THE HIDDEN THREAD

in South African Visual Heritage

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Foreword

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Drawing (1976) E Mancoba, ink and oil pastel on paper 50 x 32,5 cm
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Back Cover Image: Ndebele Homestead Limpopo (2015) Abdulcadir Ahmed

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FOREWORD

African art has always been viewed from a colonising gaze by people who measure everything. Their dances are orchestrated. Their artists learn by copying old figures. Spontaneity and intuition free from meddling thoughts are eschewed. Surrealism for instance was one movement that sought to free artists from the domination of Reason. The consequence of this western attitude to life resulted in the marginalisation of Africa!

The writers in this book seek to situate South African Art in its proper place challenging Western norms! Following in the footsteps of Mancoba, they trace meteors rise to the infinity of creativity, intuitive, spontaneous and calculated!

– Professor Pitika Ntuli

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INTRODUCTION

'What are we leaving on the way of this so-called progress?'[1]

Ernest Mancoba.

Fig. 1 Ndebele Homestead, Limpopo (Ahmed, 2015)

This publication proposes new ways of looking at and naming the vast treasure of South Africa's indigenous visual heritage.

Missionaries, travellers and colonialists called African art tribal – as if they too didn't come from tribes. They assumed however that they came from a dynamic civilisation and African people lived a primitive lifestyle unchanged by time and the dynamics of history. Tribal has become the catchword for this supposedly unchanging primitive life. These perceptions and the term 'tribal' have greatly bedevilled the understanding of African art.

Furthermore, while this convoluted inaccurate naming process was underway an 'entribalisation' process was fostered by missionaries through the way they recorded African languages. Mine recruiting agencies and mine compound living, also divided African people along these created 'tribal' lines. These divisions were encoded by anthropologists and the architecture of academia, and then branded into South African society by apartheid.

It is now sometimes impossible to imagine South Africa without the lived experience of imposed ethnic divisions and this leads many to dismiss all pre-colonial heritage as 'tribal' aka existing outside of history and societal change. Up to today much art writing enforces this problematic label.

1. Mancoba in 1994, interviewed in Paris for a documentary film Ernest Mancoba at Home (page 7).

It is a difficult task to unravel this widely accepted approach and move the discourse forward. The complexity of defining the gaze: who looks at whom, who speaks for whom who speaks for themselves, the question of 'the other' and even of 'self othering' is significant in this unravelling.

The articles here begin a search for a way of seeing and labelling African art which is not bound by 'entribalised' names and definitions, or myopia about historical dynamism and change in African art. They also explore the values and knowledge embedded in African art and in exploring the archive which records this knowledge, sometimes have to navigate and use these historically suspect terms.

The circumstances in which African art is practiced are challenging. Massive urbanisation and industrialisation over the past century, coupled with the urgent quest to engage modernity, aka the necessity to embrace the world of commodity fetishism, along with the dominance of the western approach to modernisation, are significant obstacles to the practice of African art. Those who keep the knowledge and practices of all South African arts alive, but especially those working with indigenous visual heritage in what we now call the First System of Art[2] , are determined beyond imagination. There is virtually no soft space for the majority to land, little small-scale peasant farming, inherited wealth or other means of survival which would allow artists to exist outside of the system of commodity exchange in South Africa.

One goal of the Trust's work, following artists Ernest Mancoba and Peter Clarke, reinforced by work with Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, Elizabeth Makahane, Lefifi Tladi and others, has been to look anew at the First System of Art to find different ways of appreciating its role. Another is to encourage writing on the nature of the influences between the two systems, first and western, which doesn't assume that the western system is the font of all knowledge.

It is hoped that the Trust's efforts will contribute to a better appreciation of the artists still practicing within the First Art system, the wealth of knowledge they carry and the indelible influence of the First Art system on all art practices in our context.

Indigenous visual heritage or First System Art is more often found described in archaeological and anthropological records, less often in art history or written and researched by cultural insiders. The sources can be rich, but the perspectives skewed. Patty Hardy delves into the archive, finds a treasure trove of subject matter and begins a process of cataloguing and scanning relevant publications and exhibitions in *Critical survey of published research on South African indigenous visual heritage.*

Nomusa Makhubu in *Ubuhlalu* (beads) - *The Science of an Ordinary Art* perceptively highlights some of the problematic ways in which beadwork has been understood within anthropological discourses and national boundaries. Like Sbonelo Tau Luthuli's article on ceramics she highlights a pan-African cultural heritage and calls for a nuanced historical understanding of the symbolism of beads in our society. She highlights the political uses and abuses of 're-traditonalising' and places beadwork in history, myth and society thereby dismissing the validity of the anthropological gaze on beadwork. She reclaims beadwork as an art of the everyday, for all, as well as an embodiment of knowledge, whilst highlighting the ways in which it has been and sometimes still is, subject to a colonial gaze.

One of the many issues resulting from ways in which the First system of art is misunderstood is that significant intersections between art knowledge and mathematical knowledge are woefully neglected in our Knowledge Broking Institutions (schools, universities, media)[3].

Luthuli's call for new curricula emphasises the need for knowledge of African history and customs to enrich art studies, in order that the unifying and rooting features of African knowledge are appreciated and understood.

In *Ernest Mancoba's African Rooted, Universal Vison of Humanity*, Bridget Thompson tells of the process which led to appreciation and recognition of indigenous visual heritage in Ernest Mancoba's work. Getting to grips with Mancoba's deceptively simple, yet mysterious, multi-layered art took the Trust to the heart of South African visual expression. This journey highlighted the use of confusing terminology and assumptions that obscure rather than enlighten, and suggested routes to follow to deepen understanding.

Inspired by Everlyn Nicodemus, (Nicodemus, 2012) who elaborates two systems of art in Africa, she develops the concept of First System Art and then argues for First System Art to be introduced into the education system, framed within its own paradigm of knowledge and for its practitioners to be recognised as bearers of knowledge.

The Indian example of tapping into mathematical principles in early spiritual texts suggests the possibilities for Africa. By crossing the disciplines of the western paradigm and usefully deploying indigenous mathematical knowledge, embedded in indigenous art practices in Africa, there is potential for this knowledge to contribute to development in Africa as well[4].

3. This concept is inspired by Ernest Mandel (Mandel, 1999) where he discusses how under Late Capitalism, higher education is functional to capital and no longer a place of independent intellectual exploration. The concept implies that the profit motive determines education i/o research agendas in all institutions
4. Indigenous visual heritage in Africa is also often embedded in sacred practices (Williams 1974)

"Indian mathematics whose roots lie in the early Vedic period (circa 1900-1500 BC) has always had an important place in Indian Culture, having originally been developed for religious purposes - the construction of sacrificial altars and astronomical calculations for religious observances. Mathematical principles and observances were incorporated in verse form (sutras), into the Vedas, the world's oldest spiritual texts so as to facilitate their memorisation. Indian mathematicians were the first in the old World (the Ancient Mayas had discovered the zero seven centuries before them) to formulate such key mathematical concepts and techniques as zero, algorithms, Algebra, square root and trigonometry (sine and cosine), among many others. Indian mathematicians derived the concept of zero from the Hindu concept of sunya – the philosophical notion of the void or blank space. It was because the void existed in Indian philosophy that a symbol was conceived for it.

….. the fact that modern India was able to call upon ancient India's knowledge of algorithms because that particular technique of calculation not only originated in ancient India but, like other Indian mathematical knowledge, was also an integral part of its culture, cannot be unconnected to India's outstanding achievements in computer technology. (Claxton, 2005)"

Mathematical Principles in African Art and Design, Patty Hardy's article on art and mathematics distills research on many of the complex mathematical concepts expressed in *First System Art*. She sources the work of mathematicians who have

Fig. 2 Dr Esther Mahlangu at work (Stehr, 2018)

looked at First System Art and makes some of this extraordinary knowledge accessible by highlighting South African examples that could be used to teach mathematics and art in schools today.

Commenting on the honorary doctorate given to Esther Mahlangu, the world-renowned painter within the Ndebele mural art tradition, Professor Babatunde Fagbayibo noted:

"While it is commendable that the University of Johannesburg honoured Esther Mahlangu, the question remains: what happens from here? How does the institution intend to channel her genius and that of many others like her into shaping and decolonising knowledge systems? This question is also relevant for many other universities across the continent. The need to reconsider the status quo by bringing the hidden voices of 'ritual archive' specialists into classrooms is imperative. They are not only brain trusts; they hold the key to broadening the worldview of students and faculty members, and in turn equipping them with the tool to address many of Africa's developmental challenges. As such, our students can only benefit from their presence." (Fagbayibo, 2018)

It is a special pleasure to have a practising artist, who has delved into the knowledge contained in the First System of Art, contributing to this publication. In *Ceramics And South African Indigenous Visual Heritage*, ceramic artist Sbonelo Tau Luthuli translates sources into isiZulu which identify the historical depth and variety of ceramic production in Africa, notably (Gillon, 1984). Then, writing in isiZulu, he goes on to critique the tertiary education he was given, which introduced him to none of this knowledge.

He describes how he sought the knowledge necessary for his development as an artist outside of the academy and makes a heartfelt motivation for curricula which incorporate this knowledge, pleading for this to be taught in indigenous languages.

There is a long way to go before the knowledge held in the memory, skill and practice of all South African people shapes academic and art discourses, but the call for a de-colonised education injected energy into the journey and the discussion is at least on the table now. Still however, despite all it can offer, First System Art is woefully neglected in the discourse.

The Art and Ubuntu Trust fully endorses Luthuli's call for new curricula as well as the research and documentation needed to inform such new curricula. Furthermore, we urge Department of Basic Education curriculum developers in mathematics and art to consider the work of Mozambican, Dr Paulus Gerdes (Gerdes, 1999 and 2004) and American, Ron Eglash (Eglash, 1999) in the field of

what is called '*ethnomathematics*' in which they spell out the roots of complex mathematical principles in First System Art, as indicated in Patty Hardy's article many examples can be found in South Africa.

At the least, all art teaches problem-solving thinking. This is stated/claimed by art teachers across the world and was emphasised by art and mathematics teachers in the Trust's national series of workshops. Indeed, the world economic forum has recognised the importance of art education to developing the skills needed for jobs created by the 4th Industrial revolution. (Hardy, 2015) Whilst we believe that there are reasons for promoting art education far beyond its functionality, this might persuade policy makers to recognise and act upon how essential an art education is.

Although records, public understanding and significant discourse at tertiary education levels exist for western art, which is hardly the case for First System Art, it is not only First System Art that is neglected in our school education system. Despite South Africa having wonderful artists, and the bounty of two rich systems of art to draw on, both systems of art are neglected in school education where only 5% of schools provide art at school leaving level.

We hope young artists, designers and art historians will consciously recognise the First System of Art and do all they can to document the knowledge it carries, learn from it and develop it. Its knowledge base could revive our society in multi-facetted ways.

– Bridget Thompson

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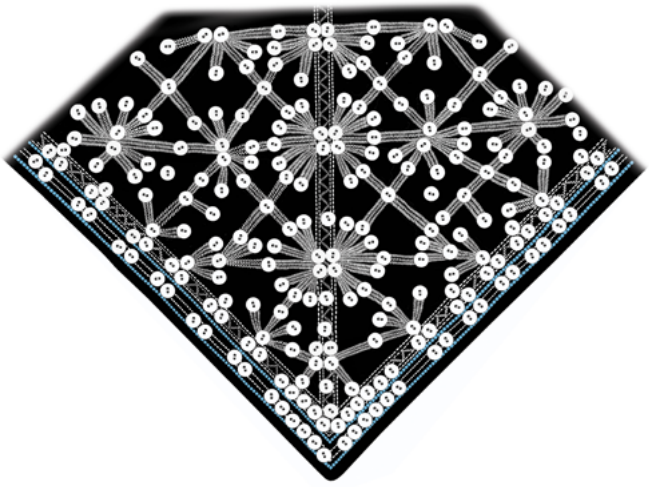

Fig. 3 Illustration of iqhiya (head wrap) by Jane Versfeld

CRITICAL SURVEY OF PUBLISHED RESEARCH ON SOUTH AFRICAN INDIGENOUS VISUAL HERITAGE

Patty Hardy

In researching the written records of indigenous visual heritage in South Africa, we must draw on knowledge gathered in many disciplines for various purposes.

Introduction

In researching the written records of indigenous visual heritage in South Africa, we must draw on knowledge gathered in many disciplines for various purposes. Information is found in mission records, in the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, and to some extent in art history. It has been gathered by missionaries, school inspectors, artists, travellers, photographers and traders, occasionally by art historians.

This published knowledge base has until recently relied almost exclusively on the work of white middle class researchers, often urban, who have theorised about African cultural practices, which are sustained most often by black people living in rural areas. The researchers are usually not insiders of the society under scrutiny and often do not speak the languages of those whose practices are being researched[1]. The conclusions are presented in writing and through photographs which often 'look at' rather than 'view from within' the society concerned. Some research is informed by oral histories. With this awareness of a) the variety of disciplines which represent the knowledge and b) the social distance between researcher and researched, this essay introduces some of what has been researched, by whom and why. It also presents some key texts, collections and exhibitions.

Patronising terminology

Until the 1980s, most western-educated researchers of African art used the words 'primitive', 'tribal', 'bantu' and 'witch doctor', all of which implied 'uneducated', 'backward', 'uncivilized', 'simple minded' savages, or at least, 'other, lesser' beings.

As recently as 1983, a Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) study showed how 'the ideological discourse in film and video content shifted from 'Bushmen as animals' to 'blacks as savages'; from 'the Noble savage civilised' to 'blacks as human but different', and finally to blacks as paradoxically 'the same but different'. These categories coincided with shifting attitudes caused by historical dynamics in the political economy…' (Tomaselli, 1989)

In 1988 there was an exhibition in New York entitled art/Artifact, which showed African art in anthropological collections. The introductory essay took great pains to explain why it belonged there. (Danto, 1988)

1. Two articles in this collection are exceptions: *Ubuhlalu – the Science of an Everyday Art* by Nomusa Makhubu and *Ceramics and South African Indigenous Visual Heritage* by Sbonelo Tau Luthuli. This survey should be read in conjunction with these articles and their bibliographies noted.

Perspective

Western hermeneutics (the theory and methodology of interpretation) cause researchers to read visual signs of African heritage through the Renaissance idea of linear perspective (with a vanishing point, converging lines and a horizon line), and to assume a lack of skill in depicting distance and form. It was thanks to Cubism that African sculpture was noticed in the west, in the early twentieth century and even so, it took another 50 years to become 'respectable'.

EARLY RESEARCHERS: AMATEURS, ARTISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS

The first written documents about indigenous visual heritage in South Africa can be found in the official records of the Dutch East India Company and investigators in their employ, as well as those like the first official astronomer in South Africa, Peter Kolbe, who provided an enduring record of Khoisan culture in 1719. (Fauvelle-Aymar, F.X. 2008) There are also missionary records, the diaries and letters of early European travellers and traders, intrepid explorers like Thomas Baines, who was also an artist, and Andre Geddes Bain, who provided the Commercial Advertiser with sketches and articles, and built his first road in 1832. There are a number of amateur investigative records like those of G.F. Angas in the mid-19th century, and more formally, there are anthropological studies as well as museum and government ethnologists' studies. (Angas G.F 1849)

Father Franz Mayr wrote about the interpretation of Zulu beadwork in 1907; Prof. Meiring of the Department of Architecture, University of Pretoria, published photographs of Ndebele beadwork and murals in the South African journal ('of knowledge and culture') Lantern, in the 1950s, revealing the practices of the day. (Meiring, A.L. 1951) The statistician who was known as an 'expert' on the subject of Nguni beadwork, Dr. H.S. Schoeman, wrote a report on Zulu beadwork in 1968 in which he discusses colour symbolism and the significance of pattern in Zulu beadwork at the time. (Schoeman, H.S. 1968).

The records of amateur ethnologist, Alfred Duggan Cronin, an Irish security officer on the Kimberley diamond mine, who photographed rural people in traditional garb between 1919 and 1939, have shown that they are open to the interpretation of the day. Michael Godby discusses the intention and impact of these photographs over the last 90 years (Godby 2010). There were mission photographers: the Swiss missionary and would-be anthropologist H.P. Junod, (1935) provided information about the Thonga to accompany Duggan-Cronin's photographs and the 1930s

photographs of the Lobedu by social anthropologists Eileen and Jack Krige. (These are contextualised and described by Patricia Davison and George Mahashe of the SA Museum (Davison, P & Mahashe, G. 2012). Their essay also provides valuable insights into the status of photographs as documentary evidence.

In 1936 the artist, educator and British Colonial Administrator, HV Meyerowitz, published 'A report on the possibility of the Development of Village Crafts in Basutoland' which provides a useful and detailed record of the art forms in existence at the time. (Meyerowitz 1936)

The South African Museum employed Margaret Shaw as their first ethnologist in 1930. Ethnology is a branch of anthropology that looks at cultures in terms of their historical development, similarities and differences. Shaw had studied under the anti-apartheid anthropologists Barnard and Schapera (a student of Hoernle's) at the University of Cape Town (Gaillard 2004 p 152). She started publishing in 1935, and along with Dr. N.J. van Warmelo, the government ethnologist, she produced several scholarly texts on the material culture of the Cape Nguni. This research appeared in four parts and was published between 1972 and 1988. The information provides meticulous, painstaking research and much original material. (Carey 1993) *The Annals of the South African Museum* (Cape Town) are a treasure trove of primary sources.

In 1958 Walter Battiss, an artist, along with the art historian J.W. Grossert and two others, produced one of the first South African histories of African Art, in *The Art of Africa*. It looks at the whole continent and provides detailed information on aspects of indigenous visual heritage in South Africa.

J.W. Grossert (1978) was the organiser and later inspector of arts and crafts for African schools in the Natal Education Department, who published his research on Zulu pottery, bone and ivory carvings and design motifs, as he feared that having fallen into disuse, these might be lost forever. (Grossert 1978). A-I Berglund (1976) and J.S. & A.P. Berg (1984) provide well illustrated guides to Zulu culture in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1980s. The retired German linguist, H.F. Jolles, developed an interest in Zulu culture in the mid-1980s and documented several aspects of Zulu material culture, including beadwork. (Jolles 1994).

The Marcel Jousse Institute for orality-literacy studies at the University of Natal

KZN has been publishing PhDs on orality and indigenous visual heritage since 1993, and this would be a good place to start researching the subject[2].

Prior to the establishment of the first department of anthropology at the University of Cape Town in 1921, there were three chief streams of written research into indigenous heritage: that conducted on San folklore by the philologist turned ethnographer, Wilhelm Bleek, and Lucy Lloyd (who was later awarded a PhD by UCT for this work) between 1870 and 1884; the collection of information on Zulu history and customs by the Natal colonial official, James Stuart, between 1897 and 1922, and the collection of ethnographic knowledge about the Tsonga and Ronga peoples of south-eastern Africa by the Swiss missionary entomologist, Henri-Alexandre Junod, whose work was first published in 1912. (Harries, P. 2007)

Thereafter two main ethnological traditions emerged in South Africa: an Afrikaner nationalist school of Volkekunde, (specialists in ethnic science) spearheaded by Wili Werner Eiselen[3] at Stellenbosch University from 1926 to 1936, and the anti-segregationist, leftist tradition of Winifred Hoernlé at the University of Cape Town.

In the decade from 1929 there was a revolution in social anthropology in southern Africa led by the women students of Winifred Hoernlé. By the mid-1940s they had produced internationally acclaimed ethnographies of many African societies, combining the analysis of tradition with the analysis of social change.

Apartheid brought a dramatic change of context for social anthropology in the English-speaking tradition. Many English-speaking social anthropologists chose to live and work in exile. African ethnographers like Archie Mafeje and Livingstone Mqotsi were forced into exile, effectively squashing what might be retrospectively identified as a rich insider ethnographic tradition in South Africa which included the work of Z.K. Matthews, Bernard Magubane, Joseph Manyoni and Absolom Vilakazi, the latter becoming early radical critics of liberal social science in southern Africa and elsewhere. (Anthropology Southern Africa online)

Writing in 1957, Absalom Vilakazi of the University of Natal had to inform his readership that 'Africans are not, as is popularly believed, a culturally homogenous group… [and refers to the] all too common tendency to paint a static picture of African life in the Reserves and to give the impression of monolithic social structures…' (Vilakazi 1957). This misperception persists to this day, fuelled perhaps by ignorance, racism, political manipulation, nostalgia or commercial opportunism. Art historian Anitra Nettleton and anthropologist Hammond-Tooke have

2. Oral literacy projects http://www.marceljousse.co.za/resall.html
3. He was responsible for demarcating the CLPA, the 'coloured' labour preference area, in the Cape in 1955

co-authored many texts on aspects of indigenous visual heritage. (Nettleton, Hammond-Tooke, 1989)

WHERE TO VIEW THE WORK
Art and archaeology

Art in South Africa: The Amazing Bushman was the first text by an art historian about rock art in South Africa. It was written by Walter Battiss, who became an acknowledged expert on the subject (Battiss 1939).

Peter Slingsby's maps provide brief and simple explanations of rock art which one can experience in situ. (Slingsby 2000) Authorities like Lewis-Williams, (who along with Thomas Dowson developed a 'neuropsychological' model of interpreting rock art) Patricia Vinnicombe and Janette Deacon, have published extensively on the subject. Graham Hancock's interpretations put South African rock art in an international context. Lewis-Williams has written a useful paper available online, on the issue of the many meanings that can be extracted from San rock art. (Lewis-Williams 1998) Theories have emerged about 'multi-authored' rock art, where a painting is augmented or adapted decades after the original was laid. (Ouzman, S and Smith, B.W 2004). There is also the question of whether rock painting is necessarily art, and what it means to view rock art in a museum or art gallery. (Lewis-Williams 1997). From these few examples it can be seen that there are many issues to be considered in approaching an understanding of rock art. The *SA Rock Art Digital Archive* is a good source of information about researchers and images in this field.

Collections of Africana

These exist in several university libraries across South Africa: in the Harold Strange Library of African Studies (Johannesburg Public Library), and in the Kimberley Africana Library. There are two private collections worth particular mention: the Brenthurst Collection in Johannesburg and The Killie Campbell Africana Collection in Durban.

Early public collections of beadwork

In 1962 the University of Fort Hare received the valuable Estelle Hamilton-Welsh Collection of artefacts garnered in the eastern Cape by Hamilton-Welsh and her mother between 1880 and the 1940s. Its value as a repository of cultural signifiers and aesthetic objects was recognised by the 1990s curator, Sean Morrow, who described his mission thus: 'In terms of museum practice, ways

Fig. 1 Battiss, W. figures and buck Watercolour on paper; 57 x 81 cm; (Battiss, 2013)

are sought to explain and transcend the aura of segregation, white financial and social power, ethnic particularism, and the allegedly 'primitive' that surrounds such collections, and to realise their potential to generate pride in cultural autonomy and the skills of their creators.' (Morrow 1996) Joan Broster moved to the Engcobo District in the Eastern Cape as a young wife in 1952. She was interested in the local abaThembu culture and collected and documented their beadwork (and that of other Xhosa-speaking groups) between 1952 and 1966. The collection was purchased by the University of the Transkei (now known as the Walter Sisulu University) in the 1980s and was declared a national treasure by the heritage agency SAHRA, in 2016.

Wits Arts Museum (WAM) has a large collection of beadwork from southern Africa, possibly the largest collection, and IZIKO National Gallery also has a significant collection. There are smaller collections in many other museums.

SOME KEY TEXTS

Early coffee table books

Jo Thorpe was responsible for bringing to the public eye the work of black artists living in KZN during the second half of the last century. She started the African Art Centre under the auspices of the South African Institute of Race Relations in 1963 and it is still in existence, although a separate entity. She was responsible for the commercial support and development of hitherto unknown artists, some of whom were to achieve international success, and published a compilation of monographs on them in 1994 [4]. There is now a Jo Thorpe Collection in the Killie Campbell Collection in Durban. (Winters 1998) and in (1994) she published *It's never too early: African Art and Craft in KwaZulu-Natal 1960-1990,* Indicator Press, University of Natal.

Joan Broster, whose collection of local beadwork can be seen at the Walter Sisulu University, published a record of her encounters with local clans in *Red Blanket Valley* in 1967. The noted professional photographer, Alice Mertens, collaborated with Joan Broster to produce an illustrated book on Transkei culture, *African Elegance*, in 1973. She then collaborated with the anthropologist HS Schoeman, in the illustrated text entitled *The Zulu* in 1974.

In 1976 the photographer and graphic designer, Jean Morris, collaborated with the social anthropologist Martin West to produce *Abantu: An Introduction to the Black People of South Africa*. In 1994 she teamed up with Eleanor Esmond-Whyte, a professor of Anthropology, in the production of *Speaking with Beads, Zulu arts* from Southern Africa.

Matsemala Manaka published *Echoes of African Art* through Skotaville Press in 1987. With a foreword by Eskia Mphalele, it is unique in its exploration of the work of artists influenced by indigenous visual heritage.

There was also a type of 'coffee table book' designed to promote ethno-tourism, with the message that 'black societies still live in pre-industrial times in peace and harmony with their environment, untainted by the pressures and demands of

4. It's never too early: art and craft in KwaZulu-Natal 1960-1990 (1994) Indicator Press, University of Natal.

modern life, white colonisation or monopoly capitalism.' (Tomaselli 1989) Having said this, there is a beautifully illustrated book on the *Ndebele* by Ivor Powell, with photographs by Mark Lewis, which is useful in that it takes an art-historical approach to the subject. (Powell 1995).

Between 1970 and 1986 the ethnographic photographer Aubrey Elliot produced illustrated texts on the Zulu, the Xhosa, two on the Ndebele, and one on beadwork. *Sons of Zulu*, a well-illustrated book published in 1978, includes an interesting comparison of 19th-century dress and artifacts with styles in the 1970s. Nowadays we understand that there is no such thing as 'the Zulu', or 'the Xhosa', and that it is more accurate to speak of '(name the language)-speaking people from a particular area at a particular time.' We also know that it is quite a challenge to identify the most useful information in a photograph.

Barbara Tyrell was an independent, adventurous artist who travelled around the country in search of local subjects to paint. She published a number of books recording the dress of indigenous peoples with great precision and an eye for detail. The Durban anthropologist, Dr. Killie Campbell (1881-1965), was an admirer of her work and an early collector. Tyrell's work was regarded as anthropology by the art world, which only fully recognised her as an artist in an exhibition at the IZIKO National Gallery on her hundredth birthday in 2012. All of her books are useful in terms of their written observations and accurate illustrations of local culture during the second half of the last century. (Jenkins 2015) It is also evident from the information she was given that she was a trusted participant observer.

Art lover and gallery owner Natalie Knight, along with her friend and colleague Suzanne Priebatsch, did a fair amount of personal research in the rural areas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to provide the provenance of works exhibited in her commercial gallery in Johannesburg. They specialised in Ndebele and Tsonga/ Shangaan material culture in Mpumalanga and the Northern Provinces.

In 1988 the cultural activist Steven Sack challenged the situation of black artists in South Africa in the exhibition title: *The Neglected Tradition* (1930-1988)[5]. The accompanying catalogue provides evidence of the concerns of black artists at the time.

5. http://v1.sahistory.org.za/pages/library-resources/onlinebooks/negleted-tradition/tradition-menu.htm 14 Sept 16

The African Mural, a beautiful book of photographs, was produced in 1989 by the photo-journalist Paul Changuion, with text by art historian Tom Matthews and artist Annice Changuion. (Changuion 1989) Although the text uses colonial terms like 'tribal' and reads a bit like a sermon, this book is often quoted by Paulus Gerdes, the Mozambican academic and mathematician, who uses indigenous visual heritage to teach geometric concepts. This is an example of how knowledge can be gleaned from an historical record regardless of its intention.

Between 2000 and 2005, Sandra Klopper adapted her academic style to provide accessible information about rural dress, ceremonies, arts and crafts and homesteads, in several books lavishly illustrated by the well-known photographer, Peter Magubane. Magubane started the process in 1998 with his V*anishing Cultures of South Africa: Changing Customs in a Changing World* in which specialists in their field annotated the photographs and Alan Mountain wrote the text.

Basketry

There are four thoroughly researched texts on the subject:

In 1992 Margaret Shaw published the first of three volumes of research into basketry: *'The Basketwork of Southern Africa, Part 1*. Technology. Annals of the South African Museum, 100 (2): 53-248, 110 Figs., 1 table. The following year she produced Part 2. *Basketwork of the Khoisan and the Dama*. The final volume covers the basketry of the Nguni peoples. (Carey 1993)

The most recent general text is by A.B. Cunningham and M.E. Terry (2006) - *African basketry: grassroots art from southern Africa*. Fernwood Press. This is a beautiful book with photographs that illustrate source materials and methods of basket-making in Africa.

Early sources worth reading include Levinsohn, R. 1979. Basketry, *a Renaissance in Southern Africa*. Ohio: Protea Press; and Lock, M. 1995. *The Dove's Footprints, basketry patterns in Matabeleland*. Basel, Switzerland: Baobab Books. There has been one contemporary publication devoted to 'Zulu' basketry. (Van Heerden 2009).

There is an interesting development in mathematics education that uses basketry to explain mathematical principles like fractals and a range of patterns. The Mozambican mathematician, Paulus Gerdes, has written extensively on the subject, and in South Africa, there is work using Ndebele wall painting and Zulu beadwork, by Chonat Getz and Helene Smuts (Van Heerden Getz & Smuts 2004).

Teachers and students of mathematics would find this text very useful as the 'objects' in the exercises are real, interesting and beautiful. The American mathematician Ron Eglash demonstrated the fractals at the heart of African design in a TED lecture which is available in transcription and describes the mathematical application very clearly. (Eglash 2014) He too has published much on the subject[6].

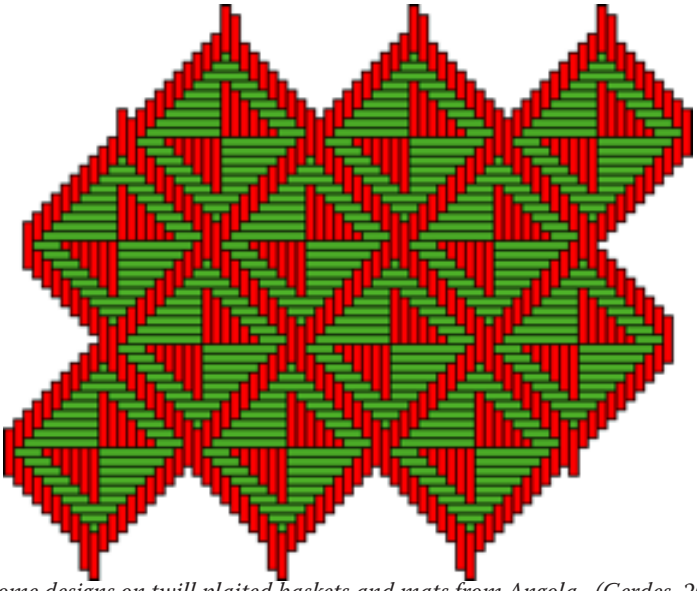

Fig. 2 Some designs on twill plaited baskets and mats from Angola. (Gerdes, 2003)

Ceramics

The SA Museum published Ann Lawton's MA thesis *Bantu Pottery of southern Africa in 1967*. This short text is a useful starting point in the exploration of indigenous clay work, as it was one of the earliest on the subject and was researched towards a Masters degree. This text is now freely available online (Lawton 1967) Another SA Museum professional, Patricia Davison, has also published primary research on the subject of indigenous ceramics. (Davison 1985).

6. See further Patty Hardy Mathematical Principles in African Art and Design in this publication

Until her recent premature death, Juliet Armstrong was the acknowledged academic authority on Zulu ceramics. She published singly, and along with other researchers, including Ian Calder, and developed a great body of information on the subject. Juliet Armstrong also draws our attention to the ethical dilemma researchers face when they know that the publication of their findings may lead to the destruction of the art source.

Prof Elizabeth Perrill also applies Indigenous Knowledge Systems to the subject in her text on Zulu ceramics, which usefully appends interviews with practitioners (Perrill 2006).

See also Sbonelo Tau Luthuli's article in this publication, *Ceramics and South African Indigenous Visual Heritage* and its bibliography.

Beadwork

Ella Margaret Shaw and N.J. Van Warmelo published *The Material Culture of the Cape Nguni: Part 4 Personal and general* in 1986 under the auspices of the SA Museum. This voluminous text, recording years of primary research, contains an exhaustive and useful bibliography. There are many general books on beadwork that include reference to South African beadwork, but specific texts include:

Carey, Margret. *Beads and beadwork of East and South Africa*. UK: Shire Publications. 1986. Courtney-Clarke, M. 1986. *Ndebele: the art of an African tribe.* Rizzoli. (internet site)

The exhibition Ten Years of Collecting (1979-1989), has already been mentioned, but it is worth drawing attention to the beadwork essays published in its catalogue: "Tsonga-Shangana Beadwork and figures" by Rayda Becker and Nettleton, A.; "Ndebele Beadwork" by Diane Levy; and "The Beadwork of the Cape Nguni" by Nettleton, A., Sipho Ndabambi and David Hammond-Tooke.

Labelle, M-L. 2005 *Beads of Life Eastern and Southern African Beadwork from Canadian Collections*. Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation. This significant exhibition and catalogue reveal interesting similarities in east and southern African beadwork.

"Southern African Beadwork: issues of classification and collecting" by Diane Levy in Art and Ambiguity (1991) Johannesburg Art Gallery.

Morris, J. & Preston-Whyte, E. 1994. *Speaking with beads: Zulu arts from Southern Africa.* New York: Thames and Hudson.

Costello, D. 1990. *Not Only for its Beauty: Beadwork and its Cultural Significance among the Xhosa-Speaking Peoples*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Dube, H. 2009. *Zulu Beadwork, talk with beads.* Denver: Africa Direct. Dube discusses the traditions and meanings of Zulu beadwork.

Morris, J. & Preston-Whyte, E. 1994. *Speaking with beads: Zulu arts from Southern Africa*. New York: Thames and Hudson.

Sciama, L. & Eicher, J. (eds) 2001. *Beads and Bead Makers, Gender, Material Culture and Meaning.* Oxford & New York, (1998): Berg Publishers. Includes the essays, "Gender in African Beadwork: an overview" by Margret Carey & "Gender in the Making, Trading and Uses of Beads. An introductory essay" by Lidia Sciama.

In terms of a mathematical analysis, there is an essay on Zulu design by Frank Jolles, Symmetry comes of age[7] in which he explores how cultural information is embedded in the symmetrical structure of pattern and explains how imperfect symmetry is intentional and provides an encoded metaphor[8].

Murals

The prolific publisher and historic architecture enthusiast, James Walton, produced some meticulously observed records of early indigenous rural murals in 1956 *African Village* and 1965 *Mural art of the Bantu*.

Another early record was produced by AF Rohrman in 1974: '*House Decoration in Southern Africa*.' African Arts 7, No3 (Sept 1974): 18-20.

Matthews, T. & Changuion, P. 1989. T*he African Mural*. New Holland Publishers. His beautifully illustrated book was mentioned earlier.

7. Washburn, D. K. & Crowe, D.W. 2004. *Symmetry Comes of Age: The Role of Pattern in Culture.* Washington: University of Washington Press
8. For more information on beadwork see also Nomusa Makhubu's article in this publication ***Ubuhlalu - Science of an Everyday Art*** and its bibliography.

For most of his working life the architecture specialist, Franco Frescura, was politically persecuted for his anti-apartheid activities, and despite all opposition, continued investigating rural culture through its architecture, and provided a slew of seminal research which he continues to deposit in a freely accessible website. (Frescura nd) Mchunu, V. in 1991 edited *amaNdebele, signals of colour from South Africa/ farbsignale aus Südafrika*. Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

Essays in this seminal text include "AmaNdebele-People of Beauty from South Africa, a short history" by Vusi Mchunu, "Mother Holds the Knife on the Sharper Side" by Gavin Younge, "Mural Painting in South Africa" by David Koloane, and "The House: function and signification in the art of the AmaNdebele" by Wolfger Pahlmann.

The text provides a unique insiders' perspective by including interviews with women mural painters.

Fig. 3 Book cover (Van Wyk, 1998)

van Wyk, G. 1998. *African Painted Houses: Basotho Dwellings of Southern Africa*. New York: Harry N. Abrahams. The first comprehensive survey of the arts, ceremony, and architecture of the Basotho people of Lesotho and South Africa. A beautifully presented book. Pieter Jolley's 2010 *Ditema Some decorated Sotho buildings* Cape Town: Creda Communications provides a pictorial introduction.

EXHIBITIONS THAT TRACK THE RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS VISUAL CULTURE AS ART

The functions of museums have been challenged this century; they no longer create official versions of the past, but open subjects for discussion and solicit public participation. In South Africa there is a strong element of redress or 'catch-up' in art gallery and museum exhibitions. A recently published book by Leslie Witz (2022). *Museum Times, Changing histories in South Africa*, addresses some of these changes.

A useful resource on art is S. Mdluli's PHD thesis *From State of Emergency to The Dawn of Democracy: Revisiting Exhibitions of South African Art, Held in South Africa* (1984–1997) along with the catalogues of the following exhibitions: In 1985 the exhibition *Tributaries*, curated by Ricky Burnett, opened discussion and a new approach by aiming to demonstrate the full range of current art production in South Africa. It included art from rural areas produced within an indigenous visual tradition.

The Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) produced *Images of Wood* which traces the roots of different sculptural traditions in South Africa (Rankin 1989)

The exhibition *Ten Years of Collecting* (1979-1989), marked a decade of collecting African art for The Standard Bank Foundation of African Art housed at the University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries. The accompanying catalogue is a compendium of academic essays on aspects of indigenous visual heritage.

In 1991 the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) mounted *Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art*. This exhibition was "an examination of a tradition of South African art that was pillaged, removed, negated and marginalised…Now it is like the people of South Africa, it is being gathered back from exile…offering a sense of identity and tradition that has been missing for decades." (Ronge 1991)

Ezakwantu: Beadwork from the Eastern Cape was exhibited at the South African National Gallery in 1993. At that time the SANG (now IZIKO) had owned a small beadwork collection for only six years. The exhibition generated some solid research on aspects of South African beadwork.

"In August 1996, two separate but linked exhibitions, entitled 'Secular' and 'Spiritual', opened at JAG. The exhibitions included '*Objects of Meditation*' and '*Views from Within*,' both curated by Nessa Leibhammer.

The resource book that accompanied these exhibitions provided explanations not only about the exhibitions, but also about the way that aspects of the indigenous visual heritage of South Africa are curated and displayed in western institutions." (SAHO nd)[9].

Zulu Treasures: of Kings & Commoners: *A celebration of the material culture of the Zulu people*. Pietermaritzburg: KwaZulu Cultural Museums and Local History Museums, 1996. The catalogue accompanying this exhibition provides a comprehensive collection of information on Zulu material culture.

In 1998 the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg mounted *Ubumba: Aspects of indigenous ceramics in KwaZulu-Natal*. The catalogue generated eleven scholarly essays on various aspects of pre-Zulu and Zulu pottery, including archaeological finds, tourist ware, and the development of fine art pottery.

Also in 1998, the Johannesburg Art Gallery presented *Evocations of the Child*. This exhibition was considered ground-breaking and challenged the boundaries of Art and Ambiguity (1991). Child figures, more commonly known as fertility figures or 'dolls', were one of the main features of the exhibition.

In 2002, Gary van Wyk organised a major exhibition of indigenous African art, *Ubuntu: Arts et cultures d'Afrique du Sud,* at the French national museum for the arts of Africa and Oceania in Paris. The catalogue included scholarly essays by leading South African and French specialists: Rayda Becker, Sylvie Brun, Patricia Davison, Lindsay Hooper, Sandra Klopper, David Lewis-Williams, Helene Joubert, Pumula Madiba, Karel Nel, Anitra Nettleton, Andrew Smith, Manuel Valentin, Johnny van Schalkwyk, and Gary van Wyk.

In 2006/2007 The Art and Ubuntu Trust mounted a commemorative exhibition of the painter and sculptor, Ernest Mancoba at the Gold of Africa Museum, Cape Town, *In the Name of All Humanity, The African Spiritual expression of Ernest Mancoba* which displayed indigenous visual heritage in dialogue with Mancoba, a modernist's work. This exhibition "centred modernity within an African consciousness-Mancoba's-and through Mancoba created acclaimed spaces for African art, ancient and modern." (Mcgee 2007).

Woven into Life: Basketry in Southern Africa was exhibited at the Castle of Good Hope in 2006/07. The accompanying information sheet provides current research on the subject. (Davison, P & Klinghardt, G. 2006)

9. We have not been able to find a complete reference for this resource book

In 2007, the Johannesburg Art Gallery presented another major exhibition called *Dungamanzi/Sitting Waters: Tsonga and Shangaan Art from Southern Africa* curated by Leibhammer. The exhibition investigated complex issues around identity. *Beadwork, Art and the Body: Dilo Tse Dintshi/Abundance* was exhibited at the Wits Art Museum (WAM) in 2015 and its catalogue provides new research on the history and interpretation of beadwork in South African indigenous visual heritage. (Nettleton 2015).

Conclusion

As this survey shows, the study of any aspect of indigenous visual heritage will take the researcher in many directions. From the earliest records of missionaries, anthropologists and travellers, through decades of changing attitudes as a result of political and social change, indigenous visual heritage has at last entered the realm of art and architecture. I have not emphasised online sources in this essay but can recommend that the researcher subscribes to academic sites like JStor that provides access to journal articles, and SEALS, a site that provides off campus access to certain South African university libraries. As more academic researchers with first-hand experience of indigenous knowledge systems enter the field, we can expect that new investigative and interpretive skills will continue to reveal our South African indigenous visual heritage and bring it to the centre of understanding of art in our context.

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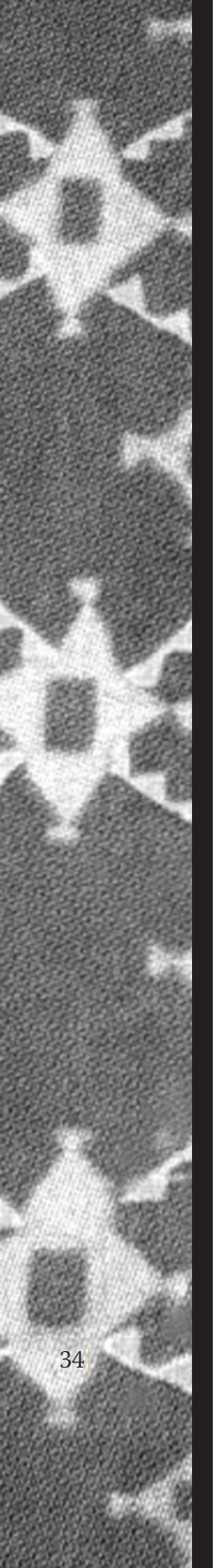

UBUHLALU (BEADS)

The Science of an Ordinary Art

Nomusa Makhubu

Sister, we have thrown our beads into the river!
Do likewise, and see what will happen!'

(African Gourmet, 2014)

Fig. 1 Makhubu, N. Emphefumlweni (in the soul) scanned art work

Some years ago, I made an artwork in which I placed my lifetime accumulation of beaded jewellery onto the surface of the scanner and then tried to scan my face onto the scattering of beadwork. My breathing created mist on the glass surface as beads concealed my face. This was a project about identity in the heyday of post-1994 racially defined ethno-crazed type of art. It was, I suppose, a personal protest against art-world conventions and market flows that refuse to see complex persons beyond formulaic conceptions of 'ethnic' groups. Artist statements seemed to almost always begin with 'In my culture…' or 'I am Xhosa and therefore…' or 'In my Zulu tradition…' I am guilty too. And the materials that were sourced to speak of or defy these 'traditions' in our conceptual art pursuits, seemed to be performing the canonical construct of the colonial museum. Native artist and native object – same thing.

So I have strategically kept away from overly fetishising academic writing about 'African beadwork', preferring to treat beadwork as a science of everyday life. I still collect and wear beads daily or when attending events, do's or weddings (and *umabo*[1]), and it does not matter if they do not help me find my Swazi-ness. Nevertheless, I continue to value their ever-changing social and political currency

Perceptions of beads and beadwork have emanated from a particular kind of scientific discourse. Both streams of hard (chemical analyses of archeologically excavated beads) and soft sciences (anthropology, sociology, history, etc.) have shaped the way knowledge about beads is presented. So although my scepticism arises from what I feel a colonial order of science has done to beads, I see them as a social medium for the making of knowledge; as a science rather than as an object of study in science. The popular endurance of beads suggests that their social and political significance is in the kinds of social networks they symbolise rather than in 'ethnic' differences. It is hard to ignore the entrenched paradox of beadwork. On one hand, beadwork can be seen as one of the key modes of formulating social consciousness and ways of belonging that are antithetical to the colonial order; while on the other hand, beadwork as a marker of identity seems to be a reversion to ethnic essentialism and stubborn parochial conceptions of 'African-ness'.

The Spectacle of Beads and the Anthropological Gaze

While historically beadwork has been invested with multifarious meanings and abstract value, that value is usually subject to the anthropological gaze in academic discourse. This discourse crystalises meanings, which otherwise continue to be redefined in everyday life. Often treated as marvellous crafts of indigenous peoples, beads have become irrevocably entangled with dying 'traditions'.

1. Exchanging gifts between the two families of the bride and groom.

There is a particular kind of fetishism linked to museum-quality beadwork in contrast to curio shop beadwork. The latter is viewed as less authentic and less valuable. The anthropological gaze accentuates difference, and concretises dynamic and transient socio-linguistic identities into essentialist 'ethnic' groups who are defined literally as 'pre-literate' in countless academic texts. Under this gaze, a social science like beadwork comes across as specifically 'third world', overlooking older European traditions in which beads were a medium of spirituality. For example, rosaries in Catholic devotional rituals. The everyday practice, the ordinary in African beadwork, is turned into spectacle and cast as eccentric and peculiar. Shifting from the ethnographic approach to beads, I consider them a tool for thinking and creating knowledge about the everyday. Like popular culture, they are, to use Stuart Hall's words, the site 'on which transformations are worked', where there is "active reworking" of 'existing traditions' (Hall, 1981).

Renato Rosaldo aptly points this out by showing the absurdities of ethnographic language, definitions and defamiliarisation. He asks: 'how valid would we find ethnographic discourse about others if it were used to describe ourselves?' (Rosaldo, 1993:49). Using the everyday ritual of having breakfast with his family and in-laws, he parodies the anthropological gaze:

Every morning the reigning patriarch, as if just in from the hunt, shouts from the kitchen, 'How many people would like a poached egg?' Women and children take turns saying yes or no. In the meantime, the women talk among themselves and designate one among them the toast maker. As the eggs near readiness, the reigning patriarch calls out to the designated toast maker, 'The eggs are about ready.' 'Is there enough toast?' 'Yes,' comes the deferential reply. 'The last two pieces are about to pop up.' The reigning patriarch then proudly enters bearing a plate of poached eggs before him. Throughout the course of the meal, the women and children, including the designated toast maker, perform the obligatory ritual praise song, saying, 'These sure are great eggs, Dad.' (Rosaldo, 1993:47)

This comical rendition of the ordinary in the kind of ethnographic language that would otherwise 'gain monopoly on objectivity' is similar to that used in defining beadwork and its cultural significance in 'rituals performed' by 'native groups' or 'sub-groups'. Rosaldo questions 'why a manner of speaking that sounds like the literal "truth" when describing distant cultures seems terribly funny as a description of "us"' (Rosaldo, 1993:48). He argues that the 'fiction of cultural compartments has crumbled' and 'when people play "ethnographers and natives" it is ever more difficult to predict who will put on the loincloth and who will pick up the pencil and paper'. By the same token, the tendency to impute fixed meanings to objects such as

beadwork obscures the contingency those meanings have on ever-changing cultural or political communities. (One hardly encounters a string of pearls that are given finite meanings belonging to a set European ethnic group.)

A critical eye has to be cast against the domineering anthropological gaze and the parameters it sets in understanding transient senses of self, belonging and being.

In creating the spectacle of otherness (Hall, 1997:223-279), traditions are cast as immutable. Within institutions where ethnography fetishises beadwork and empties social value to speculate on capital value, everyday practices become 'traditionalised', in the imperious sense of the word. Beadwork, at least the kind one finds in craft shops or the street market, has become a commodity that serves mostly a singular purpose: adornment. But they also serve a purpose of re-traditionalising the everyday. These two very different processes, one institutional and the other popular, seem to me to be at the heart of the paradox.

I am using the first term, 'traditionalising', to define the process of canonising, which distances and alienates objects from everyday life (beadwork, pottery, masks, etc.) to ossify parochial notions of ethnic difference as patterns of historical discourse. That is, people would wear, use and refer to these objects, at least in the 'traditional' forms, not for everyday usage but for special occasions and to signal a notion of 'lost traditions'. In this way, a canon of Zulu or Swazi traditional beadwear becomes formalised as unchanging; or rather, seems to resist any form of change and dynamism. Belonging to popular processes outside of institutions, the second term, re-traditionalisation, is used here to refer to people's continuing need to hold on to notions of tradition as reaffirmation of long established societies of agency, knowledge-making and complex subjecthood. Harry Garuba defines it, albeit sceptically, as 'the assimilation of modern forms into traditional practices' and the 'recuperation of traditional forms and practices… by modern elites' (Garuba, 2003:261-286). Both terms are used loosely and with criticality towards the oldfangled 'tradition'/ 'modernity' binary as a means of freezing time or casting Africa as traditional and backward, in order to imagine the West as modern and progressive (Chakrabarty, 1992:1-26). Taking also into consideration Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's notion of tradition as 'invented' (Ranger, 1992), I am critical of the biologically determinist ways in which ethnicities, 'traditions' and the things (i.e. beadwork) people ordinarily make and exchange are defined.

In scientific discourse, beadwork is generally classified into conventions of 'ethnic identities', as is often stated, or sociolinguistic groups. Much of the literature on beadwork focusses on Nguni beadwork, specifically the work of Zulu and Xhosa women. Illuminative geometric cryptograms, colour coding and gendered sartorial

conventions become ways of ascertaining provenance but also defining people in depressingly finite ways. Under the anthropological gaze, complex families whose mobility extends beyond the time-space constructs of imagined ethnic compartments, are presented as herds who, as if responding to some biological impulse, uniformly do things ('the Xhosa practice this', 'the Zulu practice that…').

A recent wedding that I attended, like many, including my own, included *umabo* – the exchange of gifts between families. Since this is often referred to as the 'traditional' part of the wedding preceding the 'white wedding', people literally call what they wear 'tradition'. So it is commonplace to hear people saying '*sizogqoka i-tradition*'/ 'we are going to wear tradition', as a general reference to Dutch wax printed fabric clothing and beadwork. Used this way, the term colloquially amalgamates people speaking different languages (seSotho, isiZulu, seTswana, isiXhosa and siSwati speakers, related and unrelated) and constantly styles anew whatever it is that is referred to as 'tradition'. My cousin, a child of a 'Tswana' man, jokingly calls himself a 'naturalised Zulu' in a 'Swazi' family. These labels do not have the aura they seem to have adopted in museums. And events are part of the ordinary and not a performance of a 'ritual'.

In many ways, beadwork can be seen as a medium that supersedes ethnic and even national boundaries. Sociocultural continuities suggest that people have been creating and sharing ideas. A history of beads in Southern Africa, therefore, forces us to look beyond present-day identity compartments without overlooking the value of knowledge created through various social processes. As colonial constructs, national boundaries conceal the exchange of ideas, practices, linguistic, scientific and creative interventions shared and learned through the Southward migration of 'abantu' from 1000 BCE to 400 CE (Nave 2010:156). This migration spread iron technology and agricultural knowledge. 'Bantu', a term 'of modern application' Soga, 1930:8), means 'people' in most Nguni languages. Bantu agro-pastoralists settled in Southern Africa and formed 'trading states' such as Mapungubwe in the Limpopo river basin. A complex society with social stratifications, Mapungubwe was established around 1220 (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007:27) and traded locally mined gold, ivory and animal skins for 'glass beads, cowries and copper ingots (Macdonald, 2010:106). They traded gold for glass beads from India and porcelain from China. Abundant gold beads 'were excavated from three royal burial sites at Mapungubwe Hill' (Macdonald, 2010:28). These were 'made by pouring droplets of molten gold into water and then flattening them slightly with a small hammer before punching a hole through the centre' (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007:27).

The spread of beads not only suggested widespread trade but also the mobility of people, ideas and values. The anthropological gaze is not only premised on a superior / inferior Manichean structure but also imposes a Eurocentric idea of property ownership as value. In the case of Zhizo 'garden roller' glass beads, for example, the wide dispersal is attributed to trade only, and not any possibility of a gift economy. Yet there is evidence of a gift economy (for example, *imibambanhliziyo*, heart-holders, are given to lovers; newborns, wives, sons and daughters-in-law are welcomed through giving beadwork as part of a gift economy).

Arguably, beadwork and the creative visual language it carries was spread through trade, but perhaps also through gifts. An example is the fame of Gawa through Kula shells. It is 'a ring of exchanges between different archipelagos in Melanesia, in which "signs of wealth", bracelets and necklaces of a certain kind were offered as presents' (Sansi, 2015:99). When a shell is received, it has to be given to others. Since each Kula has a name and is linked to a story, to circulate it is seen as 'an expansion of self' or 'an expansion of the person in space and time, an expansion of her name, her fame' (Sansi, 2015:99). Famed travelers can exchange objects that have 'bigger prestige' because they have other 'names of famous travelers inscribed in their legends (Sansi, 2015:99). The exchanges meant that the more one's name and stories travelled far in space and time, through Kula, the more prestigious one became.

Roger Sansi observes that: *the gift results in what [Mauss] called a system of total services, implying a triple obligation: the obligation to give, to receive, and to return… [and] in the movement from one obligation to the other, social hierarchies are produced, between those who give, those who receive, and those who return (Sansi, 2015:99).*

Similarly, one can hypothesise that beadwork functioned in a network of not just trade but also a gift 'economy' that circulated visual codes. Value, in this case, is not based on monetary value but social, cultural and political value. This is how I see beadwork. I see it, not as an object that only indicates social status and identity, but as a medium of making knowledge or making science through mediating constantly changing social relations and values. To me, beadwork mirrors processes of social integration and reciprocity as people migrated and continue to migrate.

One of the contradictions in how positively or negatively this gift economy is seen is, of course, how it was used for power brokerage. Political negotiations involved appeasing those in power through gifts, mostly beads. Colonial administrators often gave beads and knives as gifts, but with sights set on land, resources and labour (Sykes, 2005). Seen this way, the use of beads was instrumental in the demise of

colonised societies. Rather than treating beads as a native artifact that, in social sciences, validates the classification of ethnic difference, it is more useful to treat them as a site of contested knowledges.

The Social Art of Beads – *Uncantathu in Isibheqe*

You see the same thing in Ndebele house-painting, which is an amalgamation of the Sotho tradition with Nguni beadwork and basketry. In all of these, the fundamental form is the triangle.(Van Niekerk, 2016).

Not long ago, I came across *Isibheqe soHlamvu* or *Ditema tsa Dinoko* script on the internet. An article in the City Press announced 'a new indigenous writing system… more efficient than the "colonial" alphabet system in use' that has been developed by 'a group of South African linguists, software programmers and designers… for the past two years' (City Press, 2016). Although I remain cynical about the vague phraseology: 'amalgamation of the Sotho tradition with Nguni beadwork', I am fascinated by how a 'newly developed' script seemed so antiquated and 'historical'. This new writing system is derived from beadwork designs and mural art. It is fundamentally conceptualised on the basis of the triangle or the diamond shape that characterises the geometric conventions of different types of beadwork and mural art. As noted in the article, the word '*isibheqe*' comes from '*ibheqe*' which is what is often referred to as the beaded 'Zulu love letter'. It is similar in appearance to the siSwati, '*ligcebesha*' – which has two squares with varying compositions of triangular or diamond shapes. Considering this linguistic intervention, beadwork is ideogrammatic and enunciative, generating new knowledge techniques.

Isibheqe is based on how the mouth moves when enunciating language. It therefore echoes the social aspects of beadwork. It is also colour-coded, using mainly red, yellow, blue, pink, green, orange and black. There have been various interpretations for these colours, and generally yellow is associated with fertility, green with new life, white with purity or ancestors, and red with rebirth. The shapes, the predominant triangles, are often associated with fertility, with the heart, and, according to Gary Van Wyk, when two triangles are placed in an hourglass shape, they depict a married woman, and when they are connected at the base, they depict a mature woman (Van Wyk, 2003:32).

The diamond, two triangles joined at the base, is also thought to portray a shield as protection. It would be myopic to treat these interpretations as immutable; however, there is value in comprehending the centrality of the triangle, uncantanthu. The structure of 'the V and the triangle', Van Wyk notes, is 'locally named *Iitsomo* or *idlawa*' (Van Wyk, 2003:32).

I was intrigued by the consanguinity of the triangle in different creative forms beyond the borders of South Africa. The triangle and diamond shape is also a principal component even in Later Stone Age San ochre and rock engravings, which had geometric lines, triangle and diamond shapes (such as those found near Kuruman, Northern Cape dating back 10 000 years) and were referred to as 'the world's earliest known artwork'[2] (Giliomee and Mbenga, 2007:18). Yet, it could equally represent script or ideograms. So although isibheqe is said to be new, since it derives its script from beadwork, it may well be reflecting a sophisticated and continued writing system. And also, since isibheqe is designed as a pan-African system, encompassing many sociolinguistic groups whose linguistic similarities can be traced through migration, it traces the expansive reach of knowledge-making techniques that are manifest in beadwork conventions.

Ntandoni Biyela demonstrates how '*imibambanhliziyo* (heart-holders), or beads worn as 'love-charms' during the month of February show the literary prowess of the women who make them (Mtetwa cited in Biyela, 2014:1-10). Conceptualised as 'mind games' involving 'meticulous and critical thinking' on the part of the young women, *imibambanhliziyo* are 'deliberately coded, [and] are meant to be puzzles, sometimes taking days and months to unravel (Mtetwa cited in Biyela, 2014:4). Beads are linguistic systems and often '[functioned] like a dialect (Van Wyk, 2003:12-94). Beads, as Xulu asserts, 'talk through imagery' (Xulu, cited in Biyela, 2014:4).

As a continuation of the social science of creating language in visual and tactile creative ways, these aspects of beadwork surface in many creative forms whose taxonomic proximity has been altered by the European modernism discourse.

The paintings of Ernest Mancoba, for example, continued the innovation of language through colour-coded symbols and shapes. There is the predominance of the triangle in his compositions, where images metamorphose into text and dissipate again into non-figurative concepts. Language, like the sociolinguistic categories that have become fixed as ethnicities, transforms and transcends.

Beadwork can also be instrumental in performing public 'social protest' (Magwaza, 2001:25-32).

As Thenjiwe Magwaza illustrates, deliberately wearing beadwork in an unorthodox manner was a way to show grievance. Beads are seen to exhibit ways of belonging, as they 'map social typologies: a person's gender, age grade, and marital status, and sometimes his or her social rank and role and spiritual state' (Van Wyk, 2003:14). Yet, they have also been used to show dissent or communicate a political stance.

2. Although the Blombos Shells then superseded them in age

If one takes, for example, photographs of Winnie Madikizela Mandela wearing beadwork on her head and neck, the act of wearing beads as 'tradition' in an oppressive South Africa was not necessarily to exhibit 'gender, age-grade, and marital status', but was an overt political gesture.

Similarly, there is a photograph of Nelson Mandela wearing isiheshe, a beaded necklace. Mandela deliberately chose to wear 'a thick band of yellow and green beads' at his Incitement Trial and asserted: 'I had chosen traditional dress to emphasise the symbolism that I was a black African walking into a white man's court' (Cole,2015:105). While many accounts point out that Mandela, who was usually outfitted in suits, wore 'Xhosa leopard skin kaross', the assertion 'black African' is public protest against a racist apartheid state. Beads become a particularly political visual language that is not limited to concepts of ethnicity.

The form of re-traditionalisation here is also in consonance with postcolonial public figures for whom 're-traditionalising' was a deliberately political gesture antithetical to colonialism. Beads were a sign of 'power and political influence' (Cole, 2015:29) and they continue to have remarkable social currency.

History, Myth and the Labour of Beads

In a mythological narrative, six young girls tricked another to throw her beads into a river thinking that they had done the same. Meanwhile, they hid their beads when she was not looking. They said: 'Sister, we have thrown our beads into the river! Do likewise, and see what will happen!' As soon as she threw her beads into the river, the other girls laughed at her and dug their own beads out of the sand where they had hidden them and went home. The young girl who was tricked asked the river to return her beads. Eventually, a voice in the water said 'Your beads are here'. She followed the voice into the river and found an old disfigured woman. The girl dressed her wounds as the woman asked; the woman told her that she had been eaten by a monster who would not eat her completely because he needed her labour. She then hid the girl so that when the monster came home he would not see and 'devour' the young girl. When the monster came home, he smelt a human, but believed the old woman's retort that there was no one, and if the monster was hungry, he should finish her instead. The next morning, when the monster went out to hunt, the old woman gave the young girl beads and jewellery that were much more elegant than those she had lost. And when she returned home, the six girls who had tricked her were jealous and decided that they would go to the river and throw their beads in so that they could get the fine adornment too. When the young girls saw the old woman, they laughed at her and mocked her wounds. For that reason, she did not tell them about the monster, who then returned and ate them all up (African Gourmet, 2018).

Fig. 2 Nelson Mandela wearing beads and Kaross (Wilson, 2013)

Thinking about this story, the narrative about beads is really one about humility. However, there is also something unsettling in the portrayals (in historical accounts as well) of beadwork and the woman's body and labour. As a labourer being consumed by 'a monster', the old woman produces and gives beads as gift. There is also the latent lesson in manners: well behaved girls get the beads, badly behaved ones meet their fate.

It is reminiscent of siSwati lore about two girls: the older sister, Tsandzekile, who was kind, humble and respectful, and the younger sister, who was lazy and brash. The younger sister, Tsondzekile, tricked the older sister into taking blame for breaking their mother's prized clay pot. Fearing her mother's wrath, Tsandzekile accepted the blame; stayed by the river, and decided to take a journey to her uncle's house. On her journey, she met a disfigured woman by the river, an old woman who asked her to lick 'the mucine dirt from her eyes' and a wayward salamander. She humbly helped all the strangers she met (and even those whose trickery almost led to her demise) and this made her journey smooth. Her sister, on the other hand, was scolded by her mother and told to go and look for her sister. She met the same people on her journey, but was brash and vulgar to them, so that her journey became unbearably toilsome. She was eventually punished for tricking her sister.

The objects, beads and clay pot, in both stories, are produced through women's labour; both operate in the narratives as regenerative but also as instructive or a means of disciplining. But this kind of disciplining is centred on how to treat others or 'strangers', regardless of appearances. The 'ugly, old woman' betokens 'the young, beautiful one' and beads become a way of symbolising the value of civility.

As beads imply in the narrative, the presence of an unspeakable monster is the representation of power relations. Belittled as craft, the creative work of women might have been defended as art but it is rarely treated as such. The emphasis, however, on broader notions of social value rather than monetary value in narratives told about beads, is significant. In the story, the girl who lost her beads ends up traveling to a place unseen and gains more than she lost in the river. She gains social standing on the basis of her humility towards others rather than egotistic vanity. Beads therefore become a social vehicle, a platform for exchanging sentiments, expressing thought and circulating social values.

Most significantly, beadwork straddles different spheres of historical and mythological narratives. Take for example the ethnographic accounts of Shaka that have entered into history portraying him as a tyrannical leader (Viljoen, 2007) and as a 'bead-lover' who 'decreed [that] any new bead arriving in the country should immediately be shown to him so that he could decide whether he wanted to keep

it for himself'. Narratives about Shaka have always seemed to be histories, yet they are couched comfortably in myth. Shaka's love for beads is rarely interpreted as evidence of cultural finesse, political strategy or creative or economic acumen. Shaka is often portrayed as history's violent tyrant whose love for beads comes across as a form of greed and philistinism. Nonetheless, Shaka is also known to have 'gifted' favoured regiments with beaded necklaces called *iziqu* (Viljoen, 2007). In his book, *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History*, Dan Wylie argues that written accounts of Shaka in history books are sensationalist myth, since they were 'the product of the imaginations of a small handful of colonial-era travellers who almost all had ulterior motives' (de Waal, 2006).

In history as in myth, beads present a paradox in which they are a heuristic tool (they are didactic) but also a process of mystification. As Ben Okri reminds us, 'myth transfigures reality'. Further, myths 'mutate or perish in their collision with history' (Okri, et al, 2013:18, 23). History is subjective narrative just as myth is; the one is presented as the official didactic narrative to the detriment of the other as imaginative. It is, after all, always someone's perspective. Taken this way, a history of beadwork in South Africa cannot be pinned down to given and perceived meanings or social codes. In their paradoxical nature, beads divulge something about changing political and socio-economic relations and circumstances. Interpreting beads therefore should go beyond what certain colours and shapes mean. It necessitates an exploration of their conditions of production.

There is a space/time element to the labour of women in producing beadwork. The scientific discourse on women's beadwork presents it as a thing of 'far, far away' and 'long, long ago' while its creators could be called 'deep rural women'. There is a performance of myth in how history is staged or presented. And somehow, in the curtain folds of allegorical mise-en-scene, the creative authorial agency of the women disappears from the stage. Many beadwork artists have been unnamed as crafters. I am using the word 'unnaming' here to illustrate an active process of negating.

I am also reminded of a series of photographic works by artist Candice Breitz made between 1994 and 1996, titled *Ghost Series* and *Rainbow Series*. In the *Rainbow Series*, colour ethnographic photographs of black women wearing beads in 'rural' settings are collaged with images of white women taken from a pornographic magazine, to create disfigured bodies. In *Ghost Series*, the women in ethnographic photographs are cut out, erased or whitened out, so that only the beadwork, ornaments and background are left. This work demonstrates the violence of the anthropological gaze in constructing myth as historical narrative. In a critique, Okwui Enwezor emphasises how the gaze (that pornographises and denies a black spectator)

is a violation involving the use of black women's 'bodies as functional objects of labour (Enwezor, 1997:21-40). The fetishisation of beadwork through the anthropological gaze is to territorialise objects by de-territorialising the African body.

Beads connote a particular kind of body and labour. They have taken on a racialised and gendered disposition. While there is value in reinterpreting the significance of beadwork, it is unfortunately intertwined with the colonial imagination.

Politics of Being and Belonging, Ordinarily

'Throw your beads in the water and see what will happen'. Metaphorically, the lore of being tricked to give something of yourself for the promise of illusions, is today's predicament, resulting from a history of dispossession, which the discourse of beadwork (and other creative forms like it) has come to symbolise. I agree that beadwork and beads are a form of communication (Mtetwa 1988), (Van Wyk 2003); (Biyela 2013), (Biyela 2014), a spiritual medium; they indicate social roles and status (Twala 1951), (Boram-Hayes, 2005), and symbolise transformations (Biyela, 2009:35-52). They are pedagogical (expressing distinctive aesthetic knowledge) and should be seen as an adaptable, versatile and multi-sensory art. Since they do not only appeal to the visual, but are also haptic and auditory, beadwork and beads trace the multiplicities of embodied art and art as social process. They are also personal and, as such, can have infinite subjective meanings.

How to confront the contradictions, however, may not be so easy a task. Beadwork seems to skirt the margin between reclaiming a sense of belonging, of being ordinary in the world, and the opposite: being different, ethnic, and alien. The politics of the ephemera frozen in space and time as historical artefacts in museum buildings and archival collections continue to be haunted by narratives that are known and those that are unknown. For me, beadwork symbolises a peculiar void into which one is drawn by the mesmerising spectacle of eccentricity - and yet there is the haunt of the exotic that repels one. This paradox, entrenched in the politics of race and gender, agitates the palatable and comfortable conclusions about what its symbols mean. Beadwork has been the object of spectacle and speculation, containing history as myth and because of that, manifest in the everyday as a site of contested knowledge.

Beads are worn by ordinary people for ordinary reasons in an extraordinary world.

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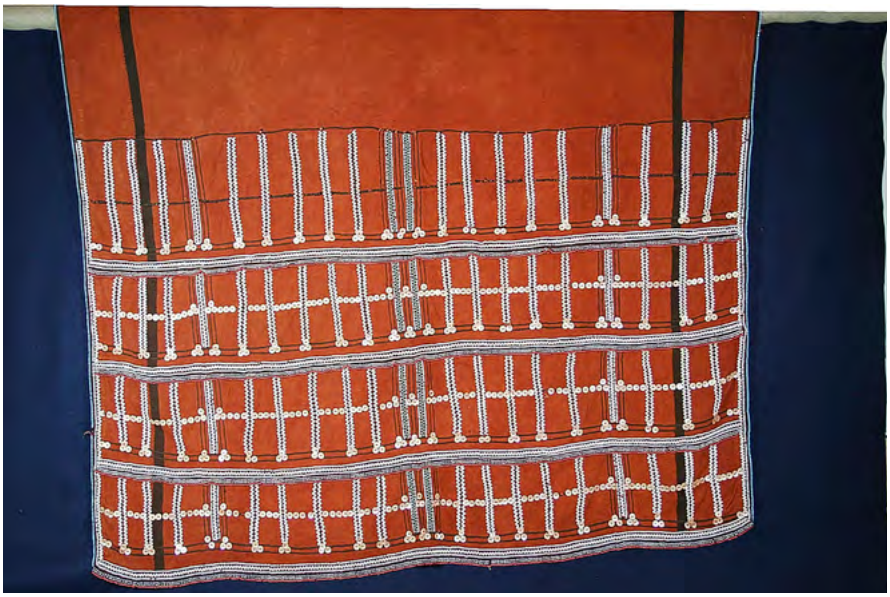


Fig. 3 Mfengu Peddie District, Women's cloak, late 20th C, ochred cotton cloth, IZIKO (Ahmed 2005)

CERAMICS AND SOUTH AFRICAN INDIGENOUS VISUAL HERITAGE

(Translated from Zulu by the author)

Sbonelo Tau Luthuli

Clay underpins the survival of humanity, and its use reflects the essence of life.

BACKGROUND TO THE HISTORY OF CERAMICS IN AFRICA

Clay-making is an old tradition that has made its mark since antiquity in Africa and the world at large. The proof of its longevity and durability is identifiable in buildings, settlements and communal spaces within civilisations that have been in existence over many thousands of years. Timbaq Tu in Mali is a living example of buildings made with clay which attest to an ingenious skill in the use of clay for architectural structures.

This amazing and articulate skill is not restricted to residential structures for human occupation but is also found in different approaches towards the making of ceramic pots, bowls and various other utilitarian clay crafts that reflect a meticulous expression of creative craftsmanship and have the stature of heritage in many societies. Through the centuries huge outputs of ceramics have been produced. This is demonstrated in archaeological finds from structures formerly populated by ancient communities where clay featured prominently in the making of highly crafted, ceramic utilitarian/domestic wares.

Fig. 1. Great Mosque at Djenne (Mystery Wonders, 2016)

We will especially focus on South Africa, where the origins of some clay-making traditions can be traced to migrations from North and Central Africa in the last millennium. Yet others are two or three millenia old.

We will identify works from the Southern African region, which, although with regional specificities peculiar to each group's particular heritage, have features in common with each other. Regrettably we find that the very people who have made these works and who are insiders to the cultures that produced the values expressed in the vessels and influenced their aesthetics, are not playing a large enough role today in documenting and preserving the knowledge embedded in these practices.

Today these knowledgeable black people are the objects of study by outsiders to the culture (mainly white) who make gross mistakes in their interpretations of the work in the formal western institutions of education. As these institutions dominate knowledge transmission more and more, the knowledge is in fact distorted and diminishing.

According to Gillon, a huge part of the Sub-Saharan region was populated by various groups of black people. Due to over population these groups decided to move further south. This large movement of people was necessitated by the need to venture into other lands /spaces for survival and subsistence. Population growth/ expansion caused overcrowding which created pressure to move. Another causative factor was drought, which had adverse effects on arable land and vegetation, which in turn produced sparse resources for human survival and that of livestock. Movement was caused by the need of the people of that particular group wishing to grow and expand due to the challenges imposed by the size of their habitable spaces and the need to produce enough food to sustain themselves. (Gillon, 1984.28). The movement of these groups was undertaken much faster after they developed the use of iron ore and the cultivation of new crops and the storage and preservation of food for long periods. (Gillon, 1984:28)

According to Gillon, (1984: 28), "The first migration took a route from north of the dense equatorial forest and reached the great lakes in the first half of the first millennium BC. There they settled and the early Iron Age culture that they developed is associated with the Uwere type of pottery found near Lake Victoria." (Gillon, 1984:28).

"A second wave of migration is believed to have moved southwards and after crossing the Zaire River, reached northern Angola and the Kwango - Kwilu region in the last quarter of the first millennium B.C. Some of the Bantu language-speaking people continued the migration from the area of the Lakes, turned westwards

and linked up with the previous groups in the Kwango - Kwilu belt. They brought with them their early Iron Age culture, symbolised by Uwere ware, and at the end of the first millennium B.C. spread southwards from Angola into Namibia. Two other streams of migrants moved away from the lakes. One turned east towards the Indian Ocean, where in the Shimba hills, southwest of Mombasa, Kwale-type pottery originated and then southwards to Mozambique and Eastern Transvaal. Others proceeded south from the Uwere area, moving west of Lake Tanganyika and reached Shaba and western Zambia in the middle of the first millennium A.D." (Gillon, 1984: 28)

This section of history is very important in that it clearly shows the effect of migration on people of this era and the tracks of communal diversity within the migrant groups. Important in this regard is also how migration influenced their survival behaviour and the will they demonstrated in upholding the culture of ceramic skill and expertise, as both a premise and a value-enhancement tool that helped to carve and positively position the course of their history.

This historical knowledge contains highly valued qualities and tells the story of the migration of black people and their perseverance in surviving and transcending the challenges faced. It demonstrates how they were communally interwoven in their movement from the huge hinterland of the African continent.

This affirms their adherence to the cohesive mortar of traditions and customs that kept them together and were prevalent in the entirety of Africa and the southern geographical regions of the motherland. One can identify utilitarian traits in the making of clay pots, masks and other handcrafted objects that were consistently used on a regular daily basis. This utilitarian culture was a stable feature of the huge and diverse group of people whose languages were different but whose clan lineages together constituted the entire African continent.

This knowledge is important in that it enables us to know and understand the bonding qualities that link and unify us as a people. The said knowledge is a vehicle that contains the depth of the history of black people. It is noteworthy that it contains the depth of the history of black people who are currently not afforded the status of custodianshipf this material culture and are are therefore regarded as low-ranking or inferior. The task of documenting our history is given to people who cannot present an accurate and authentic positioning of it.

This knowledge is shared by Werner Gillon in a book titled: A short History of African Art. According to Gillon (1984:334) "Paintings and engravings on the walls of rock shelters and caves are the oldest form of art practice in the Southern part of Africa. He further explains that "their age could hardly be determined, but it predates the Early and the late Iron Age culture by centuries or possible millennia.

"The originators of this art, the San, never became part of the Iron Age; they remained the hunters and gatherers of a Stone Age civilization, although there are remnants of these groups surviving in the Kalahari today. (Gillon, 1984.334).

"Over large areas of the South African Republic, from the (former) Transvaal to the (former) Cape Province, stone-walled settlements built by food-producing and metal-working people have been dated to about A.D. 1000 to 1500. Skeletons found in the course of archaeological research in areas related to these settlements were of negroid people. Khoisan potters produced ceramic ware found in the southern Cape. This was fine well-fired pottery, reinforced with internal lugs, easily recognised by its pointed base. …Pottery found at former Transvaal sites resembles ceramics still produced by the Venda people, a major BaNtu group". (Gillon, 1984: 334).

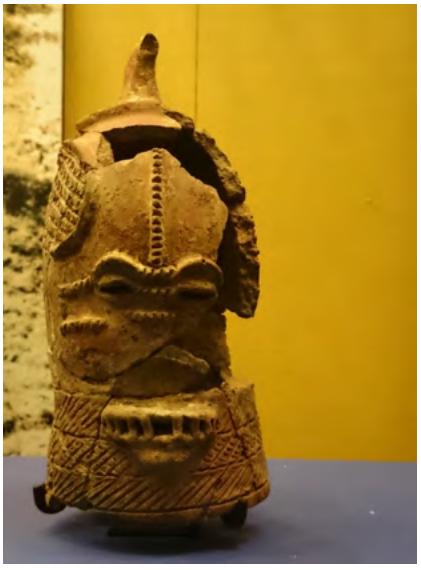
"The early inhabitants of the Melville Kopje, Witwatersrand, are known to have mined and smelted iron in several areas, and remains of the smelting activities are dated to around A.D. 1050. Early Iron Age dating's south of the Zambezi usually related to pottery-produced readings from the first century to A.D. 800. In the Phalaborwa district of the Transvaal, dating showed that probably from the eighth century A.D. early Iron Age people inhabited the area. It has been established that the present inhabitants are still producing pottery that closely resembles ceramic wares excavated and positively dated to the eleventh century A.D." (Gillon, 334)

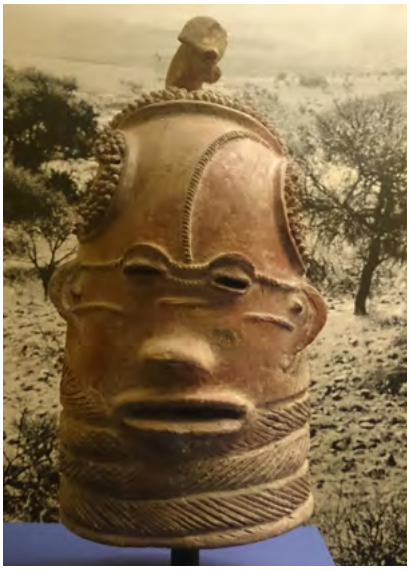
"In fact so close is the similarity between excavated early pottery and that made by the BaPhalaborwa, a Sotho group in the nineteenth century, that it is possible to lose individual potsherds from say, the eleventh century in a collection of nineteenth century material." (Gillon, 1984:334) Brown also elaborates on this. He states that "Hottentots who greeted Van Riebeeck and before him, the Portuguese marines, had well-fired ampere-shaped clay pots, conical-based to stand upright in sand and designed to be carried by pack oxen. William Ten Rhijne (1686) noted, 'the richer among them make the most beautiful pots for use in cooking.'"

"The origin of Hottentot pottery is as mysterious as the people themselves; some ascribe it to pre-dynastic Egyptian influence. (Brown, 1978:34) Jalmer Rudner, of Cape Town whose collection is unique, recovered much of it from fragments found in flat ground below shifting sand dunes on the east coast and as far west as Saldanha. Recent carbon dating has given a time span of 2000 years (300 BC) for the making of these technically excellent pots." (Brown, 1978:34). Brown reflects that "The BaNtu invading groups brought their skills southwards, each with characteristic decoration and shapes. The skilled potters, usually women, were part of their tribal structure, making pots for their own use and for barter."

"The Tsonga, Chopi, Ambo, Venda and Lemba, and some Natal Nguni and south Sotho, mould from a hollowed lump of clay. The Mpondo and Swati build with rings of clay and add the base last. The Lemba, Shona and Sotho apply geometric designs, with red and black pigment. The Nguni and Swati ware is blackened and decorations incised or bossed." (Brown, 1978:34)

"Another important discovery of Early Iron Age figurative art was the Lydenburg heads. They are one of the earliest known forms of African sculpture in Southern Africa and are dated between A.D. 500 and A.D. 800. The story of the discovery of the heads is almost as fascinating as the heads themselves. The first pieces were discovered by Ludwig von Bezing, a ten-year-old child playing on his father's farm. Bezing later went on to develop an interest in archaeology, returning to the farm as an adult, to find the rest of the pieces that he had seen while still a child.





Figs. 2 & 3 Lydenburg Heads (Wikipedia, 2022)

Between 1962 and 1966, he frequently visited the Sterkspruit valley where he unwittingly collected pieces of the seven clay heads. He joined the archaeological club of the University of Cape Town when he studied medicine at that institution.

He took his finds to the university at the insistence of the club of which he was a member, but he had not only found the heads, but pot sherds, iron beads, copper beads, ostrich eggshells beads, pieces of bones and millstones. Archaeologists of the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand respectively, Prof Roy Innskeep and Dr Mike Evers, excavated the site where Von Beizing had found

the remains. Two of the clay masks are large enough to fit over the head of a child; the other five are approximately 108 to 210 millimetres. (Gillon, 1984:335)

The masks have both human and animal features, a characteristic that may explain that they had symbolic use during initiation and other religious ceremonies or traditional rituals. Carbon dating proves that the heads date to approximately 500 A.D. and were made by early Iron Age BaNtu tribes who lived there. These people were BaNtu herders and agriculturists and probably populated Southern Africa from areas north-east of the Limpopo River One of the most impressive aspects of the Lydenburg Heads is that they are at present the earliest known example of Iron Age art (sculpture) south of the equator.

"They are considered a national treasure by South Africa and are now on display at the IZIKO National Museum in Cape Town. Two larger heads and five smaller ones make up the Lydenburg find. The heads are made of similar clay used to make household pottery and are also made with the same technique.

Figs. 4 & 5 Lydenburg Heads (Wikipedia, 2022)

The smaller heads display the modelling of curved forehead and the back of the neck as it curves into the skull. Around the neck of each of the heads, two or three rings are engraved horizontally and are filled in with hatching marks to form a pattern. A ridge of clay over the forehead and above the ears indicates the hairline. On the two larger heads a few rows of small clay balls indicate hair decorations. The mouth consists of lips.

The smaller heads also have teeth. The seventh head has the snout of an animal and is the only head that represents an animal. The heads are extremely important because they provide evidence of a complex aesthetic sensibility among early agricultural communities in Southern Africa, a millennium before the advent of European colonization." (Gillon, 1984: 336).

THE WRITER'S OWN EXPERIENCE AS A CERAMIC ARTIST

Fig. 6. Luthuli S.T. Mis-education of the Blacks/ Stolen Legacy/ Intellectual prostitutes/ Twins of Destruction, Ceramics, 12 cm x 25 cm. (Ahmed 2014)

Fig. 7. Luthuli S.T. Design Calabash/Design Ukhumba/Timeless, Cermics, 22.5 cm x 27 cm. (Ahmed 2014)

Fig. 8. Luthuli S.T. Singaba-Ntu Singaba ka-Ntu, We are a people who belong to the Ntus, Ceramics 22.5 cm x 30 cm (Ahmed 2014).

My first encounter with the Lydenburg heads was in 2015; I had never heard of them before then. I was introduced to them when I had matured and was already a well-recognised artist. Hearing about them for the first time was not such a surprise to me because it is not something I would have expected to hear about from any government institutions of higher learning such as universities because the knowledge given out from such institutions is controlled. The only time institutions such as high schools or tertiary institutions would teach about anything relating to ceramics, they would refer to Nesta Nala's pots or those of other potters who came before her. Some pieces that I often hear of, are those of old broken ceramic wares that are often said to have been produced by the founders of this art form. Most of such work is before Nesta Nala's time.

When we speak of the founders of ceramics or pottery, I often see old broken pieces of pots and dish wares that are said to have been created centuries ago. Most of those broken pieces are presented without the date of their creation, and the area of their origin is often unknown to those that claim to have discovered them. When we speak of the founders of ceramics or pottery, I often see old broken pieces of pots and dish wares that are said to have been created centuries ago. Most of those broken pieces are presented without the date of their creation, and the area of their origin is often unknown to those that claim to have discovered them.

Learning about the Lydenburg heads allowed me to understand that the skills that I possess have been around since the beginning of time. It is an ancient skill, especially of black communities. These heads are also reflective of some old broken pieces of ceramic utensils that I often see which are now often used for something other than their original purpose, due to their condition. This includes using a piece of broken ceramic pot for burning incense during certain family traditional ceremonies, which is very common today. What is upsetting now is that indigenous knowledge of this kind cannot be found at all levels of government institutions. If one happens to come across it, in these government institutions, it is usually misleading and cannot be trusted entirely. Having only learned about the Lydenburg heads five years after I graduated from a university institution should in itself tell you about the poor level and standard of our education, especially our culturally and historically based education.

I was formally introduced to Clive Sithole and Nesta Nala's work by a leap of faith while I was wondering around the streets in the city of Durban. I happened to enter the Durban Art Gallery and that is where my love for ceramics started. Seeing their work made a huge impression on me even though I had seen ceramic pots before, but I had never seen pots like theirs and of that nature. It was after that encounter that I really decided to be an artist. I decided to look for an institution that taught visual arts; however, after a while there, I realised that their system of teaching was biased and could not be justified. It was a biased Eurocentric system of education structured in a manner that encourages one to undermine one's own culture, upbringing and other culturally associated customs, especially those of African origin. All this is encouraged in a polite and subtle manner that does not raise any suspicion. When one enters an institution of higher learning, one is usually informed that the language of instruction within that particular institution is a language of European descent, not an African language.

Such behaviour restricts and prevents the one whose language is not English or any of the European languages and causes them to struggle when they are given the task of sharing narratives relating to themselves or their culture. This is due to the fact that there isn't enough content to clearly elaborate on whatever needs elaborating. The language creates a barrier.

Another misconception that I learned from a tertiary institution and from the public was that ukhamba (ceramic pot) was for drinking sorghum beer. This is not entirely true because ceramic pots vary in shapes, forms and sizes and they all serve different purposes. There are those used for carrying water, called *izingcazi*; ithunga for storing milk (ubisi), sour milk (amahewu), and for storing sorgum beer.

They all vary in their use, e.g. *imbiza* is for brewing sorghum beer and can only be used for brewing, while other pots can be used for drinking. Such pots include (*umancishana*), a small drinking pot, which is normally used by the head of the family on specific occasions or just as an ordinary pot. I did not acquire all this knowledge from a tertiary institution because there, they teach that every pot is for drinking traditional beer, regardless of how it looks. This therefore gives an impression that black people are drunkards as this is documented in the depiction of our history by white people. That we are a useless people who sit the whole day and bask naked in the sun, indulging in alcohol from sunrise to sunset. All of which is absolutely false and a defamation of character. Culturally everything was created for use; nothing was created for display. In addition, the form of whatever is created informs a user of how it should be used. In ceramics this is called "form follows function".

There were things that people of a particular gender or status were not allowed to do or use, for example men did not use water-carrying pots (*izingcazi)* because collecting water was women's duty. Women's role concerning a ceramic pot for drinking went only as far as creating it and serving with it; nothing more, because only men consumed alcohol. Most of this knowledge I've gathered through observing social or traditional ceremonial gatherings. To acquire such knowledge, I would observe through looking, questioning and listening whenever there were cultural, or merely social gatherings. Such knowledge in African society does not only apply to or is limited to one group of people or to a people of a particular lineage or language but is a commonly shared knowledge that can be instilled in a child from an early age so that by the time they mature they are well informed with regards to what is required.

In addition to observation at social gatherings I would read books by South African authors and those of Africans in Africa and those in the diaspora. Such books included "Kusadliwa Ngoludala" by C.T. Msimang. After reading this book I realised that I needed to do more reading and learn more about my culture. This introduced me to more books of much respected authors such as Credo Mutwa (1921 -2020). I read his books, "Indaba My Children,"and "Zulu Shaman". His books led me to some of his video clips that I watched on YouTube, where he gives in depth knowledge about African wisdom.

In pursuit of knowledge I would also sit with the elders or with a group of young people discussing and sharing knowledge. That is how I met people from an organisation called AbaNgoni, an organisation led by baba T. Mbhele and other members such as Ndabenhle Myeza, Khehla Ngcobo and baba Cele. Their knowledge and understanding of African history is very rich and they helped shape my understanding as well.

Such information as I gathered from them led me to understand that through my life I had been misinformed about my history and that of other Africans in the diaspora and everything else in between. I then watched YouTube videos of Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam and of other authors such as John Henrik Clarke, Anthony Browder and Dr Umar Johnson, to mention just a few.

However, of all of them, Dr Yosef Ben Yochannan (b.1918-2015) better known as Dr Ben, is the person whom I regard as my grand, master, teacher. I learned so much from him about the history of different religions, the origin of black people and many other things. He was a prodigy who contributed immensely to the liberation and emancipation of black people from the psychological bonds of mental enslavement. His contribution may not be directly relevant to this subject but what I learned from his teachings, is what informed and shaped the kind of a person I am today and allowed me to look at my society and my art from a broader perspective.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

I believe that our education system in both lower and higher institutions is in a dire condition. This is due to the fact that it is structured around a Eurocentric system of learning and teaching that undermines an Afrocentric system of learning and teaching. Well-informed and knowledgeable elders who possess African indigenous knowledge are sidelined from these institutions. They are regarded as uneducated people who lack tuition, especially those that have never studied in the institutions of higher learning. This is problematic because it prevents people from acquiring true knowledge instead of the false propaganda that creates a kind of people who are passive, ignorant and lack critical thinking skills.

Due to the challenges of the economic system, artists find themselves in a position where they have to create artworks for commercial reasons so that they can maintain themselves. As a result of this the purpose that each work is supposed to serve is often lost because of the need to serve the customers. This results in a situation where any narrative intended to be conveyed by means of the artwork is often lost. Such narratives form and are an essential part of the work because they speak to issues of politics, religion, history and social questions.

However, they are abandoned due to financial constraints and this is very unfortunate because so much gets lost due to such an approach. Some artworks lack all meaning while others are covered with decorative patterns, signs and symbols that we don't understand

A common aesthetic device amongst work created by people of different languages from different regions here in South Africa and in Africa at large, is three designs that inform everything that is designed or created. These are a square, a triangle and a circle. It is from these three symbols that you find relationships in a variety of work that represents these different groups.

Such relations can be seen in shapes that are informed by these three symbols. Regardless of where a clay pot is found, it always takes a similar circular form and this also extends to architecture and many other things.

Cultural ties developed through the imperatives of traditional value systems and spoken languages can be seen as the communal and societal mortars that constitute everyday life. These ties are shaped by three factors falling under the flagship of design: the triangle, square and circle. These three important design imperatives are the roots that inform both the creative route and aesthetic path of any traditional directives.

Authentic outputs are the best vessels to render the creative genius which constitutes our cultural and traditional well-being. These shapes build aesthetic bridges that contribute to the final realisation of any intended creative output within the holistic directives of a broad based "design" approach. The example in this regard could be a clay pot/ceramics located in the African continent. A clay pot will assume both the spherical and circular shapes in its creative route which begins with the bottom part of the pot that gradually follows an upward movement. The use of a sphere/circle is not only applicable to clay pots but also features in the construction of rondavels and traditional huts (amaqhugwane) which are dome-shaped and constructed through the use of thatching grass and strong long twigs (*izintunga*).

Common knowledge tells us that a circle is a shape that has neither beginning nor end which can mean unity between two entities. This could be the case with gender and the substantive traditional punctuation thereof.

When considering patterning we recognise that first and foremost the use of clay pots in Africa precedes the aesthetic appeal and decorative finesse of the pot. The aesthetic value of a ceramic work is driven by the dictates of its utilitarian purpose.

Customarily the value-enhanced features of the creative work process draw their path of becoming from the popular design motifs and patterns which are derived from distinct traditional, communal and societal streams, identifiable with group traits. This work process (in the making of clay pots) cuts across KwaZulu, Kwa Xhosa and Sotho-speaking localities. Patterns and authentic decorations draw their character from streams of cultural relations in pursuit of a stamp of cultural identity.

One example of this is found in clay pots that feature a finish of smeared red ochre which is commonly used by women folk on their faces and bodies for protection against sun rays. Likewise textural enhancement will vary with regard to each language group besides identifiable relations which may be a communal feature.

A finished ceramic work becomes a mirror that enables groups to position, reflect and extend their culture through key utilities that form an integral part of their lives.

Other historians/writers support this by saying, "In some areas the decoration on both media - ceramic and skin - shared the same name, *Izinhlanga* or *Izimpimpiliza* (Mayr, 1906: 462, 1907: 634- 5 cited in Armstrong et al) Cicatrisation was commonly practiced in the 19th century by teenagers between the ages of 13 and 16 and mainly by women. (Byant, 1967:165; Krige 1963: 375 cited in Armstrong et al). "Small incisions were made in the skin, sealed with dry cow dung and topped with a glowing ember. The wounds healed into small, raised pea sized-lumps". (Armstrong. J, 2008:339).

Similar decorative rendering of design patterns may be found on clay pots whose utilitarian purpose is closely related to how different groups use clay pots or ceramic outputs. This is identifiable with communal relations which also contain lateral spheres of historical and indigenous knowledge; underpinnings which cut across groups and thus are not specifically aligned to people of one particular group. This therefore is a communal trait that finds expression in the way different outputs of ceramic work /clay pots assume their sense of intended utility. In the days of old, clay pots were produced for both the community at large and also for

for the homesteads that constituted such settlements. The making of these works was prompted and driven by the need to use them in serving food/meals, cooking and serving traditional home-brewed African beer in events that were meant to affirm the importance of traditional customs.

Current trends have affected the authentic base of the statement of intent in both the making and use of creative outputs from clay/ceramic work. The arrival of white people introduced problematic factors which infused misdirection into our way of life. This brought the emergence of commercialised intent that prioritised monetary value on craft outputs in pursuit of revenue generation.

Current trends have affected the authentic base of the statement of intent in both the making and use of creative outputs from clay/ceramic work. The arrival of white people introduced problematic factors which infused misdirection into our way of life. This brought the emergence of commercialised intent that prioritised monetary

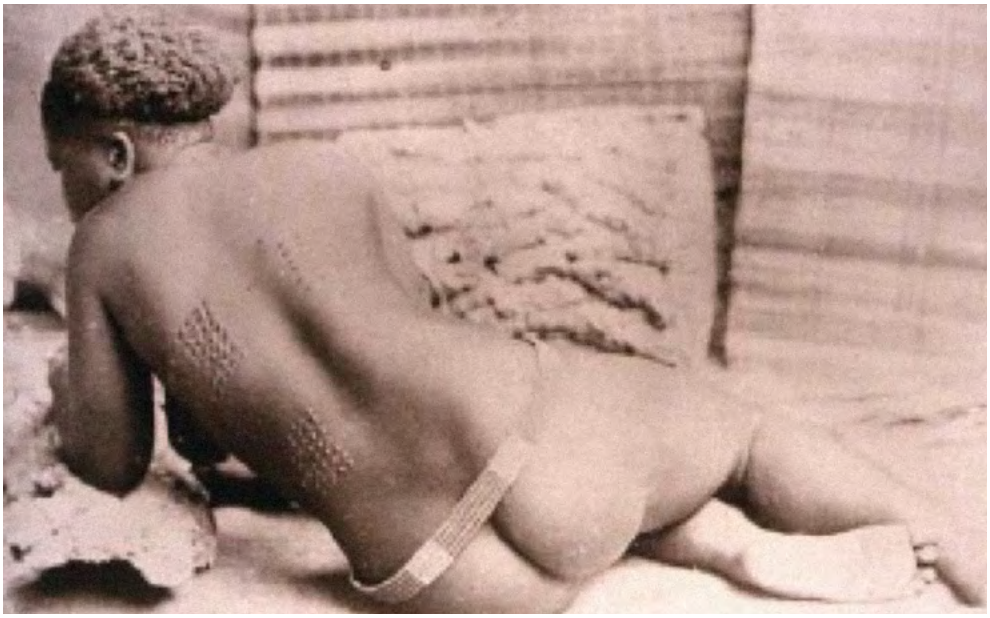


Fig. 9. Woman with cicatrization. Scars on the left-hand side and new cuts on the right-hand side show that it was a staggered process. (KwaZulu-Natal, 2016)

value on craft outputs in pursuit of revenue generation. This had an adverse effect on both the intended value and aesthetic character of creative crafts/ceramics. As a result, huge amounts of outputs from a ceramic creative base would be affected by a grossly misappropriated aesthetic/authentic character that fails to positively endow our traditional, cultural base and customs.

The norm is now to respond to the demands and dictates of buyers/consumers which, regrettably, ends up harming the authenticity and aesthetic stature of outputs – outputs that should supposedly demonstrate and mirror impacting links on our history through antiquity. The prominent scenario is now dominated by competition and commercial imposition.

All this adds up to a misdirected, compounded and mixed-up source of history where the output (ceramic work) ends up being void of any identifiable features with the overarching retrospective past. "From 1976 Nesta was in contact with the Vukani association in Eshowe, which aimed to revive and encourage Zulu crafts, and which introduced her to a wider market."

Fig. 10 (left). Pot purchased in the Table Mountain area near Pietermaritzburg in 1909.
Fig. 11 (right). Traditional Zulu Beer Pot. (Bonhams, 2012)

Garrett (1998:47) calls it a decisive turning point in her career. "She started producing small, blackened model beer pots in quantity for the tourist trade - I remember seeing whole trays of them at her home ready for transport to the African Art Centre in Durban, along with new forms based on Western prototypes, such as salt cellars, bottles and flower vases." In Garrett's words the tourist market "redirected her career and soon she was producing exclusively for external patronage." (Garrett, 1998:47; Fig. 3).

The above words (of Garrett) bear testimony to the damage that was done by producing craft for a designated consumer/group which ends up misdirecting the traditional path of authentic commitment by opting to produce ceramic work for commercial consumption. Another factor that often influences the way clay pots are made is migration. Migration of people from place to place was caused by the urge of different urban and rural communities to keep moving in order to survive. (b)(a) This exposed people to cultural inroads that potentially redirected their course of survival, and the stability of their outlook on life.

Political factors come into play in a manner that results in influences that gradually effect change in the way that people commit themselves to ceramic work. Besides the prevalent nature of depiction of human conditions, migration largely affects people moving from rural to urban communities. Specific reference to this has been observed in ceramic work within the crafts sector. Living conditions therefore

end up impacting on the production of a clay pot /ceramic work, together with the political underpinnings, historical challenges, health and adverse survival conditions. This experiential curve can potentially cause a marked difference in the creative process; that process which is regarded as an indispensable tool in generating revenue for sustainability.

My aim in creating artworks is to educate and inform about common knowledge and that which is unknown or not so popular. The information I share varies from my personal experiences to that of events that might have occurred. I am driven by the need and passion to educate and share knowledge. What I would like to see transformed in the education system is that every subject be taught in all eleven official languages. People should be taught and informed in languages that they understand and which are acceptable to them.

Fig. 12 (a) Nesta Nala pot, made in 1983 at the request of Leonard van Schalkwyk using EIA motifs from excavation sherds; (b) Detail of the decoration; (c) EIA sherd from Wosi. (Nala, n.d.)

The English language should not be forced upon people. Indigenous languages should not be undermined but must be given the same respect as European languages, and people should have a choice of the language in which they wish to be taught or instructed. A true education should be that which is liberating and emancipating and it should teach people how to emancipate themselves from every form of oppression/slavery. I am against the form of education that creates a kind of person who is ignorant and oppresses other people.

Fig. 13 Small flower vase for the tourist market, bisque-fired, burnished, 'NESTA Nala,' '19-79' (Jolles, F, 2005)

Our education sytem is structured in a manner that conditions one to look for jobs instead of creating for ourselves. This is all an outcome of a foreign system of miseducation that was introduced to Africans by white people to enslave them. Education across all cultures should also be encouraged.

As Africans we based our beliefs on knowledge system, things needed to be tried and tested before we could believe in them, but mis- education that was brought by white people is that of just believing without any evidence to guide our beliefs.

A true education should teach you about your history so that you know how to move into your future. It should also include a cultural base within the family or communal structure. In the arts institutions, the history of African and South African artists should be encouraged.

European arts history should not be imposed and dictated to students; they should also be taught and encouraged to learn about their very own founders and heroes in the history of South African arts. People such as Nomagugu Ngobese, Credo Mutwa and Dr John Mbuli, among others, should be granted an opportunity to teach and share knowledge with the youth so that they grow with an awareness of their own history. In addition to this, youth should be encouraged to be aware that their forefathers made major contributions in science, engineering and many other structures of life long before white people came to Africa.

It is critically important that history should be documented and in the same vein passed on, in the form of teaching, to annul the element of lies and misappropriation of the truth in our education. Primary and higher levels of education should be tasked with presenting truth underpinned with the tracks

of history for black communities, because that is where much redress is needed. Miseducation and compounded lies were delivered with the aim of positioning blacks in unsubstantiated tracks of history. Black people deserve to know the source of their origins and the historical underpinnings thereof. Deliberate misinformation has caused black people to follow the religious directives of other nations which have no regard for the stature of African traditional beliefs.

It is paramount that the history, art and origins of black people be documented. It is equally important to nurture development and education through enhancing our historical self-worth within indigenous knowledge systems. It is a matter of great concern that black learners are immersed in the history of foreign nations which is largely white in content. This is further punctuated by the sad state of affairs when it comes to art and the positive profiling of Eurocentric Art as the most important source in History.

This in essence is a misdirection of our history which has made some of us think and believe that you can only be afforded status in education if you have been taught by a white person about the important role Europe has contributed to the motherland. History has shown that when white people arrived in South Africa and the entire continent, black people had a deeply rooted track of history driven by the flagship of our tradition which comprises a rich history, customs and religious beliefs. Misappropriation in this regard can never be attributed to people who have lost touch with their identity. The decorative and aesthetic compositional aspects of ancient ceramic works bear resemblance to ceramic and wooden works that have been made in the current epoch. This affirms the importance of customs, traditions and rituals of people living in Southern Africa.

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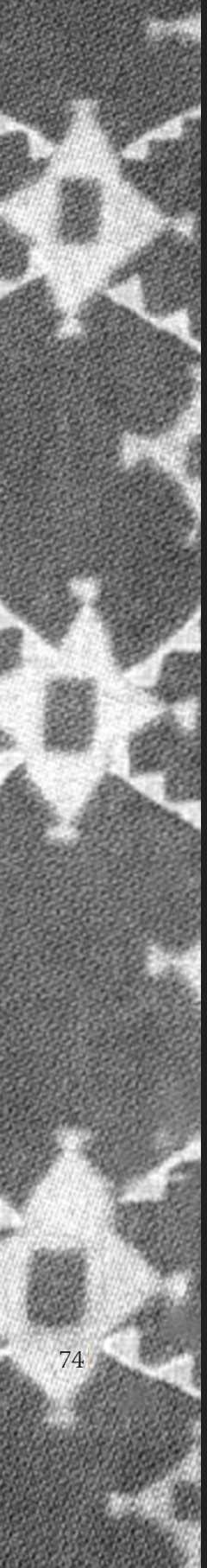
Fig. 14 Luthuli S. T. Melodies in me 2015, Ceramics, 29.5 cm x 29.5 cm



MATHEMATICAL PRINCIPLES IN AFRICAN ART AND DESIGN

with particular reference to Southern African Murals, Basketry and beadwork

Patty Hardy

Rural society is a storehouse for the decorative motifs and traditional craftwork which gives our nation its unique African flavour…'

– (Frescura, 1998, 1999:88)

Mathematics as a language of the arts

In 1986 the contemporary mathematician, Kappraff, started his research into how aspects of mathematics (similarity, proportion, the theory of graphs, two and three-dimensional geometry, tiling and symmetry) were interrelated and whether they formed a common language for the arts, architecture, the sciences and engineering. When he completed his project, he said:

'I stand in awe of the degree to which the knowledge of these areas connect. I have also discovered that mathematics provides the sinew and bone that knits these diverse areas of knowledge together. (…) In a sense, the mathematician tears at the heart of a problem and reduces its essence while, paradoxically, gaining a deeper and more general understanding of it. On the other hand, the designer sees a problem as a whole and offers up a personal solution and through this special involvement, sheds light for all to see. Each needs the other's insights. It is only through this duality of approaches to problems of all kinds that lasting and useful solutions can come about (…). It is out of the need to rediscover geometry as the language of the arts and sciences that design science had its origins.' (Kappraff, 1991)

South African mathematicians Becker, Getz and Mathison point out that as mathematical principles are found everywhere and in every object throughout history, 'it is possible to say that mathematics itself, although not a stylistic marker, is a principle used in the making.'

'For example, planar symmetry patterns are found not only among the beadwork made in KwaZulu-Natal, but also in many other regions in the sub-continent. Stylistic distinction, or what marks a Zulu piece as different from an Ndebele piece, lies rather in other factors such as colour choices, the nature of the items produced and the fashion of the time. Yet the organising principles seen in symmetry and pattern speak to a philosophical ordering of the world that has found visual expression in beadwork. So, although we cannot know how the artists originally conceived their designs, it would seem that the artist's creative process in developing a new symmetry design is not unlike the mathematician's inductive-deductive thought process in coming to the conclusion, for example, that the total number of symmetry groups which have translation in two directions must be 17.' (Becker, et al, 2001).

A cursory overview of artefacts, design and art works across Africa will reveal the wide use of geometrical ideas in woodwork, ivory pieces, pottery, paintings, weavings, mats and baskets[1].

1. For example: (a2+ b2= c2) This equation is known as the Pythagoras Theorem. It relates to right-angle triangles, where the square of the hypotenuse (c) [the longest side] is equal to the sum of the squares of the two other sides. It is therefore possible to use a basket to explain the workings of Pythagoras' theorem. This idea is illustrated later.

This again demonstrates that mathematical concepts are embedded and interwoven into the 'traditional' daily activities of various African cultures.

Thanks to a movement started by the Mozambican mathematician Paulus Gerdes, in the 1980s, African mathematicians are finding more and more ways to reveal the intricacies of mathematics and geometry in African material culture.

Rock art demonstrates early examples of mathematics

Our earliest art (and evidence of geometrical thought) is found in marks etched in rocks, such as the ochre tablets found in the Blombos caves, or in paintings on rocks. In fact, 'the drawing of lines and diagrammatic relations is to be found at the very foundation of spatial orders that later lead to scientific activity (geometry, invention of numbers, scriptural fixation of notations as writing/alphabets or pictograms)' (Gerner 2011). Geometric patterns were used by many ancient civilizations, and Islam continues to do so.

'Psychologists have shown that in the early stages of trance these hallucinations comprise geometric forms known as phosphenes, which are produced by stimulation of the nervous system. Phosphenes include grids, spots, zigzags, and vortexes, and they are frequently depicted in San art. They are more common in the engravings than the paintings.' (Lewis-Williams, 1985).

Fig. 1 (Slingsby, 2000)

'There is a powerful image in a Cedarberg Cave where the hunter and prey are arranged according to the 'golden mean': the distances from the fawn to the hunter and from the hunter to the doe are in the exact ratio 8:5 (which is also the ratio in the Fibonacci spiral which is ubiquitous in nature). Furthermore, the painted area of the fawn plus the area of the hunter exactly equals the area covered by the doe.

This Pythagorean ratio and the golden mean ratio are not happy accidents: they perfectly demonstrate the artistic eye of the painting's creator.' (Slingsby, 2000).

Fig. 2 (Slingsby 2000).

'Guy Midgely is an eco-physiologist and specialist in the field of rock art and cognitive archaeology. In terms of geometry, he has interesting things to say about an image in the Slamaans Cave. It is of an archer with his or her bowstring drawn back. The bow 'is the arc of a perfect circle, centred on the archer's left shoulder. The bowstrings are of equal length; the archer's hands are perfectly placed on a radius of the circle. The artist not only understood the physics of the use of a bow, he/she must have used Euclidean geometric construction techniques to achieve this result.' (Slingsby, 2000).

Southern African mural art reveals mathematical principles

The Mozambican mathematician, Paulus Gerdes, noted that mural decoration is one of the cultural spheres most used for geometrical exploration in Africa. (Gerdes, 1999b)

One South African researcher who is responsible for most of what is recorded about rural indigenous architecture and its decoration, is the architect and revolutionary, Franco Frescura, who began his research in the late 70s. Although his focus was architecture, he developed a great interest in historical and anthropological aspects and provided a closely studied record of wall art in rural areas over the last 40 years. Prior to his work, there were two frequently cited researchers, Campbell (1815 and 1822) and Burchell (1953), whose records included observations about mural decoration in rural areas and show that it was geometrical or figurative at the time. Later, Frescura established that these abstract and figurative forms had a social, religious, mystical, political or symbolic nature, 'although it is probable that, in reality, a combination of two or more of these elements will be involved at any one time.'

In the 1940s, when formal resistance to white political dominance was at a low ebb (though the ANC was now more confrontational) rural women 'took up the cudgels of their people's struggle and began to decorate their homestead walls, making statements about their social conditions and creating images of regional and political identity'. (Frescura, 1998/1999:87).

'These designs are generally acknowledged to be the product of women and have remained their preserve in rural areas right up to present times. Given its context, forms and symbolism, it is not difficult to show that this work is a statement made by rural women in respect to their fertility, political status, religious cosmology and

in certain instances, their family lineage. Within this interplay of social patterns, however, the choice and meaning of pictorial matter plays a different and somewhat ambiguous role. Originally the rural artist derived much of her inspiration from natural or geometric designs …' Frescura, 1998/1999:66)

Frescura identified the following common characteristics of rural wall painting:

- Wall painting occurred when farm work was minimal, and during rituals and other ceremonies
- They identified areas of women's control in the house[2] (Frescura, 1998/1999:81)
- Elements of the design may be read as heraldry[3] (Frescura, 1998,1999: 82)
- They exhibit regional identities
- In South Ndebele, Venda and Tsonga homes, wall decorations symbolised the householder's fertility and status as head of the family and participant in community matters[4] (Frescura, 1998, 1999:83)
- Some appropriated images from white urban areas, and some borrowed from neighbouring rural cultures (Frescura, 1998, 1999:83)
- They showed that women were in charge of the home[5] (Frescura, 1998,1999:81)

Evidence of the roots of mural art in pre-industrial and pre-colonial sources

Frescura argues that '… the existence of a body of cognitive symbols perceived to exist in current Sotho, Ndebele and Tsonga wall art must be seen to have its roots in a rural society which precedes the development of industrialisation in southern Africa.' (Frescura, 1998, 1999:69-70).

19th century Tswana examples

Amongst the Tswana speaking peoples the following symbols were observed by Campbell in 1815: 'A series of Í' (or 'sideways-H') designs had been painted on the interior perimeter of the dwelling wall in a graphic representation of the Tswana shield. In view of the fact that rural communities in South Africa often refer to their chief as 'the shield of the people,' a concept also used more recently in ANC symbology, it may be safely assumed that this design was used by the artist to designate the dwelling as the residence of a chief. This means that even at this early stage rural artists were reducing material objects to their basic forms and were using them as icons…' (Frescura, 1998, 1999:69-70).

2. For example, 'The front courtyard was a private area reserved for the women of the household.'
3. Among the South Ndebele the daughter is given a partly finished beaded apron with the essential elements of the design on the house. In this way the foundation of her design schools lie in the family tradition. She is free to use other patterns afterwards.
4. Also, the front walls are a symbolic vagina, concealed by patterns which provide a symbolic beaded apron.
5. From the 1930s more control was left in the hands of women as men were drawn off as labor.

In 1812 and again in 1820 Campbell observed that 'The traditional patterns of the Sotho-Tswana were chevrons, triangles, rectangles, diamonds and curved shapes filled with solid masses of different coloured ochres or with a series of parallel-coloured lines. The fronts of the huts, the inside walls, the floor or the lapa and the wall surrounding the lapa were all decorated in a similar fashion. Animals were also depicted on the inside walls.' (Walton, 1965:31).

'It is highly probable…that mural decoration was first practiced by…Sotho-Tswana tribes…from whom it spread to the Nguni and earlier Sotho.' (Walton, 1965:30).

'The earliest patterns were 'a series of geometrical forms of free shapes filled in with solid masses of colour or with coloured bands which were either straight or wavy. Similar mural designs have persisted among the Sotho-Tswana, Pedi, Venda and Ndebele … Such patterns are referred to as litema patterns…' (Walton, 1965:33) Mathematically these wavy lines are known as sinusoid or sine waves.

'The Tswana use an interesting variant where 'a few feet at each side of the entrance is smeared with coloured clay and decorated with *litema* patterns[6]. (…) The remainder of the wall surface, which faces the prevailing wind and rain, is smeared with mud in which small stones are embedded to prevent it from being washed away. These stones are arranged in beautiful mosaic patterns which it is sometimes claimed are based on the bead patterns formerly on the Taung warriors' shields.' (Walton, 1965:34).

In mathematical terms, the polygons (triangles, quadrilaterals, pentagons and so on) that make up these patterns can be used to fill a flat space completely. This is known as 'tiling.' When a shape is repeated the pattern is called a 'tessellation.' (Tess, 2016).

19th Century Sotho wall decoration: Litema

Litema patterns only appeared on the exterior of houses during the 19th century. Such patterns had previously only appeared on the interior surfaces of houses (Gerdes, 1998:35). The word litema derives from hoteme, meaning to cultivate, and tema means a ploughed field or plot. Many litema designs resemble furrows made in the earth when planting (Gerdes, 1998:35).

'… the process of traditional Sotho wall decoration begins with the plastering of a portion of the exterior wall with daga, a mixture of cow dung and mud.

6. *Litema* is a wall painting style described in *The Next Section: The Sotho Rural Mural*

Fig. 3 (Evergreen.Edu, 2001)

It is usually done once a year, and it is always done by women. Previously painted and engraved patterns are covered over with the new plaster.

Geometric patterns are incised in the fresh daga with a stick or sharp-edged tool forming the outlines of the patterns (Changuion, et al, 1989:35-36)[7]. Sometimes a comb is used to texture parts of the wall. Small stones may also be set into the plaster to form a pattern. Once this has been done, the next portion of the wall is plastered and the process is repeated. When the whole of the wall has been patterned in this way and is dry, coloured paints, made by mixing a powder and water, are applied to all or part of the patterns made in the plaster. Sometimes a pattern is painted onto the surface of the wall without engraving the surface first.

It seems likely particularly in earlier times, that litema patterns, and the process itself, were imbued with various forms of symbols associated with core concepts in Southern Sotho culture - those relating to the ancestors, fertility and initiation amongst others. Today, in general, the deeper meanings associated with this art form have been lost, and people usually view them simply as attractive decorative forms.' (Jolly, 2010).

7. The woman 'often draws with both hands. She begins at the top of an imaginary vertical and the resultant forms on either side of this are simultaneously realised and are mirror-images of each other'

Litema designs

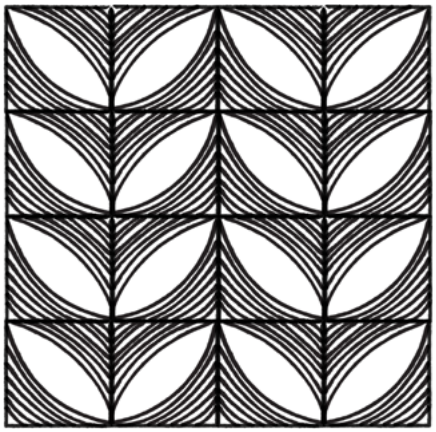


Fig. 4 (Courtney, 2022)

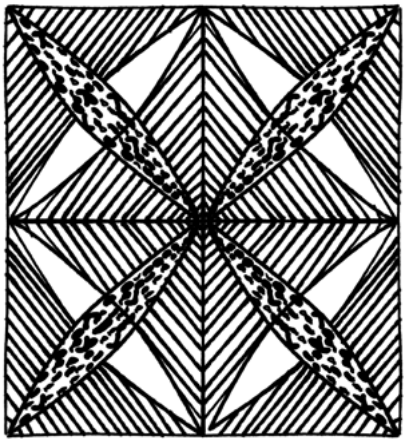


Fig. 5 (Courtney, 2022)

‘The Sotho women lay out a network of squares and then they reproduce the basic design in each square. The number of reproductions or repetitions of the unit cells depends, in practice, on the available space on the wall to be decorated.’ (Gerdes, 1999b:90).

‘Mathematically the unit cell can appear in four positions (l/r/top/bottom) obtained by ‘horizontal and vertical reflection about the axes of the square.’ (Gerdes, 1999b:90).

‘Most litema designs … are built up from basic squares, which constitute as it were the (unit) cells of the design.’ (Gerdes, 1998).

‘The symmetries of a whole tema design depend on the symmetries of the unit cell, and on the way in which the design is built up from its basic squares…’ (Gerdes 1998). The dimensions of square-toothed designs ‘are always odd numbers. Most of them have four axes of symmetry…’ (Gerdes, 1999b:127). Four-sided shapes can be divided into rectangles, squares, parallelograms, kites and trapezoids.

Symmetry is a basic feature of the Litema patterns (Gerdes, 1999b:89). Symmetry will be explored further in the discussion of Ndebele mural art and basketry and beadwork in the next section.

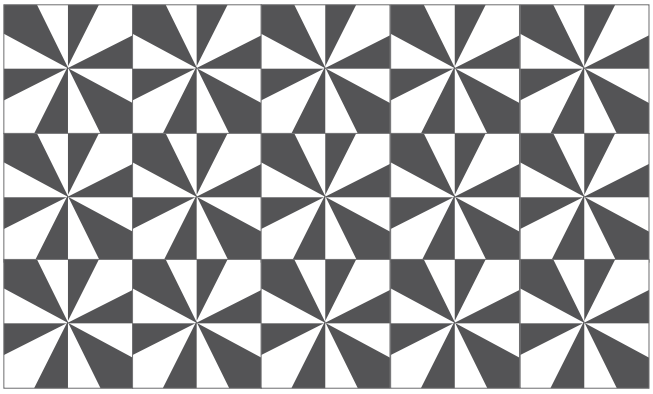


Fig. 6 (Wikipedia, 2022)

Ndebele Mural Art in the twentieth century

The most immediately noticeable aspect of the design units is their symmetry, of which various types can be distinguished. Generally, a design unit can have bilateral symmetry along a vertical and/or horizontal axis; rotational symmetry, where the basic unit is turned about a point; or translational symmetry, where it is moved to another position along an axis.

'…the decoration of homestead walls …functions on two levels. First, to other Ndebele, it announces that one of their own lives there… Second, it proclaims to outsiders the Ndzundza identity, distinguishing them from nearby peoples.' … 'By decorating her homestead in the style of her chiefdom, the artist expresses membership in it and in a certain political group as well.' (Schneider, 1985:62).

Where the style appears to have been changed as a result of colonial influence, 'what may outwardly appear to be an act of assimilation and perhaps even appeasement may, in another context, be interpreted as an act of protest and open defiance, visible only to those privy to its codification.' (Frescura, 1998, 1999:66).

Designs and motifs in Ndebele mural art

Some are drawn from the patterns used in Ndebele beadworking. The dynamism lies in the fact that it is in a state of becoming, being held in a tension 'between the possibility of the geometric mark and the actuality of the motif….' Numbers are often used for their visual properties, especially number 2, 'and for the empowering learning that they represent to the functionally illiterate… a row of black dots might designate a highway, an inverted cone painted in black a garden of trees.' (Powell, 1995:68).

Modern Ndebele wall decoration usually consists of polychromatic, highly stylized images of urban life, including Victorian homes, streetlamp posts, garden fences, motor vehicles, trains, petrol pumps and jet airplanes. These are normally reduced to basic geometric forms outlined in heavy black lines on a whitewashed background and filled in with primary colours. (Frescura, 2007,8).

Vusi Mchunu interviewed several Ndebele mural painters for the seminal work, *amaNdebele, signals of colour from South Africa*. His respondent Angelina Ndimande said, 'If you look closer to my mural designs, you will realise that my *amagama* (words, motifs) are parts of cone-shaped roofs, doors, walls, and windows. But the way I introduce it is very abstract. This at times confuses our white visitors and customers and they see the abstraction symbolising razor blades. We call this *umtesho* and for us it has nothing to do with razor blades.' (Mchunu, 1991:82). This is a contradiction of Ivor Powell's commonly held observation and an illustration of how 'outsiders' interpret what they see through their own cultural filters.

Fig. 7 (Mediacache, 2017)

Ndebele mural art now exists on another scale in art galleries and collections.

'In her work, world-renowned Ndebele artist Esther Mahlangu uses complex patterns of angles and lines, symmetry and proportions, which are also mathematical formulas found in geometry and trigonometry. While recognised as exquisite art, the Ndebele paintings are also useful for teaching mathematical concepts that can assist learners to understand squares, rectangles, angles, as well as in measuring, and understanding and solving problems like volume.' (Mosimege, 2006).

'The first Nguni people to live in close contact with the Sotho were the Ndebele of the Transvaal. They not only followed the building traditions of their neighbours but also decorated the walls of their huts and lapas with similar patterns.' (Walton, 1965:36).

The side walls, and sometimes the front walls as well, are still decorated in Sotho-Tswana fashion, being covered with an arrangement of triangles filled in by a series of straight or wavy parallel lines executed in sombre greys, browns and black…These simple geometrical patterns …represent the first stage of Transvaal Ndebele art (Walton, 1965:36).

The Ndebele housewife…developed a form of decoration which may be regarded as peculiar to the Ndebele. To the facades of the huts and lapa she applies richer colours and more varied designs in the form of panels which appear to have been derived from beadwork. Associated with these are simple human representations and odd motifs based on numerals, the alphabet, flowers and huts (Walton, 1965:36).

Originally, 'spiritually invested finger patterns (*kguphu*) [were] inscribed into wet 'plaster' (cow dung) and the use of earth pigments used without ornament, barring a contrasting hue at the edges.' (Powell, 1995:46). 'In some areas black and white geometric designs are accorded the same magical properties as the old finger-painting techniques.' (Powell, 1995:93).

'Sitting outside her front gate in Nebo, Mrs. Elisabeth Mahlangu… describes the chevron pattern on her wall as important to her family clan. For the 28 years of her marriage, mhlope (white) the overcomer, and *mnyama* (darkness) the balancer, have surrounded her and visually affirmed her and other family clan members.' (Hoard, 2010). 'A reason that was once given for these patterns was: 'It pleases the ancestors and protects the household from evil forces,' however Ivor Powell found that '…most Ndebele wall painting is unmagical in character…' (Powell, 1995:49).

'…Ndebele wall decoration also has a political text, serving to reinforce its group identity and laying claim to ancestral lands stolen from them less than three generations before.' (Frescura, 2007:8).

Later Ndebele mural decoration … [includes] panels depicting street scenes and buildings in modern towns and cities, European-style furniture, motor car registration numbers, and other features of twentieth century urban life (Walton, 1965:37).

In view of what the mural painters themselves had to say, the use of certain motifs like light bulbs and stairways provides an element of 'sympathetic magic,' 'a kind of appropriation through symbolism…' (Powell, 1995:65). Mrs Martha Msiza said, 'These small climbing steps express my wish to move upwards. Whenever I am in town in Bronkhorstspruit, I see people climbing steps, up the tall buildings. This fascinates me and I imagine myself going higher and higher (Mchunu, 1991:109).

'[It is the] tension between the representational and the geometrical that gives modern Ndebele wall painting its singular character.' (Powell, 1995:65). 'In the same process, and guided by the differences in colour value, they move between two and three dimensions in the viewing, thus generating a peculiarly active and dynamic kind of visual field.' (Powell, 1995:65). Ivor Powell concludes with the fascinating observation that '…the guiding principles behind Ndebele wall painting have a lot in common with European Cubism.' (Powell, 1995:65). The irony of this is that an African aesthetic is again known and claimed as western.

Fig. 7b (Student Work - Art & Ubuntu Trust Workshop Gemsbokspruit, Mpumalanga 2010) (Ahmed 2010)

Mathematical principles in weaving: basketry and beadwork

'The visualisation and corresponding mental (and physical) actions of the weave are akin to visual and mental functionings of the professional geometer. The weaver mathematises her or his visual field and materials. These cognitive products and practices of a culture…are mathematical. Furthermore, the mathematical attribution of the weaver's cognitive products and practices is independent of whether a professional mathematician expropriates them in their original form and transforms them into an academic, codified form. (Gerdes, 1999a).'

The symmetrical patterns in weaving can be explained mathematically:

[In Euclidian, two dimensional geometry] an object is symmetrical when one half is a mirror image of the other. A line divides the two, but an object may have more than one line of symmetry (Eather, 2014). A shape has rotational symmetry when it still looks the same after a rotation of less than one full turn (Pierce, 2018). An image has translational symmetry if it can be divided by straight lines into a sequence of identical figures. Translational symmetry results from moving a figure a certain distance in a certain direction also called translating (moving) by a vector (length and direction) (University of Minnesota, 1994). A glide reflection is a combination of a reflection in a line and a translation along that line (Wikipedia contributors, 2022).

An introduction to symmetry

'The common understanding of an object or pattern being symmetric is that it possesses bilateral symmetry. This means that it can be separated into two identical pieces if it is cut along a line, known as the mirror line, or plane. While mathematical concepts of symmetry include the idea of reflection, the definition of symmetry also embraces additional aspects such as rotational and translational symmetry. Mathematically, a pattern has some form of symmetry if it may be transformed into an identical copy of itself by means of a rigid motion, that is a motion that preserves distance and excludes any form of distortion, so there is no stretching, bending, cutting or compressing. Such a motion is called an isometry… An isometry that transforms a pattern into an identical copy of itself is called a symmetry of the pattern.'(Becker, et al, 2001:28-29).

'Every pattern has at least one trivial symmetry, called the identity. The identity simply leaves the pattern fixed. As well as the identity and reflections there are three other kinds of symmetries: they are rotation, translation, and glide-reflection.' (Becker, et al, 2001:29). The spiral structure has a five-fold axial symmetry. '…a flat basket bowl…to find the unknown centre of a circle and to construct tangent lines..' (Gerdes, 1999b:106).

Fig. 8 (Davis, n.d.)

'Geometric designs woven into copper wire baskets (*izimbenge*) by the Zulu people of South Africa have been analysed and regenerated on a computer using algorithmic processes developed mainly in the field of fractal geometry. The mathematical concept of self-similarity is used to facilitate the comprehension of several aspects of fractal geometry. The algorithmic processes used are the deterministic algorithm, the random iteration algorithm and the escape time algorithm (Getz, 1999:434).

It is easy to see the aesthetic pleasure of symmetry in weaving and to begin to understand how it works mathematically but there are many other mathematical principles found in weaving which we list and illustrate on the next pages.

Geometric designs and fractal geometry

Fig. 9. Zulu beer basket (WorthPoint, 2022).

The 'Latin square' is found in beadwork or basketry patterns that have 5 columns and 5 rows [of beads or threads of straw] (Gerdes, 1999b:79).

'Rational numbers

Fig. 10 (Naturebackin, 2017)

Rational numbers are all integers, fractions, repeating decimals and terminating decimals. The weaver would have to use these to calculate how many repeated patterns could be evenly accommodated on the basket.

Irrational numbers

Fig. 11 (Afriarts, n.d.)

To work out how big to make the circular hoop that starts a woven basket, multiply the desired diameter by Pi. Pi is an irrational number. It is the ratio (proportion) of the circumference of a circle (the distance around its edge) to its diameter (a straight line that passes from the centre of a circle and ends on the circle. (Pi is approximately 3.14159).

Natural Numbers (or counting numbers from one to infinity)

Fig. 12 (Worldesigns Incorporated, n.d.)

There are many triangular numbers in beadwork and basketry triangular shapes. 'The amazing mathematical fact is that any square number is the sum of 2 triangular numbers.' (Van Heerden, 2004:29). This is known as a theorem.

Pascal's triangle

Other number patterns in the triangle shape include Pascal's triangle. It is a triangular array of numbers in which those at the ends of the rows are one and each of the others is the sum of the nearest two numbers in the row above (the apex, 1, being at the top). It can be used to teach children how to add, to recognise even and odd numbers, and how to understand diagonals and other patterns within the triangle. At senior levels it is used in Algebra and in the discovery of Probabilities and Permutations (Mathigon, 2020).

Series

A series is the sum of an infinite sequence. Series may be convergent or divergent. 'We could even use the patterns in basketry to sum up infinite series.' (Van Heerden, 2004:35).

Polygons

Fig. 13 (De Lange, 2012)

The most basic polygons are triangles and squares. There are many polygons in geometric murals, basketry and beadwork. These patterns also reveal the concave (with an interior angle greater than 180 degrees) and convex (with an interior angle less than 180 degrees) qualities of polygons, as well as how many sides they have – three (tri), four (quad), five (penta) and so on (Van Heerden, 2004).

The Periodic or Planar Pattern

'A periodic or wallpaper pattern is one that consists of a motif repeated at regular intervals in more than one direction' '(Becker, et al:33). There are 17 possible planar designs. Any piece of beadwork or basketry will reveal examples of this sort of pattern.

The mathematics of Sotho basketry

'A study of indigenous mathematical knowledge found that inhabitants of the Basotho Cultural Village used a variety of mathematical concepts extensively. In particular, the design and manufacturing of traditional grass artefacts, such as the traditional baskets, traditional hats, and other items such as *Motlhotlho* (strainer), employed mathematical techniques. The research revealed that even with an average level of formal education of Grade 4, the inhabitants of the village were familiar with mathematical concepts such as estimation, patterns, geometry, and symmetry. Mathematical concepts are widely used: however, the terminology and understanding is not as expressed in 'western' mathematical literature.'

Having revealed Pythagoras' Theorem in the workings of the basket, the keen mathematician can then explore it for evidence of Pappas' Theorem. In *Geometry from Africa*, Paulus Gerdes shows how Pappus' generalisation of the Pythagorean Proposition for parallelograms is evident in the 'toothed' squares in African art (Gerdes, 1999:72).

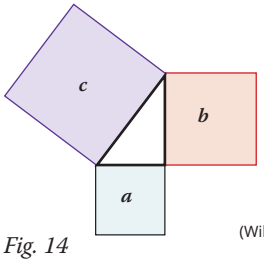


Fig. 14 (Wikipedia, 2022)

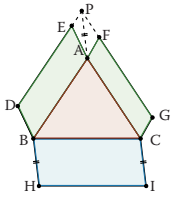


Fig. 15 Pappus' theorem

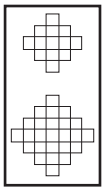


Fig. 16

Fig. 14 It is possible to use this basket to explain the workings of Pythagoras' theorem. (Gerdes 1999)

The mathematics of Zulu beadwork

'In the development of Zulu beadwork, the 'stepped diamond' appears as the key motif in an expansion of the artistic imagination from the elegantly simple, discrete geometrics found in the earliest bead fabric to a pattern complexity that shows no precedent locally in other media such as wood, ceramic and grass-textile. It is the signature image-template in the past half-century's steady kaleidoscope of graphical inventiveness on the bead fabric surface, as beadworkers begin experimenting with symmetry, and within the space of a decade – learn to play with it in ways that unpack in endless variation the basic Zulu design unit, the triangle.' (Papini, 1994).

Conclusion

These mathematical analyses of creative work produced by so-called illiterate rural woman clearly identify the hidden treasure in indigenous visual heritage. The decolonisation of mathematics is now being addressed in schools and in the media to help South Africans reconnect with their indigenous heritage and use South African rather than colonial points of reference in their cultural education.

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Fig. 15 Beadwork (Image courtesy of Wits Arts Museum)

ERNEST MANCOBA'S AFRICAN ROOTED, UNIVERSAL VISION OF HUMANITY

Bridget Thompson

There are many vexed questions concerning art on the African continent that find expression, inter alia, in problematic definitions and terms which obscure rather than illuminate. These paradigmatic difficulties create awkward processes in art history, curricula, museum collections and understandings of art and artistry in South Africa.

Ernest Mancoba's intellect and aesthetic cut through this quagmire. His vision, sourced in pluriversal epistemologies, most significantly those present in indigenous visual heritage, integrate multiple influences in brilliant, economical expressions of a possible future for humanity.

Amongst South African artists he is not alone, for the rich sources of indigenous visual heritage derived from within the system of African art have not (yet) been extinguished and are a major, if hardly acknowledged, factor in the work of many South African contemporary artists.

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Mancoba (1904–2002) was a painter, sculptor and visionary whose work, whilst cutting-edge and avant-garde in terms of the Western trajectory of art (Araeen, 2008), also closely referenced, amongst other influences, the indigenous art of his country of birth (Thompson, 2006).

Fig. 1 Unknown, Wooden staff Limpopo Province (Chaussa, 2006)
Fig. 2 Ernest Mancoba holding the wooden staff. (Lemon, 1994)

Exemplifying his respect for this heritage, throughout his life Mancoba kept the staff shown in Figures 1 and 2, which was given to him by an elderly sculptor in Limpopo in 1937, as a symbol of 'what I possess in the name not only of the blacks, but of all our humanity' (Obrist 2003).

Mancoba left South Africa for Paris in 1938, 'in a state of research', (Obrist 2003) as he put it. He was then caught up in the Second World War, interned by the Nazis, married a Danish sculptor, Sonja Ferlov, and was discouraged by the Smuts regime from returning with her to South Africa. This was before the official introduction of apartheid in 1948, but nevertheless the regime felt it couldn't allow Mancoba to live with a European wife in South Africa. He and she (through her marriage to him) became stateless until they acquired French citizenship in 1961. They remained in Europe, eking out a living and dedicating their lives to art.

Before Mancoba left South Africa, he had produced a small but significant body of sculptural work, including his first groundbreaking sculpture, 'The Bantu Madonna' (1929) (Figure 3). In Europe he slowly stopped sculpting and became a painter, referencing vital aspects of African heritage in his paintings. In a documentary film about his life and work, he ascribed his changed medium to difficulties with access to materials and space to work in Europe, but in the same breath compared himself to Inuit artists who had only feathers and fishbones with which to make art,

declaring that the material that one uses for art is not important, it is the message that one leaves for coming generations about human existence and struggle that matters. (Ernest Mancoba at Home, 1995).

In an interview with Bridget Thompson in 1994, he expressed the concern he felt about the separation between body and spirit in a world dominated by post-Renaissance Western values, and asserted that 'the spiritual and material needed to be reconciled' (Mancoba, 1994) In his last interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, he commented on a process of dislocation from a spiritual process in all modern political systems:

The evolution of our materialistic societies whether of the totalitarian type, which has just crumbled overnight in the East or of our own mercantile one which is dominating nowadays, has caused progressively, the artist, as any other spirits in their truest selves, to feel more and more isolated, precisely because we have divided spirit and matter, in order to more freely pursue and enjoy the worldly goals of our acquisitive nature at the expense of the other side of our being that yearns for spiritual fulfilment. (Obrist, 2003).

Mancoba explored the history of art to identify the symbolic basis for and solution to these problems. Noting that the split between the spiritual and material was first expressed symbolically during the European Renaissance, when perspective came to dominate painting and continued to do so for centuries after, he agreed that the

Fig. 3 Mancoba, E. From left (1929) African/Bantu Madonna yellowwood, 86 x22 x17 (1936) Musician teak, 63 x 9.8 x 9.9cm (1936) Figure of a Woman teak, 63 x 9.8 x 9.9 cm (Ahmed, 2005)

Cubist art movement in early twentieth-century Europe had innovated significantly by breaking the stranglehold of perspective within the Western art tradition. He felt, however, that these innovations were inspired by the form of African art, which the Cubists had seen in museums in Paris as it piled up as loot from colonial conquests, but didn't depict the spiritual content of the African art that inspired them (Mancoba, 1994).

In his paintings, and, it could be argued, in his sculptures as well, Mancoba expressed both the form and the spiritual content of African art. He created an image of the proverb he frequently repeated, '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu*' (a person is a person by and because of other people). This proverb is compatible with values found across the African continent and expresses a holistic philosophy, a human spirit of oneness (Jahn, 1961, pp. 96–99).

Taking this proverb as aesthetic inspiration, Mancoba completed what the Cubists left unfinished. He revolutionised contemporary art, drawing on African art and philosophy in ways that have not yet been fully appreciated. His works are predicated on respect for humanity's common ancestry and thereby celebrate all of humanity, whilst calling for peace on earth.

Significantly, many of the key aesthetic and philosophical tools he used to do this were drawn from his first 33 years lived in South Africa, before he left to study and research in Paris (Thompson, 2006).

Mancoba's Artistic Revolution calls for a Human Renaissance: *The 'problem' of perspective*

Neither Ernest Mancoba nor his wife, the sculptor, Sonja Verlov Mancoba, used perspective in their work. They used the term 'the problem of perspective' in their aesthetic discussions (Mancoba, 1994).

Shedding light on this 'problem', Robert Romanshyn discusses how in the fifteenth century the introduction to Western art of the vanishing point (Figure 4) and perspective created a gaze which is intrinsically one of a power relationship exercised by the viewer over the viewed.

The viewer casts a 'despotic eye' on the viewed, who is at the end of the vanishing point, and is thus objectified. (Romanyshyn, 1984).

Romanshyn explains how this revolution in art foreshadowed a paradigm shift in thinking whereby it became possible to view other humans as objects. He goes on to say that this paradigm shift created a framework for rationalising European colonialism and undergirded an ideology of supremacy.

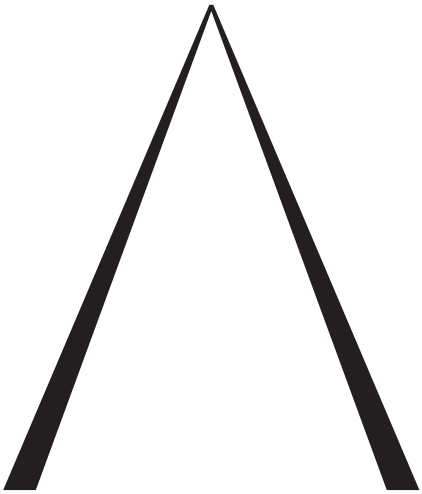

Fig. 4 Vanishing point (Versfeld, 2012)

The Mancobas were not the first artists to address 'the problem of perspective.' As mentioned above, Ernest Mancoba recognised and respected that the Cubists were the first to formally break the stranglehold of perspective in Western art, and he regarded this as a significant contribution. However, he felt the Cubists hadn't gone far enough to entirely solve the problem of perspective, because they did not provide a symbolic framework that embraced the African people whose art inspired them. Furthermore, the human dimension, the spiritual content of humanness as expressed in the proverb cited above, was disconnected from form in their work.

Mancoba solved this aesthetic and philosophical problem in his paintings. He introduced a body, a central totemic figure (modelled on a Kota reliquary Figure representing the ancestral spirit of all humanity[1]), into the centre of the pictorial plane. This body symbolised a common human ancestor. Then on the same pictorial plane he placed figurative and abstract colours depicting people in various relationships to each other and the human ancestor.

1 This Figure was described by Mancoba as a totem representing the ancestor (Ernest Mancoba at Home, 1995)

The colours, when read in terms of their meanings as coded in Southern African beadwork (discussed later in this article), enhance the interpretation of the work[2]. In this way he visually represents the proverb '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu*', the essence of African spirituality – a spirituality which is rooted in human values of dignity, decorum and mutual respect (Williams, 1974). He thereby reinstated the sacred in modern art (Thompson, 2006).

Mancoba's sources in indigenous visual heritage

Mancoba declared that his 'method in work [was] almost Freudian' in that he allowed 'what was in [his] subconscious to rise up' (Ernest Mancoba at Home, 1995). One questions then what was in his subconscious.

His life, studies, work and travel exposed him to visual influences throughout Southern Africa: on the mines in Gauteng, where all cultures of Southern Africa met and mingled, and where he grew up and was briefly an activist; in the Eastern Cape, where he studied at Fort Hare University and lived in Grahamstown, fulfilling artistic commissions for the church; in Cape Town, where he lived in District Six working as a janitor whilst pursuing his art full-time. District Six was a residential area founded by freed slaves in the mid-nineteenth century, and a place of extensive cultural mingling. Mancoba also knew Bloemfontein, where he participated in the All African Convention, and Polokwane, where he taught at Khaiso Senior Secondary School; and he visited Mozambique.

His influences before leaving South Africa were multicultural and cosmopolitan, including Chinese and other Eastern as well as Western forms of aesthetic expression. He especially appreciated the tranquility of art produced before the rise of rampant capitalism, and the patina of ancient objects from around the world that reflected their handling by many people over time. Yet it was the indigenous visual heritage of Southern Africa that was clearly central amongst his early influences.

His knowledge of visual patterns and colours from the different regions of South Africa is attested to in an anecdote shared by Dr Elza Miles[3].

2 When Mancoba was young, in the 1920s and 1930s, beadwork as body art was more ubiquitous than it is now. Even during my youth in the 1970s this was the case. Forced removals and social disruption have impacted hugely on its production since then.

3 Elza Miles wrote a remarkable book about Ernest Mancoba's life and work (Miles, 1994), and curated a landmark exhibition of his and his wife Sonja Ferlov Mancoba's work, *Hand-in-hand*, at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1994, which was the occasion for his first return visit to South Africa in 56 years.

She took a cloth to his home in Paris, four decades after he had left South Africa, upon sight of which he immediately said 'Ah! Shangaan', as he recognised distinctive colours and shapes.

It is in his paintings that this knowledge is almost preternaturally demonstrated. The colours he uses have resonance with the meanings of colours in Southern African beadwork and provide keys to interpretations of his paintings. The guiding principle is similar across a range of paintings that have a central ancestral/ Kota Figure. An understanding of the aesthetics of Southern African beadwork is key to a full appreciation of Mancoba's art. The Art and Ubuntu Trust's understanding of this unfolded slowly and serendipitously.

Following in Mancoba's footsteps,The Art and Ubuntu Trust travels and learns.

After the 2006–2007exhibition curated by the author to commemorate Mancoba's life[4], the Art and Ubuntu Trust sought to deepen and popularise an understanding of the multiple layers of meaning in his art and words. These explorations were framed by his question: 'What are we leaving on the way of this so-called progress?' (Mancoba 1994).

The trust travelled the length and breadth of South Africa for the outreach programme of the exhibition[5]. The trust's materials and two films on Mancoba were shared in these programmes[6]. Following in Mancoba's footsteps across South Africa made it possible to understand the depth and implications of the indigenous art he referenced in his oeuvre, and how these local visual influences, rooted in an ancient history, traverse so-called 'tribes'[7]. Artists practising beadwork were sometimes guest artists at these outreach workshops, and new insights were gleaned from them. Many participating artists, working within a Western idiom, responded emotionally to their first introduction to Mancoba and his work, feeling themselves to be liberated thereby.

4 The exhibition was *In the Name of All Humanity, The African Spiritual Expression of Ernest Mancoba*, curated by Bridget Thompson for the Art and Ubuntu Trust, at the Gold of Africa Museum in Cape Town. The exhibition placed Mancoba's work in juxtaposition with works that had inspired him. It acknowledged that works from the rest of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe had their place and meaning in his life and art, and included examples of works from these places that had resonance with his life story, aesthetic, or philosophy. However, it foregrounded South African indigenous visual heritage, including inter alia Blombos shells, ceramic Lydenburg heads and beadwork. It indicated that the harmonious patterning of beadwork was significant in his oeuvre, but did not explore the meaning of his colours. This understanding came later.

5 The Ernest Mancoba Education Poster Project was a specially devised outreach programme which shared films and posters on Mancoba and conducted art-making workshops in 17 peri-urban and rural venues across all 9 provinces of South Africa in 2010–2011. The work produced in this project was exhibited in another exhibition; *Widening the Circle in the spirit of Mancoba*

6 The films were *Ernest Mancoba at Home* (1995) and *Reading the Ancestor* (2005).

7 See the brief discussion of the problematic of 'tribes' as a concept later in this article.

The first hint of new insights was at a workshop at Battswood Community Arts Centre in Grassy Park, Cape Town, where the educational posters on display depicting Mancoba's work attracted the attention of a beadwork artist and guest lecturer, Mr Lamazi. He looked at them and said casually, 'This one is Ndebele; this one is Xhosa; this one is Zulu'. Astonished, we recognised the familiar colours and tones that expressed the light and hues of the landscapes of the different parts of the country where the languages isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu predominated[8].

Mr Lamazi's easy recognition was in marked contrast to European writers on Mancoba's work who were at pains to mention his extraordinary use of colour but didn't, or couldn't, describe an inspiration or source[9]. At this workshop, young participants who were mainly from the 'coloured' community also struggled to relate to Mr Lamazi's input on beadwork[10]. It seemed foreign and strange to them, as did he, but when their brightly colour-matched t-shirts and takkies were pointed out to them, along with the difference between the colours they would choose to wear and those their parents might wear, they found a way to understand beadwork as an expressive body art.

Months later in Gemsbokspruit, a small town in Mpumalanga, members of the trust were given a lecture on Ndebele painting by Mrs Msiza, an artist who could barely sign her own name, yet led the execution of the beautiful paintings below (Figures 5–7). Those of us who were not able to understand isiNdebele had to wait for the translation a few weeks later to appreciate the full import of her lecture, but Athi Mongezeleli Joja, an art historian present, understood and immediately said that her lecture was extremely powerful in the way it explained colour juxtaposition, space and symbolism.

Figures 5, 6 & 7. Mrs Msiza (left) in Figs. 5 &7 leading a painting class in Gemsbokspruit, Mpumalanga, for the Art and Ubuntu Trust (Ahmed, 2012).

8 Nomusa Makhubu, in this publication, argues for an understanding of beadwork that covers its use across all sections of our society (white and black) and against any ahistorical 'tribal' designation of beadwork. I agree with her view; however, it is possible to see regional variations in colours and styles which to my mind reflect the geographies and light of different regions of South Africa inhabited mainly by particular language groups.

9 Mancoba's friend, the Danish artist Ejler Bille, described him as one of the greatest colourists (personal communication Wonga Mancoba 2005) . Ulrich Clewing at House of World Cultures, Berlin, wrote warmly and sympathetically about Mancoba's use of colours (Clewing, 2003).

10 The 'coloured' community was designated as such by the apartheid regime; like most South African communities, it has many tributaries of cultural influence.

Once we understood Mrs Msiza's lecture it was easy to relate the colour symbolism to one of Mancoba's works. Mr Lamazi's recognition of one of the works as having Ndebele colours and Mrs Msiza's information about the meanings of these colours offered a sensational new insight into Mancoba's 1976 work (Figure 8).

Its intention became clear. In the tradition of the origins of Ndebele mural art as a deliberate form of cultural resistance, it was an economical and pointed statement on Soweto '76[11].

Fig. 8. Ernest Mancoba, Drawing (1976), ink and oil pastel on paper, 50 x 32,5 cm (Ahmed, 2005).

These realisations affirmed our sense that, as Mancoba had said, 'something was being left on the way of so-called progress' (Mancoba, 1994). We now had keys to follow the path Mancoba had traced from the old to the new, and realised the need to deepen research into this indigenous artistic knowledge, this art, and relate it to his work.

Khanyisi IIntsimbi (knowledge of the beads) is a project in Willowvale, Eastern Cape, whose aim is to revive beadwork; it was started by Mrs Epainette Mbeki, who was distressed by the gradual decline of a practice which she had found to be ubiquitous when she arrived in what was then the Transkei homeland or bantustan[12] in the 1940s.

11 See further in Hardy and Thompson (forthcoming 2025).
12 Homelands or bantustans were the cornerstone of the apartheid policy of legislating the majority of black people to live in no more than 13% of South African land.

At Khanyisi IIntsimbi we were guided in the meaning and purpose of bead patterns, symbols and colours. We were told which types of beadwork were worn by men, by women and by children, and on which occasions.

In Durban amongst isiZulu speakers, in Northern Limpopo amongst Tshivenda speakers and in central Limpopo amongst Sepedi speakers, we interviewed beadwork artists who emphasised the meaning and purpose of their work. Later, in Limpopo, we interviewed the sculptor, Meshack Rapulalani, who regaled us with stories handed down by his father that had their roots in the Mapungubwe civilisation of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. We also heard from Elizabeth Makahane in Northern Limpopo about the impact of commodity culture on her ceramic production[13].

Figure 9. Barbara Tyrell, Drawing (1940s), pencil on paper (Tyrell, 1996, p. xv).

Barbara Tyrell, the artist and prolific documenter of South African indigenous clothing styles, including beadwork, showed us a drawing of a headdress that she had produced in the 1940s (Figure 9). When she asked the wearer where it came from, she was told it was 'older than memory'. Decades later she saw a similar style in a documentary on Tutankhamen[14].

13 Various (2018)
14 Personal communication with the author (2007).

The mother of Art and Ubuntu Trust film director, Dingan Thomas Kapa (1966–2016) told him that triangles, circles and squares, when carved into the entrance step of a home, carried messages for visitors, and he in turn shared this knowledge with us. In this publication in *Ceramics and Indigenous Visual Heritage*, ceramic artist Sbonelo Tau Luthuli highlights the significance of these shapes in ceramic art across the continent, and we know they repeat in beadwork. These evocative anecdotes suggest that we were only scratching the surface of a mine of knowledge.

Yet, when we interviewed Professor Anitra Nettleton, an esteemed professor of African art and curator of a significant and beautiful exhibition of beadwork at Wits Art Museum, *Beadwork, Art and the Body* (Nettleton, 2015), which positively declared beadwork to be art, we were taken aback by her vehement declaration that beadwork has no meaning. This point of view was at odds with those of the beadwork artists we had spoken to. Nevertheless, Professor Nettleton's efforts in building the collection and promoting beadwork as art provided us with two significant opportunities to deepen our understanding of beadwork and its relationship to Mancoba's oeuvre. One was the opportunity to film Mrs Kapa, Dingan's mother, viewing the exhibition and sharing her knowledge of the work. Another was the serendipitous visit we made to the exhibition with master weaver Joseph Ndlovu, whilst he was preparing for the weaving he had been commissioned by the Art and Ubuntu Trust to make of Mancoba's painting '*L'Ancetre*' (The Ancestor) (Mancoba, 1969–1971).

Ndlovu went back to the *Beadwork, Art and the Body* exhibition thrice, each time marveling at the intricacies of the weaves and the brilliant use of colour. He wryly told us that, being Soweto-born, he had never taken this rural art seriously until he studied at Rorke's Drift Community Art Centre in rural Natal in the 1970s. This gave him frequent opportunities to see local people dressed in beadwork and alerted him to its visual richness. His visits to the exhibition decades later served as preparation for the task of weaving '*The Ancestor*' (Art and Ubuntu Trust & ConCourt, 2021), Fig. 10 a work which, following its inspiration in Mancoba's eponymous painting and in turn in Southern African beadwork, is a master class in colour[15].

15 At the time of preparation of the tapestry Ndlovu told us that he had read the catalogue of the exhibition In the Name of All Humanity, The African Spiritual Expression of Ernest Mancoba every night, using it as a lullaby, because it highlighted the significance of beadwork in Mancoba's work.

Turning back from our organic learning through the outreach programme, we revisited Mancoba's words. In Paris in 1953, he had declared in a journal co-edited by Cheikh Anta Diop[16]:

> *'My forefathers should never have allowed Europeans to deprive them of their African heritage. They should have struggled and passed on to their children as well as their children's children a culture of resistance until such a time when, on both sides, it became possible to speak to one another on a basis of equality and mutual respect… The world has become more and more of a single entity, to such an extent that we have to reconsider all our views and opinions on racial distinctions because they have become obsolete and dangerous…'* (Mancoba, 1953).

Later we will see how he expressed these values in his art.

Fig.10. Joseph Ndlovu's 2017 tapestry[16A] *'The Ancestor' fibre, 290 x 162.3 cm inspired by Ernest Mancoba's 'L' Ancetre' (The Ancestor) (1969–1971), oil on canvas, 92.3 x 60.3 cm. Here Marcia Harvey Isaksson, curator and Muriel Makhathini, a Rorke's Drift-trained weaver, at an exhibition in Stockholm in 2024 where it was on display .*

16A Commissioned by the Art and Ubuntu Trust for the South African Constitutional Court Art Collection.

16 Cheikh Anta Diop was a Senegalese polymath and proponent of the idea of a united continental culture; he was aware of the challenges of piecing together this heritage after it had been decimated by colonisation.

Art is removed from Africa and ... history

When Europeans first arrived in Africa as conquerors, they encountered rich, varied art, much of which they stole (see Figure 11 for an example of this plunder in Benin). Starting with Napoleon's expeditions to Egypt, and then as subsequent European colonisers made their way across North, Central, West, East and Southern Africa, much was looted and taken to European museums. Indigenous ways of producing art were denigrated by the colonialists, yet the art taken as loot is still held possessively in European museums. Now the tide is turning. Ghana and Senegal have recently built new museums devoted to African art, and the Savoy report in France (Savoy, 2018) has reignited debate around a long-standing call for looted art to be returned to the continent.

Fig. 11. British Soldiers during the Benin punitive expedition of 1897 (Unknown, 2017)

As in the rest of Africa, many priceless and meaningful objects were taken from South Africa and have not yet been returned. Although there is still much of significance in South Africa museums, it is not well appreciated as the framing paradigm for the history of art in South Africa.

Despite looting and systemic denigration Africa's artists continue to innovate

It is apparent that despite the looting and violent disruptions of African artistic work, time and history did not stop for African artists when colonialism began. African societies continued to produce art. However, with most momentum driving the Western tradition in the early twentieth century, it became the dominant intellectual paradigm through which all art is seen and understood.

Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie reinforces an argument about the dynamism of contemporary production of African art steeped in indigenous visual heritage (Ogbechie, 2011). He discusses the centuries-old and ongoing life of the skilled production of Benin bronzes, and points out that only the looted pieces have been prized in various European and North American museums, and been the subject of the debate about return and reparations.

What impresses Akinsanya and Ogbechie is the long tradition of bronze casting, beginning prior to the sixteenth century and continuing into the twenty-first. However, what distresses them is the way in which collectors and scholars have 'largely ignored or stereotyped as a homogenous tourist art' bronzes produced by Edo-Benin artists since the British invasion of 1897 (Akinsanya and Ogbechie p 177 in Pemberton 111 2013 p 3)… Benin bronze works of art were determined solely in terms of the objects looted from the palace in 1897. The canon was fixed! The problem was that even though the king was forced to leave the Benin palace, the tradition of kingship remained and its prerogative of patronage of bronze artworks continued. The guilds also remained even though less beholden to the throne. (Pemberton III, 2013, p 3).

African Visual Knowledge Systems - a rich seam in much South African art

When European settlers first arrived in Southern Africa with Jan Van Riebeeck's expedition in 1652, there were confrontations not only of a physical and violent nature but also of different gaze regimes – different systems of art. The settlers encountered numerous forms of visual expression in Southern Africa: rock carvings, rock paintings and ceramics, to name just those that have been researched. Evidence suggests that home decoration, wood sculpture, basketry and the use of shells attached to leather, the antecedent of colourful beadwork, have probably existed for centuries. Certainly, we know that the distinctive geometric shapes of triangles, circles and squares found in ancient ceramics also appear in murals and beadwork in the twentieth century, having been used earlier as symbols carved into entrance floors to guide interactions with visitors. Indigenous flora was used to make coloured dyes, and there is nothing to suggest that this, too, is not a knowledge that goes back centuries.

Yet the European settlers stuck doggedly to their familiar visual methods and indeed preconceived visualisations of what they encountered in the colonised territory.

(Es)strange(d) gaze

The Dutch East India Company, which initiated the Dutch colonising expeditions to the Cape , commissioned artists to sketch what they saw there. These life drawings were taken back to Holland and reinterpreted as engravings like the example in Figure 12[17].

Fig.12. A 1595 engraving of Khoi pastoralists at the Cape (South African National Library).

Luckily, some later drawings from life at the Cape remained there. They seem far less idealised than those returned to Holland. Yet one wonders why the depictions of Khoi pastoralists in the engravings are so different from those in the life drawings.

Figs. 13 & 14. Life drawings of Khoisan people done in the early 1700s (Boonzaier et al., 1997, page 29 & 31 Artists unknown)

17 Professor Andrew Smith brought these images to my attention during a SACHED workshop in the 1980s.

Possibly the engravers were unable or unwilling to 'read' the life drawings, which clearly show the contours of the land, and the dress and body gestures of the people at that time. Perhaps the renditions of people, their appearance, body coverings and context (so different to the semi-nakedness and very different landscape depicted in the engravings) were ignored in favour of fantasies or projections. Perhaps one can assume that the engravers' gaze was shaped by the paradigm of their visual training in Europe, such that source images drawn in situ like the ones in Figures 13 and 14 were not 'seen' but interpreted in Holland, according to an idealised view. Contemporaneously Khoisan artists were producing sophisticated symbolic imagery that traversed figurative and dream-sourced visual expressions.

This problem of the differences in gaze and paradigm of art produced in or about Africa continues to bedevil South African visual expression and its definitions up to today.

Ancient art, eternal humanity

The early evidence of humanity's visual art heritage, as seen in the 70 000-year-old shells made into beads (Figure 15) and the cross-hatched ochre found at the Blombos Cave in the Western Cape, is awe-inspiring. Indeed, here in Africa is evidence of the first artistic expression found anywhere on earth to date.

Fig. 15. Blombos Shell Beads, Blombos Cave, Stilbaai , Western Cape, 7,0–10,5 mm, dating back to 77 000 years ago (IZIKO Museums of South Africa, 2017)[18].

18 These Nassarius kraussianus shell beads are among the earliest beads discovered anywhere in the world. The beads show traces of ochre and of having been worn on a string (IZIKO Museums of South Africa, 2017).

Evidence of similarly ancient artistic activity has also been found elsewhere in Africa: Shell beads newly unearthed from four sites in Morocco confirm early humans were consistently wearing and potentially trading symbolic jewellery as early as 80,000 years ago. These beads add significantly to similar finds dating back as far as 110,000 [years] in Algeria, Morocco, Israel and South Africa, confirming these as the oldest form of personal ornaments. (European Science Foundation, 2009).

These finds indicate how humanity began to think, that is, to be human. Human thought began in Africa, and art is the evidence of it. Artist Lefifi Tladi articulates how important an African consciousness and consciousness of Africa is, saying that 'black is just a colour but Africa means more to me, you and the world'. He affirms the importance of 'Divine Proportion', which is 'found everywhere in nature and for 2500 years has been an aesthetic guide in art and architecture … it is a perpetual reminder that our hope for regeneration and continuity lies in realising the meaningful and harmonious relationship of all the parts to the whole.' (Hemenway, 2008, cited in Thompson, 2025, page 16).

Tladi goes on to say that this is the true meaning of interdependence between people, and between people and nature. This links clearly to Mancoba's reiteration of the proverb '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu*' in his paintings, as well as his concern about life on earth (*Reading the Ancestor, 2005; Ernest Mancoba at Home, 1995*). Indeed, Tladi's work also explores and reflects these concerns and values.

Often in the background of the life story of artists described as 'untrained' there is a significant family member who was an artist steeped in indigenous knowledge and philosophy. One example, thoughtfully described by Bongiwe Hlekiso in her master's thesis on Gladys Mgudlandlu (Hlekiso, 2019), is how Mgudlandlu was tutored by her grandmother. Another is the lessons drawn by Mancoba from his mother's work as a ceramic artist His mother also shared with him the purpose of the imbongi or praise poet which is to speak the unspeakable and say the unsayable which she shared with him (Thompson, 2006).

When learning about these examples of the handover of technique and artistic purpose from a system of artistic expression outside the Western paradigm into

the Western paradigm, one wonders how 'untrained' these aforementioned artists were. Yes, many artists took pathbreaking steps into the Western art system, by using new mediums and inserting themselves into new ways of production and consumption peculiar to that system, but they did not enter it as tabula rasae (clean slates) with no prior knowledge of art or its role in society.

Peter Clarke (1929– 2014), a painter, printmaker and writer and another elder who guided the Trust's work, shared his insights with us: 'I remember reading an article a few years ago about a performance of bushman music in Germany where this German composer said that he was fascinated by the structure of bushman music because he was also a mathematician and so he looked at it from that point of view. He said that there was so much he still had to find out as sophisticated, as advanced as German culture was, he was looking at the primitive and found that the primitive was so sophisticated that he, the sophisticated man still had to learn.' (Clarke, 2012)

Fig.16. Artist Peter Clarke (extreme left) and the participants in a workshop he was leading listen to a guest lecturer, the Bushman artist Patat, explain his work (note: Patat requested that he be described as a Bushman and not a San artist). Art and Ubuntu Trust workshop, Upington, Northern Cape 2009 (Ahmed, 2009).

Like the German composer, we found that we had to rethink a lot of our preconceptions and accept our own ignorance whilst searching for understanding of South Africa's indigenous visual heritage as art. We grew to appreciate that an ancient, subtle and sophisticated indigenous visual heritage is a vital but misunderstood, even denied, force in the discourse on contemporary South African art.

Indigenous visual heritage survives colonialism and Apartheid.

Although we don't have sufficient evidence of shifts and changes over time to allow a full historical narrative, as in Benin, forms of visual expression that existed prior to colonialism in South Africa, probably even before 1652, the date of the first European occupation, have continued to exist. These works are a remarkable expression of the resilience of indigenous visual artists who continued to produce after colonial occupation, despite the vehement and systematic attempts of the colonial system and the apartheid regime to eliminate indigenous values and cultural expression.

Beadwork is a key component of this artistic heritage – it highlights the visual literacy, dexterity, expressiveness and ingenuity of African peoples. As discussed in the previous section and shown in figure 15, beads were produced from seashells as long as 70 000 years ago; later, during the era of the Mapungubwe civilisation, gold beads were manufactured and beads produced in Asia were traded (Koleini,et al 2016). and then, with the massive importation of European-manufactured coloured beads from the late nineteenth century onwards, woven beadwork was produced in an explosion of contemporary creative colour, nevertheless incorporating more ancient symbolic languages. Beadwork was ubiquitous across the region until recently as a form of identity expression and communication[19].

Beadwork, along with other forms of artistic production such as basketware, rock paintings as old as 2 000 years or more, the ceramic sculptures known as the Lydenburg heads and dated to 750 A.D., the gold objects of the Mapungubwe civilisation, and more recently mural art, including the famous Ndebele murals that originated as a mode of resistance on white-owned farms in Mpumalanga in the first half of the twentieth century (Mchunu, 1991), all suggest earlier antecedents of what we know today as African art.

Within indigenous visual knowledge there is an extraordinary dexterity with colour which is overlooked

Amongst the tools that artists use, colour is critical. One's relationship with colour is learned and is therefore usually culturally determined. As an example, in Indonesia black represents justice and simplicity, in contrast to the array of negative connotations it has in Western culture.

19 Its practice was dealt a body blow during the apartheid-driven forced removals from the 1950s to the 1980s, which disrupted and often destroyed the social and cultural bonds within communities.

Cultural influence on how colours are experienced can be visceral. Whilst teaching, I have experienced a white student's rejection of the film Hyènes by Djibril Diop Mambety, who is considered an African and world film master, simply because the student 'didn't like the colours'. If the various symbolic meanings of different cultural visual expressions were part of a cross-cultural aesthetic learning process in South Africa, we might have more willingness, and indeed capacity, to engage each other across unfamiliar cultural territory.

A recent exhibition of black women's art at the Norval Foundation in Cape Town is a case in point[20]. The exhibition was divided thematically, with one theme being landscape. Following the insights provoked by Mr Lamazi when viewing the reproductions of Mancoba's work at the Battswood workshop (discussed earlier in this essay), it is possible to appreciate that there is no better evocation of the colours of South African landscape than that expressed in beadwork, which distinctively addresses the light and colour of different regions of South Africa. The exhibition felt incomplete without these subtle and brilliant evocations of South African landscape by often unnamed women artists. The framing of the exhibition within a Western artistic paradigm elided the possibility of 'seeing' the full potential of all South African art.

Ritual Archive

Babátúndé Fágbàyíbo, discussing renowned Ndebele painter, Dr Esther Mahlangu's knowledge and its significance, says:

'That it took the university system in South Africa this long to recognise [Dr Esther Mahlangu's] genius speaks to the glib attention that is often paid to decolonising the education system. This is not unique to South Africa, as many other African countries continue to show no serious plan to incorporate the works of cultural figures in their pedagogical approaches[21]. While it is true that some of these cul--tural icons have been conferred with honorary doctorate degrees, the sad reality is that nothing really happens beyond the fanfare and beautiful rhetoric at the graduation hall'. (Fágbàyíbo, 2018). And he introduces Professor Toyin Falola's pathbreaking concept of ritual archive.

20 The exhibition, *When Rain Clouds Gather: Black South African Women Artists*, 1940 – 2000, was ironically described in the exhibition advertorial as 'a reflection upon the influential and often unacknowledged contributions of Black women to South African art history in the twentieth century'.

21 In a personal communication with the author in 2023 artist Lefifi Tladi contended that Mahlangu's work is formulaic. This may be true, but we would argue that nevertheless it carries knowledge.

'African musicians, painters, griots and sculptors are repositories of indigenous knowledge systems and could be the key to unlocking what the Nigerian historian, Toyin Falola, refers to as 'ritual archives'. According to Falola, 'ritual archives' are 'the conglomeration of words as well as texts, ideas, symbols, shrines, images, performances, and indeed objects that document as well as speak to those religious experiences and practices that allow us to understand the African world through various bodies of philosophies, literatures, languages, histories and much more'. In exploring such archives, we could find answers to some of the problems facing governance; teaching methodologies that enhance the understanding of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); entrepreneurship; regional integration; and strategies for addressing Africa's marginal position in global political economy. The opportunities are immense but will require proactive action from policymakers and African universities'. '(Falola, 2017 cited in Fágbàyíbo, 2018).

Mathematical Principles in Rural African Art and Design by Patty Hardy in this publication highlights the mathematical knowledge embedded in indigenous visual expressions in Southern Africa, and confirms the relevance of Falola's argument to our context. Underlining that a ritual archive is not a static resource but a dynamic flow of knowledge through the practice of ritual, Lerato Kuzwayo identifies Malopo ritual as the basis of Lefifi Tladi's practice as artist, writer and musician:

'Malopo rituals are aimed at enriching the personal and social life of the Pedi community. Through Malopo ritual, the Pedi culture's socially significant occupations are practiced. Through the procedures of music learning and teaching, the Pedi culture's values are reflected. One finds information in the content of its material, which reveals the identity and interests of the community. The community's ways are exposed in its inherent processes. The ethos and significance of the Pedi community are expressed from its role in the community's existence. Despite the impact of modernisation, Malopo music is still regarded as a means whereby Pedi people perceive the present and reflect on their past experience, while projecting into the future.' (Lebaka, 2014, cited in Kuzwayo, in Thompson 2025, page 75-76)

The Bapedi people of South Africa, through their Malopo ritual music, and the Akan people of Ghana, through the symbolic Sankofa bird (figure 17), share the notion of looking from the present to the past to project into the future, and this too fits with Mancoba's views[22].

Exploring these approaches, using the concept of ritual archive in a pluriversal epistemology as posited by Falola (Falola, 2017), would take one deeper into the riches of what some call Bantu civilisation, and indeed into the fullest expressions of human civilisation. In doing so, consideration would need to be given to the intangible heritage in which tangible art objects are inserted.

Fig. 17. Sankofa symbol

Whilst the idea of a ritual archive is a sophisticated and convincing way of conceptualising vehicles of knowledge rooted in indigenous knowledge systems, we cannot embrace this concept fully in relation to art without first taking a step back into the history of art in our context, to try and find concepts and definitions of art that are more useful than those that currently prevail.

Problems of definitions and names

In exploring Mancoba's question, 'What are we leaving on the way of this so-called progress?' (Mancoba, 1994), we had found puzzling inconsistencies in definitions and understandings of art in our context. It became apparent that appreciation of indigenous visual heritage is often hidden under terminology that is no longer fit for purpose because it is imbued with multiple layers of prejudice.

22 The Sanfoka bird looks back to the egg on its tail, that is, looks to the past to find the way forward.

Those who wish to deny African history, agency and knowledge paint African knowledge systems out of existence, often making dismissive references to a 'romanticised' African past. This point of view can be expressed alongside a casual, unquestioned use of the term 'tribal', as if this term defines something real and immutable, existing outside of history. Whilst the term 'tribe' is used frequently as if it means something fixed and rigid, historians of Africa have probed it further and exposed an 'entribalisation' process.

One of the most loaded uses of the term tribe occurred in 1965, when Oxford University Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper described African history as nothing more than the 'mindless gyrations of barbarous tribes' (Trevor -Roper 1965 cited in Philips 2006) The word 'tribe' usually has this connotation, suggesting backwardness and barbarousness, and most often it is coupled with 'African'

Professor Patrick Harries, this author's African history lecturer at the University of Cape Town in 1981, argued following Leroy Vail (Vail, 1989) that the notion of a tribe as applied to Africa is often steeped in inaccuracy and prejudice, and obscures dynamic social relations. He suggested that the notion of a tribe as we know it today was constructed by colonial historical forces, and identified two main such forces that 'entribalised' black South Africans. The first of these was the role of the missionaries in writing up languages and grammars and translating the bible; the second was the role played by the mines and labour recruiting agencies that divided mine workers living in the mine compounds along so-called tribal lines. Take for example isiXhosa-speaking peoples: the argument goes that there was no notion of a Xhosa tribe before the missionaries came, and that isiXhosa-speaking peoples saw themselves first and foremost as members of a clan, a lineage: Mpondomise, Mpondo, Bhaca, Thembu, Xhosa and so on.

The missionaries created a Xhosa identity through trying to regularise the language spoken across different clans, and then this identity was further tribalised by the actions of the mine bosses and the migrant labour system. Apartheid legislated previously constructed differences, ascribing certain arbitrary identities to individuals and groups of people, allocating people to bantustans designated for particular 'tribes', and subjecting them to pass laws that restricted their movement outside these bantustans. All this led to endless pain and suffering among the people themselves and to deepening divisions between groups living in different mine compounds or bantustans.

As mentioned in *Ubuhlalu* (beads) *The Science of an Ordinary Art* by Nomusa Makhubu and *Ceramics and South African Indigenous Visual heritage* by Sbonelo Tau both in this publication, and as shown in Ernest Mancoba's aesthetic, African art has features which cross the continent. This indicates the commonalities rather than the differences between African peoples.

Curators and art historians, including Caribbean Dennis Williams, (Williams, 1974) German Janheinz Jahn, (Jahn, 1961), Tanzanian Everlyn Nicodemus (Nicodemus, 2012), Nigerians Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie (Ogbechie, 2011), Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor (Oguibe & Enwezor, 1999), together with Sudanese Salah Hassan, founder of NKA Journal of Contemporary African Art, and others have in the past quarter-century and before that begun to generate a new, historically based discourse on African art.

However, this significant body of work has not yet substantially changed the prevalent popular view of art imbued with knowledge systems rooted in pre-colonial Africa as 'traditional African art'. There is an array of deeply entrenched prejudices associated with the term 'tradition', as with the term 'tribal', which still serve to render indigenous visual heritage and the societies that produce it conceptually outside of the perceived dynamism of the dominant art practices of today[23].

Whilst there have been thoughtfully curated exhibitions of indigenous visual heritage in South Africa since the mid-1980s at least, with richly illustrated accompanying catalogues[24], these efforts have not yet reshaped the paradigms for understanding art in our context (Mdluli, 2015)[25]. Still too much art writing in South Africa neglects conceptual engagement with indigenous knowledge of art.

Too often the underlying assumption of even useful, thoughtful research, is that Western art provides the paradigm for all art. It retains dominance as the only modern, forward-looking, dynamic, constantly changing visual form, one which eschews tradition, while African art is seen as entering history only when it 'modernises' on Western terms or is described from within a Western paradigm[26]. African art is often described as craft or 'traditional art', descriptors which obscure more than they reveal.

23 In Latin America, on the other hand, there was a debate between the 'hispanics' and the 'indigenistas' as far back as the 1960s and 1970s where indigenous knowledge featured as knowledge.

24 See Patty Hardy's article, '*Critical Survey of Published Research on South African Indigenous Visual Heritage*' in this publication.

25 Same Mdluli's PhD thesis begins the process of exposing lacunae and distortions in the conceptual approaches.

26 Patty Hardy's article in this publication highlights recent exhibitions of indigenous visual heritage which have been curated with an eye to deepening historical understanding.

Calling African art 'traditional art' lends itself to a view of this art as static and unchanging, and of African artists working within the 'first system' – a concept elaborated on below – as 'not-artists'; yet, strangely, the work of such non-artists is held and even celebrated in museums and galleries as art. Flowing from the definitional difficulties of calling African art 'traditional' and Western art 'contemporary', and calling African artists not artists, but sometimes crafters, are a myriad of value judgements that inform systems of art sponsorship, markets, curatorship, research, documentation, public perceptions and, most egregiously, art education. In the next section we return to our first example, the contemporary production of Benin bronzes, which have been misjudged in this way.

In South Africa evidence of the contemporary dynamism and influence of indigenous visual knowledge is glaring in art of the past century

We have mentioned that Ernest Mancoba was profoundly inspired by many aspects of indigenous visual heritage – indicating inter alia that some influences which feature most strongly in his work are the colour patterning and symbolism of beadwork – and we have discussed his visualisation of the proverb '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu*'.

He was not alone; woven through the history of most great South African artists of the twentieth century is a similar deployment of indigenous visual inspiration and knowledge. A few examples suffice. Helen Sebidi talks of the role of reading clouds in Tswana oral narratives and how she uses this technique in her work (Sebidi, 2009). Dumile Feni claimed direct inspiration from the rock art he saw during his Western Cape childhood[27]. A poignant description of George Pemba's elder brother, Timothy, characterises him as a passionate artist who used ash from the fire, the red tones of the earth, anything at hand to make art (Feinberg, 2000).

In Lefifi Tladi's studio practice in faraway Stockholm, he uses methods of hand-painting gleaned from home in a process informed by Malopo ritual[28]. Knitwear designer Laduma Ngxokolo overtly draws on designs from beadwork familiar to him from his Eastern Cape upbringing (figure 19). Ceramic artists Sbonelo Tau Luthuli (figure 18), Andile Dyalvane and others also draw on indigenous visual heritage. Most recently, Professor Pitika Ntuli's ground-breaking exhibition of sculpture made from bones, *Azibuyele Emasisweni* (Return to the Source) draws overtly on this heritage, this knowledge.

27 https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/dumile-feni-biography-sophia-reuss
28 Personal communication with the author (2022)

Fig. 17 Sbonelo Tau Luthuli Ihubo Lengabadi (Song of the Soil) 2014 ceramic (Ahmed, 2015)

Undoubtedly these inspirations, and others which search for the 'human', give South African art its distinctive quality (Richards, 2011)[29]. To date there has been no body of research or publication that explicitly documents or assesses the influence of indigenous visual knowledge on our great artists. This theme remains largely outside intellectual discourse on art.

The first survey of South African twentieth-century art (Jantjies, Majavu & Richards, 2015) has been published without acknowledging indigenous expressions in art as vehicles of a body of knowledge with significance and impacts beyond itself; whether looking at African art or Western art, it views artists and methods from within a Western paradigm. The essay by Nessa Leibhammer and Vonani Bila (Leibhammer & Bila, 2011) in a volume edited by Jillian Carman (Carman, 2011) is the exception.

The younger generation of artists and art critics, unless they happen to have knowledge gleaned in the family, or from personal association with an informed artist, are cut off from this heritage Even if they have some local and personal knowledge, they may not have been exposed to other similar bodies of knowledge from other parts of the country, or from the African continent and diaspora.

29 See also the conversations between Dumile Feni and Omar Badsha (Jantjies, Majavu & Richards, 2015) and (personal communication Omar Badsha with the author, 2015).

Certainly, they will not have had many (or any?) opportunities to process this knowledge intellectually in our educational institutions. Much of our visual arts heritage is therefore silenced.

We are aware that in other countries this heritage is explicitly recorded and taught. In India for example scholars specialise in the practice and theory of ancient art forms, whether these concern storytelling, music, dance or visual arts. In Japan, for example, high-level practitioners of ancient art forms are designated 'living treasures' and play a role in disseminating knowledge. Indigenous and African heritage features strongly in Latin American political and artistic debates.

Ogbechie's explanation of how the Benin bronzes produced after the looting of the palace by colonialists were cast out of history by the dominant Western art system, which prized only the looted bronzes (and is now in a tizz about returning them), suggests that consideration needs to be given to who in our context is still producing art within the framework of indigenous knowledge systems and associated processes, and how this impacts the totality of art practices in our context.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this article and my own knowledge base to comment on the societal processes that frame indigenous knowledge systems and suggest the form of the ritual archive, raising the question leads inexorably to consideration of those designated 'craft' producers who, in our context, have often been channeled into producing for an external market as part of the creative industries. Although the practical skills of 'crafters' are deployed, their visual and cultural knowledge is often left aside, as they are urged to prepare 'marketable' objects most often designed by white, middle-class designers. Yet a rich and unacknowledged source of visual knowledge profoundly informs these crafters, who may be better described as artists. Dr Esther Mahlangu is at the apex, in terms of public exposure, of many unacknowledged artists who carry significant aesthetic and other knowledge.

To fully appreciate this art, our indigenous visual heritage and the knowledge embedded in it, thought needs to be given to new terms.

What made Nesta Nala, the brilliant ceramic artist who was usually designated a crafter inspired by Zulu traditions in ceramic art, less of a contemporary artist than the celebrated multimedia artist, William Kentridge, who is inspired by traditions in European art? Which of them is more influenced and informed by the respective traditions they draw on? Is it possible to answer these questions by invoking concepts and terminology currently in use, without getting caught up in a racially framed argument that would do a disservice to both artists?

How does one explain that a white ceramics student, who researched Nesta Nala's work, was inspired by her practice, uses her techniques, and exhibits in galleries, and is known as an artist, while Nala herself was known as a crafter and entered the market as such, albeit a highly appreciated one?
Does our current discourse explain why the many subtle variations of red described in the Xhosa language are not taught in our art institutions, while Titian red, by implication a product of the European Renaissance, is familiar to most art history students?

Two systems of art

Our attempts to find a way forward through a maze of obfuscating definitions and terms were assisted by Tanzanian artist, Everlyn Nicodemus's reflections on her experiences of racism, starting with her person and her society being perceived anthropologically (Nicodemus, 2012). She encountered this 'othering' point of view and experienced it as trauma as a young student in Europe. In response, she gave up the study of anthropology and made art, developing her own point of view rather than being the subject of another's gaze. She then assessed the responses to her work in a wide-ranging research project on the origins of modern art and black trauma. In the process, she developed a framework to begin addressing these questions within a new paradigm. She identifies two systems of art:

'Visual art is only partly visual; the invisible part is what consecrates it within the art system: those preconditioned notions, sets of underlying discourses and a ceremonial of approaching, handling and understanding the object as art, which Bourdieu referred to as the 'habitus'. This characterises the art production in industrialised societies, summarised as modern art. It is no less valid for how art functions and is integrated into the structure of other societies and from other epochs, where the production and use of what we call art manifests a significant and coherent system. This system might represent a completely different 'notion of art', but it has its specific codes and ceremonials. 'Art' may be a recent, and to a certain degree, western invention, but structurally integrated systems of visual production have existed and exist, whatever term we apply. It may also be assumed that visual commodities have been and are manufactured more or less alongside these systems to satisfy different needs.' (Nicodemus, 1995, p 31).

Refreshingly, Nicodemus cuts through the obfuscations created by labelling all indigenous visual heritage with the blanket term 'traditional African art', both the indigenous visual heritage with the blanket term 'traditional african art', both the art that was pre-industrially produced and its contemporary expressions. **Although Nicodemus work focuses especially on the moment of transition between the indigenous and Western systems as a moment of cultural trauma for the artists concerned[30], her identification of two systems opens a conceptual space in which to try to resolve some of the definitional conundrums we have encountered. Most especially, it allows for consideration of the ritual archive, the workings of and relationship between tangible and intangible heritage within a dynamic conception of history and art, rather than a static one.**

A 'First' System in South African art

In considering South African visual arts history, it seems self-evident that two systems of art coexist here. So many centuries later the myopia of the 17th century Dutch engravers still seems to prevail. Yet clearly a system of art other than the Western system still prevails in South Africa. It is a system of art which is responsive to societal change, is internally dynamic, comprises all the art forms discussed above and, although unacknowledged, dynamically informs the Western system.

There is also no doubt that many South African artists who present their work within the framework of the Western system draw on the knowledge, values and aesthetics, even the techniques, of the first system, and their art has impacts on the second, Western system. We can no longer strictly divide the two systems – they are intertwined, as is our society. Yet currently the definitions of art are stubbornly myopic about the knowledge carried in the first system (indigenous African) and its significant strands of influence in the second system (Western). This serves not only to bedevil understanding of the relationships between the two, but to obscure the primary significance of the first system.

Assuming it is not possible to know something properly unless it is properly named, new names should raise awareness and contribute to building knowledge of art in our context. Calling this body of visual expression an art system cuts through the old and tired contrasts between modernity and tradition used to describe African art, and creates the possibility for more useful naming systems.

30 Transitional art' was a descriptor used for some artists, mainly those without formal art school training living in rural areas in South Africa who were first exhibited in a wave of enthusiasm by galleries and patrons in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, and then somewhat dropped by their promoters (see Mdluli, 2015).

Whilst books are no longer banned in South Africa, and there is no possibility any more of going to prison or being tortured for owning a book, we still struggle to accept, document and research vital aspects of our society's knowledge and experience. It is unconscionable that we neglect the foundational knowledge of the first art system, which clearly has so much to offer us and the world. It may well be that first system artists are amongst the most important bearers of the knowledge of the ritual archive.

The late Sanusi (diviner) Credo Mutwa told Professor Pitika Ntuli, a long-time advocate for reparations, that if the vast holdings of South Africa's visual heritage held in storage in the basement of the British Museum were returned it would heal our society[31]. Is it not necessary, at the very least, to address some of the cultural and intellectual confusion about this work – about its place in our society, the place of first system artists, and the knowledge they carry – as preparation for its return?

The black and African world has identified eight 'Rs'– recognition, remembrance, restoration, restitution, reparations, reconnection, return and reconstruction – as principles for a broader movement (of black and African liberation). (AFFORD UK, 2022 p 7), first seeking recognition and acknowledgement of the injustices and crimes, then remembrance of the victims, the restoration of dignity, restitution of physical artefacts and human remains (including African skulls), then financial and psychological reparations and healing, followed by physical and mental reconnections with the severed African world, physical human relocation and return as have been achieved by communities such as the Rastafarian community in Ethiopia, and finally holistic reconstruction of African societies. (AFFORD UK, 2022, p 7)

Whilst aspects of the eight Rs have been addressed within South African society since 1994, and these efforts are ongoing, might it not be useful to explicitly consider the damage done to the ritual archive by colonialism and apartheid and address these eight Rs in relation to indigenous visual heritage or first system art as well? But to do so we need a revised conceptual framework and educational processes.

Accepting that both Western and first art systems carry the heavy weight of their respective traditions, and that each is simultaneously contemporary and located in the dynamism of history, creates new conceptual possibilities. If we consider that neither system is more progressive and dynamic than the other, we can begin to view them both with a less distorted historical, cultural and aesthetic gaze.

31 Personal communication by Professor Pitika Ntuli with the author (2021).

We can then address the massive differentials in how the knowledge of the two systems is paradigmatically framed and enters the education system.

How is the knowledge of first system art shared today ?

Urbanisation, the destructive experience of forced removals that affected approximately seven million South Africans, limited access to land, widespread extreme poverty, and the undemocratic, colonially inspired system of rule by chiefs in rural areas, which grossly distorts the pre-colonial accountability of chiefs to their people (Mbeki, 1994; Sharif, 2000) are all factors that have severely undermined the lives of bearers of indigenous knowledge, and therefore their ability to practise and hand on their knowledge.

We understand that the relevant Skills Education Training Authority in South Africa intends to develop the possibility for crafters (first system artists?) to acquire qualifications at the highest level. This is very encouraging. Yet, how will it work? Many publications on first system art suffer from cultural confusion and inaccuracies, as described by Patty Hardy in this publication. There is a paucity of documented bodies of knowledge of indigenous visual arts heritage, framed by a first system paradigm of knowledge, that could support the development of texts and other media for use in both basic and advanced studies.

There are some apprenticeships in which knowledge of art is shared[32], but is this sufficient to ensure that the knowledge is substantially passed on to a new generation? The formal education system could play a role here. Nevertheless, to the best of our awareness, the knowledge of artists who practise within the first system is not systematically fed into the education system. Yet this knowledge needs to shape visual arts curricula at schools and universities, to allow the next generation of artists in both systems to flourish.

IN CONCLUSION: From the Blombos shells to Laduma Ngxolo: South Africa's extraordinarily rich indigenous visual heritage.

South Africa's visual arts heritage goes back 70 000 years to the beads found in the Blombos Cave in the Western Cape. It extends up to today with Laduma Ngxokolo's Maxhosa knitwear (figure 19) shown on the catwalks of Europe (Ngxokolo, 2020). South African contemporary art expression is vibrant and dynamically informed by cross-fertilisation between the two systems, African and Western, first and second.

32 The author has observed ceramic artist Elizabeth Makahane teaching her granddaughters how to collect clay (2015) and Esther Mahlangu's acolytes in her studo

However, in terms of intellectual discourse, formal education, distribution, andmost critically, how it regards the artists and the knowledge that they hold, one system has almost squeezed the breath out of the other. The first system is woefully neglected and deeply misunderstood in our vision of art. Whilst there is evidence of its vitality and ubiquity in our museums and galleries, and in its practice, the significance of this huge body of work for our society as art and knowledge has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. When it is regarded as art, it is treated as something separate and apart, not as an integral, vital stream of our art heritage and discourse, with impacts and relevance across disciplines and across our society.

Fig. 18 Knitwear by Laduma Ngxokolo (Ngxokolo, 2020)

The artists who specialise within the first system are thoroughly marginalised, both economically and epistemologically. The danger of the first system continuing to be seen in a problematic way, and its practitioners continuing to be rendered voiceless in the discourse of art, is that it will cease to exist as a living force in our society. If this happens, a rich, fundamental seam of knowledge will be lost to future generations.

Ernest Mancoba's work and vision offer a bridge to heal the severing of memory that took place during the colonial and apartheid periods and restore recognition of indigenous knowledge and aesthetic principles in our discourse about art and institutions of learning. Thinkers such as Everlyn Nicodemus, Dennis Williams, Janheinz Jahn and Toyin Falola provide keys to a new approach.

Some of our greatest artists, (and musicians and writers) have led the way by integrating the two art systems in aesthetically resolved and brilliant works, thereby creating a symbolic possibility for our whole society to integrate culturally[33]. If all the art in our context were properly understood, it might be possible to rid ourselves of deeply ingrained cultural and intellectual prejudices, and our entire society could then joyfully embrace its full cultural patrimony in thought and deed.

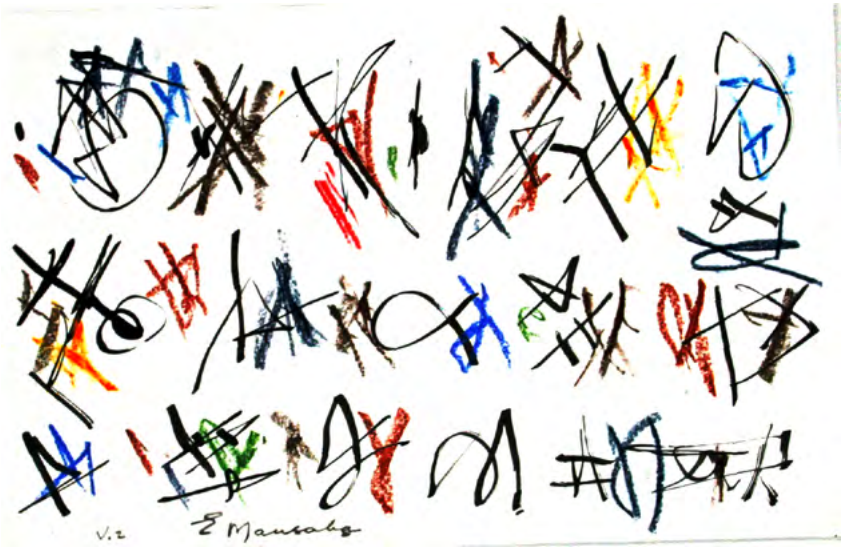

Fig. 19 Untitled 1996 Ernest Mancoba, Ink And Oil Pastel On Paper 21x 32 cm Johannesburg Art Gallery (Ahmed, 2006)

Whilst Mancoba affirmed the vital and universal significance of African cultural heritage for a peaceful world, specifically its respect for ancestral human heritage, he simultaneously recognised a universal human essence in the art of all pre-industrial societies. He said that 'the deeper you go into any culture, the more you will find the universal human essence' (Mancoba, 1997), reminding us of our common humanity across the world. He felt that attention to this ancient human essence could save the world from the rapacious greed and conflict of our times and looked beyond the problems of the late twentieth-century world, posing questions to which the twenty-first century has not yet found answers.

33 Examples of this are the music of the Blue Notes, a South African free jazz group based in exile in London from the1960s, and S.E.K. Mqhayi's novella, Ityala Lamawele (1914). Lovedale Press Alice

Ernest Mancoba's work suggests the terms for a human renaissance using African spirituality as a guide. African spirituality frames a world view that embraces the very essence of the collective nature of humanity. Engaging with this revolutionary message would allow for the transcendence of cultural limitations, racist perspectives and conflict.

Mancoba's call for mutual respect across divides, for peace on earth through an aesthetic and a philosophy rooted in first system African art allows him to declare, 'a person [will] be a person and that's it'.

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Throughout the 30 years since I first met him, my work with and about Ernest Mancoba has been enormously enhanced by many kind collaborators and informants: Govan Mbeki, Jane Gool Tabata, Elza Miles, Wonga Mancoba, Ben Mokoena, Glynn O'Reilly, Bruce Macdonald, Dingan Thomas Kapa, Christopher Peter, Jane Alexander, Karen Isabella Rolfes, Alain Spielman, Beatrice Khadige, Abdulcadir Ahmed Said , Pedro Espi Sanchez, Menyatso Mathole, Dizu Plaatjes, Marisa Mowszowski, Catharina Roux, Linda Newton Thompson, Pluto Panoussis, Lori Gie, Josi Frater, Albie Sachs, Lisa Espi, Patty Hardy, Ashley Smith, Rignold Haywood, Zubeida Jaffer, Omar Badsha, Nyanisile Jack, Vusi Mchunu, Njabulo Ndebele, Ntongela Masilela, Mbye Cham, Christopher Till, Phindile Xaba, Amos Letsaolo, Nombi Mpako, Thami Jali, Musa Mncwabe, Leah Msiza, Mr Lamazi, Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, Ezekiel Budeli, Grace Tshikuvhe, Ziphozenkosi Dayile, Athi Mongezeleli Joja, Ciraj Rassool, Stanley Hermans, Lydia Dreyer, Imruh Bakari, Pro Sobopha, Gita Saghal, Janice Cheddie, Vivienne Cohen, Kate Soal, Leane Gerber, Athalie Crawford, Wendy Smidt and Yonelisa Jacobs.

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(Image courtesy of Wits Arts Museum)

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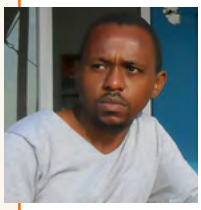

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researches, produces and directs films rooted in South African and African social and cultural history including *Ernest Mancoba at Home* (1995). She curated *In the Name of all Humanity, the African Spiritual Expression of Ernest Mancoba* (2006-2007) and together with Abdulcadir Ahmed, founded the Art and Ubuntu Trust, an NGO concerned with art education in peri-urban and rural areas of SA. She has developed national art and film education projects including the *South African Arts Past and Present Project* of 15 films and 3 books, and the online ArtSAT webinar series. She was a member of the international scientific committee of the *UNESCO Slave Route Project: Resistance, Heritage Liberty* from 2011-2017 where she played a role advising on film projects. In 2023 she initiated the *Tomas Films Scriptlab,* which produced 8 feature film scripts in a project called *Going Beyond Guns* and *Gangs and Action.*

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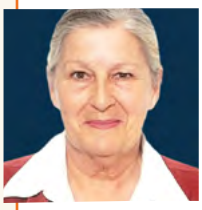
is a Professor in Art History at the University of Cape Town. She is the founder of *Creative Knowledge Resources* (CKR) – an open access platform for social justice arts. Makhubu was the Deputy Dean for *Transformation in the Humanities Faculty* at the University of Cape Town (2020-2022). She was the recipient of the *ABSA L'Atelier Gerard Sekoto Award* in 2006 and the *Prix du Studio National des Arts Contemporain, Le Fresnoy* in 2014. She received the *American Council of Learned Societies* (ACLS) *African Humanities Program fellowship award* and was selected to be an *African Studies Association* (ASA) Presidential fellow in 2016. In 2017, she was a UCT-Harvard Mandela fellow at the Hutchins Centre for African and African American Research, Harvard University. In 2017 and in 2023, she was the *First Runner Up for the Department of Science and Technology* (DST) Women in Science Awards. Makhubu has co-curated exhibitions (including a co-curation of the South African Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in Italy in 2019), and she has published *Creative Books* and research papers in peer-reviewed international journals and book volumes.



PATTY HARDY
Has a teaching diploma and a degree majoring in History of Art and the Cultural History of Western Europe from UCT (1984). She was Curator of the Natale Labia Museum, which was then a satellite of the South African National Gallery. Here, amongst many other exhibitions, she curated a retrospective exhibition of Peter Clarke's work, *The Hand is the Tool of the Soul*. She has since freelanced as a sub-editor of a jazz magazine, and of academic papers and a range of texts. She has researched and written on art history, art education and many aspects of indigenous visual history in rural South Africa and done interior design for private clients.

The South African Arts, Past and Present Project (SAAPPP) seeks to deepen understanding of the indigenous sources of South African aesthetics and address the dire need for teaching materials on South African Arts. It is a multi-media project designed to support Arts and Culture teachers work in the classroom and the work of arts educationists at community art centres.

There are three books in this **Indigenous Knowledge In The Arts Series**:

Volume 1: Listening to Literature - Towards a South African canon
Volume 2: Defining South African Music - Musicians and Aficionados speak
Volume 3: The Hidden Thread in South African Visual Heritage

and 15 short educational films which have been introduced via ArtSAT

www.artubuntu.org

The Hidden Thread
in South African Visual Heritage

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"What are we leaving on the way of this so-called progress?"
Ernest Mancoba

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PROF PITIKA NTULI

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