

Participatory Pedagogies: The African Institute of Art (AIA)

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by Steven Sack

Author's note: This is a personal account of the establishment of the African Institute of Art. As a lecturer at the time in the Art History and Fine Art Department at the University of South Africa (UNISA) from 1984, I spent time in the early years of the AIA as the first director and later a board member. This article is an attempt to describe the conditions that enabled the AIA to develop, thrive, and ultimately collapse.

The personal and the political

During the 1970s and 1980s there was an emergence of symbiotic relationships that made it possible to begin to imagine a non-racial South Africa. [1] Individuals and organisations used music, theatre, art, dance and literature to establish spaces in the cracks of apartheid that were accessible to all; in this way, social norms associated with apartheid were gradually upended and overturned. This involved interaction between art centres, universities and *"the world of activism"*. [2] It also involved the complex negotiation of a coming together of black and white protagonists in the context of a desperately unequal environment.

The notion that 'the personal and the political are one', a key idea in emerging feminist discourse, was applied to the unfolding struggle to reconcile individual 'white experience' and the liberal and radical responses that were available in the particular context of Johannesburg. There were restrictions placed on the formation of progressive social movements and voluntary associations. People working for trade union organisations were banned and placed under house arrest. At the personal level, great risks were attached to getting involved in organised political activities. But as a young graduate from art school, I felt an unease about being in a studio and trying to represent, through my art, the social and political conditions of the times. One of the avenues for a person (privileged by the apartheid context) who wanted to play a more politically active role, was to get involved in education. Artists who gravitated towards art education were inspired by the writings of Paulo Freire, and began to experiment with participative and cooperative methodologies.

On one level, Johannesburg offered new possibilities, a hive of different and intersecting art projects across all genres, with white art graduates seeking out black artists and organisations with whom to collaborate. The formation of community-based art education projects involved the coming together of individuals who would each take on multiple roles: artist, teacher, organiser, activist, visionary – a description best applied to Bill Ainslie. This entailed learning how to work together with very limited resources, developing democratic methods of organising, and teaching across racial, class and gender divides. Conflicts would inevitably arise, fueled by racial mistrust, personality clashes, competition for resources and differing

opinions on the role, purpose and content of art. This emerging community was furthermore confronted by particular kinds of black hardship produced by apartheid. There were increasing levels of police violence against the black opposition, including the deployment of the army across townships to quell black resistance under the State of Emergency, between 1985 and 1989.

However, despite these conditions, there were multiple ways in which black artists began to gain access to training, education, studios, galleries and markets.

The AIA operated in an Art Education Context. Johannesburg 1970 - 80s

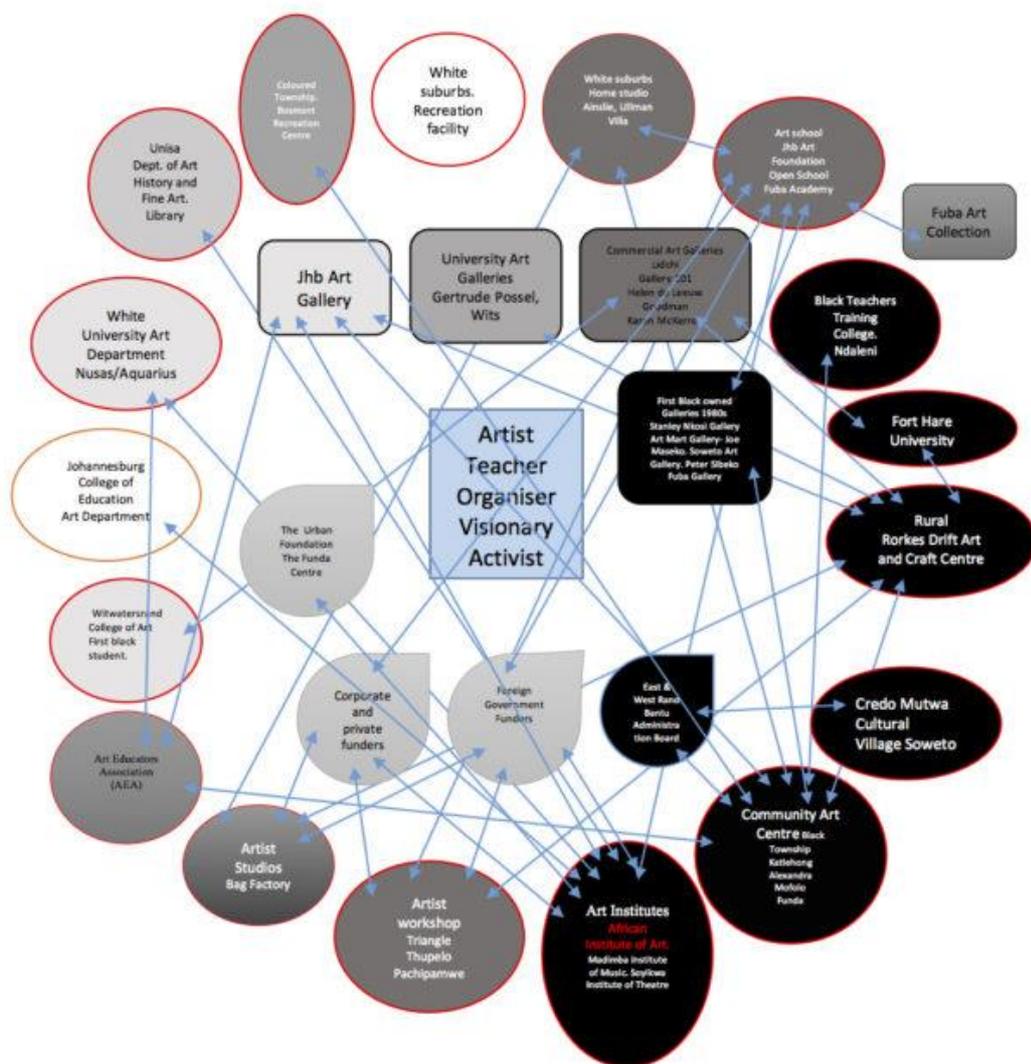


Illustration 1. Chart. Mapping the Art Institutional Landscape in the 1980s

This chart is a visual representation and a mapping of the key institutions that existed and were being established in the 1980s. The AIA was one element within

this larger landscape. The use of a grey scale in this chart is intended to illustrate graphically the transformation that was taking place. Black, white and grey symbols illustrate the extent to which state institutions were beginning to reform and enable access to the very first black artists into those white institutions. The apartheid system was being challenged at every level through the inclusion of black students and artists in spaces that had not previously existed, or which were previously racially segregated. The museums began to reappraise their racial policies. Progressive art teachers, some using the Johannesburg Art Gallery as a base, began to organise, train, and share their resources with teachers and artists in the townships.

Writing in the 1980s, this is how I characterised those times:

“In terms of some of the more recent ‘refinements’ of apartheid policy, with the so-called new dispensation and the tri-cameral Parliament, art was defined as an ‘own affair’, meaning that the different ethnic groups were required by law to develop culture in racially segregated institutions and with varying degrees of state support or restriction. In this way, culture is carefully monitored and made available selectively so as to prevent the ‘conscientisation’ of the masses... [3] Cultural venues are controlled so as to prevent the free flow of cultural ideas and to monitor the accessibility of liberatory visual ideology. [4]

In 1984 the apartheid government, after holding an all-white referendum, introduced a new constitution ostensibly enabling each ‘community’ to deal with its own political affairs. Three houses of parliament came into being, segregated along racial lines. Whites were represented by the House of Assembly, ‘coloureds’ by the House of Representatives, and Asians and Indians, by the House of Delegates. This new constitutional arrangement was based on the premise that black people lived in separate homelands. The policy was that ‘own affairs’ were to be defined as laws and policies which specially related to a particular population group in relation to the maintenance of its identity and the ‘promotion and support’ of its ‘way of life’, culture, traditions, and customs.

Black South Africans would have no access to the political system and would not be represented in parliament. They would only be able to exercise political rights in the ethnically prescribed ‘homelands’ and only be allowed a limited governing role in township councils. This led to campaigns of political resistance, opposition to black local councils and the banning of black political opposition. Virtually all black cultural, political and trade union organisations were banned. And yet these campaigns were an unprecedented rehearsal for the national liberation that would arrive a decade later. Artists found spaces in which to begin to transform their lives.

Some of the earliest precursors to the community art centres emerged out of the efforts of township-based, black artists. The Katlehong Arts Centre, or KAC, was founded in 1969 by six Katlehong-based artists – including Stanley Nkosi, Lucas Sithole, Napo Mokoena and Morningstar Motaung – who comprised the Katlehong Arts Society. Following the student uprisings of 1976, this group succeeded in persuading the East Rand Bantu Administration Board (ERAB), to provide the financial support to establish an art centre, which is still active to this day. [5]

The conditions that emerged in art centres in Johannesburg were very different to those arising in Cape Town, Durban, or Rorke's Drift. This article will situate the AIA in the particular physical and intellectual conditions of 1970s and 1980s Johannesburg.

From the Johannesburg Art Foundation (JAF), to the African Institute of Art (AIA), to the Funda Centre

From the 1970s, a number of art students from Wits University, including myself, gravitated to Bill Ainslie's studios in the leafy and affluent suburb of Saxonwold. This was where one could meet black artists and find occasional employment as an art teacher. One would find Dumile Feni, David Koloane, Kagiso Pat Mautloa, Bongzi Dhlomo, Anthony Nkosi, Dumisani Mabaso, Magkabo Helen Sebidi, Durant Sihlali, and others – many of them graduates of the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre.

In practice, traveling to the white suburbs to get an art education was unsustainable for black artists and students, hence it was imperative to locate new resources in the city center and in the townships. As these activities moved to the townships, the concept of the community art centre took root. The notion of the 'art centre', growing out of an individual initiative, was a phenomenon of the suburbs, while 'community art centres' – in townships – were premised on community ownership and geared towards fulfillment of their communities' needs.

As these initiatives developed, they became facilities which were supported, to a limited degree, by both the state and the private sector. The East Rand Administrative Board (ERAB), the authority in charge of managing the East Rand black townships, was prevailed upon to provide salaries, equipment, and refurbished buildings for the KAT. Napo Mokoena describes the beginnings of this relationship: *"The first co-ordinator was Maribe Mamabolo who was recruited from Rorke's Drift. The agreement was that ERAB would be hands-off, but the municipality wanted to be involved and maintain oversight 'to ensure it was run properly'", he says. "Members of the society who founded KAC were not paid, but full-time staff with certain responsibilities were paid. In the municipality's personnel management system, there were no posts for art trainers, so KAC teaching staff were employed as cleaners, drivers and labourers."* [6] This pragmatic acceptance of support from the apartheid state administration boards were one of the ways that artists created opportunities to pursue their artistic ambitions.

In developing the curriculum model and teaching approaches, the earliest inspiration came from the Rorke's Drift graduates and from some who had attended the Mxilikasi Centre in Bulawayo – producing a mix of art and craft activities. KAC 'fetched' artists from Rorke's Drift to undertake the training programme. Artists such as Ephraim Ziqubu, Bhekisane Manyoni and Gladys Xaba were brought to the centre to work as teachers. *"In those days we did a lot of training", says Mokoena. "We had a loose, or ad hoc, training programme... The centre had links with local schools and learners would come to the centre after-school for a few hours for an arts programme."* [7]

In contrast to the idea of training, there was an emerging practice of 'teaching by example', or 'participatory pedagogies'. At the Johannesburg Art Foundation, for

example, teachers negotiated the challenge of teaching black students with a background in bantu education. Their response was to break down the hierarchy associated with teacher/ student and to find participatory methods for making and learning processes in the context of a collective studio practice. Artists' workshops, a hub of studios, and education using these experimental methods would be critical in realising this vision. An early example of this evolving practice in Johannesburg had emerged out of Ainslie and Koloane's participation in The Triangle Network workshop in upstate New York, during the summer of 1982. This space *"allowed artists to experiment and focus on process rather than product.... artists would learn by being around each other, sharing skills, discussing techniques, and debating each other's work and practices. Furthermore, the informal nature of the workshop meant that artists could organise the project without relying on museum, academic or commercial infrastructure and any agendas or restrictions that these might impose. With such an ideal framework for the context of South Africa at the time, Ainslie and Koloane started Thupelo – the first Triangle workshop in Johannesburg – in 1985."* [8] Other collaborative, not-for-profit artists' workshops followed, their names expressing their African identity: *Pachipamwe* (Zimbabwe), 'where we all come together', *Thupelo* (South Africa), 'to teach by example', *Thapong* (Botswana), a place in Botswana famous for its association with the Medu Art Ensemble.

But these alone could not sustain artists, and hence there was an increasing need for other forms of art education in black communities. There was a growing imperative for artists to become qualified teachers. This would set the stage for the next site of struggle, which was concerned with opening access to universities.

The struggle to access Universities leading to the African Institute of Art.

The story of black artists wanting to study fine art in a university is exemplified by the unsuccessful attempt by John Muafangejo, who had been a student at Rorke's Drift, to register for the degree at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Discussing the graphic print by Muafangejo which memorialises this event, Warren Siebrits describes the following: *"In 1971, John Muafangejo applied to study at the Michaelis School of Art at the University of Cape Town. He was interviewed and rejected (later he was accepted by Rorke's Drift as artist-in-residence). He did, however, record the event in the form of a linocut titled 'An interview of Cape Town University in 1971'."* [9]



John Muafangejo, *An Interview of Cape Town University*, 1971. linocut, 41 x 56.5 cm.

One has to wonder why he was given an interview. The UCT committee must have thought it was possible for Muafangejo to attend the university if they made the offer. He ended up having to return to Rorke's Drift, where he was, no doubt, a very frustrated 'guest artist'. Rorke's Drift had provided artists the space for remarkable flowering of their talents. It should have been possible for one of their very best students to gain access to new opportunities. Muafangejo's rejection must have also dashed the hopes of those who established the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre, who would have hoped that their graduates could have gained access to further levels of training to develop their skills. This decision was taken to mean that no other black artists could possibly think about applying to UCT. It also meant that art education for black artists could and would only take place in independent spaces, under precarious conditions, or in the emerging black universities and teacher training colleges.

The African Institute of Art

It would take more than a decade for these conditions to begin to change and for the doors of white institutions to begin to open and enable black artists to access tertiary academic art education. The African Institute of Art (AIA), trying to learn from the successes and failures of already-tested methods, and in response to the interaction and approaches of the Johannesburg Art Foundation, Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA), Katlehong Art Centre and the Alex Art Centre, developed a very particular mandate: to provide academically certified degrees for black artists.

Sandy Burnett (Summerfield), who was central to the establishment of the AIA, remembers its early history thus: *“The story of AIA starts with FUBA.... I was working for FUBA as program director responsible for the FUBA Collection. This entailed the importation of a significant collection of artworks donated by leading international artists as a gesture of solidarity with black artists under the apartheid regime (organized by Robert Loder and Anthony Caro). The intention was to provide a focus on the need for funding for black artists, as well as inspiration and education. To get the greatest impact I managed a high profile tour (five major South African cities) and mostly located the exhibition in non-traditional venues with greater access to the black community.”* [10]

But Burnett became disappointed with the direction being undertaken by FUBA. She recalls that whilst she felt a commitment to the mission and purpose of FUBA, she felt that there was a lack of commitment on their part to fine art teaching. She began research into the viability of establishing a separate institution that would eventually be called The African Institute of Art. Burnett describes how she found a group of influential business and community-based individuals who agreed to become members of the board of the AIA: *“One of the first steps was to create a viable and influential board. Wilby Baqwa was a respected black businessman (he was Industrial Relations Consultant for Barlow Rand) on the FUBA board. He supported what I was advocating for and decided to join me in the effort.”* [11] The board also included Leah Tutu, Emma Mashinini and a young lawyer, Miranda Barker, who would shepherd the organisation through matters of legal compliance. *“I remember spending time with Es’kia Mphahlele and driving him to potential buildings,”* recalls Burnett. *“The original documents record Wilby and I as the official founders. I remember when it came up at an early board meeting, and they all turned to me and said, “well Sandra would be the founder”. However I really wanted to honour Wilby, because if he hadn’t agreed to split off from FUBA and back my vision, none of what followed would have happened. So it was agreed that the registration would reflect both of us.”* [12] (Sometime later, Wilby Baqwa, in 1989, became the first black board member of the Market Theatre.)

The intention, described by Burnett, was to go beyond what was taking place at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, other community art centres and FUBA, by developing a partnership with a university: *“I was concerned that a level of rigor and credibility was given to the students who would place their futures in the hands of AIA. I had approached WITS to try and establish some kind of collaboration, but to no avail. I also approached UNISA – which as a long distance learning institution seemed an easier fit. They were receptive and I remember conversations with you [Steven Sack]. Having the opportunity for students to get some credentials was critical in my view, given the challenge.”* [13]

About two decades earlier, in 1965, when Professor Walter Battiss was appointed Professor of Fine Art at UNISA, he must have been deeply conscious of the fact that his students could only be white. He visited the Rorke’s Drift Art and Craft Centre in 1974, as attested to by a photograph of him on the occasion of this visit. (Remarkably, in this photograph, Charles Sokhaya Nkosi appears at the back, guitar in hand. He would come to be a critical protagonist and leader in the unfolding thirty year story of the AIA at Funda).



Rorke's Drift class of 1975 fine art students, 1974, Otto Lundbohm (back row, left), Charles Nkosi (back row, third from left, with guitar), and guest lecturer and artist Walter Battiss (far left, front row), outside printmaking studio, Photograph © 2011 by Malin Sellmann.

By the time I was teaching in the Fine Art and Art History Department in the 1980s, black students were beginning to enroll for the Bachelor of Fine Art degree at UNISA. However, working in a distance-education programme, it was presumed that the students had access to studios, equipment and materials, and to a post office from which to post their assignments. There were annual student contact visits by the lecturers; I recall going to conduct a workshop in what was then South West Africa (now Namibia). It was facilitated and hosted by a local institution called the Academia, which was affiliated to UNISA. It did not allow black students onto the property.

The idea discussed with Sandy Burnett then, was that the way to achieve the objective of the AIA was to provide academic training by forging a partnership with UNISA. This way the students could achieve their degrees, while the AIA provided tuition, equipment and space. This led to discussions with Matsemela Manaka, who in 1984, was just embarking on a new ambitious partnership with the Urban Foundation and the newly-built Funda Centre in Soweto. Despite the fact that Funda Centre was not Burnett's first choice, all other options failed to materialise: *"During 1983 and 1984 I was trying to get a premises close to the downtown Johannesburg area – better to facilitate interracial interactions amongst artists (it would take the Bag Factory and some 8 years later to achieve that). First, I wanted to use a section of the power station complex in Newtown – that didn't work. Then I spent so much time trying to get a huge mansion type building somewhere close to the east side of downtown Jeppe/ Fairview. It was empty and essentially abandoned but heavens forbid that it be used for a non-racial school!! I remember lobbying all over the place, newspaper articles, city representatives, even going door to door to get signatures from neighbours. All in vain."* [14]

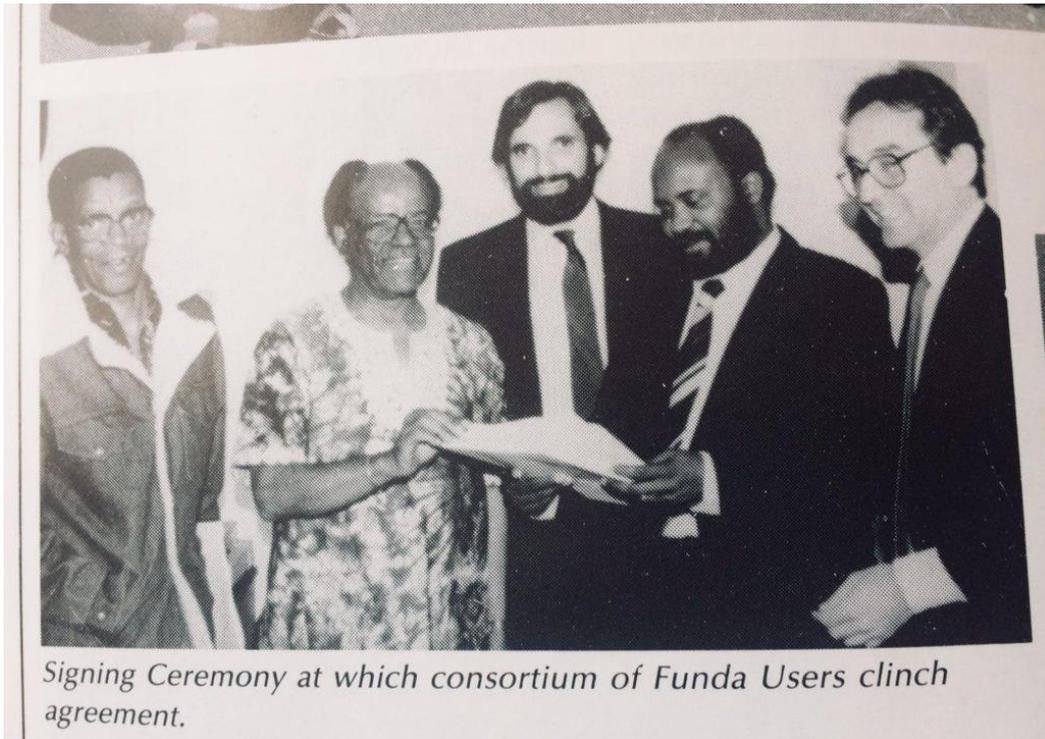
Having failed to find a space in the city, as *"it ended up being too controversial an idea to bring an arts centre focused on black artists into the downtown real estate"*,

Burnett turned to Manaka and the newly established Funda Centre, which was planned to include the arts. [15]

Funda Centre and the Urban Foundation

In an article titled *The Urban Foundation: Another Perspective*, the Executive Director Robin Lee describes how the Funda Centre would emerge in 1977 in an attempt to effect structural changes “*and not involve itself in political or party political issues*”. [16] Writing in 1982, on the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Urban Foundation (UF), Lee describes what he called the ‘creative tensions,’ between various elements of South African society and the need for actions that could be taken to address the improvement of the quality of life of black South Africans. The UF would seek to establish alliances with the newly forming democratic community movement and community leadership across South Africa. [17] “*For us the private sector certainly includes commerce and industry; but it also includes professional associations and individuals in private practice, voluntary associations of all kinds, trade unions, churches and individuals acting in their private capacity.... What is perhaps the central value represented by the Foundation, that is, the value of **voluntary** association. The Foundation is based on the assumption that valuable contributions to change can be made by a spectrum of groups formed by voluntary association and these groups represent a significant counterweight to the power of the ‘public sector’ — namely political government and state administrative structures.*” [18]

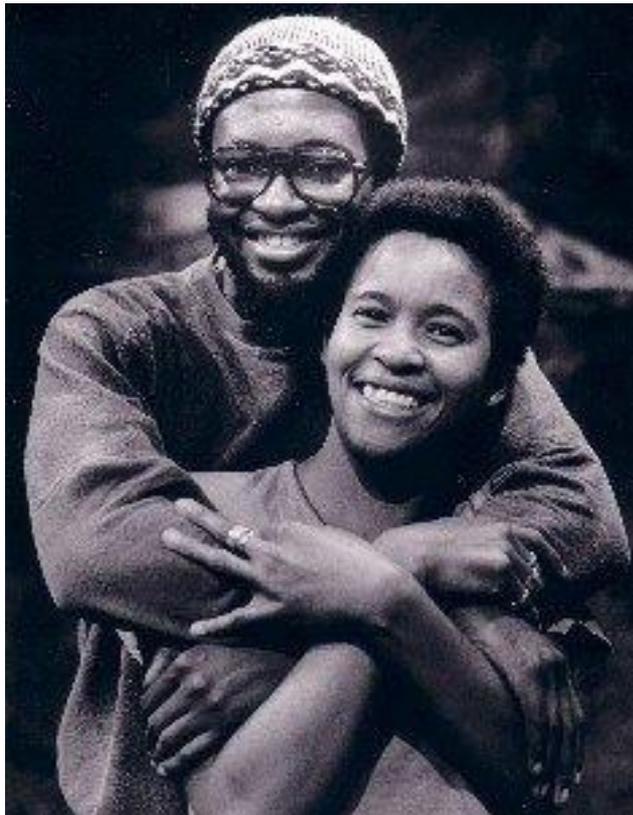
A major education initiative of the UF would be the Funda Centre, located on the eastern boundary of Soweto, near to Baragwanath Hospital, a new shopping centre and other community development facilities. Professor Es’kia Mphahlele was the founding Chairperson of the Funda board. In his keynote address at the official 1984 launch, he recognised the commitment made by the Urban Foundation to advance “*non-formal education, i.e. a variety of enrichment programmes that fall outside of the conventional school structures.*” [19] He said to the assembled audience of seven hundred people, “*The alternate facilities must boldly tackle the problem of art teacher training. Teachers, community workers, church leaders, youth group leaders and parents must be taught how to educate through art. There exists a desperate need, amongst Black youth, for an education that addresses them in a personal way that offers opportunities for self-expression and the development of sensory perception.*” [20] Mphahlele described a critical role for its ‘users’, stating that each organisation would have control over the programmes that they conducted. [21] In a later address at the 1986 Funda Forum, Mphahlele talked of the need for a new curriculum and the role that Funda could play in offering an alternative to state education in order to “*neutralise the hidden curriculum*”. [22] He talked about how black people, under Bantu Education and Christian National Education, had for too long endured an education for purposes not of their own choosing. Most significantly, for Mphahlele, this new approach at Funda would involve what he described as a humanistic learning environment, which must include art education. [23]



Es'kia Mphahlele with Funda Board members and funders.

In 1984 Matsemela Manaka started working with the Urban Foundation to help establish the art centre. Apart from the art centre, the Funda campus would include a teachers centre, a science centre, a library, a hall and a restaurant. Manaka was first allocated a very small building, but insisted on a larger one, which he got. The art centre was to contain within its limited space, the Soyikwa Institute of Theatre under Manaka, the Madimba Institute of Music, started by Motsumi Makhene, the Soweto branch of Afrapix, and the African Institute of Art. Within a matter of a year, a makeshift theatre was created, and small rooms were sound-insulated as practice rooms. There was also an active dance programme, started by Nomsa Manaka. Sibongile Khumalo was appointed as the first head of the art centre.

Establishing the AIA at Funda



Matsemela and Nomsa Manaka, Photo courtesy of Brandsouthafrica.com, Market Remembers Manaka, 17 March 2004.

Following a conversation between myself, Burnett and Manaka, it was decided that I would approach UNISA to continue to pay my salary whilst seconding me to become the first Director of the AIA at Funda, to which UNISA agreed. And so the UNISA Department of Fine Art and Art History formally became the means by which access to tertiary academic art training could be afforded to aspiring black art students in Soweto. The Department of Fine Art and Art History entered into an agreement with the AIA board, while the UNISA Library entered into an agreement with the Funda Library, which became a study centre for students. One of the advantages of studying through UNISA was that it made access to enrollment much

easier: there were special 'mature age exemption' criteria, and students with a minimal matriculation qualification could register to study.

My initial tasks as director involved reporting to the board on progress in accessing funding, engaging support staff, appointing tutors, finding bursaries for students, buying tools and machinery to equip the workshops, and acquiring art materials for the students and the guest artists.



Sibongile Khumalo

Sibongile Khumalo, Head of Funda Art Centre 1986.

The funding debates at the time were fractious. It was the start of the boycott and disinvestment campaigns. On one occasion Manaka travelled to meet with the Dutch anti-apartheid offices in Amsterdam, in order to solicit support. He

had to hide the AIA report as it showed that it had received financial aid from the Shell Oil Company, which had an active arts programme in South Africa. The

campaign to pressure Shell to disinvest from South Africa was a major project of the anti-apartheid activists in Holland. (In these debates, I recall Sipho Sepamla from FUBA saying, *“I will take dirty money from anyone and launder it”*.) After months of negotiations with CitiBank, an American Bank, for possible funding, they made the announcement that they too were disinvesting from South Africa. But a particularly important development was funding that was obtained as part of an initiative by the Funda Centre as a whole, from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This enabled the AIA to develop Khula Udweba, the teacher training programme, to which I will return below.

The AIA opens its doors

I was joined by Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, Rorke’s Drift alumni, who would oversee the studios and the practical teaching. Wits University graduates Michelle Jersky and Hazel Friedman were brought in to assist with teaching art history. Michael McIlraith, from the Johannesburg College of Education, set up the initial pilot study for Khula Udweba Art Teachers training programme. A printmaking and sculpture facility was established, and an outdoor work area for sculptors, paved. There were other rooms



on the campus that would be used for art history and art education classes. I recall approaching the contractors who were busy building roads into Soweto and they agreed to provide the concrete paving for an outside working space. Wilby Baqwa opened doors to companies within the Barlows group and thus paper, wood, steel and other materials were provided for free. We had a small printing press made for us, and with technical advice from the sculptor Ian Redlinghuys, Afrox equipped the sculpture studios with welding machines and cutting torches. These would enable Vincent Baloyi, a guest artist at the AIA, to produce the first steel public sculpture for Funda and Soweto.

Vincent Baloyi, alongside his ‘Zimbabwean Birds’ sculpture at Funda Centre,

Photograph courtesy of David Andrew.

From 1985 students began to arrive and enroll at Funda – starting with a recent matriculant, Sydney Selepe, who was followed by a Rorke’s Drift graduate, Avashoni Mainganye. Selepe describes the early years in an unpublished article: *“In 1986 there were 9 students registered for the BAFA Degree programme, 5 students in*

their second year and four in their first year." [24] When Tanki Mokele joined, said Mainganye in a telephone interview, *"he brought with him his amazing talent".* [25] Matsemela Manaka, Mainganye, Nhlanthla Arthur Xaba, Tanki Mokele and Sokhaya Nkosi provided inspiration and leadership. Because of the fact that Mainganye only spoke VaVenda and English, the common language in the studios was English. He writes: *"We could discuss anything from art to politics, openly in the passage... one could easily bump into Professor Mphahlele and the likes and that was very inspiring."*[26]

Avhashoni Mainganye recalls how, in contrast to his experience at rural Rorke's Drift, Funda Centre was always busy, *"a hive of activities of different artforms".* [27] The programme included practical courses in drawing, painting, sculpture and printmaking. Mainganye shared his skills learnt at Rorke's Drift, introducing printmaking to the other students. There was a strong emphasis on watercolour, and the students invited members of the Watercolour Society to offer courses. Mainganye writes: *"The late Eduardo Villa, Ulrich Schwenecke and Afrox personnel were invited to share their experiences with us... [as was] Theo Gerber, the surrealist painter whose 'mystic technique' changed me completely."* [28] Students were taught techniques and methods of mural painting and were commissioned to paint murals on the walls across and beyond the campus. There was an annual student exhibition hosted in the hall, and some of the students began to sell works.



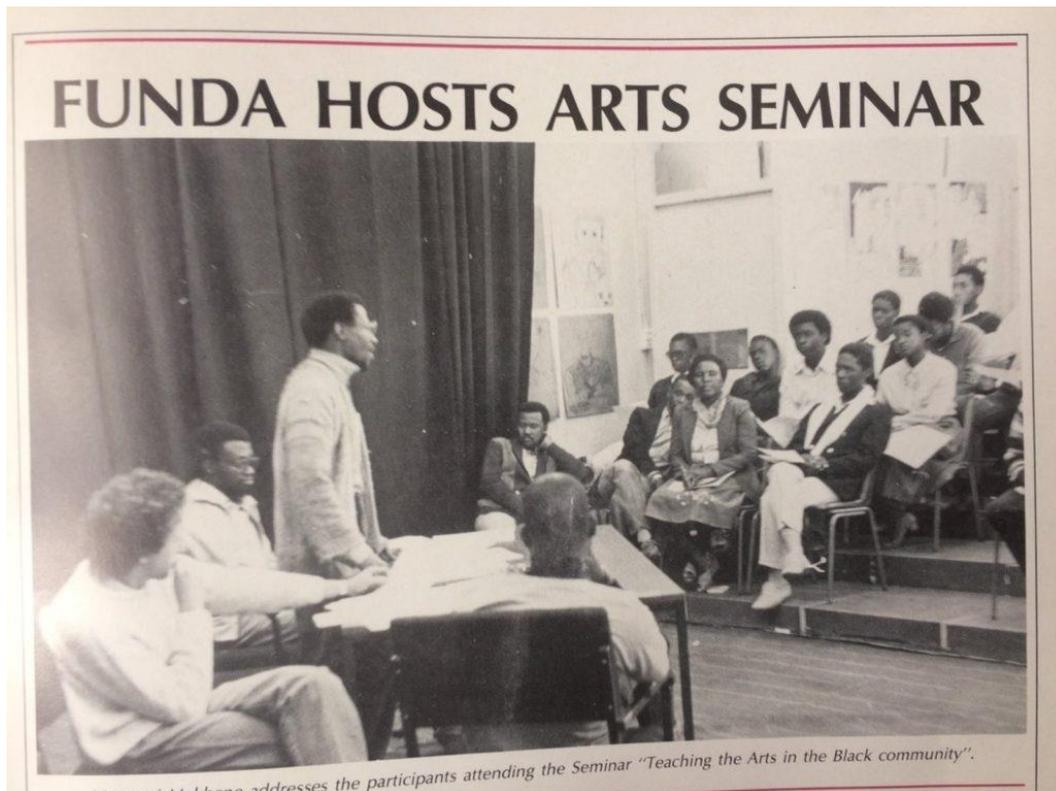
The prefab at Funda Art Centre, 2017, Photograph courtesy of Mduduzi Ndzingi, (Sowetan Live).

Mainganye became the official photographer. *"I used to sleep in the darkroom, developing and printing pictures."* His interest in photography led him to document the dance and the drama students in rehearsal and recalled how *"Matsemela was like a big brother and he introduced me to other art-forms; and I could feel myself being a part of the dance and the drama."* [29]

The UNISA Art History course followed a eurocentric, 'traditional' approach, where the story of art was told as a series of unfolding art styles and movements beginning in Egypt, Greece and Rome and culminating in European art from the Renaissance to Modernism. About the programme, Selepe writes: *"The course material was not only Eurocentric, it also made assumptions about class, environment and used approaches that were inappropriate for the students from the townships."* [30] In 1983, the UNISA department had removed *Primitive and Prehistoric Art* entirely from the syllabus. This meant that the history of 'Bushmen' – Khoisan – art (enormously influential to the founder of the Department, Walter Battiss) had been removed from the syllabus. This was partly to do with the offensive nature of terms such as 'primitive' and 'prehistoric' to refer to art from Africa. This kind of terminology emerges from the history of literature about and collections of 'primitive art' in Europe and America. In South Africa, writing and research on the subject has been primarily produced by archaeologists and anthropologists, rather than by art historians. Lize van Robbroeck describes the period: *"The concept of 'the primitive' points to one of the key assumptions that underpinned Western knowledge of this era – the notion that although fundamental human nature was the same everywhere, some cultures were more advanced than others... In particular, certain theories of race and culture that formed the intellectual foundation and justification for the system of separate development in South Africa were drawn from the academic discipline of anthropology. It is no coincidence, therefore, that some of the most influential writings about modern 'black art' of the apartheid era were produced by anthropologists."* [31]

But debates among the Funda Arts Centre community were vigorous. In an Arts Seminar held at the Centre in 1985, under the auspices of the African Institute of Art, Soyikwa and Madimba,

"a debate arose as to the value and purpose of hanging an African mask or any other traditional object, on the wall of one's living room. It was argued that the intrinsic meaning and function of such an object would be completely undermined. Art, it was argued, in traditional society, was a vital, living activity that was integrated within the mainstream of the community. It was felt that the hanging of artworks on the walls of one's house, was really a kind of superficial showmanship intended to elevate one's intellectual status. It is undoubtedly true that art's explicit function changes continually – traditional people did not hang masks on their walls as decoration – these masks constituted a vital part in performed rituals. But this fact does not prevent us in the 1980s from obtaining a different kind of emotive and intellectual experience from the mask. Other participants in this discussion argued that the act of displaying an artwork and in particular a traditional image, in one's home, is in fact an extremely important form of cultural identification: an affirmation in which one is recognising the importance of such images or relics and furthermore giving them a worth and value usually given to objects and images derived from the Western tradition". [32]



Steven Sack, Matsemela Manaka and Motsumi Makhene (from left) attending a seminar in the Art Centre, Photograph courtesy of 'Funda Community College' Facebook page, posted January 9 2020.

The average UNISA fine art student registered for two courses per annum, studying on a part-time basis, while the students at Funda, who were studying full-time, were registered for four courses. It became clear that they were overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of work. Most of the students did not complete the degree course. Selepe writes: *"At the end of the first ten years of the AIA the BAFA course did not produce a great outpouring of university graduates. Sydney Selepe was the first student to graduate in the BAFA degree programme in 1991."* [33] Selepe was later employed to head the Funda Art Centre, when Funda became the Funda Community College. The other student who managed to complete the degree was a school teacher, Ms Thuli Bhengu, who also graduated with a BAFA degree – for which she was miserably persecuted by her jealous headmaster. [34]

The Khula Udweba Programme

One of the great successes, and indeed legacies, of the AIA programme was the Khula Udweba Teachers Training Programme. Lindy Solomon, a recent graduate with a Higher Education Diploma from UCT, was employed to lead this new programme. A group of twelve participants, from township and rural backgrounds in 'bantu education' and in Christian National Education, embarked on what would become a hugely catalytic project for art education, not only at Funda and regionally, but nationally too, through the publication of a book. The group was exposed to alternative pedagogies and experiments with participatory methodologies, and in some cases, were offered a variety of new opportunities to make or teach art.

In a recent telephone interview, Solomon recalls that these participatory and collaborative methods had not come from her lecturers at UCT, but emerged from her previous experience of workshops and readings of Paulo Freire, run by the students themselves. Participatory methods would challenge the 'hidden curriculum', alluded to by Mphahlele at the opening of Funda. Solomon describes how her method of questioning confused some participants at first, leading them to conclude that because Solomon was "very young", she herself didn't know the answers. They thought that she was looking for guidance from these teacher trainees, who were mostly older than she was. But they soon came to understand their position as active agents, participating in the construction of this new dialectical pedagogy. Working in a "spirit of non-judgement", Solomon recalls, "it was an appropriate method for those times....and was well-received. People felt very empowered." [35]

The participatory method extended to broader conversations with those on the Funda campus who were espousing Black Consciousness. "Funda was quite a hotbed of black consciousness thinkers and intellectuals," says Solomon; she herself was witness to these discussions, which fed back into the project. [36]

These trainee teachers experienced a unique two-year process. Solomon described how "the art had transformed them, and given them agency in their own lives....to think on their feet, and to live in very difficult conditions creatively." People who graduated from the course "spoke about ...how they felt healed through the artmaking projects." Solomon came to understand the extraordinary power of this emerging method. The participants developed their own art-teaching projects "and they were very successful... sometimes in centres but mostly from their backyards". [37]

Sydney Selepe recalls: "In 1990 Sydney Selepe and Tanki Mokhele took over the Khula Udweba course. Together they ran training workshops for teachers, in rural and peri-urban areas,... working with a number of developmental programmes (World Vision, Various youth organisations, and the Itsidu project in Limpopo). Most of the workshop participants were pre-primary and primary school teachers, who were working regularly with classes of children." [38]

The handbook, also called *Khula Udweba*, with all one thousand five hundred copies sold, left a lasting legacy, and was destined to play a formative role in art teacher training in South Africa. Its impact is still felt to this day. Solomon herself would go on to use the *Khula Udweba* project to develop new methods for working in early childhood education with the Curriculum Development Project. Through her ongoing work, she continues to employ the capacity of art-making for facilitating healing.

The AIA incorporated into the Funda Art Centre.

I spent 1985 and 1986 as the director, and then returned to my full-time position at UNISA. I continued to serve as a board member of the AIA until the Funda Community College was established. Zakhele Mpalweni took over. Later he would be replaced by Selepe, who was followed by Sokhaya Charles Nkosi. Selepe picks up the unfolding thread of history:

“The last stage in Funda Centre’s evolution followed a principle decision to investigate the concept of Community College in 1988. A considered logical step towards transforming Funda Centre into an integrated institution that would maximise its developmental impact. It was not until April 1991, after a planning workshop by the Board that Funda began to walk the gauntlet of internal organisational change grappling with the anxieties and the policies of developing a unitary organisation from 13 autonomous projects. This transpired in a sea of shifting funding policies, especially foreign government agencies, hectic educational policy conceptualisation, frantic pre-election positioning, and dying NGO’s.

The Funda Community College (FCC) as was envisaged, did not achieve the maximum impact due to a number of challenges, and key amongst them was lack of financial support. From the mid 90’s onwards, the FCC started running out of funding; however in 2002 the National Lottery, Anglo Vaal, the National Development Agency intervened and made funds available towards some of the costs such as staff salaries.

Around 1998 former President Nelson Mandela visited FCC following an article in the newspaper that the FCC was facing closure due to lack of funds. Former President Mandela was accompanied by business people. The FCC then received additional support from Coca Cola and Eskom. In 2001 Mr Ricky Menell contributed R1m towards the visual arts programme. At this time, the FCC was also experiencing internal wrangles which led to some members of the board resigning.” [39]

The funding window for the arts that opened in the mid to late 1980s, began to disappear as the competition for resources increased and the 1990s approached. [40] This was the context with which Selepe, the young graduate who became director of the art centre, had to contend: *“The changes in the South African political scenario, since the early 90’s, started to impact a great deal on international funding. International funding agencies started to re-examine their funding policies and focus. Community organisations such as the African Institute of Art fell outside their new focus and this led to difficulties in raising funds for the AIA.” [41]*

The UNISA degree programme ceased to be the main focus and was replaced by the Bonono Fine Art Course, with ongoing non-formal links to Wits University. But for the students, the lack of material resources remained a huge challenge. Selepe describes how they were forced to seek ways to compensate for this dearth of resources: *“... the AIA survived by exploring economical image-making approaches that were bent on recycling junk to explore workable alternatives. These approaches involved media like collage, tie dye, collography, plastic fantasy technique, paper maché, the use of tyres, rags and other related paraphernalia in the making of sculptures.” [42]*

Selepe also curated an exhibition of work from community art centers from various parts of South Africa, entitled *Come Together Exhibition*, funded by the Development Bank of South Africa. The exhibition included nine community arts centres from the various regions of the country.

Other achievements that Selepe lists: *“The late Nhlanhla Xaba...was the recipient of the prestigious 1998 Standard Bank Young Artist Award. Mbongeni Richman*

Buthelezi is a world acclaimed artist through his use of plastic as a painting media a technique that he discovered at Funda Art Centre. The late Wandile Mlangeni and Dominic Shabangu were both layout artists at PACE magazine. The late Tanki Mokhele illustrated for Tribute magazine while Sydney Selepe illustrated for Frontline Magazine. Percy Ndaba is one of the world's acclaimed fashion designers. The majority of other graduates are practitioners in the Visual art and their names occasionally appear in major art exhibitions. Avhashoni Mainganye from Limpopo as not only a world acclaimed artist, but has initiated an art school in Nzhelele former Venda.” [43]

In the 1994 transition to democracy, Selepe himself was to become the head of the newly established Gauteng Department of Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture.

According to Sokhayi Nkosi in an interview in the Mail and Guardian, “*since Funda’s heyday, much has changed.*” He describes how private donations had run dry, that there had been no electricity since 2009, and that no other disciplines were being taught other than visual art. The musical instruments were stolen in 2008. What he describes as an “*invasion of a group called Senior Citizens Focus Co-operative (SCFC)*” was actually supported by the City of Johannesburg and the Johannesburg Property Company, who backed the SCFC in seizing control of the buildings. After a desperate struggle to retain a working space for artists Nkosi had enrolled, and the continuing visual art education programme, there was no other option than to obtain legal assistance, that lead to a court case. Eventually Nkosi managed to regain control, but by then the organisation faced dire financial straits. [44]



Sokhaya Nkosi sits in his office with a portrait of Es'kia Mphahlele behind him, Photograph courtesy of Oupa Nkosi (The Mphahlele portrait in the photograph is by Mbongeni Richman Buthelezi)

I undertook a visit to Funda on June 16th 2011 to witness the utter devastation for myself. The library had been severely damaged, and the shelves stolen. The building leaked and the books were strewn across the floor or piled in boxes. Mangainye takes up the story as he remembers the library: “*The Funda Centre library was to me the pride of the townshipwhen I hear of the books been vandalized, I wonder what kind of men could do such a thing. Is it the riddle of the gun against the*

brain?” [45] The Art Centre had been completely vandalized. Broken pianos, stolen tools, a severely damaged printing press, and destruction of the electrical wiring, had forced Nkosi to abandon it and to move into an adjacent prefabricated building.

Conclusion



Sokhaya Nkosi walking through the vandalised studios in Jun 2011. Photograph by Steven Sack

In the 1980s, art centres, community centres, and institutes were a desperate response to a terrible reality that could only be tackled through systemic change.

They had begun in the 1950s when the Evangelical Lutheran church in Rorke's Drift realised that arts and crafts could be used as part of healing. Their first artistic acts were part of the recovery of sick patients, especially women. In the 1980s, community art centres were a response arising out of collective and participatory practices, which, despite beginning to make significant changes in the last dying years of apartheid, were not able to transition sustainably into the new democracy. For all the human investment of those who helped create the community arts movement, the democratic government failed to recognise the value of these resources to healing and human development. The ultimate irony is that the department responsible for the arts is also supposed to lead the government in 'social cohesion'. However, the current government, despite delivering library services, fails to implement policy that will deliver sustainable

community art services. The 2017 White Paper makes this argument and points to the fact that libraries are sustained through a Conditional Grant provided by the state. [46] Without an effective financial instrument with proper norms and standards, the story of failed community art centres will be continually repeated.

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Notes.

[1] The term 'non-racial' is used in the specific context of the struggles that were fought against Apartheid in civic organisations that included a mix of racial actors, who believed that it was possible to engage on equal terms, across these racial divides, even in a context of legislated inequality.

[2] Mark Fleishman coins this phrase in an interview with Prof. Christo Doherty on the Arts Research Africa (ARA) Podcast, talking about the performing arts and research modalities that arise where these kinds of linkages exist. ARA Podcast, *The Hybrid model of Performance-Research: A conversation with Mark Fleishman*, (Arts Research Africa, May 2020), <https://www.iono.fm/e/864923>.

[3] Conscientisation, or 'conscientizagao', is a key concept in Freire's approach. The word refers to the critical understanding of the world's workings that individuals and communities develop through pedagogy emphasising history, dialogue, reflection and action. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (London; New York: Continuum, 2005).

[5] Frank Andrew Meintjies, *The Katlehong Arts Centre story; a remarkable journey*, (Frankbeat, 2016), <http://frankbeat.blogspot.com/2016/05/the-katlehong-arts-centre-story.html>,

[6] Meintjies, *The Katlehong Arts Centre story*.

[7] Meintjies, *The Katlehong Arts Centre story*.

[8] www.trianglenetwork.org

[9] John Muafangejo and Warren Siebrits *Gallery Choice 008: John Muafangejo*, *Artthrob:80* (2004), https://artthrob.co.za/04apr/gallery_choice.html

[10] Steven Sack and Sandy Burnett, *Interview by correspondence*, (2020).

[11] Steven Sack and Sandy Burnett, *Interview*.

[12] Steven Sack and Sandy Burnett, *Interview*.

[13] Steven Sack and Sandy Burnett, *Interview*.

[14] Sack and Burnett, *Interview*.

[15] Sack and Burnett, *Interview*.

[16] Robin Lee, 'The Urban Foundation: Another Perspective', *Reality* 14:3 (1982), 15 – 17.

[17] It is interesting to note that the Urban Foundation was unsuccessful in the late 1970s when they offered to assist the Community Arts Project in Cape Town. "In

1979 members decided to reject funding from the Urban Foundation, an initiative by big business to build a black middle-class as a strategy towards diffusing the threat of a black revolution.” Mario Pissarra, 'The Community Arts Project: legacies and limitations of an arts centre', *Third Text Africa* 12, (2020) 33 – 53.

[18] Lee, 'The Urban Foundation, 16.

[19] Mphahlele's 1984 keynote address was titled *The Crisis of Black Leadership*, and was published in the Capricorn papers. Excerpts can be found at Funda Community College's Facebook page.

[20] Mphahlele, *The Crisis of Black Leadership*.

[21] Mphahlele, *The Crisis of Black Leadership*.

[22] Mphahlele, *Alternative Education Now*. (Funda Forum – May 1986)

[23] Mphahlele, *Alternative Education Now*.

[24] Sydney Malefo Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art (AIA) At the Funda Art Centre, Diepkloof (Soweto)*, (unpublished).

[25] Steven Sack with Avashoni Mainganye, *Telephone Interview*, (date).

[26] Sack and Mainganye, *Telephone Interview*.

[27] Sack and Mainganye, *Telephone Interview*.

[28] Sack and Mainganye, *Telephone Interview*.

[29] Sack and Mainganye, *Telephone Interview*.

[30] Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art*.

[31] Lize van Robbroeck, 'Race and Art in Apartheid South Africa', In *Visual Century Volume 2, 1945 – 1976: South African Art in Context*, (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2011), 78 – 95. 81.

[32] Funda Community College, *Excerpt from Funda Forum, November 1985*, (Facebook, posted January 9th 2020.)

[33] Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art*.

[34] Thuli Bhengu was a schoolteacher who took advantage of the opportunity afforded to teachers to obtain a University degree. She achieved this under great adversity, including a complete lack of support from the Principal in her school. Despite this with great tenacity and hard work she became the first black woman to graduate with a BAFA degree from UNISA. Koos van der Walt, one of the lecturers in the Fine Art Dept greatly helped her to achieve this milestone.

[35] Steven Sack and Solomom, *Telephone Interview*, 2020.

[36] Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art*.

[37]Lindy Solomon notes how so many of the participants died, some not long after the completion of the project. Tanki Mokhele died in a motor car accident whilst returning from one of these workshops Dumisani Khumalo, who became art teacher at the Kathlehong School for the Deaf and Blind, too was killed in a motor car accident; Mandu Chiloane was murdered; Nhlanhla Xaba died in a fire at Artists Proof Studio; Maggie Mokoena, who had a very successful project for many years and was working in art therapy, passed away; as did Wandile Mlangeni; Janet Ohrlich, who edited the book, died of cancer, as did Charlotte Schaer, who established the Curriculum Development Project. Solomon, Sack, *Telephone Interview*.

[38] Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art*, 4.

[39] Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art*.

[40] Pissarro also comments on this, explaining that "following the end of the Cold War and the subsequent end of apartheid, international donors began withdrawing financial support for arts projects in South Africa. Somewhat naively, it was thought that the post-apartheid education system would 'normalise', with art education to be introduced in all schools." Pissara, *The Community Arts Project*, 49.

[41] Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art*.

[42] Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art*.

[43] Selepe, *The History of The African Institute of Art*.

[44] Staff Reporter, *Funda: Dark days for iconic Soweto art school*, (Mail & Guardian, 2015) [www.mg.co.za>article>2015-03-19-funda-dark-days](http://www.mg.co.za/article/2015-03-19-funda-dark-days).

[45] Notes from a telephonic interview with Avashoni Manganye, 2020.

[46] 'Chapter 4, Section 4.7', In *4th draft Revision of the Dept of Arts and Culture White Paper 1996*, (27th October 2017). 39.