Contemporary South African Art in New York: A Group Exhibition Case Study

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Abstract

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This thesis looks at the critical position of the 2004 New York exhibition “Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary African Art” within the history of South African exhibitions locally and internationally. I argue that the exhibition’s restricted selection of artists excluded craft and traditional practices, and thus overlooked the cultural diversity of the country and failed to engage with the multiple South African identities embodied in non-Western based practices.

Following the theoretical framework of world art studies, I begin by asserting the need to think about contemporary art as a temporal framework and to broaden its definition so as to include all kind of significant practices. I then look at the South African exhibitions of the 1980s and early 1990s when hope for the end of apartheid united South African curators and artists in the quest for a more representative and inclusive artistic canon characterizing the new ‘rainbow nation’ gave raise to exhibitions that displayed crafts and traditional arts as contemporary art. After the second Johannesburg Biennale of 1997, the national desire to re-enter the international art scene in collaboration with international curators and institutions promulgated a contemporary South African art understood in Western terms, changing the path opened by previous national exhibitions. Examining in more detail the artworks of “Personal Affects” in the last section, I aim to demonstrate that the exhibition is inscribed in the dominant discourse on contemporary art imposed by the international art scene by restricting the notion of South African identity to mostly university-trained and urban–based artists, whose works resonated with the American context of the Museum for African Art.

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Don't you think that African art is rather unsophisticated? I always thought that Western art was far more interesting in its complexity.

-Anonymous man encountered at the New York Frieze art fair – May 10, 2014.

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Introduction

This thesis looks at the exhibition "Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art" presented at New York's Museum for African Art[1] in 2004-2005. Organized to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the end of apartheid in South Africa (1948-1994)[2], the exhibition was an occasion to introduce to a North American audience the country's recently opened contemporary artistic scene, up until then separated from the art world owing to severe cultural boycotts. On view between September 21 2004 and January 3 2005, "Personal Affects" was organized by a team of five curators: from South Africa, the White art dealers Sophie Perryer and David Brodie, the Black artist Churchill Mandikida and the White art historian Liese Wan der Watt and from the United States, the American curator at the Museum for African Art Laurie Ann Farrell. They selected seventeen contemporary artists who "engage critically with the complexity of life in South Africa, a decade since the country's first democratic elections," (Brodie et al. 2004, V1, 18) and specifically looked at questions of performance and ritualized action framed under the themes of the personal and individual responses of artists to the multitude of changes in South African society over the past decade. (Brodie et al. 2004, 18-19) Despite the great variety in the sex, age and race of the artists, this diversity was not mirrored by the artworks; indeed, upon closer examination, the group is actually quite homogenous, for the selection consisted solely of works that were aligned with Western artistic criteria. The artists' use of 'high art' media, such as painting, photography, sculpture, drawing, and performance,

[1] The Museum for African Art has had different names over the course of its existence. From its foundation in 1984 it was known as the Center for African Art. In 1993, the name was changed to The Museum for African Art. The Museum was renamed The Africa Centre in 2013, to accompany the move of the New York institution to its new location on the Museum Mile, at the corner of 5th avenue and 110th Street, and a change of status. Indeed, in 2013, the board decided to open its mandate to business relations, and the Museum became the Centre: a branding strategy intended to encourage more private funding, with a new mandate focused on "the international understanding of Africa" and the wish "to promote direct engagement between African artists, business leaders and civil society and their counterparts from the United States and beyond." (See The Africa Center, "About us.") I will use the title 'the Museum for African Art' throughout this thesis to name the institution.

[2] The apartheid regime of South Africa will be further examined in the next section of the thesis.

with highly personal content that draws on subject matter with an international scope, is revealing of the curators' understanding of what constitutes contemporary art. Moreover, the restricted selection of artists reflecting on the changing concept of identity in the post-apartheid era meant that various South African identities, embodied in non-Western based practices, did not take part in the debate, resulting in a similarly restricted discussion on identity and post-identity. It is my argument that the exhibition contradicted its own premises and offered a very narrow representation of South Africa's contemporary artistic scene of the time, overlooking the artistic diversity of the country found in more culturally and religious based practices. Questioning the lack of craft and traditional arts in the exhibition, and its outcome regarding the definition of South African identity in the larger international context, I will examine its critical position within the history of South African art exhibitions locally and internationally.

This thesis is less a thorough examination of the "Personal Affects" exhibition than a critical analysis of its place within the debates surrounding the contemporary arts of Africa, and more specifically South Africa. Since the exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre," held in Paris in 1989, the inclusion of craft and traditional practices in contemporary art exhibitions including non-Western art has been seriously questioned. The first Johannesburg Biennale "Africus" (1995), displaying fine arts as well as crafts and traditional practices from all over the country and from various artists and community centers, has been similarly criticized for being so inclusive to the point that some critics have talked about the "political correctness" of its artistic selection. (Marshall 1999, 122) To present crafts in a contemporary African art exhibition has been seen as a step backward, an attempt to exoticize the production of 'non-Western' countries, and to continuously keep African artists outside the art world. Examining some contemporary art definitions by authors such as Isabelle Graw, Susan Vogel and Salah Hassan in the first section

of this thesis, as well as the exhibitions "Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinities with the Tribal and the Modern" (1984) and "Magiciens de la Terre" (1989) in the second section, I argue that the 'primitivization' of African artists does not occur through the display of craft and traditional practices, but rather is the result of Western curators' exhibition processes that systematically juxtapose modern artists with non-Western art, giving the latter artistic value only through formal comparison with Western artworks. Building my argument on the work of world art studies writers who argue that the concept of art needs to be thought of more broadly and be detached from Western aesthetic criteria, I claim that craft and traditional practices of South Africa, and Africa in general, have their place in the thinking and understanding of what constitutes contemporary art.

In the third section of this thesis, I specifically examine the South African context of the apartheid years through the study of three nationally based exhibitions of the 1980s and 1990s, "Tributaries" (1985, Johannesburg), "Neglected Traditions" (1989, Johannesburg) and "Art from South Africa" (1990, Oxford) that have progressively included crafts and traditional practices alongside works produced within a 'fine arts' model.

The fourth section is dedicated to the post-apartheid years, and the re-entry of South Africa into the global art scene with the two Johannesburg Biennales of 1995 and 1997. My argument is that the national desire to integrate the global arena, including the dominant position of contemporary art galleries in the country, coupled with the international art scene's interest in contemporary South African art favoured a certain kind of contemporary art that fit the Western art standards and could be exported abroad. The "aesthetic discrimination" of the international scene, where conceptualism, new media and installation are its entrance ticket (Koloane 2004, 23) progressively replaced the optimism of the 1980s to reach a truly inclusive South African

canon. In addition, the Museum for African Art's first South African exhibition "Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art form South Africa" (1999) is revealing of the misleading North American conception of South African art as it focused on the political climate of the country, framing the exhibition around the aftermaths of apartheid. By uniting art to political concerns, the American curator Frank Herreman disregarded South African curators' and artists' desire to move beyond that correlation. In the air since 1989, when South African activist Albie Sachs warned the country about the damaging effects of restraining art to political resistance, South African curators re-opened their vision of culture, promoting art as an expression of human kind rather than a cultural weapon, a curatorial shift that was not reflected in South African group exhibitions abroad. (Room 2005, 57-58)

I will finally discuss the place of "Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art" shown at the Museum for African Art in New York City, within the history of South African art exhibitions, and argue that it embodied the two forces of national and international favouritism towards a contemporary art that followed Western art standards at play during the post-apartheid years, leaving aside craft and traditional practices. The Museum for African Art, the vitrine of the continent in North America, only showed a selected contemporary art, one that fit the international art scene's expectations of what should be considered as art, disregarding the changes happening in South African art history and presenting a narrow view of the country's diverse identities.

Contemporary Art as Western Art

Isabelle Graw, founding editor of *Texte zur Kunst* and professor of art history at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts in Frankfurt, explains that contemporary art has historically been defined according to an Enlightenment system of values:

> By declaring something to be "art," I have already passed a value judgment. The finding that something is of contemporary relevance likewise bears positive connotations, at least since Adorno's plea for presentness. No one wants to be a back number. Yet "art as such," as a trans-individual principle, is an invention of the late eighteenth century. Idealist aesthetics formed this conception, charging it with ambitions that are in part excessive and in part justified; the claim was that "art" communicates a truth, that it is unburdened by extrinsic purpose, that it is subject only to its own laws. This system of beliefs still echoes in our present-day understanding of "art." The principle of "contemporary art," I would argue, combines this idealist notion of a trans-historical truth and disinterestedness with a claim to relevance for the here and now. (Graw 2009, 120)

To talk about contemporary art as a conceptual framework is therefore to admit its 'Westernness,' for the very notion of contemporary art is embedded in a Western art history that saw the separation of art and craft during the Italian Renaissance. (Duncan 2007, 32) The concept of art further developed in the West as a category of objects and practices producing an aesthetic experience, freed from all other external purposes. (Graw 2015, n.p) Contemporary art during the twentieth century thus evolved around the notion of autonomy, or "disinterestedness," that transcends history to establish itself as a universal concept. This conceptual framework is problematic when applied to non-Western artists, as it excludes a wide range of culturally and aesthetically significant practices that do not meet its criteria, like traditional or craft practices closely linked to rituals, religion, social status or daily-based purposes, and simultaneously puts the spotlight on a specific group of artists befitting its definition. Former director of the Museum for African Art and curator Susan Vogel termed this contemporary non-Western art conforming

to western artistic criteria 'international art' in her 1991 exhibition "Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art."

Organized in collaboration with the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, "Africa Explores" was the Museum for African Art's first exhibition to explore modern and contemporary African art and remains a significant contribution to the display of African art in the West, as it attempted to survey the continent's wide range of artistic practices in a contemporary temporal framework. Susan Vogel divided the contemporary creations of the continent into five categories: traditional art, urban art, international art, new functional art, and extinct art. (Vogel 1991, 10) Under Vogel's classification system, 'international art' refers to groups of western-trained artists (understood as trained either in Africa under colonialist education programs or in Europe and North America) who started to work in the early twentieth century. (Vogel 1991, 178) Until the 1960's, African international artists claimed their place in the international art scene primarily through oil painting, though their styles varied widely and included elements of modernist painting in some instances. This is what Vogel calls the "antitraditional impulse." (Vogel 1991, 179) During the decolonization of most African countries in the 1950s and 1960s, another form of 'international art' appeared, one that followed the "authenticity doctrine," promulgated by the first democratic president of Senegal Léopold Sédar Senghor around his "philosophy of negritude." (Vogel 1991, 180) The desire to unify the new nations was crystalized around the idea of an "African inspiration" drawn from tradition and patrimony. (Vogel 1991, 179-180) However, as explained by Vogel, by the time of the exhibition, these two forms of internationalism had merged, as the socio-political contexts of most African countries had changed since the 1960s. By the 1990s, artists working in an international style borrowed from traditional African art as well as foreign art and visual culture

"to create a cosmopolitan art." (Vogel 1991, 182) African and Western critics have called this specific art category 'contemporary' since the late 1960s, but for Susan Vogel "its meaning, 'of the present era,' applies equally to all kinds of art made in Africa today – including contemporary traditional, contemporary urban art, and new functional art. To appropriate the word 'contemporary' only for art by highly educated Africans is to relegate all other current forms to a timeless limbo or to an archaic past." (Vogel 1991, 182) Instead, she favours the term 'international' (a word that emerged through her discussion with African artists), which she defines as follows:

> The distinction of the International strain in African art lies both in the nature of the works and in the artists' formative circumstances and working situations. International African artists address an international audience, represent their countries in international gatherings such as the Pan-African Games or in biennial exhibitions in places as various as São Paulo, Libreville, and Paris, and may exhibit internationally, mainly under government auspices. Most have been educated in Western-style art academies in Africa, but some have studied in Europe or America, or were trained under a European mentor, They tend to be well traveled (though mainly outside the African continent and by invitation), and many have lived overseas for periods from a few months to years, often as part of training programs sponsored by the host countries. For the most part, their patrons are also international – expatriates, international corporations and their own governments. International artists deal with their African or national identity in at least some of their works. The word 'international' in no way denies their identity as Africans. It merely acknowledges the wide horizons of their world, and their access to hybrid cultures. (Vogel 1991, 183)[3]

She further states that "the artists in this exhibition, among many others, recognize that their culture is made up of movies and masquerades and all the things they have seen in Africa, Europe or Asia; all they have read; all they have owned, from amulets to audio systems; and all they have experienced, including art training and traditional initiations." (Vogel 1991, 182)

[3] I will use the term 'international artists' as defined by Susan Vogel through this thesis to refer to contemporary African artists. As I argue that the term 'contemporary art' should include craft and traditional practices from Africa, the term 'international art' or 'international artists' will clarify the text, and re-assess my position that it is a category of contemporary art but in no way does it represent what is contemporary art in South Africa, and in Africa more broadly.

Contemporary art from Africa should therefore be composed of international artists as well as craft and traditional artists to reflect the diversity and complexity of the continent's cultural scene. This idea is shared by the art historian and curator Salah Hassan who has criticized the definition of 'contemporary' African art as being elitist, exclusive and irrelevant when dealing with the arts of the continent:

> Like modern art elsewhere, 'contemporary' African art – meaning the art of Western-trained artists – is recognised as individualistically oriented rather than communally-centered. It is also perceived as less subservient to dominant socioreligious structures than 'traditional' art forms. In other words, 'contemporary' art becomes a category reserved for the works of those African artists who are mostly urban-based, produce work according to the norms of Western modern art, and exhibit in galleries, museums, or foreign cultural centres. These artists are to some extent internationally known, and their patrons include their governments and related institutions, foreign expatriates, and a largely Western-educated native bourgeoisie. Works produced by this category of artists are classified as 'elite,' 'fine or 'high,' as opposed to other forms referred to as 'traditional,' 'tourist,' 'commercial' or 'popular.' This fine or high art is contrasted to 'traditional' art as totally separate, more intellectual, entity. In this scheme, traditional arts are perceived as consensual, communally based and created according to rigid and unchanging conventions. Such dichotomy – problematic, simplistic and ahistorical – is inadequate for the study of contemporary African art. (Hassan 1999, 218)

Building on the new comprehension of the term "traditional" and its association to "authenticity" emerging in academic research and scholarly writing,[4] Hassan argues for:

> An alternative model for understanding and defining contemporary African art, and in fact other forms of African art, is urgently needed. Within this model, African art forms must be perceived as expressions of a more complex African reality. Within this reality these forms can be seen as existing in one contemporary space and interacting with each other in a 'dialogic' manner. (Hassan 1999, 221)

Both Hassan and Vogel argue in their writings that the term 'contemporary,' when applied to African art should be used as a temporal framework. As a result, the 'contemporary' would include every form of art that is produced in the present, from contemporary Western art to more

[4] See Sydney Kasfir, 1992a, "African art and authenticity: A text with a Shadow" and James Clifford, 1989, "The others: Beyond the 'salvage' paradigm."

traditional practices, including crafts. International artists and craft or traditional artists would coexist (to use Hassan's word) in what can be apprehended as the contemporary artistic productions of Africa.

In the South African context, traditional and craft practices have been revised in terms of art history, as exemplified by the writings of art historian Sandra Klopper. Contextualizing the notion of ethnicity in a post-apartheid South Africa in her 2003 article "The Postmodern Context of Rural Craft Production in Contemporary South Africa," she argues that following the liberation of Nelson Mandela, and the rise of global exchange, identity was conceived more broadly as national, resulting in fragmented and individualized local ethnicities. People in rural areas of South Africa today refuse "to embrace ethnicity as a primary frame of self-reference." (Klopper 2003, 85) Focusing on beadworks and garments produced for ritual or special occasions during the 1990s, Klopper advocates for a revised approach to crafts, one that would reflect more accurately the changes of those practices. Constant in her essay is the underlying argument that the personal interventions of artists are to be read through the objects' materials. For instance, the new use of plastic beads starting in the 1970s instead of traditional imported glass beads from Europe has been previously interpreted as an economic choice. But, as Klopper demonstrates, during the 1970s, the exchange rate was favourable for South Africa, at a time when South African currency was at its highest point. Furthermore, local dealers of plastic beads confess that women working in traditional techniques would not buy plastic beads even today, even for free. (Klopper 2003, 89-90) The use of plastic beads therefore needs to be interpreted as a personal and artistic choice; and Klopper proposes to read them through the concept of *bricolage*. Like the post-modernist aesthetic of combining past visual forms and mass culture, the South African craft artists "appropriate, adapt and ultimately extend the life of pre-existing

commodities." Using watches, figurines and bottle tops among other materials, they "challenge [the] hegemony of the dominant culture." (Klopper 2003, 92) To understand the interventions and styles of the artists that subvert the traditional forms of beadworks and garments, one needs to acknowledge the importance of individuality. Moreover, those garments, previously understood as "repositories of wealth," now need to be looked at as a "highly innovative and playful re-enactment of a lost code of value." (Klopper 2003, 95) As she notices, the insertion of the new South African flag in one apron from Limpopo Province attests to craft artists' engagement with national changes. Figurines of skateboarders and watches are themselves witness of an increasing global economy, in which cheap commodities circulate at an accelerated rate. (Klopper 2003, 96) Crafts are seen here in light of contemporary globalization as valuable, dynamic and changing art practices.

If Klopper's writing is of great value in the understanding of art in South Africa, it is because the country's three hundred and fifty years of colonization, culminating with the apartheid regime grounded the country in Western domination. Politically, economically and culturally, Whites were favoured by the regime in place, imposing their culture and ways of life at the expense of Black and 'Coloured' people[5] (descendants of both Africans and Europeans). Fine arts departments in universities were developed during apartheid, when Black and Coloured students were separated from the Whites, thus reinforcing, as argued by art historian Anitra Nettleton, the separation of traditional and craft practices from the fine arts by asserting the superiority of Western and white African art. White universities (Afrikaans-speaking universities) developed their departments according to European educational models, with

[5] "Coloured" is a term that the emancipated slaves used to describe themselves as a way to find a middle ground "between European civilised and African uncivilised." It represents a "Population group that emerged in the Cape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a result of contact between Africans, Malaysians and Europeans." (Clark and Worger 2011, 13)

curriculum almost entirely dedicated to European and American art at the expense of learning about the rich and diverse practices present in South Africa. The Afrikaans-speaking universities also offered courses on white South African art, as a means “to build a supposedly ‘national’ culture, with largely Calvinist values at its core.” (Nettleton 2006, 40) In historically black universities, only two had fine arts departments under apartheid, developed in the 1970s, where “students were enculturated into what Susan Vogel termed ‘international art.’” (Nettleton 2006a, 42) Established as a means of showing equality in education among the South African population, black universities needed to be “modern,” and thus neglected traditional African art in favour of a modern and contemporary African art modeled on Eurocentric structures. In the two black universities offering art classes (Fort Hare University and University of Bophutatswana) African art was nearly absent from the syllabi. Despite being home to a large collection of fine arts at Fort Hare, including beadwork from East Cape collected by the anthropologist E. J. de Jager, black productions were not considered as important parts of the collection, and boundaries between high art and crafts were largely maintained. (Nettleton 2006a, 43) For Nettleton, the discipline reflected the colonial structures that gave birth to academia, thus presenting European art as art, and ignoring the rest of the country's art productions as relevant and important to the advancement of knowledge in South Africa. South Africa was denied its own traditions because people were denied the knowledge and ability to produce traditional art, further “entrenching European ideas about the nature of culture.” (Nettleton 2006a, 41) The formerly white Witswatersrand University’s inclusion of African art in the late 1970s in its art history syllabi and as a collection in the university’s gallery was the result of a 1976 student protest, which has since been termed the “Soweto uprising.” But this breakthrough, according to Nettleton, “was diluted because African art was simply introduced as

another content field within the overarching structure of a discipline framed around essentially Western historical cultural practices." (Nettleton 2006a, 44) African art consisted mainly of figurative wood sculptures that would fit more accurately a Western high art canon, while other practices were relegated to crafts. Today, Nettleton argues,

> The need to interact with other cultures in the process of breaking down perceived notions of what the proper subjects of history of art might be is an essential ingredient in reconstituting the discipline. And this means that we have to step outside notions of 'art, ' 'craft,' and 'material culture,' as defined by the art markets and academies of Europe and America, and start to immerse ourselves in issues that are current and relevant in 'the practice of everyday life.'" (Nettleton 2006a, 45)

Even though changes are happening in the academic study of South African art history, with scholars such as Anitra Nettleton and Sandra Klopper, but also with Black scholars such as Mgcineni Sobopha, Andries Oliphant and Sipho Mdanda[6] who orient their research towards an inclusive art history, Western definitions of culture and art have defined the way that South Africans perceive their own visual culture, and how they perpetuate this ideology in their academic system. The Western definition of art has infiltrated the South African discourse to the point that art has been locally selected so as to fit its criteria.

My position regarding the necessary inclusion of traditional and craft practices in the discourse on contemporary art, following that of Vogel, Hassan, Klopper and Nettleton among others, is embedded in the theoretical framework of world art studies. Coined by John Onians in 1992, world art studies set its task as a field of study to be "the global and multidisciplinary examination of the visual arts" by "approach[ing] subject matter from a global perspective across time and place and to study it from all relevant disciplinary viewpoints imaginable, ranging from evolutionary biology to analytic philosophy". (Zijlmans and Van Damme 2008, 27) Even more

[6] Together they participated in the four volumes edition of *Visual Century: South African Art in Context* in 2011 that took for mission to re-write the art history of the country in the twentieth century.

relevant for this thesis is world art studies' argument for the importance of an enlarged definition of art, in other words "taking the broadest view of what is visually interesting." (Onians 1996, 206) For Onians, one of the issues at stake is the examination of the relation between human and the "material itself." (Onians 1996, 206) In doing so, art historians can escape the legacy of Enlightenment values as described by Isabelle Graw that favour a definition of art closely linked to conceptualism, and consider other contemporary practices into the redefinition of art within a global context. In his essay "Art, Aesthetics, and Cultural Anthropology: Retrospect and Prospect" published in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, Richard L. Anderson proposes a new definition, derived from art philosophy, that describes "art as being 'culturally significant meaning, skilfully encoded in an affecting sensuous medium'." (Anderson 2008, 207) For Anderson, this definition would encompass any secular or religious significant object of a culture, one made with a particular skill – be it conceptual or manual – within a wide range of media – from performance, engaging all the senses, to "literary activities" – and would be responded to with "'sensuous, affecting' responses," ranging from "the purely physical to thoroughly psychological." (Anderson 2008, 207) Following the same desire to broaden the definition of art, the independent scholar and professor at the School of Music at the University of Washington Ellen Dissanayake, drawing on "an ethological (biobehavioral) perspective," proposes to step away from a western conception of art – closely linked to enlightenment values of rarity, elitism, originality, individuality, and monetary value (Dissanayake 2008, 250-51) – and to apprehend it as a behaviour: what she called the act of "making special," which is "the ancestral activity or behaviour that gave rise to and continues to characterize or imbue all instances of what today are called the arts." (Dissanayake 2008, 252) For the author, acknowledging the importance of biology and functionality in the arts is a necessary step to

definitively erase the "traditional Western elitist assumption of 'art for art's sake'." (Dissanayake 2008, 260) The disciplines of material culture studies, anthropology and ethnology among others have examined and contributed to the study of traditional and craft practices but have not necessarily explored their aesthetic characteristics. World art studies therefore argues for a necessary merger between theories on contemporary art and craft and traditional practices. Consequently, if the authors of world art studies are working towards broader and more appropriate ways to think about art worldwide, it is because in mainstream art history traditional and craft practices from non-western countries, and more specifically from African countries, are considered outside the concepts of art in general, and contemporary art in particular. This exclusion is closely linked to historical Western exhibitions such as "Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern," (1984) and more recently "Magiciens de la Terre," (1989) which have tainted traditional arts and crafts from Africa with primitivism and exoticism by systematically juxtaposing them with Western art and apprehending them through Western aesthetic criteria. In other words, the exhibitions imposed a hierarchy of value on objects that ultimately privileged works that were more closely associated with Western modern and contemporary art and devalued as primitive those objects linked to traditional practices.

Traditional African Arts and Crafts in the West

Traditional arts from Africa, from pre-colonial times to more contemporary forms, have been presented in the West throughout the twentieth century as primitive, a curatorial practice culminating with William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe's 1984 exhibition "Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern" at the Museum of Modern Art in New

York City. Emblematic works of Picasso, Matisse and Giacometti (among others) were displayed next to unknown and undated sculptures from Oceania and Africa, emphasizing aesthetic resemblances between the works. The exhibition tried to demonstrate the universality of Western modernism and its superiority as a major artistic movement producing one of the biggest changes in Western art history, over the unchanging, homogenous and timeless traditions of the two continents' 'primitive' societies. In doing so, as Hal Foster has demonstrated, the curators decontextualized the works' conceptual, sociological and political frames and produced a purely aesthetic and formal relationship between the two. (Foster 1985, 52) The artifacts were confined to a nebulous time frame – presented as being from anonymous artists and predominantly shown with little information about their period of creation, or no date at all. Neither archaic nor really contemporary, they were kept in a historical past, which eventually allowed the institution to define them "in wholly western terms," (Foster 1985, 52) as 'primitive' art practices that only started to exist as such through the modernists' eyes. If the individualized works of European modernist artists were displayed so as to narrate the changing history of Western art,[7] the undifferentiated bulk of objects from the two continents of Oceania and Africa were literally used as testimonies to Modernism's superiority, as the Others of that history and excluded from any meaningful discussions about the active role of non-Western artists within modernity.

With a different curatorial goal, "Magiciens de la Terre," curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Pompidou Centre and La Villette in Paris, aimed to present the works of non-Western and Western artists together in a contemporary framework. Martin's selection of artworks differed from the "Primitivism" show, in which the African and Oceanic works were all undated (or pre-colonial) sculptures, for the focus was on living artists. Similar to the spatial settings of the

[7] Hal Foster also points out that the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition absorbed the groundbreaking avant-garde of the modern artworks by recognizing them as logically and formally dependant on the past and integrated them into its linear progression of Western art history. (Foster 1984, 54-58)

nineteen century's international exhibitions of Paris and London, "Magiciens de la Terre" exhibited over four hundred works from all over the world, including what Vogel would describe as 'international art' as well as traditional art and crafts. In order to avoid formal comparisons, the works were displayed according to various themes such as "Power," "Tales and Legends," "Fetishism," Voodoo," "Magic," "Death and Hell," "Past" and "Sex." The idea behind the exhibition was to bring non-Western artists into the contemporary art scene and to map the new globalized world outside the geographical borders of Europe and North America. To that end, minimal information was given about the works, and the viewers could only read the artists' name and their country of residence, along with the works' title and date. The general display of the works, however, reiterated the formal comparison previously seen in the "Primitivism" exhibition as exemplified by the famous exhibition view of La Villette in which Richard Long's *Red Earth Circle* (1989) – a twelve by twenty meter ochre circle painted on a black background – hangs above the sand drawing *Yam Dreaming* (1989) from the Yuendumu community of Australia – a translation in visual form of an alternative universe ("the 'dream time' in which the cultural world was wrested from nature" (Karp 1991, 13)) that contains ochre circles and half circles – displayed on the floor. Shadowed by Long's piece, the sand drawing appeared as the 'Other,' the exotic artists using the same geometrical circle but in a mysterious and esoteric work far from the modernist framework of the American artist. The spatial settings of the exhibition reiterated the cabinets of curiosity from the Renaissance by displaying together all the artworks according to vague universal concepts, resulting in what artist Daniel Buren would later describe as "crazy juxtapositions of completely incomparable things." (Buren 2014, n.p) Buren further criticized curator Jean-Hubert Martin for selecting a team of curators from his close European friends to travel around the world "as if to hunt and find treasures." (Buren 2014, n.p) The

curators therefore did not represent the cultural diversity of the show, and had limited knowledge about the cultures they were visiting. This is particularly evident in curator André Magnin's essay published in the exhibition catalogue in which he relates his travel to Mozambique in the form of a travel diary. The personal and subjective tone of his writing, its anecdotic character and staged narration are quite disturbing, transmitting only a very dark and primitive view of the country as the curator deplores the illness of the country after years of wars and diseases (Magnin 1989, 16); and no information regarding his process for selecting artists is given. The outcome of "Magiciens de la Terre" was that only artists following Western dictates entered the international art circuit, "the others all returned and stayed home." (Buren 2014, n.p) In his effort to be inclusive, and to change the viewer's perspective on non-Western art as being timeless, sculptural and traditional by exhibiting a wide range of artistic practices produced around the world, Jean-Hubert Martin further embedded the productions of non-Western artists as exotic and primitive. The term 'magicians,' the works' lack of contextualization, their display as artifacts suitable for cabinets of curiosity and understood in terms of western artistic criteria through a western institution (the Museum of Modern Art in Paris) set non-western artists as the magicians and their artifacts against the western artists and their conceptual and minimalist works. (Busca 2000, 8-63 and Kasfir 1992, 41)

However, despite its controversial reception, African curators Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor, observe that "Magiciens de la Terre" stands as "the place in which 'contemporary African art' made its first real appearance in Europe" (Oguibe and Enwezor 1999, 9) and they regard the year 1989 and the exhibition as the keystone of the development of African art in the West. Although flawed in many regards, they believe the exhibition succeeded "in its ability to make a strong case for a dialogue between artists of various cultures." (Oguibe and Enwezor

1999, 9) Also arguing in favour of the exhibition, the professor at Paris 8 – Saint Denis University Laurent Jean-Pierre stated that it was the first exhibition to open the frontiers of contemporary art, thereby inaugurating the era of 'global art.' (Jean-Pierre 2014) I believe that the positive and negative receptions of the exhibition were shaped by the curatorial decision of Jean-Hubert Martin and his team, even more so than by the works themselves. The artists' perceived exoticism reflected the lack of concrete curatorial statement and the failure of a post-modern exhibition that took its roots in a modern narrative in which every artwork could unveil its meaning to the audience on the basis of a so-called artistic universalism. (Busca 2000, 49) According to Sidney Littlefield Kasfir both the "Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern" and "Magiciens de la Terre" attempted to demonstrate the existence of a universal aesthetic norm that could definitively raise the status of an object to that of art. (Kasfir 1992, 57-58) Using the same curatorial strategy of juxtaposing Western and non-Western artworks – but with different artwork selections (pre-colonial and traditional for "Primitivism" and contemporary 'international art,' traditional and crafts for "Magiciens de la Terre") – both exhibitions tended to prove the artistic value of non-Western objects through their formal resemblance to contemporary Western artworks, denying them the right to autonomously exist as art.

Internationally, and responding to the problematic curatorial intentions of the "Primitivism" and "Magicians de la Terre" exhibitions, other Western curators have attempted to change the discourse on African art by criticizing or avoiding the so-called universal nature of art. Susan Vogel curated "Art/Artifacts: African Arts in Anthropology Collections," in 1988 at the Museum for African Art. Focusing on Western museums' display mechanisms, Vogel exhibited traditional and craft objects in different museum settings (the cabinet of curiosity, the

natural history museum diorama and the modern white cube among others), highlighting their changing status as curios, artefacts and works of art. She shed light on the conceptual frameworks surrounding the objects and their interpretation, questioning the Western institutions' supposedly neutral space and their changing narratives. Three years later, she curated "Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art" in reaction to "Magiciens de la Terre," and proposed, as previously shown, to include contemporary traditional and craft practices as key components of contemporary African art. Despite some questionable curatorial decisions,[8] the exhibition offered for the first time a broad definition of contemporary art outside the hierarchical Western categories of fine arts and crafts.

More recently, traditional and craft practices have been the subject of exhibitions at the Museum for African Art, among them the 2006 travelling exhibition "At Arm's Length: The Art of African Puppetry" which presented puppets, photos, and videos of two major theatrical companies in Mali and South Africa (The Africa Center n.d, "At Arm's Length"), and "Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art," (2009) focusing on the art of basketry from Africa to America from the seventeenth century onward. (The Africa Center n.d, "Grass Roots") In both these exhibitions, crafts have been shown as works of art, made by either individuals or groups of artists always acknowledged by name(s). Equally successful in engaging with the entire continent's creations, the exhibition "The Global Africa Project" curated in 2010 by Lowery Stokes Sims (curator at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City) and Leslie King-Hammond (director of the Center for Race and Culture at the Maryland Institute College of Art) sought to demonstrate the globalized nature and influence of Africa and its diaspora's creations

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[8] Indeed, the mention of 'tourist art' in the category "Extinct art" of the exhibition as curios and decorations entailed the Western classification of art versus commodity, and high art versus tourist art. Likewise artists from the Maghreb and South Africa were absent from the show, and the Islamic religious tradition of certain North African countries as well as White artists were also bypassed completely, restricting the selections of works for the exhibition to fit Vogel's categories. (Kasfir 1992, 56 and Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009, 16).

in the contemporary context. (Stokes Sims and King-Hammond 2010, 10) In doing so, it displayed a wide variety of artistic practices such as "ceramics, basketry, textiles, jewellery, furniture, and other decorative arts and design objects, and architecture and fashion," adding to the catalogue "photographs, painting and sculptures […] to provide a clarifying and complementary presentation of the content of the exhibition." (Stokes Sims and King-Hammond 2010, 11) The curators asserted the permeable categories of contemporary art practices, which "reflect the sense of interrelatedness among artistic genres that marks more traditional African object use, symbolism, and presentation." (Stokes Sims and King-Hammond 2010, 11) Craft makers were then exhibited in a globalized perspective, with a focus on their collaboration with visual artists, such as the beaded project of the New York based artist Liza Lou working with South African communities. (D'Alton 2010, 33) Of great interest in this exhibition was the presentation of a range of different artists from South Africa: collectives such as the Ubuhle Beads, the Master Craftsmen Rueben Ndwandwe from Zululand, and also the White craft artists Heath Nash from Cape Town and Beverley Price from Johannesburg, thus sidestepping the usual racialization of craft arts as black art in South Africa.

When detached from a western perspective on contemporary art, crafts and traditional practices find their place in the contemporary realm of African artistic practices. The exclusion of such practices from the term 'contemporary art' in Western art history is the result of a century-long 'primitive' view developed by Western curatorial and theoretical frameworks, violently transposed (to use Hal Foster's expression – Foster 1985, 51) onto the objects. As shown, several successful exhibitions have exhibited those practices in contemporary settings. These curatorial turns can also be seen in South Africa, where the 1980s saw the emergence of

new curatorial projects that have more or less successfully displayed contemporary practices of the country overlooked during the apartheid era.

The South African Context

Segregation and discrimination in South Africa were already part of life in the country before the apartheid regime was set in place in 1948. The arrival of the Portuguese and the Dutch during the seventeenth century for commercial purposes began the colonisation of South Africa that was to last more than three hundred years. (Clark and Worger 2011, 11) With the German, the French and the British, the "Coloured" and the Indians (imported first as slaves by the British), the different groups of people separated according to race and origin during the twentieth century composed the population as early as the eighteenth century. (Clark and Worger 2011, 12-14) Fighting against each other for land and resource rights, which resulted in the South African War between 1899 and 1902, the Boers (the Dutch population) and the English nevertheless agreed on one thing: the superiority and domination of the White race. Segregation laws were therefore set up during the first decades of the twentieth century that restricted rights for non-Whites, including travel, land ownership and job opportunities. (Clark and Worger 2011, 21-22) After South Africa became a dominion of the British Empire in 1910, and the Second World War had increased movement of workers to the cities, fear that the majority Black population could take over the country led the English and the Boers to elect the white-supremacist Nationalist Party as the head of the government in 1948. Dependence on the British crown was eradicated in 1961, after the British Prime Minister condemned the apartheid regime. While South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth of Nations and officially became the Republic of South Africa the same

year, the apartheid regime in place until 1994 supressed by a series of segregationist laws the rights of land, education and citizenship to Black and Coloured peoples. Secluded in "homelands," (independent regions settled by the government) Black and Coloured peoples became the cheap labour of the White minority until the first reforms of the late 1970s that suppressed some of the segregation laws. Strong anti-apartheid movements such as the United Democratic Front, the Black Consciousness Movement and the African Nationalist Congress (ANC) – banished in 1960 by the Nationalist Party – dominated this decade, followed in 1990 by the reforms of F.W. De Klerk, Prime Minister of the country, who unbanned the ANC and released its leader Nelson Mandela from prison. In 1994 the country saw its first democratic elections, for which everyone could vote. (Roome 2005, 40-46)

During the years of apartheid, South African art was almost absent from the Euro-North American art scene because the international community stopped including the country's artists in biennales and museum exhibitions to affirm its anti-apartheid position. (Jantjes 2011, 31) Within the country, attempts were made to exhibit the arts previously diminished in the cultural scene of South Africa. Major exhibitions were curated to re-establish the art of Black artists into the national art history, up to that point dominated by art of White artists with Western artistic training. Considered today as a seminal exhibition, "Tributaries: a View of Contemporary South African Art" was mounted in the hall of the Africana Museum complex in Newtown, Johannesburg and curated by Ricky Burnett for BMW South Africa in 1985. As stated by Ivor Powell, quoted in *The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art (1930-1988),* Burnett:

> challenged and questioned established hierarchies and for the first time in many years attracted significant numbers of visitors to an art exhibition. [The exhibition] inspired a great deal of favourable criticism and launched a number of unknown artists. It revealed just how conservative and restricted the display of South African art had

> become. The racial differentiation that characterized so many exhibitions was replaced by an unambiguously non-racist conception of culture. […] Ricky Burnett … really did break all the rules. What he did in organizing the *Tributaries* Exhibition was to look at South African art in its entirety. (Sack 1988, 29)

Indeed at a time when the growing international interest for South African art benefited mostly urban White artists, the rural productions of the country were overlooked and curatorial attempts to exhibit them "almost unthinkable." (Jantjes 2011, 33) Burnett decided then to include in his exhibition works belonging to the four categories of "rural tradition," "rural transitional," "urban black" and "urban white" (Crawshay-Hall 2013, 27) in an effort "to add energy to the 'creative forces' in South Africa and to enhance the understanding of these 'creative forces,' specifically when regarding Black artists and art." (Crawshay-Hall 2013, 23) Doing so, he included objects as various as "toymaking, ritual garment creation, and artmaking." (King 1991, 47) Although "Tributaries" is now considered as a major shift in South African art history by including for the first time art by both White and Black artists,[9] it was not, however, without critical reception. Jayne Kelly Crawshay-Hall states in her PhD dissertation "African Modernism and Identity Politics: Curatorial Practice in the Global South with Particular Reference on South Africa" that "Tributaries" was still reminiscent of a White perception of South African identity. (Crawshay-Hall 2013, 24) Indeed, by exhibiting side by side artworks from White artists and crafts from Black artists, Rick Burnett framed the understanding of Black identity as being opposed to or in relation to White artists. The focus was still on finding an inherent Africanness and authentic qualities in black art, attributes that were less important where White artists were concerned. Anitra Nettleton also criticizes this exclusive view of black crafts. For her, the exclusion of White craft artists was symptomatic of a Western view of artistic classification in which White artists are

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[9] Both the South African authors T.H King and Sandra Klopper stated that the "Tributaries" exhibition was part of the changing collecting practices of galleries and museums in South Africa in the 1980s, including more works by rural artists. (King 1991, 47 and Klopper 2004, 22)

necessarily viewed as modern through the display of "fine" art works, while Black artists are considered as having specifically African "Shamanistic qualities" through the display of craft objects (Nettleton 2014, 265) An example of this White and Black dichotomy can be found in the inclusion of the work "Crucifix" (undated) by Jackson Hlungwani, a wooden irregularly shaped Christian cross holding a crucified sculpted Christ, displayed for its African aesthetic with a prominent "Romanesque quality" according to Burnett. (Crawshay-Hall 2013, 25) Even though the artist created "'a stone palace for God'" with both Christian and African traditional references, the curator avoided any discussion of the conceptual content of the work, and focused on its aesthetic qualities. (Crawshay-Hall 2013, 26) The inclusion of Hlungwani in the exhibition therefore relies more on his Black South African identity than on the work itself. According to Crawshay-Hall, this focus on race, and on social contexts (for Burnett included arts from impoverished places, community center workshops etc.) created a further gap in the distinction between contemporary urban White artists and rural Black crafts artists. The criteria for inclusion were therefore different according to race: aesthetic for White artists, and racial for Black artists. (Crawshay-Hall 2013, 28) By opening the artistic scene to Black rural artists, Burnett still confined them to a non-fine arts, non-White category. However, I must disagree with Crawshay-Hall when she states that:

> Burnett, in all his effort to eradicate the exclusion of black artists from gallery exhibitions, failed to uphold the category of contemporary art making in South Africa – the inclusion of such traditional toy-making and ritual garment creation conveys the pressure of representing an African art current that was still defined by a sense of 'authentic Africa' and Africanness." (Crawshay-Hall 2013, 24)

She draws this statement from the author Sidney Kasfir according to whom most of these craft objects do not have the same value in the eyes of their makers. If I agree, along with Anitra Nettleton, that communities and artists must be included in the display and understanding of

these objects, (Nettleton 1995, 69) and that the objects' selection must reflect their importance and value in their respective context, I do not feel that their inclusion "failed to uphold the category of contemporary art." Indeed the discourse around the work of Black artists could have been improved, as explained above, but their inclusion stays relevant to the category of contemporary art. For example the artist Jackson Hlungwani "is seen in his Shangaan community[10] as a prophet, spiritual leader and healer." (Crawshay-Hall 2013, 25) His work has therefore a specific meaning to its maker (and this can be enhanced by the fact that the work has a religious connotation).[11] If the discourse around the works in "Tributaries" can be questioned, their status as contemporary art must be acknowledged and validated. The show nonetheless stands today as a turning point in the exhibition of traditional and craft practices in South Africa, one that has inspired other exhibitions, locally and internationally.

Also participating in the rediscovery of art in South Africa, Steven Sack, the White South African director of the Arts, Culture and Heritage in Johannesburg, curated "The Neglected Traditions: Towards a New History of South African Art (1930-1988)" in 1988 at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. The exhibition was a project of the institution, whose intention was to shed light on black art of the country. (Sack 1988, 7) Faced with a serious lack of information, research and artworks in museum collections, the project became "a resource, a departure for further detailed research that will hopefully yield a more balanced and comprehensive history of South African art." (Sack 1988, 7) As stated by the curator, the challenge of this exhibition was the inclusion of only Black artists. A hundred artists were displayed, from the late 1920s to the late 1980s, with only the inclusion of a few White artists, those who had "integral relationships

[10] The Shangaan community is a fusion of both Zulus from Mozambique and Tsongas from north-eastern South Africa. Formerly situated in the Homeland Gazankulu, it is now part of both the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga.
[11] For a more detailed account of Hlungwai's work, see Kopkins, 2009.

with the artistic development of Black South African art." (Sack 1988, 7) Indeed, even with segregation during the apartheid regime, relationships between White and Black artists were undeniable, and only by acknowledging their exchanges can one begin to rewrite South African art history. (Sack 1988, 7) This selection based on race, although questionable retrospectively, was an important step as it allowed for the re-writing of South African art history. (Pissara 2006, 51) Elaborated into three main sections, the exhibition and its catalogue revealed seven decades of art from rural, township and urban areas, and the development of art centres in various regions, in which fine artists and craft makers worked together. (Sack 1988, 21) Talking about the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre (ELC art and craft) at Rorke's Drift in the Natal province created in 1962, Sack stated:

> When one compares the art with the craft produced at the Centre there appears to have been a consistent sharing and borrowing of imagery. Artists produced designs for tapestries and participated in the ceramic workshops. Azaria Mbatha designed tapestries, Ziaubu produced ceramics, linocuts and designed a tapestry that was sent to the Sao Paulo Biennale in 1973. The ongoing interaction between the school, where fine art was taught, and the workshops, where craft was produced, was an important phenomenon in the history of South African art. (Sack 1988, 21)

This focus on the double education offered at the ELC art and craft centre proposed to look at a wide range of black art. Not confined to the international style or to the authentic and static craft category, Black artists were represented as dynamic creators, trained in a variety of media with both Western and South African teachers (Sack 1988, 20) For Sack this duality of countryside crafts and city fine arts, revitalized the works of this new generation of artists, who influenced the development of South African art in the 1980s. (Sack 1988, 29) It can be found in the last section of the exhibition catalogue the "New Generation sculpture," featuring work from the 1980s with the presentation of artists such as Jackson Hlungwani (seen in "Tributaries") and

Johannes Maswanganye, who held a double position both within their community and selling to the White buyers.

> Johannes Maswanganye, more than any of these sculptors has worked in two distinct ways that take cognizance of an implicit cultural duality. The need for carved figures, 'nyamusoro dolls,' at first in Soweto and now in his own community is contained within a specific context; they are used by sangomas [healers] as an integral part of their medicinal practices. The needs for carved figures in the white community are contained within a different context; they are used as decorative objects, evoking Africa and providing aesthetic pleasure. It is interesting to note that the nyamusoro dolls supplied to the sangomas are 'completed' by the sangomas through the addition of various 'charms' whereas the sculptures sold to the white market are painted with enamel paints by Maswanganye. (Sack 1988, 29)

The artists adapted their works, yet with slight alterations, so they could fit the needs of the two distinct communities. For the art historian Anitra Nettleton, the "Neglected Tradition" exhibition, while partaking in a shift in collecting practices at the Johannesburg Art Gallery – which acquired two major collections of mostly headrests and South African objects of the nineteenth century after the show (Nettleton 1995, 67) – was still dictated by a western understanding of art. The emphasis in the catalogue on artists' biographies and the display of individual artists corresponded to "western art history's penchant to create 'masters' and 'masterpieces' against which to measure other artists and other pieces." (Nettleton 1995, 66) This can be exemplified in the emphasis on the artist Johannes Maswanganye's work. Although Sack acknowledged that Maswanganye's 'nyamusoro dolls' created for his community are not completed until the sangomas apply their "charms" on the objects, nowhere in the catalogue could a description of such rituals be found. If the dolls are presented in their final form as valuable objects through a collaborative work, the curator's focus stayed on the artist himself.

Curated by the British-born curator and writer David Elliott, and part of the "Zabalaza" festival organized by the African National Congress (ANC) in England, the exhibition "Art from

South Africa" (1990) at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in Oxford was the first exhibition to present South African art abroad since the beginning of apartheid. (Room 2005, 56) It presented "the face of South African art to the British public and furthered the construction of an unproblematic unity in the face of the political realities of fracture and violence that led up to the 1994 elections." (Nettleton 1995, 66) Indeed, as Elliott stated in the catalogue's introduction, the background of the exhibition was the historical division between an official apartheid art (mainly works of White artists) and a popular culture oriented "proletcult" historically created and employed as a cultural weapon by anti-apartheid movements. (Elliott 1990, 7) In the 1990s, at the dawn of the most important political change of South Africa's history, when history was "literally being made," Elliott believed that curating the exhibition in Oxford's MOMA, which has historically focused on the relationship between culture and politics, was a perfect place for "detachment" and "objectivity." (Elliott 1990, 7) Therefore, he was confronted with

> an inevitable tension between the demands of making an international exhibition of work by 'professional' artists and the idea of showing a selection which was more 'democratic', and in a sense representative, which would not show the work in depth of individuals but which would reflect the diversity of different kinds of cultural activity and its context. (Elliott 1990, 7)

With the desire to showcase art from a nation facing political and social changes that sought to overcome the racial segregation of apartheid and its artistic classification of the various communities: "There was a strong feeling that the exhibition should reflect the whole range of contemporary visual culture; craft such as bead and blanket works are included along with posters, banners, linocuts, wire toys and dolls, as well as fine art – painting, sculpture and video." (Elliott 1990, 8) Indeed, in his essay "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom," the South African advocate and activist Albie Sachs stated that

> It is important to distinguish between unity and uniformity. We are strongly for national unity, for seeing our country as a whole, not just in its geographical extension but in its human extension. […] The objective is not to create a model culture into which everyone has to assimilate, but to acknowledge and take pride in the cultural variety of our people. (Sachs 1990, 13)

This artistic and cultural variety can be seen through the selection of works for the exhibition, and also in the selection of the artists, including fine artists, craft artists, children, women and collectives. 'Crafts' are discussed in the catalogue according to their own criteria. The wire toys from the townships are considered as "craft wire," because the intention of the makers (children) is not aesthetic. For Napho Makoena, the toys can still be appreciated for their aesthetic and creative qualities, and some of the makers are in fact creating the toys as a hobby while pursuing artistic careers. (Makoena 1990, 83) Likewise Rayda Becker discusses the beadworks and blankets according to their materiality, format and function. For both authors, it is not a question of confronting them with other types of artistic creations or of applying a 'fine art discourse' onto the objects, but of appreciating the works for their practical and social value and their qualities, and to allow them to be included in the writing of South African art history.

The "Zabalaza" festival in London also included a conference organized by the African ANC that aligned with the exhibition "Art from South Africa" in its desire to "professionalize" art in the country by separating it from politics. The ANC fighting against apartheid from England had up until the 1990s encouraged art and culture as "a weapon of struggle" and "promoted the interest of proletarian culture as distinct from those of high or fine art." (Elliott 1990, 7) Although necessary at that time, Albie Sachs warned the country against this systematic correlation between art and resistance in a conference in 1989. (Room 2005, 56) If art and culture are shaped by social and political contexts, they cannot be reduced to an illustration of that struggle, or determined by it. For Sachs, culture is not only about demonstrating the ugliness

and injustices of the world, but also about fun, beauty, tenderness and love. (Sachs 1990, 11) By reducing itself to a weapon, culture will lose "its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions." (Sachs 1990, 11) Therefore a curatorial shift occurred in the work of South African curators, for the political dimension of culture was replaced by more universal concepts such as the body, the land, gender relations and memory. But as I will demonstrate in the next section, that was not followed by group exhibitions curated abroad. (Room 2005, 57-58) Indeed, the new discourse of inclusiveness of the late 1980s and early 1990s was rapidly criticized and overstepped by a distinctive focus on 'international art' brought about by the second Johannesburg Biennale "Trade Routes: History and Geography" curated by Okwui Enwezor in 1997 that drastically shifted the discourse on South African contemporary art previously set up by Ricky Burnett, Steven Sack and David Elliott among others.[12]

The Post-Apartheid Moment: Obsessive Inclusiveness and Aesthetic Discrimination

During apartheid, as previously emphasized, the country was isolated from the rest of the world, and most of the cultural activities were local and national. Therefore the years of progressive modification of the art canon previously set up by a dominant White minority into one of inclusiveness towards the art forms of the indigenous and neglected people of the country was mostly a local and national phenomenon (one of the exceptions being "Art from South Africa" curated by David Elliott detailed above). In 1994 however, with South Africa's re-entry into the world, another force came into play into this transforming art scene: the international sphere. The

[12] "Ten Years of Collecting" (University of the Witwatersrand in1989), "Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection" (Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1990) and more recently "ReVisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art History" (South African National Gallery in 2004) are parts of the inclusive post-apartheid discourse that reshaped South African art history.

world's interest in an art that had been invisible for more than thirty years coupled with the local art market's opportunity to finally export South African art opened up the path set by the apartheid years. Locally, with no concrete commitment from the government, art galleries became the dominant intermediaries for artists to reach the international scene and a lot of art dealers began their activities as they saw the significance and financial opportunity to export South African artists abroad. (Jantjes 2011, 38) The Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg – one of the few galleries to have continuously exported South African art since the 1970s – its sister gallery (the Goodman Gallery based in Cape Town) in 2007 and the Stevenson Gallery in 2003 in Cape Town are good examples of this emerging local market. In fact, the Goodman and Stevenson Galleries were the only two African galleries to represent the continent at the Frieze art fair in London in 2013, (Van der Watt 2013, 61) thereby demonstrating their status as the country's preeminent contemporary art institutions. Inevitably, as commercial galleries in South Africa engaged with a waiting international scene, the spotlight was placed on a core group of artists, (Jantjes 2011, 41) whose work exported well and were recognized as worth seeing. The 1990s saw the emergence of artists such as Marlene Dumas, David William Kentridge and Sue Williamson internationally, alongside artists participating in the "Personal Affects" exhibition such as Jane Alexander and Berni Searle. (Jantjes 2011, 41) Focusing on the apartheid and its aftermaths with powerful imageries and conceptual meanings – such as Jane Alexander's infamous "The Butcher Boys" (1985), an installation of three life sized sculpted humanized beasts with no mouths or ears symbolizing the cruelty and dehumanized regime of apartheid – their art perfectly matched the art scene's eagerness for a new and forceful contemporary art embedded in one of the world's longest and most violent colonial systems. This hypothesis can be strengthened by Joëlle Busca's critique of the inclusion of African art in the Western canon,

when in the 1990s art from the continent was received in the West as a response to a contemporary art in crisis, a “breath of fresh air” for a Western art in which rupture and innovation had been banalized and institutionalized. (Busca 2000, 204)

This growing interest in South African art polarized the discourse into two major positions embodied in the Johannesburg Biennales from 1995 and 1997: the desire, after years of segregation and in “the spirit of the reconciliation […] to showcase the diversity of local art production” (Marshall 1999b, 120) on the one hand, versus “the integration of South African art into a global international context [for which] the concern for equal representation had been replaced by an unspoken concern for 'high standard' and international competitiveness” on the other. (Marshall 1999b, 124) The art historian Sabine Marshall acknowledges in her article “The impact of the two Johannesburg Biennales (1995 and 1997) on the formation of a ‘New South African Art,’” that the second Biennale, “Trade Routes: History and Geography” (1997) directed by the Nigerian born curator Okwui Enwezor, reflected the concerns of some South African artists and curators that the obsession over inclusiveness that followed the end of apartheid had transformed the selection of artists for exhibitions and collections into a political correctness. (Marshall 1999b, 122) The first Biennale, “Africus” already achieved national equality for representation and so the curatorial goal for “Trade Routes” was “clearly about the integration of South African art into a global international context.” (Marshall 1999b, 124) Therefore, the organizers “selected only artists conversant with the visual language of contemporary art production and whose work corresponded to a particular, internationally accepted standard.” (Marshall 1999a, n.p) Indeed, the first Johannesburg Biennale, “Africus,” directed by Christopher Till (then director of culture for the city of Johannesburg) and co-ordinated by Lorna Ferguson (former director of the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg) did not focus entirely

on western-style artistic practices, but also included crafts and traditional work, as exemplified by the show “Africa Earthed” curated by Chani Collet that concentrated on women’s ceramics as contemporary art of marginalized artists, (Till, Christopher et al., 1995, 92) as well as exhibitions of community art from the townships. If they had the merit of displaying relatively unknown art to the international art scene, those exhibitions were however not necessarily successful. The artist Jayne Kelly Crawshay-Hall criticized the display of ceramics in “Africa Earthed” as reassessing the authenticity of the socially marginalized craft artists (Crawshay-Hall 2003, 34-35) and the Black artist David Koloane regretted that the local exhibitions displaying community art,[13] poorly funded and mounted in off-centre locations, were not well integrated to the Biennale’s circuit. (Koloane 1996, 52) Based on the author and professor Jane Duncan’s critique of the Johannesburg Biennales as both “locat[ing] themselves firmly in the Western tradition of 'high art'” (Duncan 2007, 273) it is my opinion that in “Africus,” despite the fact that a wide range of different artistic practices were exhibited, the traditional and craft works, alongside the community art of the townships, were physically and conceptually separated from the mainstream international artists of the Biennale, being exposed in different locations with different teams of curators. In my view, the event proposed to see South African art in three distinct categories (craft and traditional arts, community art, and contemporary art) that did not challenge the Western canon of high art within the contemporary realm.

With the clear agenda of entering the international art scene, Okwui Enwezor curated the second Johannesburg Biennale, two years later, under the larger frame of globalization. Encompassing concepts such as social and political transformations, “contact zones,” homes and

[13] Although the term is contested, community art is the art of non university-trained artists from the migrant cities constructed during apartheid at the outskirt of major cities. This art has also been called transitional art, as it does not fit either the traditional and the craft practices or the category of international contemporary art. The artists are either trained in art centers or self-taught, explaining their isolation from international art.

nationalism, "Trade Routes" aimed to examine the history of globalization and its consequences on the production of meaning in our "highly globalised and technologised period of the twentieth century." (Enwezor 1997, 9) As he explained:

> The 'cutting edge' here is measured by the degree to which artists pose durable questions. Even if the works of the artists are pivoted on crucial aesthetical challenges of contemporary practices, they nonetheless do not subordinate themselves to investigations of formal problems. The artists could be seen as operating on the highest level of investigations of the philosophical, political, phenomenological and social processes of our time. (Enwezor 1997, 7)

He further stated that:

> To bring about pointed discussions around these issues, we will privilege works and artists who address both explicitly and conceptually new readings and renderings of citizenship and nationality, nations and nationalism, exile, immigration, technology, the city, indeterminacy, hybridity, while exploring the tensions between the local and the global. (Enwezor 1997, 9)

Enwezor's discussion of the artists reveals his expectations regarding the nature of the works he was looking for. He privileged conceptual artworks that reflected on "our time" and its considerations, consequently excluding from his selection artworks with more specific and concrete utility. If the selected artists corresponded to the Biennale's theme of globalization, Sandra Klopper's analysis (discussed in the first section) reveals that craft and traditional artists are not necessarily working outside those preoccupations, as the artists consciously create within the context of globalization by using new exported materials within new social structures. Enwezor's focus was on the international art category, in which artists work with a Western-based definition of contemporary art, and excluded other practices of the country.

For David Koloane the nepotism surrounding the display of international South African artists lead to an aesthetic discrimination within the nation's art scene.

> It soon became clear that although South Africa has just emerged from a history of exclusion, in the form of racial discrimination, a new form of aesthetic discrimination now loomed that implicitly rendered virtually redundant certain forms of traditional art practice. Since the discourse of cultural theory embraces multiculturalism within a global arena, one might expect that the notion of diversification would become integral to the global art scene. On the contrary, the same faces are seen again and again on the biennial circuit, and it seems that the new multinational concept of curating is often governed more by the cachet of individual artists and the type of work produced – particularly favouring new media, installation, and conceptualism – than by the notion of inclusivity. (Koloane 2004, 23)

For Koloane, the changes in the newly global South Africa are to be weighed, for the exclusion of Black artists is evidence and "much remains to be accomplished in redressing past imbalances." (Koloane 2004, 24) Therefore although the South African galleries and international artists contributed to the discourse on South African art on a global scale, filling gaps left empty by governmental institutions during and after apartheid, they also promulgated international art as contemporary South African art abroad, leaving traditional and craft practices out of consideration.

The years following 1994 also saw a growing interest from Western curators in organizing exhibitions about South Africa. The result was the fast production of exhibitions focusing predominantly on the political changes from 1994 onwards (Gavin Jantjes 2011, 33) with very little insight into the national artistic situation and its history, and displaying artists promulgated by local events and institutions as the contemporary art of South Africa. Gavin Jantjes views New York's Museum for African Art's first exhibition of contemporary South African art: "Liberated Voices: Contemporary art from South Africa" curated in 1999 by Frank Herreman, as partaking in this synthesized and misleading vision of the country's artistic achievement from Western curators in the 1990s. According to him, the title of the exhibition "signalled curatorial intentions that promoted little of the artists' intentions other than an anti-

apartheid stance." (Gavin Jantjes 2011, 26) In other words, the redefinition of art and culture in South Africa starting in the 1990s with exhibitions such as "Art from South Africa" (1990) and conferences organized by exiled organisms that promoted a separation of art from politics and particularly from resistance and activism was not followed by international curators. Herreman indeed focused his exhibition on the time and context of apartheid, framing the artists' works around the political background of liberation. (Room 2005, 57)

This discrepancy between how local and international curators define art in South Africa might be linked to what curator and professor Victoria Rovine called "South Africa's symbolic weight in the United State." (Rovine 2004, 55) According to Rovine, the similarity between the segregation of Black people in the United States and that of Black South Africans, even though deriving from two distinct political contexts, acted as an incentive for North Americans to partake in the liberation struggle through boycotts and protests." (Rovine 2004, 55) Thus, talking about North American exhibitions celebrating the end of apartheid (including "Liberated Voices") she stated that "South Africa represents a parallel to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, creating a sense of identification that had a direct impact on the exhibitions under consideration here." (Rovine 2004, 55)

In addition to the solidarity showed by the United States towards South Africa, resulting in the political lens of the "Liberated Voices" exhibition, it is my opinion that a North American, read here Western, conception of contemporary art framed the exhibition. Indeed, in the exhibition catalogue of "Liberated Voices," Herreman stated that the inclusion of only international art for the show was a deliberate choice, reflecting South Africa's desire to enter the international contemporary art scene, as expressed through initiatives such as the Johannesburg Biennales of 1995 and 1997. (Herreman 1999, 179) As determined earlier, the first Biennale did

not challenged the Western definition of high art, and the second one was curated by a team of international curators presided by Okwui Enwezor, and focused on international art that could fit the global community's expectations. Therefore, Herreman's curatorial intentions can be considered as following the dominant international discourse on art determining the participation of one nation in the global art scene more than actually representing the national desire to integrate this scene through international art. In other words, is Herreman's conception of contemporary South African art not shaped by the international Western dominated conception of contemporary art? I would say that he is revealing himself as part of a large group of Euro-American and elitist South African curators who promote the ever-ambiguous category of 'international African art' as a means of showing the country's openness and political, social, and economical transformations to the rest of the world in the post-apartheid moment in order to fit the country's cultural scene into the global art world. In the epilogue of the exhibition catalogue, Herreman explained his process organizing the show, stating: "I traveled to South Arica for the first time in January 1998. In the course of two weeks, I met with about forty artists, curators, gallery owners and director active in contemporary art." (Herreman 1999, 179) He further wrote: "At most meetings, I asked my interviewers which artists they considered representative of the new South Africa. Unbeknownst to each other, the members of this unofficial committee often brought up the same artists." The unofficial committee set up by Herreman clearly contributed to the exportation of international art abroad, its members operating all in the contemporary art milieu. The artists selected for the exhibition, diversified by including White and Black, university-trained and art center-trained artists, remained oblivious to other forms of art produced in South Africa, by staying inside the Western conception of what constitutes contemporary art. In a personal interview with his colleague and coordinator in South

Africa for the exhibition, Kristine Ann Roome, Herreman affirmed, "I wanted to show that in South Africa there was a real contemporary art scene, which, in a way, can be related to the international contemporary art scene but which has its own real identity." (Roome 2005, 229) His concern regarding the relation between South African art and the international art scene is understandable. The Museum for African Art being located in New York, it had to propose artworks New-Yorkers could relate to, and my point is not to question the artists selected for the show. However, following the path opened by previous South African and international curators, the inclusion of a more diverse artistic production would have given his thematic, the impact of liberation since 1994, more insight into the national cultural situation.[14]

In the next section, I will demonstrate that the Museum for African art's second exhibition devoted to the contemporary art of South Africa, in collaboration with local curators, embodied two forces developed above: the national desire to integrate the international art scene by promulgating international artists and the North American context grounded in a Western definition of contemporary art. I am therefore arguing that "Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African art" (2004) is inscribed in the dominant discourse on contemporary art imposed by the international art scene, and reiterates previous curatorial decisions that overlooked the diversity of South Africa's cultural production. Within the exhibition's curatorial mandate, which was to reflect on the changing notion of identity in South

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[14] The "Liberated Voices" exhibition was originally designed in 1997 by the director Grace Stanislaus, who envisioned a more historical perspective with artists from the 1920s onwards. The logistic and funding required for such an exhibition could not be found, and the exhibition was finally put together two years later, by Frank Herreman with a much more restricted number of artists, as he decided to focus on the post 1994 years. Even then, the restricted funding of the museum as well as the unavailability of certain artists limited his selection. (Room 2005, 31; 82) It is therefore with those restrictions in mind that I critique his curatorial process, fully aware of the difficulties he encountered. Although it would have been interesting to analyse all the exhibitions in this thesis within the larger framework of institutional operating systems, I had to restrict my analysis to a purely theoretical level.

Africa, the absence of craft and traditional artists stands as the absence of other identities, expressed through non-Western art practices that did not take part in the discussion.

The Exhibition

The artists selected for “Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art” varied in race, age, sex, skin colour and religion, including among others the famous White artists Jane Alexander, the Jewish performer Steven Cohen, the Black choreographer Jay Parker, the young Thando Mama and the sixty-six year old Black artist Samson Mudzunga, the only one of the seventeen artists living outside of a large city. The exhibition aligned itself with the post-apartheid desire for internationalism, which seeks to move beyond the questions of racial binaries to focus more on the art propositions of the artists, and the national impulse of the 1980s to think about art outside the limits of politics and activism. However, the selected group of artists for “Personal Affects,” varied by all appearances, was actually quite homogenous. The artists were trained as fine artists in various universities across South Africa and abroad, and lived in cosmopolitan cities, with the exception of Samson Mudzunga, the only self-taught artist in the exhibition to whom I will return later on this section. Therefore by acknowledging the predominance of Western art in South African universities and the fact that international art comes primarily from urban centers (as explained by Susan Vogel), one can see that the artists of “Personal Affects” all work within the western paradigm of the singular creator that produces unique autonomous objects, and proposed for the exhibition works that aligned with the vernacular of the international art scene. The focus on international art, prevailing in the curatorial premise of the show, and the personal responses of the artists confined the exhibition

to what curator Frank Herreman was looking for in the Museum for African Art's first South African group exhibition "Liberated Voices" (1999): the display of a contemporary art that could fit the international scene but that would have its own South African identity. The result contradicted the show's attempt at diversity, for if it featured a more complex conception of identity in South Africa it simultaneously reduced the debate to the voices of a selected social class, that of urban-based and university-trained artists. Going back to David Koloane's critique of the country's art scene as being trapped in a new form of discrimination, that of the international aesthetic, this assessment reached its full scope in the exhibition, where the aesthetic discrimination of the curator regarding the selection of artists coupled with a reflection on the notion of identity excluded from the discussion a number of artists working outside western-based conceptions of art. By getting rid of the political environment of the artists and focussing only on high art coming from mainstream galleries, the curators bypassed the social conditions of other artists and closed the debate to other identities, expressed through different art practices.

"Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art" was created through the sponsorship of South African art patron Dick Enthoven, who has used his position as the head of the Spier winery company to champion the development of contemporary art in South Africa for the past twenty years.[15] For the ten-year anniversary of the end of apartheid, Enthoven envisioned a large-scale project called "Season South Africa," which combined a dance and performance festival with a visual art exhibition – "Personal Affects" – all taking

[15] Enthoven founded the Spier Performing Arts Festival in 1996, first hosted on Spier Company grounds, which moved to the Africa Center in Cape Town in subsequent years. The Africa Center, also funded by Spier, is an organisation for the development of the arts in South Africa through an animated series of activities and programs for visual and performing artists. Under Enthoven's leadership, Spier Company has also invested in the development of the South African film industry initiated a program in architecture and launched the "creative blocks" program for artists, a patronage project to provide emerging artists (with no race distinction) with a steady income as they establish themselves as artists. (See Spier n.d, "Art" and The Africa Center n.d, "About us.")

place in New York City in 2004. He moved the Spier Performing Arts Festival to New York to reach a new audience, (Brodie et al. 2004, v.1, 7) and approached White South African curators and art dealers Sophie Perryer and David Brodie to consult on the initial idea for the exhibition. With the support of Laurie Ann Farrell, the American curator at the Museum for African Art, it was decided that the exhibition would be hosted both by the Museum and in the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in Harlem, which has collaborated with the New York institution on numerous occasions.[16] The final curatorial team consisted of Perryer, Brodie and Farrell, along with the Black South Africans artist Churchill Mandikida and White art historian Liese Van der Watt. It is worth noting here that three out of the four South African curators are Whites and that all are university-trained, including Mandikida who trained at the Witwatersrand University of Johannesburg. Sophie Perryer and David Brodie are both part of the team of directors at the Stevenson Galleries in Cape Town and Johannesburg, and Brodie worked as a curator at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, the two most powerful institutions of contemporary art in South Africa and on the continent. Their knowledge and insights on art are not in question here. My point is rather to emphasize that the selected curators for the exhibition are part of the artistic elite of South Africa, operating in urban centers, with international connections, and, in the case of Brodie and Perryer, actively working within the art market.

The team chose seventeen artists[17] not necessarily renowned internationally or regularly included in South African surveys: twelve had already been exhibited in North America and/or Europe once or twice, two had been shown only once before the “Personal Affects” exhibition,

[16] The choice of the Cathedral as a venue for the exhibition was mainly due to the fact that the Museum’ space was too restrictive. Plus the Cathedral, located at the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 110 street (in Manhattan) was going to be a close neighbour for the Museum, as it was already planning its moving on 110 street and 5th Avenue.

[17] Jane Alexander, Wim Botha, Steven Cohen, Churchill Madikida, Mustafa Maluka, Thando Mama, Samson Mudzunga, Jay Pather, Johannes Phokela, Robin Rhode, Claudette Schreuders, Berni Searle, Doreen Southwood, Clive van der Berg, Minnette Vàri, Diane Victor and Sandile Zulu.

and three were only known in South Africa. What they had in common, however, was their ability to "engage critically with the complexity of life in South Africa, a decade since the country's first democratic elections." (Brodie et al. 2004, V1, 18) The artists were brought to New York City for a week in February 2004 to see the facilities and discuss initial ideas with the curators,[18] resulting in an exhibition of site-specific and new works (performances, drawings, videos, photographs, paintings, sculptures, and dance). The curators identified two recurring themes in the artists' works: performance and ritualized action, which they framed under the larger concept of post-identity. (Van der Watt 2004, 47) The goal was to step away from the themes of identity and politics, which, according to the curator Liese Van der Watt, had been largely explored by other anniversary exhibitions worldwide,[19] and to approach the question of identity in a more nuanced way. While apartheid had tried to fix South African identities into binaries for so long (White and non-White, Black and Coloured, European and African descent…), the post-apartheid era imposed an "'over-simplified discourse of rainbow nationalism.'" (Van der Watt 2004, 46) Underlying the exhibition was the curators' view that South Africans have the desire to claim their identities and to form them "through active self-definition now, rather than through perpetual resistance and mobilization." (Van der Watt 2004, 46) Therefore, with the conviction that the concept of identity is both fluid and complex and has a troublesome history, the curators decided to inscribe the exhibition within a global discussion about race: the history of "posts." For a more complex notion of 'blackness,' curator Thelma Golden used the term "post-black" in her 2001 exhibition "Freestyle" in New York, moving

[18] Out of the seventeen artists, only Robin Rhode decided to display his work in one venue, the Museum' space.
[19] Van der Watt, Liese. "Towards an 'Adversarial Aesthetics': A Personal Response to Personal Affects," 46. The exhibitions include "A Decade of Democracy: Witnessing South Africa" at the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston and "Asking for Eyes: The Visual Voice of Southeast Africa (Selections from the Edward M. Smith Family Art Collection)" at the University Art Gallery of San Diego State University which will be discuss later in the text.

beyond the traditional use of race as a classification system unsupported by science. The scholars Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks and Paul Gilroy moved forward by calling on the rejection of race altogether with the term "post-race." Less convincing, according to Van der Watt, but equally important in the progression towards post-identity, was the term "post-ethnicity" developed by the historian David Hollinger in 1995, "promot[ing] choice of affiliation and communities consent." (Van der Watt 2004, 48) The racial lens surrounding Van der Watt's notion of identity and her use of authors either born or based in the United States resonated with the American context of "Personal Affects" and paralleled the complicated racial and segregation history of both countries. In the end, the exhibition presented itself as a questioning, rather than a definitive response, and left open to the artists the means to address the issue, thus demonstrating that the concept of post-identity is before anything else an "intellectual mindset impatient to articulate alternative ways." (Van der Watt 2004, 48)

The point of departure for the exhibition was "the use of the body, personal histories, and the construction of personal mythologies" in the artists' working methods that would reflect on the complex and nuanced notion of post-identity. (Brodie et al. 2004, V.1, 19) Steven Cohen, Claudette Schreuders, Thando Mama, Minette Vàri and Jay Pather[20] particularly worked around the body as a mediator of identity. Cohen[21] dealt with his multiple and contradictory identities as a White homosexual and Jewish man in South Africa in his 2002-2004 performance *Chandelier* re-enacted in the Cathedral on the exhibition's opening night, while Vàri used her own body in *Cyclops* (2004) to create a kaleidoscopic space in the form of a mandala that the audience could see through the mouth of a Cyclops' face, sculpted on the wall of the Museum for African Art. Claudette Schreuders and Thando Mama used their bodies in

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[20] Jay Pather, born in Durban, studied in New York before settling in Cape Town.
[21] Born in Johannesburg, Cohen was living in France by the time of the exhibition.

installations, in works displayed in two of the Cathedral's chapels. Schreuders' *The Free Girl* (2004) (fig. 1) featured a sculpted White female, with the artist's facial traits, standing with a snake on her shoulder in front of semi-circle of church candles on the floor. Referencing the deity Mami Wata, celebrated in Central, West and South Africa as well as in the diaspora of transatlantic countries like Brazil or Haiti, the Christian Madonna, and ultimately herself, the artist presented herself as having a hybrid and complex identity, symbolic of her own status as a White female in South Africa. In Thando Mama's *1994 (II)* (2004) the artist' body has been transposed into an installation of forty-six drawings on glass with a wooden base displayed in the form of a cross on the floor in the Cathedral's Chapel of St Ambrose. The visual result was a set of suspended small bodies (painted on glass) lying down or getting up over wooden bases in front of the chapel's imposing altar. Recalling the forty-six years of the official apartheid regime, the black bodies act both as a memorial and as the fragile and changing future identities in the newly democratic country. With the choreographer Jay Pather's work *From Before* (2003-2004), enacted in front of the Cathedral on the opening day, the body was enacted through the dancers in a narration that related the encounter of an urban skateboarder with a rural woman. Like in his piece *Hotel* (2003-2004) performed in the Museum, featuring three dancers moving in a re-staged hotel chamber, the artist worked around the body moving into fixed identity-makers embodied by the spaces as the necessary "fluidity and malleability and actually healthy uncertainty that may be our salvation." (Brodie et al. v.1, 2004, 113)

Dealing with personal identity through tradition and religion were the artists Churchill Mandikida and Samson Mudzunga. Mandikida's video piece *Struggles of the Heart* (2003) and *Skeletons in my Closet* (2004) (fig.2) displayed respectively in the Museum and in the Cathedral

dealt with the artist's Xhosa[22] religion. Questioning his beliefs, and particularly the circumcision ritual that accompanies the initiates in their transformation into men, in *Struggles of the Heart* the artist showed a close-up of his face covered with white powder, his mouth stuffed with a white maize porridge, both symbolic of Xhosa rituals.[23] As the artist chewed the white substance, he regurgitated it while still putting more porridge in his mouth. Commenting on the Xhosa ritual, Mandikida is partially revealing the secrets of his tradition, while at the same time questioning it. The same approach is found in his work *Skeletons in my Closet.* The video shows the artist rubbing his hands to wash off a red liquid substance. During the video, the image was doubled producing a mirrored effect, giving the hands an abstract form with sexual connotations. The title references the artist's guilt for using his tradition in his own work, participating as he declared, in its commercialization. (Brodie et al., v.1, 2004, 83) Exhibited in the north Ambulatory of the Cathedral, above a small altar on which church candles and an opened Bible surround a sculpted bust of Jesus, Mandikida used the space as a personal confession about his beliefs and his engagement with culture. (Brodie et al., v.1, 2004, 85) Also exploring links between traditions and personal identity, Samson Mudzunga's work *Suka Africa Fundudzi* (2004) was divided between the Cathedral and the Museum. In the museum space, (fig. 3) a large carved drum was exhibited next to a documentary video of his 2004 performance *Suka Africa Fundundzi* enacted in the Dopeni village and recorded by John Hodgkiss specifically for the New York exhibition. In the Cathedral, he re-enacted his 2004 performance with his wife during the opening night of the exhibition. (figs. 4 and 5) In both performances, the artist was buried in a giant drum, and released from it accompanied by Tshikona traditional musicians. His work, both

[22] The Xhosa form the second larger ethnic groups of South Africa and traditionally live in the Eastern Cape province.
[23] I have not experienced the videos first hand, therefore my account of the works are based on the writers of the catalogue's descriptions.

traditional and contemporary, challenged the curators' understanding of contemporary art South African art, as I will further detail in my critique of the exhibition.

A third theme that runs through the exhibition is some artists' exploration and manipulation of Western iconography. Both Johannes Phokela and Wim Botha play with the works of Paul Rubens and Michelangelo to deal with South African reality. Phokela's paintings are embedded in questions related to globalization and the resulting "tension between the local and the global" that Okwui Enwezor talked about in his introduction to the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale. *Apotheosis* (2004) (figs. 6 and 7), a painting displayed in the Cathedral's crossing, used imagery from a preparatory drawing for the last judgment of Rubens (1619) to explore ongoing issues of famine in Africa, replacing the figure of Jesus by the British performance artist David Blaine, starving himself in a suspended box. By painting Blaine in his box,[24] surrounded by what can now be interpreted as the victims of famine, Phokela ascribed a new meaning to Blaine's performance, the starving of the artist as the embodied experience of starving Africans. (Brodie et al. 2004, v.1, 121) In the museum space, Phokela displayed two other large paintings *Fall of the Damned* (1993) (fig.8) alongside *Diamonds and Bananas are Forever* (1993) in which he played with the techniques and iconography of seventeenth century Dutch paintings and contemporary paintings, reflecting on the inequality of today's international economic exchange. The painting's title also references the James Bond movie "Diamonds are Forever" (1971) that staged the famous character in an on-going search for disappeared diamonds from South Africa during their transit to the international market. In the same vein in *Mieliepap Pietà* (2004) (figs. 9 and 10), Wim Botha faithfully recreated Michelangelo's *Pietà* (1498-1500) in maize meal, a staple diet in some regions of South Africa, thus subverting the iconic status of the

[24] David Blaine performed *Above the Below* in 2002, a performance during which he endured a forty-four day stunt in his box suspended in London's City Hall area.

classical sculpture. By recreating the sculpture in its exact dimensions and displaying it in the Cathedral, Botha played with the canonical work of western art history while commenting on apartheid's mourning and martyrdom with the symbolic image of the pietà. (Nelson 2004, 13) Also playing with Western idioms, Diane Victor associated her work on femininity to the role of women in religious narration and iconography, and particularly that of the Virgin Mary. Victor's *The Eight Marys* (2004), a series of eight rib shaped charcoal drawings on paper, was displayed in two chapels of the choir: four of them in the Saint Boniface Chapel, facing the other four drawings displayed in the Saint Ambrose Chapel. The artist featured Mary through the use of her own body in various positions that subvert her traditional role in biblical iconography, addressing issues of female representation in religious narrations as well as their pre-determined roles within Christianity. On one of the eight panels, the Pietà was replaced by a Mary in underwear touching a naked and awake Jesus showing us the bandage on his palm. On another, an upside down naked Virgin lying on a mattress took the role of the contorted nude body of Renaissance male Saints.

In what can be seen as a fourth grouping, artists Berni Searle, Sandile Zulu, Robin Rhode[25] and Minette Vàri's works revolved around the concepts of the land and the city as both places of belonging and constructed spaces. Searle's video work *Vapour* (2004) displayed in the Cathedral and *In Light of I-V* (2004) and *Half Light* (2004) displayed in the Museum, were inspired by a Muslim community's project that consisted of preparing food in huge pots outside and distributing it in various parts of the Western Cape. The artist worked with the ritual aspect of food making, creating a landscape of giant pots filled with boiling water on burning fires around which silhouettes are wandering. Sandile Zulu also worked with fire and water to create his burned canvases exposed at both venues of "Personal Affects." Creating convoluted forms by

[25] Robin Rhode was born in Cape Town but is now living in Berlin.

burning the canvas, the artist linked his aesthetic to that of the human brain. His use of fire, water and soil in the making of the works are linked to social, economical and political aspects of land ownership, dispossession and belonging. Robin Rhode in *Autonomous Drawing Project* (2004) and Minette Vàri in *The Calling* (2003) both worked with the city. If Rhode left his mark in the city by leaving drawing instruction on how to re-use found furniture or objects, Vàri used her body as a gargoyle moving and watching over the city landscape of a utopian and imagined city made up of footings from New York, Johannesburg and Brussels among others.

As for Jane Alexander, Clive van der Berg, Mustafa Maluka and Doreen Southwood, their work exhibited in the Cathedral closely resonated with the space, perhaps more so than the other artists, giving them an in-situ quality and complex meaning. Jane Alexander's site-specific installation of nine anthropomorphic sculptures displayed on a carpet of red plastic gloves combined human bodies and animal figures in *The Sacrifices of God are a Troubled Spirit* (2002-2004) (fig. 11) surrounded by the sound of voices reading the words "'a prayer for remission of sins'" from Psalm 51. (Brodie et al. 2004, v.1, 61) Hybrid and crippled with non-expressive faces, the superb realistically rendered figures are testimonies of the invisible damages caused by the violence of others. If her work was embedded in the memory of apartheid, it can also be read more broadly, as the physical and emotional consequences of war. Used in other works, the figures were selected and re-staged by the artists for this new piece, giving the work a new spiritual connotation. Clive Van Der Berg's *Love's Ballast* (2004) was an installation featuring a sculpted body lying on a pedestal with prominent cysts as the beautiful and exposed markers of disease. Addressing homosexuality, the artist displayed his work in a chapel dedicated to AIDS victims (Faye 2005, 70), embedding his work in the American context, where questions on homosexuality are challenged by members of the Christian Right. Using, like

Van Der Berg, the idea of the memorial, Mustafa Maluka[26] exhibited *Tribute to Mr Devious* (2004) in the Crusaders Bay, an installation comprising a large painting of the black South African rapper and activist Mr Devious, murdered in his hometown Cape Town, in a street art aesthetic that Maluka commissioned from the graffiti artists Makl and Sky189. Installed with flowers and framed photographs and church candles at the bottom of the painting, it is accompanied by a glass vitrine containing Mr Devious' personal belongings as well as photographs and journal articles. As Lieze van der Watt highlights in her catalogue essay, Maluka is bringing the microcosm of Cape Town's gang violence into the global arena. (Van der Watt 2004, 52) By this act of memory and homage to an important figure of black activism in Cape Town, a man that not only sang engaged music, but also worked for the non-profit organisations Creative Education for children and Youth (CRED) and Baobab Connections.org and had a important role in his community, Maluka made Mr Devious into a Catholic Saint, and put into dialogue racism against Black people in both the United States and South Africa. Doreen Southwood also played with the aesthetic contrast between her works and the Cathedral. Her installation presented *The Swimmer* (2004), a painted bronze girl in a bathing suit standing at the edge of a diving board with a drain on her hip, and *Black Hole* (2003), a huge concave wooden container filled with circles of satin ribbons arranged in a gradation of black to blue to white, recreating and enriching the container's depth. *Black Hole* and *The Swimmer* were installed next to each other, the former on the floor and the latter elevated, both in front of one of the Cathedral's religious tapestry. The visual contrast between the Cathedral's work and the highly realistic figure of *The Swimmer* gave an almost uncanny feeling to the installation, while at the same time giving insights into the artist's works, dealing with loss and uncertainty.

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[26] Maluka studied and lived in Amsterdam before returning to South Africa.

"Personal Affects" was a success, according to the art critic Faye Hirsch, for whom the complexity of 'identity' was embodied in Claudette Scheuder's *The Free Girl* (2004) (fig. 1) – displayed at the cathedral and used for the exhibition's invitations – which resonated with South Africa's "uneasy self-definition" through its "multi-layer personas." (Hirsch 2005, 71) Indeed, the artists' works conscious engagement with the concept of post-identity gave the audience a more complex and nuanced definition of what it is to be South African. Going back to Steven Cohen's performance *Chandelier*, one can see that the audience was faced with the socially constructed White male identity that the artist was taking apart, exposing his own contradictions. Steven Cohen first performed *Chandelier* in a settlement in Johannesburg that was about to be razed. The artist wandered in the settlement in high drag queen heels and a Star of David painted on his face, wearing a corset on which was attached a lighted chandelier, literally illuminating the disastrous surroundings. Coincidently, the forced eviction of the settlement happened the day of the performance, and the artist moved around the space as people were forced to abandon their home and belongings. The performance was shown in the Museum as part of Cohen's piece *Boudoir* (2004) and re-enacted in the Cathedral on the opening day of the exhibition. The contradiction between his presence in the settlement and in the Cathedral, full of immense chandeliers, as well as the fragility of his appearance, reveals his own identity as a White queer Jewish South African male. Within the South African location of *Chandelier*, the artist is examining Whiteness in the country, as a more nuanced and complex notion than that of the dominant minority that continues to be privileged in the post-apartheid years, by associating his identity with the Black peoples from precarious settlements.

In his video performance, *Struggles of the Heart,* Churchill Madikida uses his body to reflect on his identity as a Xhosa man raised by Coloured parents. The artist questions the

circumcision rituals among Xhosa communities that continue to be practiced in the present day, and raises a lot of issues nationally, for news of deceased or injured initiates often appears in the media. By dealing with this matter in the public space of the Museum, the artist revealed parts of a hidden and secret ritual that cannot be performed or talked about outside the restricted community of the initiates. He acted thus as an outsider, a position reinforced by the fact that Madikida was not raised as a Xhosa, but became one while he was living in a Xhosa dominated community. (Brodie et al., v.1, 2004, 85) Questioning his beliefs was no easy matter for a convert, as he stated, for in questioning the Xhosa's ritual, he questioned his own identity as such. (Brodie et al., v.1, 2004, 85) Madikida revealed himself as a complex embodiment of multiple identities: the Xhosa initiate and believer, raised outside of his tradition, and working as a Black contemporary artist.

Cohen and Madikida, and the other artists of "Personal Affects" proposed to see South African identity as fragmented, outside the binaries constructed during apartheid. Their subjectivity, personal histories and affects allowed them to deal with more complex notions of Blackness and Whiteness. The curators' decision to exclude resistance and political art by focusing on the artists as subjective identities followed the South African desire to think about their art outside the limits of the apartheid regime, and to show that "the power of art lies precisely in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions." (Sachs 1990, 11)

The success of the exhibition was however tainted by the restricted selection of artists, working within the western paradigm of high art. These affinities with a Western understanding of art can be demonstrated by examining the curatorial statement of "Personal Affects," which stated that:

> A common thread throughout [the exhibition] is the highly personal point of departure of the artists' working method: the use of the body, personal histories, and the

> construction of personal mythologies. Moving beyond the confines of identity politics towards subtler investigations of agency and affect, this exhibition looks at works of art as the powerful and poetic expressions that artists leave behind – from the ephemeral nature of performance art to the more lasting material manifestation. This constant interrogation is what *affects* our selves: the feelings, emotions, memories and interactions that disrupt our subjectivities recurrently, incessantly. This show examines how these affects are embodies in our personal effects: the objects we choose and create to respond to the world around us. *Effects* become traces of our *affects*: they enunciate the power and poetics that characterize our interaction with the restless world through which we move. (Brodie et al. 2004, V.1, 19)

Art, conceived as "the traces of our subjective affects," naturally directed the viewer to a western understanding of art, in which the artist expresses her or his authentic self, in a highly personal and inimitable style. The problematic phrasing of the curators' statement resided in the association between "subjective" and "affective." Craft practices such as basketry and pottery, largely based on pre-existing traditional patterns of forms and colours with often specific functions, and valued for the high skill demanded of the makers, could not fit into this category of individualized productions and were therefore excluded from it. Similar exclusions were placed upon the religious art of various communities throughout the country that do not usually deal with world matters or subjectivity. These omissions prevented the curators from examining the physical labour involved in the making of these crafts and traditional arts, and their aesthetic forms, in terms of feelings and emotions. The particular focus of the curators on the "personal" and the "individual" specifically dismissed works created by groups of artists. Since the exhibition aimed at examining "the complexities of life in South Africa a decade since the country's first democratic elections," (Brodie et al. 2004, v.1, 18) this exclusion was problematic since, as discussed previously, centers and community projects are particularly present in the South African art scene. Consequently, works such as the *Keiskamma Tapestry,* woven from 2000 through 2004 by a group of isiXhosa-speaking women and on display at the Houses of

Parliament in Cape Town since 2006 would not have been considered for the show, but is nonetheless clearly a source of national pride for South Africa given its prominent station in the Houses of Parliament. (Schmahmann 2011, 160)

The curators' emphasis on Western-based practices categorized as high art, did not follow the South African impulse of the 1980s and early 1990s that sought to encompass crafts and traditional arts in national-based exhibitions for a more inclusive and representative art canon. If one can argue that Wim Botha and Churchill Madikida work *with* tradition, they do not work completely *within* it; while their artwork reflects on their tradition, they cannot be considered as traditional artists. "Personal Affects" instead gave a very narrow idea of what contemporary South African art was, restricting their choices to urban-based and university-trained artists. This selection was actually the main common thread of the exhibition, for as stated by Hirsch Faye "it was difficult to cogently recall the curatorial premise when viewing the works, or to draw obvious connections among them." (Faye 2005, 67) Indeed, within the Cathedral's space the various works were physically separated from each other as they were displayed in the different alcoves and chapels of the monument. In the Museum, the visual links created between the works were not related to specific themes, and gave, as I will demonstrate with the works of Samson Mudzunga and Berni Searle, simplistic readings of the South African conceptions of ritualized action and performance. With only the curatorial mandate of displaying contemporary South African artists, the curators proposed an exhibition whose narrative and outcomes were hard to read, resulting in a show that revolved around itself: displaying contemporary South African artists that have in common their ability to work within an international context and with Western-based practices. Moreover, the exhibition's focus on the international standards of art encouraged a 'typical' discourse around their artworks, one fixed within Western intellectual

traditions. This is exemplified by Okwui Enwezor's analysis of Jane Alexander's installation. (fig. 11) Connecting her work to Francisco Goya's series of etchings *Los Caprichos* (1797-1799) in which the Spanish artist "combines biting satire with social critique," (Enwezor 2004, 41) Enwezor threw himself into an equivocal interpretation of Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1797-1799). He related the decline of reason, personified in the sleeping figure of the plate, to Hegel's thesis of the philosopher's reason, always awakening after the events and relates those concepts to South Africa's coma during apartheid. (Enwezor 2004, 41) He then continued to associate historical symbols to apartheid, with an impromptu reference to Benjamin's angel of history:

> Here Benjamin's angel meets Hegel's owl. If Benjamin's angel could perform no redemptive task, Hegel's owl is always belated. But what is definitively absent is the rooster of post-enlightenment French revolution that determines a different course of history. Though South Africa was govern and often arrested by the constant declarations of states of emergency, by the end of the decade the course of its history would be determined by the heroic – in the political sphere- and relentless struggle waged – especially by artists and writers by recourse to the social realist ideals of 'resistance art' representations – to bring apartheid to an end. (Enwezor 2004, 42)

Enwezor proposed a confusing pile of Western symbols to embody South Africa's fate, thereby losing track of Alexander's work.

My criticism of the curators' focus on international art could be challenged by the presence of Samson Mudzunga in the exhibition. Neither traditional nor international in style, the artist did not fit the international contemporary art category and consciously played with both local and international contexts. Living and working in his hometown of Mphephu, his practice is highly embedded in the traditional Venda society,[27] thus making him a contemporary artist

[27] The Venda people are one of South Africa's tribal groups, and reside in the Limpopo province, next to Zimbabwe. Because it was first constituted by people from Central Africa who migrated to South Africa, the Venda society is "an hybrid of different cultures" and is made of various communities. The Venda were isolated and self-governed during apartheid, but have now been integrated to South Africa. The Venda language is part of the eleven official

working in and with tradition. However, as I will now demonstrate, the curators left out of consideration the social, political and traditional content of Mudzunga's work to focus on the performing aspect of his art as a way to better fit him into the exhibition themes of performance and ritualized action.

Mudzunga's 2004 performance enacted in the Dopleni village, was witnessed by a large local community and some personalities from the South African art scene including the curators of "Personal Affects," lasted almost a day and was staged in three parts.[28] The beginning of the performance consisted of presenting the artist accompanied by traditional Tshikona dancers and musicians. Then, his son explained Mudzunga's family lineage and his troubled history with the present chief of his community while the artist was enchained. Finally, the gallery owner Micheal Stevenson relieved Mudzunga of his wooden chains. If this sequence was highly applauded by the city audience, "the locals remained unmoved, some even bemused, by this section of the performance." (Nettleton 2006b, 76) In the second part of the performance Mudzunga was buried in and then freed from one of his large carved drums, reappearing with a white shirt on which the words "Suka Africa Fundudzi" ("Shake up Africa, Fundudzi") were written, and then shouted out "Amandla, Amandla Fundudzi" ("Power, power to Fundudzi.") (Nettleton 2006b, 76) Fundudzi is the sacred lake of the artist's community, the womb and the origin of life for Venda people. According to Nettleton, Fundudzi is the

> 'swimming pool' of Raluvhimba (the creator), who left his giant footprints in the mountains around it at the moment of creation, while the earth was still soft. Around the lake a number of natural features are identified as belonging to Raluvhimba, including some boulders that are said to be his 'drums.' In Venda tradition, it is unthinkable to be a king without drums […] and drums, the focal point of Mudzunga's performances, are among the most symbolically potent objects in Venda visual culture. (Nettleton 2006b, 69-70)

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languages of the country. (The Center for World Indigenous Studies. n.d.)

[28] My analysis of Mudzunga's performance is based on a detailed account wrote by Anitra Nettleton, who witness it first hand in Dopeni. (see Nettleton 2006b)

The use of drums and the reference to the lake are important symbols for the community, but also represent concrete objects of political power. The lake was first the sacred place of the Ngona and the Thavhatsinsi, two clans that formed the Venda community near the lake. Around the eighteenth century, however, an invasion by the Singo coming from the north changed the political affiliation of the community when a Singo chief disappeared into the lake, taking political control of the area. Even though the Singo are still not allowed to touch the lake or go near it (the tradition says that they will die if they do so), the head of the Netshiavha lineage (from the Ngona) enacts annual offerings to the Fundudzi on behalf of the Singo. Samson Mudzunga is part of the Netshiavha lineage and is claiming his right to be the head of his community, thus dismissing the present day head of the Netshiavha lineage that he should have inherited from his mother's side. His accusation has led him to two years of imprisonment in 1998. (Brodie et all, 2004a, 1001) It is from this troubled history that the last part of Mudzunga's 2004 performance took all its meaning. In this section, everyone gathered near the lake, and watched the artist drink the water from the Fundudzi. With this highly symbolic act, Mudzunga defied the Singo's political hegemony and the harmony of the community based on the belief that only the spirits can bathe and drink from the lake. Therefore, as explained by Anitra Nettleton, if Mudzunga is working with tradition, he is also subverting it. He does not fit the traditionalist label, but neither does he fit the Western norms of art. (Nettleton 2006b, 77) During the "Personal Affects" exhibition in New York, (figs. 3 and 4) he re-enacted his performance in the Saint John Cathedral but only with the help of his wife.

In this performance, Mudzunga exploited notions of art understood by the curators and writers of the exhibition (Nettleton 2006b, 72) while claiming a political position, and used tradition to have both an African 'authenticity' for the art world – for which the performance did

not have a specific significance other than to be 'African' – and a particular interest for his own community. Accounts of Mudzunga's work in the exhibition catalogue and Faye Hirsch's exhibition review[29] were evidence that the performance was not comprehended in its totality. As Nettleton points out, the exhibition was constructed around the notions of identity and performance and ritualized actions. (Nettleton 2006b, 72) Therefore, without an insightful and detailed account of Venda history and Mudzunga's political struggle, his work was merely understood in terms of ritualized action (without the subversion of tradition) and performance, understood in Western terms. Indeed, Hirsch's account of Mudzunga's performance was very concise and does not mention the artist's political statement, focusing instead on the artist's rebirth from the drum as a metaphor for his liberation from prison. (Hirsch 2005, 69) In the exhibition catalogue, Steven Nelson briefly accounted for the artist's work in these words:

> Samson Mudzunga's drums are larger parts of performances, entitled *Suka Africa Fundudzi,* that explore artistic freedom and […] are steeped in understanding the transformative qualities of ritual. In each of the two drums Mudzunga carved, he enacted a performance in which he us put into the drum under lock and key. While musicians play and people dance, Mudzunga emerges from the drum free of his chains and dressed in different clothes. With its metaphors of baptism and rebirth, Mudzunga's performance points to his artistic transformation as well as his artistic (and literal) freedom. (Nelson 2004, 15)

Here again the focus was on the artist's liberation from prison. Of course Mudzunga was invoking his release as part of his performance, but he was also very nebulous about the meaning of his performance, for example in his interview for the exhibition catalogue, (Brodie et al, 2004a, 100-105) as if only the most interested and devoted audience could unveil the meaning of his work. The result, and maybe that is Mudzunga's desire, was that the performance was understood only in artistic terms, as metaphorical, even conceptual, and overlooked in its local

[29] Very few exhibition reviews have been written for "Personal Affects.". They include Elizabeth Corr's in African art (see Corr 2005, 8) Claire Daigle's (see Daigle 2005, 77-78) and Victoria Rovine (see Rovine 2004, 48-55; 94-95) who do not mention Samson Mudzunga. Hirsch's review is the most extensive account of the exhibition.

significance. The complexity of his work was flattened to fit a certain idea of a strangely obscure ritualized action, one largely conveyed also by the artist himself and that allows him to enter the gates of the high art world. This was enhanced by the display of his drum at the Museum for African Art. Standing on a pedestal alongside a recording of his Dopleni performance (displayed on a monitor) the drum was surrounded by the photographs from Berni Searle's *In the Light of I – IV* (2004). (fig. 5) The visual link between Mudzunga and Searle's works proposed by the curators stood rather uneasily. If both works addressed the notion of performance and ritualized action, whether it was the drum, exposed as a piece of Mudzunga's performance, or the bare feet in Searle's photographs as the body in action, they had no other conceptual links between them. The result was a simplistic reading of the notion of ritualized action in the South African context, with no subtleties of understanding of the differences between Mudzunga and Searle's working contexts. Moreover, the visual association of the fire and the bare feet in the photographs with Mudzunga's drum was ambiguous, as was the lower position of the latter, barely raised from the floor, that somehow presented Mudzunga's work in a primitive light.

In the end, outcome of "Personal Affects" was an understanding of South African art in very limited terms conveyed by a narrow group of artists that correspond to what the international art world appreciates as art. Artists such as Steven Cohen, Churchill Madikida and others nuanced the concept of identity by embodying a White population that was trying to reconfigure itself in a post-apartheid era and a diverse Black population that defined itself outside its communities and traditional legacies. But it can be argued that the social and living conditions represented by their affiliations with international art contradicted the curatorial premises of the exhibition by containing the debate within a specific elite group. To present South African international art is not in question here, but it became problematic when it was

associated with the country's post-apartheid identity and was foregrounded as a representative of the nation's artistic scene, particularly in an international setting such as the Museum for African Art. The predominance of international contemporary art undermined the role of crafts and traditional arts in the changing notion of identity in South Africa and overlooks their importance as diverse cultural productions that have, as demonstrated in this thesis, their place in any understanding of South African contemporary art.

Conclusion

"Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art" exhibited at the Museum for African Art in 2004-2005 had a mission to present the complexity of life in the country a decade after the end of apartheid. Displaying less known artists from both South Africa and its diaspora with a special focus on personal experiences and identity, the exhibition can be considered successful as it displayed a wide range of contemporary artists and artworks, presenting both White and Black artists from various religious backgrounds working with medium such as performance, video, sculpture, painting, dance, installation and drawing. In this thesis, I aimed at demonstrating that this selection of artists, although varied in many ways, was conversely very homogenous as it only displayed works fitting a Western definition of contemporary art, and therefore constructed a narrow understanding of identity in the country by leaving outside the debate other South African identities expressed through non-Western based art practices.

I argued that the exhibition was the result of two simultaneous forces regarding the South African context: what I called the local artistic elite – composed mainly by Whites artists,

curators and gallery owners, but also by university-trained and urban-based Black artists – reaching the international art scene by promulgating a contemporary art fitting the Western criteria of autonomy, originality, uniqueness and individuality among others, and the North American context brought about by the Museum for African Art in New York, rooted in a Western artistic framework that dominates the art scene on a global perspective. Far from the preoccupations of the 1980s in South Africa, when the hope of the end of apartheid united curators and artists in the quest for a more representative and inclusive artistic canon that would characterize the new 'rainbow nation,' "Personal Affects" presented a selected group of artists perfectly fitting the expectations of the art world, overlooking other contemporary practices of craft and traditional artists.

The display of traditional and craft practices from Africa in general has a long history of unsuccessful and controversial exhibitions in the West. I have tried to argue, however, that those undertakings have failed primarily because they were embedded in a Western classification of art that divided high art from the more cultural and religious based practices of certain artists, resulting in the systematic devaluation of craft and traditional art as representing the so-called authentic and ahistorical African art from socially excluded groups of people. It is therefore my belief that by transforming the very concept of art, and by thinking about contemporary art as a temporal framework rather than a conceptual one, craft and traditional practices could be part of contemporary art exhibitions, not as the exotic Other or the 'authentic' African, but as a proper component of what constitutes the very concept of art. My position aligns itself to the theoretical framework proposed by world art studies, which seeks to look at art globally, at every age of humanity and with as many disciplines as needed. If we are to look at art globally, we need an artistic platform that goes beyond the dominating international art scene that nourishes itself with

conceptually based practices. To be truly global, art needs to be thought of more broadly, by including non-Western interpretations of its definition, even though they sometimes challenge its autonomy. Ultimately, if making art is a universal behaviour, its autonomous and conceptual characteristics are mostly coming from a Western perspective.

The Museum for African Art is a major platform for the representation of African art in North America. Since 2013 it has transformed itself into the Africa Center, and broadened its mandate to build economic and business relationships between the United States and the African continent, affirming its position as one of the leading institutions for African art in the country. It has in the past created ambitious and successful exhibitions that have become reference points in the study of African art, such as “Art/Artifacts: African Art in Anthropology Collections” (1988) and “Africa Explores: Twentieth Century African Art” (1991). To inaugurate its new building, the institution was planning to display a mega-exhibition “New Premises: Three Decades of Exhibitions at the Museum for African Art” that would “suggests commonalities between artworks new and old, canonical and non-canonical, questioning the existence of an impermeable boundary between contemporary and traditional African art” by including objects from its own collection and from past exhibitions. (Artdaily 2010, n.d) The exhibition, however, has been postponed along with the opening of the new facilities for financial reasons,[30] and the official opening of the Center remains uncertain. It is hoped that the Museum will continue to reflect on the Western artistic hierarchy as it did with some of its past exhibitions, and find new and alternative ways to include craft and traditional practices in the still very exclusive category of African contemporary art.

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[30] From a personal communication with the institution in 2014.

FIGURES

Fig. 1: Claudette Schreuders, *The Free Girl*, 2004.
Jacanda wood, enamel paint, 123cm high.
Religious Life Bay, Cathedral of St John the Divine, 2004.

© Museum for African Art, New York, and Spier, Cape Town, 2004. From exhibition catalogue Personal Affects, Vol. II. Photographer: Mario Todeschini.

Fig. 2: Churchill Madikida, *Skeletons in my Closet*, 2004.
Digital video, installed with found objects. Duration: 2 min 2 sec.
North Ambulatory, Cathedral of St John the Divine, 2004.

© Museum for African Art, New York, and Spier, Cape Town, 2004. From exhibition catalogue Personal Affects, Vol. II. Photographer: Mario Todeschini.

Fig. 3 and 4: Samson Mudzunga, *Suka Africa Fundudzi*, 2004.
Performance with drum: wood, enamel paint, animal hide; drum: 150 x 300 x 100 cm.
Museum for African Art, 2004.

© Museum for African Art, New York, and Spier, Cape Town, 2004. From exhibition catalogue Personal Affects, Vol. II. Photographer: Mario Todeschini.

Fig. 5: Samson Mudzunga, *Suka Africa Fundudzi*, 2004.
wood, enamel paint, animal hide, video by John Hodgkiss; drum: 150 x 300 x 100 cm.
Museum for African Art, 2004.

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Fig. 6: Johannes Phokela, *Apotheosis*, 2004.
Oil on canvas, 270 x 214 cm.
The Crossing Cathedral of St John the Divine, 2004.

© Museum for African Art, New York, and Spier, Cape Town, 2004. From exhibition catalogue Personal Affects, Vol. II. Photographer: Mario Todeschini.

Fig. 7: Johannes Phokela, *Apotheosis*, 2004.
Oil on canvas, 270 x 214 cm.
The Crossing Cathedral of St John the Divine, 2004.

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Fig. 8: Johannes Phokela, *Fall of the Damned,* 1993, diptych.
Left-hand: oil on canvas, right-hand: canvas, rabbit skin glue, cotton twine, enamel paint, 287.5 x 233.5 x 4 cm each.
Museum for African Art, 2004.

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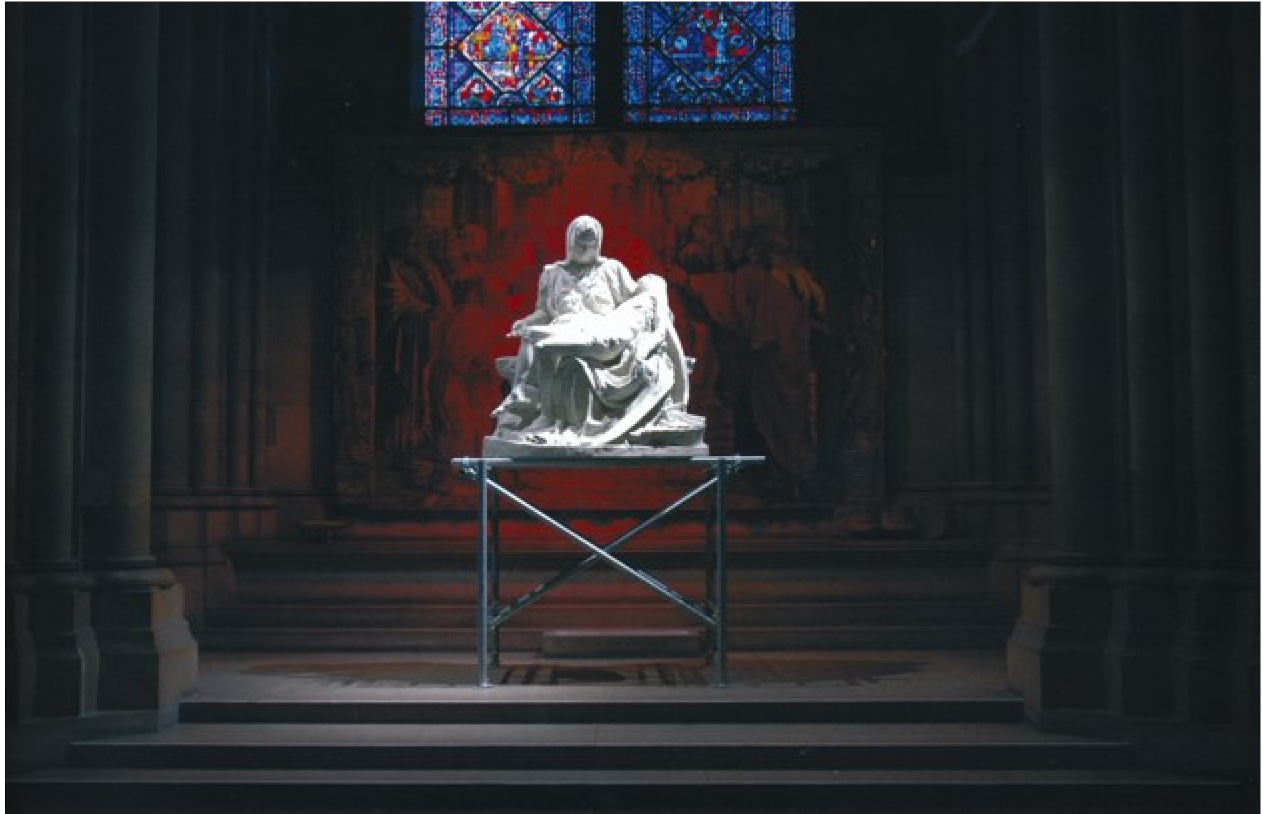

Fig. 9: Wim Botha, *Mieliepap Pietà (Maize Meal Pietà)*, 2004.
Maize meal and resin, dimensions identical to Michelangelo's Pietà: 174 cm height, 195 cm width at the base.
Press Bay, Cathedral of St John the Divine, 2004.

© Museum for African Art, New York, and Spier, Cape Town, 2004. From exhibition catalogue Personal Affects, Vol. II. Photographer: Mario Todeschini.

Fig. 10: Wim Botha, *Mieliepap Pietà (Maize Meal Pietà)*, 2004.
Maize meal and resin, dimensions identical to Michelangelo's Pietà: 174 cm height, 195 cm width at the base.
Press Bay, Cathedral of St John the Divine, 2004.

© Museum for African Art, New York, and Spier, Cape Town, 2004. From exhibition catalogue Personal Affects, Vol. II. Photographer: Mario Todeschini.

Fig. 11: Jane Alexander, *The Sacrifices of God are a Troubled Spirit*, 2002-2004.
Mixed media installation including Hobbled ruminant with rider, Harbinger with protective boots, Bird, Small beast, Guardian, Bat-eared doll riding a bat-eared fox wearing a black-backed jackal skin, and Lamb with stolen boots.
All Souls Bay, Cathedral of St John the Divine, 2004.

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