

A VISUAL AND THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCULPTED PAPER  
AS METAPHOR FOR THE FRAGILITY AND VULNERABILITY  
OF THE HUMAN BEING

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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RIKA NEL

Student Number: 8503540

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Main Supervisor: Dr. N. Shiweda

Co-supervisor: Prof. H. D. Viljoen

**Abstract**

The purpose of this practice-led research was to explore paper as a metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of the human being. This research focused on child abuse and gender inequality. Research on this theme is of topical value as it is a countrywide, as well as a worldwide phenomenon. This research was undertaken through a literature review, by analysis of relevant artists' work (particularly those artists whose work engaged with the specific themes of metaphor, the body, memory and remembrance, social commentary, or whose work utilised paper, text, and light as creative materials), and the practical and technical procedures employed in works of art. The literature indicated that although there were certain similarities in the work of other artists, my work was unique in interpretation and execution. None of the artists referenced in this thesis work solely with paper as their medium, nor have they engaged as deeply with paper as a metaphor for the human being.

My focus was on developing a personal technique of using paper as a medium of expression and creativity. I used a conceptual approach expressed through an appropriate material, which in this research was paper. I found that through the use of the very fragile medium of recycled tissue paper the fragility of the human form could successfully be expressed. Various other types of recycled paper were also used to express the historical background of the theme of abuse. The art works created for the exhibition (as partial fulfilment of this thesis) also illustrate that paper can be used as a medium for fine arts and not only for crafts.

Through my art exhibition the aim was to make the viewer aware of the fragility and vulnerability of the human being and that people should not be silent about abuse and violence, as has been the case for many generations. Although I was making a social comment it is not the role of the artist to offer solutions to these issues.

**Declaration**

I, Rika Nel, hereby declare that this is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree to any other institution of higher education.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, who since childhood educated me about my Afrikaner history and heritage and who always was proudly South African, but who, as a typical loyal Afrikaner woman, wife and mother never disclosed any family secrets and left me to find out and deal with them as an adult.

I also dedicate this thesis to all vulnerable and fragile people who, for whatever reason, kept silent.

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## **Chapter1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Orientation of the study**

The purpose of this practice-led research was to explore paper as a metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of human beings. In this study a specific material (paper) was used to symbolise the concept of frailty and vulnerability, which was then expressed through figurative forms made from the material. As this research is done from a personal point of view it is more accessible written in the first person rather than using the third person.

The inspiration for this research developed from my interest in the social issues of child abuse and gender inequality. According to Giddens (2006), studies show that children are prime targets for physical abuse, and for whom emotional scars are deeper than the physical scars. The threat of violence towards children comes mostly from men in their own families or from close acquaintances (Giddens, 2006). Giddens further explains that gender concerns the psychological, social and cultural difference between males and females (Giddens, 2006). Since I am from an Afrikaner background, this visual and theoretical research is grounded in my historical, cultural and personal perspective. This research uses the history of the Afrikaner people from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present as a key reference.

The practice-led component of this research explored the conceptual and metaphorical link between paper as material (i.e. focusing on its physical properties) and the dynamics of sculpting as the intended theme and the final product of the research. Firstly, the focus was on the use of paper as a metaphor to convey and

communicate the fragility and the vulnerability of human beings. Secondly, it focused on exploring sculpting techniques in order to develop a personal method of using paper as a medium of creative expression. The artworks produced were exhibited at the National Art Gallery of Namibia as a solo exhibition.

I have used paper as a metaphor to convey and communicate the fragility and the vulnerability of human beings. In general, metaphor is used to describe something by means of poetic comparison. In the use of a visual metaphor, an image is used to show this substitution. In my exhibition the image of the sculpted body created from paper was used as the metaphor for the concept of using or misusing something and discarding it, and the human form was used as a visual metaphor for pain, be it physical or mental.

Every artist has his or her own interpretation of what a specific material means and what memories it evokes. Paper has its own meaning, history and associations. In the practice-led component of this research, I applied paper as a significant material for creative expression and communication, due to its inherent character, namely its fragility and ephemerality. I chose paper as an appropriate metaphor to explore issues of vulnerability in an aesthetic visual context because paper is a mundane material that is often cast off, thrown away or recycled, but can also be made into works of art. Vergine (1996) states “Even scrap paper, used ship and train tickets, that is, material that is considered of low value has the possibility to be made into aesthetic creations in the same manner as if noble, traditional material had been used instead. Paper is therefore, used as a gesture of protest and provocation” (Vergine, 1996).

I have used paper as a metaphor for the low value that is placed on fragile and vulnerable people in our society. I have observed that humans are being violated and misused and that they are then discarded by the perpetrators, just like scrap paper. Therefore, used paper was collected and applied to explore a variety of techniques, in order to develop a personal method of using paper as a medium of expression and creativity. This was done by exploring a variety of surface textures, in order to express the scars that might be seen on a body. Specific methods of joining and fusing the material were explored (e.g. stitching) to symbolise repair and joining, but also scars and wounds.

My creative approach was from a conceptual point of view. According to Alberro and Blake (1999) the term “Conceptual Art” came into use in the late 1960s to describe types of art that no longer took the form of conventional art objects. Conceptual artists such as Joseph Beuys and Joseph Kosuth think beyond the limits of traditional material, and work out their concept or idea in whatever material and form is essential to the concept. In this research the material used was paper, the concept was fragility and vulnerability, and the body was used (as visual metaphor) to express emotional and physical conditions. In conceptual art the concept is the most important aspect of the work, thus giving concept priority over the “traditional” use of material. This means that conceptual art can be created from almost anything. It is common practice for conceptual artists to use “low-value materials” such as paper.

Moreover, Smith (2002) states that “Conceptual Art is unquestionably the most significant contemporary development to have emerged in recent decades; many of today’s most compelling works of art depend on a fusion of conceptual practices first established in the 1960’s with far more intuitive attitudes and responses to various cultural, social, and emotional stimuli, resulting in works that are simultaneously rigorous and evocative” (Smith, 2002). Similarly, Adams (2002) says for the Conceptualists the mental concept takes precedence over the object. Conceptual art attained official status through a 1970 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The show’s title – “Information” – reflected the emphasis of Conceptual art on language and text, rather than on imagery (Adams, 2002).

To Corris (2004) the most striking features of Conceptual art are its de-emphasis on the importance of the art object and its understanding of the role of language in shaping our knowledge of the world and our conception of art. One of the contributions of conceptual art is the explicitly social aspiration of this influential avant-garde artistic practice. Burn (cited in Corris, 2004) states that conceptual art creates an actual area of the work that enables a viewer to participate in a dialogue that gives the viewer a new significance and in which the viewer becomes an interlocutor involved in reproducing and inventing part of that dialogue (Corris, 2004). Conceptual art is therefore, art in which the concept(s) or idea(s) involved in the work take precedence over traditional aesthetic and material concerns. This is clearly apparent in my work, where paper such as wrapping paper that is found in shoeboxes, out-dated fax machine paper rolls and shredded paper from the copy centre from the University of Namibia was used. This was combined with simple

papier-mâché techniques and craft techniques such as embossing, sewing, embroidering and knitting. The material and the techniques were utilised to reveal the concept of fragility and vulnerability. This will be discussed in detail in the chapter on the creative process of this research.

According to Kreamer et al. (2007) issues of language are central to conceptualism. An understanding of postmodernist debates about text and image, text and the visual sign is crucial if one is to acknowledge the semiotic theories informing works by contemporary artists. Kreamer et al. (2007) further claim that like all art historical “isms”, conceptualism is an umbrella term used to define myriad practices but which encompasses several general ideas.

Firstly, conceptualism refers to artworks that are generally self-reflexive regarding the notion of art. In other words, conceptual art questions the process of designation, asking what makes an object a work of art. It also involves a general rejection or, at the very least, reassessment of the supremacy of the artist’s hand. Conceptualism problematizes the traditional viewer’s search for narrative, taking its cue from linguists who have taught us to question narrative as constructed, arbitrary and subjective.

Secondly, conceptualism entails a great deal of disdain for objectiveness, and has as one of its central tenets the dematerialization of the object. Consequently, there has been a shift in Western art practices away from the precious, spot-lit *objet d’art*, with a fixed cultural and monetary value, towards alternative forms, such as performance art, ephemeral earthworks, and “happenings.” Finally, the context, the framing, the place and circumstances in which the art work is seen, read, interpreted, and

experienced is a central factor in determining meaning. It is the viewer rather than the artist, who ultimately brings meaning to the work of art, applying his/her experiences to its reading (Kreamer, 2007).

My point of departure for this research was from a historical, cultural and personal perspective, and therefore the works of other artists with similar perspectives were analysed. Owing to the nature and uniqueness of visual art, this research focused on a unique and creative personal interpretation, which was then analysed. I have also used this practice-led research as social commentary on the burning issue of abuse, which not only occurs in Namibia and South Africa, but all over the world.

Many artists have taken the role of social commentator and investigated unjust situations and practices persisting in contemporary society. Artists tackle pressing issues, ranging from sexual repression to personal and social violence to racial anxiety. They confront the violent reality of living in a contemporary world. Thus, artists deliver social commentary on issues such as vulnerable children. As a result, their artworks are created in reaction to their world by reflecting on all aspects of life, from birth to death.

In this research, not only was paper explored as a metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of the human being, but the body itself was used as metaphor. For some artists the body literally becomes - embodies - the concept itself. Miglietti (2003) states that some solitary artists represented the anguished complexity of life in their works, while for others the body was used as a detox cure (Miglietti, 2003). This treatment and understanding of the body in an artistic context played a major role in this research, especially in the practical component. I explored traditional domestic

textile arts and handicrafts such as quilting and knitting, especially the therapeutic qualities of these techniques and how they have been used historically in Afrikaner domestic culture.

Silence is also a strong element that is addressed throughout this practice-led research. Abused people mostly keep quiet about their experiences because they are ashamed and because they want to spare their families from embarrassment. In the same way trauma experienced in wars remains suppressed for years, and I have used a variety of symbols to express voluntary or forced silence.

According to De Waal (2012) a variety of materials are used to push the boundaries of what art itself consists of. Conceptual artists ask how art is positioned in a society through their works, in transition from the repressive limitations of the past to the scary uncertainties of the future. I have used the image of the sculpted body created from paper - a mundane material - to explore and express the concept of abuse.

## **1.2 A statement of the research problem**

Currently, there is no research being done in Namibia on the use of paper as material for sculpture, or the use of paper as a metaphor. The uniqueness of this research lies in the research theme, which deals with the fragility and vulnerability of human beings, addressed from a visual art perspective.

In the last few months, and since the conception of this practice-led research, a number of projects have been initiated towards creating awareness about abuse in general. This was a response by government and human rights organisations to the gender-based violence that has become prevalent in Namibia. Exhibitions were

initiated where artists could submit works on the specific theme of gender-based violence and could give visual expression to and comment on abuse.

This study, however, is unique in that paper and the body are used as metaphor for fragility and vulnerability. I used paper to explore the social and psychological effects of violence and abuse. My aim was to make the viewing public aware of abuse, both locally and worldwide, because as widespread as it is, abuse tends to foster what could almost be termed a “culture of silence” amongst the abused. I wanted to demonstrate that there is a way of communicating a very personal but widespread problem without actually breaking the silence and embarrassing oneself or the other people involved. I wanted to give the vulnerable and abused the opportunity to communicate through interaction with the artworks, which in the case of my exhibition took the form of personal experiences, written anonymously on scraps of paper, and then inserted into the teabag quilts. In this way people could have an opportunity to process their emotions in a safe yet meaningful way, turning the interaction with the exhibition into a therapeutic act. Another theme I wanted to highlight in my work was the paternalism embedded in Calvinist Christian ideology, and its implications for immoral gender relations in Afrikaner culture. I also wanted to explore the effects of paternalism on the construction of identity, not only in Afrikaner culture, but universally, i.e. paternalism and male dominance worldwide as justification for the physical and psychological abuse of women and children.

Key research themes are therefore the visual representation of memory and remembrance with paper and the body as metaphor. Social commentary was made by using text in relation to paper in three-dimensional forms.

### **1.3 Research Aims**

The aims of this research are to explore contemporary artists' use of their art material as mediums to express concepts of fragility and vulnerability of human beings, whether through the use of three-dimensional figurative sculptures or two-dimensional work or text, or a combination thereof.

I have therefore reviewed the work of contemporary artists who have created acts of remembrance and who used the body to express themselves. I have also reviewed the work of artists who used techniques such as casting and using thread or embroidery, as well as artists who used their material in some way as metaphor, referred to religion in their creative expression, or used text in various ways in their work. This enabled me to draw links between these artists' work and my own work, with the focus on uniqueness and individual creative expression.

The creative objectives of this research lie in developing a personal technique of using paper as a medium of expression and creativity. This approach was the most important aspect of my work, which was from a conceptual point of view, and went beyond the limits of traditional material. Another objective of this research was to use text to inform the viewer about societal issues and the fragility and vulnerability of the body, but also to expose the emotional impact on the victims. My aim was to use everyday materials and to make use of traditional Afrikaner feminine, domestic techniques such as quilting, sewing and knitting. I have used the body as metaphor and therefore I explored the technique of casting as the most appropriate to express my concept. The rationale was to use metaphors and symbols to convey my interpretation but to also leave room for the viewer to interpret in their own way.

Together with these techniques and strategies I also used music to create an ominous atmosphere to express my feelings about the abuse of women and children in the society I live in. I simultaneously created a therapeutic experience for myself while making the general public aware of abuse.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

This study aims to create an awareness of the fragility and vulnerability of people in Namibia through the creative use of paper as a metaphor to investigate human pain and suffering. This is reflected in my art by the transformative physical manifestation of pain and suffering through paper as metaphor. I have addressed the culture of silence in Namibia on sexuality and gender inequality through an art exhibition. An aesthetic contribution to Namibian society was made by creating unique artworks where paper was used as a meaningful art material that was presented as fine art through the use of traditional craft techniques, to critique society and to function as a mirror of society. Hand-embroidery is evocative of the human spirit in the sense that it is a craft that takes time and care, and which presents and represents these qualities in a uniquely tactile way. The tedious handiwork and obsessive care employed to create the work aim to remind the viewer of these simple but intimate pieces of everyday life and to provoke nostalgia for the familiar physicality of the objects.

#### **1.5 Limitation of the study**

This research was limited to a study of artists who deal with critical social issues and who communicated suffering through the violated, distorted and fragmented human body. Artists who used the casting technique to create their bodies were also included. In addition, the work of artists who use text and light and shadow in a

variety of ways, as expressive material, was also analysed in the study, as well as artists using thread and sewing as metaphor. The research also included references to religion and the act of silence, and the way the artists used their material to communicate. The emphasis is not only on the way that the artists use their material to communicate, but also how the viewer can respond. By engaging with the artworks, the viewer's interaction becomes part of the meaning of the artworks, and this interaction could be seen as having equal value to that of the artist's vision and intentions.

The choice of the material turned out to be a huge challenge because of the fragility of the medium. It was extremely difficult to work with paper, and a number of techniques and joining methods were explored. As the artist, I had to learn how to use the fragility of the paper, make it work in my favour, and engage with the fragility of the medium (as well as with the metaphor of fragility) instead of struggling against it. This led to interesting spontaneous results as well as conscious interventions by me. I also struggled to release this fragile material from the moulds in which it was cast. In the process of releasing the casts from the moulds interesting and spontaneous effects such as texturing and tearing were achieved.

## **Chapter 2: Creative Methodology**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter contains an explanation of my motivation and the processes that I used in order to create and exhibit my art works. The chapter begins with an artist's statement that explains my motivation, followed by a statement of my creative aims and a discussion of how the artworks were made. The presentation of the works to the public is discussed in chapter seven.

### **2.2 Artist's Statement**

As an artist I feel a strong need to express my feelings about abuse in the society that I live in, particularly the abuse of women and children in Namibian and South African society, as this is the society that I was born in, where I grew up and where I have grown old. The regular newspaper and television reports, especially on sexual abuse, triggered my repressed memories of childhood. But in typical Afrikaner fashion I suppressed it until my niece visited me in 2012 and came out with her revelation of how she was abused as a child. This triggered a number of revelations about other family members but was still kept within the very intimate inner circles of the family. This of course implicated the older female members of the family. Although my niece revealed her experience to her cousins it was ignored in disbelief. No dialogue took place in the family except with three of the sisters, whom I assume were directly involved. As I felt this need for dialogue without actually speaking about it I turned to visual expression and techniques that would simultaneously express my personal, but also my niece's and sisters' emotions, and be of therapeutic value to me as person and as an artist. I also tried to create an opportunity for social

awareness for Namibian women and an opportunity to communicate in a silent and personal way through interaction within some of the artworks.

My motivation was to communicate visually from my historical, cultural and personal viewpoint through the medium of paper. I decided to use modest materials and to make use of traditionally Afrikaner feminine, domestic techniques such as quilting, sewing and knitting. I decided to explore paper as my metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of the human being, and I experimented with a variety of types of paper and techniques that would best express my theme. My intention was to use metaphors and symbols to convey my interpretation but also leave room for the viewer to interpret in their own way.

### **2.3 Creative aims**

The purpose of this practice-led research was to explore paper as a metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of human beings. To achieve this purpose the following creative aims were developed:

- To develop a personal technique of using paper as a medium of expression and creativity
- To use text to inform the viewer about societal issues and the fragility and vulnerability of the body but also to expose the emotional impact of abuse on the victims
- To express my feelings about the abuse of women and children in the society that I live in
- To use modest materials and to make use of traditionally Afrikaner feminine, domestic techniques such as quilting, sewing and knitting

- To use metaphors and symbols to convey my interpretation but also leave room for the viewer to interpret in their own way
- To use the body as metaphor
- To explore the technique of casting as the most appropriate to express my concept
- Other aims were to create a therapeutic experience for myself and to make the general public aware of abuse
- To enhance the atmosphere at the exhibition with sound
- To discuss Afrikaner history from a cultural and personal perspective, with focus on the potential for the abuse of women and children in Afrikaner society
- To review the work of contemporary artists who created an act of remembrance and who used the body to express themselves
- To review the work of artists who used the techniques such of casting, using thread or embroidery
- To review the work of artists who used their material in some way as metaphor, referred to religion in their creative expression or used text in various ways in their work
- To draw links between these artists' work and my own work with the focus on uniqueness and individual and creative expression

In this section of the creative methodology I discuss how I approached my work and in particular how I solved the many technical problems that I experienced in order to achieve my creative aims. Interestingly, finding solutions to the technical problems in many cases enabled me to come closer to achieving my aims.

I used the body as metaphor, and the technique that I felt most appropriate was casting. I chose a girl of ten, a young male, and a mature female figure to make the body casts. These figures would then be representative of family and society. I also chose a variety of males to cast masks from. I made body and face casts with plaster of Paris to create masks, bodies and limbs for my artworks.

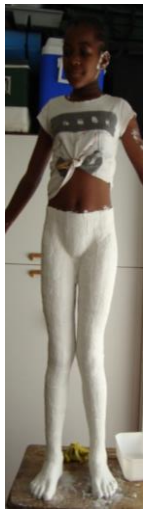


Fig. 1 Casting



Fig. 2. After the moulds were removed I sealed them with plastic varnish to prevent the moulds from perishing, as I intended to use them over and over again.

I then tried various methods to release the paper from the mould. Firstly, I prepared the mould by wrapping it with cling wrap as a release agent. I found the plastic made it difficult to form the features and used Vaseline, which was also not successful as it was too sticky and would not release the paper. Fellow artist and sculptor Dias Machaté gave me a formula for a release agent, which I found to be more successful; it contained a mixture of cattle fat dripping, floor polish and vegetable oil which was heated until it was spreadable.



Fig. 3. My assistant Samuel painting the moulds with the release agent.

As I was using tissue paper to create the fragility and vulnerability of the figures that I intended to use as the “universal family,” I started to experiment with layering the moulds with tissue paper and wall-paper glue. I soon realised that the wall-paper glue was not strong enough to hold the form of the body and the layering was too thin.



Fig. 4. Tissue paper and wall-paper glue

I then experimented with a variety of cold glues until I found one that was strong enough and waterproof enough for the cast to keep its form when removed from the mould. I then continued to layer torn tissue paper strips with glue, using the additive process to build up the casts. The layering of tissue paper and cold glue gave an interesting surface texture which resonated well with the fragility of the human flesh and skin. I experimented with sewing and text on the figure of a cast made from a ten year old girl, using symbols to suggest her vulnerability. I covered these with more layers of tissue paper to create sensitivity and to compel the viewer to come closer to be able to make out the embroidery and to place the viewer in more personal contact with the figure. The casts of the bodies were life-sized so that the viewer could identify with the artwork.



Fig. 5. Tissue paper cast of a young girl with embroidery





Fig. 6. Tissue paper casts display delicate textures as metaphor for fragility of the human being

Photograph: L. Daniz

I made use of fractured forms to enhance my theme. The mood that I wanted to create was one of empathy for and awareness of vulnerable and fragile people. The four sculpted figures represent the universal figures of woman, man and child. I suspended the figures from the ceiling to create the feeling of ethereality. Although I envisaged the play of light on the tissue paper to strengthen the theme of fragility by enhancing the transparency of the delicate paper, as well as emphasising the texture of the paper, I could only see the final effect about a week before the exhibition, when the figures were hung in the photographic studio. Only then did I realise that I had achieved my goal of touching the viewer's soul, as I was really emotionally moved when I saw the installation.



Fig. 7. Casts made from human figures as moulds using tissue paper and cold glue

Photograph: L. Daniz

I struggled a lot with the two girl figures, as they were made during the rainy season and kept on sagging because of the humidity. I nearly gave up hope until I realised that I should not fight the fragility of the material, but rather enhance it, being that its fragility was the reason I chose it. The distortion of the figures made the material look like the maltreated and abused skin of dead children. This led to the image of two dead children lying in the morgue, the rusted, metal sheet upon which they were placed emphasising death and decay.



Fig. 8. Nel, Rika *Save the children.* (2011- 14) Tissue paper, cold glue, metal. Photograph: L. Daniz



Fig. 9. Tissue paper cast of a young girl with red stitching in an attempt to “mend” the scars  
Photograph: L. Daniz



Fig. 10. Photograph: L. Daniz

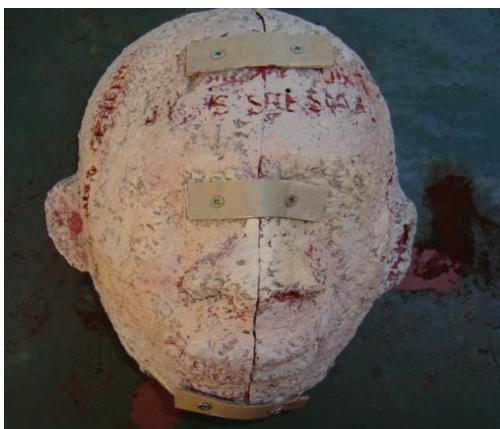
I created masks with papier-mâché made from newspaper, but found it impossible to release the mask from the mould. In some cases I had to grind off the cast as it would not release from the mould. While removing the masks from the mould they often broke into pieces. I experimented by joining the pieces with cardboard strips and screws closing the mouths, as an indication of their unwillingness to speak about what had happened. This linked well with the fractured images and the joining as researched in the literature review. The use of fractured forms enhanced my theme and created the mood that I wanted, namely that of empathy for and awareness of vulnerable and fragile people. I then started to experiment with more ways of joining the pieces, like sewing techniques using red thread and twine. This gave me the

opportunity to express the broken and constrained images. I experimented with acrylic paint for finishing off the masks, but found the acrylic paint too refined or unnatural and started to experiment with something more natural like shoe polish. The shoe polish was left in the sun to soften for easy application. Heating the shoe polish and adding raw linseed oil made it easier to spread, which resulted in a more natural patina.



Mixing the pulp with wall-paper glue, creating the mask on the mould and adding inscriptions with stencil and porcupine quill

Fig. 11. Experimenting with the use of shoe polish to finish off the mask and joining the pieces with



cardboard strips and screws





Fig.12. Masks cast in papier-mâché from human faces used as moulds. Joined with cardboard strips and stitching. Found objects were added to emphasise violence and abuse. Photograph: L. Daniz

I also used tissue paper with antique bowls and side plates (inherited from family) as moulds to create a feeling of vulnerability and fragility in *Dinner Table*, but also to create the emotion of emptiness and uselessness. The significance of *Dinner Table* lies in the fact that the dinner table was the place where reflection on the day's work and evening worship took place.

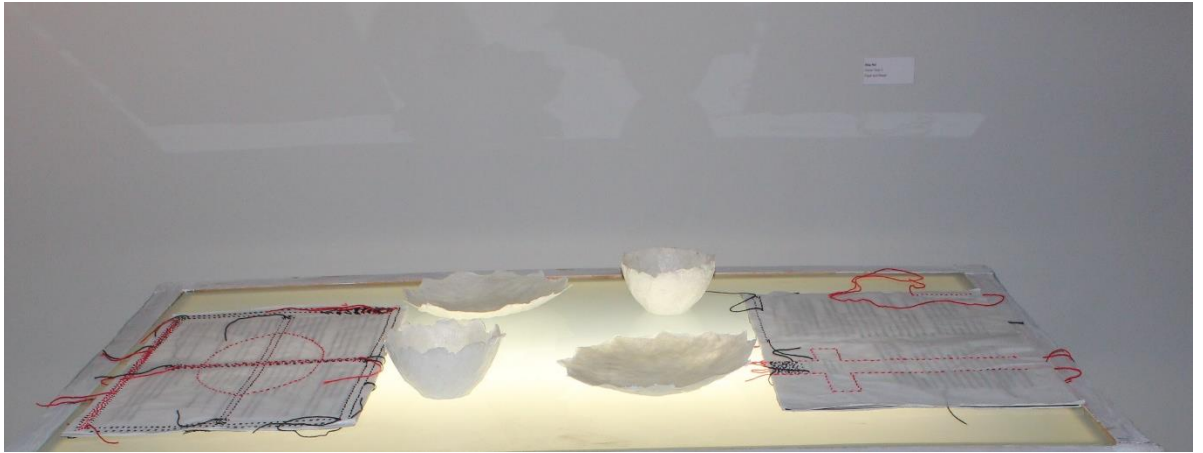


Fig. 13. Tissue paper bowls and plate (tissue paper-mâché on glass moulds) with placemats (embroidery on tissue paper) Photograph: N. Shivute



Fig. 14. Tissue papier-mâché cast made from an antique Afrikaner green glass bowl

Photograph: N. Shivute

Tissue paper was used as placemats. The placemats were strengthened with stiffening that was ironed on the backside to make embroidery possible. I used black thread to embroider certain words in order to take the text out of context and to make it relevant to any person reading it. This would have allowed for the all-important

interaction between reader and text, as the one cannot exist without the other. Dikenga and Christian symbols linked with the text on the specific page, as well as with the protestant background of the Afrikaner, and therefore of myself as the artist. The Dikenga cross was specifically used to contradict Afrikaner Christian supremacy over the indigenous people of Africa as this cross was used long before Christianity. The black thread is symbolic of death and mourning and represents the loss of the basic principles of the Dikenga and the Christian cross. It reflects the hypocritical nature of Christianity in many Afrikaner households, but also in households worldwide. References to the Bible have been made in several of the artworks, as the Bible and religion form an important part of Afrikaner culture, though many seem to think the values and moral virtues are only applicable in certain situations, and to certain people, who in many cases excuse themselves from following these virtues and values.

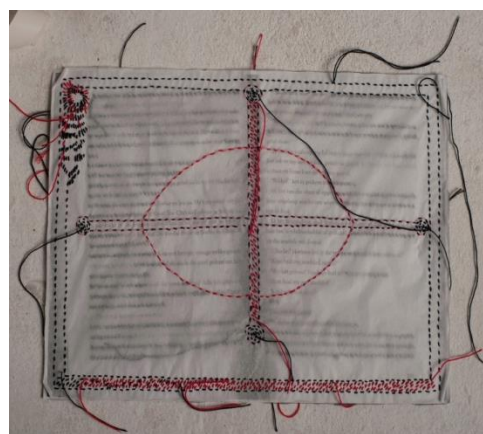
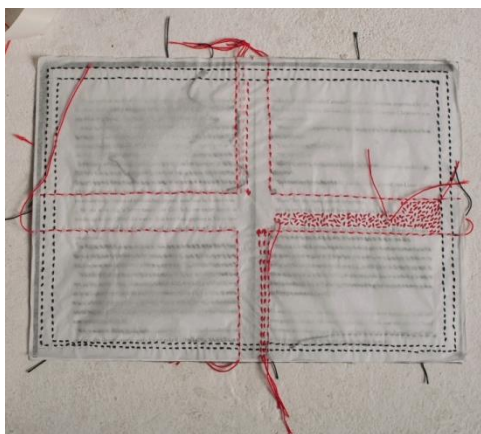


Fig. 15. Nel, Rika *Placemat: Christian Cross*      Fig. 16. Nel, Rika *Placemat: Dikenga Cross*

Photographs: L. Daniz

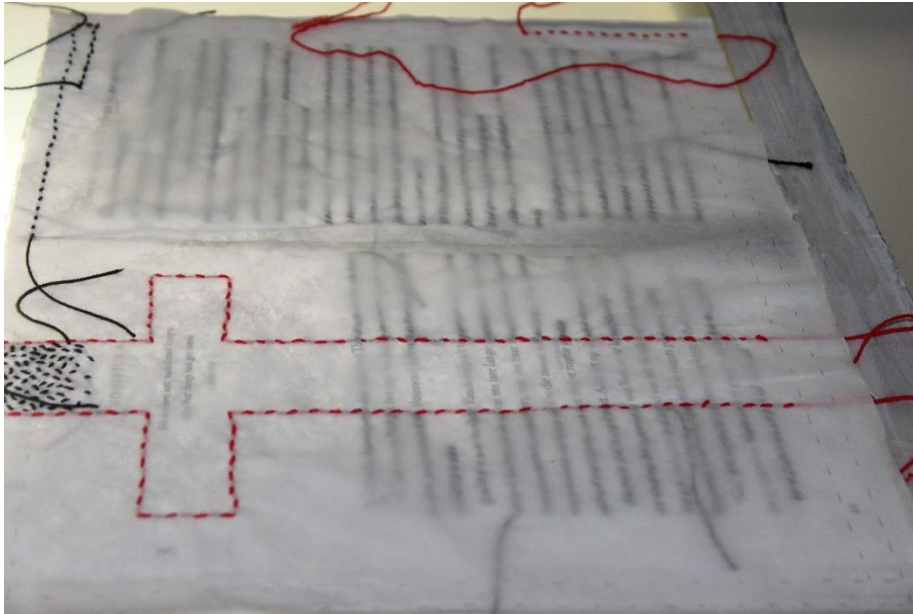


Fig. 17. Tissue paper with stiffening backing and embroidery with black and red thread. Photograph: N. Shivute.

The “boere kappies” (Boere bonnets) are created from tissue paper with the hair of four victims of abuse, knotted with red string into the tissue paper. This reflects on the verse in the Bible that no hair on your head will be harmed without “My” (i.e. God’s) permission. But as we know harm has been done to many girls and women worldwide. In the installations *Dinner Table* and *Boere Kappies*, the absence of people, the empty bowls and plates, as well as the chairs that are without “riempies” (animal hide thongs) are to suggest the absence of life and to create an ethereal feeling of loss and death.

In terms of my techniques, I see myself as a “housewife artist” because I worked from home using modest materials like paper and teabags. I also made use of traditional feminine, domestic techniques such as quilting, sewing and knitting. I used crocheted lace doilies and embossed them on tissue paper collected from

shoeboxes for *Boere Kappies* and cut lace from tissue paper to create the back frill of these “boere kappies.” This technique was traditionally used by the wives of “sub-farmers” (bywoners) to decorate the shelves in their pantries; the shelf papers were usually cut out from old newspapers.



Fig. 18. *Boere Kappie* made from tissue paper, lace embossing, lace cutwork, embroidery and human hair. Photograph: N. Shivute.

I have linked my artworks to my history as can be seen in *Knitted Rug* (Fig.60), which was knitted using paper, with contrasting images of the concentration camps, the German orphans and images from my own history. Hirsch (n.d.) explains that Boltanski’s early work is devoted to uncoupling any uncomplicated connection between photography and truth. Therefore most of his work consists of images that are re-photographed, altered, and replaced with others. Each of Boltanski’s works aims not toward particularity but toward anonymity, not toward an individual but toward a collective identity. According to Hirsch, Boltanski often speaks of the effort to erase himself, to be able to reach a layer communal memory, an amalgam of

unconscious reminiscences and archetypes through which viewers can supply their own stories as they look at his images. In *Knitted Rug* I aimed to do the same. Although some of the images are taken directly from my family albums, I have blended them with images from other sources, the common factor being Afrikaner history, but with the focus not on the individual but on a collective identity. Therefore, as in the work of Boltanski, through their lack of specificity the images represent a collective memory shaped by loss and mourning.

On the one hand, sewing and knitting are integral parts of Afrikaner culture, while, on the other, these activities can be symbolic of how all of our histories are knitted together, and that sometimes only a few stitches are holding things together. I purposefully left threads hanging to signify that if you pull a thread everything might fall apart. Therefore traditional Afrikaner handwork plays a prominent role in the creation of my artworks. I stencilled lace onto the knitted rug to link my retrospection of my Afrikaner past to the familiar household objects of doilies, which were used to decorate the tables, chair backs and coffee trays of my past. The work is unconventional as the handwork techniques are applied in and on paper and not on traditional textiles. The motivation was to communicate visually from a cultural viewpoint, but also to communicate through paper as metaphor for vulnerability and fragility. This very time-consuming technique also refers to the therapeutic role played by these traditional techniques and their significance in the creative process. I used discarded fax machine paper rolls and cut them into strips to knit with. Again, the focus was on a material that no longer has any use, but which is also extremely

fragile. The individual pieces were joined with red thread symbolizing the loss of life, but also the thread and colour of life, joining us all together.



Fig. 19. Nel, Rika. *Knitted Rug*. Fax machine paper, photo copies, conté & thread. Photograph: L. Daniz.



Fig. 20. Knitted Fax paper, photo copies, red thread and conté lace rubbings. Photograph: L. Daniz

Another handwork technique that I used was quilt-making, as quilt work offers the opportunity to explore the creation of a social text. The quilts were used to represent social experience. Moreover, women have used quilting, and the creation of quilts, as a legitimate way to come together to work on what seems, at first glance, a utilitarian task. Quilting was used as a subversive act – as a medium for the expression of resistance, rage and grief. The quilts are meant to be read, as they, on second glance, contain complex stories and meanings.

The quilts can be interpreted on different levels depending on who is reading them. The abused person could relate to his or her own situation. The message is that of fragility and vulnerability of the human being. By creating the quilts I tried to depict the trauma that survivors often struggle with, namely issues of invisibility and silence. Thus, with the concerns of what is not being said and not being seen. In

Afrikaner culture quilts become heritage pieces, wherein generations of women have left, in their unique way, a map to their descendants. I attempted to leave a message to the viewer about the degrading effects of abuse. The quilts were presented on wooden beds which refer to the place where abuse (particularly sexual) most often takes place.

Used teabags as metaphor were used to communicate how people are used, misused, and abused. By joining them with black satin I was mourning the human beings scarred for life by abuse in one form or another. The back of each teabag has a pocket where viewers can anonymously insert notes to share their experiences. This would give them the chance to process their emotions if they, for some reason, could not or would not want to share their experiences. In this way the viewer becomes part of the artwork.

I used materials and a method derived from craft because hand-embroidery is so evocative of the human spirit and represents time and care and tactility in a unique way. The tedious handiwork and obsessive care employed to create the work aimed to remind the viewer of these simple but intimate pieces of everyday life and to provoke nostalgia for the familiar physicality of the objects.

My work is unconventional as the handwork techniques are applied on paper and not on traditional textiles. These very time-consuming techniques also refer to the therapeutic role played by these traditional techniques and their comparative significance in the creative process. However, even though I was working from an Afrikaner viewpoint, the material and the techniques I used, as well as the theme of fragility and vulnerability, are universal phenomena.



Fig. 21. Used teabags hand sewn into quilts, black satin and embroidery with thread. Photograph: N. Shivute.



Fig. 22. Nel, Rika. *Memory Quilts* (2011-14). Handmade beds from recycled wood. Photograph: L. Daniz.

I created hand-written scrolls on which I used text from novels which deal with the theme of abuse. These are either biographic or based on facts in the history of the Afrikaner. Some were written in the words of abused women themselves. Because of the sensitivity of the content I rolled up the papers and tied them with black ribbons, symbolising shame and death. These were placed on used cardboard under the *Dinner Table* (“under the table,” the place where many things are said, but truths are seldom revealed), signifying the secretive nature of the content. The viewer had to bend down, take out a scroll, unbind it and was only then in a position to read it. After reading the scroll the person had to roll it up again and tie the ribbon to keep the content hidden. This refers to and symbolises the secrecy and silence that goes hand in hand with abuse, especially sexual abuse. It also compelled the viewer to be part of and participate in the specific artwork, and to interact with the exhibition as a whole.



Fig. 23. Rika Nel. *Dinner Table with scrolls* (2011-14). Photograph: N. Shivute.

## **Chapter 3: Working from an act of remembrance**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the research aim; to explore contemporary artists' use of their art material as medium to express concepts of fragility and vulnerability of human beings, whether through the use of three-dimensional figurative sculptures or two-dimensional work or text, or a combination thereof. My objectives are to discuss aspects of Afrikaner history from a cultural and personal perspective, with focus on the potential for the abuse of women and children in Afrikaner society. I also intend to review the work of contemporary artists who created acts of remembrance in their work, and who used the body to express themselves. I have also reviewed the work of artists who used techniques such as casting and using thread or embroidery, as well as artists who used their material in some way as metaphor, referred to religion in their creative expression, or used text in various ways in their work. This enabled me to draw links between these artists' work and my own work, with the focus on uniqueness and individual creative expression.

This chapter firstly gives a historical overview of violence and abuse in South Africa to locate the origins of abuse in Afrikaner society, as the creative departure point is from own and my family members' experiences. Secondly, the work of artists who express concepts of fragility and vulnerability in their work will be reviewed. Artists who create work as an act of remembrance will be addressed and discussed first, followed by artists whose work explores the body as a means to communicate vulnerability, and artists who refer to religion in their work. The last section will focus more on technique and the means of communication, like casting and text.

In certain sections of this review, particularly in discussions relating to my own creative research, I use the first person due to the inevitably personal nature of the creative process.

### **3.2 Afrikaner history**

To get to the core of the problem of abuse and violence I went back into the history of South Africa, as early as 1652 when the first white people settled in South Africa. A number of writers and public figures have stated that we have to know where we come from to know where we are going. Minister Iivula-Ithana stated that we are what we are because of our parents and our community (Republikein, 27 March, 2014), while Karin Brynard argues that violence and abuse take place worldwide every day, as the sins of fathers and mothers are repeated by children, generation after generation (Brynard ,2007). Likewise, Dr Allen Boesak holds slavery in the Cape responsible for the violence today, as people were used as utility objects – free sex was commanded from women slaves and their children were disregarded and rejected. Families were broken apart and sold and transgressions were brutally punished. Brynard (2007) therefore queries whether the violence and abuse that we are still experiencing today is not the result of this aspect of Southern Africa's history.

If we go deeper into the history of South Africa we see that according to de Villiers (2012) the environmental patterns in South Africa had already been set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when various groups of people of the Southern African sub-continent came into contact with each other. Out of this melting pot grew the South African society

of today. As an artist from an Afrikaner background, my aim was to create artwork that is grounded in my historical, cultural and personal perspective. I therefore explored my personal cultural identity and attempted to situate my artwork within the context of the pattern of habitual abuse and violence which has been historically part of South Africa's cultural formation. One has to know and understand the history of South Africa to understand where this habitual abuse and violence originated.

In 1652 a refreshment station was started and free burghers arrived in the Cape in 1657, while in 1658 the first slaves were brought to the Cape from Angola and Guinea. By 1693 there were 322 slaves, at the Cape, consisting of a mixture of men, women and children. During 1688 and 1692 about 200 Huguenots arrived who had a significant cultural influence on the Cape (de Villiers, 2012). From the inception of the refreshment station there was a shortage of marriageable white women. Miscegenation between Europeans and slaves and other indigenous peoples was common, and led to offspring known as "bastards" or "coloureds." In 1658 there was a burgher who married a slave but in 1685 marriages between burghers and slaves were forbidden. Affairs between visiting sailors, soldiers and burghers were common, however, if male slaves were involved, they were hanged and burnt on the gallows. "Baster" or "coloured" children born out of wedlock from slave women had to accept the status of the mother and only in 1775 did the law stipulate that the slave owner was not allowed to sell the slave woman and her "baster/coloured" children and they had to be freed after the slave owner's death (de Villiers, 2012).

European pioneer women lived under difficult circumstances and there were only a small number of them. It is clear that this period was already the start of race and

class division, but also the division in the way women were treated in comparison to how men were treated.

De Villiers (2012) explains that between 1652 and 1808 there were 63,000 slaves imported to the Cape Colony. The slaves who belonged to the “Kompanjie” lived in a building known as the “Slavelosie” in the Cape, which was actually a fort and run like a military institution. One hour a night, however, anybody could visit, as it also served as a brothel. The rate of mortality of slaves was high. Women slaves were maids, cooks, child carers, substitute mothers, and wet nurses. They crocheted, embroidered, sewed, knitted and washed clothes. But, they also cared for the “needs” of sailors and soldiers

Desertion by slaves was a common problem and was heavily punished. De Villiers (2012) described the severe punishment that slaves had to undergo. The worst punishment was torture followed by death. Condemned slaves were maimed, pole-hanged or slowly strangled. The corpses were kept hanging on the gallows or were afterwards displayed in public. Slaves that were in private possession would, however, only get punishment similar to what a father would apply to his children. Chains and whips were prohibited and the owner was not allowed to torture them (de Villiers, 2012). Brink (1987) describes in *Hou den Bek* that slaves as well as the sons of some of the farmers received brutal beatings during those years.

De Villiers (2012) elaborates that at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Cape community was characterised by a rigorous class division. This was typical in many countries in Western Europe. Alongside this there was also an increasing awareness of race. Race and class therefore in a large sense determined the status of people and

groups. According to Visser (2012) the direct result of the mineral revolution was urbanisation, which led to social problems such as overcrowding; unhygienic living conditions, appalling housing, alcohol abuse and prostitution were common. There also was a lack of traditional values, racism, weapon smuggling and other crimes. Visser (2012) goes on to say that the mineral revolution also led to the quest for cheap labour, which led to the subjugation of black communities. Thousands of foreigners, of who most were British subjects, rushed to South African gold fields. This eventually led to a struggle between the British government and the independent Boer republics for control of South Africa's mineral wealth, ultimately resulting in the Anglo Boer War (1899 – 1902).

According to Pretorius (2012) during the Anglo Boer War the British army adopted a “scorched earth” policy as part of their military strategy. Farms - the Boers' source of food and shelter - were burnt down. Houses were destroyed and women and children were taken to concentration camps. By 1901 there were 34 concentration camps with a population of approximately 110,000. There were roughly 66 black concentration camps with about 115,000 residents (Pretorius, 2012). In the concentration camps there was a shortage of food, wood for cooking, sanitation facilities, fresh water and medical services. The number of deaths in these camps, all of whom were civilians, was nearly six times higher than those of the Boer casualties on the battlefield. Raath (cited in Salzwedel, 2007) claims that the women in these camps paid a high price. Although the inhuman circumstances in the concentration camps are general knowledge, a certain aspect of the war has been kept quiet for many years: the rape and sexual molestation of women and young girls. This happened regularly on the

farms during the scorched earth attacks (Salzwedel, 2007). The number of incidents will probably never be known, as many women never discussed their experiences with anyone. These incidents are documented in war correspondence and diaries kept in the Transvaal archives. Dr Wilhelm Vallentin, (cited in Salzwedel, 2007), claims that there were thousands of incidents of rape and sexual molestation during the war. There were also hundreds of children born from these rapes. There were orphanages in Bethulie, Brandfort and Springfontein that housed these unwanted children. The famous Abraham Kriel orphanage in Langlaagte originated as a result of the Anglo Boer War (Salzwedel, 2007).

These events confirm that there were many instances of Afrikaner women and children being abused in Afrikaner history. My own grandmother was in one of these camps as a child. Ironically, after the death of her husband, she married an English soldier named John King who had stayed behind in South Africa after the war. Elsa Joubert (2011) writes in her historical novel, *Die reise van Isobelle*, that to be able to stay alive human beings must be filled with a desire for vengeance. If he is battered, he wants to batter someone else to ease his pain (Joubert, 2011). Could this be what Brynard refers to as the sins of the father and mothers which are repeated by their children, generation after generation?

According to Salzwedel (2007) the Afrikaner was not only the abused but also the abuser as can be seen in the saga of the German orphans of 1948. The South African organization known as the *Dietse Kinderfonds* (DKF) had two main conditions for child immigration. The first was to strengthen the *Afrikanervolk* with Aryan blood and secondly as a payback for German assistance during the Anglo Boer War. It was

also seen as necessary humanitarian assistance to about 750 000 German children who lived in post-war Germany who had lost one or both parents. The ages of these children varied between two and thirteen years. They had to be Protestant and from untainted German origin. However, about 48% of these children were not representative of the elite of German society. Many were born out of wedlock during the war and were discarded by their mothers.

Was it a mistake to uproot these children? This can only be answered by the citizens of 1948. These children and their families must have experienced a lot of conflicting emotions because to give a child away is very painful, no matter the circumstances. An example of the treatment experienced by some of these children is a girl, Ruth Raspe, whose mother died of hunger and left her and her brother as orphans. Her brother gave permission for her to become part of the project. She remembers how she was too scared to do anything wrong out of fear of being sent back to Germany. In 1970 she found her brother who had suffered for all their years apart because he had to give her up for adoption. Dr. Vera Bürman (cited in Salzwedel, 2007) who handled the medical selection of the children, said that she would never be able to do it again to anybody (Salzwedel, 2007). The history of the *German Orphans of 1948* is included because one of these orphans was a cousin of the artist. Strangely enough her name was Hanelore, which is also the name of one of the girls whose photo was used in *Knitted Rug* (2014).

It is therefore clear that a tradition of abuse, both officially sanctioned like the Anglo Boer War, the Scorched Earth approach, the Concentration camps and the uprooting of the German orphans as well as domestic abuse because of paternalism and male

dominance has existed in the Afrikaner community since the early years of Afrikaner history and as well as in other cultural groups living in South Africa during those years who experienced and participated in this way of life.

In order to explore this I have therefore reviewed some artists who have experienced abuse in various ways, either directly or indirectly.

### **3.3 Introduction to artists who worked from an act of remembrance**

The departure point to the creation of my artwork was from a historical, cultural and personal perspective. I therefore studied the work of contemporary artists with a similar approach such as Christian Boltanski, Tracy Emin and others who have both worked from an act of remembrance. Due to the nature and uniqueness of their art my focus is on their individual and creative interpretations, which I have analysed.

#### **3.3.1 Christian Boltanski**

I collected old family photos and a variety of objects such as lace, eyelets, zippers, bullets, padlocks and keys, an old rusted saw blade, etc. that belonged to my mother and grandmother and other family members. These were used in my artworks as a reminder of my past. In a similar way Christian Boltanski creates artworks that remind him of his childhood. He uses second-hand clothes, letters, recycled materials, and old biscuit tins as remnants that are ever-present reminders of the past and the memories of childhood. Berger (2004) describes his work as “exploring themes of loss and death perceived through the prism of memory.”

Christian Boltanski recollects the ever-present reminder of his own past and the blurred memories of childhood. He started to work as an artist when he entered

adulthood and when he understood that his childhood was over, and was essentially dead. Gorman (2014) states that, according to Boltanski, “everybody has somebody who is dead inside of them. A dead child. Boltanski remembers the Little Christian that is dead inside him”. This can be extended to refer to all people who were abused as children and especially those who have not been able to talk about their abuse.

Boltanski’s *Monument: Les enfants de Dijon* is the first of several versions of spiritually provocative installations of photographs, lights, and wires. Boltanski asked students for photographs of themselves, which he then re-photographed and installed in a school.



Fig. 24. *Monuments: Les enfants de Dijon* 1985 (*Monument: The Children of Dijon*). Gelatin silver and chromogenic development prints and light fixtures. Installed dimensions variable. Photographs: 27.9 X 24.1 cm to 40 X 50.2 cm). Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Photo: MCA Chicago. Retrieved March 18, 2014 from [https://www.google.com/na/images?hl=en-NA&q=christian+boltanski+artworks&gbv=2&sa=X&oi=image\\_result\\_group&ei=hETFVLj0A87TaN34gIAJ&ved=0CBMQsAQ](https://www.google.com/na/images?hl=en-NA&q=christian+boltanski+artworks&gbv=2&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ei=hETFVLj0A87TaN34gIAJ&ved=0CBMQsAQ)

This version of the work *Monuments: Les enfants de Dijon* 1985 (*Monument: The Children of Dijon*), comprises sixty-eight magnified black-and-white photographs of Dijon schoolchildren, which were installed in a darkened room. One hundred and fifty-two small pointed light bulbs in the shape of a candle flame emit a subdued glow, as their spidery electrical wires fall indiscriminately in front of the images. The directness of the photographs according to Hersch “creates a frozen chorus of faces that ominously stare at the viewer while the accompanying lights suggest a variety of religious acts of remembrance” (Hersch 2002). Boltanski uses a border of photographed Christmas paper to frame the faces in coloured, decorative shapes that are in strong contrast to the work’s overarching sense of sadness and loss. The sixty-eight images offer a documentation and inventory of the existence of each anonymous child.

*Monument: Les enfants de Dijon* is part of the larger series of individual works titled *Monuments*, in which Boltanski often used his characteristic rusted and flimsy metal frames as borders for his images. Constructed from inexpensive materials and secured to the wall with double-sided tape, they are not made of the traditional materials that one would associate with a monument. In spite of their ephemeral qualities, these works invoke a sense of sacredness and permanence. The spaces where Boltanski’s *Monuments* are installed become holy sites, places of contemplation and memory (Hersh, 2002).

According to Berger (2004) Boltanski’s installations in his *Monuments* series memorialise unknown persons at the same time that they raise questions about the sincerity of the photographic medium. Using appropriate images and mundane

objects, he follows the tradition initiated in Paris in 1913 by the iconoclast Marcel Duchamp, who abandoned the conventional tools of art by using a bicycle wheel for his first ready-made sculpture. The international Fluxus group challenged orthodox media and exhibition venues and continued in the 1960s with sponsored mail art, concerts with audience participation, and improvised performances by Joseph Beuys and others. Andy Warhol broke down the barrier between life and art as he transformed journalistic photographs of movie stars as well as anonymous accident victims into silk screen prints. Boltanski situates his practice between the irony of Pop Art and Fluxus and the pathos that Beuys re-inscribed into his manipulated found objects.

Berger (2004) goes on to say that in 1985, Boltanski began his *Monuments* installations grouped under the title *Lessons of Darkness* focusing on vernacular photographs of children as the means to convey the transience of life and awaken a collective consciousness of the dead. Here, childhood assumes a *vanitas* role, representing temporality and an irrevocable loss reclaimed only by memory. Characteristically shown in semidarkness in museums and churches, these poignant works affect a haunting atmosphere and quasi-religious tone with their altar-like design and incandescent light bulbs substituting for votive candles. Although the subjects are anonymous, the children in *Monument Odessa* have all been identified as being from a group snapshot of Jewish students celebrating Purim in France in 1939. The artist customarily reshot and manipulated the original photographs with cropping, facial enlargements, and dramatic variations in shading to create less personal, iconic images. Knowing the religion of these children and the year in which

they were photographed inevitably links them to the Holocaust and evokes thoughts about their unknown fate. The lights illuminating their images beg another interpretation, namely, Yahrzeit candles, to honour and remember the dead. The empty, rusted tin biscuit boxes, a fixture in Boltanski's works, hold more than childhood treasures and memories – they hold unwritten histories of unrealised lives.

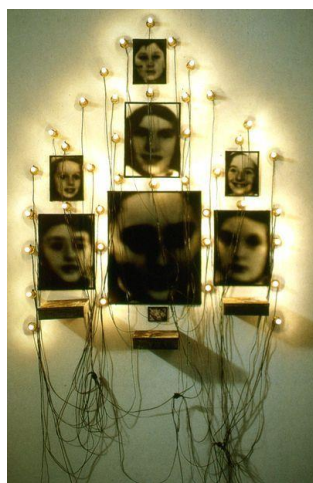


Fig. 25. *Monument Odessa* 1990  
11 photographs, 3 tin biscuit boxes  
68 light bulbs, glass and electrical cords.  
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia



Fig. 26. *Monument Odessa* 1991  
Mixed Media  
Spencer Museum of Art, Univ. of  
Kansas

Retrieved March 18, 2014 from [https://www.google.com/na/images?hl=en-NA&q=christian+boltanski+artworks&gbv=2&sa=X&oi=image\\_result\\_group&ei=hetfVLj0A87TaN34gIAJ&ved=0CBMQsAQ](https://www.google.com/na/images?hl=en-NA&q=christian+boltanski+artworks&gbv=2&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ei=hetfVLj0A87TaN34gIAJ&ved=0CBMQsAQ)

Such assemblages of objects again relate to the principle of reconstruction of the past. Such works, for which he used portrait photographs of Jewish schoolchildren taken in Vienna in 1931, serve as a forceful reminder of the mass murder of Jews by the Nazis. In the works that followed, such as *Reserve* (1989), Boltanski filled whole rooms and corridors with items of worn clothing as a way of prompting an involuntary association with the clothing depots at concentration camps. As in his

previous work, objects thus serve as mute testimony to human experience and suffering (Berger, 2004).

In my work I tried to reconstruct the past by using traditional Afrikaner techniques such as knitting and embroidering as well as objects of the past such as quilts, boere kappies, tablemats, bowls and lacework reconstructed in paper. I used images from family albums, the Anglo Boer War concentration camps and the Orphans of 1949 to indicate the experiences and suffering of Afrikaners. The only real objects that were used are the family bible and family handcrafted chairs, as well as other smaller objects that were used on the masks belonging to my mother, grandmother and other family members.

There is a tremendous resonance between Boltanski's use of biscuit tins and my use of seemingly insignificant objects such as zips, eyelets and old rusted locks, and in juxtaposition with the masks they acquired a totally new meaning from ordinary household objects to metaphors of forced or willing silence. This suggests that a neutral object can carry a lot of emotional meaning depending on the context in which it is used.

### **3.3.2 Tracy Emin**

Tracy Emin who also works from an act of remembrance is a communicator, needy for communication about things that she feels must be shown. Her daily experiences provide the fuel for her work. Everything she does can be recycled into art. She dives deep and comes back with things that reflect on all our lives. She expresses herself in a direct, imaginative and visually arresting way. Emin's great achievement is that she

draws directly on her background – the sort of background that many share, but which is neither self-pitying nor heroic (Elliot, 2008).

It is the raw emotion of Emin's work that appealed to me, since the main aim of my exhibition was to provoke an emotional response from the viewers that would lead to interaction with the artworks and communication about the topic of abuse. I wanted to share my experiences, but in a subtler way than Emin.

Weidemann (2008) describes Emin's work as provocative and entirely autobiographical, blatantly recycling bits of her life. Emin herself describes her work as "living autobiography." She is the tragic victim: "I was abused, I was sexually abused." While Schnabel (Elliott, & Schnabel, 2008) describes Tracy Emin as one of Britain's best known but least understood artists.

Emin has worked with an extraordinary range of different materials and techniques, including painting, sculpture, film, neon, installations, performance, monoprinting, text, appliqué and embroidery. It is Emin's use of text, appliqué and embroidery that links with my practice-led research where these techniques were also applied as a medium of communication. Emin shows a consistent way of thinking, a consistent passion and energy that runs through her work, whatever her chosen medium. Her subject matter (e.g. family, pregnancy, mental and emotional states) taps into the mainstream of public consciousness, and has made her art connect with people in a direct and instinctive way. I share something of her subject matter as I also tap into my personal and cultural memories, but although my art hints towards the autobiographical, it also serves as a therapeutic act to make sense of life on earth.

Emin's work is very personal. Schnabel (2008) describes her work as the battle between personal and universal. Emin's need to be honest supersedes all decisions in her life and art. The clear presentation and expression of the most intimate and private emotions is what she wants to share with us. According to Schnabel (2008) there is no personal language but only a personal selection, which applies to materials as well. In many cases the artist is not the first to work with that material, but the artist has to make the materials her own. Emin's work never lets us escape the violence that God has laid on us.

Schnabel describes Emin's work as delicate and blatant searching for form whether it be sewn cloth, paint on canvas, wood, plant, human, animal, drawings on paper, or found objects strung together. According to Elliot (2008) sex and angst remain the dominant themes in her art, filtered through the style of Munch, Schiele and the German Expressionists. Expressing herself through her art gives her hope and faith in herself. In this way she got many experiences and emotions out of her system. During her studies at the Royal College of Art in London she made tiny collages and little pictures with text. Her interest in philosophy later manifested itself in her work, in the repeated references to God, to the soul, and to the spiritual, quasi-religious nature of sex. During this period she made no paintings at all but often continued to make strange little monoprints.

Elliott & Schnabel (2008) elaborate on the fact that Emin has always sewn, and really loves fabrics. For her sewing is very therapeutic. For me as an Afrikaner woman born in 1949, handwork like sewing, embroidering, crocheting and knitting is part of who I am; it is part of being an Afrikaner and an intrinsic part of our culture.

This is why I could immediately relate to Emin's manner of expression. Taking my personal background into account I could also relate to the content of her work.

Emin's first exhibition *Tracey Emin: My Major Retrospective 1963 – 1993* was autobiographical, comprising letters, memorabilia, diaries, photographs of earlier work and also the *CV-on-a-blanket*. On one wall she showed small photographic reproductions of scores of the paintings she had destroyed a few years earlier. They were mounted on little pieces of canvas, individually framed and arranged in groups on narrow shelves. Emin also showed the *Hotel International* blanket, which featured bold, headline texts referring to her birth, her school and her friends and family, all cut from her own clothes, and smaller bits of fabric covered with intimate, handwritten texts. Here we can clearly observe the link between Boltanski and Emin in the use of personal objects as an act of remembrance. Another wall was covered with framed letters and oddments, in what Emin has described as a 'Wall of Framed Memorabilia'. The pieces were raw and deeply personal.

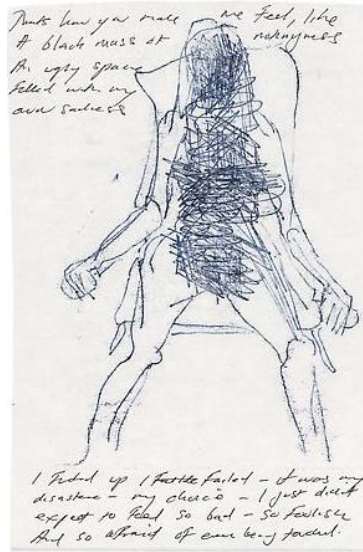


Fig. 27: *That's how you make me feel* 2012. Monoprint and pen on paper. 11.77 x 8.07 inches. Tracey Emin at Lehmann Maupin: The Carry. Retrieved March 25, 2014 from <http://dailyserving.com>

Emin made monoprints in a limited number of copies. The technique gives a quality of line that cannot be achieved by any other means. It is a dark, nervous line, which is shadowed by marks and smudges caused partly by the pressure of the pen and partly by the artist's fingers or hands as they skip across the paper. The line halts and bleeds, suggesting something fragile and vulnerable, like a cut or a scar. The technique does not lend itself to anything fancy, like shading or fine detail, so the finished item has something of the directness of children's drawings, or drawings by the mentally disturbed. Mistakes and misspelt words cannot be erased or corrected, but the mistakes give the message its urgency and authenticity. Just as Emin has chosen the monoprint as her medium to express fragility and vulnerability, I have chosen paper to express the same feelings.

The monoprint process itself helps to shut out conscious thought. Emin likes the alchemy, the fact that it is in reverse, the magic of never really knowing what it's

going to look like when you turn the page over. Also monoprints don't allow you more than thirty seconds on the drawing, which allows a kind of stream of consciousness expression. In contrast, I chose the time-consuming technique of building up figures with transparent, translucent tissue paper and hand stitching to rethink – and rework - the memories of the past.

Writing lies at the heart of Emin's work and without writing there would be no art (Elliott & Schnabel, 2008). I have also made use of writing and text as a valuable component of my research and creative expression, especially as a means of communication and interaction with the audience.

Elliott (2008) addresses another aspect of Emin's work, namely its link with the meta-theme of late twentieth-century art: "The body, *My Bed*, and much of Emin's art – the appliqué blankets for example, or the embroidered bed sheets, or her grandmother's old-fashioned chair, or the tent – have a human scale and dimension, reflecting their function. They are also associated with privacy, intimacy and vulnerability." In my own work I have made use of scaled-down rustic wooden beds covered with teabag quilts. On the one hand they depict privacy, intimacy and especially vulnerability, but because of the smaller scale suggest children's beds, which could be in the home or in concentration camps. The tissue paper bonnets (with hair of abused women) that are casually draped over the head-pieces of the beds, however, reveal Afrikaner history and culture and suggest vulnerability and abuse.

Emin's work speaks beyond the purely personal and embraces a much broader, shared experience. Emin's materials are generally 'poor' ones not normally

associated with fine art: sheets, blankets, old clothes cut up and sewn together, letters written in ball point pen, fragments of wood and found objects. Similarly, I have chosen paper to express myself.

Elliott (2008) elaborates that although Emin's blankets are perhaps her most popular and widely known type of work, she has only made about forty of the large blankets and embroideries. The social aspect of sewing is part of the appeal in making them. "Emin's blankets present a toxic blend of feminine handcrafting and pretty materials with splenetic, foul-mouthed texts. The lettering varies from giant capital letters which have the visual character of an angry shout, to intimate texts, handwritten in pen on little squares of cotton and sewn onto the blankets, which are more like whispers and have a private, intimate feel. Her hectoring blanket texts which seem to address each viewer individually and directly, are part of our culture. She has a theme, which is nothing other than herself: her body, her life, her problems, her family and friends, her ego and her victories and failures. She feeds indirectly upon herself. Her life begets art and her art begets life" (Elliot & Schnabel, 2008).

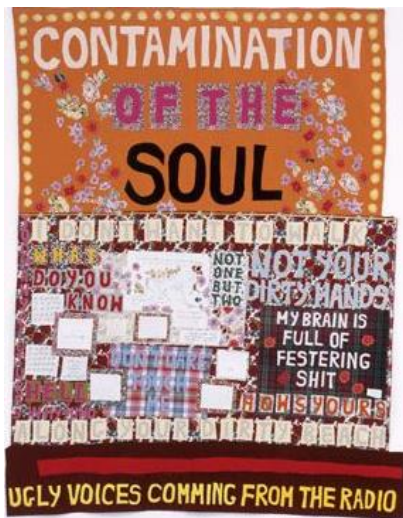


Fig. 28. *Contamination of the soul*  
 Appliqué blanket 2008  
 Photo Stephen White  
 Retrieved March 25, 2014 from [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/emin](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/emin)



Fig. 29. *Hate can be a terrible thing*  
 Appliqué blanket 2004

According to Walker (2013) “Emin’s work presents an unfiltered and often embarrassing personal view of emotional pain. It reflects the kind of desperate or careless narcissism that is the territory of the depressed. Emin is concerned with the primacy of her own experience – and the narrative of her own sadness is the unabashed subject of her work. Her oeuvre has always felt most valuable to me in terms of a documentation of personal response: these small moments in her work in which we can be self-indulgent with her; when her moments develop a mutual understanding of depressed interior life.”

The Tate Gallery’s summary describes Emin’s quilts as typically made from old wool blankets which are roughly hemmed with blanket stitch where she uses capital letters cut out of felt and sections of fabrics, for example, brightly coloured squares, printed flowers, hand-written text and drawings printed onto fabric. These are all then stitched to the base with intentionally large, uneven stitching. Emin leaves the

edges frayed with no attempt at a needlewoman's painstaking craft. Rather unusually Emin's quilts represent the idea of appliqué as a form of collage. She "transforms the concept of the traditionally nurturing feminine craft of quilt-making into an arena for angry self-expression and revelation. The jumbled mixture of tenderness and anger found on the quilts suggest a drunkard's stream of consciousness mutterings and rememberings. Emin's earliest quilts recall periods in her life; her more recent quilts refer to the larger political arena" (Tate Gallery, 2014).

I too made quilts, but for the purpose of this research I stayed true to the medium of paper. I used recycled tea-bags as a metaphor for being used and discarded, but also as a reference to the Afrikaner custom of drinking tea in stressful situations. Embroidered words on little black mourning cloths reveal various aspects of the theme of this research. In the scrolls - which are rolled up and tied with string - I have shared more personal information which indicated that these were to be read privately, to be rolled up and tied again to keep the content undisclosed.

### **3.3.3 Louise Bourgeois**

According to Weideman (2010) Louise Bourgeois has also found her inspiration in her childhood and has based her artistic output on her own life, with the emphasis on the shaping of memory, and on drawing on events in her turbulent past. Bourgeois feels that only those who work autobiographically, focusing on their own person and feeling, can really be universal and universally understood. According to Bourgeois (1994) "All my work in the past fifty years, all my subjects, have found their inspiration in my childhood. My childhood has never lost its magic, it has never lost

its mystery, and it has never lost its drama". This is also one of the links with my own work, which draws from personal and cultural perspectives. I aim, however, to use my personal and cultural perspectives to go beyond my cultural perspective and to encompass universal and physical pain, to have my work become the symbol of the suffering endured by all humans.

Miglietti (2003) describes Bourgeois' theme as pain, giving form and meaning to frustration and suffering. What happens to her body must take on an abstract formal configuration. She believes the existence of pain cannot be denied and she offers neither excuses nor solutions. She knows that there is nothing she can do to eliminate or suppress it. She cannot make pain disappear; it will be with us always. *The Cells* represent different types of pain: physical, emotional, psychological pain, mental and intellectual pain (Miglietti, 2003).

In her work *Couple, Single III*, cloth bodies are held together by external stitches, joins that seem to demonstrate the urgency and the necessity of repairs to the self. Stitching also plays an important part in my work where the meaning lies more in the fact that you can only repair something so many times before it is beyond repair.



Fig. 30. Bourgeois, Louise, *Couple, Single II & III*. National Galleries Scotland. Retrieved March 16, 2014 from [www.nationalgalleries.org/whatson/exhibitions/artist-rooms/nature-study-doll](http://www.nationalgalleries.org/whatson/exhibitions/artist-rooms/nature-study-doll)

For Bourgeois “to hang up” is a very important act because it allows things to change their location, it is an act without escape, and it changes the hierarchy of the artwork; the foundation disappears. In my artwork it has a twofold meaning. In *Fractured Lives* one cannot escape what was done but in *Fragile & Vulnerable People* it strengthens the disposition of fragility and vulnerability of the being.

As mentioned earlier, each of Bourgeois’ works has to do with memories of childhood; they are all strongly characterized by an atmosphere charged with signs of the past. Objects and clothing from one’s own existence, our life, from birth to death, forms a single thread; a thread of life. In my work I see the thread as a universal link or a thread of life. The paper threads I used to knit *Knitted Rug* are an example. If a loose thread is pulled then the blanket will unravel, just as our lives or families unravel when abuse takes place. Bourgeois uses red thread which she sees as the colour of blood, pain, violence, fear, jealousy, resentment, obsession and criticism. I

also used red thread to symbolise blood, pain, violence and fear, and black thread as symbol of death, whether physical or mental.

Like Boltanski, Bourgeois uses clothes as a metaphor. In her case, the form of the clothing is a metaphor with which to proceed and change life day by day. It is possible to narrate one's life and recall life through the forms, weight, colours and aroma of pieces of clothing (Miglietti, 2003).

### **3.3.4 Wilma Cruise**

Wilma Cruise (1996) noted in *Art in South Africa* that in *John's Wife: Artist as Subject; Subject as Object* (First Gallery 23 April – 11 May 1996) she explored the notion of identity, specifically middle-aged female identity. The exhibition shows three nudes, *John's wife* (yellow, 1995) *John's wife* (blue), (1995) and *John's wife* (white) (1995). These figures explore a facet of experience of middle-aged women. Along with the three figures is a series of other artworks: drawings, prints, artist's books, books of poetry, as well as hand-written notes, explaining the origin of each of the artworks exhibited (Cruise, 1996).



Fig. 31. Cruise, W. *John's wife* (yellow, 1995) *John's wife* (blue), (1995) and *John's wife* (white) (1995). Retrieved September 26, 2013 from [mhtml:file://E:\Master%20Research\art\\_co\\_za](mhtml:file://E:\Master%20Research\art_co_za)

Like Bourgeois, this exhibition by Cruise is a personal document informed by an autobiographical spirit. The major theme of this work is the notion of being “both perceiving subject and perceived object is explored. This irony is inherent in the subtitle *artist as subject: subject as object*. The reference to ‘wife’ alludes to the fact of observing oneself from a distance. The choice of title also refers to a practice, common in the conservative patriarchy of the mining world, of assigning women to rigid social positions. These positions are predominantly defined in terms of marriage; ‘She is John’s wife,’ being a common form of introduction. Within this socially defined area other questions of identity on the subjective experience of femininity and middle age are explored” (Cruise, 1996).

As a female, my research is written from a personal, cultural female perspective hinting towards the role and place of the woman and woman child in Afrikaner society. I have used traditional feminine Afrikaner domestic techniques such as

quilting, sewing, knitting and cutting lace from paper to link to my retrospection of my Afrikaner past.



Fig. 32. Cruise, W. *Mirroring Ourselves*. November 1998. AVA Gallery, Cape Town. Retrieved September 26, 2013 from [mhtml:file:///E:/Master%20Research/art\\_co\\_za](mhtml:file:///E:/Master%20Research/art_co_za)

In Cruise's (1998) exhibition *Mirroring Ourselves* (AVA Gallery, Cape Town, - November 1998 with Regi Bardavid) she explored the influence of the unconscious on her work. As Cruise mentions, "I was interested in a darker, Freudian approach. Given these facts I try to access unconscious realities in my working process. In this sense my sculptures reflect (mirror) an inner world. The mirror that is held up reflects fragments of reality. Because [of] the elusive nature of the subconscious, realities are apprehended rather than defined" (Cruise, 1998).

In *Mirroring Ourselves* Cruise's used a combination of plaster, paper and ceramic to create her life-size figures. The figures are armless, overtly sexual and faceless. Similar to the strategy employed in *John's Wife*, the sculptures are accompanied by texts and drawings, which allow the viewer to "decode" the meaning of the figures

(Cruise, 1998). At the same time, however, there is also an interesting tension between the figures and the “explanatory” texts. As Cruise mentions, “The act of writing mimics the process of (self) psychoanalysis. The expressionistic power of the works is a mirror for emotional realities that in a general sense fall outside structures created by language” (Cruise, 1998).

The act of writing plays an important part in my artwork as I have chosen to embroider instead of write with a traditional object like a pen or pencil. This traditional craft technique was used intentionally; on the one hand to reflect my status as Afrikaner woman and wife and on the other hand for the significance of repetitive actions, physically draining as well as time consuming work, but also work that can be used as a form of meditation. These actions have helped me to view, sort out and process my memories of my traumatic childhood experiences. Although none of these experiences are mentioned directly, the underlying significance is disclosed in my artwork. As Marinus van Aalst said: “My work should have a certain indefiniteness or inconclusiveness so that everyone can link his own history and his own experience to it” (van Aalst, 2009).



Fig. 33. Cruise, W. *Continuous Projection: An Exhibition of Sculptures, Drawings and Projection, Past and Present* at the Africa Window Museum, Pretoria, 30 September – 30 October 1997. Retrieved September, 26, 2013 from [www.wilmacruise.com/index.php/.../1999-continuousprojection](http://www.wilmacruise.com/index.php/.../1999-continuousprojection)

In an exhibition titled “*Sculptures, Drawings and Projection, Past and Present*” at the Africa Window Museum, Pretoria, 30 September – 30 October 1997, the central work was *Continuous Projection* (Fig. 10), by Wilma Cruise. Cruise again uses the same strategies of partially formed figures in combination with text and drawings to evoke a sense of autobiography in her work, a sense of “writing the self,” the intention of which is to invite the viewer to “read” themselves into the work. “The sculptures, text and drawings are embodiments, indeed projections of an autobiographical nature. Themes of death and violence as well as topics of shifting identity through the process of ageing are dealt with in the sculptures, text and drawings. In these works the personal aspects of South African experience have been universalised; the particular has become the political” (Cruise, 1997)

Cruise uses the partial figure consistently throughout her oeuvre as a symbol of unease or dis-ease. In the cycle *Nicholas – October 1990* (1991 -3), and the *Claybody* series (2002 -3) she interrogates the experience of trauma, that which lies beyond the reach of language. According to Cruise (2003) language fails to capture

realities that function beneath the surface of conscious apprehension. Through the partial and incomplete bodies of the figures in these two cycles she attempts to access the unconscious and the psychical, that reality which lies beyond language. In addition she shows that the public writings and the news reports that surrounded the events that prompted the two bodies of work, fail to capture the nature of private reality. The silent gaping mouth so instantly recognisable as an expression of pain is for Cruise a cliché and she intentionally contradicted the image of the scream by constructing her figures for the 1993 exhibition without mouths. In an age bombarded by violent images, the shock value of which has lost its impact, Cruise felt that the only resort was to portray silence. In my work I have portrayed the mouth covered by various objects as a symbol of silence, the unwillingness or inability of victims to talk about their abuse. The partial figure in my work is a metaphor for the vulnerability and fragility of the human being. I have used text written by abused women, text from novels with abuse as the theme, as well as text from the Old Testament in the Bible that refers to abuse.



Fig. 34. Cruise, W. *Three Shades (the Bully Boys I, II, and III)* (1992-3), ceramic and cast metal on concrete bases, i: 175 x 80 x 40 cm; ii: 184 x 76 x 65 cm; iii: 172 x 70 x 76 cm, Durban Art Museum. Retrieved March 11, 2014 from <http://www.Interpretingceramics.com/issue008/articles/>

*Three Shades (the Bully Boys I, II, and III)* (part of a cycle of works revolving around the murder of Nicholas Cruise, entitled “Nicholas”) is a representation of what Cruise terms “the collective shadow that hangs over nations when inexplicable acts are committed” (Cruise, 2003). In my work I refer to slavery in the Cape, the Anglo Boer War, the German Orphans of 1949 but also the state of current abuse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the world.

Cruise (2003), also reflects on the tragic death of Nicholas in 1990, which highlighted the moral paradox of God as the source of good. She saw the tragic irony in the failure of Nicholas’s God to save him or to intervene in any way to validate his death. As Cruise goes on to say, “Nicholas Cruise was a concerned Christian. His right-wing murderers claimed the same position. Yet it was evil and the forces of darkness that had prevailed. Thus, while *Durban Pieta* (1991 – 3) suggests the grieving mother of Christ, it offers no possibility of redemption. The Madonna is hidden beneath and blinded by a cloth; bands of steel bind the figure of

Christ/Nicholas. Both are armless and faceless; rendered mute and powerless” (Cruise, 2003).



Fig. 35. Cruise, W. *Durban Pieta* (1991 – 3), two ceramic figures, fired metal and cloth, 54 x 244 x 244 cm, University of South Africa, Pretoria. Retrieved March 11, 2014 from <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue008/articles/04.htm>



Fig. 36. Cruise, W. *Yellow Christ* (1992 – 3) ceramic with cast bronze face and mask on concrete base, 173cm private collection. Retrieved March 11, 2014 from <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue008/articles/04.htm>

*Yellow Christ* (1992 – 3, Fig. 13) is the last work in the cycle. Cruise mentions that the piece expresses a “position marked by the ‘wild grief that God is dead.’ Woman and man are alone in a world that is mute as to its meaning. Reality is permanently in

question. *Yellow Christ* is rendered impotent by his armless-ness and silenced by his mask (Cruise, 2003).”

In my work I refer to the tradition of evening worship, which is traditionally held after the evening meal at the dinner table by the head of the household. The whole household had to be present, that is, the family members, the workers and any guests that were present. The word of God had to be upheld by every person living on the farm, including women, children and workers, and the father would see to it that any offender was reprimanded or punished. The father, of course, was only accountable to God. This is reflected in *Dinner Table*.



Fig. 37. Cruise, W. *Claybody Series #1*, 2002, ceramic on wooden base, 160cm, Pretoria Art Museum. Retrieved March 11, 2014 from <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue008/articles/04>

In my work, fragmentation and the incompleteness of the figures suggest the fragility and the vulnerability of the human being due to abuse in some form or another. In

the *Claybody* (Fig. 14, 15) series, Cruise's figures "are not only about fragmentation but are made from fragments and are read in fragmented form...The works in *Nicholas – October 1990* and the *Claybody* series were never whole in the first place. Their incompleteness speaks of impotence and helplessness signalled by the lack of arms and faces – the means of expression" (Cruise, 2003). Where Cruise perceives the body as "never whole in the first place" I perceive the body as perfect and whole since birth but vulnerable, fragile and broken because of abuse.



Fig. 38. Cruise, W. *Claybody #4 and #5* (2002), ceramic on steel base, 157 x 124 cm, artist's collection. Retrieved March 11, 2014 from <http://www.interpretingceramics.com/issue008/articles/04>

### 3.3.5 Berni Searle

Berni Searle uses spices as a reference to her ancestry. The spices stand for the foods that unite her family and her complex combination of ancestry. According to Kreamer, et al, (2007) she attempts to challenge racial classifications by wilfully

experimenting with colour and appearance to demonstrate the insufficiency and indeterminacy of identity. By creating herself as subject and object, author and text, she is able to situate herself nowhere, neither present or absent, one colour or another. Khan (2004) adds to this interpretation that although the use of domestic ingredients may be read as references to Searle's cultural heritage, they simultaneously challenge the notion that identity is solely determined by those interlinking factors of heritage and history. Khan also suggests that her work should not only be analysed on its racial aspects but it is as much about individual agency as it is a reflection on historical circumstances, whether of race, gender or economics. Like Searle, I also reflect on historical circumstances in Afrikaner history and factors leading to the formation of Afrikaner cultural identity. Factors like slavery, class division, and the mining revolution, which led to awareness of race, rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, social problems and the influx of thousands of foreigners, who were mostly British subjects. The latter factors resulted in the Anglo Boer War, which in turn instigated the Scorched Earth attacks and the use of concentration camps, where rape and sexual molestation of women and young girls took place. Coupled with the influence of religion, these factors are key aspects of Afrikaner history and identity.



Fig. 39. Berni Searle. *Red, Yellow, Brown: Face to Face*, May 2000. From the *Colour Me* series. Installation view, Dak'Art 2000 Biennale. Retrieve July 2005 from

[https://www. Google.com.na/searle?q=berni+searle+discoloured &b](https://www.google.com.na/searle?q=berni+searle+discoloured)



Fig. 40. Berni Searle. *A Darker Shade of Light: Discoloured Series: Palms of the Hands, Small of the Back, Nape of the Neck, Under the Belly, Soles of the Feet*. 1999.

Digital prints, wooden shelves, Egyptian henna. Retrieved July 2015 from

<https://www.koofers.com/flascards/arth-final-3/review>

In her *Discoloured* series (1988), Searle stains different body parts with henna, tracing the mutations of the dyed colour upon the body canvas through digital photography to suggest bruising, trauma, abuse, disease and eventual healing. Searle expresses the interplay of language, memory, visibility, and politics in a society where evidence is written large upon the body. For Searle when talking about colour in a South African context you are generally talking about race. But when you use your body, you are a particular gendered individual, and in that sense there is a multiplicity of identities that is being explored within the work. The link to my work is clear in that she taps into her cultural heritage by using domestic ingredients as her

medium and metaphor, while simultaneously suggesting abuse. She also makes use of text in her *Discoloured Series* by a typed definition of the word “stain” with a selected word circled to convey the multiple, shifting meanings of the term. In my work I tap into my Afrikaner cultural heritage by referring to Afrikaner history and by using traditional Afrikaner crafting methods as Searle is using spices from her cultural heritage. This can be seen for example in *Knitted Rug*, *Boere Kappies*, *Memory Quilts* and the placemats.

## Chapter 4: The Body as Metaphor

### 4.1 Introduction

According to Tangen (1996) the use of the figure or body can be seen in the artworks of Western culture as early as the Hellenistic Period 323 – 27 BC. Examples such as *Old Market Woman* (early first century BC) portray Hellenistic realism that expressed emotional conditions, pain and suffering. Williamson (1996, p. 22) states that in contemporary South African art, figurative sculpture is used to symbolise pain, the mortal offence, and the savagery inflicted on the body as for example, can be seen in Jane Alexander's *Stripped "Oh yes" Girl* 1995.

Selz (2002) goes on to say that since Auguste Rodin presented his partial, yet muscular and erotic figures, the fractured human form has been endemic to modern sculpture. However, only in the *Abakans*, the distressing headless figures by Magdalena Abakanowicz, and in Stephen de Staebler's (1933 – 2011) sculpted images does the fragmented figure take on the symbolic function of human incompleteness and the yearning for wholeness.

In my practice-led research (and in addition to the above-mentioned artists) the work of various artists who use the body to express fragility, vulnerability and to make social comment was analysed, including Angus Taylor, a recurring element in whose work is the tension between fundamental opposing forces and the chaotic inner world. Taylor expresses the fragility and temporality of human life while Kiki Smith chooses the human body because it is something that every person shares and has their own experiences with. Wilma Cruise, renders the body to represent the link

between inner realities and the social environment, while Jane Alexander seeks to identify the manner in which violence, aggression, cruelty and suffering are conveyed through and contained by the human figure. Wim Botha reflects the illusionary nature of power and position in church and state (Spring 2008, p. 68) while Brodie (2004, p. 66) states that he seamlessly blends material with concept.

#### **4.2 Wilma Cruise**

Although Cruise was mentioned under artists working from an act of remembrance I have also included her here under artists who use the body as metaphor. Cruise, as mentioned in *Art in South Africa* (2013), uses the body as the vehicle for the exploration of meaning and it provides the metaphorical link between unconscious realities and the conscious known world. Her sculptures are presented as expressive life-size figures in bronze and ceramic. Cruise is preoccupied with the body and the way that the body is represented in space, forming a link between inner realities and the social environment to describe the psychic space between inner and outer worlds. For Cruise the body is the site of experience, as the vehicle for the exploration of meaning. Brenda Schmahmann (2001) says: "Cruise's works explore the relationship between subjectivity and speech. They investigate the ways in which we express desire, trauma, loss and need, not only through verbal and written discourse but also through the body. The body is performative and constitutes itself into a speech act – a statement of conscious and unconscious wants." In a conversation with Jacqueline Nurse in September 2008, (para.3), Cruise said that she finds words and text irresistible: "In all my drawings and prints, the text is often foregrounded and those

are the kind of ideas that I would use for sculpture. So conceptually they are the same.” Cruise uses the partial figure consistently throughout her artworks.

Since the practical component of this research explores the conceptual and metaphorical link between paper, its physical properties, the dynamics of forming or sculpting it in three-dimensions and the intended theme, I have explored the body as metaphor for the vulnerability and fragility of the human being.

### **4.3 Stephen de Staebler**

In Stephen de Staebler’s sculpted images the fragmented figure assumes a symbolic function of human incompleteness. His large-scale legs signify this predicament for an artist who faces the human condition – both its vulnerability and its tenacity. His work recalls ancient effigies, but at the same time, is painfully contemporary. “While there is a timeless quality in De Staebler’s work, these severed limbs remind us of our recently awakened sense of vulnerability” (Selz, 2002).

Timothy Burgard, a curator at the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco notes that for more than fifty years De Staebler devoted his sculptural practice to engaging universal aspects of the human condition, including struggle, suffering and the search for meaning. De Staebler has been quoted as saying: “We are all wounded survivors, alive but devastated selves, fragmented, isolated – the conditions of modern man,” (Grimes, 2011). The fractured human figure has always been De Staebler’s subject. According to Selz (2002), “In 1988 he [De Staebler] reduced this image to only the human leg and later those disembodied legs – fragile but immutable – have become larger and stand as witnesses to human endurance. They fuse the tangible

corporeality of clay with a sense of the metaphysical. The concept of the intimate relationship between the human and the earth is an essential element of his work.” In the same way, I have fused the corporeality or material existence of paper with a sense of the metaphysical, the abstract reasoning, or the incorporeal supernatural awareness of the human being, to show the intimate relationship between human beings and recycled paper, focusing on the fragility of both. This was done by creating transparent, fragile figures created from tissue paper that are hanging, floating, lying or barely standing in space to create an ethereal feeling.

According to Mendel (2012) De Staebler’s work includes sculptures of landscapes, masks and humanoid bodies. In the 1970s De Staebler began twisting clay into pieces of skin, flesh and bone, rubbing powdered oxides on their surfaces and firing them in a kiln. He then joined the pieces together to create large, deconstructed human figures. These powerful, thin, vertical clay columnar pieces are simultaneously modern and ancient, finished and unfinished, hopeful and dispirited. The fractured human sculptures evoke the raw emotion of loneliness and alienation of the post-World War II human condition. De Staebler struggled between spirituality and scepticism, which his art illustrates.

In the same vein, Adams (1991) adds that while De Staebler creates some work with obvious religious subject matter, his much larger body of work is concerned with transcendence, by virtue of form rather than subject matter. His sculptures express and help one to experience transcendence, a sense of the other beyond oneself. Adams (1991) goes on to say that De Staebler talks about “separateness and fusion working simultaneously” in his art. His work avoids an idealisation of the whole

human form and instead affirms transcendence through fragmented bodies, such as *Seated Woman With Oval Head*. Such arrangement of fragments asserts that the human being is not a whole or a unity but an idiosyncratic bundle of contradictions. De Staebler's sculpture with its fragmented legs, no arms, and fragile balance expresses the condition of bodily brokenness, yet it does not condemn this condition, but rather deeply affirms it.

Adams (1991) elaborates that the frontal presentation of the sculptures' bodies reminds the viewer of his or her limitations, and the mystery of the other and the unknown. His frontal presentations combined with an incomplete body evoke empathy. Such participation in another's feelings or ideas is a basis of transcendence. Adams (1991) further states that De Staebler's work is witness to an integrity and persistence of individual personality, even in the face of such bodily deterioration or death. Human connection to the earth is emphasized by De Staebler in the absence of arms and in the erosion of the left leg, as can be seen in his *Pieta*. He wants to express the quality of erosion in the loss of limbs over time and the rooting of the figure to the earth in time, so that it becomes, in its way, an extension of earth, which we are as human beings. We only exist by the grace of nature. According to Grimes (2011) De Staebler sees the leg as an abbreviated symbol of the human being, the part of the anatomy in closest contact with the earth. For De Staebler the human figure is the most loaded of all forms because we live in one. The figure obsesses not just artists, but human beings. It is our prison. It is what gives us life and death.



Fig. 41. De Staebler, Stephen. *Figure with Lost Torso*. Retrieved May 29, 2014, from [www.berkeleyside.com](http://www.berkeleyside.com)



Fig. 42. De Staebler, Stephen. *Standing Man with Outstretched Arm*. 1987. Retrieved 26 October, 2014 from [http://spenceralley.blogspot.com/2013/01/de\\_staebler.html](http://spenceralley.blogspot.com/2013/01/de_staebler.html)

In my work I aim to make a less obvious reference to religion. I am more concerned with trying to understand how abuse can be so common in so-called Christian societies and why there are so many examples of double standards in society. I identify with the use of his fragmented bodies that express the condition of bodily brokenness. I have also expressed this idea of fragmentation and brokenness, through the medium of paper.

#### **4.4 Angus Taylor**

Similarly Angus Taylor declares that as the viewer he is especially moved by art that gives insight into and awareness on all aspects of the human condition (Bartlett, 2010). It has been said that the artist's task is to stand outside of society and to function as a mirror, or as Chekov puts it "Man will become better if you show him what he is like." Angus Taylor portrays the human condition and asks questions about human existence. For him this is the main issue as an artist. It is about the interaction with the material world, an interaction that through history leads to antique monuments and artworks.



Fig. 43. Taylor, Angus. *Being, Thinking* 2010. 250 x 180 x 40 cm. Cast bronze Belfast granite. From *Angus Taylor New work*, Exhibition Catalogue: 9 February to 24 March 2010, p. 15. Johannesburg: Circa on Jellicoe.

There is a curious similarity between the work of De Staebler and Taylor. Both artists address immortality, and the inevitable reverse side, the realisation of mortality. According to du Preez (2010) in Taylor's two figures *Being, Thinking*, the drama of mind versus matter, or the mind/body dichotomy manifests clearly. By placing these two figures side by side and reaching out to one another – as if extending a hand to one another – Taylor shows the interrelatedness of these two opposing forces. Mind (*Thinking*) has no existence without matter (*Being*), and vice versa.

Taylor explores many materials on a large scale: stainless steel, bronze, aluminium, as well as stone, slate, compacted soil and thatching grass. He interrogates his materials and uses them as signifiers of thought. To him materials are about the utmost craftsmanship but are simultaneously metaphors or signifiers. His *Belated Wake* stretches the boundaries of what can be achieved technically and

metaphorically. The three heads sink into the ground, helpless and constrained by their own weighty mass. They allude to our “doubtful consciousness,” the tension between knowing and doubt, and the fragility and temporariness of human life. I have used paper to express how fragile and vulnerable we are as human beings; not only in the ways we are exposed to nature, but also to other human beings, some of whom might be very close to us.

To some, ‘all flesh is grass’ (Isaiah 40:6), perhaps indicating the frailty of human life or the fact that it is not flesh that lasts but something else entirely. Dr Stella Viljoen (2010) states that while we may tentatively assert the possibility of absolute truth we surely cannot know or define this truth absolutely. Thus we are left with beliefs that germinate, mature and die like grass. In 1637 René Descartes said “I doubt, therefore I think, and therefore I am.” In Taylor’s three heads we find a subtle reminder that it is our doubtful consciousness that both proves and undermines our very existence. We thus hold onto this consciousness as what pre-empts doubt and remains after it has subsided.

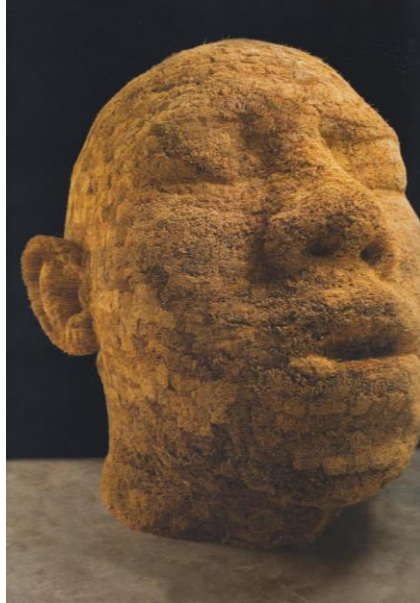


Fig. 44. Taylor, Angus, *Belated Wake I*, 2010. 220 x 185 x 170cm. Thatch, thatch twine, steel wire, steel frame, insect and fire-proof chemical treatment. From *Angus Taylor New work*, Exhibition Catalogue: 9 February to 24 March 2010, p. 15. Johannesburg: Circa on Jellicoe.

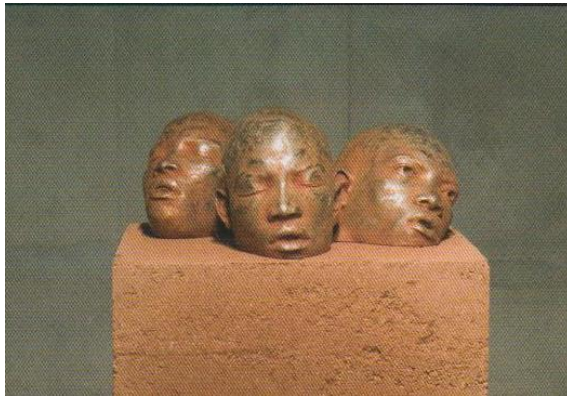


Fig. 45. Taylor, Angus, *Belated Wake I, II, III*, 2010 (Marquette) 23 x 11 x 14 cm, cast stainless steel. From *Angus Taylor New work*, Exhibition Catalogue: 9 February to 24 March 2010, p. 15. Johannesburg: Circa on Jellicoe.

Taylor places some of his sculptures on heavy rammed-earth plinths. According to Thom (2010) by placing these portraits on plinths made from the earth's soil, the artist is making a self-referential form of political commentary too. He establishes a formal and conceptual juxtaposition between the plinths, and the sculptures. For all their seeming worthlessness (first as functional stand for a sculpture and second as cheap natural material), these plinths may yet signify a kind of artistic "homecoming" of sorts. According to Thom's reading of the matter, the earthy plinths, standing in metonymically for notions of "ground-ness," "territory" and ultimately even of "home," could in fact be understood as the space of artistic play, growth and self-discovery that make possible the otherwise solemn workings of the contemporary art world. I, however, like to see it as a "grounding" of the artwork in the material from which it originated. I have grounded my own artwork in my personal history and the use of typical Afrikaner crafts techniques.

Froud (2010) describes Taylor's choice of materials as constantly being reappraised and, even when he chooses traditional materials like granite or bronze, they are used in a unique way, whether by imprinting text onto the surfaces of bronze or avoiding the traditional techniques of working with granite (i.e. carving) in favour of keeping its raw, block-like nature to construct forms that allude to human beings without overtly resembling the human form.

Contrasted with these traditional materials are forms made of stacked grass, compacted earth, charcoal briquettes and stacked slate. According to Froud (2010) the inventiveness with which he tackles these materials locates Taylor as a postmodern artist making reference to traditional crafting techniques but using them

in a contemporary manner and style. In the same way, I use paper in an inventive and contemporary way, referencing traditional Afrikaner crafting techniques, such as knitting and sewing, in a contemporary style to create fine art with a new meaning.

Although working from a slightly different angle to me, Taylor also expresses himself in *Co- presence (Apollo and Dionysus) AP/2*, through deep scars and gashes in the burnished stainless steel skin that reveals the armature beneath, which speaks of the chaotic inner world where nothing is as it seems (Freschi, u.d.). I used delicate tissue paper to create the scars and gashes on the body to reveal abuse.

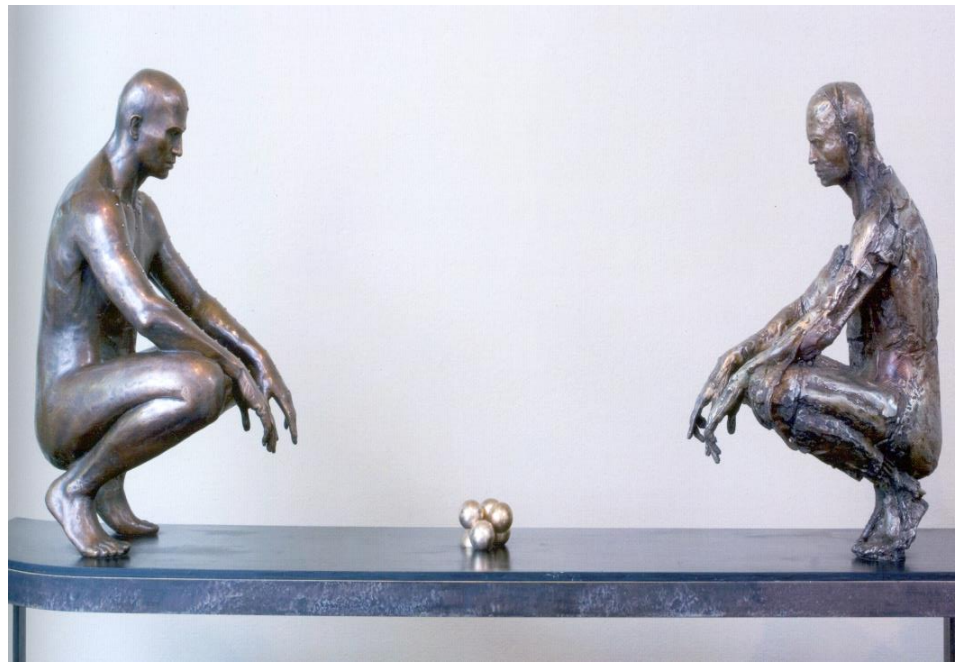


Fig. 46. Taylor, Angus, *Co- presence (Apollo and Dionysus) AP/2*, 2008. Cast bronze and cast stainless steel on a steel brass base. 62 x 150 x 40cm. From *Angus Taylor Momentary Permanence*, p.20, by Federico Freschi (2009). Johannesburg: Ex Libris Press.

#### **4.5 Magdalena Abakanowicz**

Magdalena Abakanowicz emerged as a unique presence in the arena of sculpture in the 1980s and continues to add to a powerful body of work based on her experience

of growing up and living in wartime, communist, and post-communist Poland. She produced some of her earliest known pieces in the 1950s working with fibre in the rich tradition of Eastern European artisans who refined their craft and experimented with a material often dismissed in contemporary art circles. Yet Abakanowicz initiated a new approach to the medium (Warren 2003). According to Jacob (1984) Abakanowicz insisted on the integrity of her material as a vehicle of serious artistic expression with no utilitarian application, and employed sisal and other fibres, in thoroughly new ways, technically and formally. Warren (2003) asserts that in her hands fibre transcends utilitarian application and exists as art, often expressing the brutal realities of her personal experience as well as demonstrating formal innovations never before realised. Huge forms woven out of sisal and other coarse fibres, called Abakans, marked her introduction to the international art world in the 1970s. Shown in groups, exhibitions of these works were an early and important form of installation art. Abakanowicz moved on to more representational forms in the 1980s, creating haunting tableaux of headless, often limbless figures. These truncated figures were both a personal statement – for she witnessed her mother’s arm being blown off by gunfire during World War II – and a universal statement of people’s many shortcomings, limitations, and failures to live up to their potential. Many of these works are moulded burlap; this material forms the figural element in *Cage* (Fig. 26). According to Jacob (1984) Abakanowicz used plaster moulds of figures to make her casts with sacking dipped in glue and strengthened with resin. For Abakanowicz her material has meaning. She sees fibre as the basic element of the organic world on our planet. According to Abakanowicz “all living organisms are built from fibre – the tissues of plants, and ourselves. When our bodies break down

the skin has to be cut so as to give access to the inside, later it is sewn, like fabric. To her, fabric is our covering and our attire. Made with our hands, it is a record of our souls,” (Jacob, 1984). Just as Abakanowicz has used fibre or sacking as her metaphor for the body as living organism, I have used paper as metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of the body. She also used salvaged material as a metaphor for bodies that have been discarded after abuse. Portions of a pier, fence posts, and weathered planking make a cage in which the moulded burlap figure sits, a resonant statement about man’s existential crisis.



Fig. 47. Abaknowicz, Magdalena. *Backs* 1976 – 81. Retrieved October 26, 2014 from <http://culture.pl/en/artist/magdalena-abakanowicz>



Fig. 48. Abakanowicz, Magdalena *Seated figures* 1974 – 75.  
 Figures: burlap and resin, pedestal: steel. Eighteen pieces, each figure: ca. 104 x 51 x 66 cm.  
 Each pedestal: 76 x 46 x 22 cm. Whole sculpture: 145 x 47 x 75 cm. Retrieved October, 26,  
 2014 from  
[http://pretisculpture.typepad.com/photo/other\\_artists\\_3/abakanowicz\\_seatedfigures.htm](http://pretisculpture.typepad.com/photo/other_artists_3/abakanowicz_seatedfigures.htm)



Fig. 49. Abakanowicz, M. *Cage* 1981. Burlap, glue and wood 167.6 x 116.8 x 155 cm  
 Retrieved March, 16, 2014 from  
<http://www.mcachicago.org/exhibitions/collection/browse/artist/1/1>

Nature has always inspired Abakanowicz. Roughly cut wood began appearing in her work in the early 1980s and has become a primary medium in more recent years. The wooden elements in *Cage* (Fig. 26) are salvaged as they had ceased to be useful

objects. The figure in the wooden structure, suggests the way in which people box themselves into various cages, conceptual as well as physical. Abakanowicz uses works like *Cage* to speak of man's dehumanizing and violent subjugation of others. The figure is a mere shell, too damaged to act with his arms and legs severed, preventing him from breaking out of his flimsy cage. The resigned slumped posture emphasises his surrender. Among Abakanowicz's works, which are typically unsettling, *Cage* counts among her most intense statements about the human experience (Warren, 2003). As in *Cage* where Abakanowicz refers to her background shaped by World War II, I also refer to my background of the Anglo Boer War of 1899 – 1902 in *Knitted Rug*.

#### **4.6 Kiki Smith**

According to Engberg (2011) the human body – both in anatomical fragments and in full figure – is at the heart of Kiki Smith's art. Quoting Smith, Weidemann (2008, p.145) says of her work, "the body is our common denominator and the stage for our pleasure and pain. Through it I aim to express who we are, and how we live and die." Siri Engberg, who curated her exhibition *A Gathering*, 1980 – 2005, adds that Smith chose the body as a subject because it is the one form that everybody shares and it is something with which everyone has their own unique, authentic experience. Her earlier works investigated the body's form and functions, which she expressed through individual body parts using delicate handmade paper and fragile materials such as glass, papier-mâché, terra-cotta, and plaster. In the early nineties she created life-size figures in wax and bronze depicting female bodies in disturbing, visceral poses. According to Engberg (2011) Smith's work has long addressed the uncertain

and difficult relationship between female artists and feminist issues. In the mid-nineties, she began to engage with themes from literature, history, and folklore, reinterpreting biblical and mythological women as inhabitants of resolutely physical bodies. Later on she included animals, the cosmos, and the natural world. According to Smith, her work “evolved from minute particles within the body, up through the body, and landed outside the body (Engberg, 2011).” In her work where human and animal merge, she creates new mythologies, finding in the theme of mortality that has pervaded so much of her process the possibility of rebirth. Through her work Smith is inviting us to re-examine ourselves, our history, and our place in the world (Engberg, 2011).

Weidemann (2008) adds that Smith produced increasing numbers of representations of human existence in all its vulnerability, emphasised by the use of delicate materials. When questioned about the shocking impression created by her body sculptures, Smith replied, “It is not my work which is problematic, but the history of our bodies, our love-hate relationship with our own bodies (Weidemann, 2008).”



Fig. 50. Smith, Kiki, *Getting the Bird Out* 1992, Bronze and string head. Installation variable. Collection the estate of Jane Lawrence Smith, New York.



Fig. 51. *Untitled 19* Bronze

Installation dimensions variable. Collection the estate of Jane Lawrence Smith New York



Fig. 52. Smith, Kiki. *Lilith*, 1994. Papier mâché and glass. 43 x 80 x 81 cm. From *Women Artists in the 20<sup>th</sup> And 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Grosenick, Uta (Ed.) 2001. Köln: Taschen.



Fig. 53. Smith, Kiki. *Untitled* 1990 Beeswax and microcrystalline wax on metal stands 43 x 80 x 81 cm. Female figure: 186, 7 cm. Male Figure: 195.4 cm. Whitney Museum of Americal Art. New York. Retrieved August 18, 2011 from <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/6aa.6aa177.htm>

Grosenick (2003) states that Kiki Smith draws inspiration from art historical works such as Grünewald's Isenheim altar, from biblical and mythical figures such as Lilith, Lot's wife or Mary Magdalene, but also from fairy stories and her own

dreams. In her work *Getting the Bird Out* 1992 (Fig. 27) she related man to animal, emphasising the contrary qualities of the humanity-nature-the-cosmos relationship between romanticism and exploitation, and began to see the world as a whole in the reality of its dichotomies.

Smith explored the sculptural possibilities of paper by using delicate handmade paper and other fragile materials to express the vulnerability of human existence as I have used tissue paper to express the vulnerability and fragility of the abused human being. Smith tried consistently to reveal new symbolic potential in traditional materials and techniques as I have used traditional techniques from Afrikaner culture and traditional crafting techniques such as papier-mâché. Smith has also long been interested in using the gallery as a space for creating a narrative as I have used the gallery space to create a narrative of abuse in South African history since 1652, referring to Afrikaner culture by creating small tableaus like the *Dinner Table*, the group of people with the *Knitted Rug* to suggest a family, and the morgue scene with the bodies of two dead girls. Smith also sometimes refers to herself as a “housewife artist” as she often works in her home using modest materials and traditionally feminine, domestic activities such as quilting and sewing. She also used crocheted doilies and then cast them in bronze while I made rubbings from doilies with conté for *Knitted Rug* (Fig 60) and embossed them on the *Boere Kappies* created from tissue paper.

## **Chapter 5: Religion and social change in society.**

### **5.1 Introduction: Religion and the Afrikaner**

The reformed church played a significant role in Cape society from the very beginning. In 1661 a teacher was appointed by the “Kompanjie” to educate the Khoekhoen in Dutch and religion (Hofmeyr, 2012). Later, in 1685, when the Edict of Nantes was revoked in France, many French Protestants fled to the Netherlands, and between 1688 and 1692 a number of them were sent to the Cape. In 1691 they were allowed to bring their own preacher, Pierre Simond, and a school teacher, Paul Roux, to South Africa. These French Protestants, known as the Huguenots, had a significant influence in the Cape with their Calvinistic approach (Hofmeyr, 2012).

Afrikaans-speaking churches originate from a reformed background and stem from a collective Dutch root and an earlier South African origin. The reformed churches in South Africa were founded in 1859 when the original pure Calvinism started to show signs of Afrikaner nationalism. The link between church, nation and culture played a significant role in Afrikaans churches. During the Anglo-Boer War, the revolution of 1914, and the two world wars, the Afrikaner had a great need for reassurance, pastoral care and leadership (Hofmeyr, 2012). Afrikaners were religious, adhering strictly to the teachings of the Bible (Hofmeyr, 2012). Jackson (1999) states that in a census conducted in 1707, 1,779 settlers were recorded, and within only a few years a new cultural group had emerged from the original European settlers who called themselves Afrikaners. According to Jackson two kinds of Afrikaner male had already emerged: the settler who remained near Cape Town and the Trekboer (migrant farmer), who Jackson calls the “wandering pastoralist,” an individualist

whose sole comfort in his lonely frontier existence were the teachings of the Dutch Calvinist Church. Jackson describes him as an Old Testament patriarch who saw himself to be one of the Elect of God and innately superior. The description of the Afrikaner male by Brink (1987) gives a good insight into the Afrikaner male's mentality towards religion, and how his whole family, slaves and anybody visiting were submitted to his religious education after evening meals. This mentality played a big role in Afrikaner families until today.

Religion is at the very core of Afrikaner society, and it plays a very important although understated and restrained role in my exhibition. Dikenga and Christian crosses symbolic of life (here or here-after) in both African and Western contexts were used in my artwork, for example in the placemats on the dinner table. I used black thread as symbolic of death and mourning about the loss of the basic principles of the symbol of the cross and the hypocritical use of Christianity in many Afrikaner households, but also in households worldwide. This was also the motivation for the artwork *Dinner Time* because the evening meal was generally when family devotions and prayers took place. The head of the household, usually the father, would read from the Bible and hold a lesson from a specific verse or chapter in the Bible, which did not necessarily apply to him or the men in that household.

## **5.2 Wim Botha**

According to David Brodie (2004) Wim Botha shifts meaning and the question of locatedness within particular contexts in his work, including social, cultural, religious and historical. Botha expresses in his work that as belief systems and ideologies collapse and are reborn or replaced by newer versions, we can no longer fail to

recognise the inherently artificial nature of grand notions such as “truth” and “reality.” One should not think of this idea simply as referring to a breakdown of confidence in religious ideologies, but rather that it refers to the fact that, in our contemporary consciousness, there are no longer realms considered sacred or untouchable, and thus all ideologies, all belief systems should be held up and interrogated in order to reveal the contingent truths of knowledge and context.

In his *Commune: suspension of Disbelief* (Fig. 31) Botha forces us to question the meaning and symbolic power of a life-size Christ figure carved from stacked Bibles in South Africa’s 11 official languages. In his use of alternative material and where text becomes the substance of the work, both as information and physically, the contradictory relationship between theory and belief is interrogated through texts and symbols.

The Christ figure cannot be read as an autonomous marker of absolute religious knowledge, and instead becomes a space where belief must be negotiated. Surrounding the figure, several surveillance cameras watch the suspended figure as if silently documenting its moment of doubt (Brodie, 2004).



Fig. 54. Botha, Wim. *Commune: suspension of Disbelief* (2001), carved Bibles and Biblical text. Surveillance Equipment. Installation Dimensions Variable, Figure Life-size. Retrieved 26 October 2014 from <http://www.artthrob.co.za/03apr/artbio.html>

In line with the characteristics of conceptual art Botha searches for multifunctional, inexpensive, but specific and essential substitutes for the impersonal, expensive, elitist and non-specific original material. Botha always seamlessly blends material with concept. The material itself, which is radical departure from the traditional or expected material of the real icon, becomes Botha's primary tool to deconstruct meaning within his installations. This can be clearly seen in his *Wild Life* series (Fig. 55) where he uses official government gazettes as material for full body and trophy mount carvings of hyenas and wildebeest. As the material shifts, so too does the narrative: symbols of conquest and control of land and peoples become symbols of bygone ideology (Brodie, 2004).

In *Generic Self-portraits (as a Statesman; as a Magnate; as a Landowner; as a Hero as an anti-Hero)* (Fig. 56), Botha overturns the traditional Napoleonic bust (that spoke of conquest and power) and offers us an ironic new version of portraiture. Traditionally the portraits would be carved out of marble but their mass-produced origin is now exposed in the surface seams on the busts cast in fake marble. Each

bust is cast in the generic likeness of the artist, each one identical to the last; the heads are mute, awaiting the assignment of their new identities.



Fig. 55. Botha, Wim. *Wild life Series (Heroes go solo)*. Retrieved October, 26, 2014 from [www.oocities.org/soho/coffeehouse/6702/transmigration/wim.htm](http://www.oocities.org/soho/coffeehouse/6702/transmigration/wim.htm)



Fig. 56. Botha, Wim. *Generic Self-Portrait busts as a Stateman; Magnate; as a Landowner; as a Hero; as an Anti-Hero*, 2003. Artificial marble, velvet, 74 x 41 x 25 cm each. From *10 Years 100 artists Art in a Democratic South Africa* (p. 68) by Perryer, S, (Ed.) 2004. Cape Town: Bell-Roberts Publishing.

In the same vein I have used every day or “low-value materials” such as paper. A mundane material that is often cast off, thrown away or recycled. Even scrap paper like tissue paper that was used as packing material in shoeboxes was used to create aesthetic objects as metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of the human being. Just as Botha’s *Generic Self-Portrait busts* are mute, awaiting their new identities, so are the masks and figures in my work silent, unwilling or unable to talk about their fate. Another link between my work and Botha’s is his interrogation of belief and religion. Too many atrocities in Afrikaner and world history have been justified by religion. It is high time that sacred ideologies are interrogated and reevaluated and not used to justify our behaviour, especially in a male dominant world.

### **5.3 Jane Alexander**

Surbiró (2014) describes Jane Alexander’s work as broadly political, but nevertheless non-judgmental. Instead of a call to action (as in resistance art from the 1980s), the work presents a “collection of farsighted interrogations and pertinent, even if often enigmatic, references concerning themes, issues, and stories that have the potential to elicit a reflection and reconsideration by viewers of their perception of reality as well as of their own stances in life.” And as Halder (2014) puts it, “...her work is imbued with deep political and social understanding. Alexander does not provide answers but the settings in which viewers can examine their own values and beliefs.”

Petra Stegmann (2011) states that Jane Alexander’s *Stripped (Oh Yes’ girl)*, (Fig. 57) depicts an unambiguous victim of violence: a chalk-white, naked martyr, a “Women of Sorrows” reminiscent of the crucified Christ. With stitches on her throat and legs, she is a corpse roughly patched-up for burial. This work is connected to several

others from the 1990s, in which Alexander applies the motifs of Christian art to the situation of South African society. Halder (2014) describes the work as the female Christ comparing it to Grunewald's Christ (Fig. 58) who receives the plague on the body and silently wastes away.

Halder (2014) further states that because Alexander's sculptures are life-sized and therefore share the real space occupied by the viewer they still have a spectral presence within that space. Exposed to the viewer's gaze, the figures with all their deformities, wounds and pain are unapproachable. They tell their stories but refuse pity. One may ask how relevant these sculptures are, how relevant is the past? But the past is more often never over. It decides the present and moulds the future. Put into a broader cultural context these sculptures cease to narrate the stories of Apartheid only. According to Subiró (2014) "the history of oppression and the systematic elimination of the so called 'Other' from the mainstream, and racial and religious conflicts, gender discrimination, and violence are not relegated to the past. Alexander's sculpture weaves the narrative of the continuum of oppressor-oppressed in evolving forms. Her work has a formal and technical excellence and delivers a potent emotional impact, sending warnings about historical consequences and carries hints of things to come."



Fig. 57. Alexander, Jane. *Stripped (Oh Yes' girl)* Plaster, lace, twin, calico, hair, oil paint, synthetic nails, steel support. 182 x 63 x 50.5 cm. Collection: Tatham Art Gallery. From *Art in South Africa the future present*, (p.23) by Williamson, S. & Jamal, A. (1996). Claremont: David Philip Publishers.

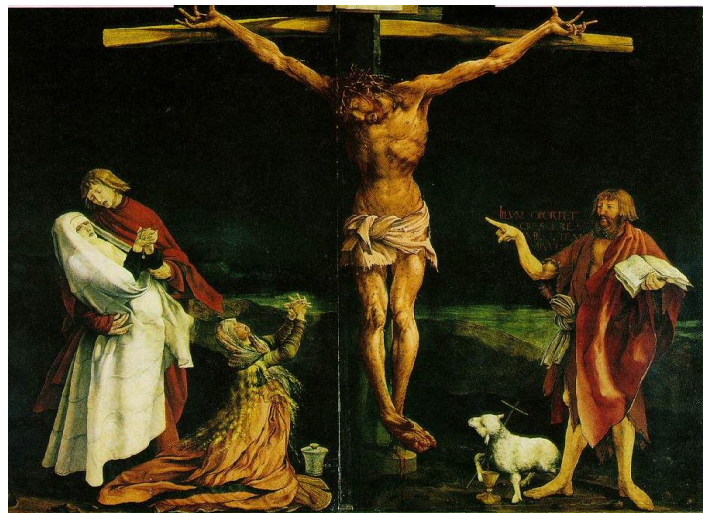


Fig. 58. Grünewald, Matthias. *The Crucifixion 1515* by Oil on wood, 269 x 307 cm. Musee d'Unterlinden, Colmar. Retrieved 26 October, 2014 from <http://www.artbible.info/art/isenheim-altar.html>

#### 5.4 Willem Boshoff

In the same vein MacKenny (2003) states that Boshoff's Afrikaans Christian background provides him with a tradition wherein the beginning and end of all things rests with the word. His interest in biblically evocative text provoked *The Writing That Fell Off the Wall* (1997) and *The Writing on the Sand* (2000). These titles highlight Boshoff's acute consciousness of the socio-historical terrain in which his work is situated, and his attempt to dislocate the pre-eminence of Christian authority in the South African context.



Fig. 59. Boshoff, Willem, *Writing in the Sand* 2005. Retrieved April 5, 2014 from [http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/writing\\_in\\_the\\_sand.htm](http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/writing_in_the_sand.htm)



Fig. 60. Boshoff, Willem, *The Writing That Fell Off the Wall* (1997) Language installation: Type on paper, wood, paint on Masonite. Overall dimensions: 8m X 24m (variable) Dimensions of one 'wall': 1200mm (height) X 1000mm (width) X 220mm (thickness) Collection: Johannesburg Art Gallery. Retrieved July 28, 2015 from [http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/writing\\_that\\_fell\\_off\\_the\\_wall.htm](http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/writing_that_fell_off_the_wall.htm)

## Chapter 6: Textuality

### 6.1 Introduction

The use of text in art is by no means a novel idea. Text has always been intertwined with visual art, and although text was used in art as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century (for example in religious paintings) it was not until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that text was used more intentionally in art and as art. Cubism and Dadaism in particular made use of text in their work, which influenced heavily the work of post-war artists. According to Wieland Herzfelde (cited in Foster, 1996) the Dadaists' sole program was to make contemporary events the content of their artworks - in terms of time and location - and therefore saw the illustrated newspaper and articles in the press as a source for their work. Kotzé (2010) states, however, that it was only in the early 1970s that artists produced the first purely linguistic, text-based works, paving the way for artists such as Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger to develop their text-based practices.

In my research, text from newspapers and novels about abuse was used, not only to inform the viewer about societal issues and the fragility and vulnerability of the body, but also to expose the emotional impact on the victims, as presented in their own words. There are also a number of personal memoirs of victims talking about their own experiences that were used in the scrolls as part of *Dinner Table II* and on the quilts in *Memory Quilts*. According to Barry (cited in Spaeth, 2009), the intention of an artwork should be to grab the viewer in a way that they can interact with the artwork, if they choose to do so. This interactivity was an intrinsic feature of *Dinner Table II* and *Memory Quilts*, as the viewer had to interact with the work by,

for example, opening and reading the scrolls and by writing personal notes and inserting them into the pockets in the quilts.

According to Kreamer, Roberts, Harney & Purpura (2007) writing is not autonomous. It requires a reader, an interpreter. Writing, reading, and critical interpretation are interdependent, and one cannot exist without the other, if writing is to have meaning. Text has to be read by someone with a comprehension of the context and the broader meaning. To read between the lines is the imperative of all modern encounters, and this places text at the centre of history. It is not simply about “inscribing” but also about dissecting the physical and conventional elements of scripts. Thus, in their acts of writing between the lines, contemporary artists often anticipate acts of reading and misreading. For many, fragments of narratives, remnants of archives and travel journals, scraps of printed newspapers and books, snippets of oral histories and daily journals, all become sources for crafting a visual imagery that seeks to disrupt the received frameworks for reading visual and verbal languages. This process of co-opting, re-shaping and blurring texts enables artists to address the asymmetrical relationships of cultural and political power embodied within their uses, which have characterized encounters of the modern period.

A significant number of South African artists are producing works that consider how speech, script, and imagery play central roles in the processes of remembering, forgetting, recording, distilling, re-writing, and sanctioning. Berni Searle contemplates the interplay of language, memory, visibility, and politics in a society where evidence is written large upon the body, and Willem Boshoff makes an

obsessive study and presentation of obscure words, whose meanings are only revealed through the employment of little known languages or the languages of the underprivileged.

One of my objectives in using text in my artwork was for the viewer to read the text and subjectively personalise the text according to their own experience, and then to interact with the artwork by writing their own text and inserting it into the quilts. My other objective was to inform the viewer about the abuse taking place in Afrikaner society.

## 6.2 Willem Boshoff

Kreamer, et al. (2007) describe Willem Boshoff as an artist of ceaseless intellectual and creative motion. He is considered a pure conceptualist because his works concentrate exclusively upon language as can be seen in his *Blind Alphabet Project* (1995 – 96), *Kring van Kennis* 2000, and *Writing in the Sand* 2005.



Fig. 61. Boshoff, Willem, *Kringe van Kennis (Circle of Knowledge)* 2000. Granite, Installation: University of Johannesburg. Retrieved April 5, 2014 from [http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/kring\\_van\\_kennis.htm](http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/kring_van_kennis.htm)

According to Vladislavić (2005) Boshoff's work is focused on bringing about conversation, especially conversation between social groups that do not engage with one another often or easily. The work serves as a kind of ice-breaker; it creates a "forum of common interest." Boshoff aims for humane meaning that fosters relationships of mutual recognition.



Fig. 62. Boshoff, Willem, *Blind Alphabet Project* (1995 – 1996). Wood, steel, and aluminium, height of each box 73.5cm. Installation Johannesburg, Art Gallery. Retrieved April 5, 2014 from [http://www.willembosoff.com/documents/artworks/blind\\_alphabet.htm](http://www.willembosoff.com/documents/artworks/blind_alphabet.htm)

Vladislavić (2005) further describes *The Blind Alphabet* as the artwork which has drawn together many of his long-standing themes. It is a work of "readable wood, a book – a dictionary – which simultaneously reveals and conceals its contents." Boshoff uses material that has meaning to him, namely wood inherited from his father, who died in 1985, and Boshoff set out to empower one of the most

marginalized minorities in modern society: the blind. *The Blind Alphabet ABC* consists of 338 wooden sculptures, each representing a word related to form, structure or texture. The caskets are crypts that hold dead words and obscure meanings. Although this work is specifically about political conversation he wants to generalise it as using text to inspire conversation, just as I wanted to inspire the viewer's participation in the exhibition and to create awareness about abuse and the fragility and vulnerability of human beings.

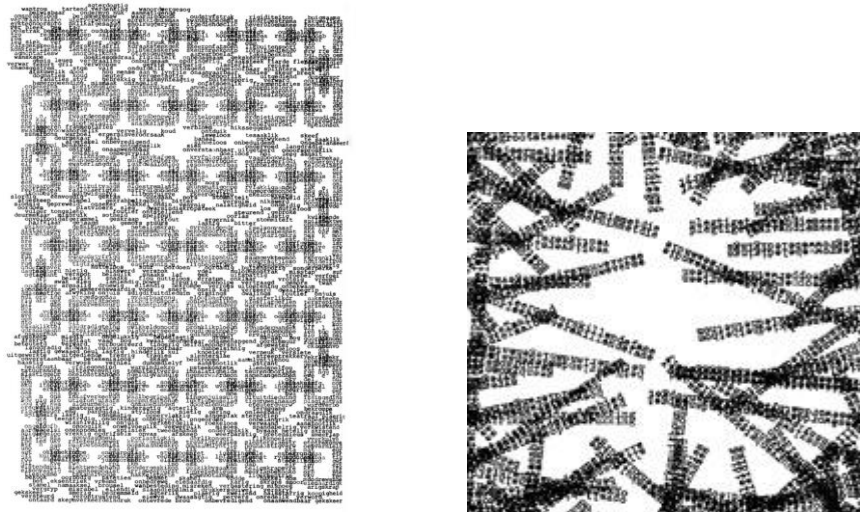


Fig. 63. Boshoff, Willem. *Kyk Afrikaans 1978 – 2003. Swak Skakelings & Duistere Bedoelings*. Retrieved October 26, 2014 from <http://www.willemboshoff.com/documents/artworks/kykafrikaans.htm>

Kreamer et al (2007) state that like many concrete poets, Boshoff has great interest in the spatial dimension of language, images and tropes. In his small, soft-cover book of concrete poems entitled *Kyk-Afrikaans*, the artist seeks to literally “concretise” the meaning of the typed word, embedding its verbal complexity in a material visual form from which it cannot be separated. Working in a wide array of materials, from stone, to paper, to sand, to mixed media, Boshoff’s investigations of the workings of

language provide fascinating reflections upon the assumed shared understandings of an arbitrary network of signs that make up the vocabularies of any language.

Boshoff (Boshoff & Vladislavić, 2005) often refers to the etymological link between the words “text,” “texture” and “textile”, which can all be traced to the Latin *texere*, meaning “to weave.” Boshoff creates textured surfaces that demand to be read with all the senses. At the same time, he sets out to frustrate this appeal: they are made not to be read but to be looked at. The textures, in which single words are cobbled, layered, crocheted, stacked together, play a coercive game with the eye – if you know the language, of course. Where someone unfamiliar with Afrikaans would simply see pattern, texture or shade, the viewer who recognizes words is challenged to read sequentially, conventionally. This movement, from visual to verbal and back again, suggests the act of breathing in and out, and re-enacts the movement towards and away from any book and any written meaning.

In *Placemats* I took text from a true story of abuse and transformed it into a textured surface by embroidering onto the text, simultaneously removing it from a specific story to a universal story by eliminating names and certain contexts. This work is also linked with my Afrikaner Christian background with the use of the African (dikenga) and Christian crosses.

Boshoff the activist is interested in the power relationship inscribed in and through language, in the way language privileges or excludes (Vladislavić, 2005). As a controversial matter can be talked out of existence (like, for instance, during The Truth and Reconciliation Commission), a controversial matter like the fragility and

vulnerability of people can also be talked *into* existence by society, as I aimed to do in my exhibition.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion of Creative Results**

The creative results of my research culminated in an exhibition titled *Paper as metaphor for the vulnerability and fragility of the human being*, which opened on 13 November 2014 at the National Art Gallery of Namibia. I had a guest book at the entrance of the exhibition hall for viewers to record their experiences of the exhibition, as one of my main aims was to encourage viewer interaction with the artworks. Other aims were to create a therapeutic experience for myself and to make the general public aware of abuse. I will refer to these viewer experiences and to newspaper reviews in my discussion of the creative results of my exhibition.

I must confess that my own realisation of the emotional impact of my work only struck me when I took my work to be photographed by Leigh Daniz at her studio. It was the first time I had seen my work hanging up, and the white walls that seemed to have no boundaries, with light flowing in from the windows, gave the work that ethereal feeling that I had only imagined. The fact that both natural and electrical lighting was used enhanced this feeling. I knew that I would be able to create the same atmosphere in the gallery because there was sufficient natural and electrical light available against a neutral background. In the gallery the setup was more personal and intimate because of the layout of various tableaux. This can be clearly seen when you compare the next two photos. The first one was taken in the photographer's studio and the second at the exhibition in the gallery.



Fig.64. *Fragile and Vulnerable People* as photographed in the studio. Photograph: L. Daniz.



Fig. 65. *Fragile and Vulnerable People* as exhibited in the gallery. Photograph: N. Shivute.

Setting up the life-sized figures with the knitted rug created an intimate atmosphere of a specific Afrikaner setting, but at the same time suggesting universal human configuration which could be playing out anywhere and anytime. As Joseph (Sun, November 12, 2014) captured it: “The exhibition is a cohesive body of work portraying the fragility and vulnerability of the human being by creating discomfoting installations to make the viewer aware of our responsibility and to make society contemplate their responsibility towards vulnerable and fragile human beings.”

In *Fragile & Vulnerable People* (Fig. 66) I sculpted four figures to represent the universal figures of woman, man and child. I layered white tissue paper with cold glue to sculpt the figures to illustrate the transparency, the surface quality or texture

and fragility of the medium, as metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of the human being. Like de Staebler I avoided using whole figures, preferring instead to suggest transcendence through fragmented bodies, such as the headless seated women, with the either total absence of certain limbs or of limbs hanging on threads. As in de Staebler's sculptures the fragmented limbs and fragile balance expresses the condition of bodily brokenness, which does not decry the human condition, but affirms it.

The composition of the figures was planned to create an interaction between the figures. The young girl figure was placed in such a way as to create a sideways glance towards the female and male figures, and to create a rhythmic flow between the figures. The figures were suspended from the ceiling to create the feeling of standing, but at the same time of lightness and ethereality. Contrast was created by scale (the male figures, the female figure and the child) and the positions of the figures: the males standing, the female sitting and the child bending forward as if in pain. Attention was also paid to the relationship between the positive and negative spaces between the figures where the forms interacted with space.

The natural light from the window in the gallery was used to emphasise the fragility of the figures through the transparency of the medium, as well as to draw attention to the inherent quality and texture of the medium. During the photo session I realised that too direct artificial light actually made the texture of the figures and features of the faces disappear instead of enhancing them. Because of the transparency of the medium the shadows cast are very soft and undefined, which can also be seen as a metaphor for human vulnerability and fragility. Yet the viewers' shadows will be

more definite indicating the power of mankind. The deeper significance is that the shadow is the symbol of the unknown, unidentifiable perpetrator. The photograph at the exhibition opening (Fig. 65) was taken in the evening and shows the effect of electrical lighting, where the shadows casted are stronger. The result is that the atmosphere changed according to the degree of natural light, fading into a more subtle variation in effect in the evening.

In Fig. 65, against the wall in the background some of the masks can be seen, as well as one of the beds with a memory quilt. One viewer described the exhibition as “a story told on each of the four walls of the room, with masks representing faces of victims each presented by a history of scars.” According to one viewer, the covering of the eyes could be seen as “the victim wishing that nothing was seen.” Other masks were cracked or split and some were pierced with a nail or bullet, representing in a viewer’s words, “the physical struggle and scars of victims.” The title of the installation of masks is *Ons weet* or *We know*, symbolizing the huge number of specifically men who had been abused but also abused themselves. This is why I used papier-mâché made from newspapers. On the one hand, because newspapers are full of stories of abuse, the material becomes a metaphor of abuse, and on the other hand it is not as fragile a material as tissue paper. But, although this material is much stronger (as men are supposed to be) it is still fragile when abused. The masks therefore show signs of forced cuts (symbolising when someone makes the choice to abuse), like the marks made with a grinder, but also unforced cracks which symbolise instances when men had to participate in wars without necessarily having

a choice. This forced conscription led to men abusing and being abused as Strassburg (2013) describes in her book *Fractured Lives*.

The masks were cast from a number of different people, some of whom are known and closely related to me, and others that are unknown, who I found in the streets of Windhoek. This is representative of the evidence, according to Giddens (2006) that most perpetrators of abuse are close acquaintances or part of the family of the victims. I used masks of people in the same way as Lucille Bertrand sculpted the gouged open, wounded and tortured body. The masks are made from newspapers to indicate that even in civilised countries gross atrocities are taking place and do not have much to do with the perpetrators' level of civilisation or education. As in Bertrand's bodies the eyes are closed; they see nothing, neither outside nor inside. Their mouths are closed, simply signing without signifying (Nancy, pp. 61-3). Some of the mouths are closed by objects forced upon the victims to prevent them from talking or signifying. There are also indications of the wounded and tortured body by tears and cuts. Objects such as bullets, screws and saws are symbols of war, torture and abuse, while stitching indicates the attempts to repair and fix an insoluble problem, which is presented in the Bible as having existed since the beginning of time. This is also reflected in the verses taken from the Bible embroidered on one of the quilts. The entire exhibition space speaks of sadness and loss. Not always the loss of lives but mostly the loss of innocence and trust, as emotional scars are deeper than physical scars.



Fig. 66. Nel, Rika *Ons Weet ... (We Know...)* Paper, thread, string, bitumen, shoe polish and found objects Photograph: L. Daniz

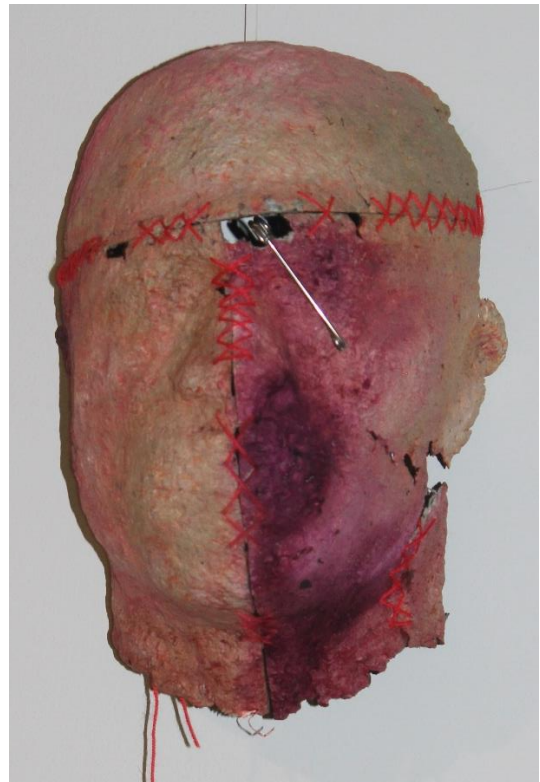
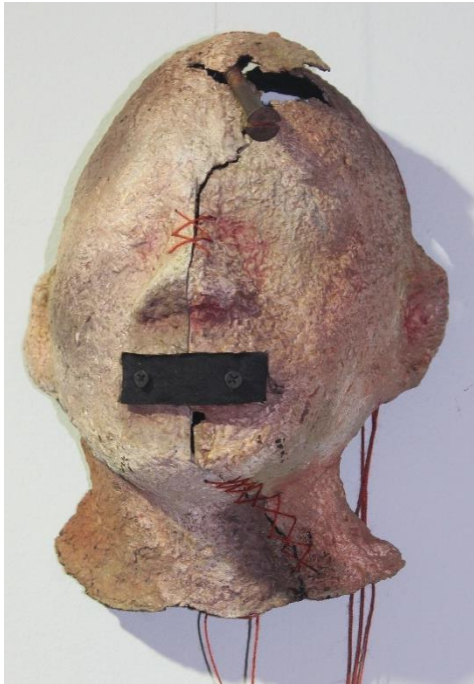


Fig. 67. *We Know. Ons Weet.* (2011-14). Photographs: N. Shivute.

The next installation of my exhibition, *Fractured Lives* was the first installation seen when the viewer walked into the gallery and is comprised of two parts, *Fractured Lives* and *Save the Children*. The documentary filmmaker Toni Strasburg (2013) describes the effect of war on people's lives in her book *Fractured Lives*. She writes that her fractured life has helped her to understand lives that are far more broken than her own. She describes how war contaminates everyone who comes into contact with it and how the effects of war go far beyond the physical injuries that are its inevitable outcome.

In *Fractured Lives* (Fig. 69), fragments of luminous bodies, specifically male torsos and arms, are suspended so as to be viewed from underneath to emphasise their dismemberment and fragility. According to Miglietti (2003) Louise Bourgeois states: "There is no body except for the body of a dismemberment that cannot manage to find unity" (Miglietti, 2003). Bourgeois also says that to hang up artworks is a very important act, because it allows the object to change its location, it is an act without escape, it changes the hierarchy of the artwork; the foundation disappears (Miglietti, 2003).

In juxtaposition to *Fractured Lives* is *Save the Children*. The two girl figures in *Save the Children* - also sculpted from layers of white tissue paper and cold glue - depict death. Their corpses are lying on a metal plate symbolising a morgue. The textures and shrunken forms of their bodies show decay; the immobility of death; silence; the solitude of the empty body. The serenity of the desperation of the moment of death is impressed on their faces. We begin to see the first signs of an inevitable decomposition on their skins. Their bodies are bruised, their eyes are closed forever.

The corpses are stripped of their identity. Andres Serrano perceives death as a failure of science (Miglietti, 2003), but here it should be seen as a failure of society to protect their children from harm, be it from direct abuse, war or religious differences.



Fig.68. Installation: *Fractured Lives and Save the Children* (2011 -14) Photograph: N. Shivute



Fig.69. Installation: *Fractured Lives and Save the Children* 2011-14).

Photograph: N Shivute



Fig.70. This photograph shows how I experimented with the curation. Here *Dinner Table II* is placed together with the group of figures while the *Knitted Rug* is exhibited on its own. In the end it made more sense to group the rug with the figures, as the rug portrayed Afrikaner history and the installation therefore reflects on an Afrikaner family. Photograph: N. Shivute.



Fig. 71. This photograph indicates where *Dinner Table II* was finally placed. Although all artworks create a sense of cohesion *Dinner Table II* was slightly isolated to give the viewer the opportunity to observe closely what is written on the placemats and to take the time to open the scrolls and read them privately, as the content is intensely personal. Photograph: N. Shivute.



Fig.72. Installation: *Dinner Table II* and scrolls. Photograph: N. Shivute.



Fig.73. Photograph: N. Shivute.

In his review Sampson (Namibian Sun, Nov. 26, 2014) states that, “the exhibition creates a sense of cohesion with a significant impact on the senses.” He goes on to say that the body of work owns and occupies the gallery space but does not overpower the viewer and is well curated by “taking cognizance of proportional space.” Spread around the floor, “each component occupies an important dimensional space regarding its contribution to the whole, without in anyway overwhelming the rest.”

I attempted to create intimate little scenes signifying Afrikaner culture, with the masks looking into these intimate domestic scenes. They symbolise that although many people know what is going on they pretend not to see and not to know. This is symptomatic of Afrikaner society, but also of societies worldwide.

The reaction I received from viewers was thought provoking. For me it was an emotional journey, taking me back to memories best forgotten. Although it was my aim to impact people's state of mind I could not have imagined how many viewers could identify with and were deeply moved by the theme. Comments like "a moving experience" and "very thought provoking, *Ek Weet, Ons Weet ...*" indicates that more people than one would think have had similar experiences. One viewer wrote, "I came into your exhibition on my own on a quiet afternoon and within moments I was weeping." The same person also thanked me for including spaces for people to write and (hopefully) leave their traumas behind. Another thanked me for speaking up for those who have chosen silence.

I would like to conclude this section with a comment written by a viewer: "Thank you for a moving experience. You created a striking connection between concept, form, technique, sound and the use of space."

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

This study was undertaken in response to the research problem, which was to use paper as material for sculpture and to explore paper as a metaphor for the fragility and vulnerability of human beings.

In order to address the problem the following aims were developed: to create artwork that has an emotional impact on the viewer; to make the viewer aware of the extent of abuse in society; to make the viewer aware through the artwork of his or her responsibility towards protecting the vulnerable and fragile; to review literature on the work of contemporary artists who created from the act of remembrance and used the body to express themselves, as well as artists who used techniques such as casting, using thread and embroidery and who used their material as metaphor as well as referring to religion and using text in various ways in their work. This review was to inform the creation of a body of creative work to be exhibited in the National Art Gallery of Namibia.

The concept of abuse was the main inspiration for this practice-led research. Paper was explored as a metaphor for the defencelessness and sensitiveness of abused human beings. The types of paper that were utilized to symbolize this concept were tissue paper, fax machine paper and newspaper. Although paper is an ordinary, everyday material that is used and easily thrown away or recycled and is considered of low value it also has the possibility to be made into aesthetic creations in the same manner as the noble, traditional art materials such as marble or clay. The forms chosen to express the concept varied from three-dimensional figurative forms to more two-dimensional forms. The focus was thus to explore sculpting and other

techniques in order to develop a personal, unique approach. The aim was also to create a space with artworks, to enable viewers to participate in some of the artworks and engage in dialogue – verbal or written – with the pieces.

The focus of the study was mostly on the abuse of women and children, but also of men in Afrikaner society. Being from an Afrikaner background I grounded the visual and theoretical research in Afrikaner history and culture from a personal perspective. This was achieved by referring to Afrikaner literature, history and religion and by applying traditional Afrikaner craft techniques. Language is also central to this exhibition, and text can be seen in many of the artworks. The viewer had to bring his or her own meaning to the artwork and apply his or her own experience to its reading.

I worked from a very personal point of departure while taking a retrospective view of the Afrikaner's history. Techniques such as quilting, knitting and embroidering were used, not only to give meaning to the artwork but also to act as therapy for myself as the artist while creating it. I explored the social and psychological effects of violence and abuse to make the viewer and the public aware of abuse in their immediate environment, in their community and worldwide. I also addressed the phenomenon of silence when it comes to abuse and to create an awareness of how important it is to communicate in order not only to prevent abuse, but to give victims the opportunity to unburden and free themselves from it.

In the literature review my departure point was to discuss the history of the Afrikaner from a cultural and personal perspective. There was a focus in this discussion on the potential for the abuse of women and children in Afrikaner society. Following this

discussion the work of contemporary artists who created an act of remembrance and who used the body to express themselves was studied. The work of artists, who used similar techniques to mine, such as casting, using thread or embroidery, was also reviewed. Other artists in this study either used their material in some way as metaphor, referred to religion in their creative expression or used text in various ways in their work. Links were drawn between these artists' work and my own work with the focus always on the uniqueness and individual and creative expression of my artworks.

The literature and practical research culminated in a solo exhibition of artwork that had an emotional impact on the viewers and made them aware of the extent of abuse in society, but most of all made the viewers aware of our responsibilities towards protecting the vulnerable and fragile.

There is thus the hint of an autobiographical rendering, but it is mostly a therapeutic act to make sense of life on earth. I aimed to touch people's lives and their souls, and hopefully, the exhibition helped the viewers to confront the past, to re-examine our collective place in the world and to make the present and the future a better place to live in.

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