

# VISUAL CENTURY

South African Art in Context



volume four  
1990 - 2007

Thembinkosi Goniwe  
Mario Pissarra  
Mandisi Majavu  
editors

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VOLUME 4 1990–2007

EDITED BY THEMBINKOSI GONIWE, MARIO PISSARRA AND MANDISI MAJAVU



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Project initiator and director: Gavin Jantjes

Editor in chief: Mario Pissarra

Volume 1 edited by Jillian Carman

Volume 2 edited by Lize van Robbroeck

Volume 3 edited by Mario Pissarra

Volume 4 edited by Thembinkosi Goniwe, Mario Pissarra and Mandisi Majavu

Project management by ASAI (Africa South Art Initiative)

Text editing and production management by Helen Moffett

Typesetting by Arthur Attwell, Electric Book Works

Proofreading by Ethné Clark and Dave Buchanan

Indexing by Ethné Clarke

Picture research by Patricia Rademeyer and Sarie Potter

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## Preface

It is often said that national liberation is based on the right of every people to freely control their own destiny and that the objective of this liberation is national independence ... the basis of national liberation is the inalienable right of every people to have their own history (Amilcar Cabral 1966).

If sometimes our great artists have been the most critical of our society, it is because their sensitivity and their concern for justice, which must motivate any true artist, makes them aware that our Nation falls short of its highest potential. I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist. If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him. We must never forget that art is not a form of propaganda; it is a form of truth (President John F. Kennedy 1963).

Nearly two decades after the fall of apartheid, these quotations from the revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral and President John F. Kennedy have lost none of their relevance for South Africans. In the era of decolonisation, Cabral stressed the importance of history for the once colonised people of Africa, and Kennedy elevated the role of artists in the United States and elsewhere.

Even though these leaders came from vastly different backgrounds, their words register a common concern for culture. They highlight the value of history to the construction of a national identity, and the role of the artist within culture. They reveal why so much of South Africa's visual art, music, literature and theatre, is inextricably linked to the desire for liberty and equality. The notions of culture of the colonial regime and the apartheid government valued neither South African art nor its artists. British colonial culture saw little value in anything other than its own reflection, and the apartheid regime excluded black artists from any role in interpreting the nation's art history.

Works of art can articulate particular moments in the life of a nation. Not all South Africa's visual artists had the liberty, the means or the will to connect their work to the politics of national liberation, or to hold a critical light up to their nation's moral potential. But those artists whose work did make these statements have become actors in the making of history, and their work is testimony to historical progress. Whether a rock painting, a wood sculpture or a video projection, such works have provided insights into how South Africans view themselves in their social and cultural environments.

The task of the *Visual Century* project has been to grapple with the uneven flow of South African contemporary art; to contextualise the relevance of artists and their works to the nation's cultural identity and, where possible, to place them in relation to the history of international art. Providing a balanced record of the never-ending production of art is a difficult yet vital task in contemporary South African culture. The constant creation of images and re-formulation of artistic concepts make art history a fluid body of facts and ideas. Art historical writing becomes a topological exercise similar to mapping a river.

One can picture the history of South Africa's art as a river meandering through the southernmost part of the African continent, growing in stature as it glides towards the estuary of the present. It connects to the history of the world's art just as rivers inevitably connect to the great oceans of our planet. In the twentieth century, some tributaries of this

waterway have been navigated by historians, and the records of their journeys have helped the editors and writers of *Visual Century* to determine where the river has flowed, and what has shaped its momentum and direction. But these early records also make it clear that one cannot know this river with any degree of certainty. Even with the most rigorous research, its topology remains sketchy. Theories as to its origins and what has dissolved into its stream will constantly change. To understand what commands its direction or progression will continue to challenge the historians mapping it. In a postmodern age, we have begun to accept that there are plural narratives of art history, and that all history writing remains incomplete. Over time, we might trace new tributaries or re-evaluate the contribution of individual artists to its flow. But the true temporal and spatial parameters of the river remain elusive.

*Visual Century* is the latest contextual survey of the river's bed, channels and sedimentary traces. The intention is to take you, the reader, along this lengthy waterway, and to leave you with an imminent sense of arrival in a different time and place. If the limited page extent of its volumes, gaps in research or simple oversight should distract from this historical journey, I hope that it will none the less offer more novel insights about art practice in South Africa than anything that has gone before.

The harsh political circumstances of twentieth-century colonial, Union and apartheid rule often eroded facts and shaped cultural fictions. The interpretation of art history was forced into narrow channels conforming to even narrower cultural perceptions. It divided achievement along racial lines, and restricted critical engagement with the wellspring of ideas from other African cultures. The challenge facing the writers in each volume of *Visual Century* was not to only immerse readers in the turbulence of the river, but also to expose some of what lies hidden in the sediment.

The revision of the river's tributaries, started by South African historians in the 1980s and continued after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, made it necessary to review a century of contemporary art. The predominance of Eurocentric art history in the teaching and discourses of art within South Africa also needed to be addressed so that a more accurate and layered map could be drawn. With the support of Z. Pallo Jordan, then the Minister of Arts and Culture, the *Visual Century* project was born at the end of 2006, with research beginning a year later.

The century under review begins in 1907, which marks the year the British restored self-governance to the Boer Republics after defeating them in the Second South African War. This in turn led to the establishment of the Union of South Africa (1910) that joined Afrikaner and British settlers under one government. The year 1907 also coincides with the epoch in which artists in Europe broke with prevailing conventions by assimilating African and other cultures into their practice to create European Modernism. Pablo Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) is one of the striking examples of this fissure, alongside Henri Matisse's *Dance* (1907), which references the art of Asia and the Arab world.

The research for *Visual Century* took existing and new material and located these in the context of South African social history and international art history. The prominent themes that emerged from initial research prompted the division of the book into four volumes. The volumes have an open structure that avoids a single author narrative. Numerous writers were invited to interpret these themes and, where possible, to redress the racial and gender imbalance of colonial and apartheid art histories. This approach matched the spirit of the project's intentions, which recognised that there are plural narratives of



Nicholas Hlobo: *Umthubi*, 2006. Exotic and indigenous wood, steel, wire, ribbon, rubber inner tube, 200 × 400 × 730 cm (variable). Private collection, Johannesburg.

history. It allowed writers to retrieve the history of South African art from the political doctrines of colonialism and apartheid, and to uncover its essential African character. By avoiding a strict linear narrative, the information gathered does not claim to be finite or absolute. There are overlaps at the start and end of volumes. Occasionally this open structure creates coincidences of ideas across volumes and different readings of certain artists whose practice extends across eras. But the multiplicity of voices keeps the project open-minded about the scope and dimensions of the river of history, and the need to review who contributed what to South Africa's art history.

Any text about art only creates new meaning through engagement and comment. The editors and I hope that the chapters in this overview will be seen as an invitation to further scholarly research. The nature of mapping something fluid is that certain issues and artists inevitably rise to the surface, while others sink. To broaden and deepen our knowledge of this river beyond what is revealed in these four volumes, South Africa's visual art history must be constantly reviewed.

Gavin Jantjes  
*Visual Century* project director  
Oslo, 2011

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## Foreword

How to chart the historic passage out of apartheid to the South Africa taking shape in its wake today? What see-think-know modes can we muster? What conceptual tackle? This fourth volume of *Visual Century* has us pondering such queries even if it does not broach them for their own sake. How to speak from within the image's surging force, whether it is from the art or media world or humdrum everyday life? Are visual images truer to the raw events they embody than abstract words and language? A core question has us tussling with how 'thinking through the visual' might work: can it prise open a critical chink in the post-Gutenberg age of spectacle, where the look of things casts a pervasive spell over how we see and experience the world?

At one pole, the *Visual Century* project is about knowledge production through art practice: this takes in both hard-nosed know-how and, to coin a Samuel Beckett term, the vagaries of "no-how". At the other pole, it is a process of translation – putting into words what artworks, activities and visual representations tell us about the historic passage out of apartheid and South Africa making itself anew. It is about figuring the drift of images in linguistic terms. We are in the rub-up of the visual and verbal. They are both at one with each other and also at odds, if not quite at loggerheads. Each has its doggedly different drive, although they tally broadly to tell the tale at hand. Nevertheless, what words and language say about images amounts to more than – and less than – what is teeming in the visual material itself. There is an intrinsic teeter between them, a relationship that fluctuates between a sense of surplus and shortfall.

Why is this vital? Because it forestalls a rendering of the South Africa story as a closed, definitive scenario. *Visual Century* could easily lapse into a representation of the "passage through apartheid to the rainbow state and beyond" as a cumulative account of dialectical advance. However, the oscillating swell and dip between verbal and visual components staves off a lock-tight, seamless representation. It opens things up, making room for uncertainty and discontinuities, for unforeseen elements. The diverse stances and saliences that make up the fourth volume of *Visual Century* seem, wittingly or otherwise, to mime this overall disposition. The intrinsic teeter between the ongoing visual-verbal play-off sparks an epistemic gear peculiar to thinking through the visual. We might grasp it in both its senses: thinking by means of the visual, via its sticky thickness, its opacities; and unpacking its processes to scan its innards, as it were.

Why is the verbal-visual wobbling pivot a signal element here? Because it mirrors more faithfully the ups and downs, the detours in the "long walk to freedom" (to borrow a phrase from Nelson Mandela). This means that the hurly-burly of the South Africa story unfolds as an assemblage of motley soundings and dissonant voicings, which cut across and translate into one another, rather than as a monolithic, triumphalist descant. It adds up to a more toned and tempered account, shot through with quavers, caveats and bittersweetness of the sort we are more likely to find in Marlene van Niekerk's post-apartheid novel *Triomf*. Dare we discern in this structure of disequilibrium the outlines of an argumentative, open-ended multiplicity of South Africa-in-the-world to come?

At odds with the above, quite another sort of South Africa-in-the-world scenario is staged in the photograph on page xi. It is an image of Professor C.L.'s office at the University College for Indians, Salisbury Island, Durban. It is also the Art History room in which I studied in the 1970s. A Breughel on the far back wall cites the North European tradition of retinal painting. Through the window, a railway line that delivered wagonloads of prisoners to



*Art History Room, Salisbury Island, Durban c. 1971, University of South Africa, University College for Indians. Photograph. Documentation Centre: Van Niekerk Collection at University of Durban-Westville for Indians (now University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban).*

and from the shipping docks is visible. On the blackboard ledge, an Islamic calligraphic strip in angular Kufic; an Aztec head; an elongated Makonde wood figurine; a Buddha head; prehistoric South Africa cheek by jowl with contemporary Zulu, Ndebele and Xhosa craft; a Walter Battiss print; a Rorke's Drift weave. The room is an art-culture-clan tableau from six continents, an epistemic-classificatory contraption. The Greco-Roman-Hellenistic bust seems to preside as the Eurocentric radial point around which an array of cultures revolves – some less superseded, more equal than others.

Was the scene – ostensibly a PR job – inscribed with ambivalence from the start, or is this something that creeps in with hindsight? A resistant spark that stares us in the face, and to which we are initially blind, is a quotation on the blackboard from Rukmini Devi's cosmic universalism. By performing the ancient temple dance in public during India's independence struggle, she defied both British colonial and Islamic authority over the native, gendered, racial body – as well as Victorian taboos that Indians themselves had imbibed in becoming ashamed of the dance's sensual-erotic aesthetic. But beyond this, the intrinsic teeter of the verbal-visual runs amuck with the dogma of race-culture separation the photograph sought to dramatise. The swirl of artefacts, art languages, idioms and modes charges the scene with a sense of runaway translation, cultural swap, mix and pidginisation, of cross-talk and chat between disparate, dissimilar elements. The sense of an incipient dirty cosmopolitanism from below is stirred up.

What of visual representation in relation to nation-building? asks *Visual Century* somewhat gingerly. Various stabs at putting visual art in the service of some or other idea – revolution, nation, unconscious, proletariat, the utopian and the like – have each given cause for consternation. Marcel Duchamp's qualms before such pre-givens led him to suggest that we might affirm art simply in 'the service of the mind' – as the open-ended drift of knowledge creation. Historical experience across the century has left us

wary of the very idea of nation. In the name of ‘who belongs?’ periodic drives to snuff out those who do not fit the bill have riddled our times. It is not easy to dissociate ‘nation construction’ from bouts of exclusionary, territorialising force. Nor have matters improved with the vaunted dwindling of the nation-state in favour of emerging transnational links and global networks.

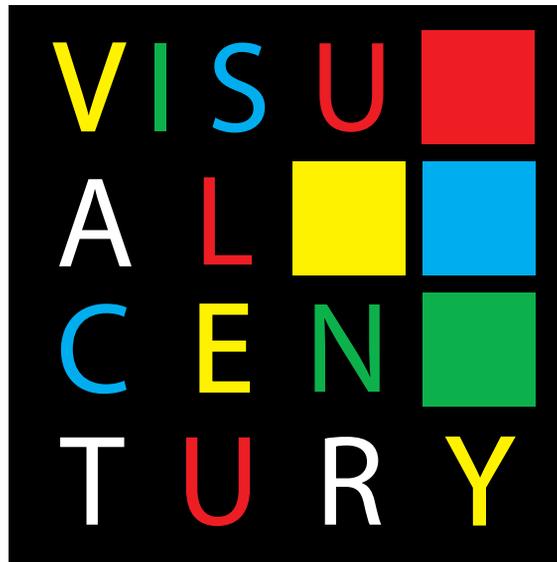
In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Hannah Arendt probed earlier phases of South African history to unpack nation, race and violence – the mentality that prepared the ground for Auschwitz. She saw ‘work-labour-action’ as the means for transcending brute material life – hard slog as a humanising process that spawned the capacity to imagine and fashion commonality and civic purpose. In her story, however, southern Africa’s indigenous inhabitants come off badly. Depicted as feckless and work-shy, they are seen as mired in ‘living in the wild’, incapable of rising above instinctual life in order to mould a world according to higher ideals. They are condemned to fall by the wayside as stalwart nation-builders march on.

At odds with Arendt’s dialectic, Santu Mofokeng casts a cold eye on the labour routines of the century’s “shadowed grounds”: the concentration camps of the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, Robben Island, Holocaust zones, reservations, the “Bantustans”, the Balkans, Cambodia, Rwanda and the like telescope to sum up the century’s logic of extermination and death-work in the name of nation-building. His *Self-portrait at Auschwitz* (1997) speaks back to Arendt – to the cruel irony that the work-labour-action she championed washes up as the motto (“Arbeit Macht Frei”) cynically emblazoned over the death-camp gates. It resonates with his image of the slogan at Robben Island – “Ons Dien Met Trots” [“We Serve With Pride”] (2002). His photographs put a critical gloss on work as a totalitarian force, –in the process highlighting the limits of Arendt’s exalted view of it. He gives us a strand of ‘thinking through the visual’ and its associative logic that is germane to *Visual Century*.

It is, not unlike art practice itself, about plunging into the unknown, turning over experiences, thoughts and feelings that are often not yet acceptable lines of enquiry or epistemic objects for academic thinking. It brings to light new, often-unpalatable notions – for example, ideas of difference and diversity that are beyond the ken of the Rainbow nation. In his film *District 9* (2009), among other concerns, Neill Blomkamp probes our ‘speciesism’ – human beastliness towards non-human species and other creatural life, towards aliens stigmatised as “Prawns”. Zanele Muholi’s deadpan mug-shots of those who have been beaten up or sworn at simply because they look different also touch on attitudes hard to square with the claims made for the Rainbow. We might try to fathom things with a striking remark by Zanele’s companion: “Apartheid het definitely scars gelaat” [“Apartheid definitely left scars”]. We are brought up short before bodies, identities, sexualities for which the label “queer” is imprisoning.

Against the xenocidal drives that riddle the Rainbow today, quite another image flares up in the unlikely quarters of the World Cup Stadiums, 2010. The air is thick with the parp of vuvuzelas – random, non-notational, uncontainable spasms of sonic stuff. From this image, dare we take the sound of the possible creative open-endedness of a coming South Africa-in-the-world?

Sarat Maharaj



SOUTH AFRICAN ART IN CONTEXT 1907-2007

INTRODUCTION

# CHARTING PATHWAYS IN AN ERA OF POSTS

MANDISI MAJAVU AND MARIO PISSARRA

This volume commences at a time of tumultuous change, a moment when conditions for making art, nationally and internationally, were profoundly influenced by broader social and political changes. The 1990s would mark a significant break in South African art, even if such ruptures can never be absolute, premised as they are on earlier struggles and unresolved conflicts.

The anti-apartheid struggle, characterised by both international pressure and mass-based internal resistance, was a critical agent in the death of the apartheid regime. But it took the end of the Cold War to convince South Africa's rulers that conditions were favourable for a negotiated settlement. Thus, on 2 February 1990, President F.W. de Klerk announced the end of the ban on liberation movement organisations. This introduced a transitional period that was marked by both optimism and extreme violence. Ultimately the 'centre' held, leading to negotiations between the two dominant protagonists, the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party, resulting in the country's first democratic elections in 1994.

Apart from enabling political change in South Africa, the end of the Cold War heralded a new international political economy – globalisation. Although the concept of globalisation was not new at the time, the present version of globalisation<sup>1</sup> as a vehicle for a free-market system is an American invention, according to Waltz (1999). Through globalisation, global markets and big business have been able to reduce the power of the state, redistributing it among international financial institutions (Apodaca, 2001).

For the local art world, globalisation arrived along with the end of the cultural boycott. For the majority of South Africa's artists, galleries and art historians who functioned outside of politically connected networks, the boycott had meant isolation from the international art world. Alternately, it had meant participating in exhibitions in countries sympathetic to the apartheid regime, or organised by individuals indifferent to or critical of the cultural boycott.<sup>2</sup> Globalisation also coincided with a mushrooming of international biennales, developed by cities as part of their efforts to attract tourism and to brand themselves as internationally competitive centres. The number of opportunities for international exhibitions thus increased with the onset of globalisation, not only for South Africans, but for artists worldwide.

The economic underpinnings of globalisation have also meant that the international art world has come to rely more and more on big corporations for funding.<sup>3</sup> Locally, this is apparent in the visible growth of corporate collections that budget-strapped municipal and national art museums can only gaze at in envy, and through corporate sponsorship of awards and art events. In such cases, a conflation between the particular interests of business and the national interest becomes inevitable. This trend was evident in the early 1990s when Nedbank sponsored the National Arts Policy Plenary, a civil society initiative that subsequently had a decisive impact on national policy. The early 1990s also saw the establishment, predominantly by business interests, of the Arts and Culture Trust, under the nominal patronage of the President of the country, as well as the establishment, with government support, of Business Arts South Africa, an organisation intended to leverage influence for individual businesses, as well as providing support for arts organisations and practitioners.

The conflation of business interests and the national interest that occurs in the space vacated by the public sector is also evident in the evolution of the Grahamstown Festival, originally a community event, to the Standard Bank National Arts Festival.<sup>4</sup> The regular

1 Globalisation may be defined as the integration of economic markets, dominated by multinational corporations and orchestrated by financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Apodaca, 2001).

2 For an account of international exchange during the period of the cultural boycott, see Chapter 8 in Volume 3.

3 For example, Tang notes of *Belief*, the 2006 Singapore Biennale: "Almost half of the Biennale's total budget of SGD 8 million (approx. USD 5 million) came from private sponsorship, which was itself encouraged by a two-for-one tax incentive" (2007: 366).

4 The term "community event" must be qualified – under apartheid, the Grahamstown Festival was routinely boycotted by the local black community and cultural activists for its celebration of "Settler culture", underlined by its origins as a project of the 1820 Settlers Foundation, which, ironically, has survived the transformation of the festival.



FIGURE 1. Tony Molebatsi Nkotsi: *Conflict*, 1991. Aquatint, crayon-resist etching, charcoal, 101 × 123.5 cm. Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Museum), Johannesburg.

support of this event by a statutory body, the National Arts Council, also a product of the new dispensation, endorses the ceding of central public spaces for artistic practice to the private sector. The art world, starved of support, has at times been opportunistic in its embrace of business interests. Perhaps the most notorious example is the now defunct and discredited Kebble Awards, established by the late mining magnate Brett Kebble. When these awards came into being, Kebble's reputation was already a matter of concern, and yet few commentators raised ethical concerns.<sup>5</sup>

With the economic dimension of the arts providing the dominant rationale for its support by the private sector, provincial and local governments have adopted a similar approach by using arts events to rebrand cities and towns. None has done so as boldly as the City of Johannesburg. Bremner (2000) points out that the rationale behind the regeneration of the Johannesburg inner city was informed by the city's desire to style itself as the "Gateway to Africa", in the new economic geography of global capitalism. Attempts were therefore made to present Johannesburg as a "World Class African City" through an emphasis on the importance of arts and culture: "The annual 'Arts Alive Festival' and the short-lived Johannesburg Biennale were inaugurated. These hoped to capture local and international cultural imaginations and establish the [Newtown cultural precinct] as a recreational and cultural theme park..." (Bremner 2000: 189).

The two Johannesburg biennales, *Africus* (1995) and *Trade Routes* (1997), were two of the largest and most prestigious international art exhibitions the country has hosted, although they differed in many respects.

*Africus*, the first Johannesburg biennale, was marked by the cultural politics of the 1980s. It championed inclusivity, democratic structures, art education and outreach. Consequently, "many participating artists were black, self-taught or informally trained and from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds" (Marschall, 1999: 120). This was certainly a break with the traditionally white-dominated South African art world. David Koloane nevertheless argues that the biennale represented a lost opportunity to transform South Africa into the art pulse of southern Africa. He argues that "the very axis of the Biennale was based outside South Africa, and its emphasis was therefore on things non-African. It was, in simple terms, a 'trans-plant' that did not take into account the sociopolitical reality of the country, and its ideal did not encompass the African essence" (1996: 56).

Expectations of an "African biennale" were raised with the appointment of Okwui Enwezor, a Nigerian-born curator resident in the United States, as Artistic Director of the second Johannesburg biennale. Enwezor rejected the nationalist foundations that underpin traditional biennials, along with any expectations of a pan-African exhibition.<sup>6</sup> Supported by a team of international curators, *Trade Routes* addressed globalisation through a series of exhibitions of contemporary art. Its audience was international-cosmopolitan and art-literate. As Marschall put it, "*Trade Routes* was clearly about the integration of South African art into a global international context" (1999: 124).

Whether *Trade Routes* was visionary or simply out of touch remains a moot point. Certainly the rejection of nationalism, in a historical context where a divided country was trying to unite itself as a nation, did not resonate with most South Africans. Art critic Eddie Chambers was among those who thought that the local audience and context should have received priority. He decried the "breathtaking contempt" for the sensibilities and political concerns of black South Africans, noting that the biennale's publicity materials, the banners and posters put up around Johannesburg, had no resonance with the local

<sup>5</sup> For a rare exception, see Minnaar (2003).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Araeen's comments on how Enwezor failed Africa (2000).



FIGURE 2. Wayne Barker: *Laager*, 1996. Containers arranged in circle, dimensions variable. Installation view, Santiago, Chile. First produced as a response to the perceived exclusion of local artists from the first Johannesburg biennale in 1995.



FIGURE 3. Pauline Mazibuko: *Wrong timing*, 2002. Mixed media, 108 × 156 cm. Artist's collection.

audience. He further condemned the fact that “there [was] no black (South) African curatorial input into this Biennale whatsoever” (1997: 15). Unsurprisingly, *Trade Routes* failed to draw in local audiences, and alienated many of those who did attend. Faced with this scenario, the City of Johannesburg terminated the exhibition prematurely, signalling the end of its biennale project.

Supporters of the Johannesburg biennale, particularly *Trade Routes*, usually argue that it was instrumental in facilitating the entry of several South African artists into the international arena. Linked to this is its influence in stimulating production of “new media”, a development which has itself been criticised by, among others, David Koloane, who dubbed this trend “the new exclusion” (Van Wyk 2004: 23).

Furthermore, the debate on post-national globalism has largely privileged artists in the diaspora, particularly those who find it relatively easy to enjoy the benefits of globalisation. This was evident in *Trade Routes*, and has indeed been a feature of subsequent exhibitions of contemporary African artists curated by Africans living in the West. Indeed, the experiences of artists of the African diaspora have been foregrounded as a concern by a new generation of African-born curators residing in the West, of whom Enwezor is the most prominent.<sup>7</sup>

A consequence of Africa’s belated embrace in the West has been that, as Araeen has noted: “The present generation of African artists – those we see in the Dakar Biennale as well as in international exhibitions – may not feel that there is any need to confront the dominant system” (2003: 100). However, as Collier has pointed out, it does make sense to ask critically what post-national globalism means for a continent that “has got the worst of globalisation, while missing the best” (2003). Can we really talk of post-national globalism when Africa has failed to integrate into the world economy? Collier writes that Africa is actively suffering from some of its most important current global encounters.

Amor points out that in the art world, “globalization has all too frequently served to reinforce dominant paradigms of circulation and to leave conventional institutional structures intact at least in mainstream U.S. and Western European institutions, where the multiculturalism of our global village manifests itself through quotas that intervene little in the dynamics of the dominant artistic discourse” (1998: 30).

Instead of uncritically embracing the notion of post-globalism or any other ‘post-ism’, it seems sensible to first ask: how do postcolonial and postmodernist theories facilitate the creative and critical engagement of artists working in Africa? And how do they address the specific challenges faced by the geo-political construct that is Africa? Addressing these concerns could be one way of ensuring that African artists develop their own voices, while still articulating some of the issues facing the continent. This is not to argue that African artists can only develop their own voices by tackling the socio-economic problems of the entire continent. However, the silence in the art world on some of these issues is deafening. Besides, Araeen poses a very important question: when art is “removed from the specificity of the socio-historical forces of Africa and its critical relationship with the dominant world, would it not lead African art to naïve and facile ends?” (2003: 100).

It should be pointed out that although political changes have introduced many benefits for South African artists, of which freedom of expression is perhaps the most notable, many artists of colour still find it almost impossible to access art education and training. According to some critics, this situation is largely attributable to the economic policies<sup>8</sup> adopted by the post-apartheid South African government – which have done little to

7 Enwezor has argued that it has become urgent to investigate the diasporic formations that have become part of the post-colonial experience of African artists and intellectuals: “We need to investigate the cultural and intellectual productions based on this experience of diaspora, to explore how the conditions of exile and expatriation provide new motifs and challenges to the discourse of Africa in the late twentieth century” (1998: 33).

8 The post-apartheid government accepted a “secret \$850 million loan from the IMF to help tide the country over balance of payments difficulties...” (Terreblanche 2002: 96). However, before the IMF would grant the loan to South Africa, the future government needed to sign a secret protocol on economic policies of the country. Terreblanche writes that in the “Statement on economic policies’ agreed with the IMF, the transitional executive council committed itself to a neo-liberal, export-oriented economic policy, and a ‘redistribution through growth’ strategy.” Further, “as soon as the ANC’s leaders agreed to the statement, they were trapped in the formidable web of the domestic corporate sector and the international financial establishment, represented by the IMF and World Bank.”



FIGURE 4. Michael MacGarry: *Hu Jintao and the scramble for Africa*, 2007. Jute, nylon, cotton, wood, enamel, paint, epoxy, fibreglass mannequin. Artist's collection.



FIGURE 5. Donovan Ward: *Anti-globalisation Barbie*, 2003–2005. From the series *Barbie Bartmann: Homecoming queen*. Polyurethane foam, acrylic paint, fabric, fabric paint, latex, polyester resin, wire, elastic cord, glass and mild steel, height 30 cm. Artist's collection.



FIGURE 6. Lisa Brice: *Sex kitten cheap*, 1993. Mixed media, 160 × 145 cm.  
Gallery Frank Haenel, Frankfurt, Germany.

change the structural inequalities of the distribution of wealth and resources in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead, the incomes of black households fell by 19% between 1995 and 2000, while the incomes of white households rose by 15%, according to Statistics South Africa (Bond 2007). Racial inequality, the legacy of apartheid still perpetuated by capitalist economic policies today, has meant that the post-apartheid art community is still largely a white world – as far as galleries, institutions and training are concerned, as pointed out by Goniwe (2003), among others.

While (2003) points out that the same economic policies have created a situation in which the global art community is dominated by networks formed within a limited number of world art cities such as New York, Paris and London, as well as a number of “second-order international nodes” such as Los Angeles, Tokyo, Zürich, Milan and Düsseldorf. These art cities have become the home of the most influential international dealers, auction houses, critics and galleries, and act as attractive art centres for aspiring artists and dealers, who in turn enrich the creative milieu of art schools and galleries in these cities. As While notes, “New York, and to a lesser extent Paris, London and other centres have succeeded in establishing a reputation as the home of modern art, giving their dealers and critics enormous power in making and breaking potential art trends, and thus dictating the history of art” (2003: 253).

It is thus perhaps not surprising that many leading African curators concentrate on trying to raise the visibility of contemporary African art within the leading art capitals of the West, as evidenced in the priority given to the Venice Biennale by the Forum for African Arts, the organisation that organised *Authentic/ExCentric* in 2001, curated by Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe, and *Faultlines* in 2003, curated by Gilane Tawadros. Very few such exhibitions are seen in South Africa. A notable exception was *Africa Remix*, curated by Simon Njami, which began its international tour in London in 2004 and concluded in Johannesburg in 2007.

The curatorial merits of *Africa Remix* aside, what was significant was the symbolism of its arrival in South Africa, as a flagship of the developing discourse of contemporary African art. The exhibition may have been narrated for non-African audiences, as it was originally intended for Paris, London and Tokyo only. However, its final stop in Johannesburg enhanced local awareness of contemporary African art as a discourse in which South Africans were integrally present. Also significant was the timing of its arrival, shortly after the mixed responses to the *Picasso and Africa* exhibition,<sup>9</sup> and following *CAPE 07*, the downscaled version of the Cape Africa Platform’s efforts to curate a new type of biennale of contemporary African art at the foot of the continent. The severe cutting back of Cape Africa’s project can be partly attributed to the failure of government (municipal, provincial and national) to back what, in South African terms, was an ambitious project.

The mixed success of these projects, along with an increasing number of self-styled African projects, highlighted a growing awareness among some within the art community of the need to develop stronger links with other African countries.<sup>10</sup> That this debate was gathering momentum at the foot of the continent a hundred years after Picasso and his peers began, from a European perspective, to acknowledge the existence of African art, highlights just how much still needs to be done in order to integrate the South African art world into an international network in which the African continent is an integral part, and not an exotic extra.

What was also significant, in retrospect, was how 2007 marked the end of a degree of innocence in the advocacy of an “African Renaissance”, a clarion call led by the-then

9 The *Picasso and Africa* exhibition was shown at the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg and the Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG) in Cape Town. It was a popular success and drew unprecedented numbers of visitors to the ISANG. Critics were less impressed. See, for example, O’Toole (2006).

10 The establishment of the Africa Centre in Cape Town, the opening of AfroNova gallery in Johannesburg, and the launch of the Africa South Art Initiative website contribute in different ways to this burgeoning African-oriented movement. They were all preceded by The Triangle Network, which has facilitated international cultural exchange for two decades, including across African countries, as well as earlier Africanist projects such as the Afrika Cultural Centre.



FIGURE 7. Candice Breitz: *Rainbow series* #1, 1996. Cibachrome photograph, 152.5 × 101.5 cm.

President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki. Late in 2008, Mbeki was removed from his position as President of the ANC, which led to his resignation as the President of the country in 2009. With Mbeki's political demise, the notion of the African Renaissance quietly disappeared from national discourse.

Meanwhile, at grassroots level, 2008 was marked by violent xenophobic attacks, in which mostly unemployed or desperately poor black South Africans turned on Africans from other countries. Signs and precedents were there for all to see, but the scale of the 2008 backlash against 'foreign' Africans highlighted the fact that the government's failure to address the aspirations of historically dispossessed black communities had created a new class of scapegoats, who bore the brunt of unrealised and frustrated hopes for transformation. A new kind of popular resistance, in the form of service delivery protests, as well as new forms of community organisations, known as the "new social movements", have also become more visible in the years following those covered in this survey. With new terrains of struggle emerging, it is too early to tell what role, if any, art will play in engaging the evolving struggle for human rights.

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In Chapter 1, Gavin Jantjes looks critically at the international context in which post-apartheid South African art gained access to the historically exclusive domains of Western modernism. Emphasising the importance of cultural infrastructure for training and professional development, Jantjes criticises the lack of investment in such infrastructure by the international community, coupled with the failure of the South African government to implement its noble policies. Consequently, Jantjes highlights the chasm between international recognition and local neglect, arguing that "the international success of South African art was not repeated at home".

If Jantjes's perspective represents a birds-eye view of South African art, in Chapter 2, Colin Richards presents an intense vision from the inside. Taking the themes of memory and history as his cue, Richards argues for the development of a "critical humanism" as a valid and necessary response to a traumatic past. Examining works by a range of artists, with particular focus on Sam Nhlengethwa, Nandipha Mntambo, Jane Alexander and Penny Siopis, Richards argues that "the struggle of becoming fully human is never over". He concludes that "inhuman histories, the work of memory, tradition, transition and 'the animal' all speak to the radical human possibilities of everyday living in conditions of conflict, contradiction, stupefying sensuality and surprise."

In Chapter 3, Gabeba Baderoon begins from the premise that the body is a landscape on which history is written. Given exploitative histories where perceptions and classifications of identity and difference have disempowered black people, particularly women, Baderoon asks: "How can we look at a figure who has been looked at too much, who has been betrayed by an invasive gaze?" Focusing mostly on works by Berni Searle and Zanele Muholi, Baderoon reveals the subtle strategies used to turn black women into active subjects rather than passive objects.

In Chapter 4, Mgcineni Sobopha provides a panoramic account of artists who have centred the body in their work, in order to address a wide range of concerns, from questions of identity and issues of social justice, to aesthetic preoccupations. Incorporating not only artists working in new media, but also in traditional Western media such as painting and drawing, Sobopha situates their work within the postcolonial moment, as he



FIGURE 8. Ernestine White: *Imbumba yengceba zayo (the sum of its parts)*, 2004. Gum transfer print and silkscreen on paper, 222 images, 10.16 × 15.24 cm each. Artist's collection.

simultaneously narrates and questions the ways in which artworks disrupt dominant ways of looking.

Kathryn Smith, in Chapter 5, sets out to define and map the experimental turn in South African art, finding it to be “a question of finding and imaginatively using, particularly ... spaces ‘between’. Between where art is made and where it is shown. Between the showing of art and its acquisition. Between maker and receiver. Between African and Western notions of form versus idea. Between objects, environments and viewers.” With this model of experimentalism, Smith poses this challenge: “In addressing the radical nature of such work ... we must consider the extent to which it possesses any significance politically, or whether the ‘cutting edge’ remains a discourse confined to the art world.”

The question of spaces for art, more specifically public spaces, is addressed by Zayd Minty in Chapter 6. Like Jantjes and Smith, Minty notes the encroaching influence of business and the economy. Focusing on projects in Johannesburg’s inner city, he highlights how public art is increasingly driven by economic imperatives, and he cautions against the “sterilised” results that can develop as a consequence. In contrast, Minty highlights the work of the artist-led Joubert Art Project, which he characterises as far more experimental and relevant to its public. Like Smith, Minty links the experimental to the everyday, and he emphasises the importance of engaging local communities for artists who aim to address issues of social justice and inclusion in their work.

In the final chapter, Andries Oliphant begins by outlining the promise of change in sources as disparate as Albie Sachs’s provocative “Preparing Ourselves for Freedom” essay and the new policies that were developed for arts and culture. Highlighting some of the successes in addressing change, Oliphant nonetheless acknowledges critical shortfalls, including the quality of delivery of arts education in schools, as well as the failure of the tiered systems of government to provide adequate support to community arts centres, including the many that were established in the post-apartheid dispensation. Oliphant concludes by arguing that the demographic ‘normalisation’ of South Africa’s art world will occur concurrently with the deepening of democracy. He also highlights two areas of increasing influence. The first concerns the ascendancy of science, and the need for artists to engage with science and technology, whether through exploiting its possibilities or through critical engagement with it. The second is the need for greater engagement with art and artists across Africa.

Together, these chapters provide a broad overview of many of the dominant trends in the period covered by this volume. They comprise both narrative and theoretical approaches, and include both focused and panoramic perspectives. Like any overview, this one is by definition partial, its value stemming in good measure from the range of voices included, and the heterogeneity of the writers’ positions in contemporary discourse. Perhaps its value will be determined by its ability to stimulate fresh and critical perspectives, disrupting the reductive orthodoxies that, as Oliphant highlights, either simplify art by reducing it to mere reflection of its context, or treat it as an autonomous field oblivious to broader issues. The application of these conceptual binaries has informed the dominant narrative that distinguishes between the ‘resistance art’ that supposedly dominated South African art in the 1970s and 1980s, and the ‘post-apartheid’ art that responded to the new conditions of the 1990s. The extent to which this volume complicates this rupture – in which aesthetics were apparently of no concern prior to 1990, while post-1990 art was liberated from social and political concerns – is perhaps the critical question that will ultimately determine its value, situated as it is within the moment of which it seeks to make sense.

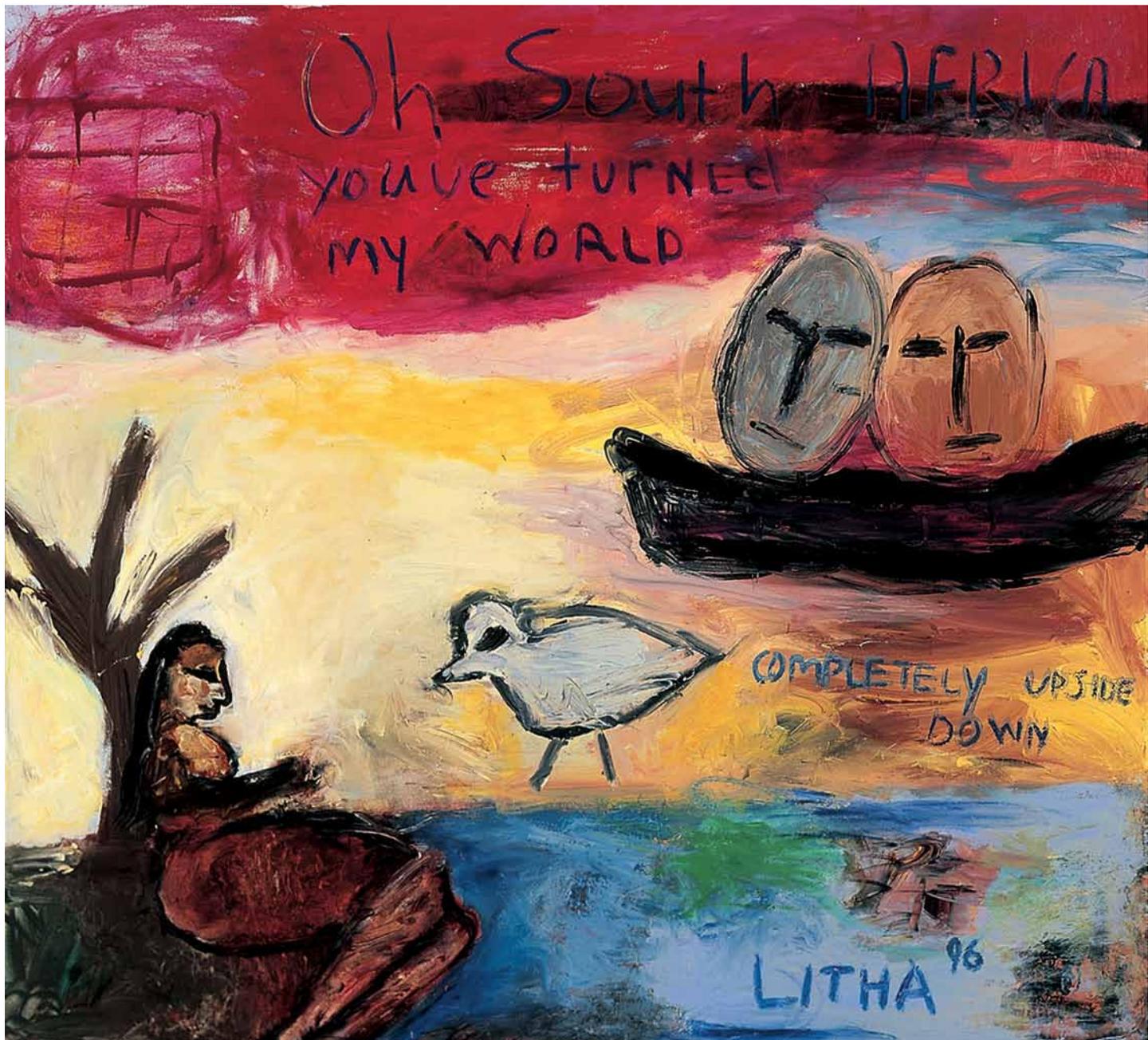


FIGURE 9: Lallitha Jawarihal: *Oh South Africa you've turned my world completely upside down*, 1996. Oil on canvas, 152 x 168 cm. Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town.

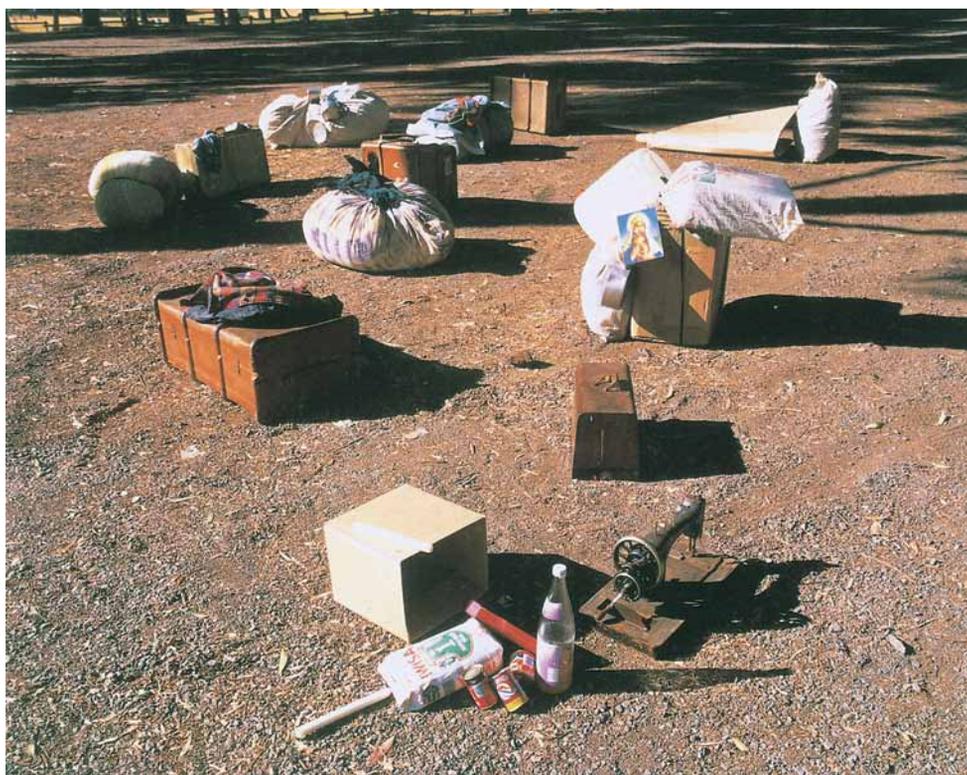


FIGURE 10. Kay Hassan: *The flight 1*, 1995. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation views (gallery and outdoors).

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