknowledgement of indigenous history not only empowers visitors (especially the youth) with an alternative to previously entrenched ideas but serves to deconstruct these beliefs and gives impetus to calls for the re-writing of history (Voyiya and Grundlingh 2001: 4)<sup>20</sup>

Importantly, as well as stimulating new ideas among existing visitors the events surrounding, *Musuku*, and other culturally specific exhibitions, attracted increased interest in the gallery from people living beyond the Cape. SANG anticipated about seventy people would travel from Venda to attend the exhibition, because of the considerable distance between the homeland and Cape Town. Instead, approximately four hundred people arrived, many of whom had travelled for up to two days on public transport to attend the show (Staff Member L 2006: 268). With nowhere else to stay these visitors were invited to sleep in the gallery annexe on the night of the exhibition (ibid.: 268-271). Coupled with the other re-enactments of the space this welcoming gesture would have encouraged previously unfamiliar audiences to feel at home and reduced the museum divide between urban and rural practice.

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<sup>20</sup> The catalogue for *Musuku* was written and published after the exhibition, as occurred in almost all of SANG's exhibitions (2001).

## Moving forward

SANG's commitment to wider participation is demonstrated in the effort it put into making the African exhibitions a success. However, its division of the African collection from the rest of the museum remained problematic.

The predominance of functional and ceremonial art works in the African displays has created a rationale for their segregation. However, there is a strong argument put forward by James Clifford, in *Exhibiting Cultures* (1991), for African works to be presented as artistic objects with unique and intrinsic value, rather than as archetypal representations of a particular group culture (1991: 227). Clifford examined a range of different approaches employed by museums in the display of 'non-Western objects' through comparative analysis of four museum sites in Northwest Coast British Columbia. He found that the use of mixed approaches to 'non-Western objects' in western collections was essential for providing for their culture of production within discourses of 'art, culture, politics and history' (ibid.: 225), but that aesthetic appreciation should be foregrounded as a means to signal the works' importance on equal terms with other art forms (ibid.: 224). Clifford concluded that the most effective way for museums to shift from 'a "colonial to a cooperative" museology' was to contextualise work as fine art (ibid.). He used his research findings to support this contention, showing how the treatment of 'artefacts as fine art' ensures they can 'communicate cross-culturally a sense of quality, meaning and importance' and in doing so operate on equal terms with art from historically privileged cultures (ibid: 225).

By choosing to adopt a primarily ethnographic, rather than aesthetic, approach to African art SANG faced the danger that the work would continue to be viewed as the product of the unchanging 'tribe'. In order to minimise this risk SANG used its museum texts to contextualise works within particular contexts or time periods. For example, in *Ilifa Labantu*, works that had gendered connotations were represented in the past tense e.g. 'the pipes and tobacco of senior men were carried in bags made from the entire hide ... women carried a smaller type of bag'. However, the broader framework of the display meant gendered practices were still represented as the norm. For instance, the multiple images in the exhibition of men, including Nelson Mandela, carrying weapons (sticks, staffs, spears and knobkerries) associated violence with men, and masculinity

with power, and thus overemphasised gender divisions in the present day. Likewise, in the opening events almost all of the main speakers and Sangomas were male, whilst women provided supporting roles as singers and dancers.

By casting gendered tribal divisions in a romantic and unchanging light *Ilifa Labantu* side-stepped the fact that ethnic revivalism in South Africa has eroded women's recently won rights and restricted the democratic process (Huston 2007: 85-86). For example, legislation currently applied in the homelands makes women married under tribal law 'permanent minors' with no right to inheritance (ibid.: 85). Thus making Constitution Article 3.4, which prohibits 'any form of racial, tribalistic or ethnic exclusivism or chauvinism', largely redundant (Johnston 2014: 46). Further, many regions in which traditional councils have control retain established male leaders and as a consequence flout the Framework Act, which decrees that at least 30% of the members of a traditional council must be women (Claassens 2013). Although SANG complexified the tribe, its lack of engagement with the contested spaces between tribal and political and social processes staged the tribe outside of the democratic milieu.

The absence of interrogation of problematic aspects of tribal practice points, perhaps paradoxically, to the need for both more rigorous political context and for a greater focus on the aesthetic of the display. With awareness of the issues surrounding the African display, SANG's curator of African art suggested that the most important change the gallery could bring to understandings of the collection would be to put African art on permanent display. By this means a variety of approaches could be deployed and African art could be seen as intrinsic to South African art practice (Staff Member L field notes Dec. 2010).

## Conclusion

SANG's historic role as a political house helped ease African art's passage into the gallery post-apartheid. The museological processes that attended SANG's development, such as the high turnover of displays and their narrative content, provided a conceptual framework for expansion. The museum's ability to see beyond the aesthetic-social art divide also meant it was able to accommodate functional, utilitarian and sacred objects and their accompanying cultural, social and political themes. Although the gallery was

hampered in its quest for inclusion by: the limitations in its African art collection; financial pressures and SAM's reluctance to share work, it was able to present exhibitions that brought an added dimension to the political house by broadening its terms of inclusion.

However, SAM's removal of *The Bushman Diorama* and its subsequent introduction of *IQe* have strengthened its position as the home of African art. *The Diorama's* removal reduced criticism of the museum, while the introduction of *IQe* signalled its commitment to Khoisan art. In the meantime, SAM's retention of the African Studies Galleries means its representation of African culture continued to be mediated through a reductive, primitivising lens. The significance for SANG of SAM's continued predominance in the sphere of African art cannot be overstated, as it means that any attempts made by SANG to include African art will be undertaken in SAM's shadow.

Nevertheless, SANG's position as a political house has enabled it to make advances that would not have been possible if it had been fashioned as a temple. The use of narrative assisted understanding of unfamiliar objects, and created the space for political interventions, such as the public forum on Human Right's Day (21<sup>st</sup> March 1997). More controversially, SANG's political disposition facilitated its inclusion of *Miscast* and its shocking images of abuse. SANG's role as a home, and place of kinship, also fed into its practices related to African art. For instance, the participants at *Ilifa Labantu's* opening night treated the gallery as a spiritual house, through its ritual cleansings. Additionally the museum operated as a literal home, in offering itself as an overnight shelter to visitors from Venda. In combination the gallery's practices framed African art as part of a living culture and not as fixed relics of a primitive past.

## Chapter Ten:

### Second to None

There must be an accompanying change of discourse from the rhetoric of oppression to that of process and exploration. This would imply an open-endedness in the use of language, a search for originality of expression and sensitivity to dialogue. The complexity of the day-to-day problems of living, in fact, coincides with the demand of creativity (Ndebele 2000)

Despite their shortcomings SANG's African displays offered significant opportunities for black input. In contrast other areas of the museum remained firmly under white control. It was therefore a momentous event in the museum's history in 2006 when Gabisele Ngcobo became the first black woman to curate an exhibition.<sup>1</sup> As a gallery employee and academically trained artist, Ngcobo was ostensibly an art museum insider. However, her background, as an outspoken lesbian art activist, meant she did not fit the profile of the all-white curatorial team or a 'known pair of [black] hands' (Puwar 2004: 122). As such, her selection did not create the ideal conditions for 'social cloning' (ibid.), but rather signalled a departure from museum orthodoxy. This fact was attested to by *Second to None*, the exhibition she co-curated with a team from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, which subjected the museum's regular practice to rigorous critique. Of all SANG's exhibitions that I examined *Second to None* best exemplified the radical transparency, social responsibility and activism, which Marstine has advocated for in her discussion on new museum ethics (2011).

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section, *A Context for Concern*, discusses the terms on which *Second to None* was created – with consideration of its political context and the impact that this had on the exhibition. The second section, *Modes of Display*, explores the rationale behind *Second to None*'s design and its effectiveness in creating an accessible and equitable display. The third section, *Speaking Out*, looks at how the model of representation used in *Second to None* was employed to explore female and lesbian sexuality in a way that challenged the phallogocentric canon and offered further evidence of the museum's capacity for change. The fourth section,

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to *Second to None* the only contemporary art exhibition to be curated by a black curator was, *Isintu* (2000), discussed in chapter seven.

*Regrouping Hierarchies*, examines negative attention *Second to None* attracted from white museum guides and critics. The particulars of these critiques reveal established gatekeepers sought to return the gallery to a state prior to *Second to None*'s intervention. The exhibition and its responses provide evidence of the potential for new gatekeepers to challenge museum norms. My investigation is the first academic study of *Second to None*.

Material for the chapter is derived from three primary sources. Firstly, detailed records of *Second to None*, which include maps of each room [plates 11.12-11.16], illustrations, photographs and field notes. Secondly, attendance of two guided tours, which I recorded via dictaphone. Thirdly, interviews with members of staff, which included interviews with the four staff members who were responsible for the exhibition: the two main curators and two assistant curators, as well as the two volunteer guides who were responsible for tours of the display. Further supporting material was gathered from the exhibition's opening night, a gallery forum, the visitors' book and articles in the press and online. As in other chapters, I have chosen to provide the names of the curatorial team, as this information is public knowledge, but to retain the definition 'Staff Member' when referencing information from interviews and tours. In *Second to None*'s case the term Staff Member is not entirely accurate, as three members of the curatorial team were employed in a visiting role. However, I have chosen to use it for expediency's sake to mask individual contributions that were not generated in the public domain.

## Section One: A Context for Concern

In 2006 SANG asked its assistant curator, Gabisele Ngcobo, to curate its commemorative exhibition of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Women's March on the Union Buildings of Pretoria, 9th August 1956. Tasking a black 'arts activist' with the project of commemorating the Women's March enabled the gallery to tap into the racial, gender and political discourse, that had specific applicability to black audience members.

The exhibition formed part of SANG's wider commitment to politically themed displays (as discussed in chapter seven), but deviated from the multicultural script usually deployed in these exhibitions in three pertinent ways: first, it placed black

women at the centre of the struggle; second, it focused on negative aspects of current South African life and held its audience accountable and third, moved away from an emphasis on 'high art' to stage the multifarious content of the display on more equitable terms. In doing so it inherited the mantle of activism from the education department of the early 1990s.

## Disrupting the rainbow

The curator generated the concept for the exhibition and then chose a three person curatorial team for support. Her team consisted of Virginia McKenny, a white female lecturer at Michaelis School of Fine Art, and two students, one black, and one white, from the same art school. Members of the team described the exhibition as a collaborative exercise, with Ngcobo as the driving force behind its political concerns.<sup>2</sup>

*Second to None* was a major event in SANG's exhibition calendar. The main exhibition occupied five display halls in the gallery and there were two supporting exhibitions hosted in adjacent rooms. One of these was an art installation by Sue Williamson in the shape of a film entitled *Can't Forget, Can't Remember* (2000), which commented on the TRC process. The other was a photographic exhibition by Annie Turock, *Life and Soul: Portraits of Women Who Move South Africa* (2006), which consisted of a series of photographs of famous South African women with detailed supporting text [plate 11.17]. These accompanying exhibitions extended *Second to None's* influence as it suggested its concerns encompassed the gallery.

The 1956 Women's March, which the exhibition commemorated, was organised to protest the introduction of compulsory passes for black people and attracted over 20,000 protestors, most of them black women (Gallery information text 2006). Although the march did not end the pass laws, it did signal an important moment in South African history as the first mass mobilisation of women for a political cause. During apartheid the march slipped out of public consciousness, but was resurrected in 1994 when it became central to the annual Women's Day celebration.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout I refer to the curators either in the plural or as co-curators, unless speaking specifically about Ngcobo who I refer to as the curator. This is intended to distinguish between the collaborative efforts of the team and those ideas particular to Ngcobo.

The introductory text for *Second to None* began as follows:

On the 9th of August 1956, some 20,000 women, black, white, Asian and coloured protested against the government's restrictive pass laws. It was a highly public statement by those 'stepping out' from their 'proper places in the home' and it marked women's power to affect social change, placing them side by side with men on issues of national liberation

The image the text conjured, of women of all races marching side by side for liberation, created the impression that the exhibition was going to adhere to the 'rainbow multiculturalism' of SANG's other contemporary displays. However, this multicultural vision was ruptured by the inclusion of the documentary film *Strike the Rock* (1981). As the one 'factual' account in *Second to None* the documentary offered a more realistic representation of the women's struggle, which 'far from being universal' was primarily fought by black women and encompassed 'problems black women alone' encountered and sought to overcome during apartheid (McClintock 1995: 304).



**Plate 10.1** Text board and television showing *Strike the Rock* *Second to None*, SANG (2006) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

*Strike the Rock* was stationed next to the exhibition's main text and played in a continuous loop (with headphones and seating provided for three audience members at a time) [plate 10.1]. The film, which lasted for twenty minutes, focused on specific issues that black women encountered under apartheid and their consequent political actions.

The women spoke directly to the camera of the acts of protest that formed the fabric of their everyday lives. For example, in one series of film segments women were shown protesting outside a township shebeen (drinking hall) with makeshift weapons, including saucepans and spades, to demand that 'their men' return home. Replacing the traditional weapons of male conflict with 'pots and pans', the documentary brought the private realm of the domestic interior into the public sphere and broadened understanding of female resistance in South Africa.

In his book *Imagined Communities* (1991) Benedict Anderson conceptualises the male soldier as the 'emblem of the modern culture of nationalism', based on his preparedness to sacrifice his life for his country (1991: 9-11). In Anderson's rendition of the nation men lay claim to their citizenship through their willingness, symbolic or otherwise, to lay down their lives (*ibid.*). In contrast, women are commonly presented as 'prominent *symbols* of nationalism', such as 'Britannia' and 'Mother Russia', who are constructed as needing 'to be protected by masculine agency' (Sharp 1996: 99-100 original emphasis). Conversely, *Second to None's* violent female protagonists were cast as agents of their own destiny. The depiction of black women as physical aggressors and risk takers thus inverted the myth of the male soldier or 'freedom fighter' as the symbolic nation builder.

## The shadow lurking

Although it was staged in terms of women's rights and agency *Second to None* did not give the impression that female emancipation had been achieved. Presented by the curator as a performative platform informed by the political and social concerns of 'day-to-day' life in South Africa, *Second to None* was staged as a space for 'speaking up and acting out' (2006: 3-4). Here, the exhibition again departed from the normative script of SANG's political exhibitions, which framed contemporary issues, either as if they had been resolved or as something occurring 'out there' and therefore beyond the responsibility of those viewing the work. The implications of this difference were signalled on the guided tours, which situated *Second to None* in the wider context of political events commemorating the Women's March, such as The Women's Conference at the Oliver Tambo Centre in Khyalitsha, Cape Town (9<sup>th</sup> August 2006).

One of the key themes on the walking tours (and in women's events elsewhere in South Africa) was Jacob Zuma's rape trial, which took place during the planning phase of the exhibition and had captured the interest of the country. In their interviews all the members of the curatorial team drew attention to the trial with one of the team describing its influence on the exhibition as the 'shadow lurking in the background' (Staff Member G 2006: 10). One of the co-curators pointed out it was not Zuma's guilt or innocence that defined their interest in the court case,<sup>3</sup> but rather the way the trial was depicted in the press and responded to by members of the general public. In her tour the co-curator contextualised the Zuma trial as a polemic event, which had reignited patriarchal tribalism and exposed the underlying sexism of South African society:

When the trial finished the accuser had to be shipped, shipped not only out of Somerstown, but out of South Africa in fear of her life. Now that single event captured it, the fact that freedom in this country for women is not won ... and it is not won in other ways too ... We have one of the best constitutions in this country, one of the world's best in this country. But this is on paper only, let it come off paper only, and into our lives (Staff Member M 2006: 10)

The co-curator used a series of rhetorical devices to convey her message, including repeated phrases and short punctuated sentences, delivered in an emphatic voice accompanied by strident hand gestures. In her reproduction of the heat and sentiment of podium speeches at political rallies she emphasised her point that equality for women was not yet 'won'. Significantly, the co-curator's impassioned speech drew the audience into the political praxis of the display by framing them as activists. This communicative aspect of the exhibition was evident in responses to the co-curator's talk, which was punctuated by audience members nodding, saying 'yes' and adding their own contributions in a way that echoed the 'call and response' format of the rally. By actively engaging visitors the walking tours effectively reduced the historic distance between audience and art object. In this respect the exhibition spoke to the political energy of the 1980s, which countered exclusionary state initiatives with participatory practices.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2007 Zuma was found not guilty of rape and was then elected President of South Africa in 2009.

## Telling different stories

Another way *Second to None* encouraged participatory practice was by bringing unfamiliar stories to the fore. This mode of engagement picked up on the general trend in political art in South Africa, which from the end of apartheid had become increasingly subjective, as artists sought to grapple with personal concerns and ‘newfound freedoms of expression’ (Bedford 2004: 4-9). One important consequence of engaging with previously unexplored narratives is that it exposed ugly features of contemporary South African life.



**Plate 10.2** Maidens I and Maidens II (Zanele Muholi 1995) *Second to None* SANG (2006)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

For instance, *Maidens I* and *Maidens II* (Zanele Muholi 1995) provided a negative commentary on aspects of modern tribalism through two close-up black and white photographs of young women’s breasts [plate 10.2]. One of the staff members informed the audience on my tour that the images referenced the ‘virginity tests’ used in some rural areas of South Africa. These ‘tests’ assessed women with smaller nipples to be virgins and therefore more ‘suitable for marriage’ than those with larger nipples who were considered more likely to have AIDS (Staff Member M 2006: 81). Without elucidation the works risked reifying the young women’s exploitation, as their truncated bodies presented them most readily to the sexual gaze. However, with the co-curator’s support the photographs served as a demonstration of tribal recidivism.

Here, the exhibition's critique of sexist tribal practices was noteworthy as it moved into a realm that whites, with their fear of being accused of racism, generally avoided and that tribal members, with a vested interest in romanticised cultural tropes, frequently overlooked. This distinction was amplified by SANG's recent gendered rendering of tribal culture in *Ilifa Labantu* (2005) (discussed in chapter nine).

By concentrating on contested stories the exhibition expanded the range of the gallery's social concerns, swapped racial and gendered binaries for more nuanced cultural readings and placed black people in a position of authority. The exhibition also exposed features of contemporary life to public scrutiny including offering a powerful critique of systems of abuse within political/cultural structures. By encouraging the audience to actively engage with these themes the exhibition presented itself as a conduit for political agency. In acting in this way *Second to None* crossed into challenging and contested territory.

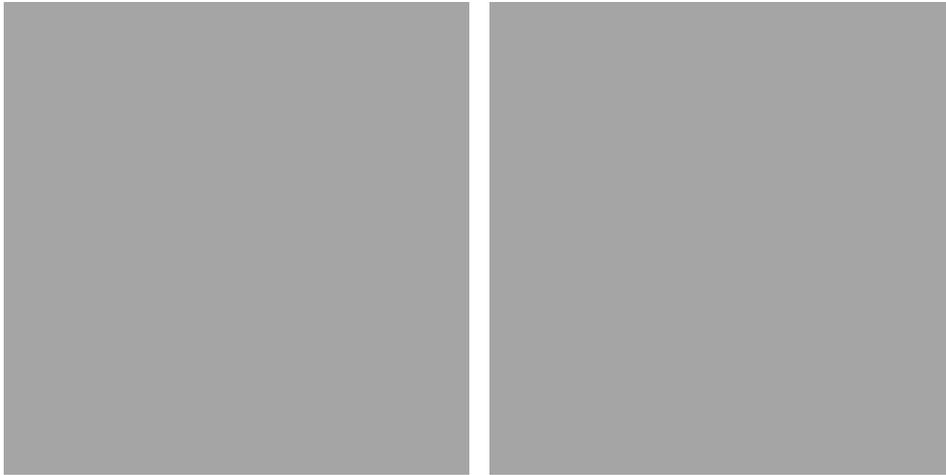
## Section Two: Modes of Display

As well as expecting its audience to take an active political view, by exposing the fissures in South African society, *Second to None* turned its gaze on the museum. Through its design strategies and arrangements the display signalled the retention of traditional practices elsewhere in the museum. In shedding light on these practices the exhibition brought race and gender biases in SANG's historic fine art collection to the fore. The revisionist strategies used built on those introduced to the European historic rooms earlier the same year, curated by Haydon Proud (discussed in chapter eight).

*Second to None* was situated directly after the gallery's European historic rooms, which the audience had to pass through in order to reach it. The visitors' movement between the two spaces was exploited in *Second to None* in order to critique the historic collection [plate 10.3, following page].



At the entrance to the sculpture *Man Looking For His Pass* (Nora Mabasa 1986) was placed in direct dialogue with a bust of the actor Ira Aldridge as *Othello* (Pietro Calvi 1868), which faced out from the historic display [plates 10.4 and 10.5].



**Plate 10.4** Man Looking for his Pass (Nora Mabasa 1986)  
and **Plate 10.5** Othello (Pietro Calvi 1868) *Second to None*, SANG (2006)  
(photographs by Catherine Hahn)

On first viewing, the works proposed a clash between the powerful black man represented by *Othello* and the submissive black man under apartheid in *Man Looking For His Pass*. The distinction was compounded by the solidity of *Othello*'s marble bust in contrast to the fragile clay of Mabasa's sculpture. However, the understanding of *Othello* as an iconic image of black manhood was challenged by the marginal status of the art work in the European collection, where it was the only historic work to portray a named black character. Facing Mabasa's sculpture, *Othello* drew attention to the absence of black subjects in the gallery's historic collection. In signalling this gap the two works became aligned, with *Othello* staged looking out from the European rooms, as if searching for something beyond its borders, whilst *Man Looking For His Pass* looked questioningly in. Here, the dual gaze became one of scepticism, with the white authored black myth on the margin of European history posed in relation to the reality of black subjugation.

As well as announcing the inherent whiteness of the historic display, *Second to None* drew attention to its gender bias through two 'borrowed' paintings from the fine art collection: *Sewing Army Tents* by Evelyn Dunbar (no date) and *Sirens* by Maurice Greiffenhagen (1910). Placed at either side of *Second to None*'s entranceway the two paintings drew attention to the subordinate position of women in the fine art tradition,

and the discriminatory overtones of the Madonna-Magdalen dichotomy. The 'Madonna' was represented by *Sewing Army Tents* in which women were shown industriously sewing tents for male soldiers, and the 'Magdalen' by *Sirens*, in which the legendary sexual temptresses lured sailors to their deaths on the rocks (discussed in chapter four). Importantly, although the same theme was exploited in *Romantic Childhood* (2006) (chapter eight), in that instance the art works' status as the 'masterpiece' was retained through the works' containment within the historic display. Conversely, in *Second to None* rehanging these paintings in a contemporary space removed the rationality of the classic fine art display, thus disinterring the works from their traditional seat of power. By introducing *Second to None* through challenges to the western canon the exhibition effectively neutralised the 'masterpiece' and promoted its own socio-political agenda.

*Second to None*'s rejection of the 'masterpiece' was underscored by the placement of twelve preparatory sketches for the proposed 'women's monument' in Pretoria, *Wathint' abafanzi*, in the first exhibition space on the main wall to the left of the entranceway (Cruise and Holmes 2000). Placing these preliminary works, replete with scribbled notes and crossings out, in a position that was generally considered the preserve of prestigious art works challenged western art history's obsession with the finished 'pristine object' in which 'no mistakes' are visible (Gombrich 1986: 95). The sketches were accompanied by a soundtrack that included a dominant phrase from the 1956 women's march: 'strike the woman, strike the rock', which was translated into South Africa's fourteen languages repeated on a continuous loop. The mantra like quality of the repeated phrase operated physically on the body like a soft drumbeat, drawing the works and audience into allegiance with its multifarious voices. Accordingly, the interwoven music, unfinished art work and use of art as social text produced a discursive setting that countered the pedagogy of the traditional display.

The memorial of a 'pounding-bowl' that the *Wathint' abafanzi* sketches referred to also spoke metaphorically to the project of South African democracy as a work in progress and in doing so gave impetus to the exhibition's gendered concerns. 'Memorials, monuments, triumphal arches, obelisks, columns and statues' traditionally commemorate the world of men, as manifestations of: 'male sacrifice, male conquest and power' (Mitchell 1992: 35). In contrast, *Wathint' abafanzi* proffered a new kind of female monument in the shape of a large 'pounding-bowl'. Where the masculine

memorial stood as the end-point of male victory, the envisaged ‘pounding-bowl’ spoke to the laborious and time consuming process of achieving female emancipation: through the daily routine of grinding grain.

## The construction of equivalencies

The open-endedness of the exhibition made sure it was seen, in Peter Furter’s terms, not as a ‘space, imposing a massive presence to which [one] can only adapt, but as a scope, a domain which takes shape as [one acts] upon it’ (quoted in Freire 1972: 65). By being posed as a place of possibility *Second to None*, like *Wathint’ abafanzi*, served as a metaphor for the unfinished project of nation building. In his essay *Beyond Protest* the South African academic and poet Njabulo Ndebele argues that true democracy will only be achieved in South Africa through a commitment to open-ended dialogue (2000: 33-34). It could be argued that *Second to None*’s most successful strategy for eliciting this dialogue was its treatment of art works as equivalencies. Throughout the exhibition improvisational techniques were deployed that eschewed the use of line and measure, so as to seek out the ‘natural’ equilibrium between works that shared a common concept or theme. According to a co-curator this process involved ‘jiggling works around’ until they ‘felt right’ (Staff Member F 2006: 40).

By treating works as equivalencies attention shifted from the artist to the curator and display. This approach signalled the exhibition’s alliance with postmodern museology in Europe and America, which in the 1980s moved from a traditional art focused approach to interpretation of the wider display. The transfer of power from artists to curators is discernible in the curators’ descriptions of themselves, which was on terms previously reserved for artists. Marc Garrett, for instance, defined curating as a ‘declaration ... a message, a way of saying something, sculpting something using context as a palette’ (2000). Artists also shifted their attention to curatorship, including the installation artist Fred Wilson who conceptualised ‘everything in the exhibition environment [as] mine, whenever I organize the space’ (Karp and Wilson 1996: 253). It has been argued that this approach moved the meaning of art so far from the art object that it became a mere portal for the curators’ concerns (Basualdo 2006), as seen to a degree in Skotnes’ handling of *Miscast*. Whilst this argument could be applied to *Second to None*, the exhibition’s emphasis on political narrative meant in many cases it

sought to amplify, rather than overwrite, the artists' concerns. This interest was evident in the exhibition's grouping of art works around similar themes.

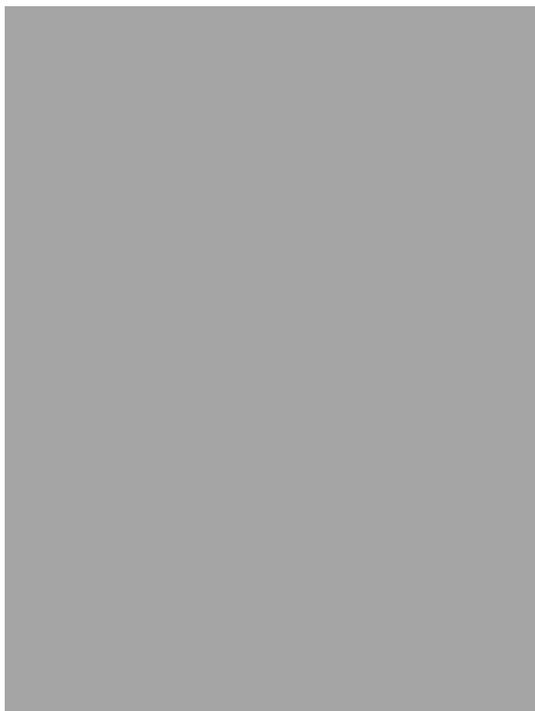


**Plate 10.6** *Period II* (Zanele Muholi 2005), *Confinement* (Svea Josephy 2005) and *Piss* (Carol Anne Gainer 2004) Second to None SANG (2006) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

For example three works by different artists: *Period II*, a photograph of Zanele Muholi's menstrual blood on a public foot path; *Confinement*, three images of Svea Josephy's afterbirth and *Piss*, a lithograph created from Carol Anne Gainer's urine [plate 10.6] were placed together so as to amplify their makers' engagement with their bodily by-products and the gendered politics of public space. *Period II*, sat within a series of works by Muholi, *Period II-V* (2005) that dealt directly with the subject of menstruation and included photographs of the artist's used sanitary pads. Pumla Gqola, in *Through Zanele Muholi's eyes* (2006), outlines the challenge this work posed for traditional patriarchy, which is 'vehement about making menstrual blood invisible' because of its association with the 'out of control ... unsafe' woman (2006: 85). She identifies the redness of the blood as the work's most provocative element for an audience:

Trained ... in avoiding the sight of menstruation and more accustomed to the blue watery liquid that is seen everywhere in the commercial products used to sanitise women's bodies (ibid.: 85)

In the exhibition the presentation of *Period II* together with *Piss* and *Confinement* extended the act of reclaiming the female body to the public realm. Muholi's blood amidst the soil and grass of the foot path arrested the bucolic journey by confronting the audience with the bloodied realities of female 'nature'. Likewise, *Piss*, made from Carol Anne Gainer's urine offered a material engagement with her bodily product. One of the co-curators drew the audience's attention to the physicality of the work and the potential for it to serve as a political act, stating 'it's the artist's urine, it's *her* urine but this is *the* national gallery and this is a *very* public place' (Staff Member M walking tour 2006: 37-38). The co-curator's representation of the work as if Gainer were actually urinating in the gallery, enabled her to ask the question 'Who is allowed to wee in public? ... It is a public space, men can operate in, men can urinate in public' (Staff Member M walking tour 2006: 39-42). The idea of males marking their realm (for example in the dirty protests in prisons in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 80s or the more perfunctory act of urinating in public) was here taken up on female terms.



**Plate 10.7** Table Setting (Penny Siopsis 1984) and Palm Leaves and Oriental Rug (Nicholas Hlobo 2002)  
Second to None SANG (2006) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The materiality of the art works was brought into further relief through the pairing of Penny Siopsis' *Table Setting* (1984) and Nicholas Hlobo's *Palm Leaves and Oriental Rug* (2002). These works once again dealt with the theme of gendered politics in public

and private space [plate 10.7]. *Table Setting*, made with baking implements (a nozzled icing bag to apply the paint and a ‘cake-trowel’ to define the surface) spoke through its material to its content, a cream cake whose moist segments read as labia against a dark interior. The work was hung on the wall in direct relation to a large phallic protuberance emerging from Hlobo’s mass-produced prayer rug, which had been partly unpicked and re-woven by the artist so as to create a totemic landscape. In tandem, Hlobo’s prayer mat and Siopsis’ kitchen scene represented the religious and domestic realms as sites of sexual repression – with an un-crossable chasm between phallus and orifice. The impasse between the works was underscored on the tour by a co-curator’s description of Hlobo as a young gay black man and Siopsis as an older heterosexual white woman and by her noting that the works were created eighteen years apart (Staff Member M 2006: 56). By outlining the difference in the artists’ backgrounds the co-curator increased audience awareness of the aesthetic qualities of the work, as her description drew attention to the artists’ shared sensibilities and style.

The presentation of the works as equivalents substituted traditional ‘high-art’ discourse for an atmosphere of symbiosis in which one art work flowed into the next, as a consequence, the focus on the ‘masterpiece’ was replaced by a relationship of mutuality. The method reduced the risk of reproducing hierarchies of the type encountered in *Facing the Past* and *Fabrications* as it accorded the art works equal status with no style or movement given predominance. Yet, importantly, it retained a commitment to the traditional notion of the aesthetic object, thereby enabling the audience to encounter the works poetically, as well as politically. The use of equivalencies therefore enabled the curators to engage with political themes in multifaceted ways and extend the notion of the gallery as a contested gendered domain.

### Section Three: Speaking Out

I like to tackle women’s issues ... how we are perceived and how we come out of the struggles. Like how do we make the streets safe and bigger for us? (Ngcobo in interview with Manetsi and Meyer 2007: 201)

Nowhere was *Second to None*’s divergence from the traditional museum script more apparent than in its emphasis on lesbian sexuality. Lesbianism remained an

inflammatory topic in South Africa at the time of the exhibition despite the enshrinement of equal rights in the constitution. In interview the curator made clear she had deliberately chosen work that would challenge homophobic prejudice in order to assert that ‘we [as lesbians] are here and we are not going away’ (ibid.: 201). Her interest in giving space to a lesbian voice was situated in regard to her own sexuality and her awareness of widespread prejudice that made black lesbians particularly vulnerable to physical abuse in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> The curator made direct reference to this violence in my interview with her, when she spoke in graphic detail about the murder of a nineteen-year-old lesbian woman, which had occurred in Cape Town a few weeks before the exhibition opened. In the interview she referenced the South African Broadcasting Corporation coverage, which described how the woman had been accosted by a school girl who taunted her shouting that she and her friend were ‘tomboys’ who ‘wanted to be raped’. A group of young black men then gathered around the young woman, beat her with golf clubs, threw bricks at her and finally stabbed her to death.<sup>5</sup>

## A sense of play



**Plate 10.8** Pielkap or Bust (Michelle Raubenheimer 1986) Second to None SANG (2006) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

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<sup>4</sup> Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Anti-lesbian violence condemned 2/2/2006 *SABC News* 15:15.

Rather than focus on the violence and prejudice encountered by lesbians in South Africa, *Second to None* affirmed lesbian sexuality by provocatively championing sexual difference. In this respect the exhibition differed from those in national museums in the west, which are generally ‘reflective of, and constrained by, the normative consensus’ (Sandell 2007: 184).

When the audience entered room five they were greeted at the door by Michelle Raubenheimer’s *Pielkap or Bust* (‘Penis-head or breast’) (1986), a sculpture depicting a woman from the waist up, positioned like a bouncer with dark shades and arms crossed [plate 10.8]. *Pielkap* was surrounded by other works that dealt with similar cross-gendered themes, including *Androgenia a Beautiful Boy* (Keorpetse Mosimane 2004), a photograph of a young woman cross-dressing, and Bridget Baker’s *Botched Epic* (2006), a laminate of a woman in leather riding a motorbike caught between steel poles [plates 10.9 and 10.10]. These works informed the viewer of their celebration of female and lesbian sexuality situated in a forum where role-play, dressing up and breaking taboos was presented as the norm.



**Plate 10.9** *Androgenia a Beautiful Boy* (Keorpetse Mosimane 2004) and **Plate 10.10** *Botched Epic Attempt to Escape the Maiden* (Bridget Baker 2005), behind *Pielkap* (Michelle Raubenheimer 1986) *Second to None* SANG (2006) (photographs by Catherine Hahn)

The slightly sinister carnival-like atmosphere created by *Pielkap* and her entourage summoned the ‘sacred circle’. In his book *The Art of Play*, Gary Izzo describes the

‘sacred circle’ as a play space that invites the audience to join in an act of discovery outside the confines of censor:

There is a need for setting rules that are apart from ordinary life ... for accepting ideas without judgement and for altering an action through the affirmation of ideas ... for the creation of a space in which judgement does not exist (1997: 14-15)



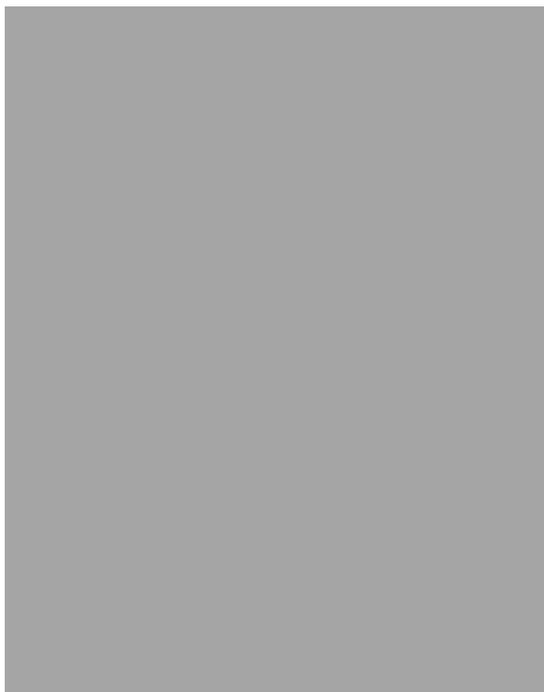
**Plate 10.11** Maidens I and Maidens II (Zanele Muholi 1995) behind Pielkap or Bust (Michelle Raubenheimer 1986), Second to None (2006) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

The idea that the exhibition operated beyond the confines of every-day rules, was fully activated in the placement of the two photographs of young women’s breasts, *Maidens I* and *Maidens II* (discussed in section one), in close proximity to *Pielkap*, which recast them as her trophies [plate 10.11]. In the juxtaposition of *Pielkap*’s harshness with the soft focused vulnerability of the teenage bodies, the audience was placed at the uncomfortable borderline between the playful-erotic and the documented truth. The dialogue between the works resubmitted the young women’s breasts to a predatory gaze in order to confront the audience with an unfamiliar, aggressive, female sexuality more commonly associated with the male role.

Further rule-breaking was evidenced in other works situated in room five that made explicit references to lesbian sexuality: *Dada* (Muholi 2003) a photograph of a naked woman wearing a strap-on dildo and *Fucking Flowers* (Rose 2000) a laminate of

vibrators dressed as stamens inside garish ‘gift-wrapped’ flowers [plates 10.12 and 10.13]. The curator took ownership of this visceral subject matter and its potential to elicit a strong reaction, stating in her interview:

I know you can play it safe at some point, but I didn’t want that. I always wanted the shock factor, the sensitive factor you know, and the unexpected (Staff Member F 2006: 29)



**Plate 10.12** Fucking Flowers (Tracey Rose 2000) Second to None SANG (2006)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Although some floor staff considered the works to be ‘inappropriate’ and in particular ‘unsuitable for children’ it is important to note that SANG chose not to censor them despite requests from staff to do so (Staff Member G 2006: 81). In practice this meant no age restrictions accompanied the works, there were no screens around them and no introduction marked them out as different in the display. SANG’s willingness to risk condemnation by showing works that dealt directly with lesbian sexuality and contained highly charged sexual content represented a departure from its prior practice, which was shaped by concern for public opinion. For example, in 2005 the gallery made the decision not to show *Dada* in an exhibition for fear of upsetting visitors (Staff Member F 2006: 129-130).

## White man's baggage

The absence of censure meant attention did not congregate around the works' sexual content. This was helpful as it allowed the organisers to signal the works' other concerns, evident in the placement of *Dada* next to *Black Woman Servant on 'Whites only' Beach, Cape Peninsula*, by Struan Robertson (1971) [plate 10.13]. Pairing *Dada* with *Black Woman Servant* spoke to their shared emphasis on the black female body. A small black and white photograph taken in the 1970s, *Black Woman Servant*, showed a black maid in a starched white uniform standing on the shore line of a South African 'Whites only' beach. The woman's arms were laden with cases that appeared to belong to a portly white man set further back in the image wearing sun glasses and swimming trunks with his hands on his hips. Light from the water on the camera lens produced 'haloes' above the woman's head and assigned her to the role of unacknowledged saint/martyr.



**Plate 10.13** *Black Woman Servant on 'Whites only' Beach, Cape Peninsula* (Struan Robertson 1971) and *Dada* (Zanele Muholi 2000) *Second to None SANG* (2006) (photograph by Catherine Hahn)

*Dada*, a black and white photograph, showed a black woman truncated at the neck and thighs adjusting or putting on a strap-on dildo in the colour of a white man's penis. A co-curator's explanation for twinning these images was that it provided a contrast between two black women carrying 'white man's baggage' (Staff Member M 2006: 97). In *Dada* the 'baggage' in question proffered a positive appropriation: with the white

male phallus re-raced and re-gendered for female only gratification. In contrast, in *Black Woman Servant* the maid appeared to have no ownership of her 'baggage', with her presence on the 'Whites only' beach determined by her white employer and her participation in the image dictated by the photographer. The theme of 'white baggage' gave effective access to *Dada's* subject-matter, but simultaneously emphasised the objectification of the woman in *Black Woman Servant*. The woman's situation at the bottom of the image placed her in direct relationship to the dildo, which, even without the allusion to 'white man's baggage', encouraged the eye to move back and forth between her image and the phallus. A relationship enhanced by the whiteness of the maid's outfit and the dildo, which brought their subjects to the fore. The consequent metronomic effect blurred the lines between the female servant, as active subject, and the phallus, as sex object. The sexual intent projected onto the woman's servitude via this twinning extended the terms of the 'white man's baggage' that attended her role.

Together *Dada* and *Black Woman Servant* spoke to multiple concerns, including the shifting politics of space, and drew attention to the ongoing vulnerability of black women, and in particular black lesbian women, in South African society. The latter concern was animated by the artist's cropping of the image in *Dada*, which rendered its female subject anonymous. Anonymity was frequently deployed by Muholi, presumably to elicit participation from protagonists who faced the real threat of retributive anti-lesbian abuse. Intriguingly, while concealing the subject's identity, this representational device subverted the anonymity of the classic nude by giving access to the female form as a 'real' lived in body. *Dada*, both conjured and refuted the universal norm by presenting the woman in its image as an active, mediating presence. Her body shape, body hair, posture and race subverted the classic norm of the supplicant white female nude, yet spoke the same language in terms of beauty, sensuality and aesthetic. The exposure that *Dada* accorded to different understandings of feminine beauty and sexuality was reinforced through the other works situated in room five, namely *Androgenia a Beautiful Boy*, *Botched Epic* and *Pielkap*, whose rebuttal of stereotypical heterosexual ideals further extended the terms of womanhood.

At the same time, the inclusion of documentary style photographs of black women in *Black Woman Servant* and *Maidens I* and *Maidens II* brought a problematic layer to the exhibition's use of anonymity. Discussing the treatment of 'nameless' African women

by white female South African artists, in *Reframing the Black Subject*, Enwezor argues that artists deliberately select anonymous subjects as this gives them the freedom to treat them as they please:

The subjects, it seems, are attractive because of their anonymity and existence at the margins of history. They have no names, thus they pose the least emotional or ethical threat, and the distance between them and the artist offers a gratifying contextual licence to do with the images as one chooses (1999: 388)

While the barely pubescent girls in Muholi's images may have chosen to be anonymous neither they nor the woman depicted in *Black Woman Servant* appeared to have purchase over their mode of display, which in both cases had negative connotations. In both instances the images were used to signal societal abuse, through the representation of women as sexual objects and to provide an element of quiet humour – in the case of *Maidens* positioning them as the trophies of the vulgar *Pielkap* and in *Black Woman Servant* through the linguistic play on 'baggage'. On a much softer level these images, like the Khoisan casts in *Miscast* and the painting of the black woman in bondage, *African Corporate Em-brace II* (discussed in chapters eight and nine), potentially reinforced the women's exploitation as it emphasised their 'muteness and silence' (ibid.: 397). In the hanging of *Black Woman Servant* and *Maidens I* and *Maidens II* one senses the concerns of the exhibition had taken precedence over consideration for the feelings of those exhibited.

## Doing things differently

*Second to None's* direct engagement with lesbian sexuality revealed a real breakthrough in mainstream museum culture. According to Richard Sandell, writing on American practice in *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, museums are generally happier to confront issues related to race than sexuality, as there is broad societal consensus that racism is wrong, whereas homosexuality is generally tolerated rather than approved of (2007: 184-185). Angela Vanegas' 2002 study of American museums, *Representing Lesbian and Gay Men*, supports Sandell's contention, as she found gay and lesbian imagery was largely missing from these museums – and when displayed was marginalised (2002: 105). Without the benefit of scope, my experience of

South African museums has been similar. Although gay and lesbian imagery appeared to be more prevalent in South Africa, the exhibitions that I visited which referenced homosexuality were either hosted in private galleries with a dedicated audience, for instance Zanele Muholi's *Only Half the Picture* in the Michael Stevenson Gallery (2006), or in HIV/AIDS related contexts.

SANG developed a reputation for AIDS related exhibitions, beginning in 1995 with the touring exhibition *Positive Lives: Responses to HIV* (1995). These exhibitions became an almost annual feature of the gallery, bolstered by the large number of artists who used the AIDS crisis and the government's reluctance to act upon it as their subject matter. As a consequence of the worldwide threat posed by AIDS to the gay community SANG's exhibitions included multiple art works with homosexual themes, such as two of Hentie van der Merwe's photo-lithographs: '*Untitled*' from the *Insatiable Series*, shown in *Positive Lives III* (2006) [plates 11.19 and 11.20].

In 2000 Kathryn Smith described van der Merwe as being acutely aware of his identity as a young, white, gay man of Afrikaner origin in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>6</sup> This awareness was discernible in '*Untitled*' which contained two black and white portraits of muscular young men in tight white t-shirts, both subtly 'wounded' through minute silver pins that mapped patterns across their chests. The material intrusion of the pins into the 'movie-star' imagery hinted at an external threat, which in an AIDS related exhibition became a signifier of the men's vulnerability and the almost invisible means by which disease penetrates the body. Although adding a powerful component to *Positive Lives III*, placing van der Merwe's work within the confines of this exhibition effectively marginalised its homosexual content by equating it solely with AIDS. Sue Williamson replicated this division in her influential art anthology *South African Art Now* (2009) in which the section entitled *Love and Gender in a Time of AIDS* was dominated by the work of gay and lesbian artists, some of whom, including Muholi, did not engage with the topic of HIV/AIDS (and also as lesbians were less at risk from AIDS than their heterosexual or gay counterparts).

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<sup>6</sup> Kathryn Smith *An artist in perspective*, Artthrob Issue No.31, March 2000 [blogspot.com./beeline.html](http://blogspot.com./beeline.html) accessed 10/10/2006.

Although the South African cultural sites I looked at replicated the conditions identified by Vanegas and Sandell in American museums they did not go to the same lengths to differentiate gay people from the norm. A visceral demonstration of this disparity is provided by Sandell who describes the difference in treatment between homosexuals and other victims of the Nazis in the state funded United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. In deciding how to display images of gay people who were killed in the Holocaust, for their permanent exhibition, staff took account of potential ‘complaints from family visitors’ (in Sandell’s text read as heterosexuals) and preemptively ‘compromised’ by using ‘movable screens’ to surround images of gay people ‘so that *people* would not simply stumble across the exhibit but would rather have to make a conscious decision to visit it’ (2007: 187, my emphasis). The choice made by the museum not to show the persecution of homosexuals on equal terms with other Nazi victims revealed its unpreparedness to tackle potential prejudice despite its public commitment to challenge it. A decision made more startling by the mundane content of the images in the ‘contentious’ exhibit, most of which were studio photographs of male couples, who were later murdered in the Holocaust (ibid.).

Although seemingly extreme, the Holocaust Memorial Museum’s disinclination to risk public disapproval, sits within the bounds of regular museum practice. In America and Europe Sandell identifies that museum staff frequently ignore ‘contentious issues’ until these reflect ‘battles already won’, which has effectively turned them into ‘impotent archivists’ (ibid.: 184-185). In contrast *Second to None*’s affirmative representation of lesbianism occurred in a climate of virulent and violent homophobic prejudice in South Africa, in which the staging of the work without a warning or protective screen risked condemnation. *Second to None*’s, and by extension SANG’s, willingness to display *Dada* and *Fucking Flowers* therefore demonstrated a notable challenge to normative museum practice.

## Section Four: Regrouping Hierarchies

*Second to None*’s message of black female and lesbian empowerment demonstrated the museum’s willingness to engage with subject positions and issues rarely encountered in mainstream museums. However, this commitment was redacted by those lower down the museum hierarchy and by critics commenting on the show. *Second to None*’s

ground-breaking approach is perhaps best evidenced by these negative responses as their vehemence signalled the extent of the exhibition's innovations and transgressions. The critiques interfered with intended readings of the display by relying on traditional understandings of the museum, which were used to reassert the status-quo.

## Criticism from within

*Second to None* was undermined by the white guides' deviation from its official account. Apart from in *Second to None* all of the walking tours I attended followed the same format, whether given by the curators or guides, and were sympathetic to the display. In contrast, the two tours of *Second to None* that I attended with volunteer guides went entirely 'off script'. The guides' divergence was underscored by the fact that both of them attended the co-curator's brief and they were therefore aware of the intentions behind the exhibition (field notes Dec. 2006).

The volunteer guides' criticism of *Second to None* related in part to its sexual content, which they appeared to find shocking, and in part to its handling of raced and gendered themes. The guides' negative response to the exhibition revealed a distinction between the white upper echelons of the museum, who endorsed it through their non-censorial approach, and the white guides, who experienced its content as a threat. The museum's internal struggle around areas of change was clearly illustrated on one of the tours when a white guide introduced *Dada* by saying it was by 'a black lesbian' (rather than providing the artist's name or the work's title) (Staff Member H 2006: 800-815). The guide went on to compare the work with another by a black artist (Bernie Searle *A Matter of Time* 2005), who he described as 'pushing this slavery background of hers until you're sick and tired of it' (ibid.: 816). The guide's correlation of Muholi's work, on lesbian sexuality, with Searle's, on race, presented both artists as if they were regurgitating the same worn out political refrain. This interpretation trivialised the artists' concerns and in the process misrepresented Searle's video *A Matter of Time*, which deployed the artist's body to explore contemporary South African racism. At the same time the guide's strategy shifted attention away from Muholi's work to Searle's, enabling him to dismiss *Dada* without investigation.

The second guide extended the scope of this rejection, telling me she refused to show people ‘some of the art works’ in room five of *Second to None* (Staff Member I 2006: 329). When I asked her to explain why she said the works were ‘nonsense’ and would not be drawn into discussion about *Fucking Flowers*, *Pielkap* or *Dada*, which she referred to collectively as ‘bloody rubbish’ (ibid.: 329-333). The reason the guides did not engage with some of the exhibition’s content may be partially explained by how ill-equipped they were to deal with its overt sexual themes. In her essay *The Reception of New, Unusual and Difficult Art* Constance Perrin details what happens when the content of work deviates from the ‘known’:

To find our feelings about and our vision of ‘our worlds’ ‘transformed’ and ‘reformed’ is to experience upheaval of familiar understandings, styles, norms, and the meanings that support these ... When this happens a sequence of neurophysiological responses we call fear and distress is set in motion ... humans transform [these] into social disdain, disvalue, disparagement, abuse, stigmatizing, prejudice and avoidance. These are social manifestations of the automatic distancing and resistance we call fear (1994: 176)

*Second to None* challenged the white guides’ world view through its refusal to engage with their known ‘classes’ of logic (ibid.: 177), which would have transformed their understanding of the gallery from a place of safety to one of fear. This disruption may have appeared particularly acute as it converged with museological practices that the guides’ would not have been familiar with, such as the inclusion of un-finished art works and the treatment of works as equivalencies.

The guides’ dismissal of the exhibition’s black and lesbian narratives also suggests ingrained societal prejudices were at play. On two occasions one of the guides referred to the exhibition’s black curator as ‘the girl’ and she went on to contend that the gallery employed her as a result of ‘political correctness’ (Staff Member I 2006: 413). Annoyance and contempt converge in the guide’s infantilised description of the curator as a ‘girl’. The use of the word ‘girl’ with its racist apartheid era connotations, and the public dismissal of the curator’s employment as ‘political correctness’, made manifest the guide’s refusal to acknowledge the curator’s status as a museum professional. The guide’s attitude offers an extreme example of an industry which often fails to recognise, or appreciate, black staff members’ contributions. Puwar notes that in public institutions

there is a general reluctance ‘to accept racialised bodies as being capable occupants of senior authoritative positions’, which can result in ‘infantilisation’ (2004: 60). As a result black people in positions of authority are frequently assumed not to have earned their roles or to be capable of undertaking them (ibid.). The guide’s dismissal of the black curator as a ‘girl’ contrasted starkly with her description of a white curator, who had recently shown at SANG, as ‘a real marvel’ (2006: 680).

The difference between how the guides reacted to *Second to None* and to other exhibitions revealed that the gallery’s attempt to diversify did not extend to the gallery floor. In *Theorizing Museums* Eric Gable identifies this is a common museological problem in American museums. He describes how the life experiences of museum guides determine their understanding of displays and consequently how the displays are explained to the general public. He goes on to show how the ethnic background of staff is of particular importance in regard to ‘raced’ displays as it has a primary influence on their interpretation (1998:172). On exploring how guides of different ethnic origins articulated the themes of social history sites in America, Gable found that their approaches differed when covering areas of contested racial history (ibid.: 172-179). For instance, he discovered that when the white guides dealt with subject-matter they found challenging they reverted ‘to a historiography of “just the facts”’, which meant they refused to ‘rethink the category of race’ in relation to miscegenation in antebellum American history (ibid.). In contrast, black guides presented with the same display drew on their own experiences of racism to dramatize the ‘new history’ format of the museum and bring new insights to the study of slavery and mixed-race relationships (ibid.: 179).

In Gable’s study, the white guides’ focus on what they considered to be ‘the truth’ meant they rejected other possible histories available within the site, even when these had been authorised by the institution’s managers (ibid.). At SANG a similar dichotomy was evident in the curatorial team’s attempts to open up work to challenging readings and the white volunteer guides’ counter attempts to shut discussion down. The guides’ refusal to engage with the works as the curators intended effectively restricted access to the exhibition’s content. The guides’ treatment of *Second to None* gave an added inflection to the way they interpreted other exhibitions. For example, the limited attention paid to black artists in *Facing the Past* (discussed in chapter seven) could be viewed as a rebuttal of black claims rather than simply reflecting an overemphasis on

whites. Their comments also revealed a deep racism at work in the museum that led white guides to feel comfortable to make demeaning comments about black staff members on the museum floor.

## Press criticism

*Second to None* received further criticism outside the museum from local art critics. *Second to None*'s challenging subject matter would be expected to court controversy and critical review, however, critics brought their own criteria and expectations to it, which appeared to override those of the curator. In his essay *The Unstable Institution* (2006) Carlos Basualdo describes how the desire to foreground their own expertise encourages critics to ignore or react indignantly to the subordination of individual works to thematic displays, such as in *Second to None* (2006: 530). In thematic exhibitions a greater importance is frequently placed on the curator than the art, which in the process displaces the critic as interlocutor (ibid.). Consequently, critics fail to signal the curator's intent in these types of display as a means to re-establish their own authority; as a result, inattentive critical attention has become an established feature of the contemporary field (ibid.).

The impact of inattentive critique on *Second to None* is exemplified by M. Minnaar's review in *The Cape Times*. Titled 'Strong works marred by haphazard exhibition' Minnaar's article bore witness to 'professional' slippage and revealed underlying racial tensions in its reassertion of the western canon. The display mechanism employed in *Second to None* was the main source of Minnaar's discontent. He wrote positively about individual works of art, but criticised the show's hang referring to it as 'haphazard and awkward' and blaming it for a 'limp' and 'uneven' display (2006: 12). There is resonance in Minnaar's use of the term 'haphazard' with the curator's own depiction of 'jiggling' the work around and in the oblique nature of some of its narratives (Walking Tour 10/08/06). However, his critique made no reference to the curator's rationale for hanging work in such a way, which was to bring forward specific themes and denote equivalence. There was therefore no allusion in his article to the dialogues that the design engendered.

By dismissing *Second to None*'s mode of display Minnaar reaffirmed the museum's traditional hang and by extension his own competency as its guide. This judgement enabled him to conclude that: 'Iziko seems to be in desperate need of a good exhibition display person' (Ibid.: 12). Here, the barely veiled contention that the curator was not a 'good exhibition display person' asserted the efficacy of the canonical norm by presenting the exhibition as a failed attempt to replicate accepted practice. By obscuring the curator's intention the critic therefore effectively returned the museum to a space prior to her intervention.

### Where are the white women?

A separate, potentially more damaging refutation of the exhibition's intent was provided by Linda Stupart in her editorial for *Artthrob*, the influential on-line South African art review (July 2006 1-2). Stupart framed her criticism of *Second to None* around the question 'Where, in fact, are the young white women?' In asking this question, she drew the reader's attention to the fact that the white artists 'Julia Clark, Doreen Southwood, Kathryn Smith and Ruth Sack' were not represented in the exhibition. Stupart rightly identified that these artists were absent. However, she did not draw attention to the fact that across the wider display white female artists took up more physical space and were represented by more art works than their black counterparts. This included the two accompanying monograph exhibitions by Sue Williamson and Annie Turock and the works of at least seven other white female artists in the main body of the display (including the young artists Diane Victor and Claudette Schreuders).

Stupart's failure to recognise the significant number of white artists who were in the show implied that, for her, whiteness had been normalised to the point of invisibility (Dyer 1997:3). It also implied she had an interest in *particular* white artists and a concern with a specific type of representation. A premise born out in Stupart's elucidation on her theme of the 'lack of white women' whose absence she maintained led to the exhibition's failure to capture the 'nostalgic and whimsical trend that has so enamoured women and Feminist artists worldwide' (ibid.). Yet the gap that Stupart identified in the exhibition was not corroborated by examination of the display, which contained works by white artists, which dealt specifically with this trend [plate 10.14].





10.15 Girl at her Dressing Table (Isolda Kram 1981) Second to None SANG (2006)  
(photograph by Catherine Hahn)

Room four presented Isolda Kram's *Girl at her Dressing Table* (1981), a sculpture of a white girl sitting in a state of undress on a high stool gazing wistfully into a mirror [plate 10.15]. The work was positioned next to Bridget Baker's photographic montage *The Blue Collar Girl* (2004), which provided a second image of a mirror-gazing white female, in this instance posed staring into a looking-glass while her alter ego scaled a building as the 'caped crusader'. The introspective escapism of these works alluded to the displacement of whites in the South African context. This reading was underpinned by Claudette Schreuders *Burnt by the Sun* (2005), positioned in the same room, in which a white woman was presented on a blank background, with sun-burnt arms staring nonplussed into 'the void'. The earliest of these works (*Girl at her Dressing Table*) dated back to 1981. Nevertheless, it, like the others, spoke to the current interest in introspection and nostalgia, and the difficult renegotiations of identity undergone by whites in the context of a transitional South Africa.

Stupart's lack of acknowledgement of the white artists in the display hinted at a self-imposed amnesia derived from the desire to express a loss of whiteness rather than a genuine absence. In *Reframing the Black Subject* Enwezor provides an extensive, and somewhat scathing, account of how whites operate in the art arena in South Africa that has resonance here. Enwezor describes how white art world professionals (and in particular white women) have reformulated the boundaries of the canon so as to position

themselves as indispensable participants in the re-writing of history (1999: 376-399). Expanding his theme Enwezor suggests whites view 'white story-tellers' as essential mediators in the South African art world even when the stories being told are not about whites (ibid.: 383). The thrust of Stupart's argument drew attention to the traditional gate-keepers' desire to retain control of 'the representational intentionality of the body politic' and in particular 'its archive of images' (Enwezor 2000: 383). A desire that was also present in her treatment of black artists.

In contrast to her lack of awareness of works by and about white women in the exhibition Stupart appeared acutely aware of the inclusion of black artists, who she implied were being shown at the expense of whites. To this end she stated the show 'reeks of an overly focussed issue of race representation and an unfortunate tendency towards overcompensation' (July 2006 1-2). Stupart's assertion that the show was too committed to 'race representation' was situated against the back-drop of wider racial bias towards whites that typified the authorised South African art world, exemplified in the then recently published art book *Ten Years One Hundred Artists: Art in Democratic South Africa* (Perryer 2004). In the book the ten selectors (five white and five black) unanimously chose artists of their own race. While the black selectors almost exclusively chose lists of black artists and white selectors, white, different motives appeared to be at play. The black selectors chose short-lists of little-known black artists (many of whom were not formally trained) that demonstrated a concerted attempt to expand the canon. In contrast, the white selectors chose professionally trained white artists and a handful of 'known' black artists, thus restricting entry to the canon to the chosen few (ibid.: 7). Stupart's soliloquy on the lack of white artists therefore sits within the wider sphere of white validation of whites that, as Enwezor (1999) and Goniwe (2008) point out, continues to operate as the norm across all aspects of the art sector in South Africa.

## Getting out

Stupart's representation of the presence of black artists in *Second to None* as 'overcompensation' insinuated that the black artists who were chosen came from a wide and indiscriminate pool. Yet, the one striking absence in the exhibition was its lack of breadth in regard to the selected artists. *Second to None's* curator maintained she had

initially intended to diversify the contents of the display but in the process found herself subject to constraints that limited her gaze. In interview she described how she had intended to travel extensively and ‘conduct in-depth research’ in order to discover new works ‘and bring them to the fore’ (Staff Member F 2006: 73). However, on beginning the project she became aware of the realities of the South African art world in which a lack of available acquisition funds, limited finance to transport work and time restrictions made it difficult to source and acquire new works of art (ibid.: 73, 250). Under these constraints *Second to None*’s curatorial team adopted a strategy developed by SANG’s permanent curators, which was to persuade local artists and small commercial galleries to lend their work free of charge in return for exposure in the national gallery (ibid.).

The difficulties associated with accessing new work meant the exhibition contained works that by-and-large resembled the museum’s regular fare. Of the fifty-one art works in the final exhibition, twenty-five came from SANG’s holdings and twenty-six from external sources (Staff Member M 10/10/2006: 79, Staff Member F 2006: 249). Of the twenty-six externally sourced works all but three were by well-established artists represented by commercial galleries in Cape Town (Staff Member F 249-256).

The fact that *Second to None* was able to tackle so many issues with minimal resource bears testament to the commitment and ingenuity of the curator, whilst simultaneously signalling the need for the gallery to employ more black staff. Meanwhile the replication in the exhibition is a reminder that SANG requires fresh sources of art and the funds to extend its collection.

## Moving on

Further advances were made following the appointment of the new Director, Riason Naidoo. Although his short time in office, 2009-2014, does not sit within the timeframe of my research, it is worth reflecting on briefly here.

In December 2010 I met Naidoo for lunch to talk through his plans for the gallery. Taking into consideration the limited funds at SANG’s disposal and its inability to dismiss existing staff his vision was to develop a ‘South-South’ dialogue with countries

below the equator and to have greater engagement with other African countries. In this way he hoped to move the conversation with the wider art world beyond Europe and the United States and away from traditional western spaces. He also sought to include Afrikaner artists whose work had slipped into abeyance post-apartheid. Through these means the collection would look backwards at more diverse histories and forward to a greater range of possibilities (Staff Member O December 2010).

Evidence of Naidoo's vision for the museum was provided in his first major project *Pierneef to Gugulective* (2010). The exhibition showed 'one hundred years of South African art' from across a range of disciplines and practices including craft and performance art. For the exhibition Naidoo had all the art in the gallery taken down and replaced, including the historic rooms and the Sir Abe Bailey bequest. *Pierneef to Gugulective* therefore went further than *Second to None*, which had spanned the whole gallery with the exception of the historic rooms. Naidoo also managed to borrow works from forty-eight lenders from across South Africa thereby extending the museum's terms of reference.<sup>7</sup>

Naidoo's appointment and subsequent work demonstrated the gallery had managed to increase its reach. However, his treatment in the press echoed that of Ngcobo. Gabriel Clark-Brown, the editor of the influential and conservative *Art Times*, described Naidoo's decision to remove Bailey's bequest for the duration of his show as 'trashing' the museum's reputation.<sup>8</sup> He then used the opportunity to question Naidoo's capability, stating 'I believe Riason Naidoo was a political appointment rather than on merit'.<sup>9</sup> The critic's dismissal of the Director's professional status replicated the guide's response to Ngcobo's curatorship of *Second to None*, which meant he, like the guide, could avoid engagement with the actual display. Although other members of the press engaged more positively with the show Clark-Brown's response indicated the ongoing adverse influence of the 'white art establishment'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Tham, M. 'Blood on the Walls as South Africa's national gallery axes first black Director' *Guardian* (Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/16/blood-on-the-walls-as-south-africas-national-gallery-axes-first-black-director> accessed 10/05/15.

<sup>8</sup> Pollock, L. and Clark-Brown 'SANG's reputation trashed for 2010 show' *Art Times*, Cape Town May 2010 p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

By definition a single case study of an exhibition cannot hope to elucidate all the ways in which curators might determine change in institutional art settings. Nevertheless, the transformative practices present in *Second to None* confirm that the involvement of a black professional staff member led to significant change.

The use of directive social narrative in the curators' tours was accompanied by a complex, open-ended display, which exposed hitherto underexplored realms of South African life to public scrutiny including those commonly set apart as 'culture'. Consequently, the exhibition circumvented traditional homilies and exposed the audience to injustices without the comfort of pre-packaged solutions. Meanwhile, the design, layout and arrangement of the display undermined the museum's white power structures, as it swapped its European fine art hierarchy for an equitable view of art works as equivalencies. Its message of black female and lesbian empowerment and highly-charged sexual themes confirmed the curator's understanding of the space as one for 'speaking up and acting out' (2006: 3-4).

Negative responses to *Second to None* indicate that despite endorsement by those at the top of the museum's hierarchy, the exhibition was subject to prejudicial review that singled it out from other displays. The white critics and volunteer guides problematized the exhibition to the extent that those who attended without the benefit of the curators' tours may have been unaware of its intent. The similar response to Naidoo's exhibition demonstrates that attempts to change SANG continue to be affected by the South African art world's white gate-keepers and their process of validation.

## Conclusion

SANG was fashioned in the interests of whites, but with a local identity that intimated its capacity for wider inclusion. The fine art museums of Europe, following the temple model, used strategies that distanced the audience from their art to create a space of reverence and awe. In contrast, SANG developed a close relationship with its visitors through its homely setting, story-telling displays and leisure and educational initiatives. SANG's emphasis on participation indicated it would be more amenable to change than the temple, a premise born out in my research, which demonstrated it behaved in a less hierarchical and more communicative fashion than its western counterparts. However, my research also revealed SANG's investment in overt and subtle forms of whiteness, which meant it struggled to move away from its racist past. Indeed, in some respects it has continued to perform as a white space.

## Findings

My investigation of SANG's practices from late 1930 to early 2009 reveal it to be a political house in which the sedimentary layers of past practice resonate. The décor, which was introduced when the gallery opened in 1930, presented a mythologized patriarchal story of working life that promoted white settlement and nation building during a period typified by white racism, poverty, high unemployment and civil unrest. The décor's myth-making was compounded through its presentation of black people requiring white control and of Cape Town as a white city under uncontested English rule. Through these narratives the décor carved hegemonic white societal myths permanently onto the gallery's walls.

Turning to SANG's early collection, I found that the gallery was originally a contested space that included: women's craft work; paintings by local amateur and professional artists (including at least two works by a black modernist artist) and European fine art. However, by the 1940s this eclectic content had been largely replaced by the Randlords' bequests. The predominance of European fine art in the Randlords' collections indicated that the gallery might turn into a temple. However, the preponderance of images of nudes and sporting-life generated a rough phallogocentric norm. The confluence of the

Randlords' collections; their public lives as colonial men and the mining industry turned the gallery into the realm of the Randlords' and the civilised-brute. The gallery also privileged the English through its glorified representation of Rhodes and its concentration on English painting.

In 1948 apartheid was introduced in South Africa and SANG employed its first Director, John Paris, who helped extend apartheid's reach into the cultural sphere. During Paris' fourteen years in office (1948-1962), I identified that the gallery merged features from the temple, modern art museum and education and leisure complex to become a place of social engagement. At this time the museum came to be viewed as a safe space for performing white citizenship and moved from being the gentlemen's club to the white family home. Black people were included in the museum, as artists and the subjects of work, but their presence was heavily policed.

In the 1980s tensions precipitated by increased government control, resistance art and the cultural boycott led to changes in the museum. Initially the gallery responded to external pressure by adopting a white recidivist approach, but the era ended with greater black control. During this period SANG's history of communicative practice helped it to adapt to the changing expectations of its role. Black education officers were employed who: introduced community initiatives (including teacher-training programmes and art workshops); brought non-fine art and craft work back into the gallery's main halls and incorporated political themes in displays. Despite the gallery continuing to be a predominantly white space, the changes that were introduced by black artists and education officers in the late 1980s and early 1990s demonstrated its potential for further inclusion.

Following the end of apartheid SANG sought to further destabilise its historic relationship with whiteness through initiatives that were congruent with the post-museum. These initiatives included: the orchestration of its collection and displays around contemporary political concerns; the reduction and revision of the historic European display halls and the introduction of African art exhibitions and events. The expanded framework meant the collection included African craftwork and utilitarian objects and presented exhibitions with challenging and contentious themes. The changes that took place indicate SANG had been through a process of development that went

well beyond ‘transformation rhetoric’ (McGee 2006). However, post-apartheid SANG maintained a special relationship with whiteness: it retained an all-white curatorial team; historic European art remained the museum ‘standard’; the Randlords continued to have a significant presence in the gallery and the décor continued to relay a white, masculine theme. Importantly, African art remained housed at SAM thereby sustaining the divide between fine art and ethnography. It was also the case that the majority of the new initiatives at SANG were temporary, including the political and African art exhibitions and the employment of trainee black curators. As a consequence, the opportunities for power-sharing, partnership building and dialogue were partial and/or transitory.

## What we can learn

My research was restricted to a single art museum with a particular focus on its representational practice and development of racial ideas. My findings should therefore not be considered to apply directly to other South African sites or to museums more generally. Nevertheless, the approach I used to ascertain the practices in operation at SANG have wide applicability.

Opting to restrict the study almost exclusively to one site had the advantage of providing an immersive experience, which enabled identification of how the gallery operated across time. Close analysis using a mixed-method approach accorded access to aspects of the museum that would not have been identified through either a broad survey of multiple sites, or by looking at a single period or practice. Focusing on SANG’s representational practice proved particularly effective for understanding the museum. My image-centred methodology included: mapping, photography, drawing, attendance of walking tours and the collation of information on past displays. Through these methods I ascertained what the museum wanted the public to see. Analysis of this information alongside contextual material enabled me to ascertain the societal concerns that fed into SANG’s vision.

My close observation of SANG provided evidence of its distinction from the temple model and revealed its role as a political house. What I found out about SANG’s role suggests that ‘common-sense’ understandings of the art museum rooted in western

expectations of practice may not tally with the realities of the museum experience, in particular when institutions are situated outside of the western geographic terrain. For this reason, research should pay significant attention to the individual circumstances of each site.

The study further revealed that impediments to a museum making meaningful change may be concealed in practices that appear as if they would grant greater inclusion. For example, although educative and political practices are commonly considered to open up museums to a wider audience, I demonstrated these same practices can be divisive when a museum has a particular audience in mind. Research should therefore interrogate practices that present themselves as inclusive in order to check whether they favour particular parties.

An important finding from my analysis of exhibitions and walking tours is that SANG has not been successful in promoting diversity because of its retention of white professional staff. This finding supports earlier research at SANG (McGee 2006) as well as wider research, that indicates reconstructive power has not been shared in the South African art world due to its continued reliance on white gatekeepers (Edgar 2009; Enwezor 2009). Additionally, my research showed that SANG's professional staff had different viewpoints by race. Although white staff members made significant contributions to SANG, at the extreme of their opinions white gatekeepers sought to retain the status quo and their position in the art world (relying heavily on the idea of professional standards to do so). Conversely, black gatekeepers were interested in opening up the field to more progressive practices. Indeed, my research established that the most significant changes in SANG's practice have been delivered by black participants in professional roles. This distinction indicates that black staff members should be represented at every employment level at SANG and most particularly in its senior roles. The presence of different staff behaviour by race at SANG indicates research on other sites should consider the possibility that racial distinctions might be occurring in their domain (more particularly as Gable identified a similar set of circumstances in an American museum previously (1998)).

Although the dominant position of white staff has slowed change, analysis of SANG's representational practice points to strategies that could provide the means for greater

institutional inclusion. For instance, the relative fluidity of SANG's disciplinary boundaries and preparedness to remove and rehang its collection has enabled it to destabilize the misleading narrow view of art history as commensurate with western fine art. Meanwhile the inclusion of popular, political, utilitarian, decorative and spiritual art forms offers a wide set of art histories and practices from which to envisage different futures. The story-telling themes that accompanied SANG's displays indicate another valuable root to inclusion as they refute the timeless masterpiece and replace this concept with a subjective aesthetic. The emphasis on narrative has allowed the museum to tap into personal tastes and interests as well as art activism, which has both personalised and politicised the terrain. SANG's conception of art as activism has assisted it to incorporate the controversial, subversive and angry politics of battles still to be won. The gallery's preparedness to deal with contentious themes, such as lesbian sexuality, gender violence and reductive tribalism, demonstrate its distinction from normative national museum practice that frequently avoids contentious issues and transgressive art practices.

The initiatives introduced at SANG provide evidence of its potential for inclusion and signal strategies that could be adopted elsewhere. However, SANG remains restricted by its continued allegiance to European art and by extension European history. Unless the European collection is permanently taken down it would appear imperative that SANG offsets it against the permanent and extensive display of African art and art from other population groups, so as to reflect the country's demography and artistic heritage. Otherwise the fluidity of the rest of the collection oscillates around a European nucleus. Likewise SANG should consider removing or concealing its original décor. The décor's fabricated version of South Africa's history, with black people represented under the control of whites, and the objectifying images of black women in *Holiday Time in Cape Town*, persist in limiting black people's right to enter the gallery on equal terms with whites. Although my research did not consider what the décor's utopian vision of a white run society might mean in the contemporary context, its presence draws the rest of the collection under its gaze.

## Taking things forward

At the end of each of my interviews I asked the interviewees ‘How could SANG become more inclusive?’ Out of this process two inter-connected ideas emerged. Firstly, respondents suggested establishing satellite museums in the townships on the outskirts of Cape Town, which would provide a stepping-stone to the gallery. Secondly, they advocated increasing SANG’s size and content to offer a more comprehensive national collection. One of the most striking ideas for a new gallery came from a long-term curator, who envisaged an extension to the museum that would straddle the car park, so as to engulf the annexe and museum. Together, these ideas suggested a potential way forward for the gallery. Expansion of the existing museum and the provision of satellites would make a clear commitment to the black citizenry of Cape Town, and of South Africa, in the form of increased access and devolved power. Expansion would also create the need to extend the collection and provide an opportunity to diversify the staff team. Importantly, the physical action of adding a new building to those already in Company’s Garden would mean it would no longer read architecturally as an entirely colonial space, effectively changing the core of the city.

If realised, the ideas mooted by gallery staff could have wide-reaching consequences. However, the museum’s ability to achieve transformation on this scale would be reliant on its sourcing adequate funds. McGee has proposed deaccessioning part of the European collection as a viable means of financing a ‘more equitable and representational collection,’ but the gallery is hampered in this regard by the restrictions placed on the Bailey bequest, which it holds but does not own (2006: 188). Marilyn Martin, SANG’s ex Director, used her catalogue essay for *Decade of Democracy* (2006) to berate the government for providing it with inadequate income and in 2008, SANG hosted an exhibition of empty frames entitled *Why Collect?* accompanied by statistics on recent government spend.<sup>1</sup> Presumably in both cases the intention was to embarrass the government into extending extra funds. However, the multiple competing claims on government resources make the likelihood of vastly increased revenue from this source unlikely anytime soon.

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<sup>1</sup> P. 1. ‘*History of Neglect*’ The Weekender Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2007, SANG archive.

If substantial funds are not forthcoming, the work undertaken by the education department; the curatorship of *Second to None* and SANG's broad commitment to critical practice, serve as reminders of what can be achieved with will and vision.

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Berger, M.	2005	Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture	Berkeley and Los Angeles	University of California
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Johnston, A.	2014	<i>South Africa (Inventing the Nation)</i>	London	Bloomsbury Academic
Jordanova, L.	1989	<i>Objects of Knowledge: A Historical Perspective on Museums</i> (22-40) in <i>New Museology</i> Vergo, P. (ed.)	London	Reaktion Books
Kalinovska, M. (ed)	1996	<i>New Histories</i>	Boston	Institute of Contemporary Art
Kalra, V. Kaur, R. Hutnyk, J.	2005	<i>Diaspora and Hybridity</i>	London Thousand Oaks Delhi	SAGE Publications
Kane-Berman, J.	1978	<i>Soweto: Black Revolt, White reaction</i>	South Africa	Ravan Press
Edt. Karp, I. and Lavine, S.	1991	<i>Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display.</i>	Washington and London	Smithsonian Institution Press
Karp, I. Mullen Kreamer, C. and Lavine, S. (eds)	1992	<i>Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture</i>	Washington and London	Smithsonian Institution Press

Karp, I. and Wilson, F.	1996	<i>Constructing the Spectacle of Culture</i> (251-268) in <i>Thinking about Exhibitions</i> , Greenberg, R. Ferguson, B. and Nairne, S. (eds)	London New York	Routledge
Kasfir, S.	1999	<i>African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow</i> (88-113) in <i>Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace</i> , Oguibe, O. and Enwezor, O. (eds)	London	inIVA
Kravagna, C.		<i>Working on the Community Models of Participatory Practice</i> , <a href="http://www.republicart.net/disc/aap/kravagna01-en.htm">http://www.republicart.net/disc/aap/kravagna01-en.htm</a> , accessed 21/08/2015		
Kelly, P. (ed.)	2002	<i>Multiculturalism Reconsidered: Culture and Equality and its Critics</i>	Cambridge	Polity
Kennedy, D.	1987	<i>Islands of White: settler society and culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1890-1939</i>	Durham	Duke University Press
Khan, N.	2005	<i>Choices for Black Arts in Britain over Thirty Years</i> (115-122) in <i>Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain</i> , Bailey, D. Baucom, I. Boyce, S. (eds)	London	InIVA
Kiewiet, C.	1941	<i>A History of South Africa: Social and Economic</i>	Oxford	Clarendon Press
Kincheloe, J.	1999	<i>The Struggle to Define and Reinvent Whiteness: A Pedagogical Analysis</i>	USA	West Chester University
Kippnis, J.	2006	<i>Who's afraid of gift-wrapped kazoos?</i> (94-107) in <i>What Makes a Great Exhibition?</i> Marincola, P. (ed.)	Philadelphia	Centre for Arts and Heritage
Knell, S. J., Aronsson, P., Amundsen, A. B. et al.	2011	<i>National Museums: New Studies from Around the World</i>	London	Routledge
Knowles, L.	1936	<i>The Economic Development of the British Overseas Empire Volume Three The Union of South Africa</i>	London	George Routledge and Sons
Knowles, C. and Sweetman, P. (eds)	2004	<i>Picturing the Social Landscape: Visual Methods in the Sociological Imagination</i>	London	Routledge
Koloane, D.	1995	<i>Moments in Art</i> (140-157) In <i>Seven Stories: about Modern Art in Africa</i> , Havell, J. (ed.)	London	Whitechapel
Koloane, D.	2000	<i>Postapartheid Expression and a New Voice</i> (19-31) in <i>Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa</i> , Herreman, F. and D'Amato, M. (eds)	New York, London	Prestel
Kymlicka, W.	1995	<i>Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights</i>	Oxford	Clarendon Press
Lalu, P.	2009	<i>The Deaths of Hints: Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts</i>	Cape Town	HSRC Press
Lam, D. Ardington, C, Branson, N. and Leibbrandt, M.	2012	<i>Credit Constraints and the Racial Gap in Post-Secondary Education in South Africa</i> , Preliminary draft to the 7 <sup>th</sup> IZA/World Bank Conference: Employment and Development	Delhi, India	

Lane, P.	1996	<i>Breaking the Mould? Exhibiting Khoisan in Southern African Museums</i> (3-10) in <i>Anthropology Today</i> 12 (5)	Cape Town	
Lawson, G.	2005	<i>Negotiated Revolutions: The Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile</i>	Hants	Ashgate publishing Ltd
Lax, I.	2004	<i>Amnesty, Reparation and the Object of Reconciliation in the Context of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission</i> (224-241) in <i>To Repair the Irreparable</i> , Doxtader, E. and Villa-Vicencio, C. (eds)	Claremont	New Africa Books
Le May, G.	1995	<i>The Afrikaners: An Historical Interpretation</i>	London	Blackwell
le Roux, D. (ed.)	2005	<i>Company's Garden Self-guided Walk</i>	Cape Town	Heritagae Resources Section, City of Cape Town
Levitz, C.	August 1996	<i>The Transformation of Museums</i> (1-4) in <i>South Africa CIDOC Volume 7</i>	Cape Town	CIDOC Newsletter
Lidche, H.	1997	<i>The Poetics and The Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures</i> ( 151-222) in <i>Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practice</i> Hall (eds)	London	Sage
Lilla, Q.	2004	<i>The Advancement of Art: Policy and Practice at the South African National Gallery 1940-1962</i> Masters Degree	Cape Town	University of Cape Town
Lombard, K.	2004	<i>Across the divide of perception: The strategic and Moral Demands of Reparation at the End of the TRC</i> (184-196) in <i>To Repair the Irreparable</i> , Doxtader, E. and Villa-Vicencio, C. (eds)	Claremont	New Africa Books
Luke, T.	2002	<i>Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition</i>	Minnesota	University of Minnesota Press
MacClancey, J.	1997	<i>Anthropology, Art and Contest</i> (1-25) in <i>Contesting Art: Art, Politics and Identity in the Modern World</i> , MacClancey, J. (ed.)	Oxford New York	Berg
Macdonald, S. and Fyfe, G. (eds)	1996	<i>Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World</i>	London	Blackwell Publishing
Macleod, D.	1996	<i>Art and the Victorian Middleclass: money and the making of Cultural Identity</i>	Cambridge	Cambridge University Press
Madeline, L. and Martin, M.	2006	<i>Picasso and Africa</i>	Cape Town	Bells-Roberts Publishing
Macdonald, K.	2001	<i>Using Documents</i> (194-210) in <i>Researching Social Life</i> , Gilbert, N. (ed.)	London	Sage
Magocsi, P. (ed.)	2007	<i>Encyclopaedia of Canada's People</i>	Canada	University of Toronto Press
Magubane, B.	2004	<i>The Road to Democracy in South Africa Volume 1 (1960-1970)</i> SADET (eds)	Cape Town	Zebra Press
Magubane, Z.	2004	<i>Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class and Gender in Britain and colonial South Africa</i>	Chicago	University of Chicago Press

Mamdani, M.	1996	Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism	Princeton	Princeton University Press
Manning, E.	2003	Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home and Identity in Canada	Minneapolis and London	University of Minnesota Press
Marincola, P. (ed.)	2006	What Makes a Great Exhibition?	Philadelphia	Centre for Arts and Heritage
Marstine, J. (ed.)	2006	New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction	London	Blackwell Publishing
Marstine, J. (ed.)	2011	The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum	London New York	Routledge
Martin, M.	1993	Made in Wood: Work from the Western Cape	Cape Town	SANG
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Martin, M.	1995	The Rainbow Nation: Identity and Transformation, PAM 709. 68 MAR. SANG archive		SANG
Martin, M.	1996	<i>Bringing the Past into the Present: Facing and Negotiating History, Memory, Redress and Reconciliation at the South African National Gallery</i> , paper presented at Faultlines 5 <sup>th</sup> July 1996, PAM 709. 68 MAR. SANG archive	Cape Town	SANG
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Martin, M.	2004a	Co-existence: Contemporary Cultural production in South Africa	Mass.	Brandeis University
Martin, M.	2004b	<i>The Horn of the National Art Museum's Dilemma (54-67)</i> in <i>A Decade of Democracy</i> , Bedford, E. (ed.)	Cape Town	Double Storey Books and Iziko Museums of Cape Town
Mason, R., Whitehead, C. and Graham, G.	2013	<i>One Voice to Many Voices? (163-177)</i> In <i>Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration</i> Golding, V. and Modes, W. (eds.)	London	Bloomsbury
Mastai, J.	1996	<i>Oh Heck! High Tech Art Galleries, Ideologies of Practice and Shifting Paradigms of Knowledge (146-160)</i> in <i>Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future</i> , White, P. (ed.)	Canada	The Banff Centre for the Arts
Mathieson, S. and Attwell, D.	1998	<i>Between Ethnicity and Nationhood: Shaka Day and the struggle over Zuluness in post-apartheid South Africa (111- 124)</i> in <i>Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and Identity</i> , Bennett, D. (ed.)	London and New York	Routledge
Maurice, E.	1993	Picturing Our World: Contemporary Images of the Western Cape (catalogue)	Cape Town	SANG

Mbeki, G.	1984	The Peasants' Revolt	South Africa	Pleasure Masango
Mbeki, T.	2004	<i>Statement to the National Houses of Parliament and the Nation at the Tabling of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation (15-28)</i> in <i>To Repair the Irreparable</i> , Doxtader, E. and Villa-Vicencio, C. (eds)	Claremont	African Books
McClelland, A.	2003 [1994]	<i>Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-century Paris</i>	Cambridge	Cambridge University Press
McClintock, A.	1995	<i>Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest</i>	London and New York	Routledge
McDonald, H.	2001	<i>Erotic Ambiguities</i>	London	Routledge
McGee, J.	2006	<i>Restructuring South African Museums: Reality and Rhetoric within Cape Town (179-196)</i> in <i>New Museum Theory and Practice</i> , Marstine, J. (ed.)	Oxford	Blackwell Publishing Ltd
Mdanda, S.	2000	<i>The Role of Art in the Liberation Struggle (189-195)</i> in <i>Democracy X: Marking the present/re-presenting the past</i> , Oliphant, A. Delius, P. and Meltzer, L. (eds)	Pretoria	Unisa Press
Meli, F.	1988	<i>South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC</i>	Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe publishing House
Memmi, A.	2000	<i>Racism</i>	Minnesota	Minnesota Press
Mercer, K.	1994	<i>Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies (including the essay: Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe)</i>	London and New York	Routledge
Mercer, K.	2002	<i>Ethnicity and Internationality (116-131)</i> in <i>Third Text reader on Art, Culture and Theory 2001-2</i> , Araeen, R. Cubitt, S. and Sardar, Z. (eds)	London, New York	Continuum
Mercer, K.	2005	<i>Iconography after Identity (49-58)</i> in <i>Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain</i> , Bailey, D. Baucom, I. Boyce, S. (eds)	London	InIVA
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Mervis, J.	1985	<i>The Fourth Estate: A Newspaper Story</i>	South Africa	J. Ball
Miller, D.	2002	<i>Liberalism, Equal Opportunities and Cultural Commitments (45-61)</i> in <i>Multiculturalism Reconsidered: Culture and Equality and its Critics</i> , Kelly, P. (ed.)	Cambridge	Polity
Mills, C. W.	1997	<i>The Racial Contract</i>	New York	Cornell University Press
Mills, C. Wright	2000 [1959]	<i>The Sociological Imagination</i>	New York	Oxford University Press

Mindry, D.	2001	<i>Nongovernmental Organizations, 'Grassroots' and the 'Politics of Virtue' (1187-1211)</i> in <i>Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society</i> 26		
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Mitchell, W.	1990	Art and the Public Sphere	Chicago	Chicago University Press
Moodie, T	1975	The Rise of Afrikanerdom, Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion	America	Berkeley
Morrell, R.	2001	From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal 1880-1920	Pretoria	University of South Africa
Mudimbe, V.Y.	1999	<i>Reprendre: Enunciations and Strategies in Contemporary African Arts</i> (31-47) in <i>Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace</i> , Oguibe, O. and Enwezor, O. (eds)	London	inIVA
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Nasson, B.	1990	<i>She Preferred Living in a Cave with Harry the Snake Catcher: Towards an Oral History of Popular Leisure and Class Expression in District Six, Cape Town c.1920s-1950s</i> (285-309) in <i>Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century South Africa</i> , Bonner, P. Hofmeyer, I. and James, D. (eds)	South Africa	Wits University Press
Nead, L.	1992	Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality	London New York	Routledge
Nesbitt, L. M.	1936	Gold Fever	New York	Harcourt, Brace and Company
Ndebele, N.	2000	'Beyond Protest': New Directions in South African Literature		Institute of African Studies
Nochlin, L.	March 1995	<i>Learning from Black Male</i> (91) in <i>Art in America</i> vol. 83		
Norval, A	1999	Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse	London New York	Verso
Nuttall, S. Coetzee, C. (eds)	2002	<i>Negotiating the Past: The making of Memory in South Africa</i>	Oxford	Oxford University Press

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Oliver, L.	2004	Boris Anrep: The National Gallery Mosaics	New York	Yale University Press
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O'Meara, D.	1996	Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994	Randburg	Ravan Press
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Osundare, N.	2000	The Word is an Egg: Poems	Michigan	Kraftgriots
Parsons, N.	1993	A New History of Southern Africa (Second Edition)	London	Macmillan
Pearce, S.	1994	On Collecting: an Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition	London and New York	Routledge
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Pearce-Moses, R.	2005	A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology		SAA
Pearson, N.	1982	The State and the Visual Arts: A discussion of State intervention in the visual arts in Britain, 1760-1981	Milton Keynes	Open University Press
Peffer, J.	2009	Art and the End of Apartheid	Minneapolis, London	University of Minnesota Press
Perrin, C.	1994	<i>The Reception of New, Unusual and Difficult Art (172-197)</i> in <i>Artist Outsider</i> (Hall, M. and Metcalf Jr. E. (eds.))	Washington, London	Smithsonian Institute Press
Perryer, S.	2004	10 years 100 Artists: Art in Democratic South Africa	Cape Town	Bell Roberts
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Plummer, K.	2007	<i>The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research</i>	London	SAGE
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Pollock, G.	2000	<i>Differencing the Canon</i>	London	Routledge
Popper, K.	1990	<i>A World of Propensities</i>	Bristol	Thoemmes
Posel, D.	1991	<i>The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise</i>	Oxford	Clarendon Press
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Preziosi, D.	2001	<i>Brain of the Earth's Body</i>	Minnesota	University of Minnesota Press
Preziosi, D.	2009	<i>The Art of Art History</i>	Oxford	Oxford University Press
Proud, H.	1999	<i>The Sir Edmund and Lady Davis Presentation: A Gift of British Art to South Africa</i> (Exhibition catalogue)	Cape Town	SA National Gallery
Proud, H. and Tietze, A.	2001	<i>Sir Abe Bailey Bequest: A Reappraisal</i> (Exhibition catalogue)	Cape Town	SA National Gallery
Proud, H.	2002	<i>"The advancement of art": The South African Society of Artists and its exhibitors (1902-1950)</i> (Exhibition catalogue)	Cape Town	SA National Gallery
Puwar, N.	2004	<i>Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place</i>	Oxford	Berg
Quennell, P.	1955	<i>Hogarth's Progress</i>	London, New York	Viking Press
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Rasmussen, B.	2010	<i>The Laboratory on 53<sup>rd</sup> Street: Victor D'Amico and the Museum of Modern Art 1937-1969</i> (451-464) in <i>Curator: The Museum Journal</i> Vol. 53, Issue 4 Oct		
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Robins, S.	2005	Limits to Liberation after Apartheid	Cape Town	David Philip
Rose, G.	2012	Visual Methodologies (3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition)	London, California	SAGE
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Ross, F. Reynolds, P.	2004	<i>Voices Not Heard: Small Histories and the Work of Repair</i> (106-114) in <i>To Repair the Irreparable</i> , Doxtader, E. and Villa-Vicencio, C. (eds)	Claremont	New Africa Books
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Rubin, P.	1995	Giorgio Vasari: Art and History	USA	Yale University Press
Rugoff, R.	2006	<i>You Talking to Me ? On Curating Group Shows that give you a chance to Join the Group</i> (44-51) in <i>What Makes a Great Exhibition?</i> Marincola, P. (ed.)	Philadelphia	Centre for Arts and Heritage
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Sachs, A.	1990	<i>Preparing ourselves for Freedom</i> (19-21) in <i>Spring is Rebellious</i> , de Kok (ed.)	Cape Town	Buchu Books
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Said, E.	1978	Orientalism	London	Routledge
Sandell, R. (ed.)	2002	Museums, Society, Inequality	London New York	Routledge
Sandell, R.	2007	Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference	London New York	Routledge
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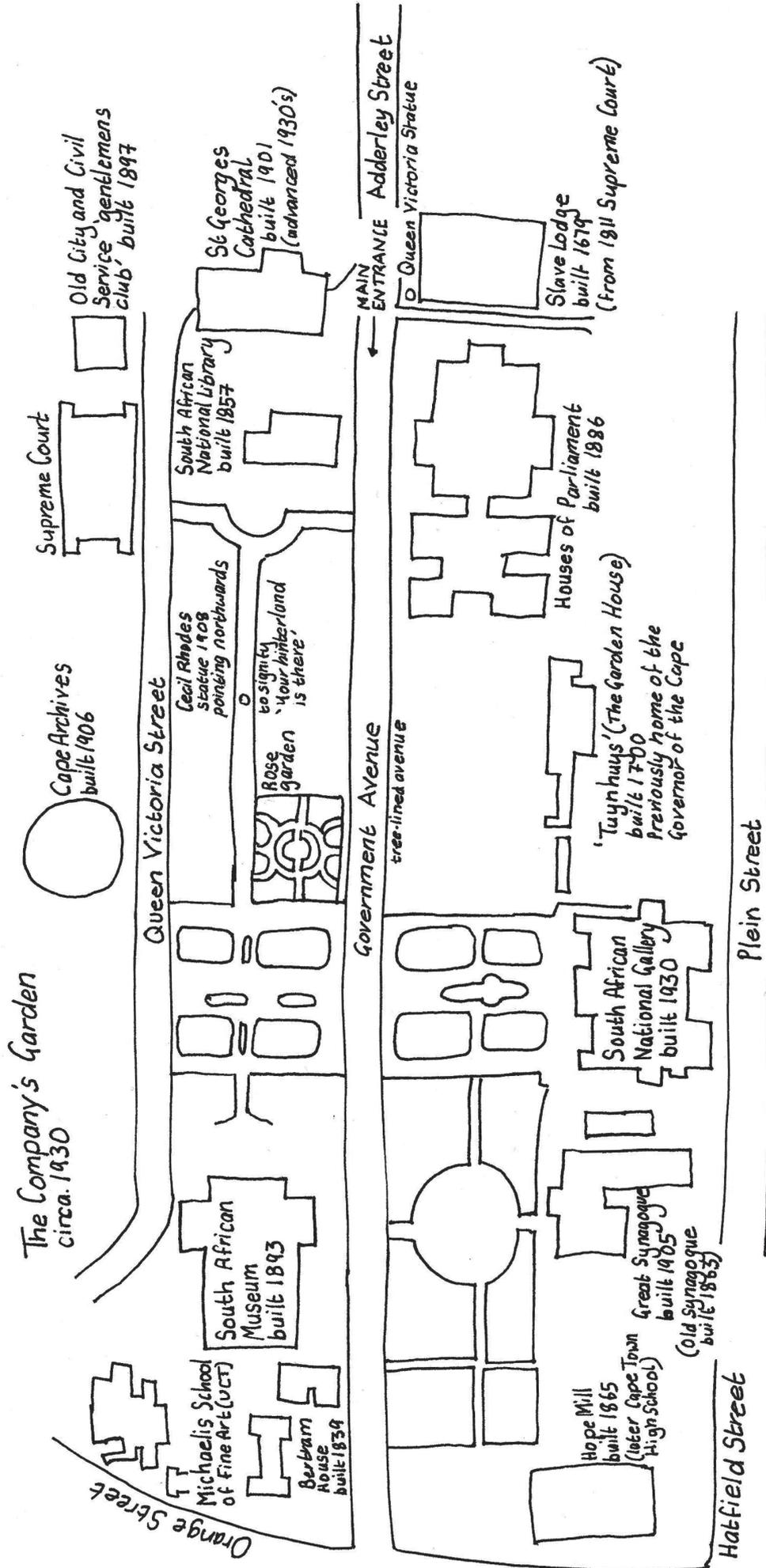
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Shilling, S.	2012	Editor's Introduction (1-5) <i>Live Methods</i> , Back, L. and Puwar, N. (eds)	Oxford	Blackwell Publishing
Shweder, R. Minow, M. and Markus, H. (eds.)	2002	<i>Engaging Cultural Differences: The Multicultural Challenge in Liberal Democracies</i>	New York	Russell Sage Foundation
Simon, R. (ed.)	1999	<i>A Rake's Progress: From Hogarth to Hockney</i>	London	Sir John Soame's Museum
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Skotnes, P. (ed.)	1996	<i>The Politics of Bushman Representations</i> in <i>Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of Bushman</i>	Cape Town	University of Cape Town Press
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Smith, A.	1996	<i>The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art</i>	Manchester	Manchester University Press
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Sorenson, C.	1989	<i>Theme Parks and Time Machines (60-73)</i> in New Museology Vergo, P. (ed.)	London	Reaktion Books
Statistics South Africa	2011	<a href="http://cs2016.statssa.gov.za">http://cs2016.statssa.gov.za</a> accessed 10/01/16		
Steadman, C.	2008	Dust. The Archive and Cultural History	USA	University Press Rutgers
Stephenson, J	2006	<i>Picturing the Past, Creating the Future: Art of the !Xun &amp; Khwe Cultural Project (17-23)</i> in Memory and Magic: Contemporary Art of the !Xun & Khwe, Rabbethge-Schiller (ed.)	South Africa	Jacana Media
Stevenson, M.	1997	Old Masters and Aspirations: the Randlords, Art and South Africa	PhD	University of Cape Town
Stevenson, M.	2005	Both Curious and Valuable: African Art from late 19 <sup>th</sup> century South-East Africa (catalogue 12 January 2005)	Cape Town	Michael Stevenson Publications
Steyn, M.	2001	Whiteness Just Isn't What it Used to Be: White identity in a Changing South Africa	New York	University of New York Press
Stigger, P.	August 1994	<i>White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-Industrial South Africa: The Making of the Colonial Order in the Eastern Cape 1770-1865</i> in Canadian Journal of History vol.29 (2)	Canada	
Stoler, A	1995	<i>Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things</i>	Durham and London	Duke University Press
Stoler, A	2009	<i>Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense</i>	Princeton	Princeton University Press
Storr, R.	2006	<i>Show and Tell (14-31)</i> in What Makes a Great Exhibition? Marincola, P. (ed.)	Philadelphia	Centre for Arts and Heritage
Stott, W.	1973	<i>Documentary Expression and Thirties America</i>	New York	Oxford University Press
Strecker, J.	2001	Colonizing Culture: The Origins of Art History in Australia in Art History and Its Institutions, Mansfield, E. (ed.)	London and New York	Routledge
Swanson, M.	1977	<i>The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony 1900-1909</i> in Journal of African History vol.18	Cambridge	Cambridge University Press
Swidler, A.	2001	Talk of Love: How Culture Matters	Chicago	University of Chicago Press
Tatz, C.	1962	Shadow and Substance in South Africa: A Study in Land and Franchise Policies Affecting Africans 1910-1960	Pietermaritzburg	University of Natal Press

Taussig, M.	2007	What Colour is Sacred	Chicago	Chicago University Press
Taylor, B.	1999	Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public	Manchester	Manchester University Press
Tietz, A.	1995	Alfred de Pass Presentation to the South African National Gallery	Cape Town	SA National Gallery
Tietz, A. (also listed under Proud, H.)	2001	The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest: A Reappraisal (exhibition catalogue)	Cape Town	SA National Gallery
Thorn, H.	2006	Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society	Hampshire New York	Palgrave Macmillan
Thorne, J.	2006	<i>Designing Histories</i> (139-158) in <i>Kronos</i> v.34 no.1	South Africa	Kronos
Trench, L.	2014	The Victorian and Albert Museum	London	V&A Publishing
Uglow, J.	1997	Hogarth: A Life and a World	London	
Uprichard, E.	2012	<i>Being stuck in (live) time: the sticky sociological imagination</i> (124-138) Live Methods, Back, L. and Puwar, N. (eds.)	Oxford	Blackwell Publishing
Vail, L. edt	1989	The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa	London	James Currey
Vanegas, A.	2002	'Representing Lesbian and Gay Men' (98-109) in <i>British Social History Museums' in Museums, Society, Inequality</i> , Sandell, R. (ed.)	London, New York	Routledge
van Onselen, C.	1976	Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia	Oxfordshire	Taylor and Francis Ltd.
Vasari, G.	1550 (reprint 1963)	Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects	London	JM Dent & Sons
Vergo, P.	1989	<i>The Reticent Object</i> (41-59) in <i>The New Museology</i> , Vergo, P. (ed.)	London	Reaktion Books
Vergunst, N. (SANG Media Officer)	1991	Kevin Brand Nineteen Boys Running (Internal art text held in 'Recent Acquisitions 1990-91')		SANG
Villa-Vicencio		<i>A Difficult Justice: Reparation, Restoration and Rights</i> (66-87) in <i>To Repair the Irreparable</i> , Doxtader, E. and Villa-Vicencio, C. (eds)	Claremont	New Africa Books
Vogel, S. and D'Alleva, A.	1990	Lessons in the Art of Seeing African Sculpture	New York	Museum for African Art
Vogel, S.	1991	Africa Explores: 20 <sup>th</sup> Century African Art	Michigan	The University of Michigan
Voyiya, V. and McGee, J.	2003	The Luggage is Still Labelled - documentary	USA	Voyiya and McGee
Wade, G. (edt.)	2000	Curating in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	Walsall	The New Art Gallery
Walker, E.	1930	The Frontier Tradition in South Africa	South Africa	H. Milford
Wallach, A.	1994	<i>The Battle Over 'The West as America' 1991</i> (93-101) in <i>Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America</i> , Pointon, M. (ed.)	Manchester	Manchester University Press

Ware, V. and Back, L.	2002	Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics, and Culture	Chicago, London	University of Chicago Press
Warnke, M.	1994	Political Landscape: The Art History of Nature	Chicago	Reaktion Books
Webb, D.	1994	<i>Winds of Change</i> in Museum Journal, vol. 4		South Africa ZKM
Weibel, P. and Buddensieg, A. (eds.)	2007	Contemporary Art and the Museum: A Global Perspective	Germany	
Wheatcroft, G.	1985	The Randlords: The Men who made South Africa	London	Weidenfeld and Nicolson
White, P. (Publication Coordinator)	1996	Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future	Canada	The Banff Centre for the Arts
Whitehead, C.	2011	<i>National art museum practice as political cartography in nineteenth-century Britain</i> (105-122) in National Museums: New Studies from Around the World, Knell, S. J., Aronsson, P., Amundsen, A. B. et al.	London	Routledge
Williamson, S.	1989 (2010 reprint)	Resistance Art in South Africa	South Africa	Juta and Company
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Williamson, S.	2009	South African Art Now	London	Harper Collins
Winant, H.	2000	<i>Race and Race Theory</i> (169-185) in Annual Review of Sociology vol.26		
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Wolff, J. and Seed, J. (eds)	1988	The Culture of Capital: Art, power and the Nineteenth-century Middle Class	Manchester	Manchester University Press
Wolfflin, H.	1932 [1915]	Principles of Art History (translation by Hottinger, M.)	New York	Dover Publications Inc.
Wolpe, H.	1972	Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power: From Segregation to Apartheid (425-456) in Economy and Society vol. 1	South Africa	
Wright, P.	1989	<i>The Quality of Visitors' Experiences in Art Museums</i> (119-148) in New Museology Vergo, P. (ed.)	London	Reaktion Books
Wu, C.	2002	<i>Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980's</i>	London and New York	Verso

Yoshiara, Y.	2005	Museums in a Diverse Society: A Visitor Study at the South African National Gallery	Unpublished PhD	SOAS, senate House
Young, F. B.	1939	The City of Gold	London	William Heinemann Ltd.
Zelizer, B. ed.	2001	Visual Culture and the Holocaust	London	The Athlone Press
Zolberg, V.	1990	Constructing a Sociology of the Arts	Cambridge New York	Cambridge University Press
Zolberg, V.	1996	<i>Museums as Contested Sites of Remembrance</i> (Part II) in <i>Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World</i> , Macdonald, S. and Fyfe, G. (eds)	London	Blackwell Publishing
Zucker, P.	1963	Styles in Painting: A Comparative Study	Canada	Dover Publications



**Important landmarks in, or adjacent to, The Company's Garden c.1930:**

- The Houses of Parliament
- Supreme Court (formerly Slave Lodge)
- The Garden House, Home of the Cape Governor
- South African National Library
- Cape Archives
- Old City and Civil Service Club
- St Georges Cathedral
- Great Synagogue
- South African Museum
- South African National Gallery
- Michaelis School of Fine Art, UCT
- Planetarium (situated just off the map on Queen Victoria St.)

**Plate 0.1** The Company's Garden c.1930  
Information adapted from Company's Garden Self-guided Walk (Ie Roux 2005)

# Plates

















































