

**Thesis Title: Visual Entanglement: Political and Aesthetic Connotations of  
Gladys Mgudlandlu's Work.**



**Bongiwe Hlekiso**  
UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE  
**Student number: 2050917 E**

**Supervisor: Prof Patricia Hayes**  
**Co-supervisor: Prof Hermann Wittenberg**

**A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master  
of Arts degree in Visual History and Museum and Heritage Studies in the  
Department of History, University of the Western Cape.**

## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I, Bongiwe Hlekiso, hereby declare that 'Visual Entanglement: Political and Aesthetic Connotations of Gladys Mgudlandlu's work' is my own work. I understand what plagiarism is and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.



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Bongiwe Hlekiso  
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‘One isn’t necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can’t be kind, true, merciful, generous or honest.’

Maya Angelou

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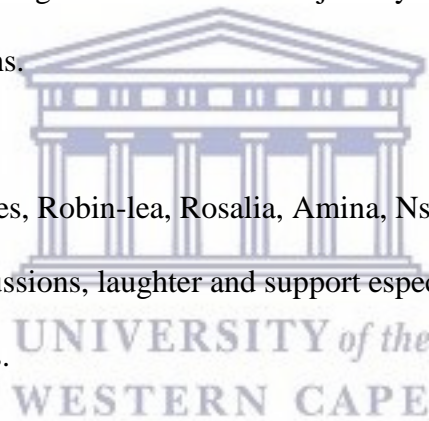
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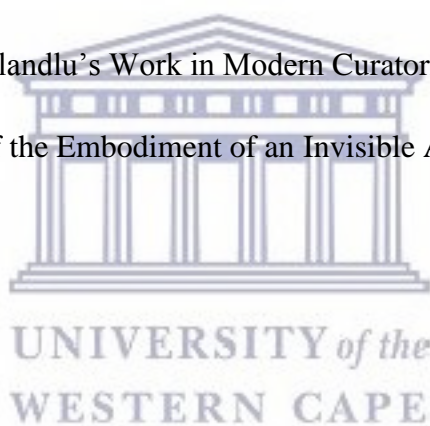
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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on how we can interpret political meanings embedded in Gladys Mgudlandlu's work by concentrating on her landscapes, murals, and portraits during the period of the 1960s – 1980s. The core of my thesis is to question whether the artwork of Mgudlandlu was political. The thesis argues that Mgudlandlu's talents and interventions have been overlooked and undermined. Engaging with a deep analysis of the context in which Mgudlandlu lived and worked, a visual analysis of her paintings and a discussion on the meaning of her life and work from various vantage points across time substantiates the above argument.

The study engages with three fundamental approaches. Firstly it approaches Mgudlandlu's work through how it is articulated and historicized as part of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa before 1994. Here I disrupt the idea that her work was out of touch with reality and that her work was of a naivety that isolated herself from the struggles of black people. I further argue that her work transcends the norms and expectations of black artists during this period. Her work in many ways challenges stereotypes and broke social conventions by painting landscape: something which was mostly associated with older white male artists. Thus I advocate for a reconsideration of her work by revisiting her landscape painting which carries most of the weight of my argument regarding Mgudlandlu's political stand.

My second approach is to explore the production and process of her work by concentrating on cultural workshops and their role in South African art during the apartheid period. Mgudlandlu's creation and production process was very different from her counterparts which is explored through a careful analysis of Mgudlandlu's paintings.

The third approach examines the ways curatorial techniques have been used and how cultural meanings are produced, presented and contested in the public domain and spaces. In exploring her upbringing and artwork during the apartheid period in the 1960s – 1980s, I grew to understand that most of her work was influenced by the ‘everyday’ struggles of a black woman who felt alone and persecuted for her love of art. And so upon exploring Mgudlandlu’s work, it became clear that it was never her intention to be different from the rest but because of her style of painting, she ended up being given different labels that tried to explain her work rather than embracing the kind of artist she was.



## INTRODUCTION

“If more people in the world were artists, there would be more peace and understanding. They would speak the language of art, admire nature and beauty, and not seek to destroy.”<sup>1</sup>

Gladys Mgudlandlu, 1972.

I first heard about Gladys Mgudlandlu when I came across a thesis entitled ‘A Fragile Archive: Refiguring, Rethinking, Reimagining, Re-presenting Gladys Mgudlandlu’ by Nontobeko Mabongi Ntombela in 2014. Ntombela narrated a rich body of nearly untouched biographical transcripts which had a remarkably detailed biographical record of Mgudlandlu as an artist. The mere fact that I stayed in Cape Town and I was not aware of Mgudlandlu made me more drawn to know more about who she was. With an interest birthed out of Ntombela’s thesis, I wanted to acquaint myself with who she was, her artwork and how her work impacted on South Africa as a whole. It was important for me to know what she stood for and what role she played in the history of South Africa by being a black female in an industry such as art that is historically surrounded by racial politics and is a very gender-biased field as well. These are some of the questions that I grapple with as I study her work: What influenced her to paint landscapes, murals and portraits, and can this be categorized as political resistance? Who influenced her painting style? And how was her work interpreted by those who shared the same discipline as her? Doing this will allow me to understand the significance that her work had in South African politics at large, as

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<sup>1</sup> Elza Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night: The Art of Gladys Mgudlandlu* (Johannesburg: Fernwood Press, 2002), 14.

well as interrogating aspects of how art has an impact on different audiences by giving them a voice. Also, understanding what influenced her work and training will lead me to appreciate her motives for painting and why her paintings were up to now mostly appreciated by a white audience and market.

Nontobeko Mabongi Ntombela, a South African student at the University of Witwatersrand, completed a Master's thesis in 2013 on the biography of Gladys Mgudlandlu and curated a body of her work in an exhibition called 'The Fragile Archive'.<sup>2</sup> Ntombela's thesis provides an in-depth study of the exhibition archive demonstrating how fragile, incomplete and inclusive the archive is. Her focus on Mgudlandlu's archive is a significant contribution to South African art historiography where the concentration on black females is marginal, considering that most studies in this area have dwelt on white artists. However, her thesis did not engage with issues of aesthetics and politics in respect of Mgudlandlu work.

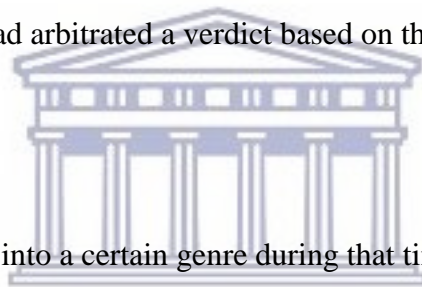
In 2002 Elza Miles published a book called *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints At Night* and she was one of the first art historians who took an interest in Mgudlandlu's work.<sup>3</sup> She further went on to write a biography about Mgudlandlu, exploring who she was and further exhibiting her work. In her biography of Mgudlandlu she takes us on a journey with much detail on how the artist grew up and all the challenges she faced as an artist in terms of her race and gender. She further delves into how she was mocked and taken for granted by other artists based on how she painted as an artist. She exposes how she was ridiculed for being 'naïve' and an escapist in the ways she portrayed her

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<sup>2</sup> Nontobeko Mabongi Ntombela, 'A Fragile Archive, Refiguring, Rethinking, Reimagining, Re-presenting Gladys Mgudlandlu' (Published MAFA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 7.

work. Miles in her biography brings to attention how Mgudlandlu's work was mostly compared to old folk art and how it was labelled as 'primitive art'. The category of primitive art was used mostly to classify South African artists in regards to their cultural background. Sally Price articulates this by bringing clarity to the term primitive. She argues that primitive "In the 19th and 20th centuries was used in cultural and social discourse to define people with limited mechanical and technical knowledge (societies with tools, but not machines); peoples who had not developed writing; and classless societies."<sup>4</sup> For that reason it also does not help that in Africa art was in many cases historically associated with pagan spiritual practices involving objects such as 'idols' and 'fetishes'. As a result this saw Mgudlandlu's artwork being placed in a category that had arbitrated a verdict based on the fact of being African rather than being an artist.



Seeing that she was boxed into a certain genre during that time, as a result her work ended up being compared to the likes of Grandma Moses and Henri Rousseau. Both of these artists were folk American artists, Grandma Moses also like Mgudlandlu was self-taught and she also painted about rural life. This clearly was similar to the life of Mgudlandlu. We can contest and say Mgudlandlu had no choice but to accept this title and embrace being called the black Grandma Moses.<sup>5</sup> Miles further argues that at the end no one understood Mgudlandlu's work. Even though almost all of her paintings are displayed in white homes and galleries, her talent has never been recognized as that of a true artist. The critics continued to categorise her work as an impulsive, primeval expression and on such grounds she continued being just another African artist with little recognition or honour for her originality. Miles further argues that the

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<sup>4</sup> Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilised Places* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 14.

critiques that Mgudlandlu received did not recognise the brilliant artist that she was and the role she played as an artist in schools and nurturing other artists in South Africa.

This study is theoretically framed within the debate around aesthetics and politics. The work of Azoulay best addresses these debates by looking at how people regard certain photographs and artworks as political and others as just aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> Such separation of aesthetics and politics is one of the reasons why people criticise Art History whose main method of enquiry is formal analysis (that is, examination of the visual contents of an artwork to appreciate its aesthetic qualities including the use of colour, form, tone, etc.). What Azoulay is saying is that we should not separate aesthetics and politics, that every image has aesthetic qualities and at the same time has the capacity to raise political questions. Historically, South African artistic tradition under apartheid separated aesthetics from politics. The art arena dominated by white artists created landscape paintings, portraits, etc that did not give any clue about the violence and injustice going on at that time. Azoulay argues that even when an artwork is not obviously about resistance when we look at it, it is possible to read it as political.<sup>7</sup> For example, if you see a sculpture of Jacob Zuma's image, you can be amazed at how the artist has represented him in a very naturalistic manner so that you are absorbed in enjoying the creativity, the aesthetics of the artwork. But for Azoulay, you can read the same sculpture as political when you say for instance that the sculpture is the portrait of the most corrupt president of post-apartheid South Africa, that he commissioned his own son to produce the sculpture for 1 million Rand. So, art

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<sup>6</sup> Ariella Azoulay, 'Getting Rid of the Distinction between the Aesthetic and the Political', *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 27, No 7-8 (04 January 2011), 239-262.

<sup>7</sup> Azoulay, 'Getting Rid of the Distinction between the Aesthetic and the Political', 239-262.

commissioning is a way through which the president embezzles public funds. If he had commissioned any artist who had no connection with him, he would not pay 1 million Rand for his portrait, unless it was a deal between him and the artist.

Therefore I find the art work of Mgudlandlu to be very political. Mgudlandlu produced artworks which in their visual contents do not obviously show the violence and injustice of apartheid, but we can deduce the injustice from the analysis of the condition in which Mgudlandlu created the works, the kind of space where she worked, her training, her sourcing of art materials and the processes of producing the works. We also need to look at how her work had a radical impact for other South African artists, also giving recognition to black artists generally.

Among other things this study therefore aims to give acknowledgment to how Mgudlandlu's work has explored the micro politics of production in the art world of South Africa, which allows us to understand the politics that surrounded black artists and the production of their artwork. We also need a detailed 'life history' of the type of work Mgudlandlu painted and to present a fuller case of agency. Through the work of Mgudlandlu, this study attempts to problematize certain assumed meanings around landscapes, portraits and politics. I focus on the textual reading of Mitchell with a particular emphasis on how he examines the ambiguous concepts of landscapes and their meaning. William J.T. Mitchell suggests "that we think of landscapes, not as an object to be seen or text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed."<sup>8</sup> He further points out that people are under the assumption that landscapes are a European construct and he argues that is an incorrect assumption. He elucidates that the concept of landscape emerged from a long tradition of paintings

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<sup>8</sup> William J.T. Mitchell(ed), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

that have become a global thing through the elevation of Dutch art. He argues that paintings of landscapes are about power in a more indirect manner. “Landscape, we suggest, doesn’t merely signify or symbolize power relations, it is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is independent of human intentions.”<sup>9</sup> Centred on Mitchell’s argument we are able to understand how landscapes become a process, as landscapes are able to create their own citizens through histories that they want to represent to their audience. This confirms the power that the landscape holds when it comes to its audience and how it is able to endorse different representations to its audience. Mitchell brings to our attention how representation of landscapes should be treated as a discourse in which various political positions may be articulated as a cultural practice that silences alternative discourses and disarticulates the readability of landscape in order to carry out processes of institutional and political legitimation. Thus it is of importance that we consider the work of John Jakle, who suggests that it is important that we look at landscapes in connection with a place. He proposes that there is a link between the human behavior and landscape, “a place is a setting that, because it contains a distinctive range of social interactions, may be thought of as inviting or inducing the continuation of those interactions.”<sup>10</sup> That is why it is important that we understand that the visualization of landscapes is based on the place that a person is subjected to at that point in time which is very visible in the work of Mgudlandlu. Most of her landscapes reflect the place that she was living in at the moment (especially townships). As a result the place that we find ourselves in cues individuals visually and that is what Mgudlandlu used to her advantage to reveal her place of living and what everyone was subjected to in black communities. Her paintings of landscapes

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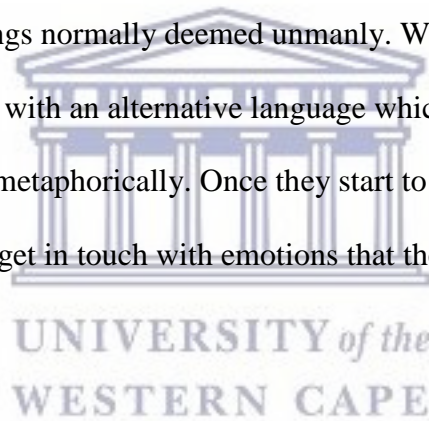
<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> John A. Jakle, *The Visual Elements of Landscape* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) 4.



allowed her to demonstrate what social ills the people in the segregated areas were facing and living under.

This forces me to unpack the genre of Mgudlandlu's work in trying to address my question. I focus on the work of Hayes which provides a very interesting argument implying that landscape photographs are a medium that helps you to express emotions, rather than simply images that provide information. In this chapter Hayes' argument makes reference specifically to white colonial men in how they appreciate and refer to the landscape. She highlights that landscape photographs are an avenue for escaping dominant gender norms if you are man, as they provide a platform to portray thoughts and feelings normally deemed unmanly. We should understand that landscapes provide people with an alternative language which allows them to explore different things including metaphorically. Once they start to take these photos of landscape they are able to get in touch with emotions that they are not meant to reveal and say as a man.



“I also wish to propose that men have recourse to landscape representation in specific and personal ways, that white colonial masculinity could use landscapes to express the range of private or unacknowledged feelings about place and people, and through these, hint at an undisclosed subjective self.”<sup>11</sup>

The same ideas are also contended by Arnold that somehow landscapes are seen as a genre predicated on male vision and established within male controlled art institutions. According to Peter Selz, “art on the other hand, gives form to something

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<sup>11</sup> Patricia Hayes, ‘Camera Africa: Indirect Rule and Landscapes Photographs of Kaoko, 1943’ in *New notes on Kaoko*, edited by Giorgio Miescher and Dag Henrichsen (Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2000), 48.

that cannot be expressed otherwise.”<sup>12</sup> “It opens up to man the part of reality that neither thought nor emotion could ever penetrate, it is the ‘development of the intuitive consciousness’.”<sup>13</sup> So here I attempt to problematize certain assumed meanings around landscapes, portraits and politics, by bringing Mgudlandlu to present a new meaning to the genre that was always seen as manly. I do this by unpacking her work and how it was in relation with her everyday life as an artist. Mitchell’s work specifically dealing with the ambiguous landscapes is useful here since it explores the possible meanings of landscape. His work forces us to interrogate our thinking and not just see Mgudlandlu’s painting as aesthetic but to also understand that they are a discourse on their own. For that reason Mitchell forces us to reason with the process of landscapes outside seeing them as just materials that are perceived as text to be read. He says we should view landscapes as a course by which social and subjective identities are formed. He further points out that people are under the assumption that landscapes are a European construct and he argues that is an incorrect assumption. These arguments become very productive in engaging with the work of Mgudlandlu and the different arguments that I am undertaking.

The archive of Miles has been very helpful in providing a detailed assembly of the work of Mgudlandlu. The archival process of Miles took over two years to complete which was assembled between 2000 and 2002. Miles managed to gather all the artistic work of Mgudlandlu into one book. Miles’ archive was made up of her 2002 book and the exhibition that she curated in 2002. For the past years the work of Miles has provided us with an overall view of the work of Mgudlandlu in terms of the different genres she painted. Her artwork varied from landscapes, portraits to murals. She did

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* (London: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Selz, *German Expressionist Painting*, 4.

not only focus only on gouache but also painted using water colour, oil painting, etchings, drawings and chalk artworks. It makes it very hard to estimate the number of works that Mgudlandlu painted since these are very dispersed and her actual archive is very limited and mostly represented by what Miles has assembled.

### **Methodology and Thesis Structure**

For this research I have used three research methods. The first and primary research method was the in-depth excavation of all published material relevant to Mgudlandlu's artwork, and her interviews for different publications and exhibitions. Information such as original articles, reviews, newsletters and any other original documents connected to exhibitions were the primary focus of this excavation process. The Iziko South African National Gallery Library carries a great deal of information on different artists. Books by E. Miles who provides biographical detail of Gladys Mgudlandlu and John Peffer were the first to be consulted, followed by library, museum and gallery visits. This cross-institutional research method provided an opportunity to explore Mgudlandlu's biography in depth so as to better understand the environment she lived in and how she related this to her artwork. My research is thus concerned with her exhibitions as a conduit for enabling multiple readings on different exhibitions, and for understanding the artistic achievements and biography of a woman artist in South Africa.

The second research method involves an examination of the different methods of art production. I focus on the role that cultural workshops played in the lives of the artists and interrogate the lack of these institutions within the black communities. I therefore select only aspects of particularly influential and canonical approaches to characterise

and define the production of Mgudlandlu's artwork. My aim here is to uncover the role of cultural workshops, their functioning, and the groups who ran these cultural workshops. Most of these workshops were run by different artists from disadvantaged communities in South Africa, and played a role in the politics of South African art-making. I further interrogate the underlying influences of workshops and the opportunities they presented for artists, comparing black artists to white artists. For structuring this thesis, such an examination was critical in order to understand the contextual background and theoretical debates concerning the method of Mgudlandlu's work.

The third research method was to look at the different production methods that Mgudlandlu used to produce her work and also compare these with her colleagues to see variations in their processes. I then decided to focus on Kemang Wa Lehulere's work in collaboration with that of Gladys Mgudlandlu. I do this by engaging with current curatorial strategies in response to the idea of restaging curatorial techniques, and thus look at how the work of Mgudlandlu has been given new meanings by use of collaboration. Here I try to understand how curators and their audiences view the assemblies, juxtapositions and contrasts that are created by a curator.

The above mentioned methods are different forms of study that provide alternative ways of looking at complex histories, offering critical accounts of Mgudlandlu work. Therefore in this approach we are able to look at Mgudlandlu's art from a different approach to how her work was portrayed and viewed in the apartheid era. We are therefore able to understand that her artwork dealt with issues that addressed the voices of silent women, of black African artists in white spaces, and grasp the context

of their work in terms of how it is viewed and labelled. This also allows us to understand her contribution to the wider political discourse.

The aim of this research is to provide an answer to my research question: did the work of Gladys Mgudlandlu have political connotations? The study is divided into three chapters. The following three chapters assist in answering this question through different areas of focus related to this interrogation. In chapter one, I explore the background that could have led Mgudlandlu to become the type of painter she was, and how she was influenced by the cultures that surrounded her during the 1960s – 1980s. I further demonstrate how these discourses perpetuated and entrenched her view of life and art in African culture. Therefore my purpose is to undertake and draw an intellectual frame for my later investigation on how all of these propelled her into painting landscapes and portraits and how her work was a form of political resistance. The intention is not to provide an extensive account of the great variety of interdisciplinary descriptions and interpretations of how race, gender, culture and politics had an impact on her choice, but rather to establish how her art was a subtle weapon of resistance during the apartheid period.

In my second chapter I looked at the processes of making landscapes within South African politics, I explore the different ways in which Mgudlandlu produced her work and what these mean. I do this by paying attention to the role of cultural workshops and what their role was in terms of producing artworks. I further scrutinize closely the different materials Mgudlandlu used to create her paintings. I start by paying attention and carefully observing the methods she used in her painting to analyze their importance. After observing her methods I further break down what each painting

surface enabled and what it meant to work through these different surfaces.

In the third chapter I study and critically analyze the different exhibitions in which Mgudlandlu's work was shown. I reflect on the role that these exhibitions played during the apartheid period. In addition I look at how these exhibitions were a vehicle of defiance against segregation between the different races of South Africa. These exhibitions did not only act in defiance of the government of South Africa but these exhibitions also told different stories of black Africans in an apartheid South Africa through the obvious visuals of shanty homes and poor backgrounds. Lastly I demonstrate the importance of the spaces where these exhibitions were housed, what it meant for the Mgudlandlu works to be seen in these spaces, and also interrogate the kind of audiences to whom she exhibited.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE COMPLEX PERSONALITY OF GLADYS MGUDLANDLU: INTELLECTUAL, ART ACTIVIST AND PAINTER

Gladys Mgudlandlu was born in 1917 in Peddie situated between Grahamstown and East London in the Eastern Cape.<sup>14</sup> She came from a Mfengu background on her grandmother's side which influenced most of her artwork.<sup>15</sup> She was called 'Nomfanekiso' which she later explained as being significant in a sense that it informed her work as an artist. Nomfanekiso in isiXhosa refers to a picture or an image, therefore her explanation makes sense when you consider that her life revolved around paintings of portraits and landscapes. Mgudlandlu lost her mother at an early age and was brought up by her grandmother.<sup>16</sup> In her twelve years with her grandmother, she was taught how to paint murals and how to implement and tap into her background which reflected her Xhosa language and traditions. Mgudlandlu was very educated in terms of the Eastern Cape bird life. She was fascinated with birds' lives, and she became deeply familiar and obsessed with their appearance and habits. She would call the birds her 'friends.' She was referred to as 'uNontaka' in isiXhosa which meant that she was a bird.<sup>17</sup> In one of her interviews she explained her love of birds and why most of her artwork revolves around birds and said: "Birds have always been my companions. I am a very lonely person. They are the only real friends that I

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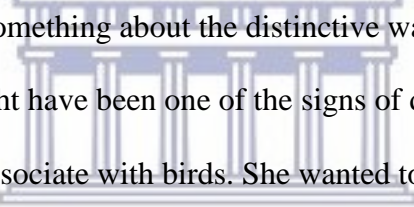
<sup>14</sup> However her date of birth is disputed there are three different dates of birth recorded. This clearly indicates strongly on how her biography was incomplete, See Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Elza Miles, *Land and Lives, A Story of Early Black Artists* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1997), 84.

<sup>16</sup> ReVisions, *Expanding the Narration of South African Art: the Campbell Smith Collection* (South Africa: Unisa Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> ReVisions. *Expanding the Narration of South African Art*.

have had. Sometimes I think I should have been a bird. I even paint like a bird. You will notice that all my landscapes are done from a bird's view, high up and far away."<sup>18</sup> This might have been influenced by her love of playing outside and climbing on high surfaces. "As a child she had often climbed the rock of the Xhosa mystic and seer, Ntsikana, and would gaze out over the landscape from that high vantage point."<sup>19</sup> This might have been the vehicle that made her paintings seem effortless through the manner in which she could 'capture' the view in her paintings from high up in the sky. And this is one of the skills that made her an unusual artist, since she was able to convey life situations that seemed isolated most times from the human eye.



She managed to illustrate something about the distinctive way birds saw things from high up in the sky, this might have been one of the signs of dealing with an identity crisis and a preference to associate with birds. She wanted to escape and be free just like a bird, she would rather adapt to the livelihood of birds than face the life she was living. From above everything seems smaller and tends to disappear the higher you go. Maybe this was her way out from dealing with life issues during the apartheid period in South Africa. Clearly for anyone to be exposed to what is happening around them they are required to be close to the ground and have their feet firmly on the ground. Most people felt that she was not in touch with what was happening around her, that is why her style of painting was ridiculed and this draws more attention to her style of painting even though she kept on dismissing these attacks on her artwork. This became one of the reasons that she was criticised so much by colleagues: they argued that she was shying away from realities of South Africa during the apartheid

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<sup>18</sup> ReVisions, *Expanding the Narration of South African Art*.

<sup>19</sup> ReVisions, *Expanding the Narration of South African Art*.



period. Schneider writes “Mnyele<sup>20</sup> believed that most black artists neglected to work with ‘the people’ as both their source and audience.”<sup>21</sup> This is somewhat relevant to the way that Mgudlandlu worked and how she identified herself as being a recluse and even her work suggested this. She always worked on her own thus it is no wonder that she was labelled a sell-out. Her working on her own might have suggested to others that she had no cares regarding how apartheid policies impacted on black people including black artists. This might have been one of the reasons people started labelling her art as only significant to the whites and not the blacks. Therefore this forced her to be increasingly a loner in her journey rather than collaborating with other artists or being viewed as an artist who fought for the struggle. She was labelled as a dreamer. Schneider further elucidates how Mnyele argued that “the older communal way of life had been emasculated by the labour, land, and ethnicity policies of the British and National Party.”<sup>22</sup> This is significant when we look at the manner in which Mgudlandlu was being criticized and was being forced to conform to how things were evolving in the sense that most artists around her was painting acts of struggle and clearly revealing their opposition towards the apartheid government. Most artists resisted the apartheid government by using all forms of expression to demonstrate that they were not in support of apartheid. Consequently on the side lines Mgudlandlu was being persecuted for painting in her particular style and not changing her style to accommodate the struggles against apartheid. Most artists during that

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<sup>20</sup> Thamsanqa Mnyele was a South African artist and an activist during the apartheid period in the 1970s and early 1980s. His work was influenced by the apartheid period focussing on township oppression by the government. Here in this case he has been referenced by Schneider to elaborate on the role of community and township art. See Elizabeth. A. Schneider, ‘Art and Communication: Ndzundza Ndebele Wall Decorations in the Transvaal’, in Anitra Nettleton, and David Hammond – Tooke (eds), *African Art in Southern Africa: From Tradition to Township* (Johnnesburg: Ad. Donker, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Schneider, *Art and Communication*, 103.

<sup>22</sup> Schneider, *Art and Communication*, 103.

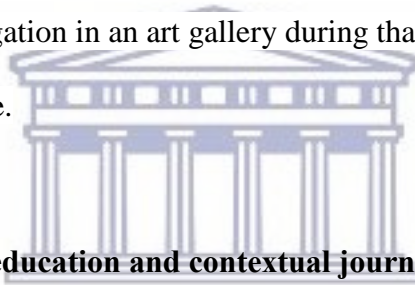
period were having bold illustrations in their different art forms which would loudly reflect the state of the nation which was under apartheid at that time.

However I intend to disrupt this notion and contend that she saw fit to address what was happening around her through the type of art she painted. It is not for everyone who is fighting for a cause to be present in a battlefield. Her artwork was more strategic than the rest of her peers at that time. The expressions in her artwork captured exactly what she wanted the world to see and know. Most of the landscapes that she painted in fact raise issues of land and segregation. These best describe her political agenda. Through her artwork and exhibitions she addressed these issues boldly without being scared of people's take on her work. That is why we find most of her work to be very symbolic of the apartheid era. As a result I find the way Mnyele unfolds Mgudlandlu's artwork very interesting. At first he reveals why Mgudlandlu's artwork was criticised, however he further on illustrates how her work was important. Mnyele believed that "those who hoped to resist the current oppressive order could find inspiration through a return to the spirit of the communal social responsibilities of old, by using cultural work to emphasize the conditions and aspirations of the people of South Africa."<sup>23</sup> Schneider emphasises Mnyele's argument here that he believed this was the only way people would be aware of what was happening around them, he believed that our culture was in itself a culture of resistance. Therefore if people kept on expressing themselves through cultural 'folk' art they would be in resistance to the colonial and apartheid government. He further believed that this type of art was the answer to marking social change in South Africa. For example, the Ndebele older rural women artists produced an art of resistance. The

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<sup>23</sup> Schneider, *Art and Communication*, 103.

work of Mnye spoke to Mgudlandlu's artwork since she understood that there was more to resistance art, she understood liberating her people through art was a way of resistance too. She was one of the first black females to exhibit in an all-white gallery studio and this on its own was the first step of breaking out as an artist and also opening doors to other black artists. Thus Mnye's statement makes so much sense. "Our work hasn't yet developed above the mere stage of protest: we're still moaning and pleading. And even that we do with inferior craftsmanship and insincerity. We must partake actively in the struggle to paint sincerely."<sup>24</sup> It is true that for emancipation to take its course we are required to understand that there are other forms of protesting than through songs, burning of tyres, and fighting. In my view breaking the laws of segregation in an art gallery during that time was enough to be seen as a form of resistance.



### **Mgudlandlu's early life, education and contextual journey**

In Miles' book *Nomfanekiso*, the biography of Mgudlandlu provides us with details of her educational background.<sup>25</sup> Mgudlandlu attended primary school from 1929 in Port Elizabeth. Coming from a Ciskei family which attend the local mission, she received a junior certificate from Healdtown Institute and qualified as a teacher at Lovedale College, Alice in 1942. According to Miles, Mgudlandlu through her schooling and college years attained A symbols for drawing and handicraft, the latter primarily leatherwork.<sup>26</sup> Mgudlandlu moved back to Port Elizabeth and registered to train as a nurse at Victoria Hospital, but did not complete her training before moving with her parents in 1944 to Langa, Cape Town. While in Cape Town she started to nurse at

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<sup>24</sup> Schneider, *Art and Communication*, 103.

<sup>25</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 13.

Brooklyn Chest Hospital. And this is where she started to attend art classes in Rondebosch. Miles further explains in her biography that Mgudlandlu's interest in the human figure as a motif for painting derived from her training as a nurse. Therefore the manner in which she turned out is not surprising that in her painting she is able to capture lifelike paintings drawing from her studies of the human figure.

Since the 1900s there had been considerable western cultural influence in education, and we can see suggestions revealing the missionaries' influence on her life. Thus growing up spending most of her time at Healdtown Comprehensive School she became influenced by certain modern ideas.<sup>27</sup> These influences of modernity helped in shaping her thinking and also restructured her values. When we read Peterson we start to understand that the role of missionaries in South Africa was to shape the minds of the Africans. They tried by all means to get Africans to view the world differently and bring them into conflict with their traditional ways.<sup>28</sup> They knew if they indoctrinated the Africans with Christianity and embedded their values in education, Africans would never be able to ascertain their hidden agenda. Thus the saying that 'a scholar takes from his master' has some relevance to Mgudlandlu's life. We can clearly argue that the education that Mgudlandlu received shaped who she was since no education system is value free but contributes to the calibre of students it produces. So if we look closely at Harries' argument, we start to understand the power of how missionaries had a way of engraving their doctrines into South African literacy: "if literacy is imbued with different meanings in different contexts, learning

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<sup>27</sup> Healdtown Comprehensive School is a Methodist school located near Fort Beaufort, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. It was established in 1855 and assumed its current name in 1994, having been known for most of its history as simply "Healdtown". The founder was John Ayliff, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary from England.

<sup>28</sup> For recent debates on missionaries and conversion see Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping and the Work of Imagination in Kenya* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2004).

to read will never be value-free; and nor will it be synonymous with reading to learn.”<sup>29</sup> Considering Harries’ argument it is clear that the values of education instilled by the missionaries in their students encouraged them to want to be different and better according to what they were taught. For that reason the Mnyele argument is significant when we look at how the missionaries disregarded the communal way and look at them as being primitive. They undermined African people from working together and sort of implied that each person an individual on his own. Clearly according to Mnyele this was not part of an African culture to only think of yourself and not your community. Therefore the way that Mgudlandlu worked and carried herself might be subject to the education that she received, and also the in doctrines of Christianity would have all added to her reclusive manner. This is the reason why she could never be subjected to what Mnyele argues in *Art and Communication*. He argues that if people kept on expressing themselves through cultural ‘folk’ art they would be in resistance to the colonial and apartheid government. According to Miles while Mgudlandlu was in the Eastern Cape she was only subjected to her grandmother as a mentor and she was taught how to paint in her grandmother’s house. We have no mention of cultural workshops mentioned during her upbringing hence I argue that Mgudlandlu was never subjected to this type of setting or an established school of painting. This influenced her approach to teaching.

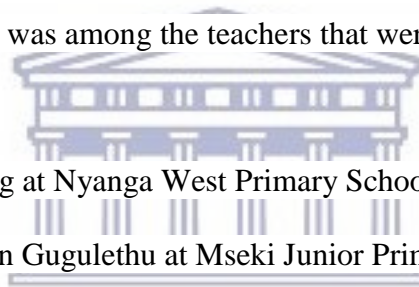
As mentioned above, Mgudlandlu worked in nursing for two years in Brooklyn, Cape Town. In 1947 she resumed teaching at Athlone Bantu Community School. The school was formed and established by the Methodist Church.<sup>30</sup> She taught at the

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<sup>29</sup> Patrick Harries, ‘Missionaries, Marxists and Magic: Power and the Politics of Literacy in South- East Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, No. 3 (2001), 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 16.

Athlone Bantu Community School for 15 years. “During this time she offered guidance to approximately 800 learners, many of whom became teachers and artists.”<sup>31</sup> According to Miles, in one of Mgudlandlu’s interviews she narrates how Mgudlandlu was surprised by the pupils she taught, she said “Some children come to us straight from the reserves and it is interesting to see how they express themselves.”<sup>32</sup> “They don’t draw tall buildings and fast cars, but recreate scenes from their homeland as they remember it and as they have learned to know it.”<sup>33</sup> When the Bantu Education Act was passed in 1953 Mgudlandlu was forced to move from her Rylands shack to be close to where she taught. According to Miles, “Black teachers were moved from Athlone to teach in Langa, and the black townships of Nyanga and Gugulethu.”<sup>34</sup> Mgudlandlu was among the teachers that were affected by this act.



In 1953 she started teaching at Nyanga West Primary School, she taught there for two years and moved to teach in Gugulethu at Mseki Junior Primary School with some of her colleagues from Athlone.<sup>35</sup> While Mgudlandlu taught in Gugulethu she moved to two different schools in search of a bigger building to accommodate the number of students the school hosted. In 11 January 1965 that is when they moved to a bigger school called Nobantu Lower Primary School this were they were employed as full time teachers.<sup>36</sup> The school Nobantu Lower Primary School was established in 1966. The school was considered a model institution and its learners excelled in singing and art.<sup>37</sup> According to Miles the school motto was self-explanatory: *Ekugqibeleni*

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<sup>31</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 6.

*sakoyisa* (At last we conquer).<sup>38</sup> Mgudlandlu remained in Cape Town until she passed away in 1979.

She craved success and wanted to help her community to achieve success since this is part of what was imparted to her by her own teachers. We can envisage that education was part of what made her curious: it was a weapon that she used to measure her success not only through education but through crossing racial barriers in terms of her choices when it came to her work. Even though Mgudlandlu had some influences by the missionaries she did not want to be confined to their ways of doing things and she started by introducing a different manner in terms of education. Her progress in education challenged the notion that women are meant to be in the kitchen and not work or further their studies. With Mgudlandlu it was more than just challenging the notion of how women should behave, she challenged the domestication of woman by striving to be different. Her way of teaching was therefore very innovative, and she strove to be a better teacher. We are told her way of teaching art was different from the norm, she would send students out to the field to collect waste materials and construct whatever came to mind.<sup>39</sup> She believed that the minds of her students should not be confined to a certain way and they should rather be open to explore different styles of painting. In one of her many interviews she was asked about her teaching method, and her response was “she simply gave the learners the necessary materials and told them to start.”<sup>40</sup> “Each one approached the task in his her own way and she was there to just help them make it better.”<sup>41</sup> She was an advocate for art around black communities where she would provide advice in how parents should embrace their

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<sup>38</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 14.

children when they are artistic. “She asked teachers and mothers not to punish children when they drew on books, doors, walls and windows at school or at home.”<sup>42</sup> She said that children should be free in the “free world of art” and that parents should encourage their children by providing them with drawing books, pencils and crayons, to give them freedom to interpret their idea of the world around them.<sup>43</sup>

She therefore played a huge role as a teacher at Nobantu Lower Primary School in 1965 - 1977.<sup>44</sup> According to Miles, “Mgudlandlu contributed to the development of the school. One of her art classes consisted of fifty, eight to ten year old pupils.”<sup>45</sup> Miles further narrates how Mgudlandlu in 1967 curated a successful exhibition at the school with assistance from fellow teachers.<sup>46</sup> As a result she was seen as one of the people that contributed to the development of the school. During this period of 1967 - 1968 she was commissioned by the Department of Education to stage an exhibition through the use of murals.<sup>47</sup> All of this was just an extension of her educational journey and it opened up lots of possibilities in taking advantage of her passion. This also allowed her to express herself more and engage in her love for art. Her way of allowing freedom to her students to express themselves artistically saw her gaining ground with the students and the school. Also her outspokenness in encouraging parents to allow students to express themselves at home through drawings helped her in becoming popular among parents and students. Therefore we can argue that for Mgudlandlu art was a tool for self-exploration that helped her in interpreting her aspirations as a black urban female in relation to other races. I tend to label her as a

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<sup>42</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 14.

<sup>44</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 15.

<sup>46</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 15.



strategist and a thinker for her to gain such ground in a much marginalised role of an artist, not just in the white community but also in the black community which takes a lot of persuasion. Throughout her time there was no one she could compare herself to or learn and gain from as her mentor. These things were not available during the apartheid period, books and schools had no educational lessons that spoke about black artists or encouraged students to take up art as a subject. However Mgudlandlu was a revolutionary and revolutionised black minds to aspire toward becoming more than what a classroom articulates.

### **Race and Gender Roles in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

It is not difficult to be a celebrity in a situation in which others sharing a similar history have been prevented from succeeding by a vicious discriminatory system. Being the first this, that or the other, though reflecting a personal accomplishment, should also be seen as an indictment of a society which has denied many more black people the opportunity to excel. The double jeopardy of being black and woman compounds the problem for me.<sup>48</sup>

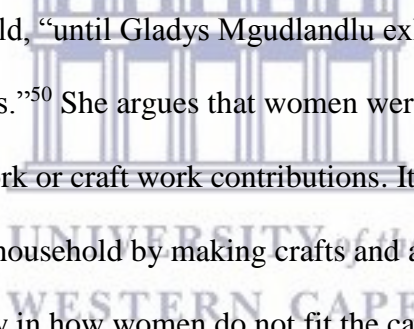
Mamphela Ramphele.

Although the apartheid system was discriminatory to black people but it was more profound when it came to women. Being a black female in a society that is very biased in terms of gender and race meant Mgudlandlu had to develop expertise in how to handle her critics. Her fight compared to her white female colleagues was formidable; she did not only have to deal with the issue of being side-lined because of her gender she had to deal with cultural stereotypes as well. She had to defy debates

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<sup>48</sup> M. Ramphele, *A Life*, Second Edition (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996), 180–181.

of what a black female's role is according to the dominant notions of African culture. Women in general are ostracized in roles such as the ones that Mgudlandlu embarked on, which was being the 'first black woman to exhibit'<sup>49</sup> in South Africa. According to African culture this is not what African women are known for or should be doing. At that time she was not seen as a pioneer of anything. However the manner in which she inserted herself into South African history makes her a pioneer among black females in the art scene. Even though her role was never about feminism as such, Mgudlandlu found herself being the advocate of a feminist agenda. She became the face of an overtly politicised imagery of women artists of her time. She disrupted different discourses related to female black artists in South Africa.



According to Marion Arnold, "until Gladys Mgudlandlu exhibited, black women artists had been anonymous."<sup>50</sup> She argues that women were never recorded individually for their artwork or craft work contributions. It was only seen as part of generating income for the household by making crafts and art pieces. Arnold argues that there is still a difficulty in how women do not fit the career path of being an artist. She writes "indeed, it is still weighted against black women, for craft is seen as the appropriate creative activity for black women and a route to economic empowerment, art is done by men."<sup>51</sup> She further argues that in South Africa there have always been gender roles rather than 'gender-neutral' roles in particular domains. However prior to the post-apartheid period it has been very difficult to dismiss this type of marginalisation when it comes to women in the art world. Arnold refers us to 1981 when the South African government formulated a Commission of Inquiry into the

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<sup>49</sup> This statement is very much debated and challenged.

<sup>50</sup> Marion Arnold, *Women and Art in South Africa* (Cape Town: St Martin's Press, 1996), 13.

<sup>51</sup> Arnold, *Women and Art in South Africa*, 14.

Creative Arts. The government appointed ten men, and when this was questioned the response was “in the field of arts there is not necessarily a female point of view” and continued, “while in certain areas a woman’s point of view is important, for example with abortion, I’ve never looked at the arts from a sexist view point.”<sup>52</sup> This was clearly an indoctrinated point of view derived from cultural norms of women’s roles. It was not just racial discrimination but gender discrimination which was not based on anyone’s abilities as an artist but based on one’s gender.

The arrival of Mgudlandlu on the art scene saw her challenging these connotations and resisting being labelled as a female and also the labelling of the type of art she was doing. It was not enough that she was dealing with rejection from her own people for not being woman enough, now she finds her work being assessed by her colleagues who consider themselves as masters of the art trade. Her work was never considered on its merit or she herself in her own right of being an artist. That is why she was receiving attacks from different artists such as Bessie Head and James Mitchell. She also had to deal with her work being critiqued as ‘naïve’ since she was a woman from an African context. Her field of work as an artist challenged the status quo; it challenged the perceptions of her race and her gender. In most cases in the apartheid era black people were not considered to be artists who could excel at their craft. Also it was frowned upon being a female and working in the art industry. One exception was fellow artist George Pemba who paid tribute to her saying, “She is an honour to our womanhood, since they have always been regarded as useful for scrubbing floors and hoeing corn and mealie fields.”<sup>53</sup> Being an artist was always considered a man’s position and a female position was being the caretaker of the

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<sup>52</sup> Arnold, *Women and Art in South Africa*, 14.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew Krouse, ‘Bird Lady Still Soars’, <https://mg.co.za/article/2002-10-10-bird-lady-still-soars> (Accessed: 07.06.2018).

household and the children. Therefore we can argue the problem here was more about what black African women can or cannot do in the art world. Therefore when we look at how her work was framed or looked down upon, it is easy for us to see how racialized and discriminatory the critiques were.

Even though Mgudlandlu was taught by the likes of her grandmother and she received advice and encouragement from artists like Marjorie Wallace and Katrine Harries who encouraged her in her painting skills, her colleagues found ways to point out her shortcomings.<sup>54</sup> These centred on her lack of ‘technical training’ and made her a target for other white artists who were technically skilled and had also studied the field. We can argue that they saw her as someone who painted to pass time and not as professionals like they were. We are told that James Mitchell frowned upon the manner Mgudlandlu painted. “Mitchell remembers Mgudlandlu, crayon in hand, covering a sheet of paper in one colour. Then, in the roughly covered surface, she discovered images lurking which she explored by delineating their shapes and deciphering their narratives.”<sup>55</sup> However Mgudlandlu always had a way to answer critiques such as Mitchell’s. She told him that “the picture presented itself to her to develop.”<sup>56</sup> This is just to prove that she was not willing to conform to the norms of how artists should operate. She was not interested in being technically inclined but to let art present itself to her. We can sum up her technique as spiritual, working from the subconscious where she would see within the lines that she created through the use of her crayons and colour.

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<sup>54</sup> ReVisions, *Expanding the Narration of South African Art*.

<sup>55</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 16.

In her community she was a hero, she broke stereotypes and provided hope for women. She was one of those women that allowed other women to dream or aspire to be more than housewives and housekeepers. She gave them back their self-worth by giving them an identity that says I am more than wife and a mother, and I am not imprisoned by culture. We have come to understand that Mgudlandlu never allowed herself to be dictated to by her skin colour and gender. She never internalised the obstacles of race, class and gender even though these seemed like things that are orchestrated to create a delay or stop her from being an artist. She did not allow the fact that she was black to stop her from pursuing her dreams and also bettering her craft. The fact is that in black families women are seen as home makers and not as artists and their role of practicing art is seen as passing time. Mgudlandlu in her work challenged these gender roles and this saw her being an outcast from what is traditionally accepted from a woman in African culture.

### **Radical South Africa**

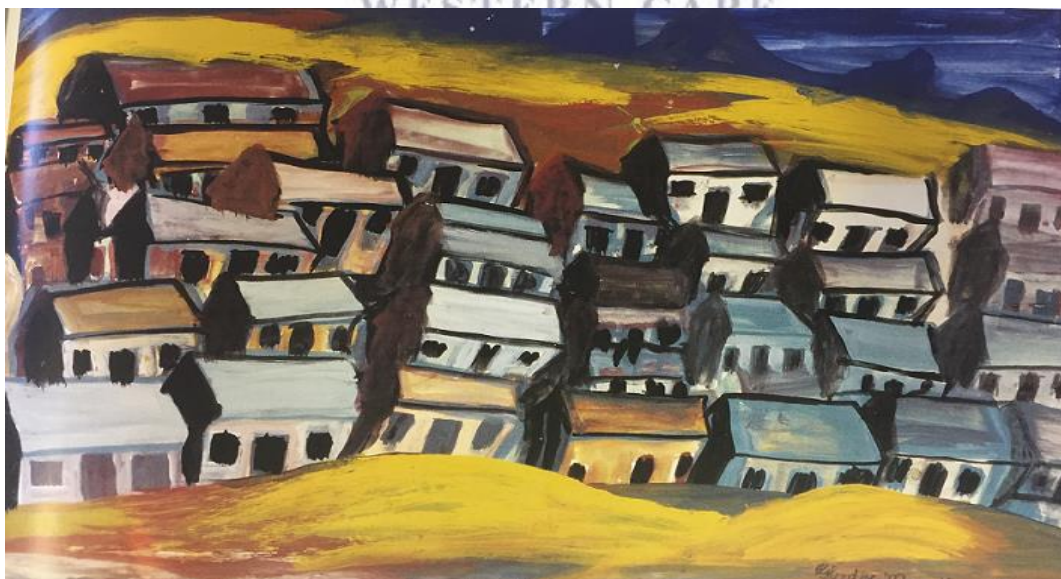
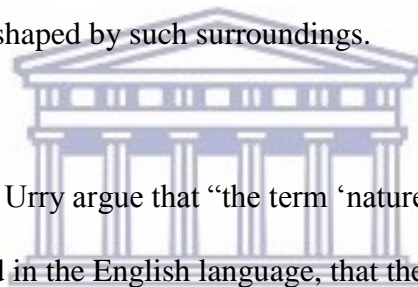


Figure 1. Houses in the Township by Gladys Mgudlandlu, 1970 (Iziko South African National Gallery)

It is important that we understand the South African landscape is a space that is occupied by politics. The landscape itself is very political, for the most part between 1948 – 1994 South African policymaking and legislations were mainly dominated by the pro-Afrikaner Nationalist Party which was the apartheid government. Therefore it befits to associate the country's landscape with the bodies that occupy the landscape. For Africans, landscapes meant different things to different races. For some it was more inclined to reflect aesthetics associated with nature and this was how in most cases the elite thought of these spaces, whereas for black bodies the type of landscapes that they were subjected to revealed poverty and the different violations of basic human rights to which African people were subjected. Thus the landscapes that Mgudlandlu painted were shaped by such surroundings.



Phil Macnaghten and John Urry argue that “the term ‘nature’ is perhaps the most complex and difficult word in the English language, that the idea of nature contains an enormous amount of human history, and that our current understandings of nature derive from an immensely complicated array of ideas, linked to many of the key concepts of western thought, such as God, Idealism, Democracy, Modernity, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and so on.”<sup>57</sup> Therefore it makes sense that we interrogate landscapes as representations of nature, since nature is a man-made creation which clearly conveys the element of human intervention. Therefore the spaces that black people were moved to during the apartheid period was solely created to keep them outside the central urban areas, also to make sure that they did not disrupt the landscape in the urban areas that was preserved for the ‘elite’. Hence it makes sense to argue that nature is fundamentally intertwined with the dominant ideas

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<sup>57</sup> Phil. Macnaghten and John Urry, *Contested Natures* (London: Sage Publications 1998), 7-15.

of society. This is to demonstrate that dominant ideologies still represent a significant role in the constructions of these ideas of nature. It is also of importance that we understand the role that was played by the apartheid government in constructing these different spaces of nature. These natural spaces were created to suit a certain group of individuals and they were not seen as suitable for everyone. “This nature has been seen to consist of both separate ‘virgin’ territories of often extraordinary natural abundance, and of people who are seen as more ‘natural’ as workers and later as objects of the colonizing tourist gaze.”<sup>58</sup> Macnaghten and Urry further insinuate that these natures are not static. “They are not fixed and eternal but depend on particular historical and geographical determination, as well as on the processes by which nature and the natural is culturally constructed and sustained, particularly by reference to what is taken to be the ‘other’.”<sup>59</sup> This permits us to comprehend that for the natural landscapes to exist they are codependent on a particular history and geographical determination. Mgudlandlu’s landscape paintings carried and produced images of the real South Africa according to the eyes of those subjected to that space. However people outside of her space were not accustomed to her interpretation of landscapes as her landscapes revealed the ‘other’. In *The Visual Elements of Landscape*, Jackle references J.B Jackson who suggests that we should “take as a guiding principle the notion that landscapes were to be read and interpreted according to function rather than merely appraised visually.”<sup>60</sup> Jackson argues that our perception and the way we look at landscapes should be adjusted and our emphasis should not just be based on the aesthetics only but into other issues relating to social structures, cultural structures, economics and politics embedded in that specific space. It is important that we understand that landscape spaces are inhabited by humans therefore they are

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<sup>58</sup> Macnaghten and Urry, *Contested Natures*, 7-15.

<sup>59</sup> Macnaghten and Urry, *Contested Natures*, 7-15.

<sup>60</sup> Jackle, *The Visual Elements of Landscape*, x.

human driven. Individuals inhabiting these spaces find their behaviours governed by the appearance of the space and also how everything is structured around them.

Therefore Mgudlandlu's interest in painting landscapes was somehow how she wanted to interrogate, perhaps, how landscapes are generally represented. Doing so in that manner she was able to make a solid statement that landscapes are produced as a social idea. That is why there was a radical conversion in the manner that she uses to paint her paintings. The fashion in which she used to paint her landscape evolved to highlight social injustices that were predominant at that time. Thus in many cases her landscapes were able to produce and translate whatever was required at that moment. Figure 2 below, 'Houses in the Hills', is a great example of how her work captured and translated what was happening around her during the apartheid period. The 'Houses in the Hill' painting was a direct result of Mgudlandlu's move from Athlone to Gugulethu where she started to paint what she saw every day in her space. In this case it was shacks, everywhere she looked she could only see these tiny houses made out of metal sheets. Her point of reference was changing compared to how she used to paint before her relocation. In the past she used to paint these beautiful landscapes that eloquently displayed the Eastern Cape scenery which were aesthetically remarkable. That is why Jakle's argument is so important that "landscapes are centres of human intent and those inclinations to act are cued visually."<sup>61</sup> This is quite clear in Mgudlandlu's work, we are able to see how the change in scenery influenced the manner in which she painted, and she was driven by what was in her sight which was the social ills of staying in a township under the apartheid era. Gugulethu was the second black township that people were forcedly moved to by the apartheid government. The term Gugulethu means igugu lethu which refers to 'our pride' and

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<sup>61</sup> Jakle, *The Visual Elements of Landscape*, x.



this is the name that was given to the second black location in Cape Town.<sup>62</sup>

“Gugulethu residents included Africans forcibly moved from Windermere when it was declared a Coloured area. An estimated number of 735 families were moved from Windermere to Gugulethu. Windermere is an urban area in the vicinity of Lansdowne, located south-east of Athlone in Cape Town. By 1960 the number of people evicted from Windermere had increased to 3128 families - including those from Retreat and Athlone. In November 1961, 2 000 Steenberg residents who were threatened with removal signed a petition protesting forced removals to Gugulethu.”<sup>63</sup> Gugulethu Township was established after the first black township Langa could not accommodate all the people that were moved as part of the Group Areas Act 1950 which was created by the apartheid government to impose segregation with acts of land dispossession and forced removals. Gugulethu is situated 15 km from the city centre of Cape Town. This changed Ngudlandlu’s manner of doing things, prompted by all the elements that surrounded her daily mundane life. Therefore this painting (Figure 1) represents something about how her mind would see and think politically about her space. Her new insight was visible in how she constructed these social histories in her landscape paintings.

I would argue that maybe her style of painting might have initially seemed what Bessie Head called naïve, since she was not subjected to the ill treatment of apartheid coming from the Eastern Cape. Mgudlandlu even after her move to Cape Town she still continued painting the lifestyle of the Eastern Cape. Miles writes that Kalati in *Imvo Zabantsudu* argued that she “relied on memories of her Peddie childhood,

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Gugulethu Township’, [www.sahistory.org.za/place/gugulethu-township](http://www.sahistory.org.za/place/gugulethu-township). (Accessed: 10.06.2018).

<sup>63</sup> ‘Gugulethu Township’

instead of painting life around her in Cape Town.”<sup>64</sup> “He concluded that she could learn a lot from others as to variety in the subject matter and flexibility in treatment.”<sup>65</sup> When she came to Cape Town and became a teacher she taught at a mixed race school which sheltered her from realities of black communities and other black schools. This might be the reason why her painting at that period was thought to lack something in revealing what the apartheid system was doing in South Africa. The landscape below in Fig. 2 was her way of articulating the inequalities that were happening around her new setting. In 1953 Mgudlandlu’s work took a new direction and became some sort of representation, not just of her art work but a representation of her new community.

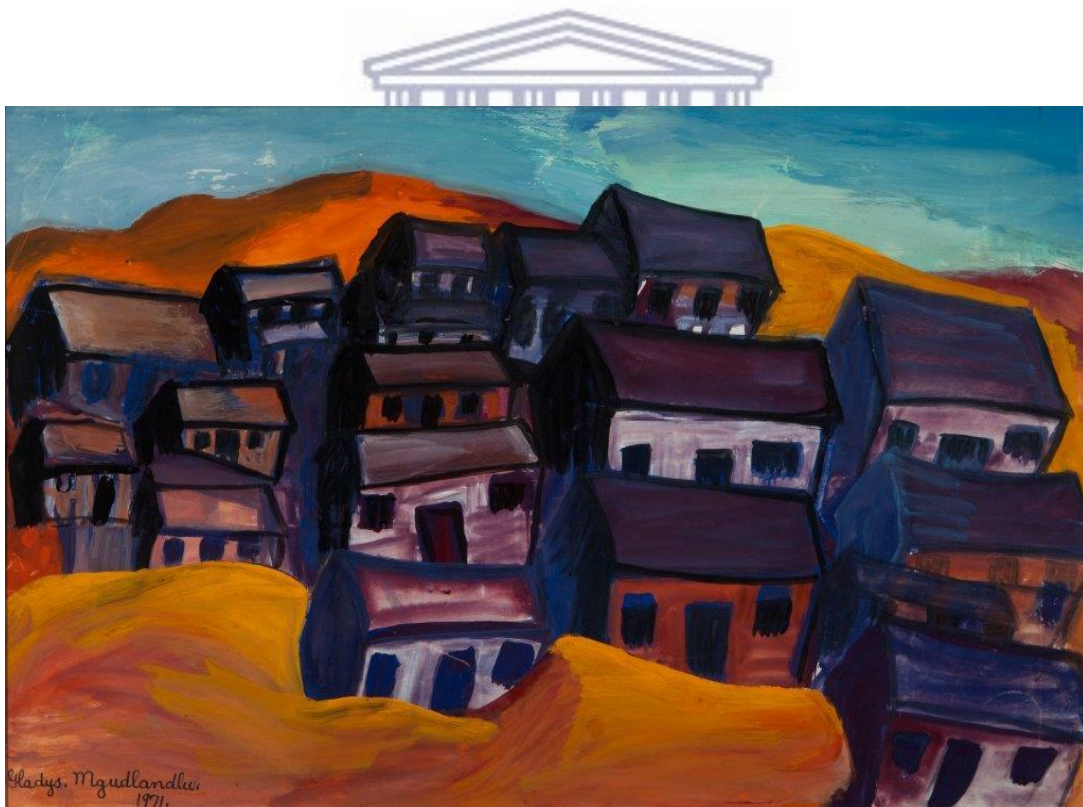


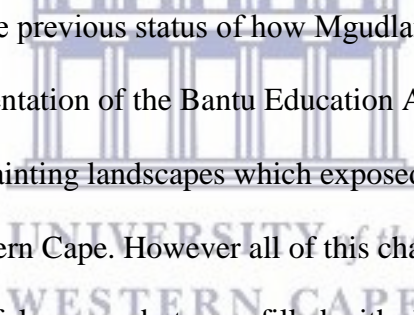
Figure 2. ‘Houses in the Hills’ by Gladys Mgudlandlu, 1971 (Iziko South African National Gallery)

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<sup>64</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 7.

In a period of more overt political representation, landscapes were viewed and mainly used as backdrops when painting or taking photographs and in the ways people referred to them. However in this case Mgudlandlu through her paintings she forces us to interrogate these truths and not only see these spaces as backdrops of nature but see them for the role they play in our social constructions as different communities. Macnaghten and Urry allude to the very same argument that Mgudlandlu is raising that there is more to these spaces than mere backdrops. They argue that the “exceptional levels of exploitation and degradation of land and landscapes and of animal species which many humans now find intolerable, human themselves have suffered.....”<sup>66</sup>



This account answers to the previous status of how Mgudlandlu’s paintings have changed since the implementation of the Bantu Education Act in 1953. Prior to this act she prided herself on painting landscapes which exposed beautiful mountains, the natural scenery of the Eastern Cape. However all of this changed and her landscapes no longer portrayed beautiful scenery but were filled with shacks and roads without any ‘nature’. It would be fair to argue that some of the changes in her paintings were the only way she knew in regard to taking back her power and causing a resistance because of her being powerless in fighting the government in regard to her relocation to teach in Gugulethu in 1965. For Mgudlandlu it was very important to let South Africa know the conditions to which black people were subjected. Malcolm Andrews identifies with this and says “Certain groups of people, institutions and ideas possess power, and so are dominant or hegemonic, they are ‘powerful’ in the colloquial sense, while others are comparatively if not wholly powerless, and are pushed to the literal

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<sup>66</sup> Macnaghten and Urry, *Contested Natures*, 7.

and figurative margins of the prevailing cultural, political and economic order...Power is exercised to constrain, limit, forbid, detain and so on.”<sup>67</sup> Therefore here we see two different forms of power, one is the power that the apartheid government had and the second is the power of the black space.

The power of the apartheid government was displayed in the manner in which they were able to put in place these different laws on segregation and forced removal. These acts are laws that took away the right of human dignity and the right to be able to live in any area in South Africa. The apartheid government knew that by pushing and reclassifying people based on their race meant that people will be ruled and subjected to the space they occupied. However in the case of the power of the black space people occupied, the space itself revealed injustices and also how these people have been stripped of their power to own land, plant and have livestock. However the people occupying these spaces have used the spaces to deal with issues of inequality and racial discrimination. Their form of defiance could be seen through different cultural murals, the music they sang and also how they embarked on mass action, involving civil disobedience, strikes, boycotts and other forms of non-violent resistance. All these forms of resistance took place in their own spaces and beyond which they challenged the power at hand. That is why we are able to understand how the role of landscape goes beyond nature and aesthetics, and that landscape provides a space of interrogation.

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<sup>67</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 111.

## The legacy of Mgudlandlu: Aspects of her influences in Art



Figure 3. Untitled by Gladys Mgudlandlu, 1970 (Iziko South African National Gallery)

Gladys Mgudlandlu only started to paint seriously after the death of her grandmother which was around 1957 when she was forty years old. According to Miles she started painting after she studied and observed country life. This was the time that South Africa was already heavily controlled by the apartheid regime. Her paintings were mostly of landscapes, but she also painted different murals in her home. She referred to herself as not belonging to any school of art, however her work consisted of a mixture of expressionism and impressionism, and therefore she calls herself a ‘dreamer– Imaginist’.<sup>68</sup> According to Michelle Gaugy, “expressionism intends exactly what the word indicates. Its primary intention is the *expression* of feelings or spirit and it therefore in effect gives an artist permission to distort image or even dispense with image altogether, in order to better convey emotions or spirit.”<sup>69</sup> That is why as an artist she was never confined to a specific technique or genre. The same

<sup>68</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 51.

<sup>69</sup> Michelle Gaugy, ‘What’s the difference between expressionism and impressionism (art/music)?’ [www.quora.com/Whats-the-difference-between-expressionism-and-impressionism](http://www.quora.com/Whats-the-difference-between-expressionism-and-impressionism) (Accessed: 04.09 2018).

encouragement she bestowed upon her students to be adventurous when painting and following their heart was the same principle she used in her own work. Arnold states that “artworks never merely imitate life, they imitate life from specific point of view.”<sup>70</sup> In her paintings and murals she allowed herself to embrace different art materials such as oil, ink, crayons, gouache and many different forms such as plastic. She was more spontaneous and curious of how the artwork will come out. She never concentrated on fine lines or different tones. For her it was more about how the art will present itself and she would express herself from there. According to Miles, “she often painted all through the night, by the light of paraffin lamp, to give expression in vivid colours to her vision and dreams.”<sup>71</sup> At first she was forced to paint using a paraffin lamp, however when electricity was introduced she continued using the paraffin lamp. In one of her interviews she articulates her reasons for continuing with the use of the paraffin lamp: “I paint from 9 pm to 2 am, I get shadows in the light of this paraffin lamp and I develop my pictures from these. During the day it is too flat and I can’t work.”<sup>72</sup> It was during this period that Mgudlandlu won many hearts in the Cape Town art scene and was known by many as the African queen in Nyanga.<sup>73</sup> Her first exhibition was hosted by the Liberal Party in 1961, and this event took place in their offices. The exhibition was hosted in the wake of political violence and repression that took place in Sharpeville where many South Africans resisting the enforced pass laws had been attacked by police.

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<sup>70</sup> Arnold, *Women and Art in South Africa*, 14.

<sup>71</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Mgudlandlu was a teacher for 15 years in Athlone Bantu Community School, however she was forced to move to Nyanga in 1953 during the Bantu Education Act when the school was declared for coloured people by the apartheid government, see. Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*. 7.

Miles' biography of Mgudlandlu *Nomfanekiso* provides us with detailed specifics of her curated work.<sup>74</sup> Her first exhibition was held in Cape Town in 1961 at the offices of the Liberal Party, which was soon followed by another exhibition in 1964 in Johannesburg, at Adler Fielding galleries. Both these exhibition were solo exhibitions which attracted great numbers. The Liberal Party of South Africa was founded by Alan Stewart Paton in 1953 to offer a non-racial alternative to apartheid.<sup>75</sup> The purpose of the political party was solely to achieve liberal progress for all in South Africa, though it is argued that at first it was very conservative. However its mandate was to change the minds of the whites hence it suffered a lot at the hands of the apartheid government. This party agonised about allowing the marginalised to have their own voice and also how to resist the ethnic segregation that was instigated by the apartheid government. That is why the Liberal Party was one organisation that opened its doors to Mgudlandlu to exhibit for them. This was a way of defying the whole of South Africa, a way of introducing marginalised voices to what was only seen as a white venue. Mgudlandlu was part of making history in South Africa since her exhibition was during the time the Liberal Party was under bans and sanctions. We can claim that her exhibition was somehow a mode of response to what happened in a previous year where the Nationalist government retaliated harshly against the nationwide campaign of civil disobedience. In Sharpeville, the police opened fire on demonstrators, killing sixty-nine. Protesters had left their passes at home and marched to the police station to present themselves for arrest; and some 30 000 objectors also marched from Langa to Cape Town.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*.

<sup>75</sup> Alan Paton, 'South African Writer', [www.brittanica.com/biography/Alan-Stewart-Paton#ref74804](http://www.brittanica.com/biography/Alan-Stewart-Paton#ref74804) (Accessed: 10.06.2018).

<sup>76</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*.

During the course of all of her exhibitions she found herself among spaces that only catered for white people, she was not even allowed to make use of the lavatory in the exhibition hall. On the other hand she made history when she was accompanied by Dawn Haggie to the Park Station lavatory since she did not want to go alone. At the time she might not have seen this as something that would create an uproar for the nation however after this came out in papers everyone was talking about the ills that were created by segregation. Not only did she have to walk a distance from the space that she was exhibiting, but she was also subjected to using a different toilet which was meant for blacks only. She was known to cause a stir when it comes to spaces that were regulated by different racial acts however her work was able to break those stereotypes and show that art is for everyone and not only certain racial groups. She was also able to show that black artists are good at their work and should not be forced and boxed in to 'resistance art' to be able to fight against the apartheid system. Based only on the spaces and people she interacted with during the period of her exhibitions we are able to see how she always found herself among white audiences. Miles articulates how she was photographed having tea with the wives of the members of parliament.<sup>77</sup> There is a photo of herself, Mrs A. E. Trollip the wife of the Minister of Immigration, Mrs M. C. Botha the wife of Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, and including Mrs P. M. K. Le Roux the wife of the Minister of Agriculture and Technical Services. This photo was seen as the first step to social relations and integrating different races in one room sharing a common interest, in this case tea. This photograph ended up causing an uproar within the National Party. Members of the Liberal Party were upset at how the wives could entertain a black lady when they know there are laws prohibiting this, however there

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<sup>77</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 27.



was nothing that they could do since the husbands defended their wives. They argued that they have no say as to who their wives interacted with or which artist sparks interest in them. This only made work harder for the vision of change in which Mgudlandlu saw South Africa as a place that will accommodate all races and everyone will live as equals. That is why she never swayed in what she doing and rather stuck to her guns and continued with her work.

Throughout this period in her career as an artist in South Africa she had four solo exhibitions and two touring exhibitions around the country. To date her recorded exhibitions are seven. In 2003 she received (posthumously) the Presidential Order of Ikhamanga Silver for her pioneering contribution to visual arts in South Africa. This landed her the title of being the first female artist in South Africa, even though this is contested by other artists. Arnold writes “Mgudlandlu commented: I think I can claim to be the first African women in the country to hold an exhibition. As far as I know I am the only African woman who has taken painting seriously, it has become my first love and there is nothing else I want to do.”<sup>78</sup> In Mgudlandlu’s work it is difficult to see open suggestions of the political situation that surrounded her in her actual work. There are a few of her paintings where there are political references to apartheid, this is evident in most of her landscapes where you find paintings of Nyanga, Gugulethu and the political figure named Patrice Lumumba. The manner in which these first two paintings ‘Houses in the Hills’ and ‘Houses in Township’ spaces have been portrayed is an indication of the manner in which these communities are living, through the way

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<sup>78</sup> Arnold, *Women and Art in South Africa*, 13.

the houses have been painted. However most of her paintings give reference to her traditional Fingo background.<sup>79</sup>

Mgudlandlu references this background by paying tribute to folklore, the ancient craft of woodcarving, and traditions.<sup>80</sup> She pursued this even though she was criticised for not painting the political struggle and what most South Africans went through during the apartheid regime. However she was the first black female to paint a portrait of a political figure, namely Patrice Lumumba. Based on this portrait she became known in the political scene because Lumumba was an African leader of the Congolese National Movement who proceeded to become the first Prime Minister of the independent Congo, though he was soon assassinated.<sup>81</sup> However she still received negative reviews from other artist such as Bessie Head who criticized Mgudlandlu “for being an escapist who fed white guilt, who served to entertain white audiences.”<sup>82</sup> Bessie Head’s argument was based on the fact that she believed that none of Mgudlandlu’s work challenged the status quo in regard to the apartheid regime. However with the influence and advice from Katrine Harries, Marjorie Wallace and Ray Alexander Simons the work of Mgudlandlu started to change from painting designated white areas to painting her local area such as Langa and Gugulethu. “Ray Alexander Simons, the national secretary of the Federation of South

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<sup>79</sup> It is important that I state that the term Fingo is surrounded with a lot of controversy since it was a term coined during the colonial period. According to Allan Webster “Fingo was the original name coined by missionaries and colonial officials, and points out that it is a Latin word which means to form or alter with the intention of untruth.” When searching we find a very interesting meaning that depicts Fingo as ‘to force’. “Webster continues to state that the term Mfengu was developed later as an Africanized version of Fingo and popularized in the 1950s by white anthropologists working for the South African government.” See, Allan C. Webster, ‘Land Expropriation and Labour Extraction Under Cape Colonial Rule: the War of 1835 and The ‘Emancipation’ of the Fingo’ (Unpublished MAFA Thesis, Rhodes University, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 7.

<sup>81</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Leila Dougan, Gladys Mgudlandla, Escapist or Black Irma, 04. 08. 2014. [www.thejournalist.org.za/gladys-mgudlandlu](http://www.thejournalist.org.za/gladys-mgudlandlu) , 08.11.2017.

African Women and noted trade unionist, encouraged her to paint scenes of Langa, Gugulethu and Nyanga.”<sup>83</sup> When she took the advice to heart her painting started to expose the inequalities that people of South Africa were living under.

These paintings when juxtaposed with her previous paintings of the Eastern Cape are a big contrast. With these two paintings Figures 1 and 2 and the other paintings depicting the Cape Flats it is hard to dispute that she was not able to see how the colour white had a greater power in South African politics. For Mgudlandlu art was an escape for her, she saw art as something that brought peace into one’s soul, however when we look at her paintings in the time that she was stationed in Langa through forced removals by the Group Areas Act 1950 we are able to see how she changed from escapism to painting the grim lifestyle of black African locations. Mgudlandlu’s work has always been subtle and cognisant of what was happening around her. Looking at the manner in which Jane Alexander exposed the apartheid regime through her sculptures we can somehow argue that it was similar to Mgudlandlu’s. They both chose a subtle manner to address the inequalities, the marginalisation and reign of terror of the apartheid era. Alexander produced a sculpture called ‘The Butcher Boys’<sup>84</sup> which is highly relevant in respect of the apartheid struggle. The sculpture speaks to certain apartheid issues, what it stood for and its impact towards the marginalised.

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<sup>83</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 13.

<sup>84</sup> John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 66-65.



Figure 4. The Butcher Boys by Jane Alexander ([www.theartist.me/collection/sculpture/the-butcher-boys/](http://www.theartist.me/collection/sculpture/the-butcher-boys/))

This sculpture references the situation of people who were detained during the period of 1986 and 1987. Through this sculpture Alexander was able to show how sinister the apartheid period was and its ability to dehumanise. People's voices were stolen from them and their rights were taken away from them. Looking at this sculpture which is half human and half man it is clear to see how man is equated to animals since we know certain animals are unable to make their own choices and are subjected to their owners. And this is how the South African government was operating by taking away people's rights and choices. Therefore it is very important that we understand the context of Mgudlandlu's paintings. Just because you could not see resistance slogans and different political colours, this still did not suggest that the landscape and its context did not address different issues that South Africa was dealing with at that time. At the time of Mgudlandlu's working life, the art in townships was used as a communication apparatus about discrimination taking place. Artists were expected to communicate what black African people were going through,

it was an unspoken secret that if you are a black artist your mandate was to stand in solidarity with other black artists by painting art that explicitly exposed the inequalities of apartheid. Mgudlandlu was not the only artist who was persecuted for the type of art that she used to do, looking at the work of David Koloane, he was also criticised for not conforming to the type of art that black artists were expected to be doing.



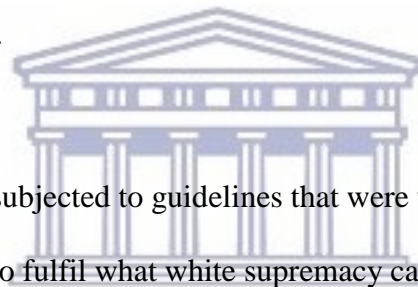
Figure 5. David Koloane, Moon Over Squatter Camp Settlement (Iziko National Art Gallery)

Funnily enough this was not just a critique that came from other black artists however even spaces such as galleries were rejecting this type of art since they perceived it to have no link to resistance. In one of his interviews Koloane states that ‘if you didn’t do this kind of thing (township art) it was harder. In 1977 and 1978 I started experimenting with collage, and I took some of these pieces to the Gallery 21. The first thing that the owner said was that I didn’t do the work because this is so ‘un-African’. He said that was the reason he didn’t feel comfortable buying it.’<sup>85</sup> Koloane

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<sup>85</sup> Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, 29.

was experiencing the same issues that Mgudlandlu was struggling with. At some point she was asked to stop painting white porches and start painting areas and places that she occupied rather than, as some works indicate (purchased and now unavailable to the public), concentrating on white spaces such as Constantia. I tend to disrupt this notion since I understand that what is alleged to be black art is what is derived from a European sense of what African art is. Though what Europeans are quick to forget is that what they consider to be African art is what was instilled in black people according to their taste during the colonisation period. They tend to forget that African people had to conform to what they required as art to fill their European museums. African people were never given a chance to fully express themselves in a manner that spoke to them.



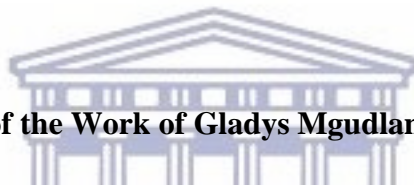
Black artists were always subjected to guidelines that were very particular, and in a sense the guidelines were to fulfil what white supremacy called primitive art. Kaloane further claims that ‘we’ never had role models in the visual arts in this country, we were not even allowed into art museums, or theatres or cinemas because of the Separate Amenities Act.<sup>86</sup> Therefore it is clear to understand that since Africans were never allowed into these spaces it was feasible for them to create their own styles that would be expressive of really who they are and to the type of art that they would like to express themselves in. Yes, we can argue that probably being a black artist was the hardest thing since you are not allowed into certain spaces and you are not allowed into institutions who teach art or have mentors that are in the same field as you.

Nonetheless I tend to oppose this and say maybe it was a great thing for these artists

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<sup>86</sup> The Separate Amenities Act was passed in South African parliament in 1953 under this law black persons were not allowed in most art museums unless they were accompanied by a white person, see Padraig O’ Malley, The Heart of Hope, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/031v01538/041v01828/051v01829/061v01857.htm>, (Accessed: 10.09.2018).

such as Mgudlandlu, Gerard Sekoto, Dumile Feni and Kaloane to be excluded in these spaces so that they can achieve what they have achieved on their own. These exclusions allowed them distinctiveness and uniqueness. Their art is not the same as the rest of the artists who chose to express resistance in a realist style, they chose to express themselves in a manner that depicted what they saw and how they felt when painting these artworks. Their artworks were used as tools of metaphorical work revealing the conditions that they were living under. Their paintings were concerned with socio-political matters and the disadvantages of black artists in South Africa during the apartheid period. Therefore they saw fit to use metaphors and creative expressions in their work as a weapon of resistance towards their suppressors.



### **A Provisional Overview of the Work of Gladys Mgudlandlu**

As mentioned, Gladys Mgudlandlu started her career as an artist in 1961 with her first exhibition debut in the Liberal Party office.<sup>87</sup> She enjoyed success in her career as an artist for ten years where she, together with her work, were featured in prominent newspaper headlines such as ‘SA Art record of Africa’, ‘Even critics buy her work’, ‘African artist scores a hit – may paint in US’.<sup>88</sup> However in 1972 the work of Mgudlandlu disappeared from the spotlight. According to Miles, “her work fell into oblivion because she stopped painting and exhibiting her works during the last eight years of her life.”<sup>89</sup> One of the reasons that she stopped painting was the fact that she was in a car accident in 1971 on her way to work and suffered severe injuries.<sup>90</sup> As a result when she died in February 19, 1979, there was no mention of her in the newspapers until months later when “Eduard Ladan paid tribute to her in the *Cape*

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<sup>87</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 8.

<sup>88</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 13.

<sup>89</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 8.

<sup>90</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 8.

*Times*: Black artist's death leaves a void in Cape art scene".<sup>91</sup> As a painter she was very remarkable in how she was able to paint in different styles and genres using what she had in her house and surroundings.

The artwork of Gladys Mgudlandlu is made up of various paintings and there are new works that are being discovered every day. For that reason, at this point we are unable to confirm how many paintings she has produced. Her artwork revealed Cape Town and Eastern Cape landscape scenes. Even though she was situated in Cape Town her work still reflected in Eastern Cape landscape as a result her art collection was very diverse. Below I have added some of the paintings that she painted while she was staying in the location, to show how her artwork was not subjected to the spaces that she occupied only. Even after her move she still painted landscapes that revealed Table Mountain landscape and Cape Town City District Landscape. In my view she continued to paint these landscapes to demonstrate the discrepancies in terms of the township landscape and house they occupied compared to the houses in the CBD and their landscape.

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<sup>91</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*. 13.



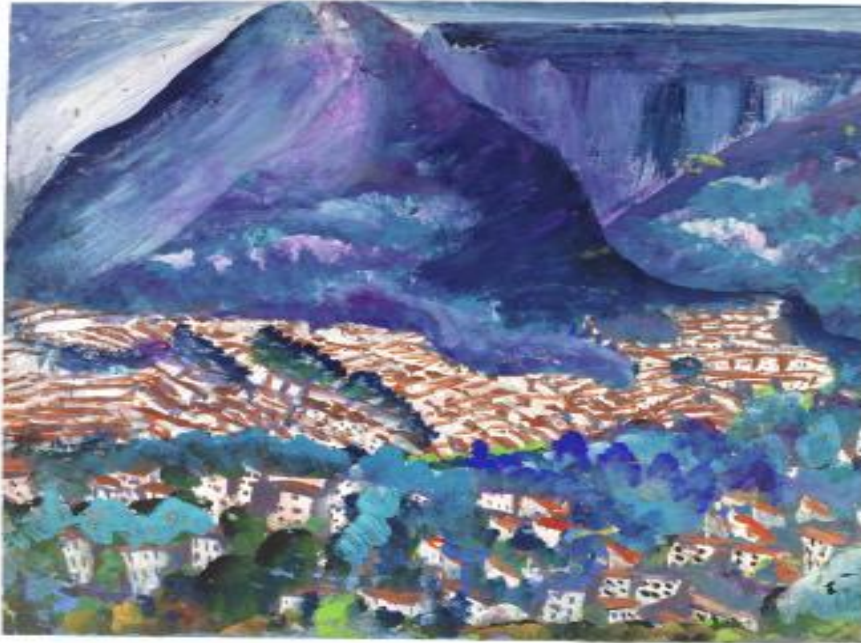


Figure 6. Devil's Peak, Table Mountain (blouinartsalesindex.com/auctions/Gladys-Mgudlandlu). No date provided.



Figure 7. Cape Town From the Sea 1963 (blouinartsalesindex.com/auctions/Gladys-Mgudlandlu)



Figure 8. Townscape, Landscape 1965 (<https://blouinartsalesindex.com/auctions/Gladys-Mgudlandlu-4414439/Townscape.-Landscape-1965>)

Miles narrates that the body of the work of Mgudlandlu was made out of “crayon, watercolour, gouache, oil paint, ink and felt-nibbed pen, she often painted in gouache on paper, applying thick layers of colour in an impasto – like fashion.”<sup>92</sup>

Mgudlandlu’s subject matter is very diverse. It is helpful at this point to elaborate further on her preoccupation with birds. According to the study that was conducted by Gijbertsen, he states that ‘the amaXhosa culture assigns cultural significance to a number of birds. A main distinction can be made between the utilitarian and the symbolic value of birds. Utilitarian values are expressed in material practices such as hunting, birds as climate indicators, and all kinds of indirect livelihood services. Symbolic values are expressed in nonmaterial practices such as the role of birds in ancestral relations, birds providing a sense of place and identity, and birds as omens. Findings further indicate that birds do relate to particular places associated with ancestral veneration, this providing people a sense of place and identity. In particular

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<sup>92</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 38.

“birds of the house”, are of high significance for amaXhosa well-being.<sup>93</sup> Miles narrates how part of Mgudlandlu’s rich heritage was the Eastern Cape bird lore. “She knew the birds of the region intimately, called them her friends and painted them.”<sup>94</sup> As we have argued, since she grew up in the Eastern Cape and her grandmother used to tell her stories related to her culture and ancestors this might have been why she was drawn so much to bird life and also that might have been the reason that she rather wanted to have birds as friends. As a result her fascination is seen in how she was able to paint and draw each bird totally different from the next. According to Miles, “Mgudlandlu was once asked why all her birds had such a big, strong feet. She explained that, as a child, she played in the bush where there were always chickens to be found. Being small and observing them from only slightly higher than ground level, she was impressed by their strong feet.”<sup>95</sup> If we pay attention to Figures 9 and figure 10, we are able to see the strong feet that she was referring to. And we are also able to see how each bird was captured differently in each painting.



Figure 9. Three Birds, 1966 (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

<sup>93</sup> Jaap Gijsbertsen, ‘Birds in the amaXhosa World, An ethno-ornithological exploration of the cultural significance of birds, and its potential for conservation in South Africa’. (Unpublished MAFA thesis, 2012) I.

<sup>94</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 42.

<sup>95</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 42.

Looking at the three birds painted in Figure 9 in 1966 we can clearly see her unique interpretations of the birds she painted and how she was also able to introduce the rural landscape as part of the painting. In this painting she used gouache on paper that has been laid on a board. The three birds painting was painted by Mgudlandlu during her stay in Gugulethu. The birds in this painting have small beaks and long legs which is somewhat different from Figure 10. Her colour of choice for this painting was the use of browns, light yellow and black. The landscape in the painting is made up of rocks, trees and blue sky. The birds in the painting look like they are trying to find food or they are looking for something. The way she painted these birds can be argued by most painters as not being properly captured as they might appear in their original form. However if we focus on Figure 10 we are able to see how these two paintings are different from each other. Her style is totally different in Figure 10 from Figure 9. The shape of the birds in Figure 10 is smooth and the lines are delineated in an exquisite manner. It looks almost like she had technical training in how she painted this scene. The honey bird was painted when Mgudlandlu was a resident in Cape Town in 1961. In the Honey Bird painting the colours she used are more deep and vibrant. The landscape itself is depicted differently from Figure 9 it was if she paid more attention and it was not a rushed job. Here in Figure 10 we see low rounded mountains. With this painting we can argue that it is a metaphor of what she longed for. It could be something that she knows she cannot attain, something that is distant from the city life of Cape Town. As we know most of her bird paintings were of indigenous birds of the Eastern Cape and surely this painting must have been motivated by her longing of the Eastern Cape life. The birds are somehow portrayed in this image as if they are in their own space without the noise that governs the

places that she stayed in. It is as if the birds are free and not in the cage of the city. Even the shapes of her birds are different from each other. When looking at the two examples in Figures 9 and 10 it is clear to see how both birds are painted differently and also how the colours used differ in intensity and tone. Figure 9 painting is lighter and flat in colour while figure 10 is more intense in colour. Also the brush strokes in both paintings are different. In Figure 10 when concentrating on her brush technique we can argue that the brush strokes are more subtle and not rushed, yet in Figure 9 there is more emphasis given to the stones and the trees it seems as if there was more silhouette emphasised. Based on Miles' narration, an art critique F.L Alexander for *Die Burger* newspaper responded positively when he saw the 'Honey Bird' painting, praising its originality and well-balanced harmonious colours. He even wanted to use this painting for his book cover for *Art in South Africa since 1900* which was published in 1962.<sup>96</sup>



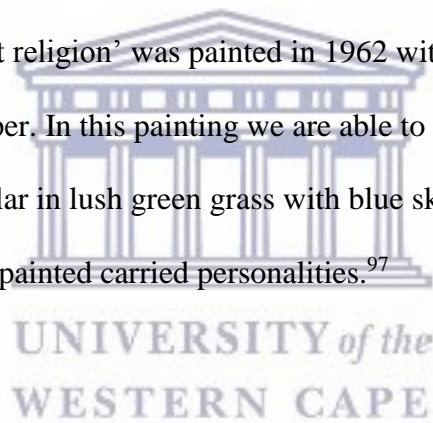
Figure 10. Honey Birds, 1961 (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

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<sup>96</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 30.

Her fascination with birds was not just related to the Xhosa belief that these birds represented ancestors, she also loved how birds were free. She was tired of being subjected to the apartheid ideology and feeling bound in how she was forced to live in a world that confined her as if she was in prison. Apartheid South Africa had different laws that made black people feel like they were in prison. As a black person prior to 1994 you could not move around as you wished, there were certain areas that you were not allowed in. For black Africans to pass these boundaries set up by the apartheid government they were required to produce a pass. Therefore it is probable that Mgudlandlu envied the freedom that birds possessed.

Figure 11, 'No life without religion' was painted in 1962 with the use of gouache, painted on a 70x50 cm paper. In this painting we are able to see a big raven with a yellow beak and white collar in lush green grass with blue skies. According to Miles the birds that Mgudlandlu painted carried personalities.<sup>97</sup>



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<sup>97</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 42.



Figure 11. No Life without Religion 1962 (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

As a result Miles refers us to an interpretation by Andre Celliers who asked: What, for instance is the compulsion that created *No life without religion*? A large bird with a white ring collar around its neck, obviously intended to suggest the clergy, seems to be passing judgement to the viewer. There is a suggestion of a father-figure about it. Celliers's interpretation corresponds with Xhosa bird lore. Xhosas call the white necked raven, and occasionally the pied crow, *umfundisi* (the 'learned one, 'teacher' or 'missionary').<sup>98</sup>

This interpretation of Celliers is an indication that the artwork of Mgudlandlu was not just naïve or art without meaning, as argued by others before. However to Mgudlandlu her artwork was a weapon that she could use to be honest about her feelings. To Mgudlandlu her painting was an outlet for addressing what was

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<sup>98</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 42.

happening around her in terms of how her art was judged and how she affected by the apartheid regime. The ‘No life without Religion’ paintings speaks to the dominant challenges of the hierarchy, here in her painting she made reference to the Pastor figure that is always seen as the dominant figure. In my view even though she did not address this as white dominant figures we can still view this painting as speaking to those who have power over the masses. Hence Miles referred to her work as having personalities. Now, we tend to understand that her work was a metaphor of what she wanted to say but felt restrained because of the politics of apartheid.

In this captivating painting of ‘Nyanga Landscape’ in Figure 12 Mgudlandlu made use of gouache when she painted this artwork. Gouache is a “Painting technique in which a gum or an opaque white pigment is added to watercolours to produce opacity.”<sup>99</sup> “In watercolour the tiny particles of pigment become enmeshed in the fibre of the paper; in gouache the colour lies on the surface of the paper, forming a continuous layer, or coating. A gouache is characterized by a directly reflecting brilliance.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Gouache Painting Technique, see <https://www.britannica.com/art/gouache> (11.10.2018)

<sup>100</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, Gouache Painting Technique, see <https://www.britannica.com/art/gouache> (11.10.2018)



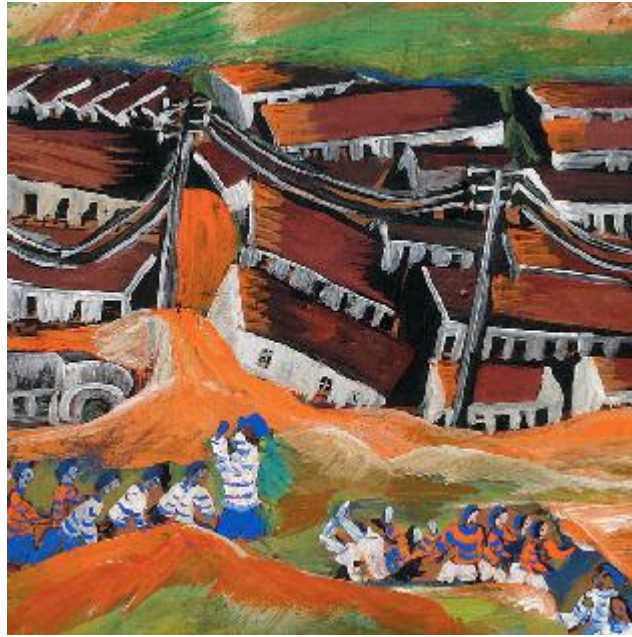


Figure 12. Nyanga Landscape 1962 (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

Most of her paintings are painted using gouache since it was a method that was easy and affordable for her to handle. We can perhaps argue that her main reason for using gouache in her paintings was because it was easily accessible, lasted longer and was cheaper than using oils. What was also interesting with her choice of gouache was the fact that not everyone could master the technique of painting with gouache. “Gouache has a bolder, flatter colour laydown, more like acrylics or oils. Unlike acrylics or oils, gouache cannot be applied thickly to create texture, if a layer of gouache is too thick, it will crack when it dries.”<sup>101</sup> Therefore when we look at her art work we are able to see proficiency in how she mastered the technique of using gouache.

The ‘Nyanga Landscape’ reflects the life of the locations painted through the eyes of Mgudlandlu.<sup>102</sup> In this painting we are able to see how the mountain peaks are in the

<sup>101</sup> K. McDermott, What is Gouache and How is it Different from Watercolor, see [www.plazaart.com/blog/what-is-gouache/](http://www.plazaart.com/blog/what-is-gouache/)

<sup>102</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 44.

background of a not so stable landscape. It can be argued that the landscape in this painting might be unstable because of how the houses are built on sand dunes. The manner in which these houses are built in a line one after the other without any space in between them is still significant today in black locations. As a result the only thing that comes to mind when I look at this painting is how the past is similar to the present. This painting clearly suggests a metaphor addressing concerns of space and houses in the black locations. This painting was painted in 1962 just after the implementation of the Group Areas Act in 1961, which is why I argue this painting was influenced by her circumstances in a black location, and how she was moved into an area that did not allow them to have privacy in terms of how small the spaces are between each house. The painting does not give an indication of houses with fences around them rather open space, hence my argument about privacy.

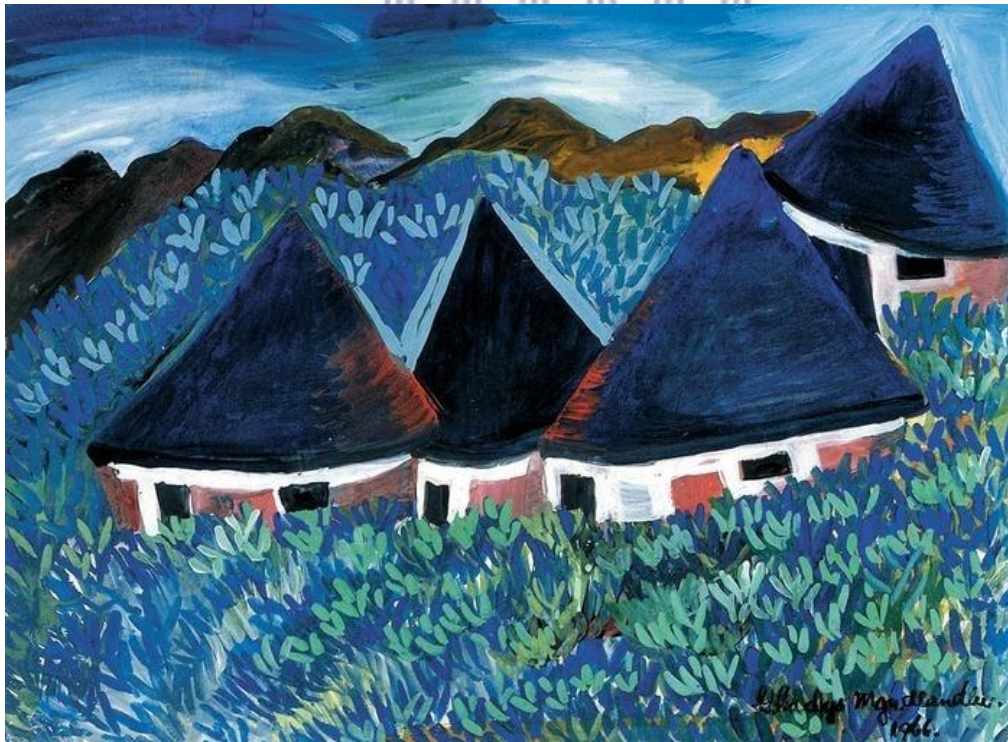


Figure 13. Huts 1966 (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

Gladys Mgudlandlu's painting of the huts in 1966, Figure 13 again shows how Mgudlandlu has used gouache on paper. With this painting Mgudlandlu was questioned on how realistic this painting is, and questioned whether she ever tried to paint realistically. Her response to this question was "But they are realistic....That is how I see them."<sup>103</sup> Miles argues that "after seeing the landscape of Eastern Cape, where Mgudlandlu spent the first 27 years of her life, one can identify the white-blush plumes in her landscapes as *Buddleia* in bloom, the torches of flaming colour, either as flowering *Aloe Ferox* or *Aloe speciose*, and the big orange cones borne on dripping fronds as the Eastern Cape's giant cycad."<sup>104</sup> The huts are clearly a landscape portraying the kind of village she comes from in the Eastern Cape since Cape Town does not have this type of housing. The painting is different from how the painting of Nyanga has been executed with reference to how there is much more land in this landscape and the house is not constricted in one space. This was a true reflection of how in the Eastern Cape houses are far apart from each other and each homestead owned their own land, therefore most homesteads will be made up of three or four huts. Here in the 'Huts' painting we can see how Mgudlandlu depicted the flowers that grew around their huts which is not visible in the Nyanga landscape. In the Nyanga landscape there is no depiction of flowers but of people moving around. In these two paintings, the 'Huts' and 'Nyanga landscapes', we are able to see how in each painting Mgudlandlu saw space differently in the Eastern Cape and Cape Town. According to Miles, "Mgudlandlu associated the colour white with protection."<sup>105</sup> And this can clearly be seen in both Figure 8 and Figure 9. Miles narrates that "the white painted surrounds of the doorways and windows of the rondavels of her youth were absent in the houses of Nyanga and Gugulethu. However, she remembered the

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<sup>103</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 41.

<sup>104</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 41.

<sup>105</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 44.

sacred and protective power of white when she conscientiously painted the white surrounds of the windows of the homesteads evoked by her childhood memories.”<sup>106</sup> Miles further points out how her manner of painting the mountains of Cape Town differed to how she depicted the Eastern Cape mountains. “Cape Town also gave her mountains to paint. Close and immediate were Table Mountain, Devil’s Peak and Lion’s Head. She showed them from different perspectives – sometimes foiling the city, and at other times from Nyanga and Gugulethu. Unlike the undulating Amatolas, their shapes were rough and angular. In her paintings and drawings of the Eastern Cape landscapes, Mgudlandlu used the suggestive shapes of these peaks to symbolise the nurturing aspect of the earth. Often they remind [sic] of women’s breasts.”<sup>107</sup> Her depiction of these two provinces clearly indicates how different things were from when she left the Eastern Cape and her arrival in Cape Town. Also her symbolism of the Eastern Cape Mountains compared with the Cape Town Mountains reveals how she saw Cape Town as something that was stifling her growth and freedom rather than cultivating and helping her community to grow. We should pay attention to how she depicted each angle of the mountain and how the mountain would block the city as it speaks to the forced removals and how people were moved far away from the city as almost locked inside their own township. We can also argue that the mountains blocking Nyanga and Gugulethu from the city is for the elite not to be able to see the black location, but also means black people have the city to themselves and Mgudlandlu is pointing this out in her work.

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<sup>106</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 44.

<sup>107</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 44-46.



Figure 14. Cattle. (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

Here again in Figure 14 Mgudlandlu is using the cattle painting to interrogate the notions of gender. According to the Xhosa tradition women are not allowed near the kraal where there are cattle. Her work was more about challenging the status quo, she was challenging how man are considered and esteemed better than women so that even certain animals are only subjected to them and not women. This was the same with how women in art were perceived, in Xhosa culture women are meant to work in the kitchen they are not considered or seen as artists unlike men. As a result Miles argue that “Being familiar with the customs of her people, she knew that Xhosa women were not allowed near cattle. Only men handled these animals. Yet the cattle were a recurrent motif in her paintings.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 44.

In the overall body of her work most of her painting depicting humans comes with shadow reflections. According to Miles “Many of Mgudlandlu’s paintings include shadowy figures that accompany the people.” According to Miles, “the shadows could perhaps indicate that the ancestors are still present, guarding the townspeople.”<sup>109</sup>



Figure 15. Three Men in Blue (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

Figure 15 ‘Three Men in Blue’, was painted with the use of gouache on paper revealing three men in blue with their backs to the viewer and also showing shadows. When we look carefully we are able to see these men are looking into a distance of a barren land. It’s not clear exactly what they are looking at however we can perhaps argue they were looking at the new space that they were moving to. Miles narrates that according to Reverend Stanley Qabazi, “the shadows are the ancestors, Mgudlandlu shows that townspeople are not abandoned because the ancestors are still

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<sup>109</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 46.

guarding them.”<sup>110</sup> We can therefore argue that this painting, as with most of her paintings, was addressing land issues such as forced removals in Cape Town.



Figure 16. African Woodcarver (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

Figure 16, African woodcarver draws upon the way Mgudlandlu watched her uncles carving wood.<sup>111</sup> The Africa woodcarver drawing was illustrated using pen and ink on paper. According to Miles this drawing evoked memories of Mgudlandlu’s uncle “carving utensils for use.”<sup>112</sup> The African woodcarver drawing shows the versatility of this artist’s works and how she was able to switch from painting with gouache and oil

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<sup>110</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 48.

<sup>111</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 44.

<sup>112</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 44.

to drawing. Miles narrates how Celliers interpreted this work, showing the contrast between how Mgudlandlu draws the man with small feet and hands but with the massive logs and enormous axe under his arm.<sup>113</sup>



Figure 17. Mini Girls (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

During 1970 the work of Mgudlandlu took a shift. According to Miles this shift started in the late sixties, “away from the picturesque and decorative detail of the carefree pastoral past.”<sup>114</sup> Miles points out how Mgudlandlu’s work was more vibrant and broad in colour. The work of Mgudlandlu now produced areas that are delineated with thick contours such as the Mini girls painting. Below are other examples of how

<sup>113</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 44.

<sup>114</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 48.



the work of Mgudlandlu evolved. According to Miles Mgudlandlu was aware of this change in her work and stated, “I have now changed over to painting African figures because my trend of imagination is changing. I do not look into the past. I think of the future and the trends that come themselves.”<sup>115</sup>



Figure 18. Flowers (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

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<sup>115</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 48.

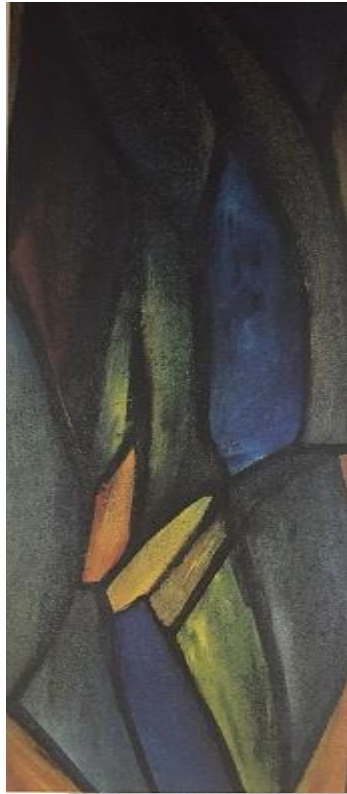


Figure 19. African Spear (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)





Figure 20. Untitled (<http://www.artnet.fr/artistes/gladys-mgudlandlu/>)

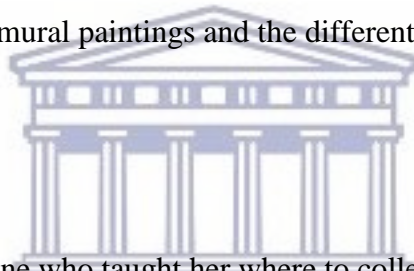
## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROCESS OF MAKING MGUDLANDLU'S ARTWORK WITHIN SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICS PRIOR TO 1994

It is important to go beyond what we see and start interrogating South African art conceptually, socially and historically. It is also imperative to understand the intellectual and social conditions of the artist. We come to understand some of this by allowing the artist to help us in developing a comprehensive understanding of her art. This chapter rotates around the contextualisation and depiction of the production of certain paintings and the story of each painting. It looks at the creation process and issues of physical placement of the paintings in terms of the destinations of her artworks. I further concentrate on what each genre means in different social contexts within the frameworks of interpretations of the apartheid period. I do all of this through introducing how Mgudlandlu became initiated into art, what kind of art she first experienced and what that meant in the context of South Africa. It is also important to note that the genres of paintings that I will look at are not necessarily restricted to the research question, but demonstrate broader ideas.

The story of Mgudlandlu's art encapsulates the type of hardships and the different level of opportunities that black artists face in South Africa. Art production in South Africa was very different in terms of different races. How production was structured was grounded in different art traditions and subjected to the politics of the apartheid era. Most art producers from black communities never had formal training, unlike their white colleagues during the apartheid period. It is thus a testament to Mgudlandlu, who was born between the 1920s -1930s when there was no formal

training for black artists that she achieved what she did. According to Lize van Robbroeck, “during the ’20s and ’30s there was practically no art training available to black artists. Artists either received private tuition from well-meaning artists or patrons, or were trained in artistic skills by missionaries who provided materials, working space and commissions for religious carvings.”<sup>116</sup> It is recounted that most African artists were either self-taught, or art was inherently something that they were born with. In Mgudlandlu’s case her artistic ability was developed by her grandmother. Her grandmother played a very significant role in training her to acquire and perfect her artistic skill. Mgudlandlu’s artistic labour assembly was motivated by what she was taught by her grandmother. Miles tells us that her grandmother was the one who introduced her to mural paintings and the different techniques that she used when painting.<sup>117</sup>



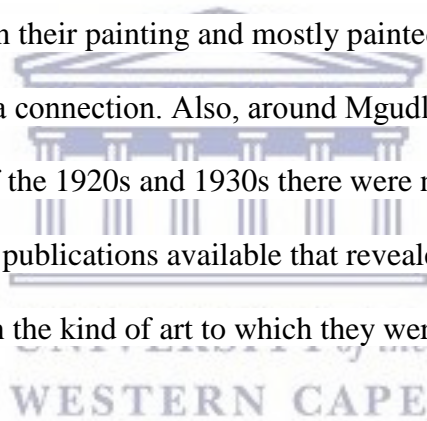
Her grandmother was the one who taught her where to collect and gather the necessary materials to use for paint. She would further instruct her on where she can collect different clays, and which clay was useful when painting different artworks. The clay that she used in her artwork was made up of three different colours. According to Miles she collected red clay which could be found in her village, blue clay that came from the town of Bathurst and white clay that came from Grahamstown. The clay colours that her grandmother introduced her to for the making of her paintings were the colours that were very prominent in San people’s rock art. Van Robbroeck traces the genealogy of governing discursive practices which were influenced by the cultural discourses, colonial era and the apartheid era. She

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<sup>116</sup> Lize Van Robbroeck, ‘Writing White on Black, Modernism as Discursive Paradigm in South African Writing on Modern Black Art’ (unpublished PHD Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2006).

<sup>117</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 10.

does all of this to reveal how South African art writing has not evolved even post-1994. She suggests that art writing in South Africa still takes after the Western way of writing which is more about objectifying the other which was what the colonial period was all about. For that reason she agrees with my argument that the colours that Mgudlandlu were introduced to initially were “The prehistoric colour palette used in African cave painting by Bushmen artists consisted mostly of earth pigments. Reds and browns from bole or haematite; yellows, orange and reds from ochre; white from zinc oxide; blue from iron and silicic acid; blacks from charcoal or soot.”<sup>118</sup> As a result we can argue that there might be influences coming from the San people into Mgudlandlu’s style of painting. Our connecting these two is derived from the fact that they used similar colours in their painting and mostly painted murals with people and animals, thus constituting a connection. Also, around Mgudlandlu’s grandmother’s time between the period of the 1920s and 1930s there were not many black artists known; also there were no publications available that revealed different types of art, hence this might have been the kind of art to which they were exposed.



Miles confirms that Mgudlandlu also knew the San paintings, she narrates that Mgudlandlu was introduced to these paintings while walking in the bush and she would often draw these images.<sup>119</sup> This was based on the narration of her brother’s daughter. Her grandmother further taught her how to carve bone and yellowwood needles for knitting and hooks for crocheting. They used feathers and sorghum stalks rather than manufactured paintbrushes when painting. These were not the only

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<sup>118</sup> ‘Prehistoric Colour Palette’ <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/artist-paints/prehistoric-colour-palette.htm> (Accessed: 12.08.2018).

<sup>119</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 10.

equipment that they used they also made use of what they had in the house. Hence the production of an African artist is a social struggle on its own. This is evident in how Mgudlandlu had to be innovative when painting, and it is important that we recognize that each artist needs paint and brushes that are made up of a certain calibre and a standard mixing medium. According to Miles, Mgudlandlu further learned which stones when sharpened made good pencils.<sup>120</sup> Mgudlandlu did not have that luxury of using paint brushes until the later stages of her life as an artist. She was mostly dependent on makeshift paintbrushes, using feathers, rocks and her hands to produce different art pieces. Mgudlandlu was not just a painter, she also sketched and drew using a pen. Miles further points out that her drawings were motivated by her grandmother's stories that is why she was occupied with the idea of publishing her own book called *Woman in the moon*.



Figure 21. Gladys Mgudlandlu, *Woman in the Moon* 1960

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<sup>120</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 10.

This book would have been made up of her grandmother's stories, one story in particular motivated Figure 21(above), the 'Woman in the Moon' drawing which tells a story of a character called Nonkani, which means stubborn. Nonkani was banished to the moon for not observing a day of rest. Therefore this drawing illustrates the type of art the book would have been made of which would have focused on drawings rather than paintings.

### **Cultural Workshop Settings**

As I further engage with the work of Mgudlandlu I find no suggestion of formal training in respect of how Mgudlandlu painted. There is also no mention of her attending any cultural workshop of any sort. Kasfir and Forster introduce the concept of a workshop to allow us to understand the work of Mgudlandlu and her process of making artwork outside such settings. Kasfir and Forster elucidate that a "workshop is a sphere in which interpretive processes unfold, where every artist who is or becomes a member of a workshop will interpret, and even has to interpret the actions of the others in this context."<sup>121</sup> In Mgudlandlu's case her grandmother's house doubled as a workshop, it was the first place that she was introduced to art. Therefore it is important that we understand why social settings for an African child are different from other races. Within the African context space has always been interrogated since it doubles up as a home and a social setting. During the apartheid period a home was a space filled with a political agenda and different ideas of reclaiming governance. And this was the same space where Mgudlandlu was taught how to appreciate art, style and genre, and how to apply and produce all of this. Therefore her style of painting will always be an appreciation towards her master, her grandmother's style of

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<sup>121</sup> Sidney Kasfir and Till Forster (eds), *African Art and Agency in the Workshop* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2013).



painting. In her paintings, the work resonates with what she was taught by her grandmother growing up. Her creativity within the 'workshop' setting was motivated by the imaginary stories of her grandmother. She was allowed to dream and imagine what she wanted and who she wanted to become. As a result this setting allowed her to be more creative. She could interact and play around with the different colours and painting equipment that was used by her grandmother when painting. All of her playfulness and creativity was identifiable in the work she produced. Miles identifies her artwork as works of an 'expressionist'.

It is further contended that her daring imagery and robust colours demonstrate a similarity with the paintings by Thomas Mukarobgwa of Zimbabwe. Miles comments that both of these artists were self-taught and they both concentrated on rendering the human anatomy and proportion that differs from other local expressionists such as Maggie Loubser, Irma Stern, Wolf Kibel and Pranas Domsaitis, who were all exposed to German Expressionism.<sup>122</sup> The styles of both these artists Mgudlandlu and Mukarobgwa exemplified themes of expressionism, which was evident in drawings of indigenous source, free from observation and the guidance of fellow artist and critics. We further understand that with everything that was happening at that time, artists were forced to change their style of drawings to accommodate the demand at that time. Mgudlandlu remained constant and never changed her vision, she was uncorrupted by formalism. It seems that most people could differentiate the direction of Mgudlandlu's work from the rest. As a result "Marc Glaser points out: this is not work of complete naiveté. There is an intellectual feeling underlying a number of these paintings which the artist combines with the undulating rhythm of her paint and

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<sup>122</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 10.

her strong feeling for pattern.”<sup>123</sup> A number of people agreed with Glaser’s observation, such as art critic F.N. of *The Evening Post* who argued that “A deliberating primitive and childlike treatment of human figures and animals, with complete disregard for conventional perspective transform reality into the stuff dreams are made of.”<sup>124</sup> That is why it is important that we understand the role of workshops: sometimes it tends to force individuals to conform and be subjected to their master’s styles or to what styles are popular in the market at the time. As a result Kasfir and Forster argue that the workshop was not just a training ground for artists, this was also a place where young artists’ minds were shaped. This meant that by the time the artist ventures outside the workshop her individual style has been instilled and moulded through the requirements of the workshop.

For that reason it makes sense that we point out the significant role that Mgudlandlu’s grandmother played in shaping Mgudlandlu’s thinking, even though we do not have much evidence of their conversations and discussions. I am still forced to contend that this figure was behind her boldness and confidence in regard to her art. She was the one that instilled her forceful nature in terms of not backing down from what she deemed as right, based on the type of art she did. She was able to tell people off when critiquing her style by motivating why she felt she was a great artist and that her work spoke for itself. We are told many times how different artists such as Mitchell tried forcing her to change her style of painting. James Mitchell frowned upon the manner Mgudlandlu painted. Mitchell remembers Mgudlandlu having a crayon in hand, covering a sheet of paper in one colour. Then, in the roughly covered surface, she discovered images lurking, which she explored by delineating their shapes and

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<sup>123</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 28.

<sup>124</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 28.

deciphering their narratives. Mitchell frowned at this procedure, but Mgudlandlu explained that the picture presented itself to her to be developed.<sup>125</sup> According to Mitchell this was an incorrect manner of painting, it did not make sense to him. Lewis-Williams argues that when we attempt to read and appreciate the different aspects of art, such as the excellent composition, the style and the subject, only then will we be able to understand that they are joined with intuition in the artist's vision and beliefs, and interpreted through the views of the artist who created that piece. This was very evident in the work of Mgudlandlu. She as an artist understood this and that is why she was able to articulate why she painted the way she did.

Looking at the work of Mgudlandlu there is a remarkable painterly consistency in the manner of representation and her subject, and this is what I want to discuss here. We can identify that Mgudlandlu was a versatile painter, she did not only focus on painting, and she illustrated and did etchings (prints) as well. She also used to draw a lot using different crayons, and all of this was done in her house during weekends. Her production was very different from most workshop productions since she did not have the necessary equipment for painting and drawing. According to Miles, "she propped up a drawing board in front of her house and freely painted whatever passed her mind's eye."<sup>126</sup> Kasfir and Forster urge us to recognise that "a workshop provides the means of production, mainly materials, instruments, tools and utensils."<sup>127</sup> Mitchell also refers to this: "social groups with differing access to power, financial and social resources, and ideological legitimacy, contend over issues of production and reproduction in place. Out of these contestations the form of the landscape is

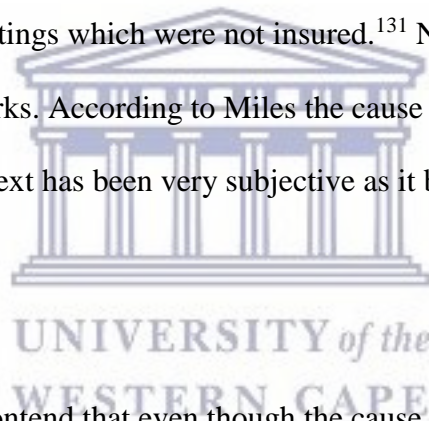
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<sup>125</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*. 16.

<sup>126</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 18.

<sup>127</sup> Kasfir, and Forster (eds), *African Art and Agency in the Workshop*, 7.

produced.”<sup>128</sup> Mgudlandlu lacked such support since she did not have a ‘proper’ workshop. In 1969 when Mgudlandlu stayed in her Rylands shack she had to make use of a table as her painting station and once she moved to Gugulethu she used her dining room small table as her painting station. As a result of not owning a painting studio or belonged to any workshop she had no proper storage for her paintings and they were all stored underneath an old stove, beneath her simple iron bed.<sup>129</sup> Since she lacked a proper room to paint and to store her artwork she was a victim of many disasters. According to Miles, “before Mgudlandlu started painting seriously, her shack in Rylands burnt down, along with all her belongings”.<sup>130</sup> According to Miles in another building where she had her work framed and stretched a fire broke out and she lost twenty of her paintings which were not insured.<sup>131</sup> Nothing was saved from the fire, none of her artworks. According to Miles the cause of the fire was unknown. Fire in South African context has been very subjective as it became a weapon to express people’s feelings.



For that reason I tend to contend that even though the cause of fire was unknown it makes sense that we identify that fire is a much debated issue in the South African mind. We should understand that in the history of apartheid and post-apartheid, fires were used as one of the methods of resistance. During the apartheid period in South Africa fire was mostly associated with power since that was the way of rebelling towards the acts put in place by the apartheid government of that time. This is what many protesting people used when they wanted to redirect the relations of power, it gave some sort of solidarity against the powers that governed them at that time. In this

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<sup>128</sup> John Wyle, *Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 157.

<sup>129</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 18.

<sup>130</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 20.

<sup>131</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 20.

case fire was a medium that was used by the poor to make sure that the apartheid government heard their pleas. However in the case of Mgudlandlu fire was presented as something that came to strip her of her home and her work. To her fire presented some sort of loss and danger, in a sense it spoke to the type of house that she was inhabiting which was a shack. It revealed how unsafe her home was and opened her eyes to the struggles for proper housing. Should she have stayed in a better house perhaps made of bricks her work might not have caught fire, should she have owned a proper studio her work would have been safe. Here in her case fire is not just about danger and power but it speaks to the politics at large faced by every artist in Cape Town. Kaye and others give details on how a personal archive does not only allow efficient storage and retrieval of information. They also outline the fears that people go through when it comes to losing their archived materials and what devices they use to try to stop this. Kaye and others illustrate the emotions that come with losing personal belongings. They do this by focusing on the rationale behind subjects archiving, which go beyond information retrieval to include creating a legacy resource, confronting fears and anxieties, and identity construction.<sup>132</sup> This is very interesting as I believe that the loss of Mgudlandlu's work might have produced fears of starting over. We are told by Miles that the paintings that were burnt by the fire were up to twenty or more. This meant that Mgudlandlu had to start over from scratch and try to reconstruct her artwork archive, if not she had to find new ways to spark creativity so that she can paint again. These are somehow things that are not discussed or seen as being important when we think of living conditions of black artists.

Location and space are not treated as a form of agency in an artist's life whereas where you live and how you store you work is very important for any artist. In one

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<sup>132</sup> Joseph. J Kaye, Janet Vertesi, Allen Dafoe, Shari David, 'To Have and to Hold: Exploring the Personal Archive', Conference Paper (Cornell University: 2006), 2.

interview from Kaye's paper, "one subject admitted that after a house fire when she was thirteen, she never kept anything of an archival nature, whether academic or personal, preferring now to display her judgment or discrimination at not keeping anything at all."<sup>133</sup> This might also apply to the work of Mgudlandlu and it could be one of the reasons why the archive of her work is so limited. Maybe Mgudlandlu also had fears of losing everything and rather opted to paint when commissioned.

Fires were understood as a force for change within the black African community, for example the students of the June 1976 Soweto uprising,<sup>134</sup> which was a protest against the Bantu Education Act. The Bantu Education Act was created by the apartheid government forcing students to be taught in Afrikaans as a language of instruction in the Secondary schools. This saw students setting out on marches around South Africa resisting this act by burning tyres and schools. Thus Chance reasons that, "Using fire as a platform to redirect power, [the urban poor] become legible to state agents, not as the governed but as the ungovernable. Even if fleeting or momentary, fire rarely leaves those involved wholly unchanged: a conflagration could result in bodily injury or collective solidarity."<sup>135</sup> Chance further allows us to engage with fire as a productive body that has a way of altering the political stance of people and the government. James states that during 1791 the Haitian revolution also used fire to demonstrate their opposition against slavery: "Like the peasants in the Jacquerie or the Luddite wreckers, they were seeking their salvation in the most obvious way, the destruction of what they knew was the cause of their suffering, and if they destroyed

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<sup>133</sup> Kaye et al, 'To Have and to Hold', 5.

<sup>134</sup> The June 16 Soweto Youth Uprising, 21.05.2013, <http://www.historyonline.co.za> (Accessed October 5.2018).

<sup>135</sup> Kerry. R. Chance, *Living Politics in South Africa's Urban Shacklands* (University of London, Chicago Press, 2008), 17.

much it was because they had suffered much.”<sup>136</sup> “They knew that as long as these plantations stood their lot would be to labour on them until they dropped.”<sup>137</sup> As a result the slaves were aware that for them to be free from their fate of laboring on the plantations they needed to utterly destroy them. Therefore the art that Mgudlandlu lost in the fire speaks to the struggles of most black artists who use their homes as art studios and have no means of accessing different locations to work on their artworks. This is still evident among some of the African artists today.

As a result these fires pushed black artists to start retaliating in the form art expression and that is how some of the cultural workshops such as the Community Arts Project (CAP) developed in South Africa. They were a sort of stance taken against the apartheid regime. For that reason it is important that we understand “The development of ‘Art’ in South Africa has been shaped largely by the markets and institutions of the white minority. It is through these structures that their ideas and assumptions about ‘art’ have become dominant, for example the idea that art is based on individual genius rather than being based on human and social needs, or that art is superior to crafts.”<sup>138</sup> The Community Arts Project (CAP) originated at 17 Main Road, Mowbray, with workshops in various areas of the arts: printmaking, painting, sculpture, ceramics, weaving, photography, dance, music, drama and creative writing.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Cyril. L .R James, *The Black Jacobins, Toussaint L’ouverture and The San Domingo Revolution* (London: Vintage, 1989).

<sup>137</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*.

<sup>138</sup> 1989 CAP Newsletter (Accessed 5.10.2018).

<sup>139</sup> Jacqueline Nolte, Ownership of Community Arts Project (CAP), 1976 – 1997, <http://www.asai.co.za/forum.php> (Accessed 5.10. 2018).

Mgudlandlu was one of those artists who would not allow the established art institutions to dictate the type of art she should ascribe to. She was adamant not to let the dominant art ideologies box her in, though there were exceptions. Through her career she managed to do three etchings namely the Ostrich farm – ‘Ostriches’ (Fig 8 above), ‘Traditional Designers’, and ‘War Harvest’. The etching technique is “picture produced by printing from a metal plate that has been etched with acid.”<sup>140</sup>

Mgudlandlu learned this technique at the Michaelis School of Art in Cape Town, she was introduced to this technique by Katrine Harries after seeing the work of James Mitchell. She was fascinated by this technique since she never saw anything similar to this and attempted to do it herself and failed until she worked with Harries who helped her and she was able to produce great prints. She managed to sell the Ostrich Farm print below for R50 in an exhibition held at Durban Art Gallery in 1963. This was the first time in her life that she produced artwork from an institutional frame, whereas all her paintings before that were produced aligned to her own style of painting. The scarcity of resources and studios for black artists saw them joining these institutional spaces so that they were able to expand their skills and use the technical equipment needed for new genres of painting. Therefore the argument of Kasfir and Forster is very vital in how they introduce the significant role of a ‘workshop’ in an African space. These workshops were able to provide the relevant needed tools to be able to produce certain artworks that are required by different artist. Therefore it made sense for Mgudlandlu to join the school of art since she lacked the required materials to produce the print work. Kasfir and Forster further argue that “the provision of

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<sup>140</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/etching> (Accessed 5.10.2018).



resources may frame the work of the artists but their work, in turn, shapes the materiality of the workshop.”<sup>141</sup>

However the idea of workshop in South African art historiography is so much about the provision of ‘other’ space, a more informal space for artists whom the apartheid bigotry could not allow to receive recognised training at school. It is worth mentioning that community arts centres had existed since 1949 when Polly Street was founded. Other art centres prior to CAP are Rorke’s Drift (1962), Chiawela Art Centre, Moroka (1951) and Johannesburg Art Foundation (1972). The CAP workshop was created to accommodate all artists especially black artists in South Africa. CAP was one of the workshops that disrupted the familiar path of the dominant ‘white art’ and created a different art that would address the issues facing South Africa. The work of the artists was concerned with issues that were not being addressed under the apartheid government. They did all of this through production of their work addressing the discriminatory Bantu Education, the Soweto uprising, the forced removals and everything aligned with ills of the apartheid regime. CAP decolonised art, which for a very long time persisted as an elite discipline. We find the artists that were part of the CAP workshop challenging this notion of art being for the elite through their works. They made sure that their work demonstrated boldness in fighting for liberation at a time when freedom of expression was under arrest. In the midst of the acts of suppression they condemned the very regulations that denied them the formal study of art. In their work they asserted the atrociousness of the ‘evil’ of apartheid, and persisted till the apartheid regime was no more.

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<sup>141</sup> Kasfir, and Forster, (eds). *African Art and Agency in the Workshop*.

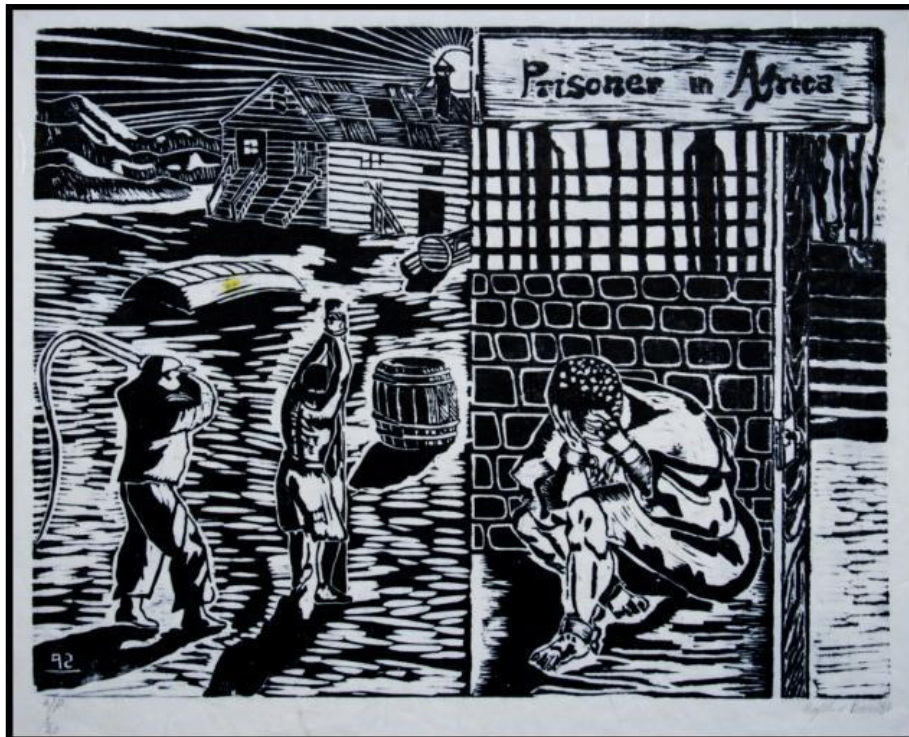


Figure 22. Sophie Peters Untitled, ca 1985 -1986.



Figure 23. Unknown Artist Untitled.

The CAP workshop was able to provide a great space for multi-racial sharing.<sup>142</sup> This was all happening during a time when forceful racial preconceptions operated. This space allowed for inter-community relations and fraternization of artistic thoughts between different artists. Even though CAP was addressing issues of the struggle they were opening themselves up to aesthetic issues, and beauty does not always construe as resistance art. Williamson who in her work provides a detailed interpretation of South Africa's visual arts history during the apartheid period wrote "before 1976, a trip around South African art galleries would have given very little clue to the socio-political problems of the country. Strangely divorced from reality, landscapes, and experiments in abstraction, figure studies, and vignettes of township life hung on the walls".<sup>143</sup> This type of art was criticised greatly since it did not show any signs of what was being perpetrated by the government against black people.



### **Decolonising Mural Paintings in South Africa**

In a South African context mural painting is considered to be domestic art. Murals are identified with the dwelling and always seen as something that is made by women.<sup>144</sup> Even in later years mural art has been placed and categorised with the 'arts and crafts' category, as opposed to fine art. We clearly see this in the example of the Venda women where they are in charge of painting different murals in their community and their homestead. Since the art that is painted by Venda women is tourist-driven it makes sense to be placed alongside the arts and crafts, however this is totally different from Mgudlandlu's murals. Her murals were not for mass media but for her own and

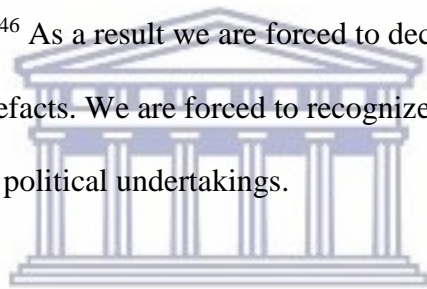
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<sup>142</sup> Eben Lochner, 'The Community Arts Project (CAP): The role of the arts in building community and artistic development', [www.dut.ac.za](http://www.dut.ac.za) (Accessed on 9.09.2018).

<sup>143</sup> Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (Lansdowne: Double Storey Publishers, 2010) 8.

<sup>144</sup> Sabine Marschall, *Community mural art in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2002).

her visitors' consumption in her house. For that reason the work of Jarman is very important in how it narrates the manner in which we should view murals and artifacts as vehicles of communication. This view of Jarman allows me to broaden my argument that the murals of Mgudlandlu served as metaphors of what she could not communicate, hence the argument that murals are a communication vehicle. Jarman further request us to interrupt the notion of seeing murals as beautifying public spaces, saying we should rather see them as "more artefact than art."<sup>145</sup> "As artefacts they are produced to be seen at fixed sites and in specific locales, and an extension of their significance is generated by the semiotic dynamic which involves the images taking meaning from their location and the location in turn having a differing significance because of the paintings".<sup>146</sup> As a result we are forced to deconstruct the manner we view and critique these artefacts. We are forced to recognize and appreciate them as artistic images that narrate political undertakings.



It is essential that we understand that during the apartheid period in South Africa murals played a huge role in passing the necessary message to the apartheid regime. Most black South African artists claimed the public spaces as spaces of visual resistance, and their artworks became weapons of destruction. Sack asserts that the use of open spaces as visual aids did not only display aesthetic features but these spaces acted as an aid to repossessing the land. "The painted images and slogans played an important didactic function, serving to popularise the historic black leadership."<sup>147</sup> However some had different opinions on how effective the painting of murals was during the apartheid period. Marschall argues that murals were not that

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<sup>145</sup> Neil Jarman, 'Painting Landscapes: The Place of Murals in the Symbolic Construction of Urban Space' in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, ed. Anthony Buckley (Belfast: Queen's University, 1998), 81.

<sup>146</sup> Jarman, 'Painting Landscapes'. 81.

<sup>147</sup> Steven Sack, *The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art '1930-1988'* (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1988).

influential during the resistance period. She further enunciates that compared to other forms of murals such as banners, posters and t-shirts, murals were the least influential. She argues that murals were not encouraged. “The repressive climate of the time was not conducive to the protracted and highly visible process of painting a mural, particularly on an exterior public wall.”<sup>148</sup> She further argues that some of the many murals that were painted across the country, if they displayed slogans of the African National Congress (ANC) or anything remotely close to the struggle, was removed. That is why some of the people such as Mgudlandlu and other different artists would paint these murals inside their houses. According to Mario Pissarro, the Liberal Party identified resistance art as “When a work or activity is removed from a high art context (e.g. not intended primarily as art),” or “When the art is made available on a mass scale.”<sup>149</sup> Marschall argues that during the period of the 1970s and 1980s in Cape Town, in areas such as Nyanga and different townships, “there were many murals inside people’s homes or on exterior walls facing side alleys not patrolled by police. Usually painted haphazardly at night most of these paintings were presumably relatively small and informal.”<sup>150</sup> Bill Rolston refers us to the work of Jarman, where he suggests “that to view the murals as handcuffed to fixed ideological space is to miss the point.”<sup>151</sup> He urges the viewer to cross-examine what they see since murals are far from straightforward. This is suggestive for reading Mgudlandlu’s murals since we know throughout her artwork she has been addressing social ills of the apartheid government and none of her work is without meaning.

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<sup>148</sup> Sabine Marschall, *Community Mural art in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2002).

<sup>149</sup> Van Robbroeck, ‘Writing White on Black, Modernism as Discursive Paradigm in South African Writing on Modern Black Art’ (unpublished PHD Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2006).

<sup>150</sup> Sabine Marschall, *Community Mural art in South Africa*, 51.

<sup>151</sup> Bill Rolston, ‘Changing the Political Landscape: Murals and Transition in Northern Ireland’ *Irish Studies Review* 11, No 1, (2003).

According to Miles, Mgudlandlu's initiation into mural painting as a child influenced her profoundly. Her grandmother taught her the rudiments of this art form. When she was interviewed and asked to name the most important commission, Mgudlandlu replied: "The painting of the mural on my hutment".<sup>152</sup> The mural that she was referring to portrayed her daughter, Linda, with two grandchildren, Brenda and Blanche.<sup>153</sup> The murals that Mgudlandlu painted were an extension of who she was and what was close to her heart. That is why in most of her murals she reflected her love of birds and also painted her family members. Everyone that has been to her house has a great memory of seeing the murals she painted in her house. "James Mitchell distinctively remembers a mural showing huts, birds and two girls that Mgudlandlu had painted on the wall facing the front door."<sup>154</sup> Mitchell was fascinated by the murals since they were unexpected. He claims that no one expected to see murals when visiting, however for most people who visited Mgudlandlu's house the murals are the highlight of what they remember about being in that house. Rolston highlights why most people had this feeling after seeing Mgudlandlu's work. He says "murals not only reflect the commitment or otherwise of political groups to the on-going peace process, but also reinforce that commitment for the communities that view them."<sup>155</sup> Below is one of the murals that she painted while she lived in Gugulethu.

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<sup>152</sup> Hutments are houses that are mostly found in the Eastern Cape. The term hutment refers to a number of huts that are in one yard and are encamped or surrounded with four or five huts belonging to one family. See, Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 37.

<sup>153</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 37.

<sup>154</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 37.

<sup>155</sup> Rolston, 'Changing the Political Landscape', 3.



Figure 24. Bird Mural, by Gladys Mgudlandlu

However in the new South Africa murals have changed drastically they changed to become an agency for beautifying spaces. In the past, prior to the 1990s, the mural genre was practiced on a small scale and that is why it was more prominently in people's houses since it did not have a controlled bureaucracy unlike public murals. According to Coleman mural paintings changed from being an individual thing to become a community initiative where artists collaborate to work on these murals. Murals are considered to be temporary hence they were painted over rather than being restored.

### **Decolonising South African Paintings During the Apartheid Era**

Peffer provides us with a foundation of how the art scene was able to bring unity among different races. He states that "The arts became a relatively safe area where the

kinds of cross – racial interaction that peaked in the 1950s around the jazz and writing scenes of bohemian Sophiatown and District Six, and were effectively stamped out by the South African government by the 1960s, could be preserved and developed.”<sup>156</sup>

This was also evident in the work of Mgudlandlu. Through her work and exhibitions she was able to unite different races under one roof. In one newspaper article she was shown having a high tea party in Rodin Gallery with the wives of the members of parliament, where the Senate and Diplomatic Corps were invited. This revealed how art allowed the marginalised to be able to break boundaries created by the apartheid regime. This highlighted the historical and political power that artists obtained through their work. Art allowed different artists in South Africa to be able to dismiss the restrictions and separations that were created by the apartheid laws. This was Mgudlandlu’s platform to showcase the much criticised and unexpected work of a black artist that did not speak to the expected African paintings. This was her first step of decolonising what art was projected to be in relation to the black African artist. Koloane pushes this notion of decolonising African art by pointing out the way in which black practitioners must fulfil an ethnic/mythological role, an expectation which does not appear to apply to white artists if they want to succeed in the mainstream.

Koloane states that the need for “identity to clearly manifest itself in the work of black practitioners mirrors the ‘protection’ of the ‘otherness’ of separate cultures that lies at the heart of apartheid.”<sup>157</sup> White critics tended to associate African art with mystical practice and some of the artwork was viewed as being ‘strange’. This created

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<sup>156</sup> Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, xi.

<sup>157</sup> Richard Hylton, ‘Re\_Framing Africa’ in *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*. Edited by Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820008576845> 22.



an agency and demand for anthropologists and ethnographers to collect these art pieces to study them. Some filled up their curiosity cabinets and took some art pieces as souvenirs to show back home. According to Kasfir, “In the latter, the enigmatic (to Westerners) nature of contemporary African, Asian, and Diaspora art was translated into the art of the conjurer (magician), and at the same time this act of conjuring was equated (quite misleadingly) with the cultural production of a Western avant-garde.”<sup>158</sup> In her argument she further points out we need to eradicate the idea that prior to colonialism African societies were in isolation. She argues that this is utter nonsense and points out those African societies were highly integrated societies that engaged with each other. She claims this is the history of the West, that they have fed African people lies, nevertheless people still believe this fiction. Kasfir further argues that the “primitive artist”, in this Africa of the mind, is controlled by forces larger than himself and is consequently ignorant of the subjective feelings of aesthetic choice. In such an equation, the Western connoisseur is the essential missing factor that transforms the artefact into art.”<sup>159</sup> Thus it is important that we reassess the role that the apartheid government had in the construction of our identities through marginalisation and segregation. That is why we have many artists that are struggling to recognise what art is in relation to African identity.

Most artists in South Africa rejected the type of paintings that Mgudlandlu painted since it was not seen as typical ‘African’ art. Painting landscapes or abstract paintings was never considered to be what black African artists are capable of. Mgudlandlu had to reject this connotation and embrace her style of painting that displayed the type of artist that she was, driven by her own individuality with some influences from her

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<sup>158</sup> Sydney Kasfir, ‘African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow’ in *African Arts*, Vol 25, No 2, 41.

<sup>159</sup> Kasfir, ‘African Art and Authenticity’, 44.

ethnicity and culture. Other artists such as Garth Erasmus and Uche Okeke similarly including Mgudlandlu enjoyed carving their own path when it came to African art. They both draw upon their cultural background and embrace their identities in the way they painted. Miles also mentions this when she relates the work of Mgudlandlu to her being a Fingo and Xhosa, whereas Erasmus rejected his identity as a coloured and embraced a new identity of Khoisan. In Okeke's works he represented the Ibo heritage since he is of the Ibo people.

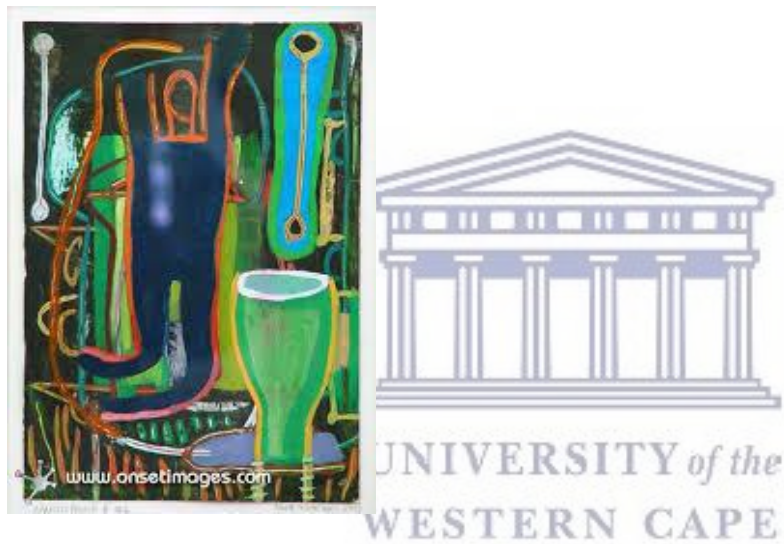


Figure 25. Garth Erasmus (onset productions.com)



Figure 26. Uche Okeke (Uzorka mutualart.com)



Figure 27. Mgudlandlu, Leaf Forms (Elza Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*)

Therefore these obliterate the notion that abstract paintings are located within western modern art and do not express Africanism. According to Hassan, since African artists are seen as not creative or inventive, there was a widespread fallacy that “contemporary African culture is a distorted copy, a mere imitation, of Western culture besides contact with Western culture is seen as a source of decay and, indeed, the extinction, of Africa's great traditional arts.”<sup>160</sup> On the other hand, “African assimilation of Western techniques, materials, ideas, and forms have not been an act of copying those forms, but rather, have been creative, selective, meaningful, and highly original.”<sup>161</sup> Therefore Hassan enforces that we distinguish and dismiss the notion that the artists such as Mgudlandlu, David Koloane and including Dumile Feni might have copied their style of painting from the West, and rather embrace them for the originality of their style and from steering away from the norm that is considered to be African art. Therefore the point that is raised by Mitchell about landscapes not

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<sup>160</sup> Salah Hassan, ‘The Modernist Experience in African Art: Towards a critical understanding’ in Altbach Philip and Hassan, Salah (eds.) *The muse of modernity: essays on culture as development in Africa*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.1996, 216.

<sup>161</sup> Hassan, ‘The Modernist Experience in African Art’, 216.

being from the West makes a great argument of how art in Africa has been colonised and distorted by the belief that black artists can never paint such art. He further points out that people are under the assumption that landscapes are a European construct and he argues that is an incorrect assumption. He elucidates that the concept of landscape emerged from a long tradition of paintings that have become a global thing through the elevation of Dutch art which also borrowed from the Chinese art. He argues that paintings of landscapes are about power in a more indirect manner. “Landscape, we suggest, doesn’t merely signify or symbolize power relations, it is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is independent of human intentions.”<sup>162</sup> Therefore we could argue that Mgudlandlu by painting this type of genre was well aware what kind of power her painting will possess and she might also have understood the disruption her style would cause among the elite.



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<sup>162</sup> Mitchell (ed), *Landscape and Power*, 3.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **THE LEGACY OF GLADYS MGUDLANDLU AND THE FRONTIERS OF THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION IN SOUTH AFRICAN ART.**

The elusiveness of not being able to pin down Kemang Wa Lehulere for an interview made me think about some of the dynamics of being an artist who collaborates with different artists around the world from different disciplines. For this chapter, in the absence of an interview with Kemang Wa Lehulere, I therefore decided to focus on his own work in collaboration with that of Gladys Mgudlandlu through other means. I do this by engaging with current curatorial strategies in response to the idea of restaging curatorial techniques, and thus look at how the work of Mgudlandlu has been given new meanings. This I do by examining the ways curatorial techniques have been used and how cultural meanings are produced, presented and contested in the public domain. I thus pay attention to the curatorial installations created by the work of Kemang Wa Lehulere. I concentrate here on two issues. The first is methodological, looking at how another artist has inserted the work of Mgudlandlu alongside his own work, using new curatorial styles that create new meanings of her work. Here I concentrate particularly on the methods that Wa Lehulere has used and what the insertion of Mgudlandlu's means in terms of her larger body of work. Secondly I ponder on the connotations of her work being invisible and what it suggests to be invisible in the art world. I consider the causes that might have generated the withdrawal of her work from the limelight. Both of these approaches will help me to understand why she disappeared from the South African artwork

market for sixteen years after her last exhibition in 1972 and only resurfaced through Wa Lehulere's incorporation of her work into his collaborative installation.

### **Insertion of Gladys Mgudlandlu's Work in Modern Curatorial Styles**

To frame the role of curators and exhibitions, authors of the book *Thinking About Exhibitions* Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne look at a number of writings by academics, critics and artists from different disciplines in North America, Europe and Australia.<sup>163</sup> These writers focus on current exhibition styles and draw out the development of new dialogues in terms of exhibitions and stress why these debates are important when looking at exhibitions today.<sup>164</sup> They have argued how these spaces are still dominated by biased selections of collections and exhibitions that are subject to dominant authorities and museum elites. Reesa Greenberg and others elucidate the following: "During the course of the 19th century, exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known. These exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed."<sup>165</sup> This statement suggests that exhibitions have become the primary sites where knowledge about art is produced. What is written about artists, their work and their exhibitions is drawn from these encounters, as opportunities to record the developments of this artistic practice. In essence, exhibitions function as sites for theorising and creating meaning. For that reason the volume of Mgudlandlu's work found in the galleries and auction houses is evidence of this function that is created by curators of art and exhibitions to bring relevance to her work. The work of Coombes allows us to pay attention to how

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<sup>163</sup> Reese Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>164</sup> Reese Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking About Exhibitions*.

<sup>165</sup> Reese Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking About Exhibitions*.

establishments such as museums and galleries are able to re-insert new connotations into these spaces. This is all done by the process of using the old meanings of apartheid in a new South Africa post-1994.<sup>166</sup> In her work Coombes has concentrated on how the District Six Museum has implemented a way of rethinking apartheid in the new context of freedom. She further points out how the museum no longer became a space of authority, rather it became a space that involved people's interest in the remaking of post-apartheid histories.<sup>167</sup>

Therefore the curating style of Wa Lehlere and how he has implemented the work of Mgudlandlu in his own practice allows us to be able to view curating as a discourse. Most of Wa Lehlere's work to date has been inspired by the artist Gladys Mgudlandlu. Kemang Wa Lehlere is an undisputed champion in addressing issues of marginalization and racial segregation in the context of past and current South African politics. And the issues that he is concerned with resonated with the issues addressed by Mgudlandlu in her paintings. In one of his interviews with *Artmag* he said that "I am interested in the ephemeral, which is what drew me to Gladys."<sup>168</sup> Wa Lehlere further points out that his curiosity and interest in the work of Mgudlandlu was influenced by Singenu, his long-time friend. He recounts how he was never interested in her work and his interest was only instigated by a case of serendipity in 2014 which prompted him to review his position. He further re-counts the relationship his aunt had with the artist. "Wa Lehlere was visiting his youngest aunt, Sophia, when a neighbour presented him with a copy of art historian Elza Miles's 2002 monograph on

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<sup>166</sup> Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>167</sup> Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 10.

<sup>168</sup> Kemang Wa Lehlere is Deutsche Bank's, Artist of the Year 2017, <http://db-artmag.com/en/93/news/kemang-wa-lehlere-is-deutsche-banks-artist-of-the-year-2017/> (Accessed: 10.08.2018).

Mgudlandlu. His aunt looked at the book and recalled visiting the painter's nearby council-owned home in 1971. Wa Lehulere was stunned. It was the first time his aunt had mentioned this. She further recalled the elaborate murals she had seen."<sup>169</sup>

Reflecting on this encounter, he states that "within months he had received permission from the city authorities to uncover her plastered-over murals."<sup>170</sup> Her work became a great influence in his work since it also interrogates the dominant ideologies of racial segregation. Subsequently he felt that Mgudlandlu's paintings addressed these ideologies, which was the big part of his work. Also, her work was able to offer a solace to him since he was also subjected to racial segregation throughout his childhood. Now that he has started to 'collaborate' the work of Mgudlandlu into his work he is able to reconcile with his past. He further elaborates that the work of Mgudlandlu was also somehow something that helped him deal with the loss of his friend since he was the one that introduced him to Mgudlandlu's work. Wa Lehulere in one of his interviews with the *New York Times* narrates that he can relate to the work of Mgudlandlu since he is biracial and because he was born during the apartheid period. Growing up Wa Lehulere was subjected in a time that the South African apartheid government had an act in place in 1949 that prohibited mixed marriages. This act was called 'The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act' which made marriages between different races such as Europeans and non- Europeans illegal.<sup>171</sup> For that reason it means black people could not marry white people. He mentions how his mother and father were not allowed to live in one house because of the apartheid laws. He further explains that being born prior to 1994 he experienced some of the harsh

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<sup>169</sup> Kemang Wa Lehulere is Deutsche Bank's, Artist of the Year, 2017, <http://db-artmag.com/en/93/news/kemang-wa-lehulere-is-deutsche-banks-artist-of-the-year-2017/> (Accessed: 06.05.2018).

<sup>170</sup> Kemang Wa Lehulere, *Bird Song: Artist of the Year 2017*(Frankfurt: Deutsche Bank/Hatje Cantz. 2017).

<sup>171</sup> Angela Thompsell, The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, 2018, <https://www.thoughtco.com/prohibition-of-mixed-marriages-act-43464> (Accessed: 14.11.2018).



laws of apartheid when he was staying in Gugulethu.<sup>172</sup> I argue that perhaps this might have been one of the catalysts that drew Wa Lehulere to Mgudlandlu's work. Both artists were battling with issues that they were facing during the apartheid period. Wa Lehulere was born in 1984 when apartheid was very rife in South Africa, his father was a white man from Zambia and his mother was a black lady from Cape Town. "I feel like a permanent outsider"<sup>173</sup>, he said. "I've never been black enough; I've never been white enough."<sup>174</sup> He added: "I reject the idea of a South African identity; I feel outside the South African art scene. I don't feel part of any shared collective sensibility. It's troubling, but freeing at the same time."<sup>175</sup>

The identity issues that he was and still dealing with up to today are the same issues that Mgudlandlu dealt with, however in the case of Mgudlandlu her identity issues were associated with her artwork. People wanted to identify her work with a certain group of people which was very hard since her work was so diverse and also lacked features that most refer to as primitive art. For that reason she ended up as a loner searching for a place where her art could belong. As a result he visits these issues and they become very reflected in how he curates his artwork. His curatorial and exhibition style saw him winning a number of awards such as the Deutsche Bank 2017 Artist of the Year, the inaugural Spier Contemporary Award in 2007, the MTN New Contemporaries Award in 2010, and the Tollman Award for the Visual Arts in 2012; he was one of two young artists awarded the 15th Baloise Art Prize at Art Basel in 2013; he won the first International Tiberius Art Award Dresden in 2014 and was the

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<sup>172</sup> Roslyn Sulcas, South Africa's Rising Art Star Builds His New Stage in Chicago, 01.11.2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/11/02/arts/design/kemang-wa-lehulere-constructs-a-history-from-south-africas-shadows.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/02/arts/design/kemang-wa-lehulere-constructs-a-history-from-south-africas-shadows.html) (Accessed: 10.05.2018).

<sup>173</sup> Roslyn Sulcas, South Africa's Rising Art Star Builds His New Stage in Chicago.

<sup>174</sup> Roslyn Sulcas, South Africa's Rising Art Star Builds His New Stage in Chicago.

<sup>175</sup> Roslyn Sulcas, South Africa's Rising Art Star Builds His New Stage in Chicago.

Standard Bank Young Artist for Visual Arts in 2015.<sup>176</sup> His ingenious intervention of using the black chalk board and old school desk to portray his work of art created a platform where he curated and exhibited in over twenty countries around the world. This has taken him around the world curating solo exhibitions in places such as MAXXI, Rome (2017); the Deutsche Bank Kunst Halle (2017); the Art Institute of Chicago (2016); Gasworks, London (2015); Lombard Freid Projects, New York (2013); the Goethe-Institut, Johannesburg (2011), and the Association of Visual Arts in Cape Town (2009).<sup>177</sup> He also curated a lot of exhibitions with the Stevenson Gallery such as *The South African Pavillion without Walls*, Performa 17, New York (2017); *Art/ Afrique, le nouvel atelier* at Fondation Louis Vuitton (2017); *African Odysseys at Le Brass Cultural Centre of Forest*, Belgium(2015); the 8th Berlin Biennale (2014); *Public Intimacy: Art and Other Ordinary Acts in South Africa* at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2014); *The Ungovernables*, the second triennial exhibition of the New Museum in New York (2012); *A Terrible Beauty is Born*, the 11th Lyon Biennale at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Lyon, France (2011) and *When Your Lips Are My Ears, Our Bodies Become Radios* at the *Kunsthalle Bern* and *Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern*, Switzerland (2010).<sup>178</sup>

The body of the work of Wa Lehlere is made up of paintings, drawings, performance work, video, collages and sculptures, and most of his exhibitions are curated using these categories. His work “echoes how traces of racism and injustice are blurred and ignored, revealing the gap between individual biography and official

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<sup>176</sup> Stevenson, Kemang Wa Lehlere, <http://www.stevenson.info/artist/kemang-wa-lehlere/biography> (Accessed: 10.05.2018).

<sup>177</sup> Stevenson, Kemang Wa Lehlere.

<sup>178</sup> Stevenson, Kemang Wa Lehlere.

historiography.”<sup>179</sup> Somehow his work showcases traces of a socialist mentality in how he advocates for the marginalised and how he educates different communities through his artwork of their past. He also has a way of engaging with the present social issues in his artwork such as addressing free education. His work also includes the element of the new and the old in how he collaborates with artists from disciplines or media different from his own. His exhibitions include collaborations from musicians, architects and dancers. The work of Wa Lehlere has always found ways of revisiting and re-imagining the narratives of the archive that relate to the histories of the marginalised artist, authors and different musicians. This is done to make sure that these artists’ work does not sink into oblivion. And this is so conversant with the work of curator Deliss who invited different artists around the world to come and spend time in the Weltkulturen Museum storage and go through the museum archive and be innovative in finding new meanings in artworks that have been dormant for years.<sup>180</sup> As a result she allows the artist to bring up difficult conversations that most institutions shy away from. She does this by allowing the pieces exhibited to tell stories of race, marginalisation and gender issues. This allows audiences to create their own meanings based on what is curated and how it is curated. Deliss speaks about this process in her work called the *Object Atlas*, she explains what the process means and why it is good for such institutions to collaborate with different disciplines.<sup>181</sup> Deliss points out that the collaboration with these artists brought new aspects into the ethnographic museum in the case she discusses. “Painting and drawing as a medium for engaging with the objects in the museum was not a

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<sup>179</sup> Kemang Wa Lehlere is "Artist of the Year" 2017, [www.db.com/newsroom\\_news/2016/medien/kemang-wa-lehlere-is-artist-of-the-year-2017](http://www.db.com/newsroom_news/2016/medien/kemang-wa-lehlere-is-artist-of-the-year-2017).

<sup>180</sup> Clamentine Deliss, *Weltkulturen Museum, Object Atlas, Fieldwork in the Museum* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2012), 1-8.

<sup>181</sup> Clamentine, Deliss, *Weltkulturen Museum*, 1-8.

development that was anticipated from the start. Yet, the participants in *Object Atlas* independently brought back the tradition of the artist as visual chronicler of expeditions. In the museum lab, the selected ethnographic artefacts became the strange unknown that required tools for detailed observation, recognition and comprehension.”<sup>182</sup> She further suggest that these collaborations from different disciplines helped with the formation of an exhibition, also in “transforming its initial concept step by step to allow for new metaphors to emerge in response to each external impulse.”<sup>183</sup> As a result the same happened with the collaboration of Wa Lehulere and Wolfs when they collaborated on ‘Bird Song’ exhibition. Wa Lehulere recounts how working with Wolf in the ‘Bird Song’ exhibition opened his eyes, therefore now he argues that most paintings of Mgudlandlu pertaining to the location are not of Gugulethu location but of Luyolo Village which the occupants were forced out as part of land expropriation and force removals.<sup>184</sup> He further argues that when he first started working with Wolf he had no idea that he will discover such. Luyolo Village was a residence for blacks and this location was destroyed during the apartheid period. The residents of Luyolo Village were deported to go live in Gugulethu Township. Wa Lehulere in the ‘Bird Song’ exhibition review he was quoted as saying, “This mixing of artists and times creates a conversation between the past and the present and between the objective historical, the tangible artefact, and the action of memory—intangible and vague— like recounting a dream.”<sup>185</sup> He believes that when you work with different disciplines you are able to get ideas that you did

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<sup>182</sup> Clamentine, Deliss, *Weltkulturen Museum*, 1-8.

<sup>183</sup> Clementine Deliss and Yvette Mutumba, *Foreign Exchange: (or the Stories You Wouldn't Tell a Stranger)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2014)12.

<sup>184</sup> The Bird Lady- In Search of Gladys Mgudlandlu, <https://db-artmag.com/en/98/feature/the-bird-lady-in-search-of-gladys-mgudlandlu/> (Accessed: 28.08.2018).

<sup>185</sup> The Bird Lady- In Search of Gladys Mgudlandlu, <https://db-artmag.com/en/98/feature/the-bird-lady-in-search-of-gladys-mgudlandlu/> (Accessed: 28.08.2018).

not have before. Also you tend to get information and knowledge that you did not know in regards to that particular subject you are working in, thus the information about the Luyolo location made him see Mgudlandlu's painting in a different light. He also agrees with Deliss in how when different disciplines mix and work together new meanings and methods of working appear. That is why his curating style is so different. In one of his interviews he points out that "curating becomes a discourse that takes place in a certain social context which is exposed to limitations of time and space."<sup>186</sup> Consequently, with each exhibition curated there is a greater understanding of ideas that are being put forward by these curators. As a result the roles have changed and it is no longer only about preservation, provenance and producing different catalogues as part of the curator's duties. However, now that things have changed curators are more concerned with disrupting different histories by interpreting and telling their stories in a manner that brings new understanding to the different members of society. The role of a curator changed from just being a keeper of collections to becoming a storyteller and being more concerned with conceptual strategies.

This is very apparent in the work of Wa Lehlere, we notice that his artwork and curating style is about answering the restricted questions. This can be seen in his exhibitions called the 'Bird Song' and 'History will break your heart'. Both exhibitions are made up of Mgudlandlu's and Wa Lehlere's work. In this collaboration he curated both their work through the use of juxtaposing art pieces to show some contrast and create open-ended questions. The 'Bird Song' exhibition is underlined by his exploration of works "by South African artist Gladys Mgudlandlu

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<sup>186</sup> Wa Lehlere, *Bird Song*, 11.

(1917–79) placed on the walls alongside Wa Lehulere's. The title of this exhibition was motivated by the title song of Miriam Makeba called Ntyilo Ntyilo."<sup>187</sup> The 'History will break your heart' installation 'entails a very different set of collaborations both with his aunt, Sophia Lehulere, and with artists such as Ernest Mancoba and Gladys Mgudlandla who have been marginalised and "written out of history."<sup>188</sup> These exhibitions sought to foreground a 'lost' history particularly of black South Africans who have not been acknowledged in the canon of South African art. And this is the case with the work of Mgudlandlu who disappeared from the history of South Africa after her last exhibition in 1972. As a result when studying the curatorial style of Wa Lehulere we find many similarities to the work of Fred Wilson in 'Cabinet Making,' where Wilson pushes the history-making process to the extreme.<sup>189</sup> In his exhibition Wilson inserts new meanings into how people have viewed and perceived history by seeking new ways to convey the way history has been presented. Wilson's works further reflect on cultural diversity since prior to this exhibition, histories of minorities were under-represented for groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, and other groups.<sup>190</sup> Women are another under-represented category. This is actually what has been evident with Mgudlandlu's work. Most institutions did not know how to curate and place her work in the public, so they rather kept her work in storage. For example the Iziko South African Nation Gallery (ISANG) has four paintings of the artist and only one is displayed in the gallery. Similarly, the work of Wilson deals with art pieces which are filling storage rooms

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<sup>187</sup> Wa Lehulere, *Bird Song*, 11.

<sup>188</sup> Kemang Wa Lehulere: History will Break your Heart, <https://sponsorships.standardbank.com> (Accessed: 06.08.2018).

<sup>189</sup> Maurice Berger, 'Viewing the Invisible: Fred Wilson's Allegories of Absence and Loss', in Maurice Berger (with contributions by Fred Wilson and Jennifer González), *Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations, 1979-2000* (New York: Centre for Art and Visual Culture, University of Maryland, 2001).

but are full of history that is not told to the public. For that reason he portrays this in his work when he juxtaposes pieces that are expected, together with unexpected pieces. The story that he is bringing across by going against the norm and the expected is to interrogate and reveal its prejudices and omissions. All of this is executed through the use of the manifestation of the museum's lost history, using the old ignored objects in the museum storeroom.

We should understand that the work of Wilson in his exhibitions is about allegories of absence and loss, aesthetic meditations in which fragments from the historical past are brought together to reveal difficult truths about the present. The 'Bird Song exhibition' and 'History will Break your Heart' installations are good examples of how Wa Lehulere's work is similar to the work of Wilson. The 'Bird Song exhibition' was installed and exhibited in 2017 and was a retrospective of Mgudlandlu's work alongside his work. The exhibition called 'History will Break your Heart' was exhibited at the Iziko South African National Gallery in 2015, curated to show the work of Mgudlandlu and Mancoba. Here Wa Lehulere wanted to present artists that have been written off from history, artists that have been marginalized. This exhibition also saw him collaborating with a number of artists. In the exhibition called 'History will Break your Heart', you find an installation called 'Does this Mirror have a Memory'. Here Wa Lehulere "asked his aunt, who visited self-taught artist Gladys Mgudlandlu's house as a child, to draw Mgudlandlu's paintings from memory."<sup>191</sup> Let us refer to Figure 28 below, where we are able to see an example of an installation where he used his aunt's drawing in juxtaposition with Gladys Mgudlandlu's actual

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<sup>191</sup> Alice Inggs, 'Kemang Wa Lehulere, History Will Break Your Heart', <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/visual/kemang-wa-lehulere-history-will-break-your-heart/> (Accessed: 05.06 2017).

painting. And if we look closely at the frame of Mgudlandlu's painting we able to see how Wa Lehlere had made use of the old iron from school desk scraps. This installation portrays how connected we are to the old and the new, how our histories are intertwined and how we have a responsibility to each other.



Figure 28. Image from History Will Break your Heart collection ([www.africasacountry.com](http://www.africasacountry.com))

As a result Wa Lehlere in one of his interviews narrates that “the discovery of Mgudlandlu's murals was an act of restitution of another kind. Her art had been reviled as escapist and childish in a famous 1963 review (Gladys Mgudlandlu: The Exuberant Innocent) by writer Bessie Head, who called it safe art for consumption of whites. Her work was attacked for not challenging the political situation of the day.”<sup>192</sup> Or, in Wa Lehlere's own words:

Her work not was revolutionary and anti-apartheid in the spectacular aesthetic form like what most blacks were doing. But it makes it the more interesting to me. I also find it interesting that she painted a lot of landscapes given how black people had been forcefully removed and systematically alienated from their land under apartheid it was an act of

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<sup>192</sup> Wa Lehlere, *Bird Song*, 18.



resistance for a black woman to paint a bird or a tree, that alone was political.<sup>193</sup>

For that reason the work of Coombes is very significant in highlighting the challenges that Wa Lehulere facing trying to answer the role of presentation of history in public spaces. Annie Coombes focuses on the methods used to negotiate historical knowledge in public spaces, by paying attention to how representation of these models such as museums, monuments and contemporary fine art are presented in the public, and how their historical knowledge is communicated for the public and how it is perceived. She further argues that establishments such as museums and galleries are able to re-insert new connotations in these spaces through the process of using the old meanings of apartheid in a new South Africa post-1994.<sup>194</sup> For that reason, we see this again here in the work of Wa Lehulere since they are both trying to rework the meaning of the past. They are both challenged by the concept that the older can still be relevant in the now through curating art to represent the political and social ideas of the now. For that reason we are able to recognize that Wa Lehulere's installations are there to rewrite history not just for the visitor but for the exhibition space too. As a result it makes sense that I keep associating Wa Lehulere's curatorial discourse with Wilson's since their ideology is very similar and the process applied is very similar with reference to Wilson's 'Cabinet Making'. Wilson informs us that with his previous installations he had always paid attention to various museum practices, the way objects are displayed, what curators said about the art and the artists in wall labels. But now he explores the ways in which the conventions and hierarchies of the museum consciously or unconsciously perpetuate prejudice. His exploration is much

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<sup>193</sup> Wa Lehulere, *Bird Song*, 18.

<sup>194</sup> Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 10.

revealed in the manner he juxtaposes the expected and the unexpected since this is the only manner that they both can disrupt the museology discourse. It is also important that I mention that traditional museum displays represent people of Africa to reveal the 'other' in a manner of exoticizing the black body or dehumanizing the black body as being 'primitive'. In galleries such as ISANG you find that there is a specific room that is reserved for displaying African works. And this is what both artists are trying to move away from by using the so-called 'primitive art' with a new piece of artwork. Both these artists challenge this notion through their work and you can easily see it through their curatorial style. They curate in a manner that will address different discourses that most institutions and curators shy away from. They make it a point that their works are interrogating the meanings of the marginalized other and the different politics that people of colour have faced through colonialism and apartheid. As a result Wa Lehulere's fascination with Mgudlandlu's painting makes so much sense since these were the challenges Mgudlandlu faced and that she addressed to the world through her art. Mgudlandlu's work disrupts and challenges the idea of the other in terms of the labeling of black art.

Below I have attached examples from different exhibitions of both artists Wa Lehulere and Wilson to illustrate the manner in which they have imposed the perfect with the imperfect. Just by looking at the first two images we can analyze them as a way of addressing colonial power. In Figures 28 and 29 we can see a black whip placed with the royal tea cup set and in Figure 29 we can see Bibles shut with crutches. Both these examples expose the dominant ideology of the oppression of the mind of black person, not just physically but mentally too. That is why people use the phrase that says 'the white man came with the bible and left with the land'. It is to

insinuate that they came and taught us about God while they were stealing our land right under our noses.



Figure 29. Fred Wilson Collection



Figure 30. Kemang Wa Lehulere Collection



Figure 31. Fred Wilson Collection



Figure 32. Kemang Wa Lehulere Collection



Figure 33. Fred Wilson Collection



Figure 34. Kemang Wa Lehulere Collection

Therefore, we can argue that both exhibitions the ‘Bird Song and History will break your heart’ sought to challenge through parodying the dominant, official, institutional museum discourses in relation to the ‘other’. These exhibitions address issues that most artists run away from fear of being too political. Thus Wa Lehulere in this exhibition he challenges those silent voices that are never interrogated in such spaces head on. Therefore the two exhibitions focus on issues of the repressed history of South Africa and its silenced voices. As a result his work opens up a new conversation and a new production in the art world of South Africa. For that reason the History will break your heart exhibition wants to bridge a gap in how both these artists Mgudlandlu and Mancoba were viewed in a more suppressed South Africa. This exhibitions offer a holistic approach to the work of these artist through education and allowing the audience to engage with the conveyed meanings.

## **The Political Discourse of the Embodiment of an Invisible Artist**

Most of the exhibitions that Mgudlandlu featured in were curated and staged in white areas, none of her work was exhibited in the townships where she lived. At the time of Mgudlandlu there were no facilities such as art studios or gallery where she could showcase her work. Also at the time a career of an artist or black artist was not something that was celebrated or seen as an occupation. According to Wa Lehulere:

Many people used to make fun of Gladys Mgudlandlu because an artist was such a rare thing in a black township back then. Black people did not have any arts education because of the curriculum. One of the South African presidents had stated that there was no need to teach black people things that they would never use in their life. There was no holistic education, they didn't try to convey a broad world view, to nurture people philosophically or engage them, for example, with mathematics. The education system was purely geared towards preparing black people to be servants for whites. So to see that mural was quite a big thing for my aunt.<sup>195</sup>

As a result the sites that exhibited her work were areas isolated from township areas under the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 that “was in full control at the time of her work.”<sup>196</sup> The Separate Amenities Act shaped a classification system that produced full-on racial segregation in South Africa. As a result this restricted the social interaction of South Africans within facilities such as beaches, restrooms, buses

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<sup>195</sup> Wa Lehulere, *Bird Song*, 11.

<sup>196</sup> South African Parliament repeals The Separate Amenities Act of 1953, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/south-african-parliament-repeals-separate-amenities-act-1953> (Accessed: 16.08.2018).

and train stations. “The Act enforced segregation of all public facilities, including buildings, and transport, in order to limit contact between the different races in South Africa. The Act also stated that the facilities for different races did not need to be equal. In practice then, the best facilities were reserved for whites while those for other races were inferior”.<sup>197</sup> Mgudlandlu’s exhibitions therefore, based in the spaces they occupied, attracted the white market and that might be one of the reasons that most of her work is hanging on white people’s walls. Logistically the environment and space did not allow for black Africans to participate in these types of social interactions. I also argue that based on the Separate Amenities Act, having these exhibitions in the townships would have also limited the number of people being exposed to her work and also limit the number of people purchasing her art work. It is important that we understand since most black people then had no interaction with artists or art and had never studied art they would not have fully understood the meaning of attending such spaces. As a result the same reasons still apply most artists even today are moving to affluent areas such as the CBD and the Woodstock area where there is a demand for their work. Artists rather close their workshops in the location since there is not much funding and following. Therefore some funders and art lovers might have struggled with the concept of having her exhibitions in townships and withdrawn from funding her exhibitions. Wa Lehlere mentions in one of his interviews that even his lecturers argued that people of the township had no concept of art:

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<sup>197</sup> South African Parliament repeals The Separate Amenities Act of 1953, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/south-african-parliament-repeals-separate-amenities-act-1953> (Accessed: 10.07.2018).

When we did Gugulective one of my lecturers said, “Hey man what the fuck are you guys doing bringing conceptual art to the township? You’re speaking a language people don’t understand’ and I was like what? I mean, the responses I had at Gugulective were the most sophisticated, from an audience that is largely uneducated, they have an incredible ability to read images.”<sup>198</sup>

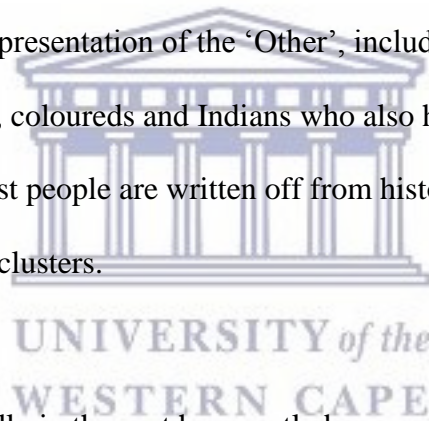
As a result this statement made me think of myself, funnily enough I have no background in art and yet I am fascinated by art. I wonder which category I fall under then, to date I have friends who are artists and frequent art galleries. Does that mean since we stay in township areas we do not know anything about aesthetics? I used to be one of those people that had never set a foot in a gallery or museum until I left High School. While I do not like playing the blame game, however, I feel that some of us were actually robbed by the apartheid government. We missed out on being taught about art and our own African artists, we were rather fed the line that African artists should focus on creating craft art, African artefacts and painting everything related to African culture. For that reason some of us still believe that we are not the creators of art. Consequently you would find that there are many that agree with this lecturer’s statement that conceptual art or Mgudlandlu’s work should be something that is exhibited and curated for the white audiences in a rich white area where there is an astute audience. Since these groups of people are the only people that can enjoy and speak about art. I am therefore certain that I am not the only one who feels that the South African education system is very biased against the ‘other’ in terms of what is taught at the township schools. Even now the history that we encounter in high

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<sup>198</sup> Leila Dee Dougan, 13.07.2015, <https://africasacountry.com/2015/07/kemang-wa-lehulere-history-will-break-your-heart/> (Accessed: 08.09.2017).

school is based on the ANC struggle which is very biased. It still reflects the dominant ideologies of those who stay in power and belong there while the marginalized have no place, they should remain at the bottom of the food chain.

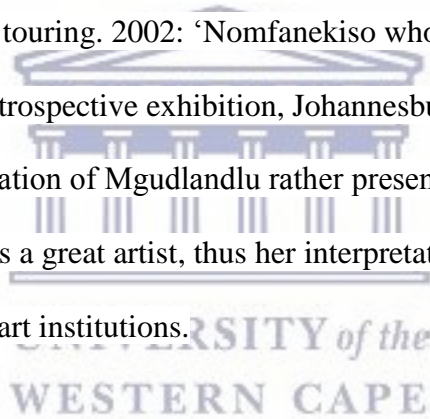
Mgudlandlu's struggles have always been to fight off misrepresentation of Africans and the argument that says we are not good enough. Even within the new post-apartheid South Africa, art from outside South Africa is still dominating the art scene. Some of the galleries such as ISANG, their acquisitions are still made up of large numbers of European artists, only now within the past eleven years or so are they trying to diversify their acquisition with adding black, coloured and Indian artists in their acquisitions through their contemporary and photographic work. There is disproportionate lack of representation of the 'Other', including the stories of others such as the black Africans, coloureds and Indians who also had a great impact on South African history. Most people are written off from history because they do not form part of the dominant clusters.



The narration of Mgudlandlu in the past has mostly been concerned with promoting her as the first black female to exhibit in the history of South Africa. Not much has been said about the genre of her painting and the connotations her work addressed and represented during the apartheid era. Her work in the past has always been viewed as meta-narrative, merely inserting black African women into a very subjective space of arts. She is frequently celebrated for her achievement as an artist rather than having an interactive discourse that dismantles and reassembles her work to ask open questions that address the issues that she struggled with during the apartheid period. When we focus on the narration of Mgudlandlu by Miles and Ntombela we find that there are a lot of gaps in who she really was and what her work really represented. Both of their



narrations of Mgudlandlu do not address the question of why she is invisible in the art space now, and why there is so little of her work documented. We rather come across how much of her work has been exhibited, when she was born, and who influenced her in her work. For instances Miles gives us a detailed account of her exhibitions referencing that “In 1961 she had her Solo Exhibition at the Liberal Party’s offices in Cape Town. In 1964 she had another follow up Solo exhibition at the Adler Fielding Galleries, Johannesburg; Rodin Gallery, Long Street, Cape Town. 1967: Rodin Gallery, Long Street, Cape Town. These were followed by other different Solo exhibitions in 1971 promoted by the Association of Arts Gallery in Cape Town. 1972: Solo exhibition, King Williamstown, Eastern Cape. 1997: ‘Land and Lives’, Johannesburg Art Gallery, touring. 2002: ‘Nomfanekiso who paints at night: The Art of Gladys Mgudlandlu’, retrospective exhibition, Johannesburg Art Gallery, is touring”.<sup>199</sup> Miles’s articulation of Mgudlandlu rather presents an artist’s biography and could not uphold her as a great artist, thus her interpretation fell short in keeping her relevant and visible in art institutions.



Therefore Gladys Mgudlandlu’s reappearance in, and disappearance from, the available archive sources of other forms of identification such as art institutions becomes a very interesting subject of interrogation. Since it is evident that after her last exhibition called ‘Land and Lives’ in 1997, her work has totally vanished and gone missing to only resurface through the work of Ntombela in 2013 which was followed up by an exhibition in 2015 curated by Wa Lehulere. For that reason the work of David Cohen allows us to interrogate why there are gaps and why she was invisible for such a long time and only reappears after sixteen years. Cohen addresses

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<sup>199</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso*, Who Paints at Night, 46.

“questions of memory control and how those in power try to control recall and intellectual capabilities of others.”<sup>200</sup> He further argues that “their control extends to decisions regarding selective and non-memorialisation of events that are disruptive to authorities.”<sup>201</sup> Thus we can argue that the reason that the work of Mgudlandlu disappeared in the arts was surrounded by ideology, and the relevance of her work was subjected to those who were in power and to the people who are in charge of these institutions. The disappearance of African artists is not only relevant to the work of Mgudlandlu, there is a number of African artists that remain and continue to be unknown even though some of them have exhibited their work around the world. However these artists are not recognised in their own countries and lack the recognition that they are receiving in the outside world. This therefore limits the museums’ role as sites of social meanings and it points to the limits of curating content mainly from the perspectives of curators and the state. Therefore we can argue that the impression of apartheid in South Africa has left traces of racism and segregation that still continue in different forms of visual art. Campbell writes that “Under the influence of early 20th-century European art movements such as Cubism, Fauvism, Expressionism, and Surrealism, artists such as Maggie Laubser (1886–1973), Irma Stern (1894–1966), Maurice van Essche (1906–1977), Walter Battiss (1906–1982), Alexis Preller (1911–1975), and Cecil Skotnes (b.1926) adopted a more radical means of representation, and began to envisage not only a South African, but also an African identity through their works”.<sup>202</sup> South African art institutions are only embracing these radical means of representation now, therefore we can further argue that even though it seems the world has accepted diversity in art culture in terms of embracing diverse artists such as black artists, yet black artists are still

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<sup>200</sup> David Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 244 – 250.

<sup>201</sup> Cohen, *The Combing of History*, 244 - 250.

<sup>202</sup> Revisions, Expanding the narrative of South African Art.

subjected and relegated to a constricted conceptual space in which to operate. This becomes predominantly so if they have any expectations of their work becoming a part of the larger and still precarious discourse. Therefore this constricted space of anticipation is one which both prevents and dampens them from concentrating on the massive variety of art history as the foundation of their work, and in its place encourages a continuing, endless reconsideration of an all too familiar racial terrain, subjected largely to the typecast African. “The assertion of a nationalistic identity through art cannot be separated from the power struggles of the time, particularly the conflicts between the British and the Boers. With the coming to power of the National Party in 1948 it should come as no surprise that books on South African art were mostly written in Afrikaans, and had no or at best little space for artists of colour”.<sup>203</sup>

The work of Mgudlandlu disappeared and became invisible and could not be seen in any art space. Her work was pushed to the margins without any having any self-representation. Therefore these collaborations from different artists in different disciplines allowed for a new way of looking at things. Wa Lehulere in one of his interviews about Mgudlandlu’s murals narrates that since there is no record of her murals and there is no access to the one discovered in the house, the only way he could make it accessible was by drawing the murals on the chalkboard and make them part of his exhibition so that everyone can have access to her work. His manner of making Mgudlandlu’s work accessible to everyone can also be interpreted as a way of making sure that she remains in the memory of people.

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<sup>203</sup> *Revisions, Expanding the Narrative of South African Art.*

was an epitome of what is possible just disappear like that while during her career she was very visible? She appeared in every newspaper article around South Africa talking about her work and explaining each and every painting. The work of Jenny Edkins explains what it means when a person goes missing, she gives different scenarios where a person goes missing and why. Her emphasis is for us to get a new perception on how we see the missing. She reveals to us that we never fully know the people that go missing as we thought we did. She argues that perhaps we should look beyond the term missing and understand the underlying meaning based on how the political system views the 'other'. She further makes evident how the government treats missing people as objects rather than seeing them as individuals, how the government sees people in terms of categories such as class and race. And so when she talks about the unmissed, in this case Mgudlandlu the unmissed, she points out that "however, there is a larger sense in which we could think about the unmissed: those who are not present to a Western imagination in the first place, those who are from a particular perspective, as if that were the only one. These persons could be said to be 'missing' in a different and arguably more important way than those I have been discussing so far. Their discussion is fundamental that we don't even realize they are missing".<sup>204</sup> Edkins points out that the unmissed are very important since no one really cares about them but pretends to. She argues that if they are missed or counted they are counted as objects of humanitarian aid or intervention, not as person with political views of their own. This is so true and relevant in the case of black South African artists. In Mgudlandlu's case her visibility in the past was based on how a group of people viewed and labelled her work. She was motivated and hailed as a hero by the white liberals who were looking out for their own gain. In his essay Bell

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<sup>204</sup> Jenny Edkins, *Missing: Persons and Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011) 5-6.

to a certain extent agrees with this notion by disrupting most theories about liberalism. He states that liberalism is “across and within scholarly discourses, it is construed in manifold and contradictory ways: as an embattled vanguard project and constitutive of modernity itself, a fine-grained normative political philosophy and a hegemonic mode of governmentality, the justificatory ideology of unrestrained capitalism and the richest ideological resource for its limitation”.<sup>205</sup> Thus Bell argues that liberalism is an act, he emphasise that liberalism is “an actor’s category”.<sup>206</sup> That is why then I argue that black artists are not really seen for who they are but to be used as part of a liberal discourse. They are not incorporated because they are good at what they do but because these institutions are forced to present different races in their work. Most institutions are forced to have these artists to appear to be diverse and some comply with the new national narrative of post-1994. Mostly government funded institutions are required by law to represent all races in their acquisitions.



Ralph Ellison writes:

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination indeed, everything and anything except me. Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a bio-chemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I

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<sup>205</sup> Duncan Bell, ‘What is Liberalism’, *Political Theory*, Vol. 42, No. 6 (December 2014), 683.

<sup>206</sup> Bell, ‘What is Liberalism’.

come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.<sup>207</sup>

Ellison addresses the perception of blackness and being invisible to the rest of the visual sphere. He interrogates the visual spaces such as television, music and the arts, he questions why the 'Other' is invisible in these spaces and cannot be seen. He argues that the 'Other' is seen in a distorted manner hence he writes "it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass".<sup>208</sup> He addresses the way people misrepresent him and this is the same case with the work of Mgudlandlu. Her work has been distorted and misrepresented so much that her own biography does not do justice to the presentation of her work. I tend to argue that the main reason why her work is so much distorted is because the majority of her critics were the white audiences that had a certain ideology of how a black African artist should be painting. They had a pre-selected genre of style of painting that was subjected to the white body thus they robbed Mgudlandlu's work of being authentic and represented properly for what her ideas were. Black artists were not viewed or seen as artists that can paint landscapes and abstract art. That was seen as European art or art that can only be mastered by white people. So when Mgudlandlu was painting landscape they tried to discredit her work as naïve. Andrew Crampton argues that "public art museums for the most part ignored the work of black artists in their acquisition policies. The Johannesburg Art Gallery was the first public Institution to acquire work by a black artist when it purchased Gerard Sekoto's *Yellow Houses: a street in Sophia Town* in 1940, but this remained the only painting by the black artist in the galleries

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<sup>207</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952).

<sup>208</sup> Ellison, *Invisible Man*.

until the 1960s.”<sup>209</sup> Therefore we are able to understand that these institutions were very biased in the work that they bought and exhibited to the public. Crampton further makes a statement that shows how each artist’s work was not bought based only on how great the work was aesthetically, but it was more about race and class. Therefore this clearly indicates that we live in a world where the work that is acquired is based on where the artist is from and who the artist is. As a result Crampton points out that “The ownership of European art by the National Gallery ( and other galleries across Africa) provided a source of civic pride, indicated South Africa’s place among civilised nations, and allowed settler culture to claim difference from superiority to indigenous cultures”.<sup>210</sup> The mere fact that a gallery in South Africa had to source acquisitions from outside as a source of superiority, that gives a clear indication on how they felt about local artists in South Africa. As a result we can argue that Mgudlandlu had no chance of keeping her work alive with so much politics surrounding art institutions. Crampton claims that even though black African art was being collected and added to the museum and galleries acquisition it was never really considered art. “Black art therefore was collected but did not achieve the status of ‘art’.”<sup>211</sup> Crampton’s argument is similar to the argument of Philips and Steiner who argue that the work of black Africans has always been “appropriated primarily into two of these categories: the artefact or ethnographic specimen and the work of art.”<sup>212</sup> For that reason it is difficult for other institutions to move away from this notion of viewing art by black people as just pure art rather than being associated with ethnography. This is very challenging for most African artists since collectors and

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<sup>209</sup> Andrew Crampton, ‘The art of nation-building: (re)presenting political transition at the South African National Gallery’, *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April 2003), 223.

<sup>210</sup> Crampton, The art of nation-building, 223.

<sup>211</sup> Crampton, The art of nation-building, 224.

<sup>212</sup> Ruth Philips and Christopher B Steiner, *Unpacking Culture, Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

outside markets such as tourists they are always looking for something that will reveal it comes from Africa and not be similar to what is argued to be European art. That is why Mgudlandlu had such a hard time with her work because the people that were viewing and buying her work felt as though it was not African enough. Even now when people see her work they compare her to European and American artists such as Grandma Moses and Le Douanier Rousseau.<sup>213</sup>



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<sup>213</sup> Miles, *Nomfanekiso, Who Paints at Night*, 35 citing Ray Alexander - Simons.



## CONCLUSION

### **THE VISUAL ENTANGLEMENT: POLITICAL AND AESTHETIC CONNOTATIONS OF GLADYS MGUDLANDLU'S WORK**

This thesis developed from my desire to engage with a visual entanglement: the political meaning of Gladys Mgudlandlu work. These were some of the questions that I grappled with when I first started to write this thesis. I wanted to understand what influenced her to paint landscapes, murals and portraits, and whether these could be categorized as political resistance? Who influenced her painting style? And how was her work interpreted by those who shared the same discipline as her? I wanted to understand how her artwork was significant in South African politics at large, as well as interrogating aspects of how art has an impact on different audiences by giving them a voice. Also, understanding what influenced her work and training will lead me to appreciate her motives for painting and why her paintings were mostly appreciated by a white audience and market.



In my thesis I first started by positioning the life of Mgudlandlu in contextual mode by exploring her background and how that could have influenced her in becoming a painter. I further demonstrated how the influence of culture in her life during the 1960s-1980s propagated and entrenched her view of life in African culture. As a result I started to understand that her expression in her paintings was influenced by the everyday, the things that she saw, that she witnessed and imagined. I further learnt that through scrutinizing her as an artist I started to understand that she was never a crowd pleaser. Her work was not motivated by what everyone around her was doing. I further realised that her artwork was an exposé of her talent and the type of genres

that stimulated her as an artist. My intention here was never to provide an extensive account of the great variety of interdisciplinary descriptions and interpretations of how race, gender, culture and politics had an impact on her choice, but rather to establish how her art was a subtle weapon of resistance during the apartheid period.

I argued that it was necessary to engage with South African art in a manner that will allow us to start contextualising Mgundladlu's artwork conceptually, socially and historically. The moment we do that we will be able to understand the intellectual and social conditions that artists are subjected too. Therefore, the study proposed that once we do that, we get to understand the artist and this helps in developing a comprehensive understanding of their artwork. I further engaged with the concept of production in different workshop settings. My role here was to bring meaning and understanding to the production development of paintings and the story of each painting. As a result I discovered how important the creation process is and how important it is to position Mgudlandlu's paintings in the right context historically. We should therefore understand that with everything that was happening at that time, artists were forced to change their style of work to accommodate the demand at that time. Furthermore, I focused on what each genre means in different social contexts within the frameworks of interpretations of the apartheid period. This concludes with how Mgudlandlu became initiated into art, what kind of art she first experienced and what that meant in the context of South Africa.

At that juncture it made perfect sense that I would be intrigued by the people that have inserted the voice of Mgudlandlu in their work and I wanted to know why the collaborations took place. I did this by engaging with current curatorial strategies and

how these restagings have given new meaning to the work of Mgudlandlu. I further examine the ways curatorial techniques have been used and how cultural meanings are produced, presented and contested in the public domain. First I particular pay attention to the work of Kemang Wa Lehulere interrogating his curatorial technique to help understand why his technique is different from the rest and why it was important for him to use the work of Mgudlandlu in his installations. Secondly I pondered on the connotations of her work being invisible and what it suggests to be invisible in the art world. I consider the causes that might have generated the withdrawal of her work from the limelight. For that reason I become troubled by the accessibility of Mgudlandlu's paintings and exhibitions to the public. Even though her work addresses issues of race segregation and marginalisation of the other, however, I can't help argue that perhaps the inaccessibility of her work in some areas has somewhat fallen part of excluding further the 'other', despite the fact her own work refers to disadvantaged communities that do not have access to galleries and museums and miss out on his representation of history. In addition, I looked at the authority of the museum curators in exhibition space utilisation, as well as the interpretation of the work of Mgudlandlu, questioning what her paintings stood for. The approach that I have used to probe these questions helped me understand the central role played by curators in problematizing issues and setting the research agenda. Through my analysis, I was able to transfigure Mgudlandlu into a research subject. All these investigations pose similar questions on the paintings of Mgudlandlu, particularly in relation to the political history of this country. How do we deal with the past in a contemporary context? How do we respond to the urgency to recollect what is in danger of being lost? The exhibitions of Wa Lehulere operated within the realms of revision and compensation of black people, which had not been the focus of many

galleries and museums. Wa Lehlere may indeed have believed that such an exhibition would have penetrated white communities that may be unaware of experiences of the black majority.

In my thesis I have addressed the issue of how the work of Mgudlandlu had political connotations and whether her artworks spoke to the apartheid politics in South Africa. what are the arguments that branded and classified her work as naïve? The arguments of WJT Mitchell helped me situate the role of Mgudlandlu's landscape in South African context. Looking at how the work of Mitchell specifically dealt with the ambiguity of landscapes was very useful in bringing my point across and helped me explore the meaning of landscapes. Through his argument I was forced to interrogate not just my thinking but our thinking in not just seeing Mgudlandlu's painting as aesthetics but understand that they are a discourse on their own. Hence Mitchell asks "that we think of landscapes, not as an object to be seen or text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed."<sup>214</sup> He further points out that people are under the assumption that landscapes are a European construct and he argues that is an incorrect assumption. These arguments become very productive in engaging with the work of Mgudlandlu and the different arguments that I am undertaking.

I started this journey with an understanding that there is little or no literature on the work of Mgudlandlu to allow me to examine her landscapes and murals through text. In exploring this partial history of Mgudlandlu's artwork I struggled a lot since there was not enough material that produced evidence of her murals that could have helped

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<sup>214</sup> WJT Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 1.

me with a detailed study of her artwork. I further struggled getting the interview that I initially thought would assist me with informative curatorial perspectives in engaging with the work of Mgudlandlu.

The artwork of Mgudlandlu particularly the landscapes played a critical role in addressing apartheid issues in my thesis. Critical analysis in furthering this research will need to consider the fact that there is not much evidence in reference to the murals she painted. And her artwork archive is very shaky and incomplete in terms of correct dates, and the correct names of her artwork. For that reason, for further research I recommend finding evidence of her murals and what they represented, and to critique them.



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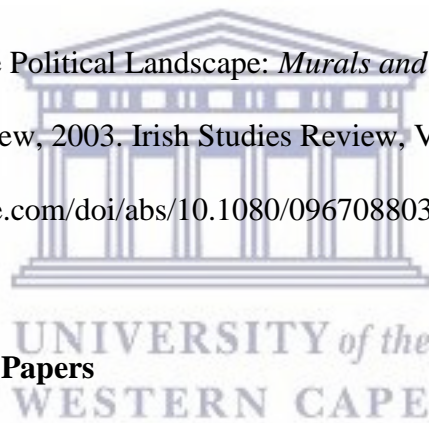
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