VISUAL LANGUAGE IN THE WORK OF JAN VAN DER MERWE

By

Jan van der Merwe

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree

DOCTOR TECHNOLOGIAE: FINE ART

In the
Department of Fine and Applied Arts
FACULTY OF ARTS

TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Supervisor: Dr E L Basson
Co-supervisor: Prof I E Stevens

30 November 2017
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of appendices</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION** ................................................................. 1

1.1 Motivation and background .............................................................. 1
1.2 Research aim ....................................................................................... 4
1.3 Research objectives .......................................................................... 6
1.4 Research methodology ....................................................................... 8
1.5 Outline of chapters ......................................................................... 8

**CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

**PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH AND AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY** ................................. 13

2.1 Practice-led research ........................................................................ 13
2.2 Auto-ethnography .............................................................................. 25

**CHAPTER 3: VISUAL LANGUAGE IN THE WORK OF JAN VAN DER MERWE:**

**A FRAMEWORK** ..................................................................................... 36

3.1 Introduction: a visual language ........................................................... 36
3.2 Concept and conceptualisation ............................................................. 48
   3.2.1 Memory and reflection: commemorating past events or persons, specifically the nameless, disempowered or traumatised ........ 49
   3.2.2 Elegiac and melancholic content, emphasising vulnerability and transience ................................................................. 76
   3.2.3 The banal and ordinary as carriers of poetic meaning ...................... 87
   3.2.4 Ritual, cycles, repetition and obsession ......................................... 94
   3.2.5 Gender roles: male and female ................................................... 108
3.3 Materials, technique and process.................................................................126
3.4 Presentation ................................................................................................ . 166

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY 1: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME,
A RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION AT THE PRETORIA ART MUSEUM,
28 JUNE TO 3 DECEMBER 2006 .................................................................194

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY 2: TIME AND SPACE,
A COMPREHENSIVE EXHIBITION AT THE OLIEWENHUIS ART MUSEUM,
BLOEMFONTEIN, 9 JULY TO 8 AUGUST 2013 ..............................................219

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.............................................................................261

SOURCES CONSULTED ..................................................................................273
Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the degree D.Tech. (Fine and Applied Arts) at Tshwane University of Technology is my own work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher education. I further declare that all sources quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

Jan Lodewyk van der Merwe
This study is dedicated to my grandmother Sarie (S W) Pozyn, née Boshoff, my mother Nellie (P H) van der Merwe, née Pozyn and my father, Hermanus (H A) van der Merwe.
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to:

- The Tshwane University of Technology and the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of the Arts, for support and for the opportunity to undertake this research.
- The National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences for awarding a SAHUDA/NIHSS PhD Scholarship to me.
- My supervisor, Dr. E. L. Basson and co-supervisor, Prof. I. E. Stevens for their exceptional care and positive, inspiring and professional guidance.
- Prof. M. Sirayi, Executive Dean, Faculty of the Arts, Tshwane University of Technology, for his support and motivation.
- Prof. N. Moodley-Diar, Executive Dean, Faculty of the Arts, Tshwane University of Technology (as from 2018) for her support and encouragement.
- Dr R. Kruger, Head of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Tshwane University of Technology, for her support.
- The library service, Faculty of the Arts, TUT, in particular Ms Franlie le Roux, Ms Martie van der Merwe and Ms Mamphake Sechele for their patient assistance.
- The following members of staff for their enthusiasm and willingness to provide assistance: Ms Eunice Cugnolio, Mr Pfunzo Sidogi, Ms Susan Dry, Ms Cathy Batchellier and Ms Marion Gebhardt.
- Prof. I. Stevens, Dr. R. Kruger, Dr. A. Sheffer and Dr. J. Lewis for their interest in my art and for co-writing academic articles on my work.
- The following persons for their unceasing interest and support during my career: Mr Stefan Hundt (curator of Sanlam Gallery), Ms Cecile Loedolff (former curator of ABSA Gallery), Ms Annali Dempsey (curator of University of Johannesburg Art Gallery), Ms Elana Brundyn and Ms Ann Gonzalves (former owners of Brundyn & Gonzalves Gallery), Ms Sharon Crampton (former curator of Oliewenhuis Art Museum), Ms Ester le Roux (curator of Oliewenhuis Art Museum), Ms Dirkie Offringa (former curator of Pretoria Art Museum), Ms Lélani Stommelinck.
(Pretoria Art Museum) and Mr Dirk Oegema (functional head, Art and Culture, Pretoria Art Museum), the Department of Communication Studies, History of Arts, North-West University. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the staff members of these institutions.

- My lecturers at art school, Mr Gunther van der Reis, Ms Jean Beaton and Mr Richard Adams who encouraged me to study fine art; Mr Koos van der Watt for support and advice; Mr Johan Timperman and Ms Sabine Saesen of Groep Ubuntu, Prof Geert Vanhove, University of Ghent and Onze Nieuwe Toekomst, Belgium as well as Ms Regina van Britsom for their interest and for facilitating opportunities and Ms Thea Nigrini for her support and encouragement.
- Mr Danie de Waal for film documentation; Mr Waldo Roodt for editing the DVDs; Mr Danie van der Westhuizen for his practical assistance.
- The Ampersand foundation, Mr Jack Ginsberg and Mr Willem Boshoff.
- Mr Harrie Siertsema and Modern Art Projects for exceptional interest and support.
- To my family and friends and all the persons who have encouraged me over the years, especially my sister Mariët Robbertze and her daughters Gadiël and Danielle.
- My wife Olga and my two daughters Hedwig and Nell - I sincerely appreciate your patience and ongoing support.
Abstract

The aim of this research project is an investigation of my own body of artwork as it developed over four decades. Artists gradually establish their own unique visual language and *oeuvre* that distinguish their work. Although this evolvement does not necessarily occur within a linear manner, but rather, grows organically and instinctively, it is possible to discern and describe these characteristics. As I decided to commence with an investigation of my own visual language, it was necessary and a conscious decision to create some distance in an effort to examine my work and the distinctive visual language that I employ. As this project occurred within an academic context, a research methodology had to be established.

A practice-led and auto-ethnographic approach was followed. A whole body of research on these topics had been published to date and an overview of this extant research was first undertaken as groundwork before turning to an exploration of my own work. The insights I gained into these methods were applied as an aid to establish a framework as well as a research model for the thesis and to gauge the validity of this research activity. Practice-led research entails that creative work is presented along with an accompanying written document, in this instance, a doctoral thesis. The theoretical text is therefore one aspect of the two components submitted as requirement for the degree. The second component entails evidence and documentation of two comprehensive art exhibitions presented as case studies, accessible as appendices in the form of documents as well as DVDs of existing film footage and photographs.

With regard to the theoretical component, the body of the thesis focusing on my own work was introduced by way of tracing and locating the distinct characteristics of my visual language over the span of my career. However, it was also necessary to create a context for my work within a current and relevant discourse. Hence, theoretical enquiry as well as discussion regarding the work of other artists whose work bears relevance to mine had been included. Different aspects of my work were discussed separately: in the first instance concepts and conceptualisation were pinpointed where I identified five focus areas, summarised as memory, vulnerability and transience, the ordinary, ritual
and gender. Following on this discussion I outlined my work processes and use of materials and techniques. As the use of found material, especially mundane objects and corroded materials have been present throughout my career, these practices interlinked with crafting and transformation. Lastly, I discussed strategies of presentation as well as my evolvement from an artist interested in ‘mixed media’, to an installation artist, employing digital media plus a variety of strategies to enable the viewer to ‘experience’ the artwork.

The later sections of the thesis deal with the two exhibitions presented as case studies, namely a retrospective exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum in 2006 (case study one) and a comprehensive exhibition at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in 2013 (case study two). Both these exhibitions demonstrated mature work in which the development of a signature style could be detected and where the visual language that I have honed had been applied. In case study one the use of rusted metal to express subject matter revealing a preoccupation with memory, commemoration, vulnerability and transience, among others was accentuated. Rusted metal had been used as a tool to ‘shift time’, creating an ‘archaeological effect’. I discussed how I utilised the opportunity to fill a large space to apply specific approaches regarding installation art, such as enabling an immersive experience and transporting the viewer into a state of contemplation. In case study two emphasis was placed on progression and changes that occurred in my work. Digital media had been replaced with a rekindled interest in drawing on paper, which I presented as part of the installations. In my most recent work the use of the cladding technique to cover objects in rusted metal had been replaced with the presentation of scorched and blackened objects. This technique is suggestive of an apocalyptic event, but also introduces a distinct sense of the spiritual due to the simplification that ensued regarding conceptualisation and use of materials.

The thesis concluded with an evaluation of what I gained as a practicing artist through this research as well as the validity of the research. An opportunity was presented to trace the recurrence of an interest in specific materials and subject matter that had been evident throughout my career. Furthermore, I gained a far more conscious awareness
and insight with regard to the scope of my interests and my identity as an artist. The imperative to use language to express my intentions, guided me towards clarity and new knowledge about my own work and its context. I emphasised the cyclical aspect of life, death and renewal and drew an analogy to the artmaking process. I realised, furthermore, that through artmaking, I displayed my queries about life and commented on aspects of life that seem to touch upon the universal questions of humankind.

By acknowledging these shared questions, by giving shape to them and by displaying these universal issues through the use of humble and recognisable materials, I hope to enable accessibility and an opportunity for reflection.
List of figures

1. Fig. 1: Zip painting, 1978, zip, canvas, enamel paint on board, collection Modern Art Projects (MAP), photograph by author. 39
2. Fig. 2: Barnett Newman, Who’s afraid of red, yellow and blue II, 1967, oil on canvas, (Barnett Newman, S.a. [Online]). 39
3. Figs. 3a, 3b and 3c: Skildery vir ‘n pendeltuig/Painting for a space shuttle, 1983, enamel on window blind, collection Gideon Erasmus, photographs by author. 41
4. Fig. 4: Grid, 1980, rust marks on canvas, collection MAP, photograph by author. 42
5. Fig. 5: The star, 1982, scorched marks, charcoal, found paper on canvas, Collection the artist, photograph by author. 42
6. Fig. 6: Robert Rauschenberg, Lake Placid Glori-Fried yarns from New England, 1971, cardboard, plywood, rope and wood pole, (Amason, 1977:620). 43
7. Fig. 7: Alberto Burri, Sacco e rosso, 1956, burlap and oil on canvas, (Alberto Burri, S.a. [Online]). 45
8. Fig. 8: Antoni Tàpies, Grey relief, 1959, black latex paint and marble dust on canvas, (Antoni Tàpies. 2011, [Online]). 45
9. Fig. 9: Gunther van der Reis, Abstract composition number 1, 1968, mixed media and resin on panel, (Gunther van der Reis, S.a. [Online]). 46
10. Fig. 10: Psalm, 1987, found objects, cement, acrylics on wooden panel, collection Gail Forrester, photograph by author. 46
11. Figs. 11a and 11b: Galaxy (and detail), 1982, bells, paint, mixed media and pressed wood, collection Groep UBUNTU, Belgium, photograph by author. 47
12. Fig. 12: Christian Boltanski, Reserves: The Purim holiday, 1988, tin boxes, black-and-white photographs, metal lamps, cables, (Christian Boltanski, S.a. [Online]). 54
13. Fig. 13: Photograph of my mother, Petronella Hendrina (Nellie) van der Merwe (née Pozyn), 6 August 1925 – 19 August 1996, photograph taken approximately 1951, collection family archive. 58
14. Fig. 14: Portrait of my mother, 1978, acrylic paint on discarded wooden lid and canvas, collection Mariët Robbertze, photograph by author. 58
15. Figs. 15a, 15b, 15c and 15d: It’s Cold outside (and details), 2004, found objects, rusted metal, digital screen, DVD player, collection the artist, photographs by Stefan Hundt. 59-60
16. Fig. 16: Rembrandt van Rijn: Bathsheba, 1654, oil on canvas, (Wallace, 1971:172). 63
17. Fig. 17: Opwasbak/Sink, 1992, acrylics on canvas, collection Koos van der Watt, photograph by author. 64
18. Figs. 18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e and 18f: Biegbak/Confessional (and details), 2004, found material, rusted metal, digital screen, DVD player, data projector, wooden panels, unbleached cotton, collection the artist, photographs by author. 65-67
19. Fig. 19: Photograph of my grandmother, Susara Wilhelmina (Sarie) Pozyn, (née Boshoff), 18 April 1891 – 15 April 1981, photograph taken approximately 1912, collection family archive. 68
20. Fig. 20: Photograph of me (aged 16) and my grandmother, photograph taken in 1973, collection family archive. 68
21. Fig. 21: Wag/Waiting, 2000, rusted metal and found objects, collection Pretoria Art Museum, photograph by Stefan Hundt. 70
22. Fig. 22: *Blik/Tin*, 1977, found discarded tins and acrylics on board, collection Danie de Waal, photograph by author.

23. Fig. 23: Jan van Kessel I, *Vanitas still life*, c.1665, oil on copper, (Southgate, 2000:1619).


25. Fig. 25: *Strik/Trap*, 1987, charcoal, pencil and gouache on paper, collection Pieter Pistorius, photograph by author.

26. Fig. 26: Jeff Koons, 1994-2000, *Balloon dog (orange)*, stainless steel, (Jeff Koons: S.a. [Online]).

27. Fig. 27: Damien Hirst, *For the love of God*, 2007, platinum diamonds, human teeth, (Skelly, 2014:226).

28. Fig. 28: *Vonds/Find*, 2006, child’s dress clad with rusted metal, collection Mariët Robbertze, photograph by author.

29. Figs. 29a and 29b: *Showcase* (and detail), 2003, rusted metal, found material, data projector, digital monitor, collection Olievenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, photograph by author.

30. Fig. 30: *Sagle landing/Soft landing*, 1998, found material, private collection, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.

31. Figs. 31a and 31b: *Story Board* (and detail), 1997 found objects and mixed media, collection ABSA, photographs by Christiaan Kotze.

32. Figs. 32a and 32b: *6 pm* (and detail), 1998, found objects and rusted metal, collection Groep UBUNTU, Belgium, photographs by author and Christiaan Kotze.

33. Figs. 33a, 33b and 33c: *Screen saviour*, 2004 (and details), found objects and rusted metal, collection MAP, photographs by Stefan Hundt.

34. Figs. 34a, 34b and 34c: *Killing time* (and details), 2007, found objects, wooden panel, rusted metal and digital screen, collection UNISA, photographs by Carla Crafford and Rupert de Beer.

35. Figs. 35a and 35b: Willem Boshoff *370 Day project*, (and detail), 1982-83, 370 species of wood, wooden cabinet, two diaries in red ink, collection Jack Ginsberg (Vladislavić, 2005:36, 37).

36. Figs. 36a, 36b and 36c: *No I want my mother* (and details), 2000, found objects, rusted metal and digital screen, collection UNISA, photographs by Stefan Hundt.

37. Fig. 37: Eva Hesse, *Contingent*, 1969, cheesecloth, latex and fibre glass, (Barnes et al., 1999: 201).

38. Fig. 38: *Killer*, 1985, newspaper, acrylics and Perspex on pressed wood, private collection, photograph by author.

39. Figs. 39a, 39b and 39c: *Kispak/Sunday suit* (and details), 2003, rusted metal, found objects, digital screen, collection MAP, photographs by author.

40. Fig. 41: Robert Hodgins, *Suit of lights*, 2004, oil on canvas, (Robert Hodgins, S.a. [Online]).

41. Fig. 40: Robert Hodgins, *If you’ve got it, flaunt it*, 2000, oil on canvas, (Atkinson et al., 2002:121).

42. Fig. 42: Joseph Beuys, *Felt suit*, 1970, felt and clothes hanger, (Joseph Beuys, S.a. [Online]).

43. Fig. 43: CO *add something special*, 1996, found material, bitumen and rusted metal on board, private collection, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.
44. Fig. 44: Watchman, 1996, found material, bitumen and paint on board, private collection, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.

45. Figs. 45a and 45b: Bagged baggage, 1998, found material, cement, cement bags, digital monitor, DVD player, collection MAP, photographs Dirk Oegema and by author.

46. Fig. 46: Gerard Sekoto, Song of the pick, 1946, oil on board, (Gerard Sekoto, S.a. [Online].).

47. Fig. 47: Finale Inspeksie/Final inspection, 1997, oil paint and found objects on army uniform, private collection, photograph by Dirk Oegema.

48. Fig. 48: Bosklere, 2000, found objects and rusted metal, on loan Pretoria Art Museum, photograph by author.

49. Fig. 49: Bliksooldaat/Tin soldier, 1997, found material, bitumen and paint on board, collection Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.

50. Fig. 50: Blik/Tin, 1977, found discarded tins and acrylics on board, collection Danie de Waal, photograph by author.

51. Fig. 51: Andy Warhol, Chicken noodle soup, 1968, screenprint on paper, (Andy Warhol. S.a. [Online].).

52. Fig. 52: Jade burial suit, 206BCE – 8CE, China, 4248 jade pieces connected by gold wire, (Atlasobscura, S.a. [Online].).

53. Fig. 53: Golden rhinoceros of Mapungubwe, circa 1300, wooden carving clad with golden foil and nails, (Bruno, C. S.a. [Online].).

54. Fig. 54: Nowhere to go, 2008, rusted metal and found objects, collection Shamwari Townhouse, Port Elizabeth, photograph by author.

55. Fig. 55: Jackson Hlungwani, Figure of Christ in the work Altar of God, 1970 – 1980, wood, found metal and stone, (Burnett, 1989: 17).

56. Fig. 56: Meret Oppenheim, Object, 1967, fur covered cup, (Armson 1977:374).

57. Fig. 57: Jan Fabre, Armur (Breast), 1997, construction made of scarab beetles, (Lyssens, 2016:S.p.).

58. Fig. 58: Jan Fabre, Skull with Magpie, 2001, construction with taxidermied magpie and scarab beetles, (Lyssens, 2016:S.p.).

59. Fig. 59: Anselm Kiefer, Naglfar (Die Argonoten), 1998, lead and finger nails, (Anselm Kiefer, S.a. [Online].).

60. Figs. 60a and 60b: Artifacts (and detail), 1999, found objects, rusted metal computer and monitor, on loan Pretoria Art Museum, photograph by author.

61. Figs. 61a, 61b, 61c and 61d: Gaste/Guests (and details), 2000, found material, rusted metal, digital monitors and DVD player, collection Sanlam, photographs by Stefan Hundt.

62. Fig. 62: Dennis Oppenheim, 1994, Battered tears, polyurethane, fibreglass, polyester, wood, pigment and digital monitors, (Hoet et al., 1999:214).

63. Figs. 63a, 63b, 63c and 63d: Koeëlwas/Bullet proof jacket (and details), 2003, wax, plastic, television monitor, video machine and light box, collection Olievenhuis Art Museum, photographs by author.

64. Figs. 64a, 64b, 64c and 64d: Cleaning instructions (and details), 2003, found objects, television monitor and video machine, collection Olievenhuis Art Museum, photographs by author.

65. Fig. 65: Oogtoets/Eye Test, 2007, Perspex and found material, collection MAP, photograph by author.

66. Fig. 66: Clairvoyant/Heldersiende (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
67. **Fig. 67:** Double vision/Dubbelvisie (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
68. **Fig. 68:** Tunnel vision/Tonnelvisie (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
69. **Fig. 69:** Sharpsighted/Skerpsiende (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
70. **Fig. 70:** Farsighted/Versiende (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
71. **Fig. 71:** Shortsighted/Kortsigtig (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
72. **Fig. 72:** Near-sighted/Bysigtig (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
73. **Fig. 73:** Multifocus/Multifokus (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
74. **Fig. 74:** Light phobia/Ligfobie (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
75. **Fig. 75:** Brandmerke nommer 3/Scorch marks number 3, 1979, scorched marks on canvas, collection the artist, photograph by author.
76. **Fig. 76:** Cai Guo Qiang, Vortex, 2006, gunpowder on paper, (Cai Guo Qiang, S.a.b [Online]).
77. **Fig. 77:** View of my first solo exhibition entitled Final Inspection, African Window Museum, 1998, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.
78. **Fig. 78:** Soldier’s bed, 1998, rusted metal and found objects, collection Memórias intimas marcas, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.
79. **Fig. 79:** Ironing board, 1998, rusted metal and found objects, collection Memórias intimas marcas, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.
80. **Fig. 80:** Clothes horse, 1998, rusted metal and found objects, collection Memórias intimas marcas, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.
81. **Fig. 81:** Chair and jacket, 1998, rusted metal and found objects, collection Memórias intimas marcas, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.
82. **Fig. 82:** View of the artworks Soldier’s bed, Clothes horse and Chair and jacket, displayed at the MUHKA museum in Antwerp in February 2000, photograph by author.
83. **Fig. 83:** Playpen, 1989, mixed media on pressed wood, collection Pieter Pistorius, photograph by author.
84. **Fig. 84:** Photo of me aged 10 years (1968), photo family archive.
85. **Fig. 85:** Pick-up-sticks, 1986, mixed media on pressed wood, collection unknown, photograph by author.
86. **Fig. 86:** Ludo, 1986, acrylics, Perspex and collage on pressed wood, collection unknown, photograph by author.
87. **Fig. 87:** Erfgoed, 1991, oil on pressed wood, collection the artist, photograph by author.
88. **Figs. 88a, 88b, 88c, 88d, 88e, 88f, 88g and 88h:** Rooi tapyt/Red carpet (and details), 2002, rusted metal, carpet, digital screens, DVD players, data projector, microphone, security camera and found objects, collection the artist, photographs by author.
89. **Fig. 89:** Ed and Nancy Kienholz, Sollie 17, 1980, mixed media construction (Barnes et al., 1999:234).
90. **Fig. 90:** Ed and Nancy Kienholz, Sollie 17, 1980, mixed media construction, (view from the outside), (Ed and Nancy Kienholz, S.a. [Online]).
91. **Fig. 91:** Louise Bourgeois, Cell III, 1991, mixed media, (Barnes et al., 1999: 57).
92. **Fig. 92:** Louise Bourgeois, Structures of existence: the cells, 1991, mixed media, (Louise Bourgeois, S.a. [Online]).

94. Fig. 94: *9/11 Memorial*, New York, photograph by author, 2012.

95. Fig. 95: Part of the foyer of the Pretoria Art Museum during the retrospective exhibition in 2006, photograph by Dirk Oegema.

96. Figs. 96a, 96b and 96c: *Baggage arrival* (and details), 2001, rusted metal, found objects, security camera and digital screen, collection the artist, photographs by Dirk Oegema.

97. Fig. 97: View of the aisle linking the foyer and the East Gallery, Pretoria Art Museum, 2006, photograph by Dirk Oegema.

98. Figs. 98a, 98b, 98c, 98d and 98e: *The end* (and details), 2006, theatre chairs, found objects, rusted metal, screen, data projector, lights, collection the artist, photographs by Dirk Oegema.

99. Fig. 99: *Unclaimed*, 2008, rusted metal and Perspex, collection UNISA, photograph by Dirk Oegema.

100. Figs. 100a and 100b: *Unknown* (and detail), 2004, rusted metal, collection Sanlam, photographs by Dirk Oegema and Stefan Hundt.


102. Figs. 102a, 102b and 102c: *Eclipse* (and detail), 2002, rusted metal, barbed wire, gravel, three digital screens, collection MAP, photographs by Dirk Oegema.

103. Figs. 103a and 103b: *Time out* (and detail), 2009, rusted metal, found objects, screen and charcoal, collection MAP, photographs by Carla Crafford and the author.

104. Fig. 104: *Reisiger/Traveler*, 2012, rusted metal and found objects, collection University of Pretoria, photograph by Sylvester Mqeku.

105. Fig. 105: *Stof op my skoene/Dust on my shoes*, 2015, rusted metal, digital screen and found objects, collection MAP, photograph by Kevin du Plessis.

106. Fig. 106: *Power failure*, 2007, found material and rusted metal, collection John Fensham, photograph by author.

107. Figs. 107a and 107b: *Red Cushion* (and detail), 2012, rusted metal and found objects, collection Jurie Willemse, photographs by Sylvester Mqeku.

108. Fig. 108: *Diagnosis*, 2013, rusted metal and found objects, collection University of the Free State, photograph by Sylvester Mqeku.

109. Fig. 109: *Breinfoute/Blackout*, 2009, rusted metal, found objects, Fabriano paper and graphite, collection MAP, photograph by Rupert de Beer.

110. Fig. 110: *Downfall/Documents from heaven*, 2009, rusted metal, found objects, graphite on Fabriano paper, collection the artist, photograph by Rupert de Beer.


112. Fig. 112: *Papierwerk/Paper work*, 2010, rusted metal, collection University of Cape Town (installed at the Department of Engineering), photograph by Rupert de Beer.

113. Fig. 113: *Paper weight*, 2010, rusted metal and found material, collection Ester le Roux, photograph by author.

114. Fig. 114: *Dwaalkoeël/Stray bullet*, 2010, found material, collection Stuart Trent, photograph by Stuart Trent.

115. Fig. 115: *Missing files*, 2010, rusted metal and found material, on loan Pretoria Art Museum, photograph by Rupert de Beer.
116. Fig. 116: Verdagte bagasie/Suspicious luggage, 2016, rusted metal and found material, collection Jurie Willemse, photograph by Jurie Willemse.

117. Fig. 117: Jacket and tie, 2012, rusted metal and found material, collection Jurie Willemse, photograph by author.

118. Figs. 118a and 118b: Monument (and detail), 2013, rusted barbed wire and steel, collection Anglo-Boer War Museum, Bloemfontein, photographs by Neels Nieuwenhuizen and Rupert de Beer.

119. Figs. 119a and 119b: The end, 2006, (installed in the Reservoir, front and back views), theatre chairs, found objects, rusted metal, screen, data projector, lights, collection the artist, photographs by Sylvester Mqeku.

120. Figs. 120a, 120b, 120c, 120d, 120e and 120f: Uitverkoping/Sale (and details), 2009, rusted metal, charcoal on paper, plastic, Perspex and found material, collection Frank and Lizelle Kilbourn, photographs by Sylvester Mqeku and Rupert de Beer.

121. Figs. 121a, 121b and 121c: Ontwortel/Uprooted (and details), 2009, installed in the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, furniture, tree stumps, Fabriano paper and charcoal, collection the artist, photographs by Rupert de Beer.

122. Figs. 122a, 122b, 122c, 122d, and 122e: Ontwortel/Uprooted (and details), 2009, furniture, tree stumps, Fabriano paper and charcoal, installed in the Oliewenhuis Art Museum, collection the artist, photographs by Sylvester Mqeku.

123. Figs. 123a, 123b, 123c, 123d, 123e, 123f and 123g: Ontwortel/Uprooted, 2011, furniture and tree stumps, land art event: Site-specific, Plettenberg bay, collection MAP, photographs by Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau.
List of appendices

Appendix A
Data regarding case study number one: *The archaeology of time*, a retrospective exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum, from 28 June to 3 December 2006: invitation, list of artworks presented, copy of opening address, report by the museum director, peer assessment report.

Appendix B
Data regarding case study number two: *Time and space*, a comprehensive exhibition held at Oliwehuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein from 9 July to 8 August 2013: invitation, brochures, list of artworks presented, copy of opening address, report by the museum director.

Appendix C
Data regarding *Ontwortel/Uprooted*, University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, 11 November 2009 to 27 January 2010: invitation, copy of opening address.

Appendix D
An extended curriculum vitae including the following:

- Awards
- Nominations
- Selected exhibitions
- Collections
- Selected academic articles and dissertations
- Articles published in newspapers and periodicals
- Catalogues and brochures
- Radio and television interviews
- Other recognition
- CV and list of exhibitions
- References internet web pages
- Career information
- Complete list of exhibitions
- Workshops in collaboration with mentally handicapped artists
Appendix E

**DVD disk 1: Film documentation**

1. *The Archaeology of Time, installations by Jan van der Merwe*,
   28 June-3 December 2006, Pretoria Art Museum,
   film documentation by Danie de Waal (2006),
   editing by Waldo Roodt and Jan van der Merwe (2017)
2. *Time and Space, installations by Jan van der Merwe*,
   9 July-18 August 2013, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein,
   film documentation by Green Pepper video production house in collaboration with
   Oliewenhuis Art Museum
3. Interview on the installation *Time and Space* and on the Oliewenhuis Art
   Museum by Nosaba Sondiyazi for the program *Love Warrior* on Hlasela TV, 2013
   film documentation by Koos van der Watt (UNISA), Gustav van Heerden (UNISA)
   and Fernando Alvím (Memórias Intimas Marcas)
5. *Installation Artist: Jan van der Merwe, 2004, Summit*, DSTV Channel 55
6. *Bagged Baggage, Jan van der Merwe, 2002, Kunskafee KykNet*

Appendix F

**DVD disk 2: Photo documentation**

1. *Final Inspection 1998* (first solo exhibition), African Window Museum,
   photographer: Christiaan Kotze
2. Catalogue: *Unknown, installation by Jan van der Merwe*,
   published by Sanlam Life Insurance limited, 2005,
   edited by Stefan Hundt
3. *The Archaeology of Time, installations by Jan van der Merwe*,
   Pretoria Art Museum, 28 June-3 December 2006,
   photographers: Dirk Oegema and Rupert de Beer
4. *Ontwortel/Uprooted 2009*, University of Johannesburg Art Gallery,
   11 November 2009-27 January 2010, photographer: Rupert de Beer
5. *Time and Space, installations by Jan van der Merwe*
   Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, 9 July-18 August 2013,
   photographer: Sylvester Mqeku
6. Selected installations:
   *Monument*, 2013, Women’s Memorial centenary, Bloemfontein,
   *Ontwortel/Uprooted*, 2011, Land art event: *Site-Specific*, Plettenberg Bay,
   photographers: Neels Nieuwenhuis, Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau,
   Carla Crafford and Rupert de Beer
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation and background

I have been a practising fine artist for the past 41 years, from 1977 to date. In addition to and complementary towards my role as an art lecturer, my focus has been on the creation of a body of artwork in which my intellectual and creative interests could be realised. Over the years a substantial body of reviews and articles focussing on my practical work has also been generated from the many exhibitions as is evident in the list attached. I should also mention that a selection of my artwork forms part of the art curriculum at secondary and tertiary institutions in this country.

Following is a brief overview of my career to date: In 1977 I enrolled for a three year course in Fine Art at the former Pretoria Technikon, henceforth known as the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). From 1980 until 1988 I worked as an artist in various positions outside the academic world, namely at the Shows and Exhibitions Department of the SANDF, at the State Theatre and at The Bureau of Heraldry. I completed a national Higher Diploma in Fine Art in 1986. In 1989 I was appointed as lecturer in the Department of Entertainment Technology at the Tshwane University of Technology, where I lectured in drawing and décor design. In 1998 I completed an M. Tech. degree in Fine Art and was promoted to senior lecturer. In 2004 I was appointed to the position of senior lecturer in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at the same institution. Amongst the academic responsibilities in this Department I was appointed course coordinator for Sculpture and since 2008 as course coordinator for Painting 2 and 3, as well as coordinator of the practical component of Fine Art 4. For the past few years I have also been involved as art advisor for the Fine Art Master’s degree students, overseeing the practical component of these studies.
On occasion I have been invited as a guest lecturer or to act as external examiner at the art departments of UNISA and the universities of Pretoria, Johannesburg, Free State, and North-West and have also acted as judge at art competitions, some of these at national level. Since 2002, I have been involved in the presentation of workshops for mentally handicapped artists in Belgium as well as in South Africa. Owing to the many contacts that I have built up through the years, various creative work related opportunities have been generated for my students.

Ever since the start of my career as a practising artist, I have been creating artwork on a regular basis and have taken part in many exhibitions. During this time I have gained valuable experience regarding the art industry as well as managing a career as a fine artist. This expertise I gladly share with my students who are being groomed to become practising fine artists on completion of their studies at TUT. To date, I have shown my work in 18 solo exhibitions, I have taken part in 152 national group exhibitions and my work has been represented in 21 international group exhibitions which amount to 191 exhibitions in total. During this time I have been the recipient of various awards and/or have been nominated for awards, pertaining to both my career as lecturer and as fine artist.

Hence I am at a stage in my career where it has now become possible to undertake an overview of my own body of work. Over time I have become aware of recurring themes, processes and approaches in my artwork and although these evolve very instinctively, I have gradually established my own visual language. With regard to my field of research, I will be embarking on a close examination of and reflection on my own body of work as it developed through the decades. Through this research, I propose to consider aspects of my conceptual development, the working process and representational strategies - the recurring cycles - more consciously, as these issues will in all probability inform current and future work.
The terms ‘visual language’ or ‘vocabulary’ are often used to describe the distinct characteristics of an artist’s practice. When embarking on a career in the visual arts, the student is trained in visual communication, its traditions and basic tools. However, as the artist gradually develops his/her own oeuvre, this ‘vocabulary’ is applied in a unique way. Following is a brief summary of my field of interest and working processes as an artist:

At present I am working with the artefacts of our time, mostly commonplace objects such as clothing and furniture amongst other discarded objects either inherited or sourced in an attempt to transform these items into ‘archaeological’ remnants. In my installations, these found materials and objects are mostly transformed through a process of cladding using rusted tins or by altering these objects through a process of scorching. Many artists work within the field of the objet trouvé – the ‘found object’ (Osborne, 1970:785). Such items are ‘rescued’ from being dumped into a landfill or, ironically, from being used for the intended purpose, only to be re-assigned as works of art. In my case, it is not only the object, but also the discarded rusted matter littering the countryside that is sourced and redefined. Through time, oxidation and deterioration, this material becomes obsolete, unusable and undesirable. In many artworks these objects are transformed into ‘textiles’ and tactile surfaces, which are finally stitched and sewn into ‘garments’ (among other objects), carrying with them a far deeper significance. Tin cans are ordinarily used for preservation, but in my artworks the fragile rusted tins become metaphors for waste, loss and consumerism. Their use could be interpreted as an attempt to ‘preserve’ the transient and the vulnerable.

The working process is also significant. The method of collection is compulsive as discarded objects are sourced and taken to the studio where they are transformed into selected sections of the installations. The collected tins are often rusted, but if they are still relatively new and shiny, their surfaces are transformed into rust by using a mixture of salt, water and vinegar. Large solid objects such as furniture are clad or covered with these rusted tins using small nails. ‘Clothing’ or cladding is created through a process
similar to sewing as each piece of tin sheeting is attached to the next with thin wire ‘thread’. The objects are finally completed by adding bitumen – a black sticky substance used in making tar – and sand to create smooth surface transitions from one section to the next. This technique allows me to ‘shift time’, to rework, render and antiquate the found objects into ‘archaeological finds’. In later installations found materials are scorched until they are blackened.

My inspiration is often drawn from highly personal source material in which themes are developed that could be universally appreciated, but more intensely so by viewers familiar with the peculiarities of South Africa – its art, society and its history. I frequently refer to my work as ‘monuments’. As with conventional monuments, some of these installations demarcate a significant amount of space and the viewer is enticed to step up towards and into the installation for closer examination. These ‘monuments’ could be interpreted as anonymous and broadly widespread as they refer to the universality of collective memory. In other works, intimate and private spaces are suggested. The installations often seem like film sets but without the actors.

1.2 Research aim
The following key question serves as a guiding principle for this research project: can I construct a valid theoretical framework within which it is possible to locate and contextualise the characteristics of my visual language, as well as analyse and interpret the body of artworks that I have developed over four decades?

My field of research is defined as an examination and documentation of my own working processes (conceptualisation, the use of materials and techniques as well as presentation) as it evolved throughout my career. I attempt to contextualise these concepts and processes within a theoretical framework with regard to current discourse and precedents of practice.
The artwork is the result of an instinctive creative process which might include sketching, writing, researching, collecting; producing material that often remains undisclosed and not exhibited with the subsequent artwork. These trails form the ‘record’ of the ‘event’. As I am both the author and (as artist) the focus of this investigation, I have exceptional sources at my disposal: not only do I possess the first draughts and sketches of ideas that would eventually be developed into artworks and installations, some on a large scale, but I also retain the memory of my thought processes, struggles and of the experience of creating the artworks. Furthermore, I have the artworks themselves at my disposal as well as visual records of most of my artworks, either in the form of photographs, catalogues or in the medium of film. Some artworks have been included in private and public collections such as museums whilst others are in my possession. My research aim is to ‘translate’ my visual language into words and to reflect on my creative process. This will entail narrative, analysis, ordering and categorising, with the aim to discover possible patterns, cycles, development, progress, changes and meanings in an effort to define my own visual language.

One of the main objectives of this research is to examine my own working processes in a more deliberate way, but also to investigate the concept of the archive, history and archaeology, all pertinent issues regarding the meaning and conceptualisation of the artworks themselves. According to Baer (2008: 54), many artists in recent years have investigated the archive as metaphor. The archive is an aid to memory and represents a collection of material that incorporates objects that to Baer typifies “the value of and significance of which are not completely known at the time of their archiving”. By employing the found object as a strategy within the art making process is in fact a form of archiving of these objects. As part of this research my creative process will be ‘archived’ (investigated, ordered and documented). My body of artworks might be regarded as ‘archiving’ my comments on or reactions to life experiences over a period of four decades. The nature of such a collection of artwork and the way in which it is ordered constitutes meaning. Meaning and memories are thus embedded in objects that are collected and presented, but their significance might be obscured or revealed.
(Bartlett, 2009:1). The artist might deliberately ‘obscure’ or ‘reveal’ meaning in this process of transformation. However, it should be noted that whilst working with tactile material, these processes of transformation occur intuitively and that elements such as chance and accident are applied by experienced artists. This research will afford an opportunity to investigate my work with ‘new eyes’ which, in all probability, might lead to new insights and understanding as new meanings are uncovered.

1.3 Research objectives

With this thesis I intend to trace the development of my visual language by using the sources at my disposal as mentioned in section 1.2. One of the main objectives, however, will be the close investigation of two large solo exhibitions which will serve as case studies. Here I shall explore the application of my personal visual language which was honed over many years. As I intend to commence with a practice-led approach towards this research, the two above-mentioned exhibitions are viewed as crucial components towards the fulfilment of the doctorate degree. These two exhibitions are viewed as prerequisites to the written theoretical section of this research presentation and comply with the departmental requirements and standards, regarding artistic and academic merit, professionalism, categorisation and peer assessment.

The case studies comprise the following two bodies of work:

- Case study number one: *The archaeology of time*, a retrospective exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum, from 28 June to 3 December 2006.
- Case study number two: *Time and space*, a comprehensive exhibition held at Olievenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein from 9 July to 8 August 2013.

These case studies will form the focus of the last two chapters of this thesis. As preamble, I shall attempt to pinpoint the particular nature of this personal visual language and explore how it gradually evolved ever since my training as an art student. I shall analyse specific examples of earlier and more recent work to illustrate the scope of my interests as an artist, including a selection of work presented in the two
exhibitions. I shall endeavour to discuss specific aspects of my work (conceptualisation, the use of materials and techniques as well as presentation) separately. I shall also address theoretical discourses that bear relevance to my work and compare my creative strategies with those of other contemporary artists, in an effort to create a context in which to situate my artwork. As I will be undertaking an auto-ethnographic and practice-led approach to the research, I shall commence with a survey of current literature on these topics. This will enable me to gain further insight into the requirements for such an investigation.

The thesis will have an extended list of appendices. A record of the artworks as well as related documents regarding the two exhibition case studies will be provided in these appendices. They will also reflect events and aspects of my career as a visual artist and serve as proof regarding the original sources for this investigation. The appendices will include the following:

**Appendix A**
Data regarding case study number one: *The archaeology of time*, a retrospective exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum, from 28 June to 3 December 2006.

**Appendix B**
Data regarding case study number two: *Time and space*, a comprehensive exhibition held at Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein from 9 July to 8 August 2013.

**Appendix C**
Data regarding *Ontwortel/Uprooted*, a solo exhibition held at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, 11 November 2009 to 27 January 2010.

**Appendix D**
Extended curriculum vitae

**Appendix E**
DVD disk 1: Film documentation

**Appendix F**
DVD disk 2: Photo documentation
1.4 Research methodology
As the theoretical research component aims to afford an investigation of the visual language pertaining to my practical work, a practice-led as well as auto-ethnographic approach will be followed. The fairly recent development in the field of practice-led research has resulted in a substantial body of research articles, conferences and books on the subject. According to Macleod & Holdridge (2002:6, 7) the insistence on a separation of theory from practice and therefore of making from writing about the creative process is outdated:

Creative practice research takes us to the edge of dialectical reason…it is possible to advocate a new understanding of the relation between theory and art practice research. It is possible to assert that advanced art practice research is necessarily theorised practice…the ‘subjectivity’ of the artist as opposed to the ‘objectivity’ of the scientist is a familiar and well-trodden path of misnomers.

Auto-ethnography as a method also “attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011:7). It is a form of self-reflection and writing that explores the researcher's personal experience and connects this autobiographical narrative to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011:1). Auto-ethnography could also be described as a personal account incorporating documenting methods such as journaling, looking at archival records, interviewing one’s own self, introducing hindsight and “writing to generate a self-cultural understanding” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011: 2). These statements emphasise the broad context in which the investigation of one’s own work needs to be situated, thus providing relevant knowledge within a current framework. As these strategies (practice-led research and auto-ethnography) have been selected as the preferred research methodologies for this study, these methods will be further investigated in chapter two, where a selection of the extensive research published on these topics will be addressed.

1.5 Outline of chapters
Chapter one provides a rationale for this research and introduces concepts and terminology that are pertinent to this investigation. In this chapter parameters are also
established, whereas **chapter two** expounds the fields of practice-led inquiry as well as auto-ethnography, as these methodologies are employed in order to institute a research model. Chapter two also provides a selected literature overview on these topics.

In **chapter three** an objective, academic framework will be presented in an effort to create distance between myself and my own work. This chapter endeavours to locate and isolate the visual language that has evolved over four decades. Through an analysis of earlier as well as recent examples of my artworks, I intend to narrate and explain the creation of these works. This chapter also includes references to significant discourses as well as discussions of examples of “precedents of practice” (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010:34), which comprise the work of those artists that has influenced me (either conceptually or where use of materials and strategies are concerned). Those artists whose works lend support to create a context for my own work and whose ideas and work are of current interest will be identified. With specific reference to my work, I will be researching the origins of selected concepts, themes and strategies as they developed through the years and how they are applied currently. I will briefly provide an outline of this visual language, as structured in this chapter:

**Concept and conceptualisation:**

The conceptualisation of an artwork is difficult to separate from other aspects, such as the choice of materials and the strategy of presentation, as these components are integrated into the subsequent or final work. For the purposes of this investigation, I regard conceptualisation as the development of the content and meaning that I intend to convey. It is possible, however, whilst writing from a retrospective or reflective point of view, to outline specific recurring concepts in my work. In chapter three I will provide a general overview of these fields of interest and will be extending information on these aspects in chapters four and five, to indicate how my focus has shifted and intensified in the examples of mature work illustrated in case studies one and two. To date I have pinpointed the following themes as central focus areas: memory and reflection: commemorating past events or persons, specifically the nameless, disempowered or
traumatised; elegiac and melancholic content, emphasising vulnerability and transience; the banal and mundane as carriers of poetic meaning; ritual, cycles, repetition and obsession and lastly gender roles: male and female. Relevant theoretical discourse is woven through the discussion, supported by examples of my own work and by comparing the work of other artists.

**Materials, technique and process:**

Material carries metaphorical meaning within contemporary art. My work process and choice of materials are specific and deliberate. I regard this aspect as central to my view of myself as an artist, as it demonstrates my need to express meaning through tactile material. My attitude towards the tangible quality of material is expressed in the following citation (Bartlett, 2009: 2):

> I think through fabric. As a material it is fundamental to my practice not only in substance but also for what it can suggest. Fabric has tactility and connectedness tempting one to reach out and feel it between eager finger tips. In touching, past bodily experiences are evoked; visceral responses, layered memories, associations and emotions.

As a visual artist the desire to work with a certain material or found object is very often the starting point of the creative process. As described by Bartlett (2009:2), contemplation and structuring of ideas occurs through tactile material. This research aims to consciously ‘recreate’ this process through the medium of language. A large body of artworks has already been created and presented by way of public exhibition. This ‘recreation’ into words occurs in the aftermath when the artist needs to distance himself/herself from the artworks in order to investigate this body of work. The artist, however, is instinctively aware of the metaphorical meanings of materials and processes and of recurring themes, methods and rituals, culminating in a process which might seem chaotic to a viewer observing the work from the outside. To articulate the working process is in many ways a means of (re)structuring and (re)presenting (‘translating’) the working process into language, whilst not diminishing in any way the original creative process. Apart from the discussion regarding my work processes, this chapter comprises an analysis of specific artworks in which recurring strategies and techniques occur, such as the use of found and discarded material, the process of rust, cladding techniques, scorching as well as the use of digital screens and filmed footage.
As in the other sections in this chapter, a theoretical background plus a discussion of relevant work by other artists are included.

**Presentation:**

“A gallery has ceased its conventional activity of showing objects and become a place to experience experience” (Petry *et al.*, 1994:29). In chapter three I will be tracing my development from a ‘mixed media’ artist working in the 1970s and 1980s, to utilising the strategy of installation, which has become my central means of expression in the last two decades. Installation art could be described as a dialogue between the artist and space. Although this tactic is often viewed as a fairly recent (1970 onwards) development within the visual arts, its creation evolved in fact from a very long tradition (cave painting, religious art and architecture) where space is manipulated to convey meaning. Installation art comprises a wide array of methods and strategies. Rosenthal (1988:28), in an effort to “categorise”, order or group these strategies, proposes a “taxonomy” of installation art, representing four “poles” or rubrics, namely enchantments and impersonations (filled-space installations) and interventions and rapprochements (site-specific installations). An attempt will be made to place my installations within these suggested headers, especially with reference to the “enchantments” and “rapprochements” type installations. I will illustrate the discussion with examples of my work in an effort to convey the particular approach encompassing my visual strategies as an installation artist. This chapter spans a long period of my career. Early examples of artworks will be compared to recent work, demonstrating continuity and shifts in my interests and areas of focus, where conceptualisation, use of materials and strategies of presentation are concerned.

Chapter four will examine case study number one: *The archaeology of time*, a retrospective exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum from 28 June to 3 December 2006. This exhibition showcased not only major installations which were produced between 1999 and 2006, but also created the opportunity to include early work, emphasising the reflective approach towards selected works for this retrospective exhibition. Many of the artworks which were presented in this exhibition are discussed in chapter three where various creative features have already been identified and
illustrated. This will afford an opportunity in **chapter four** to focus on a selection of a smaller number of major works where the use of rusted metal to clad or make objects is pertinent. Special reference will be made of the installation entitled *The end* (Figs 98a, b, c, d and e), to demonstrate the extent of refinement of my visual language and how it had been integrated into this large scale work. **Chapter five** will focus on case study two: *Time and space*, a comprehensive exhibition presented at Olievenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein, from 9 July to 8 August 2013. A selection of artworks from this exhibition will demonstrate a shift in focus where subject matter and technique are concerned. I will analyse examples of these works in depth in order to trace pertinent changes that occurred and to situate these works within a contemporary context. The use of the scorching technique as well as the implementation of other new strategies and techniques will be interrogated.

**Chapter six** offers a conclusion to the thesis and a summary of the insights that I have gained in my own work through this research, especially with regard to the development and scope of my work and its place within a broader contemporary context. In this chapter a survey of the validity and reliability of the research activity is provided, within the context of the chosen methodologies.

In the following chapter (chapter two) the methodologies, related to practice-led research and auto-ethnography will be investigated in more depth and a structural matrix or model for this thesis will be determined.
Chapter 2
Research methodology:
Practice-led research and Auto-ethnography.

In this chapter the methodologies regarding a practice-led research project are explored and a selective overview of literature on these topics will be provided. The development of these fairly new approaches within academic scholarship will briefly be traced. I will also reflect on different views and will attempt to define what these diverse strategies entail.

2.1 Practice-led research

Practice-led research entails that postgraduate candidates working within the fields of the performing and visual arts (plus the related fields of design and media) submit creative works “along with an accompanying written document or 'exegesis'” (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010:31, 32). The framework for such submissions has gradually been established and research within these fields has been formally recognised since the 1990s. However, this acceptance of a “new area of formal research” (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2008:s.p.) is not universal and is described by Engels-Schwarzpaul (2008:s.p.) as an “emerging discipline”.

In the discussions opened up since the advent of practice-led submissions, stereotyped views and “age-old antagonisms...between abstract rationality and imaginative aesthetics”, between theory and artistic practice, have been laid bare (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2008:s.p). From a practitioner’s viewpoint, it has, for example, been

---

1In the late fourteenth century the seven liberal arts referred to the attainments “directed to intellectual enlargement, not immediate practical purpose and thus deemed worthy of a free man. Liberal in this sense is opposed to servile or mechanical” (Dictionary.com: S.a.). The liberal arts included grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. Painting and sculpture were excluded and categorised under the mechanical arts, which required labour and craftsmanship (Arnheim, 1969:2). Since the advent of the Renaissance a new view of art as fine art gradually emerged. By the eighteenth century philosophers attempted to define beauty and “began to say that reason itself could not explain beauty...it is understood through intuition and experienced with human feeling and emotion. An aesthetic experience could include a mixture of feeling, such as pleasure, rage, grief, suffering and joy” (Bruyn: S.a.).
argued that artists work intuitively, that written language is reductive, that art should not be an “illustration” of theory and that academic writing is not creative. According to Frayling (2006:xiii), the word “academic” has been a pejorative since “the rise of modernism”, as much of the art produced during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ensconced in the “Western Canon”, is viewed as a direct reaction or rebellion against academic institutions. “Academic has come to mean rule-bound, safe, technically proficient, competent rather than inspired” (Frayling, 2006:xiv).

From the established academic side there has existed a “deep-seated confusion” ever since the 1960s as to whether it is appropriate to grant university degrees for studio practices, especially due to the teaching, learning and researching of studio arts within a university setting (Frayling 2006:xiii). “There’s the confusion about how the traditional procedures of research – finding a subject, searching the literature, selecting a perspective, contributing to knowledge and understanding – might apply in the fine art area” (Frayling 2006:xiii). Macleod and Holdridge (2006:1) refer to a “raging debate” regarding the nature and value of doctorates within the fine arts and the status it has acquired as an academic discipline.

Early debates on research and fine art practice (in the late 1980s and early 1990s), were concerned with the question of whether fine art should engage with research, but have since then moved on to a methodological question namely how should fine art be engaged? (Douglas, Scopa & Gray, 2000:s.p.). The transformation within this debate suggests that a new process of conceptualisation is occurring within academe as well as in the professional arena. New and diverse meanings for the words “research” and “research output” are evolving (Douglas, Scopa & Gray, 2000:s.p.).

However, there exists a prevailing view that “the search for meaning” becomes tangible once procedures are accepted and codified (Sullivan, 2005:35). The latter half of the twentieth century has been characterised as an era of revisionism and scepticism regarding the rationality of logical positivism, seen as the “long-term trustee overseeing
what is commonly known as the ‘scientific method’” (Sullivan, 2005:35). Nevertheless, it is proving difficult to turn this ship, where viewpoints regarding the status of research in the field of fine arts practice are concerned. Traditional viewpoints apropos definitions of what academic research should encompass remain and the absence of “a good sense of international trends” at academic institutions, are cited as obstacles in the way of establishing a new imaginative research approach or paradigm (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2008:s.p.).

According to Engels-Schwarzpaul (2008:s.p.), these problems represent the symptoms of change: new professions are developing and often competition exists regarding more established disciplines. Emerging disciplines need to establish the identity of their field of research by negotiating differences with “peers or adversaries”. Davey (2006:21) infers that “we [have to] free ourselves from the illusion that the modern notion of theory is the only model of theory available to us”.

Sullivan (2005:35) remarks that positivism is less successful when applied to the study of human behaviour owing to the immense complexity of human nature, which he describes as “elusive” and “intangible”, contrasting “strikingly with the order and rationality of the natural world”. However, new opportunities to adapt or “reconfigure” research practices have been introduced by postmodernism, socially grounded qualitative research and critical theory. Moreover, Sullivan (2005: xviii) argues that new pathways need to be opened up to human understanding as the “assumed structures” are not sufficient in an uncertain world. “Our worlds as we know them are changing. Gone are the presumed certainties and stable entities that make the process of finding out about things a relatively simple task” (2005:64).

Pragmatic concerns are also raised in the debate. Elkins (2006: 241), for instance, asks the question: “Why do we want to start thinking about visual art as if it were a science? And what is the new knowledge produced by an artist like Picasso?” He describes the literature that has “sprung up” in order to justify and amplify the concepts
of research and new knowledge as “curious”. He also comments on the economic impetus that drives these adaptations and implementations of new PhD programmes (Elkins, 2006: 241) and by implication the need to configure a definition of research that would include studio practice as formal academic research. The reality, however, is that numbers of papers delivered as well as budget concerns inform the current academic environment. Sullivan (2005:27) argues that:

…the impact of widespread economic rationalist policies is keenly felt at the local level where the micro-economic reform of recent decades directly affects educational change…the model of education as a marketplace of performance continues to dominate.

Douglas, Scopa and Gray (2000:s.p.) note that when formal research occurs within the practice of fine art, the context of such research is the academic environment, although “live” professional situations (“the new knowledge produced by Picasso”) are also engaged. Such research is a response to “cultural changes that impact on practice”; it forms part of a process where the roles regarding practice within a culture are redefined and becomes part of the “progressing discipline”. This knowledge has to be validated and acknowledged within an academic context. Formal research within fine art practice is an area of debate and experimentation “in an effort to develop models of research practice that function like those of science and technology, but are not necessarily the same” (Douglas, Scopa & Gray (2000:s.p.).

Sullivan (2005:65) views scientific inquiry as lacking in capacity to cater for the “full dimensions of human need and knowing”. He advocates the opening up of a “greater intellectual and imaginative space” and bemoans the little change within institutional walls “despite worldwide access to information sources that offer the possibility of different perceptions about the way knowledge is valued and used”. According to Sullivan (2005: 65) “the way the visual arts can contribute to a fuller understanding of everyday reality is rarely heard within academic rhetoric, cultural commentary, or public debate, and this leaves artists, critics, theorists, and teachers talking among themselves”.

16
Sullivan argues that creative practice should be set on a solid disciplinary foundation (2005:26). The agenda that is exerted by the university should help to shape the institutional art world, but the challenge must be accepted to maintain integrity with regard to what visual arts as a field of study constitutes. Sullivan (2005:26) therefore urges that the current uncertainty regarding how the visual arts contribute to new knowledge, should be utilised: “there is no better time to act”. He further states that visual arts research could be placed within the frameworks that exist “but not be a slave to them” (Sullivan 2005: xiii). He acknowledges the “rigorous institutional demands” but again maintains that the practices of the studio could be the basis of visual research as they are robust enough.

Bal (2008: 209) advocates the need for a new “dialogic sensibility”, where it is possible to benefit from different modes of research, where “the imagination is made reason’s equal and facts are not gathered before we have made the questions meaningful”. She points to the meaning of the word “research” namely to search again or anew (Bal, 2008: 210), implying that ingrained concepts of scientific research should be “deconstructed”.

However, as a prerequisite, research questions, processes and findings at PhD level need to be communicated in a comprehensible way to non-creative communities. A further question might be put forward namely, how far should the definition of what academic research entails be stretched and should there always be the “expectation that academic research contributes to the ‘clarification of existing forms of professional practice from an informed perspective’, and to the ‘definition of new frames of reference for the profession’” (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2008:s.p.)?

In an effort to define what research at a PhD level entails, Candy (2006:4) states that a distinct and significant contribution to knowledge is required through original investigation before this degree is awarded to candidates. She adds that new knowledge is expected to have two characteristics: it is shared and it can be verified or challenged…Accepting that much of what we know is known
tentatively rather than absolutely, the properties of being sharable and challengeable are more important than the absolute certain truth of the new knowledge.

Knowledge concerns “what is and knowing what causes what” but according to Candy (2006:6), and pertinent to a practice-led PhD, “we are also interested in knowledge about action”. She maintains that such practical knowledge could still be shared, verified and criticised.

Sullivan (2005:146) observes that “artists cast their minds to issues, ideas, and experiences that reveal imaginative insights, yet the process resists capture by the freeze-frame of clinical analysis”. Artists need to invest time and energy to investigate what they are busy doing or creating by documenting and sharing their experiences in the studios, communities and in diverse cultural communities. These are the spaces where “mind and matter merge” (Sullivan, 2005:146). Sullivan (2005:35) advocates a more inclusive and holistic model of research.

Douglas, Scopa and Gray (2000:s.p.) argue that traditionally it has been the art critics, theorists and historians who have placed art practice and individual artworks within the academic and theoretical debates. They distinguish between what they term “Formal Research in the Practice of Fine Art” from other research “scenarios”, where fine art is concerned, for example personal or private undertakings: professional rather than “research based conventions”. This could include sketchbooks, storyboards, published or networked interviews or viewpoints not argued in a thesis or academic paper. The large-scale projects of the land artist Christo are cited as example where an extensive volume of “research” is generated. The authors maintain that “in research terms, the impact of any new knowledge is therefore limited within this route” (Douglas, Scopa & Gray, 2000:s.p.), as, among other reasons, much of the “research” remains unpublished. The “emerging discipline” of practice-led research obviates this argument as the creative practice of the artist, including artistic output, plus the “personal, private undertakings” mentioned above, are validated within an academic context and are therefore incorporated into “Formal Research in the Practice of Fine Art”.

18
Art represents another language, or as Macleod and Holdridge (2006:8) argue: “art is always in translation”. As art is seen as “materially realised ideas”, the binaries between “word and deed; contemplation and action; theory and practice; feeling and cognition; intuition and reason; imagination and logic” become transparent. Hay (2006:3) emphasises the identification of the conceptual within the art practice and suggests that the binary opposition of theory to practice might be rethought through this strategy.

Art, however, is not theory. It can be said to encompass conceptual schemata. It can perhaps be identified as theorised object...employs the imaginative capacity which could be said to release sense-construction from the bounds of language in pursuit of the direct rendition of experience” (Macleod & Holdridge, 2006:11).

Moreover, Macleod and Holdridge (2006:5) emphasise the physicality of art, its “complex, sensuous and cognitive presence or ‘entity’” and suggest that, if art as “research” is to be understood as academic research, this aspect must be explored.

Davey (2006:20), in advocating a “new model of theory”, offers an explication of the term theoria, which in ancient Greek encompassed the concepts theoria (contemplation), and theoros (participant). This term therefore approximates the contemporary meaning of witnessing, implying active participation, unlike the contemporary concept of theory as being a “detached” and “objective” observation. Davey (2006:35) infers that theory (implying the full meaning of theoria) should be used to “bring into reflection the subject matter of an artwork and to assist in its realisation”. One’s understanding of an artwork’s subject matter is extended when theoria is employed and when the “reciprocity” between thinking and making is recognised.

A term that becomes significant in the field of practice-led research, specifically fine art, is “visual knowing”. Sullivan (2005: xix) rejects the simplistic dichotomies aligning certain ways of knowing and thinking with the sciences and “forms of feeling with experience in the arts”. Sullivan (2005:180) argues that

...research in the visual arts incorporates ways of presenting, encountering and analyzing information that is sufficiently robust to produce new knowledge that can be encountered and acted on. It is possible to consider ‘the visual’ not only as a
descriptive or representational form, but also as a means of creating and constructing images that form an evidential base that reveals new knowledge. Seen from this perspective, the role of visual data in research can be used to move beyond the contribution to explanatory knowledge production, and to a more ambitious state of formative knowledge construction.

Hence a case could be made for the artist to be seen as “both the researcher and the researched”. Artists’ studios could be used as a critique of new knowledge as they “are theoretically powerful and methodologically robust sites of inquiry” (Sullivan, 2005: xix). The practices applied by artists could expand our understanding of “who we are, what we do, and what we know”. Sullivan (2005: xix) emphasises the role of the artist in the process of conceptualising new ways of knowing:

Settings such as those opened up by digital environments, cultural collaborations, and community spaces are creating new places for creative and critical inquiry that offer opportunities for different forms of research and scholarship. I argue that artists explore these places in ways that disrupt boundaries.

The conceptualisation of research could therefore be expanded if acknowledgment of the purpose exists, namely that of acquiring new knowledge. It must, however also be acknowledged that this purpose could be achieved through different means (Sullivan, 2005:66). Sullivan (2005:110) argues that it must be accepted that the “visual image is replete with potential evidence of knowledge. This is a plausible claim if we consider how images operate as texts, artifacts, and events that embody cultural meanings”.

The artist, however, has often remained the “silent participant”, whilst the artwork has been explicated by “aestheticians, historians, psychologists, sociologists, critics and cultural commentators” (Sullivan, 2005:83). The artist has also often been in the position where his or her “product” is not regarded as a viable academic output, whilst those who produce theoretic analyses of these artworks, receive recognition within an accredited academic environment. In the field of practice-led research within fine art practice, the “practice of creating artworks, and the processes, products, proclivities, and the contexts that support this activity is included, from the perspective of the artist, as an ‘insider’” (Sullivan, 2005:84).
As stated previously, the way visual arts research might be formalised is still being debated, but according to Sullivan (2005:110) the challenge lies therein to satisfy both the credibility demands of “good research” within the academe, and the goal of creating “good art” within the art world. The visual arts are always “in and of the world” (Macleod & Holdridge, 2006:1) and the research within this field might “provide a way of coming to know the world that is real and relevant” (Sullivan, 2005:34).

In the past few decades case studies of practice-led research and submissions have been undertaken in an attempt to establish valid models and patterns for such research projects. According to Macleod and Holdridge (2006:2) case studies reveal that fine art doctorates often disregard the normative academic practice of basing a premise upon extant theory and that

…extant theory is more usually used as a stepping stone in the process of analysing and constructing visual propositions. During this process, it could be argued that new theory is constructed through and by the artwork, or in other words, the artwork becomes theorised itself. This particular use of theory is bound into the construction of a methodology. Evidence shows that the use of exemplars from other disciplines has frequently been superseded by the need to create a methodology more appropriate to the artist’s own practice.

According to Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010:32), within practice-led research the creative practice is “both the driver and outcome of the research process” and this “initiates a new form of writing…a unique research paradigm”.

Students engaging in practice-led research face the challenge of conceiving a model that would qualify as “a form of academic research” whilst at the same time justice is being done to the “invested poetics” (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010:32) in view of the fact that research also occurs through art practice. The idea of “art as research” becomes problematic when the “writing up” of the text that accompanies a creative submission turns into a “mere” interpretation of the research as artefact (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2008:s.p.).
Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010:32) suggest that while the researcher might include a theoretical framework that approximates conventional research models, as part of the practice-led research project, the researcher’s creative practice forms the core of the project. This section of the research describes the creative process and might comprise …the methodology and methods, as well as the creative works at the heart of the project. It may include how the research unfolded in practice, the process of discovery, and the methods of development, iteration and review. It may include a discussion and description of the creative artefacts that have been realised within the research project. It may also include an analysis or discussion of the reception of the creative practice in exhibition…the process or form of the documentation as well as the archival process (Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010:35).

Regarding practice-led research, neither the project itself, nor the research, develops in a linear manner, nevertheless, there is an “ongoing dialogue between the practice, concepts and precedents” (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010:32). These observations by Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010:31-44), are not prescriptive but reflect on findings reached after a content analysis of a number of practice-led research projects submitted since the 1990s.

The authors conclude that the observed pattern follows a structure that could broadly be described in the following terms, especially where the main section of the research is concerned, namely: situating concepts (the ‘theoretical’ section of the exegesis, including the definition of key terms and issues and the establishment of a theoretical framework), precedents of practice (establishing a link between the researcher’s practice and its broader context and the examination of key precedents in the field), concluding with the researcher’s creative practice (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010:34).

As formal research commences, such a model for practice-led research expects of the researcher to adopt a multi-perspectival position, undertaken, but the practitioner also needs to write in a self-reflexive way as an “insider” who “draws on what they uniquely know and have experienced in relation to their creative works and processes” (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010:38). For the purpose of this thesis the model proposed by Hamilton
and Jaaniste (2010:34) will be broadly applied. I will be structuring the written component on my own art within three chapters. In chapter three a broad framework will be established in which I endeavour to trace and locate my visual language with reference to concept, materials and technique as well as strategies of presentation. I will also engage with relevant theoretical discourses and discuss examples of the work of other contemporary artists that bears relevance to mine, in order to establish “precedents of practice”. In chapters four and five I will be utilising the information gleaned from chapter three and will be implementing this knowledge with regard to two major exhibitions. These exhibitions will serve as case studies and will be discussed in depth, indicating certain patterns, scope of interest, changes and development.

An array of writing styles and genres has to be adopted in the researcher’s attempt to synthesise theory and practice. The integration of a range of voices is also required (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010:40): “…from the formal, critical, and polemical third-person voice of the theorist and historian to the personal, explorative, questioning and sometimes emotive first-person voice of the diarist and reflective practitioner”.

Reporting on their findings regarding case studies, Macleod and Holdridge (2006:9) infer that artists’ “subjecthood” or “sense of themselves”, are key elements in the realisation of practice-led research work. The normative academic could be alienated by the tone of “intimacy” present in practice-led research, where the “first person singular is axiomatic” and research findings “are often seen as part of a developing and self-developing practice rather than as research inquiry”.

However, Holly and Smith (2008:xiv) ask a pertinent question namely: “Should an artist or designer be familiar with existing published academic research that pertains to his or her practice, and why should he or she need to demonstrate this familiarity?” The advantages of the model put forward by Hamilton and Jaaniste, (2010:31-44), are, amongst others, that the practitioner is able to present his or her work within a broad contextual framework and might be able to gain some distance from the work, by
preventing the possible problem that the research might only be of value to the practitioner. When the creative practice project is presented within the context of a “research trajectory”, a case might be made for “advances of the field” as well as a claim to “a significant and original contribution to knowledge” plus an “increase in the stock of knowledge”, which is accepted as the functional definition of the purpose of higher research (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010:38, 40).

Hughes (2006:285, cited in Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2008:s.p.), also emphasises the necessity of written communication as it establishes an interpretative-contextual framework – the “core concept” for practice-led research. Without written communication, “practice would remain practice and not additionally a form of research”. When there is a fusion of “creative and critical modes of enquiry”, (Hughes, 2006:292), new connections could be made and the expansion of our understanding being brought into play. Sullivan (2005:181) remarks that

…for the artist, the artwork embodies the questions, ideas and images whereby for the art writer, the word becomes the vehicle to advance new realms of investigative possibility. In this case, the coalition between the visual and the verbal is both critical and supportive…It can be argued that a new era of visual arts research is possible for those who see studio art as a site for conducting transformative research that has individual and cultural relevance.

In conclusion it could be said that the anxieties that artists often experience regarding theory are not always unjustified, as art is sometimes “entombed in an all enclosing concept of discourse” (Davey, 2006:25). Some practitioners are intuitively resistant to this “amputation” of art from the world, when it is reduced to an “ideological production”. This occurs when art is subordinated or appropriated to address historical or political issues, and is presented as confirmation of or as evidence for a thesis that implies a conventional methodology for academic research.

The success of a practice-led research undertaking in the field of visual art lies in the objective of establishing the artwork as the core issue of the research, from which the theoretical component or “exegesis” develops. Sullivan (2005:220) emphasises the
autonomy of the artist over that of ideology and the value of the artist as the provider of "visual evidence on which to ground experience". He respects a view of "the centrality of the artist as the site of profound human experience". New pathways are being investigated and opened up which might be enriching both to the discipline of "academic enquiry" and to the art practitioner whose work might find acknowledgement within this "emerging field".

In the following section practice-led research will be linked to the related field of auto-ethnography, an approach to research that also emerged during the latter decades of the twentieth century, as new "opportunities to reform social science and reconceive the objectives and forms of social science inquiry" arose, as a result of the uncertainties and new paradigms that were emerging at the time (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:1).

2.2 Auto-ethnography

Auto-ethnography is a methodological practice, but also a form of writing and it could therefore be viewed as both process and product (Grist, S.a.:5). The word auto-ethnography comprises three components, namely auto (personal experience), ethno (cultural experience) and graphy (writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse) (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:1). This implies that personal experience or stories are told, placed within a cultural context and offered as a valid method to gain new understanding and knowledge. Auto-ethnography as a "genre" provides "…intimate reflections and personal narratives about the relationship of self, other, culture and communication" (Young, 2009:1). It could be described as an effort "to map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life" (Behar, 1996:174). Chang (2008:9) views auto-ethnography as a "research method that uses

---

2 The spelling variants autoethnography and auto-ethnography are encountered in the literature on this topic. For the purpose of this thesis the variant auto-ethnography is adopted.
The researcher’s autobiographical data to analyse and interpret their cultural assumptions.

This approach towards research could (as in the case of practice-led research methods) be viewed as a response to critique of the existing canon and axioms concerning research methods that developed as the “universal master narratives” were being questioned by philosophers such as Barthes, Derrida, Lyotard and others, during the advent of postmodernism:

…they realised that stories were complex, constitutive, meaningful phenomena that taught morals and ethics, introduced unique ways of thinking and feeling and helped people make sense of themselves and others (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011: 1).

Rolling (2008:841) describes the “disruptive” quality of auto-ethnography where the “proprieties in social roles and acts of research” are interrogated and where the insistence on authoritative and abstract analyses are thus undermined. Through auto-ethnography, Western systems of knowledge become the object of inquiry and are destabilised and “deconstructed” from within (Grist, S.a.:32). Demjanenko (2011:14) also points to the roots of the self-reflective or reflexive nature of auto-ethnography within philosophy, especially evident in the writings of Foucault who “questioned how the world knows what it knows, how discourses are developed, and how these discourses play out in power relations between those who define and those who are defined”. Trahar (2009:1) informs us that narrative inquiry is based firmly on the assumption that, as human beings, we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through storytelling. However, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011:7) point to critiques and responses where auto-ethnography is concerned: it is criticised for “either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful”. According to the authors art and science are “erroneously” positioned as “at odds with each other”, a condition that auto-ethnography seeks to correct by disrupting the “binary of science and art”.
Duncan (2004:30) on the other hand relates how auto-ethnography evolved from ethnographic studies that have been undertaken since the early 1900s and states that ethnographic approaches are currently being acculturated into a postmodern academic world: “The desire to discover and make room for the worldview of others suits a postmodern sensitivity, in which no right form of knowledge exists and multiple viewpoints are acknowledged and valued”. Auto-ethnography is being adopted by a growing number of scholars from diverse disciplines. Owing to its disparate uses it has no strict definition and is often adapted to suit various research purposes (Grist, S.a.:3, 4).

Auto-ethnography is utilised as a method or an approach within various fields of social science inquiry, as nearly any aspect of one’s life could become a research focus (Chang, 2008:49). Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011:4) distinguish between different forms of auto-ethnography, some of which are useful tools when applied to practice-led research in the field of visual art. Among the approaches mentioned, personal narratives are described as

...stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives…Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author’s world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand and cope with their own lives (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:5).

If this view is applied to the artist embarking on practice-led research the phrase “to understand a self or some aspect of a life” might be interpreted as the artist writing or relating the story of his or her art making and the development of a personal visual language. This form of writing is contemplative and narrative by nature, as the artist reflects on a process that might have developed in a sub-conscious or more instinctive way. “Writing is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry” (Richardson, 2000 in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:5) and therefore, apart from the possible therapeutic value, the value of writing a narrative is a way “to make sense of ourselves and our experiences”.

27
The subjective view and the value of “inner knowing” have gradually become acceptable as a method for the practice of research as the assumption is held by auto-ethnographers (and qualitative researchers in general) that “reality is neither fixed nor entirely external but is created by, and moves on with, the changing perceptions and beliefs of the viewer” (Duncan, 2004:30). The research presented in this thesis will “not present a record of the world the researcher has visited or been part of; rather [it will demonstrate] how the researcher made sense of that world” (Duncan, 2004:30). The auto-ethnographer is taking a risk in laying bare some aspect or aspects of her or his being as it is exposed to the world (Brogden, 2008:370). In displaying artworks in an exhibition, artists set their products up for public scrutiny and critique and thus have already faced a certain risk. The practising artist undertaking an auto-ethnographic study increases this risk by exposing and analysing the very origins of the work and the processes in which these artworks were created; by trying to map a process that is elusive and perhaps needs to remain elusive.

In her examination of aspects of self-narratives, Chang (2008:39) points to a range of writing styles that are employed, such as “descriptive/self-affirmative, analytical/interpretative and confessional/self-critical/self-evaluative”. The researcher might be subjective or emotional, not necessarily neutral, which might have an influence on his or her research. In his description of what auto-ethnography encompasses, Rolling (2008:849) uses words and phrases such as “stammering”, “unspeakable”, “animating struggle for words”, “evocative methodologies” and “scholarship that wears no clothes”. Narrative writing that comprises “mere self-exposure without profound cultural analysis and interpretation” is viewed by Chang (2008:51) as “writing at the level of descriptive autobiography and memoir”. The writing styles might be varied in a specific narrative, or a specific style might be more pronounced, depending on what the author sets out to achieve.

Brogden (2008:375) suggests that tensions are created within auto-ethnographic research as questions lead to more questions and the possibility that the investigation
might entail the “opening up of crisis”. This might lead to different or altered readings of “our work”:

When we see ourselves as producers and produced, we place ourselves fully within a hermeneutic circle of meaning making, grappling with questions to which no fixed answers exist…the sharing of particular academic (and other) identities (some in crisis, some not) delineates and expands spaces of the academically possible.

The practising artist in the role of auto-ethnographer displays a multitude of identities: he/she is now not only an artist but also an academic, whilst the subjective and personal, the core origin of his or her work is placed under the spotlight, by the artist him/herself. Grist (S.a.:17) argues for a balance between the personal and analytical “paradigms” in auto-ethnographic research and claims that auto-ethnography needs to be “rescued” from the “personal” and the “evocative”. This view is echoed by Chang (2008:48) who argues that auto-ethnography should be “ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretative orientation and autobiographical in its content orientation”. Chang (2008:66) warns against positioning oneself in a self-reflexive narrative and advises “to use your story as part of a larger study of others”. Kumar (2011:45) emphasises the “necessary critical reflection” that should inform auto-ethnographical writing, echoing Grist’s argument (S.a.:17) for a balance between personal, evocative and analytical approaches.

Chang (2008:71) refers to the manner in which personal memory functions as a building block of auto-ethnography, “because the past gives a context to the present self and memory opens a door to the richness of the past…you have a first-hand discernment of what is relevant to your study”. In the case of the practising artist, he or she has the artworks to show as well as the tangible trail of the process of their creation in the form of notes, sketches, journals and conceptual studies as ‘evidence’, as well as functioning as an aid to memory. However, writing reflexively on the stories of their making and connecting the artworks to a theoretical framework and/or the work of other artists, is a method of “translating” the artworks, in order to be viewed in more
than one way or to be viewed by others who require the key of language in order to discern or understand the artworks.

According to Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011:5), writing up personal stories enables “witnessing”. Ethnography as a field of study places emphasis on the cultural context of stories and is a tool by which outsiders (strangers to a specific cultural group) might gain insight or become “participant observers” of that group, as their stories are told and noted (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011:2). Auto-ethnography entails that when a story is being told, the storyteller also becomes an observer with personal experience being introduced “to illustrate facets of cultural experience”. With regard to the essential difference between ethnography and auto-ethnography, Duncan (2004:30) informs us that whilst researching auto-ethnography, the researcher is not trying to become an insider regarding the research venture, but that “he or she in fact, is the insider”. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011:2) argue that the achievement of such a research undertaking “might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research”. This view echoes the conclusions that were reached regarding practice-led research and the importance of the “contextual framework” put forward by Hamilton and Jaaniste, (2010:31-44) and might be partly concomitant with the “cultural context” or “ethno”-component of auto-ethnographic research.

Chang (2008:15, 19, 21) views culture as a “web of self and others” and suggests that culture forming occurs “…in the process of people’s interactive communication and meaning making”. People are “agents” of culture, but when the role of individuals in “culture-making” is overemphasised, the “collectivistic nature” of culture is neglected. The work of the individual enters the public domain and “culture-making” follows when the work is communicated. Chang (2008: 29) sees the concepts of “culture”, “self” and “others” as interconnected. The intersecting of a personal story within a cultural context could be applied as an exploration of contextual theoretical frameworks and precedents of practice by the visual artist in his or her particular field of interest. This will necessarily involve the positioning of the artwork within the context of current discourse. Auto-ethnography is thus a means to make others understand by showing and telling, as
well as a parameter to self-understanding. Chang (2008:41) places emphasis on the process of writing, that “evokes self-reflection and self-analysis through which self-discovery becomes a possibility; …the cognitive activity of compare and contrast engenders self-examination and self-learning”.

Rolling (2008:841,842) admires the energy of self-reflexivity in order to disturb social and academic agreement and defines auto-ethnography as “…the transcription of human social experience through evocative and emotional written discourse;… a form of enquiry that does not merely write up the research but is itself the story of discovery…opening up possibilities for continual reconstruction and reconfiguration”. Rolling (2008:842) sees auto-ethnography as a “narrative performance” and an act of “social transgression”, not only because of its disruption of a “deterministic and politicised epistemic dispensation” but its potential to reveal what has been kept hidden and to give voice to “what has been kept silent”.

In the process of reading on the topic of auto-ethnography, the concept of “visual auto-ethnography” has been encountered. This is an approach where visual aids (such as videos, photographs or drawings) are used in a narrative manner or as an aid to a narrative, and does not necessarily refer to artistic practice (Pink, 2007:1), although it might be considered an effective tool for artists embarking on auto-ethnographic research. Watson (2009:526), in a critique regarding the established academic tradition, argues that the privileged place of text over image might be overturned and a different relationship between the verbal and the visual be recognised. When the auto-ethnographical approach is applied in art practice, the dichotomy is obviated; text and image are used in an interrelated way as the artist is “allowed” to tell the story of his or her art making process whilst using their own work as reference.

Art encompasses the full human repertoire plus the “lyrical content” (Rolling, 2008:844) that is possible within auto-ethnographic research that might suit the practising artist whilst writing the narrative of his or her art making processes. Rolling (2008:844)
describes such content as representing “actual experiences”, capturing events in such a way that “others can experience and feel them”. The artist has the advantage that he or she might possibly elicit such responses by merely exhibiting their artworks whereas the written narrative might open up such “felt” experiences to a wider audience. The visual transcends language and might be used where words fail but, according to Pink (2007:21), “visual research methods are not purely visual. Rather, they pay particular attention to visual aspects of culture. Similarly, they cannot be used independently of other methods; neither a purely visual ethnography nor an exclusively visual approach to culture can exist”. It could be argued that auto-ethnography is a methodology that could open up new possibilities for recognition for the visual artist, who might have previously experienced that his or her artistic output is being usurped as a focus point for academic research by others. The spectrum of writing styles that might be employed plus the “ambiguity” that is possible within this new academic “genre” might suit those with an artistic sensibility. Demjanenko (2011:11) describes auto-ethnography as a “conceptually ambiguous” style and an art that might be practiced by anyone where auto-ethnographers “give of themselves and … believe that this giving possesses academic worth, relevancy and value”. In this approach multiple methodologies are incorporated and “researchers can move toward a respect for the participants in research, the academic creativity and the growth possible in fluid and ambiguous research” (Demjanenko 2011:12).

Chang (2008:52) views auto-ethnography as researcher-friendly: “auto-ethnographers are privileged with a holistic and intimate perspective on their ‘familiar data’”. She also vies for this approach as being reader-friendly as readers might experience the writing style as more appealing than conventional scholarly writing.

Key considerations when an auto-ethnographic approach is followed are those of credibility, validity, bias and reliability. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011:7) ask: “For an autoethnographer, questions of reliability refer to the narrator’s credibility. Could the
narrator have had the experiences described, given available ‘factual evidence’?”. According to the authors the issue of validity stands in relationship to the reception of auto-ethnography; does it evoke in readers a feeling that “the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true”? In all probability this aspect of critique could be addressed by means of the artist presenting concrete artwork being assessed against the theoretical explanation.

Hegelund (2005:649) regards the question of objectivity and subjectivity (with regards to the related field of ethnographic study) as of “crucial importance” and asks “what claims to validity exist, (if any)?”. He refers to the “earlier” concept of “triangulation (the idea of combining different research strategies in the same study)” as a means to “validate a given study through reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation”. The emphasis placed by the authors Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010:34) on three key strategies when embarking on practice-led research, namely a focus on situating concepts, precedents of practice and lastly the researcher’s creative practice, might be regarded as comparable to the concept of triangulation as mentioned in Hegelund’s article (2005:649) and therefore as a probable means to give validity to the study.

The issue of bias is also raised when commencing with auto-ethnographic research. Jones (2001: s.p.) regards triangulation as a means to “achieve a balance of biases and thus enhance the 'internal validity' of data”, rather than “trying to exclude bias from the research process”. On the criterion of reliability, Duncan (2004:11) suggests that a “case study protocol” should be established “that would allow someone else to follow the researcher’s procedures”. Hegelund (2005:662) points out that “at the first (and most basic level), the study must correspond to the piece of reality it attempts to describe”. As this research project is supported by the presentation of evidence in the form of concrete artwork that might be examined and analysed without the interference of the ‘voice’ of the artist, it is possible for the reader to judge for him or herself whether there exists such “correspondence” and whether it is reliable.
According to Hegelund (2005:649) the strategy of triangulation has been given new impetus within the postmodern era with the term being augmented by the concept of “crystallization...as it emphasizes the multitude of angles and the infinity of refractions”. A subjective point of view plus a narrative strategy might be regarded as an aspect of an auto-ethnographic text, but the reception of the text (and indeed also the artworks that are presented) might be perceived or placed within an infinite number of contexts. This emphasis on multiplicity is one of the key concepts introduced by postmodern thinkers such as Derrida and Barthes. Their ideas also bear relevance to the possible interpretations engendered by a text (or an artwork). Ulmer (1983:389) cites Derrida in this regard:

Every sign...spoken or written in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotation marks: in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable.

The concept of the artist or author as a genius and self-sufficient subject; “the prestige of the individual”, is rejected by Barthes (1978:145-177) in his influential essay entitled The death of the author. According to Barthes (1978:147) “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing...when the author is found the text is ‘explained’”.

The artist engaged in auto-ethnographic writing should acknowledge his/her subjectivity as well as the lack of control over its reception. The multiplicity of interpretations and the concept of “crystallization” (2005:649) is viewed by Hegelund as an “enrichment”. The reader of the text or viewer of the artworks is placed in a position to participate in the process of ‘engendering’ a multiplicity of interpretations, meanings and viewpoints.

When a practice-led research approach is compared to auto-ethnography, many pertinent similarities are evident. Both approaches seem to have been developed by theorists in the late twentieth century in the aftermath of critique regarding the existing academic conventions. In both these two approaches the opening up of new possibilities within academic convention are revealed. Both offer an array of writing
styles and viewpoints, from the objective to the subjective and also give weight to the importance of situating the personal within a social or cultural context.

In the next chapters an attempt will be made to apply these methods when formulating the visual language developed in my own artwork and to relate the work to “precedents of practice”. I shall be setting up a theoretical framework and refer to examples of my own artworks, as well as works of other selected artists. Within the research aim of this thesis, as projected in chapter one, it is stated that I intend to undertake an examination and documentation of my own working processes as these processes developed through the decades. I shall be referring to recurrent themes and concepts in an effort to determine the origin of these themes. Concurrent with the conceptual development, a working process and an affinity for certain materials and techniques evolved. Although this course will be traced along with an attempt to situate my artwork within a broader context, my own art will form the central focus point within this practice-led undertaking. Before commencing on an in-depth discussion of the two exhibitions that will serve as case studies in chapters four and five, I shall be structuring the inquiry in the following chapter along the following main headings regarding the gradual evolvement of my visual language: concept and conceptualisation, materials, techniques, process and lastly presentation. Although the following chapter involves a formal academic investigation, a narrative tone is applied in selected sections as I attempt to identify the origins of my concepts and use of materials, which encompass references to my personal history as well the socio-political context of my life.

---

3 Over the years my artworks have been the focus of a number of academic articles and studies at postgraduate level. In this regard, I have often been interviewed to provide personal viewpoints and background information on specific artworks. I have not consulted these dissertations for the purposes of this research. However, I would like to declare that, in the event of a possible overlap between this research and other academic articles regarding information on certain artworks, that I was the source of the information in all instances. I have also been the co-author of published articles regarding my own art. In certain instances these articles are cited in this thesis.
Chapter 3
Visual language in the work of Jan van der Merwe: a framework

3.1 Introduction: a visual language
As cited in chapter two, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011:5) describe personal narratives as an invitation to “readers to enter the author’s world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives”. This citation emphasises communication and the effect it has on the receiver. My primary means of communication or ‘language’ is through art and it is my sincere wish that the viewers would use what they find in my art “to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives”. This endeavour of an auto-ethnographic study, is also an opportunity for me as a visual artist to reflect on my own art in an attempt to ‘translate’ my visual language into words.

When the artist communicates the story of his or her art making and the development of a personal visual language, he or she unravels processes that are often experienced as enigmatic. The reasons behind the desire to make art are difficult to fathom. Attempts to define art itself are undertaken anew by each generation and in this narrative I shall make an effort to reflect on my own individual views regarding the meaning of art as well as my personal visual language that developed through my art making processes. I will be referring to parallels and “precedents of practice” by discussing the work of other artists and also by including current relevant discourses pertaining to the strategies employed in my own work.

Arnheim (1969: v), in his study on the relationship between visual perception and cognitive activity entitled, Visual thinking, states that artistic activity is indeed a form of reasoning in which “perceiving and thinking are indivisibly intertwined” and that “human beings and animals explore and comprehend by acting and handling rather than by mere contemplation, which is after all a rare stance” (Arnheim, 1969: vii). In his study Arnheim traces the neglect of the arts “because they are based on perception and
perception is disdained because it is not assumed to involve thought” (1969:3). Mcleod and Holdridge (2002:5) write on research findings that reveal the “rigour and integrity of visual intellectuality”. They examine the “states of being precipitated by practice” and position the artist as “being in the world”. In their study of “the subjecthood of artists/researchers” the authors emphasise the artwork as “a site of gathering and ordering (re-articulation) of the gatherings, producing new matrices, new bodies, new conjunctions of semiotic chains…It is the methodology that determines the quality of the artist’s theoretical premise and this resides in the artwork” (my emphasis) (Macleod & Holdridge, 2002:6,7). The artist “investigating” his/her own visual language has to balance his/her “theoretical premise” with a methodology that is engendered by his/her art, described as “new bodies”. These “new bodies” are engendered through the creative manipulation and juxta-positioning of materials and objects, but they are also new bodies of ideas and meanings that are invented by the imaginative manipulation of tactile matter. This undertaking or “investigation” by the artist seems to be a very hazardous task, as the journey is mapped along the way. Moreover, the candidate should be vigilant not to fall into the trap of merely using his/her art as illustration for extant theory. Macleod & Holdridge (2002:6) cite Barthes who remarked that “the invariable fact is that a piece of work which ceaselessly proclaims its determination for method is ultimately sterile”. What follows is an attempt to trace the development of a personal visual language and to take the first strides on this journey.

I will be structuring this chapter by dealing with the following three aspects regarding my art: firstly, concept and conceptualisation, secondly, process, materials and technique and lastly, presentation. I shall attempt to discuss these features separately, although it is difficult to dissect these topics as they are assimilated into the eventual artworks. I shall also endeavour to continuously contextualise my work by introducing links with the work of selected artists who are relevant to the discussion and by referring to applicable theoretical discourses. My artwork will however remain the main focus of the overall discussion.
The visual language that I employ will be broadly set out in this chapter. An in-depth examination of the application of the strategies that I have developed throughout the years, will follow in chapters four and five and where I shall be discussing a selection of more recent major installations presented in two key solo exhibitions.4

Telling the story of my artmaking is an opportunity to render my visual language into words and to invite “the reader to enter” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:5) my world, whereas my artworks have been presented to the viewer for visual scrutiny for many years. To me, art is a way of communicating a personal and subjective insight into what it means to be human, in a concrete, tactile way, by using visual metaphors, textures, shapes, materials and selected working processes. The opportunity for reflection emphasised by Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011:5), regarding the producer of an artwork as well as the viewer, is one of the key concepts that I will be dealing with in this chapter.

I shall introduce the narrative by focusing on the origins of certain concepts, the use of materials and influences at the beginning of my career, when my visual language started to evolve. I began my fine art studies in 1977, at a time when conceptual art and its aftermath were very much in vogue. Our training reflected a consistent balance between the acquisition of traditional skills and an encouragement to experiment with new conceptual strategies and ‘mixed media’, as it was termed then. In the 1970s conceptual art movements in Europe and America impacted on South African art schools at all academic institutions. I majored in painting, together with other subjects including sculpture, ceramics, drawing and history of art. The painting course was divided into two sections, one focusing on the conventions of paint as a medium, and

4 In this chapter, examples of early artworks will be introduced to demonstrate the origins of concepts and the use of materials that are recurrent and are still being used. Most of the early works referred to in this chapter formed part of the retrospective exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum in 2006 which will be the focus of the discussion in chapter four, although more emphasis will be placed on recent work. Throughout this thesis, there will be limited, but some reference to the body of work that was exhibited as part of my M.Tech. degree which I completed in 1998. A number of the later installations (e.g. Confessional and It's cold outside), will be discussed in chapter three in order to illustrate conceptual development. This will lend more opportunity for in-depth discussions of other larger installations in chapters four and five. The examples discussed in this text are not comprehensive. A complete list of works presented as part of this practice-led degree is added as an addendum.
the other emphasising experimentation with materials and concept. The illustrations of my early work in this section are examples of the latter and clearly demonstrate the influence of movements such as conceptual art, arte povera and post-minimalism. These influences were absorbed by art students of my generation and consciously affected my approach to artmaking. I shall briefly discuss examples of these early works, as certain recurring concepts and processes that are developed in later work are already evident in these works.

Post-minimalism might be viewed as one of the movements in which the implosion or “collapse” of late modernism and formal abstraction becomes apparent, although the latter is often still discernable. Rosalind Krauss (1973:43) describes post-minimalism as “a historical wedge” between minimalist art and a diverse younger generation whose work, among other strategies, subverts the formal grid- and stripe paintings of hard-
edge abstraction. In *Zip painting* (1978, Fig.1), raw canvas is stretched over a wooden board, painted bright red. The canvas is split vertically in half by a dark green zip that can be opened or closed by the viewer, thus creating or disguising the red ‘stripe’. When this work is compared to an example of a stripe painting by the formalist, Barnett Newman (Fig.2), it is noticeable that the emphasis on flatness, purity and on art elements such as colour, scale and edge, pointed out as key qualities of modernist abstract painting by the art critic Clement Greenberg (Wallis, 1984: xii) are referred to. However these characteristics are also undermined by the introduction of a found object (the zip), the presentation of raw material (the canvas) and the way the audience is invited to interact with the artwork. The suggestion of something that is ‘screened off’ or hidden, the play between inside and outside, as well as the implied repetitive action (opening and closing) are recurring concepts and strategies that will be discussed in later work.

It is important to note that an artwork such as *Zip painting* (Fig.1) (and all other artworks for that matter) were not conceptualised as a result of theoretical study, but rather, conceived instinctively. The influence of knowledgeable lecturers, the encouragement to explore and experiment as well as the stimulating environment at the art school cannot be underestimated. I refer again to Sullivan (2005:220) who emphasises the autonomy of the artist over that of ideology and the value of the artist as the provider of “visual evidence on which to ground experience”.

The artwork entitled *Skildery vir ‘n pendeltuig/Painting for a space shuttle* (Figs. 3a, 3b and 3c) is another example of an early work where the hard-edge abstraction of the previous generation is perceptible, but employed here in a conceptual manner. The title reflects something of the contemporary global technological environment at the time when the artwork was executed, but also indicates a ‘break’ with the tradition of an untitled work, associated with much modernist art. As will be demonstrated throughout this text, titles play an important part in the presentation of my artworks: they

---

5 Where the figures indicate examples of my own work, the name of the artist is omitted.
underscore the conceptual basis and often provide a key to the intended layers of meaning. In this artwork the canvas is substituted for a found object, namely a window blind, which can be manipulated by the viewer. The three images (Figs. 3a, 3b and 3c) demonstrate three ‘settings’ of the blinds, but many other variations are possible.

The following two early artworks (Figs. 4 and 5) reflect the prevailing interest in the grid as applied in minimalist and post-minimalist art, but also introduce those creative strategies that became signature processes in my later installations. In Fig. 4 the use of rusted marks as a process is introduced for the first time. An old iron doormat (that was part of our family household for many years and lay at the entrance to the kitchen door and at present at the entrance to my studio), was wrapped in canvas and left outside in the wind and rain. The rust process was further exacerbated by my regular addition of salt, water and vinegar. After a few weeks the doormat was unwrapped, the canvas framed and presented as an artwork. The conceptualisation is important in this work as the natural process of oxidation produced the marks on the canvas whereas the hand of the artist is not visible in this instance. This rust process along with salt, water and vinegar is still in use in my current installations. Fig. 4 demonstrates the use of scorching, in this case made by a domestic iron on raw canvas. To date the technique of scorching is employed in most recent large installations, for example Ontwortel/Uprooted, (2009) (Fig. 121) and its effects and implications are discussed fully later on.
The notions of process, of a beginning and an end, the ongoing decay and the passing of time are apparent in Fig. 5, as indicated by the gradual fading and disappearance of the scorched marks within the grid-like structure. Ironically time is also frozen in the visible date on the found and collaged piece of paper. Right from the start the experimentation with materials were concomitant with the possible meanings and content of the artwork conveyed through these materials. In these two works (Figs. 4 and 5) important themes, namely that of earth and heaven, the spiritual association with decay, of rust and the end of matter are suggested. The doormat (Fig. 4) is very much a vehicle of earth or soil but might also be symbolic of humility and toil, whereas The star (Fig. 5) points to the heavens as a spiritual, arcane domain. These concepts permeate much of my body of work. The use, evidence or image of a domestic iron as perceived in Fig. 5, ironed clothes or an ironing board crops up continuously in my work and it is only with hindsight that I might attempt an explanation of this image that is lodged in my
subconscious: my father passed away on my twenty-first birthday and we had our last conversation while I was ironing clothes.

Certain early experiences and emotional impressions are retained with more clarity than others and might influence an artist’s choice of subject matter as well as materials. As a child I spent much time alone outside, constructing environments from sticks, stones and mud. I have vivid memories of evenings spent lying in my bed, my imagination lit by the spectacle of the stars visible through the window and the excitement when I saw a shooting star. As part of my first employment after school, I had to do duty at the railway station at Ladysmith, at times also at night. The sensations that I experienced during this time, the sight of the rusted train tracks and the 'mystery' of a train filled with passengers appearing and disappearing, the smell of steel, oil and coal and the memory of the labour carried out by men, are associations that remain with me. Later, as a soldier, I had to stand duty at night and my fascination with the stars was rekindled, as I had hours in which I could study the patterns and figures in the galaxy or the movements of satellites and shooting stars.

Fig. 6: Robert Rauschenberg, Lake Placid Glori-Fried yams from New England, 1971, cardboard, plywood, rope and wood pole, (Arnason, 1977:620).
As a student I became aware of the work of ‘fashionable’ artists at the time through the subject of history of art and in class discussions (I did not have the opportunity to study visual art as a subject in high school). I also devoured images in art books found in the well-stocked library at the art school. I developed an affinity for the work of Joseph Beuys, whose use of banal materials and his array of strategies intrigued me. I recall being impressed by the ‘absurd machines’ and witty, creative recycling of found materials by the Belgian artist Panamarenko. The unconventional manner in which found and unexpected materials were employed by Robert Rauschenberg (Fig. 6) seemed to me both sensitive and courageous.

Although conceptual art and the concurrent emphasis on the idea rather than the physical object was prevalent at art schools in the 1970s, the concrete and tactile aspect of art has remained of primary importance to me and my art making process. Matter, texture and material (as well as their transformation) are the carriers of the concept and as my art developed, the installations grew bigger, heavier and very tactile, with emphasis on surface texture, although screen images are often included, contrasting with the concrete objects. Alberro and Stimson (1999: xvii) provides a comprehensive definition of conceptual art:

In its broadest possible definition, then, the conceptual in art means an expanded critique of the cohesiveness and materiality of the art object, a growing wariness towards definitions of artistic practice as purely visual, a fusion with the work, its site and context of display, and an increased emphasis on the possibilities of publicness and distribution.

In spite of my awareness of conceptual strategies, the emphasis on language and the dematerialisation of the object, I remained interested in concrete or tangible objects and materials and in the possibilities of their manipulation and transformation. The phrase “…a fusion with the work, its site and context of display” bears relevance to the strategies that I have developed, as it refers to installation and site-specific work. Conceptual art opened up possibilities and broadened the options available to an artist, as ‘anything’ could be deemed art, since Duchamp ironically made his first ‘anti-art’ statement by presenting found objects as art early in the twentieth century. As the found
object or found material is vital to my artmaking process I chose this topic as the focus of my M. Tech. dissertation, entitled: *The transformation of the found in a contemporary context* (Van der Merwe:1999).

The experimentation with materials during my student days was also influenced by the Italian movement, *arte povera*, which is described by Celant in Lucie-Smith (1995:146) as

…express[ing] an approach to art which is basically anti-commercial, precarious, banal and anti-formal, concerned primarily with the physical qualities of the medium and the mutability of the materials. Its importance lies in the artists’ engagement with the actual materials and with total reality and their attempt to interpret that reality in a way which, although hard to understand, is subtle, elusive, private, intense.

I identify wholly with this view and admired the way these artists, such as Alberto Burri, created poetry out of banal objects or materials. I also respected the work of the Spanish artist Antoni Tàpies who was associated with *arte povera*. I appreciated the textural quality in these works (as illustrated in Figs. 7 and 8), as well as the unexpected choice of materials, which induced in me a respect for the inherent characteristics and
meanings conveyed by available raw materials. To me the artworks and work processes
developed by these artists, seemed to embody something spiritual, as if they were
hymns to the banal tangible matter and markings in our environment.

At art school, I was particularly inspired by one of my lecturers, Gunther van der Reis,
whose work also displayed similar textural qualities as well as the natural colours visible
in the work of Burri and Tàpies. Other South African artists whose work have made an
indelible impression on me during my formative student years, specifically their use of
materials, have been Willem Boshoff and Christo Coetzee. In the 1970s the persona of
Walter Battiss was very prominent in the Pretoria art world. His presence and
assertiveness served as a role model and confirmation of the possibility of pursuing a
career as a fine artist.
Psalm, (Fig.10) is an early work in which the materials and found objects convey the meaning. These found objects are discarded items and their apparent wear and tear is evidence of their former usefulness and worth. The mindful compositional arrangement as well as the title reveals an attempt to honour these humble materials. Furthermore, I also have an affinity for cement as medium and have often used it in diluted form as ‘paint’ to create texture, as a surface for scratched mark making and for its natural raw quality. A later installation entitled Bagged baggage (Fig.45), is largely constructed out of cement and found material and will be discussed in chapter three.

I consider Galaxy (Figs. 11a and 11b) as a key earlier work as new creative strategies were introduced. In view of its extreme simplicity and the straightforward presence of found objects, it could be regarded as a conceptual artwork, but other senses apart from sight and touch were engaged, as the bells were presented as metaphors for stars (this work was selected for an exhibition for the visually impaired held at the Pretoria Art Museum in 1986, entitled Reach out). The sound of the bells became audible when the work was touched. Although the work was executed on a two-dimensional surface
(pressed wood) in which circular holes were drilled, it was displayed to be viewed from both sides and suspended from the ceiling, making it easier to entice the bells to ring and evoke a sound. The reference to the stars and the heavens and the use of metaphor became pre-occupations in later work.

In this section I have introduced my visual language by indicating early influences at the outset of my career and I have chosen specific examples of artworks in which the seeds of recurring strategies and themes are discernable. In the following sections I shall be discussing my enduring interest regarding content, material as well as techniques and strategies. I shall be introducing further early examples of my work as well as some of the later installations to elucidate and clarify the discussion.

3.2 Concept and conceptualisation

In this section I shall be focusing on content and subject matter – the heart of the artworks that make up my body of work. In the previous section the first steps towards the development of a personal visual language were pointed out. Emphasis was placed on the context in which these early artworks were conceived. Here I shall strive to isolate those concepts that evolved forming the core of what I attempt to communicate in my work. As was evident in the previous section, the application of specific materials forms an integral part of the meaning that is conveyed. I will, however, try to separate and describe the concepts that inform my work and will place more focus on the use of materials, techniques and strategies later in this chapter. The effort to create the necessary distance to enable me to write about my own art is challenging. According to Macleod and Holdridge (2006:9):

…artists’ sense of themselves, their subjecthood, comes into play when realizing research artwork. The first person singular is axiomatic as is a specific intimacy with research findings which are often seen as part of a developing and self-determining practice rather than as research inquiry. This intimacy can provide for an alienation from the normative academic. We might call this, the tone of art research.

As my artworks grew into a larger body of work, the ideas and concepts developed and matured organically. These works were inspired by my personal circumstances, the
larger context of my identity within a social environment and my continuous awareness and interest in the possibilities of art as a visual language. Mcleod and Holdridge (2006:9) suggest that art “can, like poetry, only be reread and not read, since some of its structures can be perceived only retrospectively”. Although many of the ideas, concepts and content inherent in my artworks are present when I am working, consciously making an effort to imbue matter with specific meaning, I too make discoveries about my art during the course of ‘rereading’. In this section I shall attempt to link and compare my art to other contemporary artists in an effort to create a context that is of current interest. I have also attempted to identify focus areas, as well as recurring concepts in my work.

3.2.1 Memory and reflection: commemorating past events or persons, specifically the nameless, disempowered or traumatised

The seed of the conceptualisation process in my artworks often stem from a personal source namely a memory, an everyday experience or the desire to work with a found object or material that evokes certain memories. As my visual language matured, I have started to view my installations as akin to memorials or monuments. A memorial is defined as a public construction or space “that is built in order to remind people of an important past event or of a famous person who has died” (Hornby, 2010:926). It is a place where one is induced to reflect upon the past. I regard my work as an opportunity to evoke the past or past experience but also to create an awareness of the transient nature of the present. It is important to me to create visual metaphors or visual poetry, where the works are meant to be viewed and experienced as art. This aspect embraces my intention that the artworks be considered as spaces where opportunity is created for mediation and meditation, to reflect on universal human issues, but also to create an opportunity for the viewer as well as for the artist to look within. Through my art, my search for meaning is made visible and my personal questions, queries and interrogations are therefore ‘displayed’.
Current theory on the concept of memory comprises a wide and diverse field of inquiry (Gibbons 2007: xiv). Memory is such an expansive topic that it warrants a study in itself. Huyssen (1995:7) views this phenomenon (the current obsession with memory) “as a reaction formation against the accelerating technical processes that are transforming” our lives: “…it represents the attempt to slow down information processing…to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload”. He describes the “memory boom” as:

...a contestation of the informational hyperspace and an expression of the basic human need to live in extended structures of temporality, however they may be organized. It is also a reaction formation of mortal bodies that want to hold on to their temporality against a media world spinning a cocoon of timeless claustrophobia and nightmarish phantasms and simulations. In that dystopian vision of a high-tech future, amnesia would no longer be part of the dialectic of memory and forgetting. It will be its radical order. It will have sealed the very forgetting of memory itself: nothing to remember, nothing to forget (Huyssen,1995:9) [my emphasis].

The acknowledgement of the vulnerability and transience of “mortal bodies” is a major theme pervading my body of work. An in-depth investigation of all the pertinent issues that are raised in the above citation falls beyond the scope of this thesis, but the statements suggest a justification for the current interest in memory within the present global context.

We experience reality as discontinuous, as chaotic, but present our memories of experience “in terms of a narrative framework – as to make a continuous sequence out of those events”, allowing them to be understood as meaningful (Van Alphen, 1997:50,51). The perception of the idea of memory has undergone change and has been developing throughout history. Gibbons (2007:1) describes the fallibility of memory and mentions that it can be both “elusive” or false, or “intrusive” - suggesting that the memory of trauma might lead to dysfunction and from there it might lead on to retribution and/or violence in a never-ending cycle of more trauma on a personal as well as societal level. Memory can also be seen as “good” and “accurate”. Memory that can “store and retrieve knowledge and experience used to be one of the most desirable
attributes of learning and acquiring knowledge” (Gibbons, 2007:1). Since the nineteenth century, memory has also been viewed as an “agent of the imagination” as, for example, it can be used to “access…the innocence of childhood”. Marcel Proust (1871-1922), the famous writer associated with the concept of memory through his seven-volume novel *In search of lost time* (1908 - 1922), “treated memory as something that has an emotional rather than an intellectually organised base – as an important constituent of a person’s inner self” (Gibbons, 2007:3). Gibbons refers to Proust’s well-known description of the taste of a biscuit, the *petite madeleine*, “which, uninvited, calls up an assemblage of sensation and emotion that is beyond the reach of the intellect and voluntary memory”. Where Proust is concerned, such involuntary memories that are brought forth through sensory experience, evoke a knowledge of the past in its complexity that is “more deeply imbedded in the psyche…not simply by ‘snapshots’ of the event but by an everyday experience that manages to key into the whole host of sensations and emotions experienced in the moment or event” (Gibbons, 2007:3).

In my view, such an experience should not be confused with nostalgia, which implies a longing for the past that might also include idealisation. The unexpected sensation that Proust felt when savouring the *petite madeleine* could be compared to the associations that I experienced whilst watching my mother applying lipstick, that were kindled when she performed the same gesture before she was taken to hospital and to her death bed. My witnessing of that modest ritual and the specific context at that moment evoked certain emotions, sensations and associations that led to the installation *It’s cold outside* (Fig. 15). This work will be discussed later on in this section.

The theorist Pierre Nora (in Gibbons, 2007:7), along with other memory theorists, sees “memory as overtaking history in the significance it holds for the culture” and this “allows a transformation from the historical to the psychological, from the sociological to the individual from the objective message to its subjective reception”. This statement demands a validation of auto-ethnographic practice as well as the views expressed in chapter two.
With regard to current literature concerning memory theory, the reader is continuously confronted with discourses relating to the memory of “the incomparable nature of the Holocaust” (Van Alphen 1997:33). These arguments are complex and have evolved since Theodor Adorno’s “condemnation of the aestheticisation of suffering, which he saw as yet another violation of the victim that not only offers him/her up for aesthetic pleasure but, in doing so, removes some of its proper horror” (Gibbons, 2007:75). This debate engages many issues, such as, amongst others, who has the right to make art that deals with such events? Could such artworks not bring “a sense of redemption through art to that which cannot be redeemed”? (Gibbons, 2007:75). Van Alphen (1997:18) writes that “whereas up to World War II the creation of art and literature possessed a serious, almost religious aura, after Auschwitz it suddenly seemed a shockingly frivolous occupation”. Some theorists also warn against the view of “art as therapy or exorcism” (Bennet, 2005:3), thereby diminishing the complex functions of art within society. The intellectual debate concerning art that reflects trauma has many nuances and the after effects of the Holocaust and Hiroshima unlocked various discourses regarding the function of art and its relationship to memories, memorials or representations of trauma. The Holocaust, with the psychological after effects it had on individuals and on society as a whole is a subject of enormous magnitude and, by mentioning it in passing, one runs the risk of dishonouring this significant albeit horrendous subject that is still being worked through and processed by theorists and artists, amongst others today. This ongoing discourse has also been complicated by more recent traumatic events creating emotionally disruptive after effects on a global scale, such as the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, as well as other acts of recurring terrorism.

With the many references regarding the Holocaust encountered in current texts assessing aspects of memory, it is perhaps indicative that it has become more possible to write about this event as it recedes into the past. The philosopher Adorno (Bennet, 2005:15) later “asserted that art was compelled to ‘resist the verdict’ that the Holocaust was inimical to art”. Adorno (in Van Alphen, 1997:19) writes that “we must…keep the
world informed of the suffering of the victims, and it is the task of literature to provide that knowledge. Aesthetic pleasure cannot be reduced to ‘pleasure’ in the sense of (distracting) amusement”. According to Van Alphen (1997:41) the survivors of the Holocaust “often share a basic incapacity to express or narrate their past experiences”. In order to survive:

their selves were killed in the camps. A killed self has no experiences, much less narratable memories...Many testimonies make clear that life in the camp is not being remembered at all. There can be no distance from something that once happened and cannot be remembered. Many survivors still live in the situation of the camp, a fact that precludes the possibility of distance from it. For them the past of the Holocaust continues still; it is for this very reason that narrative frameworks that make use of the sequence of the past, present and future are inadequate (Van Alphen 1997:50, 55).

Salzman (2006:6), in his discussion on the subject of art in relationship to war, states that there are “moments when painterly practice comes to function as an active agent in the cultural production of memory”. Goya produced his well-known paintings and etchings before the advent of photography where he paid homage to the memory of the anonymous victims of power abuse in these famous images. The photographs of the Holocaust, however, seemed to speak so loudly that it muted all expression. According to Saltzman (2006:6), “Frank Stella’s obdurately abstract minimalist black paintings might be understood to have refused figuration as a means of expressing the impossibility of producing history paintings in the aftermath of Auschwitz”.

Artists such as Anselm Kiefer began to break the “strict taboo” on “narrative images or texts” concerning the Holocaust as seen in his body of work dating from the 1970s and in the following decades. His work is described by Van Alphen (1997:4) as “provocatively historical and imaginative at once, and remarkably, it does not place these two modes in opposition”. Van Alphen (1997:3) in fact distinguishes between “historical and imaginative” discourse on the Holocaust and makes the pertinent statement that “art and literature” have the “power to stay for generations that can no longer count on lived experience”. Van Alphen narrates his own “boredom” and
“aversion” regarding historical accounts of the Holocaust that informed his childhood years and is fascinated by the fact that it was “imaginative representations of the Holocaust that hooked me” (Van Alphen, 1997:3). Anselm Kiefer and Christian Boltanski are two of the artists whose strategies of dealing with the aftermath of the Holocaust are analysed by him (Van Alphen, 1997:3-10, 93-122, 149-175). Saltzman (2006:6) writes that “Anselm Kiefer and Gerhard Richter have found in painting and its acknowledged incapacity the very possibility of figuring something of their nation’s catastrophic history”. These views reaffirm the potential of the imaginative visual language of art to contribute to the body of knowledge and memory. Bennet (2005:2) states that the contribution of art lies “in the endeavour to find a communicable language of sensation and affect with which to register something of the experience of traumatic memory – and, thus, in a manner of formal innovation”. Perhaps the artwork is another way of remembering over time and the real iniquity lies in the forgetting.

Christian Boltanski’s grid-like installation (Fig. 12) could be described as “formal innovation” that serves to evoke memories of the Holocaust. Photographs of the faces of children are placed on stacks of rusted tin boxes, the kind of boxes that were often
used by previous generations to keep treasured personal belongings safe. The faces have been enlarged to such an extent that the simplification of the tones suggests skulls or the emaciated faces visible on photographs of Holocaust camp inmates. Each blurred face is closely lit, referring to practices of interrogation but also evoking an attempt to 'bring them to light' or shed light on to these human beings whose existence have been fading from memory. The extreme close-up presentation of these anonymous faces emphasises their disappearance (Van Alphen, 1997:98). Van Alphen (1997:99) describes Boltanski’s strategy as the creation of a “Holocaust-effect” through the “radical emptying out of subjectivity” and says that through this gesture he “represents the whole of Nazi practices, including their consequences…these portraits don’t signify 'presence', but exactly the opposite: absence” (Van Alphen, 1997:100, 104).

The boxes are reminiscent of archival boxes and seem as if they might contain memories of those who have disappeared. They also evoke the piles of belongings that were confiscated by the Nazis. Boltanski (Christian Boltanski, S.a. [Online]) remarked that

…part of my work has been about what I call ‘small memory’. 'Large memory' is recorded in books and ‘small memory' is all about little things. Part of my work then has been trying to preserve 'small memory' because often when someone dies, that memory disappears. Yet that 'small memory' is what makes people different from one another, unique. These memories are very fragile, I wanted to save them.

The Holocaust and everything that it signifies is evoked but not overtly displayed. The anonymous faces are also reminiscent of the inlayed or ornamented photographs that one encounters in a graveyard. Only a very small personal remnant of the individual as a human being is captured, namely the moment before fading from memory or the very instant before the horrific intervention into these lives. Perhaps that is why the viewer can bear to look at these artworks; on the one hand they honour the anonymous children by displaying images of their faces before they became victims, whilst at the same time pointing to their future disappearance. My affinity resonates deeply with that of Boltanski’s strategy and his intentions expressed in the citation above, especially with regard to the contemporary context or environment. Here prominence is given to
sensationalism where desensitisation is engendered through the visibility of explicit violence in the media and popular culture, leaving the audience incapable to discern between reality and fantasy.

This installation by Boltanski (Fig. 12) evokes images of a shrine with the lighting effects taking on another meaning when viewed in this manner. Its silence also prompts reflection. In this installation Boltanski realises a reference to actual historical events, but through his presentation the fading memory of the event is thereby stalled and the absence of these lives is made all the more present. The tangible presence of the found objects contributes to the effects that he achieves and in this instance I perceive similar parallels regarding my use of tactile materials as well as my attitude towards the memory of anonymous lives. Boltanski made the following statement: “All my work is more or less about the Holocaust” (Van Alphen, 1997:149). As demonstrated in the discussion of my artwork entitled *Wag/Waiting* (Fig. 21) (and in other works that will be discussed later), as a point of departure I occasionally employ references to factual events, but endeavour to move beyond the specific event in an effort to convey meaning. My aim is to comment on the relentless recurrence of traumatic events throughout history and the immense impact of these events on those lives that are never recorded. My artworks could be interpreted as an acknowledgement of this erasure as part of the mystery of what life entails. Boltanski also acknowledges the complexity of meaning that is evoked by his images and perhaps his statement quoted above could also be interpreted as a reference to points of departure in his work process. In an interview (in Semin, Garb & Kuspit, 1997:24), his remarks echo similar views that I have also expressed:

A good work of art can never be read in one way. My work is full of contradictions. An artwork is open - it is the spectators looking at the work who make the piece, using their own background. A lamp in my work may make you think of a police interrogation, but it’s also religious, like a candle…There are many ways of looking at the work. It has to be ‘unfocused’ somehow so that everyone can recognize something of their own self when viewing it.

Thus Boltanski reveals that his installations do have connotations beyond reference to
the Holocaust. He is queried on whether his works are memorials and he answers: “Yes I think so”. On the question: “So they are about lost lives, and the lives that are lost are equally one’s own life, one’s own childhood…”? Boltanski answers: “I’d say that we all have a dead child within us. We don’t die once, we have already died several times over” (Semin, Garb & Kuspit, 1997:24). With these statements an acceptance of death as part of life is implied.

Some of my artworks are represented as recurring examples of ‘memorials’ to specific family members, especially to my mother and my grandmother. They could be regarded as ‘private memorials’ although they are eventually displayed within a public setting. These works indicate a personal meaning pertaining to my upbringing and the important influence of these women in my life. My father suffered the first of a series of heart attacks when I was twelve years old and his life became seriously impaired. He died on my twenty-first birthday at the age of forty-six and his passing alerted me to the transience of life and imminent death. As the only son among three other siblings, responsibility was passed on to me and I became acutely aware of the daily chores and difficulties that lay upon the shoulders of my mother and grandmother, who lived with us. It was almost as if I had acquired an extra perspective, whilst observing how these two women kept the family together. Whereas my grandmother managed the household and the daily routines of preparing food, cleaning and doing the laundry, my mother cared for my father whilst he was still alive and took responsibility for the administrative upkeep of the home. Two later installations are dedicated specifically to these two women: It’s cold outside (2004) to my mother, and Biegbak/Confessional (2003) to my grandmother.

As early as in my second year at art school, I felt the desire to devote an artwork to my mother, as is evident in the work Portrait of my mother (1978) (Fig. 14). This work demonstrates an effort to steer clear of an illustrational rendering in favour of honouring my mother in a conceptual way by means of using matter to convey meaning. As a young artist, one instinctively selects subject matter in a struggle to establish an identity and many of these early works are experimental. However, this choice of subject matter
is evidence of my reverence and admiration for my mother. Her presence, pride and beauty, symbolised by the cascading hair, forms the content of this work. The memory of my mother’s long hair is associated with a specific period in my childhood and the photograph (Fig. 13) is a confirmation of time that has passed. As my mother aged and became frail, this particular image was superseded by others. There is a definite distinction between the more illusional rendering in paint and the carved marks on a piece of discarded found material such as raw wood. This contrast between illusional and tactile qualities became more noticeable as I gradually developed my visual language. As in most of my artworks, this portrait demonstrates that the concept cannot be severed from the material or technique. When this work is compared to the photographic source, it is obvious that robust choices were made to simplify and repeat
shapes, limit the colour scheme and to allow the wood and raw canvas to convey the poetic meaning, in an effort to preserve the memory or to draw the memory into the present moment.

Fig. 15a: *It's Cold outside*, 2004, found objects, rusted metal, digital screen, DVD player, collection the artist, photograph by Stefan Hundt.
Figs. 15b, 15c and 15d: It's cold outside (details), photographs by Stefan Hundt.
The later installation, *It’s cold outside*, 2004 (Figs 15a, b c and d), could also be regarded as a tribute to my mother, although the title does not refer specifically to her. The floor space of this installation is demarcated by a section of rusted metal tiles placed on the side of the gallery space, next to a wall, suggesting the intimacy of a room. All the objects are made out of or clad with rusted metal. The work consists of a chair with a woman’s negligee casually draped over its back. An open vanity case is displayed on a stool and in the lid a small digital screen is visible, displaying the black and white image of a woman’s lips and the repetitive action of lipstick being applied. A suitcase lies on the floor. A heater with open elements is plugged into a wall socket with its warmth being felt by the viewer. Against the wall are drawn curtains, but through a slit a cold breeze is felt, as if from an open window behind the curtain. This effect is created by a fan placed behind the curtain. The concept of screening off or separating the intimate from the public sphere or space occurs often in other works.

The visitor to the installation becomes a witness, almost an intruder into this ‘private space’, sees the image on the monitor and feels the heat as well as the coolness of the breeze from ‘outside’. The objects are like props on a stage, but the ‘actor’ is absent. The work was inspired by the memory of my mother, who, through difficult circumstances, kept her pride and self-respect. Before she was driven to hospital, where she would die thirteen days later, old and frail, she asked for her lipstick and made sure it was well-applied, using a small mirror. These rituals of grooming and preparing to face the day impressed me as a child as immensely symbolic of a stoic resoluteness to face life. Along with the brushing of her long hair, these were rituals that I witnessed many times as a youngster. During a trip in the car, she used the small mirror available to the passenger in front to apply her lipstick. Through the selection of this intimate moment as a concept for an artwork, I attempted to give universal meaning to this small everyday gesture. This installation is also meant as a tribute to everybody who chooses to face the world, in spite of his/her vulnerability.

---

6 The vertical slit in the curtains as well as the emphasis on ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ echo the concepts in *Zip painting* (Fig 1).
The defenselessness is symbolised by the piece of intimate clothing draped over a chair and the make do of self-care by the warmth of the heater. A disparity between what is experienced personally and what is presented to the outside world is suggested. The use of the heater and fan has an added personal association to me, beyond the obvious metaphoric suggestions in the work, which actually reverses their meaning. During her last days in hospital, my mother developed a fever and as I sat next to her bed until she passed away, I was constantly aware of the whirring sound of the fan that was placed in the room in an effort to cool the air in the room.

The stool on which the vanity case is placed, is a barstool. This may be interpreted as a subtle reference to a masculine presence and the application of lipstick takes on a paradoxical meaning to the allusion previously mentioned, as the woman’s role in relationship to the male is emphasised. As in Fig. 14, there is a contrast between the textural surfaces of the objects and the ‘illusional’ image on the screen. The illusion of her presence underlines her acute absence. The curtain providing a screen or protection is an important element in the work as it implies is the border between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’.

With this installation I have tried to capture something fleeting and ephemeral, a small gesture, but at the same time have attempted to create a ‘memorial’ and to move my private experience into the public sphere, where it might hopefully have meaning beyond personal memory. My intention that the artwork should be accessible to any interested viewer and that it should carry universal meaning is underlined by the fact that there is no reference to my mother in the title. Although the concept of the artwork developed out of personal experience, I do not really consider such a work (or in fact, any of my work) as autobiographical in the sense that my art is being appropriated to tell the story of my life. However, it remains important to me to use personal experiences and memory as points of departure, as all my artworks are inevitably reflections of my viewpoint and my world. My experiences inform my understanding of life and contribute towards the source material I utilise in my questioning about life. These observations,
questions and reflections are communicated and shared through art and their accessibility to any viewer is paramount to me. Although the title of an artwork often provides a clue regarding the intended meaning, the visual impact and layers of meaning derived by the viewer, is an aspect that the artist does not control, and in my view should not control. The attentive viewer gradually develops an understanding of the visual language that a particular artist employs.

To illustrate the importance of source material, I would like to refer to a painting by Rembrandt, entitled *Bathsheba* (Fig. 16) that formed a particular reference point when the abovementioned installation (Fig. 15) was created, as this painting was uppermost in my mind while executing the artwork. Here the nude figure of a woman is placed within an intimate and secluded interior. Her femininity and daily rituals are depicted in this scene but to me the folds, drapes and twists portrayed in the cloth in the back- and foreground evoke a sense of inner tension, of a woman exposed and vulnerable. In my installation (Fig. 15) a similar application of textile and cloth is echoed in the presence of the negligee and the curtains, although rendered in a very different medium.

![Bathsheba](image-url)

*Fig 16: Rembrandt van Rijn: *Bathsheba*, 1654, oil on canvas, (Wallace, 1971:172).*
The painting *Opwasbak/Sink* (Fig. 17), is a precursor for the later installation entitled *Biegbak/Confessional*, 2004 (Figs. 18a, b, c, d, e and f). The daily ritual of household chores may refer to a woman’s work and life task; it refers to what each generation has to face and perform on a daily basis. This daily ritual garners spiritual meaning in the sense that it evokes the inevitable struggles, rituals or at least involvement that is required of one. This painting is one of the few examples of illusional rendering on a flat surface and reflects the influence of my initial experience as a theatrical décor painter and lecturer. However, the attempt to create metaphoric meaning is evident in the contrasts between empty and full, inside and outside, dirty and clean as well as in the deliberate choice of very mundane subject matter.

From this initial illusional version the installation entitled *Biegbak/Confessional* (2003) (Figs. 18a, b, c, d, e and f) was conceived as a homage to the memory of my grandmother, who often prayed while doing the dishes. She lived with us ever since the marriage of my parents in 1953 and many of her habits and views provided a link to a generation that belonged to the nineteenth century. My grandmother performed the...
commonplace daily chores as if they were divine rites, donning a clean apron and headscarf before starting her household tasks. The daily rituals of cleaning, cooking, sweeping, washing, ironing, doing the dishes, reading the Bible and praying shaped an environment that was predictable, comforting and reassuring. She was a religious person, but not narrow-minded, although she had little opportunity for formal education. The memory of her dignity, acceptance and respectful attitude towards the way in which she managed and lived her life and routines, made an indelible impression on me as a child as to how to approach life and in retrospect seems now to have been a major anchor.

Memorials are ordinarily erected to pay tribute to the famous, the heroes, the brave and the powerful. My grandmother’s life and personality induced in me a resolve to, through my artworks, pay tribute not only to her, but to those individuals whose lives often remain undisclosed, unknown and forgotten.

Fig. 18a: Biegbak/Confessional, 2004, found material, rusted metal, digital screen, DVD player, data projector, wooden panels, unbleached cotton, collection the artist, photograph by author.
Figs. 18b, 18c and 18d: Biegbak/Confessional, (details) photographs by author.
This installation, *Biegbak/Confessional* is mounted in an enclosed space, a small room with three white walls and a white cotton curtain that has to be drawn aside to enter. The installation is meant to be placed in a corner within a public gallery space as the ‘content’ of the little room is concealed by the walls and curtain. The viewer might notice the title that is visible on the outside before entering the space and might anticipate a private experience. It is up to the viewer to elect to draw the curtain aside and to enter. The objects inside this confined space can only be perceived by a single person at a time. Upon entering, a small kitchen, made of rusted metal, is encountered, contrasting sharply with the white exterior and the whiteness of the interior walls. The dishes have been placed on a drying rack, but seem to be in an advanced state of decay, as suggested by their rusted and broken surfaces.

A digital screen has been mounted inside space of the sink on which the image of two hands scrubbing a pot is visible on the screen. The black and white image of the dirty pot gradually being turned around and scrubbed until clean (Fig. 18a) is placed on a loop with the incessant scouring seeming to take on an obsessive quality. The viewer, standing in front of the sink, has to look down at the screen with bowed head, but if he/she looks up, a courtyard with rain streaming down a window pane is visible: an image projected from a data projector above the viewer's head (Fig. 18c).
The doors underneath the kitchen sink are decorated with latticed inlays in the shape of a gothic pointed arch, emphasising the idea of a confessional. Other objects, made of rusted metal, are also displayed in the little kitchen such as a bar of soap, an apron, oven gloves and dishcloths. Some of these items, as well as the ‘tiles’ above the sink have been made out of old-fashioned, decayed metal ceilings with embossed decorations. These patterns refer to womanly crafts and decorations associated with kitchen textiles and invoke a suggestion of pride in the upkeep of the domestic space. The inclusion of these ‘tiles’ are specifically inspired by the embroidery, knitting, needle-and mending work done by my mother and grandmother. The apron and oven gloves symbolise a readiness for the task at hand that has to be faced each day as well as to protect and to shelter from the daily onslaught of dirt and deterioration, also the inevitable spiritual and psychological corrosion.

Along with the dish cloths the items suggest features of the attire, the procedures and rituals carried out as part of liturgical ceremonies. These references to the recurring

Fig. 19: Photograph of my grandmother, Susara Wilhelmina (Sarie) Pozyn, (née Boshoff), 18 April 1891 – 15 April 1981, photograph taken approximately 1912, collection family archive.

Fig 20: Photograph of me (aged 16) and my grandmother, photograph taken in 1973, collection family archive.
cleaning rituals become indicators of the cyclical within nature and so gain spiritual meaning, especially in view of the visual evidence of inevitable decay, but also point to renewal and cleansing. It is important to me as an artist that these cycles are conveyed as incessant with no end to these perpetual cyclic processes, as the objects are transformed by time and the banal everyday activities are placed within the larger context of decay and regeneration. The visitor to this installation might experience aesthetic pleasure in the disparities between dirty and clean, the creative skill involved in the making of the objects and in the metaphors that could be perceived, but they might also be lead to reflect and meditate on this work. This installation creates a mood of being very quiet and the silence is intensified by a sense of isolation and a feeling of loneliness the visitor might experience when viewing this artwork. The contrast between the tangible earthly existence and the immaterial and spiritual is further emphasised by the use of the brown rusted objects together with black and white projected images to create an almost intangible mood. Although this work was inspired by the enduring impression left by my grandmother’s attitude and approach towards life and created in her memory, my foremost intention was to convey a universal meaning.

The installation entitled *Wag/Waiting* (Fig. 21) is an example of a commemorative artwork without any of the personal references present in *It’s cold outside* (Fig. 15) and in *Biegbak/Confessional* (Fig. 18). In fact, this work refers to an actual historical event associated with the Anglo-Boer war. During the centenary commemorations of the Anglo-Boer War, fought in South Africa from 1899 to 1902 (Cameron, 1986:200-218), I was invited to exhibit work in a group exhibition where the relevance of this war was to be visualised for a generation a century later. The exhibition, entitled *Shrapnel*, was reviewed and interpreted by a diverse group of artists and formed part of the countrywide commemorative events. The work was exhibited in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal in 2000, where many battles were fought during the war, then travelled to other venues and exhibition spaces in different regions of South Africa. The artwork *Wag/Waiting* (Fig. 21) was my contribution towards this exhibition.
Fig. 21: Wag/Waiting, 2000, rusted metal and found objects, collection Pretoria Art Museum, photograph by Stefan Hundt.
This invitation placed me in a predicament, as I was reluctant to be perceived as an artist who aligns himself, above all else, to a specific cultural group, especially within the complicated socio-political context in South Africa after the 1994 elections. As argued in the abovementioned discussion of the two works entitled *It’s cold outside* and *Biegbak/Confessional*, (Figs. 15 and 18), it is of utmost importance to me that my artworks should convey a universal meaning, that they should cross cultural boundaries and that they should express a sense of what it means to be human that might be recognised by everyman. However, I also believe that an artwork should focus on a specific and/or an original idea or theme, and that easy or superficial generalisations are not meaningful within the creative process. It remains a challenge to resolve this tension between the particular and the universal. When the artwork is associated with a specific event in history, the artist could be faced with issues such as that the work might be appropriated by a specific cultural alliance, that it might be interpreted as too literal, and that the content might overshadow the artwork. Furthermore it remains challenging to address the philosophical questions that are particularly pertinent regarding the political context and varied points of view within the South African environment plus the revision of history that emerged with the advent of postmodernism. Other discourses concerning art dealing with traumatic events in history have also been opened up and have been referred to earlier on in this section.

The Anglo-Boer War is ingrained in the memories of the generally more white South African population and is regarded by this group as a traumatic event in our history (Cameron, 1986:200-218). The stories of the trials and tribulations experienced by individual families are carried over from generation to generation. This war is also viewed by some historians as a precursor to the Holocaust during World War II (Changuion, Jacobs & Alberts, 2003:11), as Boer women and children were confined to concentration camps after their farms with their livestock, homesteads and belongings were razed to the ground by British troops. According to Changuion, Jacobs and Alberts (2003:27) 30 000 farms were destroyed. The survivors were transported in open wagons or railway carriages and were allowed only basic possessions on their journey to the many camps erected by the British, where more than 27 000 Boer women, elderly
citizens and children died due to neglect, malnourishment and lack of medical care: “some of the photographs of emaciated children, only skin and bones and barely alive, are reminiscent of the photographs that emerged from Hitler’s death camps” (Changuion, Jacobs & Alberts, 2003:11). In more recent research, a previously neglected fact has emerged namely that 115 700 black citizens were placed in 66 concentration camps, especially erected for their detention by the British forces during the Anglo-Boer War, where as many as 14 000 had died, in circumstances that are described as worse than those in the other camps (Cameron, 1986:216; Changuion, Jacobs & Alberts, 2003:21-23).\(^7\)

The Boer soldiers were regarded as heroes in Europe owing to their courageous attempts to resist the onslaught and greed of the colonial British Empire (Cameron, 1986:200-218). It is also worth mentioning that I grew up in Ladysmith in Natal and lived there from an early age until the completion of my school education. As a child I immersed myself in the stories of the battles that were fought in the region, especially of the long siege of the town by Boer soldiers. I was familiar with some of the actual battlefields in the vicinity where, in the 1960s, bullet cartridges could still be found and I often visited the graves of British soldiers. (Another dimension is added by the fact that the house where I grew up was very close to a modern day military training camp where I could see the activities first hand of the soldiers through the fence. These soldiers were viewed in a completely different context, to which I will refer to in later sections).

For the exhibition, *Shrapnel*, I conceived an artwork that would involve and revise history. I was interested in experimenting with a project that would enable me to express my view on this war in particular (as I have a considerable interest in this war), to convey my ideas on wars in general (these ideas evolved ever since I reached maturity), and to set myself the extra challenge of trying to communicate meanings or

---

\(^7\) My viewpoints on and artworks referring to the present-day struggles and battles in South Africa plus those that occurred in the twentieth century will be discussed in a later section.
possible interpretations that would be of current interest beyond the concept of war. In preparation for this project I visited selected battlefields in the vicinity of Ladysmith, a cemetery for Boer citizens who died at the Irene Camp near Pretoria as well as grave sites in the form of stone mounds at Greylingstad, where a camp for black citizens was rediscovered. Eventually I chose to concentrate on an aspect of the circumstances pertaining to the Anglo-Boer War, namely the camps (instead of the battlefields) where the women and children became the victims and the powerless. In my view, however, all soldiers might also be viewed as victims in any war as they are always manipulated by those in power. Changuion, Jacobs and Alberts (2003:13) cite the description of war as “the continuation of politics by other means”.

_Wag/Waiting_ (Fig. 21) is an installation comprising two pieces of ‘furniture’: a bed and a wardrobe for clothes, with the designs suggesting a style of furniture used by previous generations. These two objects are constructed out of or cladded with rusted metal. A wedding dress with delicate floral decorations lies on the bed. I made this dress by cladding an actual wedding dress with rusted tin sheets, ‘sewing’ the fragments together by using wire and by making holes in the metal with a punch. The delicate embroidery and beadwork were replicated by using small pieces of metal. The dress lies on a blanket made of patchwork, featuring a pattern I copied from a patchwork quilt designed by my grandmother. Over the railing at the foot-end a bride’s veil made of metal gauze is draped, along with flowers to which the veil is attached. These flowers were created out of pieces of metal. A cushion has been placed at the bed-head, constructed out of a piece of rusted metal ceiling decoratively embossed.

The rusted wedding dress laid out on the bed implies that the cycle of peoples’ lives, their rites of passage, was interrupted by war and that this trauma had been ‘frozen’ in time. The dress suggests a narrative with characters.\(^8\) The ‘wardrobe’ is constructed out

---

\(^8\) There exists a true story that formed part of the inspiration for the wedding dress: a Boer girl fell in love with a British soldier. He deserted from the army, was caught and executed. For many years after the war, until she was an elderly woman, she regularly placed fresh flowers on her lover’s grave (Gouws, 2013:7). This story contributes to the symbolic meaning conveyed by the artwork, namely that of reconciliation between opposites and points to the common human traits that can cross those artificial boundaries, set by the greedy and the powerful.
of barbed wire through which the dresses of a girl and a woman are visible. The three dresses imply the cycle of life, as they are those of a bride, a grown woman and a little girl and infer of what might have been. In the context of the exhibition, *Shrapnel*, the barbed wire ‘wardrobe’ could be interpreted as a reference to the concentration camps. The womanly domestic activities, making the bed, decorating the wedding dress, sewing the patchwork quilt, caring for the clothes, are replicated in so-called ‘masculine’ or manly materials such as metal and wire. The difficulty implied in ‘sewing’ with metal and wire, might refer to the difficulty of preserving life, or as an attempt to mend and to heal. The metal clothing could also be associated with medieval armour, as if a man attempted to clothe his family in an effort to protect them. The Afrikaans version of the title of this installation is more potent than the English translation, as wag means both ‘to wait’ and ‘to keep watch’. Therefore the waiting here alludes to a woman or to the families who await the return of the men-folk, and also to the soldier who keeps watch over his family or is prevented from doing so. So often in times of upheaval conventional gender roles are inverted as the ‘keeping watch’, the desperate attempts to mend, heal and preserve often fall onto the shoulders of the female persona as implied in this work.

Although there are subtle references to the Anglo-Boer War in this installation, the work is also meant to reveal far more layered and universal meanings. It could be viewed as a statement against the abuse of power or against the abuse of women and children, and as a comment concerning women (or societies) caught up within patriarchal systems. The barbed wire ‘wardrobe’ is either a device to protect the woman and child, or to claim and possess them, as the clothes could be interpreted as intimate possessions that are exposed and violated and/or as symbolising individuals whose privacy is dishonoured. Thus the installation is not only a memorial to historical events, but also to all those anonymous human beings trapped in situations of power abuse and trauma. The notion of waiting could be applied to anybody whose life is interrupted by traumatic events. ‘Waiting’ could be viewed as a condition of disempowered resignation or as an essential universal notion, as we do not always understand the incidents occurring in our lives and struggle (or ‘wait’) to find meaning or to fulfil our dreams.
The narrative in this work implies a tragic ending, and the waiting, the stalling of the flow of these lives, is not temporary. Here, the impossibility of closure and the presence of grief is captured. Where my artmaking is concerned, I consider it as crucial to convey and acknowledge the presence of trauma as part of the mystery of life and endeavour to express a longing to understand and find answers regarding this aspect of the human condition.

In this section emphasis was placed on memory and commemoration and this inevitably also entailed the relationship between art and traumatic events. Artworks referring to or commemorating horror and trauma are not new to art history; Goya’s disturbing images of a war that occurred two hundred years ago have since been canonised. Significant contemporary problems causing trauma in the lives of individuals on a global scale such as ecological damage and disasters, race, class, cultural and gender identity, poverty, war, disease, displacement and other harrowing events have become outright visible, portrayed as striking subject matter within contemporary art. Such themes are also appropriated by artists to render their work meaningful as an artwork might possess the power to communicate across cultural boundaries and time. It could ‘capture’ (or ‘make present’ in a concrete or sensory way) a subjective experience such as an historical event or the impact of a personal memory, depending on the integrity of the artist and the effectiveness of his/her formal innovation or visual language.

Apart from the connotation of art with traumatic events and the nameless individuals whose lives are affected, I have tried to demonstrate that I also commemorate life and, in fact, try to prompt reflection on the inescapable transience that is part of life. I have placed emphasis on the way homage is paid to ordinary people whose lives were not necessarily caught up in the spectacular events of history: those unknown, ordinary people whose traces are small, insignificant and eventually erased.
3.2.2 Elegiac and melancholic content, emphasising vulnerability and transience

*Blik /Tin* (Fig. 22) is an artwork created in my first year at art school. The use of found and discarded materials (such as flattened tins collected on the roadside) is a direct result of the fact that I am instinctively drawn to materials that are worn, corroded and in the course of deterioration. In this process these materials have acquired interesting surface textures as they seem to have been tarnished through wear and tear and weather conditions. However, it was also a creative attempt to disguise my initial lack of artist’s materials due to limited funds during my years of study (and heed my grandmother’s advice that anything could be of use). These scraps of metal were carefully arranged as to suggest increments of decay, starting from the top left to the bottom right. Importantly, these scraps were ‘recycled’ to construct a new tin or rather the representation of a new tin within an artwork. Many of the themes already mentioned such as inevitable decay and death, the passing of time indicating a
narrative of a beginning and an ending, cycles of degeneration and renewal are present in this work. It could be viewed as an ordinary still life that comments on the fragility of concrete objects but on a metaphorical level it could also point towards the transience of life, vulnerability and erosion of matter.

Still lifes portraying similar themes were popular in the seventeenth century and the term ‘vanitas still life’ is applied to distinguish this genre (Southgate, 2000:1619). According to Southgate, (2000:1619):

…it described a type of still life painting that was intended to remind the viewer of the transience of created objects, of pleasure, even of life itself… it is meant to convey a sense of emptiness more than a sense of permanence… it refers not so much to the transience or fragility of life, as to the futility of seeking what does not last.

Southgate (2000:1619) recounts how the emergence of this genre might be interpreted as a reaction to traumatic events, as this painting (specifically Fig. 23) was painted during a renewed outbreak of the plague or Black Death in Europe, which led to the deaths of thousands. My attempt to express vulnerability was implemented in this work without knowledge of this tradition and was not meant to convey the concept or ‘message’ of futility. It was rather an instinctive effort to reflect on the meaning of life and death and on transience. At this early stage in my career, my interest most probably lay in the challenge to work with these materials to which I was intuitively drawn.

The expression of notions such as vulnerability and transience in my artworks occurs through the use of selected materials and I shall be elaborating on this issue in a further section. Apart from my inherent interest in the visual and tactile features of materials with their threadbare, textured surfaces and muted, earthy colours caused by their corrosion, I am also acutely aware of a sense of melancholy and loss that clings to such objects. They seem to embody a story of their past and at the same time retain a sense of poetic beauty. Throughout time melancholy has been expressed in many variations by artists. As a first year art student I strongly identified with the work of Giorgio De Chirico (1888-1978), who conveyed a sense of longing and melancholy in his paintings.
through his choice of carefully selected subject matter. I was intrigued by the description by art historians of his work as ‘metaphysical’ and perhaps grasped something of the possibilities and the kind of issues or emotions that could be expressed through art. The words ‘melancholy’ and ‘mystery’ in the work entitled *The melancholy and mystery of a street* (Fig. 24) resonated with me, especially as they were juxtaposed with the ordinariness of a street. The sense of emptiness and implied presence through the use of shadows strongly affected me. An early drawing entitled *Strik/Trap* (Fig. 25), implies a reference to childhood through the presence of a bicycle whereas the main picture plane comprises a depiction of ‘trapped’ space, a trap within a trap. The shadow visible in the bottom foreground is partly confined and an impression of ‘inside’ versus ‘outside’ is suggested.

The wide-ranging sources of melancholy could be analysed psychologically or philosophically. Apart from certain emotional pressures and disruptions I experienced as a child (which are not uncommon), I am of the opinion that the varied states of melancholy and longing should almost be viewed as essential attributes of humankind, owing to our vulnerability, the brevity of life and the recurrence of trauma, whether it be...
on a personal level or on global scale. However, this view does not impede the existence or expression of joy and beauty; the awareness of transience might enhance the experience of sheer joy.

Much has been written in contemporary literature about the denial or evasion of the idea of death within contemporary society where consumerism has become an almost obsessive pursuit, a kind of euphoria. This attitude is described by Rajchman (1985:13) as a hysterical “catastrophic panic”. The overproduction and consumption of products could be viewed as an attempt to impede an awareness of the ephemeral quality of life. “Neo-Pop” artists such as Jeff Koons and Takashi Murakami are currently receiving worldwide attention and acknowledgement. Their artworks depict the extreme frivolity and superficiality within contemporary popular culture. Favell (2011: 86, 87) describes the “endless cartoon characters and bizarre sexual mores”, as “fizzy soda served up by Murakami”, and cites Elliot who suggests “that Murakami’s ironic attitude toward the trashy and risqué was meant to be a homeopathy for the country’s passive-aggressive postwar psyche, dominated by U.S. popular culture as much as by its military power.” This remark is an indication that the trivial content in art reflecting popular culture could also be interpreted as a reaction to trauma. Murakami (2005) edited a volume of essays entitled Little boy: The Arts of Japan’s exploding Subculture (referencing the atomic bomb code named “Little boy” that was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima) in which he remarked in the introduction that:

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the American-made constitution prevented the nation from taking an aggressive stance…it cast Japan in the role of a “child” obliged to follow America’s “adult” guidance, and the nation willingly complied (Murakami, 2005:8).

The art of American artist Jeff Koons has been described as overtly sexual or as a form of neo-kitsch (Siegel, Sischy & Schneider, 2009: 306, 307). Koons' work commands millions at auction and is positioned at the forefront of contemporary art. His twelve foot high sculpture entitled Balloon dog (Fig. 26), became the most expensive piece of art by a living artist sold at auction at the time (Jeff Koons: S.a.:4). Siegel, Sischy and Schneider (2009:400) comment as follows on this artwork:
Not only does this object symbolically capture the artist’s breath, it clearly stands as the opposite of a vanitas image: this balloon will never deflate. In Balloon dog, Koons takes an object that represents life’s fleeting joys and renders it permanent. The incommensurability of Koons’ meticulously planned and controlled production and the lightness of his subject brings home the power and centrality of these evanescent moments in modern life.

Fig. 26: Jeff Koons, 1994-2000, Balloon dog (orange), stainless steel. (Jeff Koons: S.a. [Online]).

Fig. 27: Damien Hirst, For the love of God, 2007, platinum diamonds, human teeth, (Skelly, 2014:226).

Koons is quoted as saying: “My work is a support system for people to feel good about themselves” (Siegel, Sischy & Schneider, 2009: 3). Koons is surely aware that in ‘playing along’, in producing images that are ‘light’ regarding subject matter, that he is also exposing and critiquing what is described as the “evanescent” aspect commanding such attraction within popular culture. His remark reflected in the quotation is ironic, due to the very “lightness” and in fact meaninglessness of an object such as a balloon dog, represented as an enormous sculpture in a ‘permanent’ shiny material namely stainless steel. This “support system” is fleeting and “evanescent” and the consumer breathlessly hurries off in pursuit of the next experience.
The artwork entitled *For the love of God* (Fig. 27) by contemporary British artist Damien Hirst might be interpreted as a radical artwork in which the denial or rejection of death is exposed. The artwork involves a cast skull incrusted with 8601 flawless diamonds (Biles, 2014:227). In the tradition of the *vanitas* still life the presence of a skull acts as a *memento mori*: a reminder of death, but in this artwork the artist attempts to camouflage death by covering the skull with distracting, precious gems. In the traditional *vanitas* still life the skull is occasionally juxtaposed with emblems of worldly riches and prestige – jewelry, a crown and a scepter. Thus the theme of *vanitas* concerns one of life’s fundamental tensions, between the enjoyment of earthly pleasures and accomplishments and the awareness of their inevitable loss and ultimate meaninglessness – an ambivalent, bittersweet notion (Biles, 2014:232).

This artwork (Fig. 27) could be interpreted as a comment on society’s current compulsion to overcome this inevitable loss almost as a ‘celebration’ of the spiritual emptiness within contemporary culture. In this instance, the riches or assets are not rendered in an illusional way through the process of painting but rather through the actions of the artist who actually parades his own wealth (thus also commenting on the market value of art). The shock value of the work lies in the display of actual excess and the almost obsessive attempt to create a literal ‘everlasting’ work of art. In this work a similar structural strategy to mine is employed namely cladding, but whereas I cover objects in rusted metal in order to emphasise their decomposition and to ‘expose’ their measured transformation into decay, Hirst’s artwork accentuates the extreme denial of transience within our culture.

Ironically Hirst’s shock tactics might have similar consequences to those effects that I attempt to achieve in my own work namely to reflect on the ephemeral and transient aspects of life. Similarly, Hirst employs an ‘absurd’ strategy in this work as his skull seems closer to the intrinsic meaning of the *vanitas* still life cited in above (Southgate, 2000:1619). The futility “of seeking what does not last” is made garishly visible in a most ironic manner as he uses everlasting and precious material such as diamonds in contrast to the evocative symbolic objects such as flowers, fruit, candles and hour-
glasses employed in seventeenth century still life painting. Hirst uses an exceptional and precious material to adorn decay and death (the skull) with an indestructible and very costly material (prompting the perception that his intention is, amongst others, to comment on society’s pre-occupation with the acquisition of wealth as an answer to our anxieties). I focus and use the debris generated by consumer society, namely rusted tins, to clad objects and thereby to either ‘preserve’ or ‘expose’ their fragility. Whereas Hirst emphasises spiritual shallowness, I try to kindle spiritual meaning by pointing towards the mystery of transient lives and to visualise the reason or motives behind the concept of melancholy.

Within current literature, the notion of a post-utopian world is often mentioned with reference to present viewpoints in art, literature and philosophy. Huyssen (1995:85-101), in a chapter entitled *Memories of Utopia*, suggests that the emergence of art dealing with memory and history is not “the exhaustion of utopian energies vis-à-vis the future, [but only] the result of a shift within the temporal organization of the utopian imagination from its futuristic pole to its pole of remembrance” (Huyssen, 1997:89, 91). He relates how postmodern media culture “deterritorialises and deconstructs, delocalizes and decodes” and says that “what is lost according to this account of a society saturated with images and discourses is not utopia but reality”. In the interview with Christian Boltanski, mentioned earlier (Semin, Garb & Kuspit, 1997:37), he is asked: “If we live in the face of the loss of Utopia and the loss of grand beliefs, God and meaning, can art be a space where you can repair that loss?” Boltanski answers as follows:

Art is always a witness…I think what's more important for all of us is to be the witnesses of what has happened…I am like a preacher going from town to town, working with small communities. I think I can communicate with them, touch them, ask them questions.

His emphasis on witnessing relates to the preservation of memory. He also stresses the importance of communication and seems to expect nothing more than to merely “touch them, ask them questions”. Like Boltanski, I can only try to acknowledge what I witness of life. The melancholic or nostalgic tone in much of my artwork is not necessarily
despair, but an expression of what I perceive to be the ‘ingredients’ of life. Similar to Boltanski, I do not claim to create a space “where you can repair that loss”. In the interview mentioned earlier Boltanski expresses views that I strongly identify with:

I am working around the idea of vanitas, a huge subject in art….Fifty years ago one’s grandfather, say, would die at home, and the grandchild would see the grandfather’s dead face. The fact of dying was inside the fact of living. Now we have become ashamed of dying, we want to forget that we’re going to die. Dying has become an accident. But I think it’s important to speak about it as it’s the only thing we can really be sure of. We are all going to die. We also have a problem with the act of killing. For example, I eat meat but would never dream of killing an animal. But I think if we eat meat, we have to accept that being alive means that we kill things around us. But we forget these basic aspects of our humanity (Semin, Garb & Kuspit, 1997:37).

The artwork entitled *Vonds/Find* (Fig. 28) represents a dress of a little girl (the dress once belonged to one of my daughters) clad in rusted metal. The title is an indication of the intended meaning of the work that was created after reading an article in the newspaper concerning the statistics on missing and murdered children in South Africa. The cold facts conveyed in this article seemed to be such a ham-fisted or unwieldy way to describe this phenomenon as it oozes sheer horror on such a grand scale. As a reader of the article, I became ‘witness’ to these events. The title *Vonds/Find* refers both to what I ‘found’ in the newspaper and to the eventual ‘find’ or discovery the police will inevitably make. The label on the clothes hanger transforms the ‘find’ into police evidence whilst the presentation on a clothes hanger points to the original function of the dress namely a prized possession of an individual girl. As citizens we are numbed by the sheer volume of reports of such nature that we encounter every day. We lead our lives and carry on, but how could we not be overcome by the gloom and melancholy concerning the fate of these children and the mystery of their births, lives and deaths?
The installation known as *Showcase* (Figs. 29a and b) consists of an actual vitrine, in fact, the very same one that was part of the furniture in the house where I grew up. The vitrine is clad in rusted metal as is the clock placed on top, where it was always visible, chiming regularly as the hours passed. In the installation the clock is stationary. The showcase is filled with bric-a-brac which is of sentimental value to its owner. Various items such as teaspoons, commemorative bowls, bells, and teacups belonged to my mother. There are other objects such as trophies and medallions that my father won at playing darts as well as key holders, small artifacts that he made and other memorabilia associated with my father. These are the original artifacts displayed in the vitrine when I grew up. Some items were added from my own collection of ordinary and ‘valueless’ objects. All the objects have been worked or treated in such a way as to suggest the rusted appearance of deterioration.

Fig. 28: *Vonds/Find*, 2006, child’s dress clad with rusted metal, collection Mariët Robbertze, photograph by author.
Fig. 29a: Showcase, 2003, rusted metal, found material, data projector, digital monitor, collection Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, photograph by author.
These items resemble archaeological artifacts displayed in a museum setting, especially owing to the use of interior lighting and their insulation behind glass. The relentless deterioration of the objects that were once prudently cared for, is reminiscent of a vanitas still life as their transient qualities are emphasised in this display cabinet. This installation mirrors the ‘treasures’ of one family collected over a lifetime with objects losing their meaning and value as they are passed on to new generations. At the same time the nostalgic connection with the memory of a specific person is lost. Ironically these objects might now be considered ‘saved’ through the physical gesture of emphasising their transient characteristics and also by recontextualising the objects as the components of an artwork.

Two digital images form part of this installation. On the bottom shelf a small screen displays the black and white filmed image of an index finger desperately buffing and polishing a small silver trophy. The gleaming trophy on the screen contrasts sharply with
the deteriorated or ‘neglected’ objects in the showcase. Above the showcase, an image is projected via a data projector which places the installation within a very specific context namely an image of the Voortrekker Monument. This image is static, as the original picture was taken from a propaganda poster printed in the late 1940s. Here, the filmed version flickers, disappears, darkens and lightens before the viewer’s eyes.

My intention with this installation was not to lament on history, but rather to remark on the fact that ordinary people are trapped in a certain context within history. Within this context they endeavour to give meaning and value to their lives over which they have little or no power, especially when their daily routines are focused on survival. This installation emphasises transience and also stresses the fragility of ideologies and beliefs, and the phenomenon that each generation has to start anew or has to re-create or ‘clean up’ after the previous generation. The rusted patina and the silent clock indicates that time has ‘caught up’ with these particular objects and memories as well as the context of the lives that they were linked to. The flickering screen that darkens and lightens suggests that history is repeated and that the actions of the new generation carry the very same seeds of eventual decay. The showcase implies the notion of private lives on the ‘inside’ of the vitrine contrasting with the political context on the ‘outside’. The demarcated floor space (rusted metal tiles) plus the lighting effects suggest a shrine foregrounding an important feature of the installation that transforms it into a memorial to the lives of ordinary people.⁹

### 3.2.3 The banal and ordinary as carriers of poetic meaning

Concrete, tangible objects bear a conspicuous presence for me. The manner in which items lie on a table or by chance within any environment, the ‘casual evidence’ of the lives of ordinary people are noted as they are difficult to ignore. I am always aware of associations that are suggested when objects, furnishings, textures, shapes and forms

---

⁹ The installation *Showcase* was acquired by the Olievenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein and was recognised with the Helgaard Steyn Award in 2005.
are placed or found within a specific space. I ‘collect’ the visual memories of these daily experiences, very often by saving actual objects associated with events or persons; perhaps in the same way as a writer who ‘collects’ words and phrases. I find ‘collections’ of ordinary things (such as glasses, watches, flashlights, tools, buttons, knitting needles, old toys, shoes, clothes, heaps of scrap, et cetera), visually compelling and they seem to me to be laden with inexplicable meaning. I find it difficult to discard possessions that belonged to deceased family members. Ordinary broken or damaged household gadgets such as toasters, flashlights and alarm clocks are stored away as they seem more fascinating due to the fact that they have been useful and were used. Schwenger (2006:3) observes that “for many the familiar presence of things is a comfort. Things are valued not only because of their rarity or cost or their historical aura, but because they seem to partake in our lives; they are domesticated, part of our routine and so of us”. They represent physical evidence of our lives.

This attachment to objects might have been influenced by the attitude or approach of the adults when I was a child. My father was a skilled craftsman and often fashioned items from scrap metal or discarded material, such as the painted postbox fastened to the fence next to the front gate of my childhood home. My grandmother on the other hand was adament about unneccessary waste. This attitude of waste not want not belongs to a previous generation, as materials were scarce amongst others and something about this outlook remained with me. My peer group recalls memories of a world before the digital revolution and perhaps we are more connected to a generation whose attitude towards tangible, actual objects was shaped before the advent of mass production and consumerism. (It is interesting to note that the desire to document and hoard evidence of one’s life seems to have gained obsessive momentum within the digital era, although the ‘collecting’ now occurs in virtual space). As a child I delighted in fashioning toys from scrap material and created ‘environments’ with mud, stones, bottle tops and other discarded items. I also developed an evening ritual: to ‘unpack’ all that I possessed as well as new finds of the day, arranging them onto my bed and scrutinising them before they were stored away again. Schwenger (2006:75) remarks
that “possession is most overtly ownership, called by Walter Benjamin ‘the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects’. But he immediately cautions, ‘Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them’.

Many of the objects used in my work are the very objects associated with specific persons or events. Schwenger (2006:75) describes ownership as “a relationship of control over objects”, and remarks that this has a:

…the reverse side in which the owner becomes no more than the sum of his objects, indeed may feel himself to be an object among others…the realisation that one has become an object is here a vanitas, a melancholy reminder of the futility of amassing material things, and of the Last Things that await everyone. The owner of these material objects might also be acutely aware that they might outlast him/herself.

My desire to give objects a ‘second life’ might well arise from the awareness that their presence underlines the absence of their owners or that they might embody the past of someone else or my own. The fact that these objects have become obsolete seems to add meaning to them. Much of the body of work that was executed towards the requirement for my M. Tech. degree displayed an assemblage of objects such as those mentioned above. In my dissertation for that degree, I analysed examples of artworks where I attempted to achieve metaphoric meaning through the juxtapositioning of everyday objects. Such strategies have been employed by many artists since the advent of the use of the found object in art, notably by the American artist Joseph Cornell. Cornell fills boxes with seemingly unrelated material evoking a strong poetic quality through the mystery implied in the visual contrasts and obvious careful consideration by the artist. According to Schwenger (2006:154): “For if Cornell’s boxes imply elusive narratives and invite the reader to provide others, they do not contain narrative. Rather, they open up narrative to the unpredictable and endless vagaries of dream: ‘cages for infinity’”. This description emphasises the transformation of the mundane into art; placing these mundane objects in a space and context where the imagination is stimulated and where they are transfigured.
The artwork entitled *Sagte landing/Soft landing* (Fig. 30) consists of a wooden box with drill-bits that belonged to my grandfather. The haircurlers belonged to one of my grandmothers. It was not my intention to comment on their lives or my relationship to them when I executed this work. I delighted in experimenting with opposing forms and tried to create interesting visual contrasts, meaning and wonder through the juxtaposition of carefully selected objects. Within the context of the artwork, the drill-bits and haircurlers seem to gain a suggestive and metaphoric connotation. However, the fact that I was able to utilise these personal objects in an artwork and thereby give them 'new life' was the impetus behind the work.

In a series of twelve artworks in which drawers were 'recycled', entitled *Story board* (Figs. 31a and b), I displayed many inherited objects, as if they were carefully arranged by a museum curator, even pieces of textiles belonging to my grandmother, as well as a collection of plastic toys that belonged to my children (Fig. 31b). I attempted to create a play between old and new, female versus male and inside versus outside as
developed strategies to construct visual focal points in this artwork. Although I was trained as a painter, my ‘two-dimensional’ artworks had become so weighty that I had to present these works on custom-made stands.

Figs. 31a and 31b: Story board, 1997 (and detail), found objects and mixed media, collection ABSA, photographs by the author and Christiaan Kotze.
The work entitled *Screen saviour* (Figs. 33a, b and c), is an example of a more recent installation, where mundane objects comprising a television monitor, video cassette and remote control were used in an attempt to create depth of meaning. As my visual language developed, the images became simplified. This is evident when *Screen saviour* is compared to an earlier artwork entitled *6pm* (Fig. 32a and b). This work is one of the earliest examples in which I introduced rusted metal to clad selected objects. In Fig. 33 (*Screen saviour*) the television set is stripped of its technology and its content. The found objects are transformed by cladding these items in rusted metal in an attempt to achieve symbolical meaning (this strategy will be discussed in section 3.3). My interest remained however, in using very ordinary objects to create meaning and to comment on issues that have current relevance. In *Screen saviour* an attempt was made to transfer technology and cyberspace to the realm of history – an effort to ‘shift time’ and enforce scrutiny of the present-day context, as one would scrutinise an archaeological find. The digital screen has ‘decayed’ and a rusted, flecked and textural image is all that is visible.

To watch television is a mundane but also a universal daily ritual within contemporary life, similar almost to worshipping an idol. What we experience is secondhand, the distinction between reality and fiction becomes blurred and what we watch on a television screen becomes the measure of comparison regarding our own lives. (Ironically, the video cassette and the other technology visible in this image have already become obsolete since 2004). However, the screen remains, like an emblem or an historical relic. At most, one could only meditate and reflect in front of this ‘screen saviour’ as the transient nature and emptiness of the present is exposed. The introduction and use of mundane material might be perceived as a contrast to the emphasis placed on the spectacle and sensationalism of contemporary culture (seen, amongst other media, as the content that might actually be visible on the screen when watching television). By cladding ordinary objects (the television monitor, video cassette and remote control) in rusted metal, by presenting the monitor on an unusually high
Figs. 32a and 32b: 6 pm, 1998 (and detail), found objects and rusted metal, collection Groep UBUNTU, Belgium.

Figs. 33a, 33b and 33c: Screen saviour, 2004 (and details), found objects and rusted metal, collection MAP, photographs by Stefan Hundt.
stand and by displaying these items in a gallery, they invoke the principle of ‘making it strange’ or ‘defamiliarisation’, with its emphasis on the ‘artistic’ removal from the typical surroundings of these objects so as to recharge its potency, the object itself being ‘unimportant’…the ‘ordinary’ thus turns out, after all, to be seen as the ‘aesthetic’. But that aesthetic remains resistant to definition" (Perloff, 1996: 11, 80). The image reflected on the screen in Screen saviour is reminiscent of a digital screen that is malfunctioning and it might also be compared to an abstract painting, for example the hazy, scumbled, painted surfaces in the works of Mark Rothko, which are presented to the viewer to induce reflection. Regarding these abstract images by Rothko, Arnason (1977:533) writes that “the sense of image, or the painting as a mysterious presence, is capable of moving the emotions of the spectator, of developing complex associations from the simplest visual stimuli”. In this work, Screen saviour, the ‘abstract’ image revealed on the screen is set within a familiar and very ordinary context, namely as the screen of a television monitor, but is ‘made mysterious’ or ‘strange’ through its transformation into another material and by its presentation as an art installation.

### 3.2.4 Ritual, cycles, repetition and obsession

The need to make art might be viewed as an obsession or it might be stated that obsession is a necessary prerequisite for making art over a long period, over a lifetime in fact. This view is echoed by Rexer (2006:58) who states that “…one can consider obsessiveness…as an attitude of practice rather than as a characteristic of an artistic product. In the first case, repetition and compulsion are the occupational hazard of most artists”. However, in this section I intend to refer to aspects of repetition and ritual presented as content and subject matter in my artworks. I do not intend to undertake a psychological analysis of the reasons for becoming an artist or for the selection of subject matter. It is nevertheless interesting to note Rexer’s reference to Freud’s view on obsession and its relationship to art (2006: 62): “The circular, repetitive nature of obsession, the magical thinking and compulsive behaviours that accompany it, all testify
to a struggle for which no truce can be declared. Life is stuck. Art, however, was always for Freud a way forward, a way *beyond* the dead end of obsession, a way to turn damage and repression into productivity and rapprochement*. In this section I will be reflecting on examples regarding the occurrence of repetition and ritual and what I observe in my art making processes and recurring strategies, in hindsight.

I have consulted articles on cultural rituals and obsession written by anthropologists and discovered interesting and relevant links regarding the artmaking process, specifically those features that recur in my own work. What follows is a brief attempt to summarise my findings and to place some examples of my strategies within this ‘new’ context. I have found valuable information in an article by Dulaney and Fiske (1994:243-283) entitled *Cultural rituals and obsessive-compulsive disorder: Is there a common psychological mechanism?* Here the authors endeavour to “explore the hypothesis that a limited set of common behavioural and ideational features characterize rituals all over the world” (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:243). In their article, Dulaney and Fiske cite other scholars, especially ethnographers, who have compared ritualistic practices in different cultures and communities and discovered similarities, even though these communities were very diverse and representative of cultural groups on different continents. I shall list a few examples regarding practices and refer to links with my own work.

According to Dulaney and Fiske (1994:274) “to transform or solidify social status or relationships and to heal or prevent harm, people reorder the world, constructing new structures…by simplifying and concentrating order, they feel able to manipulate it so as to bring about the desired state” and it is these practices that constitute cultural rituals. When these rituals are compared to patients with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), many interesting similarities within ritual behaviour are apparent. Dulaney and Fiske (1994:274) suggest that:

> …individuals in some circumstances may feel an imperative need to order or reorder their personal worlds in ways for which the culture does not provide a clear template. Individuals may experience personal traumas that threaten to break down the order that sustain their lives…for these reasons, some individuals may have
fears and perform repetitive acts that do not make sense to others in their culture, but – for that individual – help to restore the necessary order in the world.

Many of these personal obsessions and compulsions “resemble culturally constructed rituals in form and content, but lack shared meaning and collective legitimation” and might be an impairment to a certain individual’s life (Dulaney & Fiske, 1994:247). Contrary to this, a cultural ritual mechanism “is what enables people to mark and constitute life transitions, to reinforce and transform social relationships, to cure illness and cope with misfortune, to express and to respond to the ineffable paradoxes of human life” (Dulaney & Fiske, 1994:276).

Freud (Dulaney & Fiske, 1994:246,247) linked obsessional neuroses to religious practices and “emphasized that obsessive patients, like people observing religious taboos, are often entirely unable to explain the reasons for their observances, yet feel rigidly bound and compelled by them”. Dulaney and Fiske (1994:246) state that this does not imply that the rituals of OCD-patients are culturally meaningful nor that cultural rituals are “collective disorders or in any way pathological”. What they try to ascertain is to determine the distinctive features that OCD-patients and rituals share, as well as to offer possible reasons for these similarities:

In both, people simplify the world by orientating to a very small number of salient concerns and actions. Simplification is the foundation of most religious and mythological explanation, art and memory, as well as some kinds of technology and ‘magic’. It is also the basis of all scientific modeling and theoretic explanation … In short, to comprehend and control the world, people have to control its complexity…OCD is characterized by a need for absolutes…People need clear-cut demarcations in some tiny portion of the spectrum of life…What OCD patients do idiosyncratically and alone, participants in cultural rituals do legitimately and collectively (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:248, 249).

The observations in this citation are all relevant to artistic practice, as the artist also examines aspects of life “as through a microscope” (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:249) and every artwork ought to be viewed as an experiment in ‘presenting’ the results. As the artist develops an oeuvre or unique visual language, a certain “demarcation” or expression of a specific viewpoint becomes apparent.
Dulaney and Fiske (1994:245) describe certain actions as “distinctive and universal” once a sample of world rituals have been systematically compared. In pinpointing their findings, they refer to specific rituals, among many others, that are pronounced:

Rituals often involve washing and other forms of purification, orientation to thresholds and boundaries, and colors that have special significance. Rituals tend to involve precise spatial arrays and symmetrical patterns, stereotyped actions, repetitive sequences, rigidly scrupulous adherence to rules (and often the constant creation of new rules), and imperative measures to prevent harm and protect against immanent dangers. These features typify rituals, but they also define a psychiatric illness, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).

Freud regarded the “most common” symptoms of obsessive patients as being: “fear of touching something (or sometimes the need to touch certain things), the tendency for displacement by which the taboo quality of objects is transmitted to other objects, and preoccupation with washing” (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:246). He also noted that these rituals “resemble features that are common in traditional religions”. According to Dulaney & Fiske (1994:262) “every kind of symptom that is diagnostic of OCD” appears in ethnographic accounts of cultures “all over the world”, but there is one clear exception, namely the “ritual hoarding of valueless objects: OCD patients sometimes collect rooms full of newspapers, or pick up and bring home certain kinds of trash whenever they see it”.

Furthermore, Dulaney and Fiske (1994:244, 245) also observe that the culturally meaningful rituals in pre-modern societies often seem “non-rational” but that they have “powerful effects…because they represent the sacred values of the culture and the core relationships of the society”. These meaningful rituals are performed for their own sake and are “separated in time and space from everyday action”. Many features of these ritualistic practices are present in my artworks and possibly in many other art practices. I shall briefly point to a few examples with reference to my own work. Dulaney and Fiske (1994:244) cite Wallace, who asserts that “rituals – at whatever phylogenetic level - function communicatively to reduce anxiety and mobilize the organism(s) to efficiently perform some task”. It might be argued that the ritualistic aspect of all art practice, in fact one of the fundamental reasons for the existence of art practice, is the attempt to
“reduce anxiety”, within the universal sense where we are faced with our own vulnerability and incompleteness. In my case, apart from the conceptual meanings attached to specific works, I find solace in the physical making of the work where many hours of physical labour is required.\(^{10}\)

I have often viewed the repetitive aspect of my work, (especially cutting and flattening tins, setting off the rusting process by applying water, vinegar and salt, using a punch to make holes, ‘sewing’ the tins using wire, applying bitumen and ‘finishing’ the seams by scattering dust), as a ritual comparable to someone plying a rosary to pray – almost as if to fix or structure time, warding off an overwhelming feeling similar to vertigo that is evoked by an awareness of time and space.

Rituals that are part of universal everyday life (and therefore not “separated in time and space from everyday action” (Dulaney & Fiske (1994:245)) are often depicted in my installations. In section 3.2.1 I have emphasised my fascination with and the importance attached to the household rituals I was exposed to as a child and I discussed the metaphoric meanings I tried to convey in works such as *Opwaskan/Sink* (Fig. 17) and *Biegbak/Confessional* (Fig. 18) amongst others, where there were specific references to banal household rituals such as washing dishes. In many installations there are references to the care of clothing: folding, ironing, storing in a wardrobe or presented on a clothes horse or dumb valet. In the installation entitled *Gaste/Guests* (Fig. 61), the everyday ritual of sitting down at table for a meal is the subject matter. These actions are part of the daily rituals that are required of everybody, although I have attempted here to add layered meaning by the way the rituals are presented. However, many other strategies presented in my installations could be linked to the universal, ritualistic cultural, practices listed by Dulaney and Fiske (1994:245) and occasionally these common daily rituals seem to be presented in such a way as to appear obsessive.

\(^{10}\) In this section I briefly refer to practices, use of materials and aspects that pertain to ritual and obsession, but some of these strategies (for example the use of materials and installation strategies) are discussed in more depth in other sections.
Allusions to cleansing or purification are apparent in the installations entitled *Water and rust* (Fig. 101) and *Sunday suit/Kispak* (Fig. 39), amongst others. The rusted surfaces in many of the installations imply that they are dirty, polluted or decomposing and therefore contaminated. In *Biegbak/Confessional* (Fig. 18), there appears to be an obsessive attempt to clean the dirty dishes. The rusted objects in this installation are in stark contrast with the clarity and pureness of the white walls and the crisp cotton curtain. According to Dulaney and Fiske (1994:261), the preoccupation with cleansing in traditional rituals are often associated with death or the “effects of dangerous contacts”, for example the handling of a corpse or the belongings of the deceased. The purification rites might therefore have developed for hygienic reasons, but they also express a symbolic awareness of death and a concern that “ideas, images or words associated with the dead person will intrude on them”. The rusted patina so prevalent in my work could be interpreted as a pre-occupation with death: both acknowledging its presence and at the same time attempting to preserve some shreds of life.

Various installations could be interpreted as references to liminal events or spaces: the threshold, implying a rite of passage, transformation or the notion of fluctuating between inside and outside. Even a very common everyday ritual might trigger the metaphoric tool to refer to this ‘threshold’. In *It’s cold outside* (Fig. 15), the daily ritual of a woman getting dressed, applying make-up and getting ready for the day is implied with the curtain representing the threshold. The installation entitled *Sunday suit/Kispak* (Fig. 39) comprises of a man’s pressed clothes hanging on a screen (suggesting a private space separated from a larger environment), ready to wear presented together with a video displaying a hand rinsing a razor in a basin filled with water, evoking a sense of the man’s presence as a well as a cleansing ritual. These actions seem to be the unimportant moments in the day, when preparations are being made for the ‘actual significant’ activities; the grooming action before dressing in the suit or leaving the private, intimate space is the chosen subject matter in these installations. To me these ‘threshold moments’ are very often the time in which vulnerability is revealed. They are intimate moments, instants where fleeting opportunities for reflection are created before
or after the ‘performance’ required when entering the public sphere. The rusted surfaces of the objects in the installations underline the feature implying stripping away the outer layer or the veneer to reveal the slow decay or movement of time that is ever present while these actions are repeated every day. The topic of liminality was also the focus of an article entitled *Liminality, absence and silence in the installation art of Jan van der Merwe* (Kruger & van der Merwe, 2011:158-170) in which it is remarked that the emphasis on repetition “seems to invoke timelessness than linear, progressive time” (Kruger & van der Merwe, 2011:167). ‘Timelessness’ may be interpreted as an ‘ever-present’ awareness of vulnerability in the face of the slow linear progression of time. Other installations implying liminal spaces are *Ontwortel/Uprooted* (Figs. 121, 122 and 123), *The end* (Fig. 98) and *Baggage arrival* (Fig. 96). It is possible that the transformations and transitions (the threshold moments) required as life progresses heighten anxiety or uncertainty and that these events are therefore structured through ritualistic practices.

Dulaney and Fiske (1994:245) also refer to the phenomenon that rituals turn to boundaries and sometimes involve precise spatial arrays and symmetrical patterns. These features are all present in the way that many of my installations are displayed. I often create boundaries by enclosing or demarcating a space, through the use of curtains, wardrobes, barbed wire or ‘floor tiles’ laid out in precise symmetrical order. Dulaney and Fiske (1994:256) describe cultural rituals where spaces are demarcated in the shape of a square that is meant to protect from harm. This act of drawing the shape is termed “drawing protection” by the authors.

Regarding the orientation and significance of colour as described by Dulaney and Fiske (1994:245), this feature bears relevance to the pervasive presence of a rusted brown colour in many of my installations. As mentioned in earlier sections, the rusted patina emphasises vulnerability and transience, although the obsessive cladding of objects in rusted metal might also signify “imperative measures to prevent harm and protect against immanent dangers” (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:245). Adding an outer layer is an
attempt at protecting and preserving. A limited use of colour is evident in my mature body of work, although the subtle tonal variations and shades ranging from warm to cool are visible. White is occasionally used to contrast with the rusted brown patina (as visible in the installation Biegbak/Confessional), whereas in later installations objects are scorched until they appear black. Brown is associated with decay and death, as well as with the earth and fertility, while black, apart from the association with death, is often a reference to mystery and the unknown cosmos, for example in the installation Breinfloute/Blackout (Fig. 109).

The phrase, “the tendency for displacement by which the taboo quality of objects is transmitted to other objects” (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:246) is of particular importance to me as it indicates one common characteristic regarding cultural rituals, namely expressing what it means to be involved in art practice. My art practice is ‘transformative’ in that it shapes structure and meaning in my life in the same manner in which cultural rituals are described (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:245). Anxieties, questions, observations and qualms forming part of life, that might be harmful and crippling (or taboo), are eventually “transmitted” to other objects – which are finally presented as artworks. The link to universal cultural pre-modern rituals in my art practice is an interesting discovery and it is possible that many other art practices also demonstrate aspects of these ancient traditions:

As they are transmitted across the generations, cultural rituals probably tend to retain the ideas and actions that have the greatest psychological impact. If humans are especially concerned about a set of issues that includes contamination and pollution, spatial configurations, boundaries, repetition and numerology, ideas and actions related to these issues would tend to be retained (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:250).

There are many examples of implied repetitive actions in my installations, apart from the artworks in which rituals are overtly referred to, as indicated in the works above, as well as in other installations such as Baggage arrival (Fig. 96) where a luggage carousel is displayed, endlessly recycling the decaying baggage. Many of the repetitive actions are made visible on digital screens that are built into the installations. The clips of video
footage that frequently form part of my artworks do not convey narratives, but display the same repetitive action. I have been doing most of the filming of these actions (with some assistance), although there are also examples of ‘found footage’ as illustrated in No I want my mother (Fig. 36) (the image of one hand caressing or appeasing another). The images very often display a hand or hands performing some action, for example in, Gaste/Guests (Fig. 61) (the image of a hand repeatedly firing a pistol), Biegbak/Confessional (Fig. 18) (hands scrubbing a pot), Kispak/Sunday suit (Fig. 39) (a hand rinsing a razor), Cleaning instructions (Fig. 64) (a hand cleaning a pistol), Eclipse (Fig. 102) (a hand scattering petals) and Showcase (Fig. 29) (a hand cleaning a trophy), amongst others. Perhaps the reference to the obsession with tactility or not touching referred to by Dulaney and Fiske (1994:246) could be read into these images. The videos exhibit an action performed over a short period of time (sometimes only a few seconds). The footage is edited and presented in a loop, implying an ever recurring cycle or an infinite number of the very same actions. This display of extreme repetitiveness might hint to obsession, compulsion and redundancy (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:245) and underscore the perception, as Freud put it (Rexel, 2006:62) that “life is stuck”. I regard these repetitive actions as an attempt to communicate through recurrence or to express stunted communication.

It is also possible that a distinction could be made between works that imply restorative cycles to emphasise purification (as perceived in the references to natural cycles of death and renewal in works such as Blik/Tin (Fig. 22), Water and rust (Fig. 101) and the rain visible in the digital image of a window in Biegbak/Confessional (Fig.18c)) and other works that might be associated with actions that are meaninglessly perpetuated and thus regarded as a symptom interfering with the ability to function (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:250). The scouring of a pot in Biegbak/Confessional (Fig. 18) and the polishing of a small trophy in Showcase (Fig. 29) are revealed as to be futile within the context of the installations where inescapable decay is exposed, whereas the daily efforts of cleaning, within real life, are not harmful or destructive activities – in fact their neglect might be viewed as pathology. The extreme repetitiveness displayed in the installations
might however be linked to certain actions performed by OCD patients who are indeed so pre-occupied with washing or some or other action that their lives are impaired to the extent that they themselves view their actions as “inappropriate, ineffective, irrational, and hence ‘crazy’ in the sense that relationships and effectual everyday performance are disrupted” (Dulaney & Fiske 1994:247).

Other distinctive symptoms of OCD patients cited by Dulaney and Fiske (1994:249,250) bearing relevance to my artmaking process (several of these symptoms have been mentioned within the context of cultural rituals) are:

- concern with inanimate (e.g. household items); prescribed procedures for cleaning inanimate objects; concern with dirt, germs, and environmental toxins, or anything regarding as polluting, dirty, unclean, or impure…frequently repeated hand washing, showering, bathing…or grooming…special measures to prevent harm to self or others, colors that have special significance, ordering and arranging things so that they are in their proper place; arranging…things in some precise spatial configuration; attention to a threshold or entrance; repeating actions; stereotyped hoarding or collecting actions.

Through the representation of potentially harmful compulsive actions within the context of an artwork, these actions might have been transformed and employed, as Freud (in Rexer, 2006: 62) stated, as “a way beyond the dead end of obsession, a way to turn damage and repression into productivity and rapprochement”.

An installation in which the concept of obsessive compulsion and harmful reiteration is applied is entitled *Killing time* (Figs. 34a, b and c). This installation depicts a table and chair, a briefcase and a piece of male clothing draped over the back of the chair. Embedded in the surface of the table a digital screen displays the repetitive action of two hands folding a paper airplane. A stack of ‘paper’ (in fact A4 size steel sheets) is placed on the table, ready to be folded. A few meters from the table lies a heap of rusted metal ‘paper planes’ that seems to have been thrown, one after the other, into the white wall facing the table. The planes have damaged the wall as many tiny holes are visible, as if somebody whiled away the time by folding and throwing these metal ‘paper planes’ into the wall in an apparent fit of boredom or through lack of
Fig. 34a: *Killing time*, 2007, found objects, wooden panel, rusted metal and digital screen, collection UNISA, photograph by Carla Crafford.
impulse control or with malicious intent. The title, *Killing time*, is ambivalent and the seemingly meaningless act of folding and throwing the planes could also be interpreted as the strategies, war games, manipulations and plans of the powerful played out in the boardrooms and in their offices that, nevertheless, leave permanent scars and effects on communities and individuals. The work could also be interpreted as a monument to wasted moments or opportunities that could never be retrieved. There is no cycle implied in this work, only the perpetual replication of a futile act. The presentation of pointless and possibly harmful ‘games’ is repeated again and again as each generation takes over from the previous one. The work expresses the enactment of obsessions and compulsions as ways to fill time, but could also point towards the possibility that the need for power might be seen as a compulsive ‘game’.

Figs. 34b and 34c: *Killing time* (details), photographs by Rupert de Beer.
Ritual might be perceived as the main content in the work by Willem Boshoff entitled *370 Day project*\(^{11}\) (Figs. 35a and b) (Vladislavić, 2005:36, 37). In this work a sense of a reflective ‘journal’ of the daily rituals imposed on himself are revealed. I have admired the work of Willem Boshoff since very early on in my career. Apart from the wide-ranging content in his work and his use of discarded material, especially in his early work, I have been impressed by the ritualistic aspect made visible in his installations.

The artwork entitled *370 Day project* is one of many examples where Boshoff systematically documents the passing of time over a certain period. In this work, Boshoff set himself six tasks to be carried out each day, over a period of 370 days (Vladislavić, 2005:34). The information regarding these tasks and the successes or not that he achieved were logged each day, by carving the data into different oblong pieces of wood in encrypted language he devised himself. For each day a different species of wood was used for the carving ritual. These rectangular blocks are presented in slots in a storage-like cabinet.

\[^{11}\text{According to Vladislavić, (2005:34) “Boshoff set himself the task of keeping a journal in wood for a solid year. The number of days in a year was rounded off to the nearest figure that allowed for a symmetrical storage system.”}\]
The ritualised feature is evident in his work process and time management, but also becomes the content of the work, as the ritual and the passing of time are made visible in the actual artwork as the end product of a long process. Vladislavić (2005:34) describes the work as “an intensely personal journal of an idiosyncratically ordered private life…they speak to us of time spent purposely, creatively, consciously. The blocks are time inscribed with meaning, whether earnest or frivolous”. Vladislavić, places the work within the context of other conceptual artists “who put themselves through trials of endurance”, such as Yves Klein, Joseph Beuys, Vito Acconci, On Kawara and others and remarks that “Boshoff’s artistic undertakings can seem like an ordeal or a penance”. During the initiation ceremonies within cultural rituals described by Dulaney and Fiske (1994:251,252), bodily ordeals are often imposed. The disciplined, almost priestly manner in which Boshoff works, often simultaneously on different artworks is of interest. By adhering to the strict routine that he set himself as well as his conceptual strategy combined with rigorous crafting of materials, he conveyed an attitude towards artistic practice that was admired by me and many of my fellow students early on in our careers.

Contemporary society has been stripped of many of the early rituals or religious ceremonies that carried distinct symbolic meaning and perhaps assisted communities to deal with transformations, doubts and fears encountered throughout a lifetime. The lack of symbolic rituals in the postmodern context might be experienced as a loss that needs to be expressed. The rituals evident in my artworks have not been consciously planned to comment on this phenomenon, although I am constantly aware of the ritualistic ‘pattern’ present in my work as the meditative or contemplative character of my installations gradually became more marked and important to me. The emphasis placed on reflection (as discussed in section 3.2.1) echoes religious rituals. It is with hindsight that I perceive some of these patterns as well as the links to tradition. I would also like to reiterate that, although I acknowledge trauma and damage in many of my artworks, for example in Killing time, it is also my intention to convey meaning and beauty through the portrayal of the cycles of life, death and renewal.
3.2.5 Gender roles: male and female

When I look back on my body of work, it is noticeable that male or female personas are implied in different works. However, I do not intend to engage in current gender theories in this section. In the process of conceiving an artwork, I am totally absorbed in particular events or sensations that reflect specific aspects of human nature and the feminine and male personas implied in my installations encompass different features or characteristics that might reside in any one individual human being. Maslow (1966: 137,138) remarks that “the relations between the sexes are largely determined by the relation between masculinity and femininity within each person, male or female”. He cites Jungian scholars who view the antagonism between the sexes largely as a projection of the unconscious struggle within an individual person, “between his or her masculine or feminine components”. The concepts for my artworks develop gradually mostly from within the context of personal experience and in this section I shall be reflecting on the origins of selected works and report from a personal viewpoint, instead of applying theory to my own body of work.

Elsewhere in chapter three I described the importance and guiding influence of women in my life and a strong feminine point of view in the household where I grew up, where women played a vital role in the struggle and promise of survival. I discussed artworks such as Wag/Waiting, It’s cold outside and Biegbak/Confessional where feminine personas had been suggested. Although war is generally associated with a male domain, I recounted in what manner I chose to create an artwork relating to a woman’s perspective when I was invited to take part in an exhibition commemorating the Anglo-Boer War. In this work I indicated the manner in which I attempted to replicate traditional feminine crafts in metal and wire and how my artmaking process was directly influenced by these crafts.

This sense of compassion or awareness is intuitive and informed by my identification with the women who raised me. It should also be noted that it is not my intention to
narrow down the role of women to the mere execution of domestic chores or to the performance of specific crafts as represented in my artworks. My artworks stem from my personal experiences. If the emphasis was placed on domestic chores or certain crafts, it was introduced to commemorate and revere the role of those women of my childhood who seemed, from my point of view, to have found a sense of pride, self-respect and family honour through the performance of their daily responsibilities. Activities such as making clothes, mending, knitting and embroidering were meaningful as it created a sense of caring. I was also fascinated by these womanly activities. To this day I still own tablecloths and tea cloths embroidered by my mother and I am struck every time by the effort and determination to create objects that are visually and aesthetically so pleasing, beyond mere functionality. These activities formed part of the household rituals although there were hardships.

My awareness of the experiences of the women in my household sensitised and informed me regarding the predicament of women especially within vulnerable communities and the powerlessness to which they are susceptible. I have also created artworks commenting on these social ills in a broader context. One such work was conceived as I was viewing and listening to an interview with a rape victim on television during a news broadcast. This young woman, who lived on the outskirts of Johannesburg, sat next to her mother, and repeated the words: “No I want my mother” as an answer to all the questions that were put to her. Her face was not shown but the camera focused on her hand, which was caressed by her mother’s hand. The image of the hands as well as the accompanying sentence, as an audible sound, was replicated in a video clip presented on a digital screen, which formed part of the installation entitled *No I want my mother* (Figs. 36a, b and c).

The fragmented, transparent gauze slip (made from wire mesh) as well as the discarded and ‘mended’ materials used in the installation convey defenselessness and a violation of privacy – an attempt to heal or ‘patch together’ pieces of broken debris. Here I have
tried to convey a depth of emotional sensitivity through the use of materials. The 'suitcase' presented as part of the installation is made from a discarded metal rubbish bin with holes pierced through the surface. The violence implied by these perforations expresses an ambivalent symbolic meaning. These metal konkas are often seen alongside public roads during winter, where people huddle around them to keep warm. A fire is made in these containers and heat is given off through the holes. I was compelled to conceive this installation as I was shocked and moved by what I observed as a 'bystander' during the broadcast. This installation was first exhibited in a group exhibition, together with work by international artists, “that explores different aspects of the feminine” (Arthrob, 2000). The show was curated by Minette Varí and I was the only male participant.

---

An artist whose work I have noticed since the early eighties is Eva Hesse, who is often viewed by critics as a post-minimalist or a “second generation Minimalist sculptor” (Lucie-Smith, 1980:42). She employs techniques such as weaving, knotting and draping, amongst others, and I have been drawn to the manner in which she experiments with materials and new ways of presentation. She manages to embody materials with psychological and emotional sensitivity “to create forms and textures which seem to come directly from the depths of the unconscious mind” (Lucie-Smith, 1995:138). I admire the way Hesse is able to instill matter with meaning. In the work entitled Contingent (Fig. 37), she presents strips of material resembling skin or perhaps laundry hung out to dry. Barnes et al. (1999:201) observes that the uneven surface textures lend a human-like or even an erotic dimension to the work. Techniques that were previously regarded as pertaining to womanly crafts (such as weaving and plaiting) are employed in the creation of her artworks and for that reason her work has been associated with feminism (Barnes et al., 1999:201). I consider it essential to acknowledge the fact that the full spectrum of human emotion, sensitivity as well as strength, is possibly innate in all human beings, but that certain characteristics are associated with the feminine and others with the masculine sensibility. However, any
artist, regardless of gender, might consider expressing any element of human receptivity through any possible means. As much emphasis was placed on aspects of the feminine in previous sections, what follows will be a discussion of examples of artworks where male guises are apparent.

An earlier work entitled *Killer* (Fig. 38) (1985), could be viewed as a precursor to the work known as *Killing time* (Fig. 34) which was discussed in section 3.2.4. The title of this work refers to an actual game of darts. As in *Killing time* the title conveys an
ambivalent meaning within the context of the artwork. I associate the darts game, “Killer” with my father and the male environment of the bar at the Railway Institute, one of the few spaces in our town available to working class men of his generation, for recreation after a hard day’s labour. My father was a very good darts player and I was aware that the competitiveness displayed during these games also implied that this was an opportunity amongst men to establish the upper hand or a sense of manhood. I experienced the same sense of competitiveness whilst playing darts during my years as a soldier amongst young men who were conscripted into military service. In this work the profile or ‘shadow’ of the player is superimposed over the target by means of a cut out Perspex shape, implying a sense of self-inflicted harm or the harm that ensues when emphasis is placed on the obsessive achievement of power. The red Perspex profile represents the outline of my own body. An image of a cheering crowd is visible on the collaged newspaper at the bottom end of the artwork, hinting at power games I associated with the male dominated public sphere at that stage. The crosses and the ‘scores’ in this artwork might refer to the statistics of a battlefield.

The installation Kispak/Sunday suit (Figs 39a, b, c and d) could be regarded as a counterpart to the work It’s cold outside (Fig. 15), discussed in section 3.2.1. An intimate scene is also depicted in this work where a grooming ritual is implied behind a screen. I was aware of my father’s physical vulnerability when I was a young child, even though he was a tall, well-built man. He suffered the first of several heart attacks when he was thirty eight years old. In the installation Kispak/Sunday suit, a man’s pressed suit is suspended from a dumb valet alongside a chair on which a basin filled with water is placed. A shirt and tie casually hang on the screen, ready for wear whilst a towel is draped over the back of a chair. Every object is made of or clad in rusted metal. In the basin a digital screen displays a hand rinsing a razor suggesting the presence of a man getting dressed. His vulnerability is heightened by the fact that the viewer ‘intrudes’ into this private space behind the screen. As this man has not yet put on his suit or his ‘armour’ he is therefore exposed. This emphasis on male vulnerability and
Fig. 39a and 39b: 
Kispak/Sunday suit, (details), photographs by author.

Fig. 39c: Kispak/Sunday suit, 2003, rusted metal, found objects, digital screen, collection MAP-South Africa, photograph by Dirk Oegema.
defenselessness might have been a result of observing my father’s illness during my childhood. The Afrikaans translation of the term ‘sunday suit’, namely ‘kispak’ carries added meaning, as it refers to a suit that was stowed away in a chest, only to be worn on special occasions, namely the important rites of passage such as christenings, weddings and funerals. However the word ‘kis’ also means ‘coffin’; implying that this will be the suit that he will be buried in. As discussed earlier, the ‘preparation’ or grooming ritual is presented as a moment for reflection, when the self is faced, before entering the public space and assuming the roles that are required.

Although this artwork focusses on the man who is unmasked and inward looking, my father had a broad-based, cosmopolitan attitude towards life. He was skeptical towards the politics of the day as well as formalised religion (although he got along very well with his mother-in-law who read right through the Bible every year). He had friends from all walks of life and amongst a wide variety of cultural groups in Ladysmith in Natal especially within the large Indian community. He was not the stereotypical Afrikaner patriarch and his critical attitude towards convention influenced my world view. Although I had my father in mind when executing Kispak/Sunday suit (Fig. 39), the work conveys a more universal content. Amongst other meanings the work is a tribute to the working men amongst whom I grew up, whose pride seemed evident when they donned their best clothes. The shaving ritual is perceived with fascination by young boys as a symbol of manhood, but as the boy matures, the vulnerability and humanity of the father is revealed. The suit, as a metaphor for manliness or masculinity, later became the subject of a major installation, entitled Uitverkoping/Sale (Fig. 120) which will be discussed in chapter five.

Although the work of the painter Robert Hodgins differs stylistically from mine, I feel an affinity towards him owing to his working class background (Atkinson et al., 2002:54) and his cynicism towards those who strive for power within politics or in the financial arena.
Hodgins’ humility, humanity and wit inspired me. In his satirical depictions he deftly employs the suit and the uniform to clothe the men as authoritarian figures. Of the suit, he says (Atkinson et al., 2002:60): “there’s the idea of the man in the suit who is superior, who at the same time is in a suit of armour…and the sense that, if you’re in a suit of armour and you fall down, you can’t get up again”. In Figs. 40 and 41, the colourful and seemingly humorous images belie the strength of the underlying critical attitude towards these male personas, whose weakness will be revealed once the suit is removed.

The suit has also been used by Joseph Beuys to achieve a completely different effect. Beuys’ Felt suit (Fig. 42) might be interpreted as seeking to explain the traditional separation between fine art and domestic items. He states that he hopes viewers might “realize that everyone is an artist” (Joseph Beuys, S.a.). Felt as a creative medium has personal significance for Beuys who views his artistic practice as similar to that of a
shaman, in the sense that he emphasises the transformative power of art. The suit is presented as a metaphor for everyman (Joseph Beuys, S.a.).

In the environment in which I grew up, the working men were the providers for their families. Their daily struggles emerged as subject matter in some of my artworks. In CO *add something special* (Fig. 43), emphasis is placed on labour by incorporating tools such as a hammer and a wood plane as found objects. These objects have been attached to a surface spread with bitumen, a material that is also associated with physical labour.
Fig. 43: CO add something special, 1996, found material, bitumen and rusted metal on board, private collection, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.

Fig. 44: Watchman, 1996, found material, bitumen and paint on board, private collection, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.
In the work entitled *Watchman* (Fig. 44) two men, representing different social classes, face each other. They are both surrounded by painted images and found objects. To the left watches, cigarette lighters, remnants of electronic equipment, a flashlight, collaged reproductions of artworks and an image of a space shuttle can be seen. The one man wears glasses and is dressed in a shirt with a stiff white collar; his head is placed against a halo-like golden background, suggesting that he is the ‘watchman’ indicating social status. The worker on the right is encircled, amongst other objects and images, by worker’s tools such as a rusted opened tin of fish, a loaf of bread and he wears a worker’s glove, placed on the hand of his raised arm, suggesting that he is gripped in a struggle for survival. The image of the worker is a reference to the prevalent political power struggles in South Africa, where the disparity between the rich and the poor remains a central issue.

The interest in the plight of the worker culminated in the installation entitled *Bagged baggage* (Figs. 45a and b), in which clothes are also used to imply human presence. The installation consists of a single wardrobe and a suitcase, plastered with cement. Inside the wardrobe are clothes namely a jacket, a shirt, a pair of trousers, a tie, a belt and a bag, the sparse possessions of a person put on display. The wardrobe, clothes, suitcase and bag are symbolic of individuality and privacy. The clothes and bag were made out of empty paper cement bags and selected items were clad with this paper. The logo and name of the cement company are visible on many of the objects, inferring that the worker’s distinctiveness as a human being is overshadowed by his obligations as a labourer. The cladding of all the objects in this installation suggests that a private or personal identity is masked or ‘plastered over’.

Furthermore, filmed footage of a line of workers (Fig. 45b), wielding pick axes and working in unison, whilst singing rhythmically, is visible and audible via a digital monitor at the bottom back of the wardrobe. This image of the line of workers is well-known and associated with pre-democratic South Africa and has also been used as subject matter
Fig. 45a: Bagged baggage. 1998, found material, cement, cement bags, digital monitor, DVD player, collection MAP, photograph by Dirk Oegema.
by artists such as Gerard Sekoto in his painting entitled *Song of the pick* (Fig. 46) (Gerhard Sekoto, S.a.) in which the power and authority of the man overseeing the workers (the ‘watchman’) is exposed. The painting could be interpreted as a hymn dedicated to the pride, beauty and strength of workers, in spite of their subordination. The political system conjured by the video image in *Bagged baggage* (Fig. 45) signifies
part of the ‘baggage’ of the past. The image of the repetitive motion of the workers and the rhythmic sound of their song might suggest a moment for reflection as this installation could be viewed as a tribute to the labourers. This installation offered an opportunity to experiment with the qualities of and the effects inherent to cement. I tried to create visual contrast between the grey colour of the cement and its textural quality with the paper cement bags displaying lettering and subdued colours. The beauty of the materials is intrinsic to the meaning that is conveyed.

In Ladysmith, our house stood close to a military base. As a child I was intrigued by the movements and rituals of the soldiers I could see through the fence. After completing my studies at art school, I underwent compulsory military training like all young white men in South Africa of my generation. Although I was initially preoccupied with personal survival, the harsh realities of being a soldier and the political system that I was born into gradually dawned on me. My experiences in the defense force during the 1980s became the subject matter of a body of work that formed the practical component of my master’s degree studies. The image of the soldier was employed as a metaphor for life’s battles or for the notion of the life of the artist.

In the defense force, I encountered a world dominated by men. The initial training and ‘stripping’ away of a personal identity contrasted sharply with my years at art school, where I experienced an environment in which I was free to ‘break the rules’ and encouraged to develop my individuality. In the artwork entitled Final inspection (Fig. 47), my own army coat and uniform, worn when I had to stand guard at night during winter, is used as a surface for a painting as well as an assemblage of found objects. The front surface is completely transformed, but on the back the original textile surface of the uniform is still visible. Illusional images are rendered in paint, contrasting with the found material (toy soldiers, chicken wire, medals, my surname printed on a strip of material, etc.). Sections of the propaganda posters I designed whilst I was assigned to the ‘shows and exhibitions’ section of the defense force are reworked and used as collage.
elements on the surface of the coat. This work was executed in 1997 at a time when my artworks were developing into installations. The title, *Final inspection*, is a term familiar to all soldiers in training, but in this work it refers to my awareness as I found myself in a position in 1997, to look back and reflect on my years as a member of the defense force.
In this work the coat is transformed into a landscape with a prominent horizon line. The coat and army cap remains discernible creating an effect resembling a ‘fight’ between illusion and reality. The images on the coat progress from the bottom upwards where images of training (a collage of personal photographs) as well as camouflage patterning can be seen, to the middle section where scenes from a battlefield are depicted. The blue sky and golden cap might represent a spiritual feature and a reference to death that is part of the reality of the life of a soldier. The ashes of burnt documents are depicted on the floor, referring to the destruction of war but also symbolising the demise of the old political system.

The coat is a personal item of clothing, but as a uniform, it enables the shedding of individuality, transforming a man into a soldier. A soldier not only struggles for physical survival, but also for survival on a psychological and emotional level. The ashes might also refer to the remnants of an individual, a human being with a unique personality; that which is left when the transformation into a soldier is complete. As in previous works, there is again reference to the tangible and the material in contrast to a spiritual domain. The transformation of the army clothes into an artwork, might indicate a reckoning with the past (a *Final inspection*) as well as a rekindling of a new cycle.

The installation entitled *Bosklere* (Fig. 48) was amongst the first group of artworks in which I used rusted metal to clad found objects. The term *bosklere* (bush clothes) was introduced here to refer to the uniform worn by soldiers during training as well as during deployment in the bush as was the case during the border war. This work was one of the first artworks I completed after my exhibition for the M. Tech degree. During the five years that I worked on this body of work, my visual language matured and became more simplified as I developed a signature style and technique\(^\text{13}\) evident in this collection of work. My own army clothes, my *bosklere*, are presented here as if they have been taken off a moment ago: the shirt hangs over the back of a chair and the trousers are folded and placed on the seat. Everything is clad in rusted metal and the

\(^{13}\) This style, technique and presentation strategy will be discussed in the following sections.
uniform resembles a skin that was shed. The rusted surface emphasises the notion that my life as a soldier has become part of my own history and that of my generation and that this period is receding into time. Between 1980 and 2000, when the work was executed, the political system in South Africa had undergone a complete transformation and the work therefore allows for an opportunity for reflection. I regard this work as a monument to those young men (amongst whom were some of my friends and schoolmates) who were caught up in the political system and who lost their lives during this war. Ironically some of my friends died during training or during incidents in the bush war where they were accidently mistaken for the 'enemy'.

In this section on conceptualisation I have pinpointed major themes that recur in my artworks. Some of these concepts were developed further in recent major installations and will be discussed in chapters four and five. Although references abound to the materials and techniques that I employ, I will be discussing these topics in more depth in the following section.
3.3 Materials, technique and process

Although the path laid by conceptual artists in the twentieth century bears relevance to my art (as discussed in section 3.1), the craftsmanship or the creative, constructing aspect remains essential to the process I employ. Crafting is not necessarily a prerequisite for present-day visual artists and although this feature of art has certainly not disappeared, many artists employ skilled craftsmen whom they direct to implement their concepts or assist in manufacturing the artwork mechanically or technically.\(^\text{14}\) Ever since the introduction and experiments by Picasso with collage (Arnason, 1977:138) and Duchamp with his found materials (Arnason, 1977:313), contemporary artists are now in a position to exploit the many strategies that have been opened up regarding the use of material. Technological advances have also led to new possibilities for artists. In the following section I will be discussing the physical aspect of my art, the choice of materials and the processes involved.

My personal involvement in the making process is of utmost importance, to such an extent that I consider the whole process as part of the end product. In an article entitled *On making*, the sociologist Sennet (2009:46), writes about the value that the act of crafting or making something has within the current sociological context. Although his article concerns the broad subject of craft, his views could be applied to the field of visual art as well. He points to the scope and extent of what has been lost within the contemporary social framework due to the unprecedented pace of life and circumstances and that crafting is not “about quick transactions and easy victories”. According to Sennet the slow tempo of craftwork is profoundly stabilising to individuals (2009:48). These statements are relevant to my own method of working, owing to the time and extensive process involved to create my artworks. I have also previously mentioned the importance of the ‘making ritual’ in section 3.2.4. According to Sennet the slow, concentrated, repetitive nature of crafting “is seen as something dysfunctional and

\(^\text{14}\) In 2010 the Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei covered the floor of the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern in London with more than 100 million individually handmade replica porcelain sunflower seeds for an installation entitled *Sunflower seeds*. Each seed was pre-cast, fired, hand-painted and fired again in the Chinese city of Jingdezhen over a period of two years (Ai Wei Wei, S.a.).
irrelevant in the modern world”. He states that human beings are form makers, and as such need a sense of closure: “enacting this process of completion, of making something that is separate from us and stands on its own like an object, is a way of saying, ‘I made this. I exist’” (Sennet, 2009:48). This statement reflects the desire for expression and forms part of the complex meanings regarding art praxis.

Sennet also opens up the debate, mentioned in chapter two, concerning the relationship between mental activity and manual labour and the lack of research pertaining to this issue. He bemoans the perception:

…that people who are competent in verbal symbols are thought to be more gifted than those whose development occurs through physical or manual experience. This is a terrible blindness in modern society to people who work with their hands, and this leads to class differentiation and even contempt for manual work (2009:48).

Although visual art is acknowledged as perhaps having more ‘status’ within contemporary society than other forms of manual labour, I completely identify with the citation above, as I certainly prefer making art to writing about it and, as I have mentioned in chapter two, academic articles about my art have received wide acknowledgement as they seem to validate the physical work involved. As a lecturer in fine art, I have often been struck by the ‘visual intelligence’ of my students and my professional work entails the coaching and nurturing of these practical skills to embody their visual ideas. However, whilst writing about my art making processes, I am aware of the fact that I am generating new knowledge about my work. This awareness is substantiated by the statement of Sullivan (2005:100) that:

an understanding practice describes the way visual arts knowledge is framed, encountered, critiqued and created during the research process as insight is achieved and communicated…This means that knowledge creation in visual arts is recursive and constantly undergoes change as new experiences “talk back” through the process and progress of making art.

The difficulty in the writing process might lie precisely in the nature of practice described in the citation namely that the process itself is in constant flux and new possibilities are
constantly opened up. Writing about the artworks and the process remains an approximation.

My artmaking process starts with the collection of found material, which is then transformed through an elaborate process, discussed later in this section. The impetus behind collecting and saving objects is an instinctive compulsion. My need for collecting physical objects and working with textures might relate to the fact that I find expression through material things, but it might also reflect a need to save or retain something of life, of a day, a minute, or a particular experience; in a sense by collecting memories or through the creation of a physical ‘archive’ of experiences. The pertinent concern regarding the pervasiveness of waste within the contemporary environment due to over production and consumption might also be a factor that bears relevance to the prevalence of found material in contemporary art. Not only do artists concern themselves with the realities of these global issues, but there might also be a deep seated need to recycle, make use of, ‘clean up’ or ‘heal’, inherent in their attitudes. As discussed in my dissertation for the M. Tech. (Fine Art) degree, entitled *The transformation of the found in a contemporary context* (1999), I devoted a whole section to the view of the artist as a recycler of waste. According to Baurriaud (1992:61), the necessity for re-processing and recycling has infiltrated the manner in which industry is managed and these views have 'remodelled' the sensibilities of artists. My reluctance to discard physical objects is certainly influenced by the necessity to regard all possible material as of value as I experienced this notion in the household in which I grew up.

My dissertation was concluded in 1999. In this text the impact of the use of found material as a strategy available to artists in the twentieth century was traced and investigated. The aim of this study was formulated as follows:

In this dissertation the implication of the use of found material, objects and images in twentieth century art is investigated, with reference to the relationship between art and reality, the definition of the work of art and relation between concept, content, material and process, as well as the effect of this strategy on the prevailing concept of artistic authorship (Van der Merwe, 1999:ii).
In the body of work presented as the practical component for this degree and exhibited at the African Window Museum in Pretoria (now the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History) from 22 April to 29 May 1998, the use of collage and found material was prominent. In my dissertation I observed that “found material is an instrument that can be used as a tool to review the past and that the transformation and revision of the values and meanings that we assign to the found is an affirmation of our search for a new identity on the eve of the new millennium” (Van der Merwe, 1999:119). The use of found material was contextualised within discourses associated with postmodernism. Foster (2004:3) remarks on an “archival impulse at work in contemporary art…artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present”. The utilisation of found material in the artmaking process could be viewed as a form of archiving. My use of this strategy was employed, however, as a personal tactic or approach. The development of a visual language occurred organically by means of continuous experimentation and within the circumstances regarding the social structures framing my personal life. As demonstrated in the previous sections, I have always been drawn to experimentation with unconventional materials and the use of found objects ever since my first year as an art student. This experimentation went hand in hand with efforts to imbue matter with meaning and metaphorical significance.

In the abovementioned body of work, the image of a soldier was placed centrally as a metaphor for the struggle to construct an identity as a human being and as an artist. Having been conscripted as a soldier was part of my own history and that of my generation. The image of a soldier was an appropriate metaphor at that stage of my life as it was an identity and history in the process of being shed. The struggle between a personal and an ‘official’ identity is prominent in the work entitled Bliksoldaat/Tin soldier (Fig. 49) which formed part of this body of work.
The clear outline of the soldier's head, the use of metal and aggressive shapes contrast sharply with subtly painted and collaged images and objects referring to family and home life and to the soldier's private identity. Many of the objects that are of personal value to me have been used in this work in an intimate manner and are noticeable
when the work is examined closely: objects such as my grandmother’s pair of scissors, pins that belonged to my mother plus other delicate objects, photographs and images. On the inside of the soldier’s ‘ear’ are the remnants of an old alarm clock that belonged to my father, which could be ‘activated’ by the viewer to hammer against the side of an old tin box, sounding like a machine gun or the whirring sound of my grandmother’s Singer sewing machine. There is much irony in the fact that the young man who was cared for and loved within the family environment, is then conscripted to become a soldier, where his humanity is tripped away and he indeed becomes a ‘tin soldier’. The flattened tins on the soldier’s face resemble the dappled effect of camouflage gear, effacing his facial features.

The complicated assemblage of images and objects in artworks such as those depicted in Fig. 49 were, in subsequent works, substituted for a more limited choice of favoured materials, namely rusted tin, wire and bitumen. Most of the artworks which formed part of the body of work submitted for my M. Tech. degree were heavily collaged, two-dimensional works that had to be displayed on custom-made stands. For the last four works completed for this exhibition flattened tins were used to completely clad three-dimensional found objects. This technique was first used in the work entitled 6 pm (Fig. 32), which was discussed in section 3.2.3 and refined additionally in the last four works, namely Soldier’s bed (Fig. 78), Ironing board (Fig. 79), Clothes horse (Fig. 80) and Chair and jacket (Fig. 81). These works, similar to Bosklere (Fig. 48), discussed in 3.2.5, reveal a uniform rusted appearance and the transformation from the collage technique to cladding. This technique introduced a new phase to my working process and developed into a signature style that would be employed over the next two decades. This transition regarding style and technique occurred at the end of a period that I devoted to working on the body of work that was to be exhibited as the practical component for the M. Tech. degree. This body of work afforded me my first opportunity to present a solo exhibition.

---

15 The transition to three–dimensional works also entailed a new strategy of presentation. This aspect will be discussed in section 3.4.
The transition from using rusted tins to cladded three-dimensional objects followed after a hiatus during this period of work as my mother took ill. I constantly spent all my time at her bedside in the hospital but she died. Her fragility and resigned attitude, combined with her utmost pride remained to the end. These characteristics affected me profoundly. When I started working again, the rusted tin that I was using, seemed to gain new meaning. I tried to express transience and vulnerability and the rusted metal seemed an apt material owing to the visible decay of an object that was once new and strong. It seemed logical to me to use this material in an artwork to emphasise or ‘preserve’ the qualities of fragility and evanescence even though the tins were ironically, initially used for the prevention of decay.

The oxidation process that occurs when metal rusts, indicates that it is being broken down\textsuperscript{16} to its natural or molecular state in order to be re-absorbed into the earth. During the corrosion of the rusting process energy is emitted and oxygen is released.\textsuperscript{17} The rusting process is also life giving. During the early stages of the cosmos, a primordial oxygenating process occurred, enabling life as the atmosphere of the earth was established.\textsuperscript{18} The process of rust is part of the mystery of the origin of life.

The visible state of decay and decomposition within rusted metal allows me to express impressions regarding the cycle of life and death as well as the link between earth and heaven in a metaphorical and tangible manner. Rusted metal enables me to convey my perceptions of the tragic process of death as well as of its beauty. Before being used the tins are strong and gleaming and the metal seems to bear a masculine quality, but in their rusted and fragile state they gain a softer and more feminine quality to become more pliable. The rusted tins are ephemeral objects: they change and are transformed as I work with them and in the eventual artwork the vulnerability of the material is

\textsuperscript{16} A material that contains iron will rust when it is exposed to both oxygen and water. This is a chemical reaction that is exacerbated when salt is added. The presence of salt acts as a catalyst, accelerating the corrosive chemical reaction process (Capital Steel, S.a.)

\textsuperscript{17} “Changes in the energy held by chemical bonds in the oxidation of iron yield a net loss of energy from the reactants, and this net loss escapes to the surroundings where it is felt as heat” (Sciencenet, S.a.).

\textsuperscript{18} Approximately 2.45 billion years ago oxygen became a significant component of the earth’s atmosphere. “At roughly the same time (and for eons thereafter), oxidized iron began to appear in ancient soils and bands of iron were deposited on the seafloor, a product of reactions with oxygen in the seawater” (Sciencenet, S.a.).
transferred to the installation. In contrast to those artworks created in stone, marble or bronze, these cladded installations and artworks are not destined to last over time. Should there be a desire to preserve these works, they would have to be treated in the same way as fragile and brittle archaeological finds. For this reason I often refer to my installations as ‘indoor monuments’ that need to be protected from the onslaught of the exterior elements, as if they are metaphors for the inner lives of human beings.

I also regard rust as emblematic of a ‘fight’ or a battle against time. The uniform rusted brown appearance of many of my installations since 1998 became an important element within the visual language that I employ. Apart from other meanings, the rusted patina becomes a tool to ‘shift time’ as the objects on display seem old and ‘historic’, similar to archaeological finds. Many of the objects that are transformed through the addition of a rusted patina are in fact contemporary artifacts, such as television monitors as well as contemporary furniture. By “making [them] strange” (Perloff, 1996:11), the viewer is enticed to examine the objects closely, similar to being fascinated by an archaeological artifact. These objects are, however, presented as artworks and are meant to be perceived as such. The rusted appearance enables me to ‘freeze’ time\(^{19}\) and to accentuate a moment during their slow process of decay or decomposition. The viewer is forced to look at objects and concepts that are of recent or contemporary interest as if they are remnants from a previous era and this strategy (presenting the present as historic) might facilitate the possibility for reflection or by achieving or grasping of a new viewpoint.

Many of my artworks suggest elements of what could possibly be termed as Post-Pop Art where style is concerned, as I often make use of banal or mundane industrial products and objects also used by Pop artists. Pop Art reflects the prevalence of consumer culture as depicted in a tinned can of soup by Andy Warhol entitled, *Chicken noodle soup* (Fig. 51). Russel and Gablik (1969:11) remark on the ubiquitous aspect of

---

\(^{19}\)In contrast to my attempt to ‘freeze time’ I have since my student days been fascinated by the spatter technique of Jackson Pollock (Arnason, 1977:524) who, as it seemed to me, was able to ‘freeze speed’.
the subject matter used by Pop Artists “that are based upon real things which are part of everybody’s world…household objects, images from the cinema, images found in the mass media, food and clothing”. The desirability of commercial products and the energy displayed by popular culture are often presented in Pop Art where emphasis is placed on outward appearance. How ironic that the stress experienced by nomadic hunters in previous millennia in their pursuit of food, is substituted within the post-industrial era by frenzied shopping ventures amongst the mazes stacked with food in outsized malls. The rusted patina that is visible in many of the objects that I present in my installations indicates how the ‘glossy’ commercial aspect, with the accent on design and packaging of objects, is stripped away and how decay underneath the layer of veneer is exposed. This is achieved, ironically, through ‘repackaging’ the object by cladding it with rusted metal. The colourful but also often superficial energy of popular culture is substituted with a melancholic undertone, as if the ephemeral aspect of the energy is acknowledged. This is noticeable when Blik/Tin (Fig. 50) is compared to the tin in Warhol’s Chicken noodle soup (Fig. 51)
The idea of the apparent ‘stripping’ away of the outside layer is particularly evident in the large installation entitled The end (Figs. 98a, b, c, d and e) where the glamour of the cinema and Hollywood culture is referenced and where many banal objects such as popcorn boxes, cool drink tins, toys etc. are displayed. This installation will be discussed in depth in chapter four.

The rusted patina in the installations are achieved by cladding found objects in strips or patches of rusted metal or by constructing new artifacts with rusted metal, very often garnered from tin cans. To clad implies to cover or add an extra layer of material to an existing object. Cladding has been associated with preservation since ancient times, also as a symbolic act (Casson, 1966:76). In ancient Egypt, the cladding of a body in pure linen, fixed to the body with resin, was the last step in the process of mummification. The procedure of mummification was carried out as an act of the denial of death as the after-life meant a corporeal existence to an Egyptian (Casson, 1966:76). Cladding aided the preservation of the physical body and the belief that eternal life could be attained.

Fig. 52: Jade burial suit, 206BCE – 8CE, China, 4248 jade pieces connected by gold wire, (Atlasobscura, S.a. [Online]).
Jade burial suits made in ancient China (Fig. 52) were constructed as “armour for the afterlife to prevent mortal decay” (Atlasobscura, S.a.). These suits were made from precious everlasting materials, using silver and gold thread to attach thousands of plates crafted from jade. They were expensive and labour intensive to make, requiring approximately ten years of work by a skilled jade craftsman. Jade was believed to have preservative and protective qualities that would prevent the deterioration of soft tissue and deter bad spirits. Yet beneath these stone suits only crumbled skeletons remain (Atlasobscura, S.a.). Such a suit is reminiscent of the artwork entitled *For the love of God* by Damien Hirst (Fig. 21), as he also used precious materials (diamonds) to cover a cast human skull. The ancient suit however, was made to ward off decay in a very literal manner. This beautiful relic has lasted over time and might function as a *memento mori* to the onlooker; the suit eventually hid the decomposition and what was on the inside could only be imagined. The utmost care and extreme labour required to make this suit is indicative of an intense desire to prevent the end of physical existence at all costs.

![Golden rhinoceros of Mapungubwe, circa 1300, wooden carving clad with golden foil and nails. (Bruno, S.a. [Online].)](image-url)
An artifact that is of considerable importance within the cultural history of South Africa is the golden rhinoceros found at Mapungubwe in the Limpopo Province, described as “a defining symbol of precolonial South Africa…clearly a product of great workmanship” (Bruno, S.a.). The cladding technique was achieved by nailing gold foil with golden nails to the body of a carved wooden figure. Nothing is known of its intended function (Bruno, S.a.), but the use of gold leaf effectively transforms this humble object into an extremely precious and important article that is meant to last over time.

The artwork entitled *Nowhere to go* (Fig. 54), reveals detail of the cladding and construction techniques that I employ to create installations out of ordinary and recognisable objects, that imply human presence. Tins are cut open, flattened and positioned on the object that will be clad by this material. When clothes are covered, the patterns, pleats, seams, pockets, collars, etc. are replicated. The rings on some of the tins are used for textural effects whilst the rims at the edge of the tins are used to suggest seams and pleats. Occasionally pieces of clothing are unraveled and used like stencils to enable me to copy the initial pattern. Holes are made with a punch and wire is used to ‘sew’ the pieces together – a crude version of the needlework and patchwork carried out by my mother and grandmother that I watched with fascination as a child. Initially I used my father’s darts which I still had in my possession to make holes in the flattened tins but later I switched to a more sturdy punch. When furniture or other robust objects are clad, I use a hammer and nails and this activity seems to take on a more masculine character. Both these techniques (sewing and hammering) are applied in the ancient examples (Figs. 52 and 53) referred to above. The files and the folded map placed on the chair in the work *Nowhere to go* (Fig. 54), are examples of objects that have not been clad, but new artefacts crafted entirely of rusted metal, although the same techniques are often used to attach (or ‘sew’) strips of material.
Fig. 54: Nowhere to go, 2008, rusted metal and found objects, collection Shamwari Townhouse, Port Elizabeth, photograph by author.
Although I also use found fragments of rusted metal with interesting textures, colours and surfaces bearing imprints and traces of their own history, I often initiate the rusting process. The creation of a rusted patina is central to the installations, not only regarding the concept that is conveyed, but also the rituals involved to achieve the rusted effect. The tins are firstly scoured to remove protective layers and then sprayed with a mixture of water, salt and vinegar.20 Salt is strewn over the surfaces and this procedure is repeated daily until the desired effects are achieved. Apart from the connotation with cleansing rituals, water, as well as salt and vinegar are ingredients I associate with Biblical references21 that I was familiar with since childhood. These ingredients were used by my grandmothers to preserve food, amongst others, an activity that I often witnessed. In our household, salt water or vinegar was also used for medicinal purposes. During my father’s illness, I regularly washed his swollen feet with lukewarm water mixed with vinegar or salt and, during my mother’s last illness, I cooled her face with water. To this day I still associate the whiff of vinegar with my father’s illness. Throughout the years the rituals that I perform during the creation of the installations have acquired a certain meaning that is not necessarily obvious in the presentation of the completed work. I have come to regard the meditative side inherent to these rituals and the materials used in the final artwork, as of great importance.

In 2015 I took part in a group exhibition entitled The spiritual in the material, curated by Les Cohn.22 These ideas are corroborated in a statement in the accompanying catalogue: “The material selected by a contemporary artist and the various extraneous elements incorporated in a work convey and extend its meaning, as meaning can be embedded in the material itself” (Cohn, 2015:3).

An artist whose work has inspired me because of the personification of the spiritual and aesthetic potential through his use of material and craftsmanship, along with his chosen

---

20 When I prepare for large exhibitions, I rely on the aid of one or two assistants to assist with basic tasks.
21 Water is used during the baptism ritual. The disciples are compared to salt, with reference to its cleansing and preserving qualities (Matthew 5:13) (Holy Bible,1981:734), apart from many other references to salt in the Bible. Jesus is offered a drink of vinegar before he dies on the cross (Mark 15:36-37) (Holy Bible,1981:744).
subject matter, is the South African artist Jackson Hlungwani. In the work entitled *Altar of God* (Fig. 55) (Burnett, 1989:17) it is evident that Hlungwani used the raw qualities of wood, stone and rusted found pieces of metal for expressive purposes. Even though he used to carve his sculptures, selected surfaces of the original raw material have been left unaltered. He used and transformed the material to communicate directly with the viewer.

In the catalogue accompanying Hlungwani’s solo exhibition, Burnett (1989:4) cites psycho-analyst James Hillman, who states that “the image is always more complex than the concept”. The formulation of this complexity could only be approximated through language. It is precisely the emphasis on the tangibility and textural qualities, the raw material in the artwork, such as in the figure of Christ (Fig. 55), (forming part of the larger work entitled *Altar of God*), that contributes to the metaphysical meaning of the artwork. Hlungwani appeared to be able to perceive the potential of a piece of raw material as a vehicle to convey his inner vision. This instinct also directed him towards
achieving a balance between the extent to which the material had been manipulated and left in an unaltered state. When the cladding of a piece of clothing is complete, for example the jacket in the work Nowhere to go (Fig. 54), it does not resemble the flexible suppleness of textile, but rather appears two-dimensional, inflexible and flat. However, I achieve the folded and pleated effects by first draping an un-cladded item of clothing such as a shirt or jacket over a chair as an example and a guide. By donning a pair of industrial gloves, I need to use considerable force to shape the folds and draped effects to transform the inflexible metal into a three dimensional form resembling cloth. This struggle with a rigid, headless but humanlike shape has often evoked the feeling in me that I am fighting with myself, or that I am trying to resuscitate a lifeless form. During this process of shaping the folds and drapes the wire attachments often become unattached and I have to ‘mend’ the clothes after they have been bent into shape.

The next step is the coating with bitumen working this substance into the ‘seams’ and over the wire used to attach the strips of tin to soften the sharp joints. Before it dries, I scatter fine red coloured sand (dried and sifted soil from my garden) over the bitumen. The action of the scattering of sand is reminiscent of a burial ritual. At this stage the object is totally covered in sand and I have to use a soft brush to clean the artwork in the same manner that an archaeologist would cautiously brush away layers of dust on a found artifact, to uncover the surprising textures and craftwork hidden by the soil. By now I have accomplished a fairly uniform, textured surface, resembling the effects of gravity on draped or folded clothes. A selection of furniture, suitcases, clothing, etc. often form part of the installations and indicate human presence; these objects are also the basic physical remnants left behind when someone dies.

---

23 I have used bitumen since early on in my career, sometimes to cover surfaces (Fig. 43) or to attach collaged or found objects (Fig. 49). Bitumen (also known as asphalt or tar) is a black, oily, viscous material, a naturally occurring by-product of decomposed organic materials. It is waterproof and this natural material has been used by humans for a wide variety of tasks and tools for at least the past forty thousand years (Hirst: 2016: S.p.). There are many references to bitumen in the Bible: it is described as the material that was used to insulate Noah’s ark (Gen 6:14) as well as the crb of Moses (Ex 2:3) and to lay the baked bricks of the tower of Babel (Gen 11: 1-9) (Holy Bible, 1981: 48, 5 and 8), to mention a few.
Cladding techniques have also been used by other contemporary artists creating different and varying effects. Meret Oppenheim’s *Object* (Fig. 56), a fur clad cup is emblematical of the Surrealist movement (Arnason 1977:374). In an article published on my installations, Scheffer and Van der Merwe (2014: 77) cite Freud who used the term ‘uncanny’ to refer to an encounter where the familiar, for example, an object from the home, has unexpectedly been rendered alien (uncanny). Freud associates it with the return of the repressed, describing it as an “unresolved attempt to work through a trauma one would rather forget”. As such, an uncanny encounter produces anxiety. According to Scheffer and Van der Merwe (2014: 77) such objects “seem to have an objective existence, as actual objects, but in their illogical character…they also reference psychic space”. I use the rusted metal surfaces to express feelings, longings, memories and ideas, but as an artist I also acknowledge the fascination with and attraction to a certain material; the artist searches for an excuse to physically work with a material and in this manner many other layers of meaning are brought into the work in an instinctive way. The many new strategies used by the Surrealists to render the familiar strange, have opened new pathways and means of expression to artists who followed.

**Fig. 56: Meret Oppenheim, Object, 1967, fur covered cup, (Arnason 1977:374).**
Over the past two decades, I have had the opportunity to act as a mentor for adult mentally handicapped artists in Belgium. These stimulating encounters and experiences have deeply influenced my viewpoints concerning art and artmaking. Through these visits, I encountered the work of the renowned contemporary Belgian artist, Jan Fabre, whose creative intentions seem to resonate with mine, although his use of materials is unique to his creative world. He was influenced by the work of his great grandfather, Jean Henri Fabre, who was the renowned nineteenth century entomologist.

Jan Fabre's "oeuvre is steeped in notions of the human and animal body, of death and metamorphosis" (Lyssens, 2016:S.p.). He uses the iridescent wing casings of thousands of scarab beetles to clad or construct his installations. His works are described as "worldly reminders of death, memento mori" (Lyssens, 2016:S.p.) and he is quoted as saying:

We have an internal skeleton, while the scarab’s skeleton is external. [My] works were about creating a new skin, a new armour, a kind of protection. My universe is devoid of cynicism, it articulates hope and the defence of the vulnerable…I'm sort of a servant of beauty (Lyssens, 2016:S.p.).
The art of Anselm Kiefer has been a source of fascination and inspiration to me and I would like to refer to his use of materials in this section, although there are many other facets of his work that draw me to him. His world and his work evoke memory and history and he has a deftness to imbue materials with depth of meaning. His installations have a presence that is difficult to ignore, as if “a phantom presence of the past suddenly breaks into and immobilises the present” (Lauterwein, 2007:15). As a German citizen, this ‘reanimation’ of the past “has a dual value: the reference may be an act of respect, or it may be a summons to appear before the court of history” (Lauterwein, 2007:15). The impact of Kiefer’s work on artists who have turned away from popular culture and attempt to grapple with the past and with identity has been felt since the 1980s. According to Rosenthal (1987:7), “modern man’s lack of a shared spiritual language and a common mythology does not lead Kiefer to the conclusion that art must be created for its own sake, but rather that such a language must be renewed or reinvented”. Kiefer has invented this language through the use of an array of evocative materials that seem to be transformed in his hands with the skill of an alchemist.
I have personally encountered Kiefer’s artwork entitled *Naglfar (Die Argonoten)* (Fig.59) (Anselm Kiefer, S.a.) in the SMAK⁴⁴ museum in Ghent and will briefly remark on his use of materials. The artwork consists of a stack of enormous books made of lead. On the book placed at the top a ship is positioned as if the viewer in his or her imagination might visualise these books on an even larger scale, in comparison to the ship. The books, lying on the bottom of the imagined sea, seem as if they carry the knowledge of the ages. Clipped human nails lie next to the ship, representing the crests of waves. Lead was used to convey the immensity and impenetrable mystery of the ages. The nails refer to an Icelandic saga⁴⁵ (Anselm Kiefer, S.a.) but the trauma and horror of the Holocaust is also evoked through this literal reference to the remnants of human bodies.

---

⁴⁴ Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent.
⁴⁵ *Naglfar* is mentioned in the Icelandic sagas and is described as a “ship of dead men’s nails, which is to bring Loki and the giants against the gods at Ragnarok” (Davidson, 1964: S.p.[Online]).
Through his exceptional use of materials, Kiefer has conveyed associations with the past as well as with contemporary history. Lead is a metal that carries weight and strength, in contrast to the sense of vulnerability that is important in my works. Lead is also toxic and it is as if, in these books, records have been kept of the wrongs that were done over many generations, but they might also refer to knowledge and wisdom. Kiefer has created a powerful poetic visual language.

The analogy of alchemy could be used to describe the artist’s transformation of banal material such as the lead in Fig. 59 or the rusted metal in my own installations into artworks that convey varied layered meanings. The alchemical process is an attempt to purify materials to distill a spiritual essence. Von Graevenitz (1991:95,96) writes that:

…alchemists equate processes occurring in nature with spiritual processes. It is specifically this synchronisation of spirit and nature which distinguishes them from science. Moreover, alchemists want to instigate natural and spiritual processes, to influence and to be influenced by them, as wisdom and purification – their highest aims – are not learnable.

In my artworks, I follow the natural processes evident in nature, for example the oxidation process of metal to form rust is an intrinsic part of the method, whereas the raw material is crafted and transformed through a process of labour. Thus, the artmaking process entails elements of physical and spiritual labour to achieve the transformation of banal or mundane matter to enable the communication of meaning. At the same time a process of transformation also occurs within the psyche of the artist. According to Schwartz-Salant (1995:2) “this outer or mundane work [of the alchemist] with materials was intimately linked to an inner or arcane work on the human personality…the alchemical fire is also the heat-producing quality of meditation and imagination”. This view echoes statements I have made in previous sections of this thesis regarding the transformative and reflective nature of the making process and the impact it has on the artist. The artist Joseph Beuys also referred to the relationship between the alchemical process and art. He believed that for the artist “the aim of the transformation was always the ‘spiritualisation of substance’ – which is comparable to the alchemical sublimation process” (Seegers, 2014: 208). The oeuvre of Joseph
Beuys “like alchemy, is based on the idea of transformation and progress, to which both inanimate matter and humankind are subject” (Seegers, 2014: 208). However, transformation of matter also entails the process of decay.

In contrast to the tactile qualities inherent in materials such as rusted metal and bitumen, I frequently make use of digital media as part of my installations. The availability of electrical sockets and the ‘wiring’ of my artworks are important considerations when the works are installed. My father was an electrician who built substations for the South African Railways. He repaired electrical components and in his spare time and during his illness also lights, radios, sound equipment, watches, etc. whilst recovering at home. He enjoyed fashioning new gadgets from remnants of broken equipment and apart from his knowledge of electricity, he was also a skilled metal worker who used soldering and brazing tools and techniques. As a child I watched him at work and I have also incorporated many of his tools as found objects in my artworks. The coating of bitumen during my work process has often reminded me of the way my father soldered metal. In my installations elements such as lighting, sound, as well as electronic equipment such as data projectors, digital monitors, DVD players, microphones and security cameras often form an integral part of the works.

Although the technological equipment and screens seemingly contrast with the relics of a mechanical era (the rusted metal) which forms the body of many installations, I consider the current technology used in the installations as another ‘layer of archaeology’, or physical ‘archiving’ of what is available within the contemporary context, that will eventually recede and become part of history. The electronic equipment in the installations are very often incorporated to enable the display of digital footage. Most of these screens display films of unassuming repetitive actions in black and white and not narrations or the juxtapositioning of disparate images.

The viewer does not need to look at the screen for more than a few seconds to understand the image. The rhythmic repetition of the image displayed along with sound
in selected works, might create a meditative effect. I have previously referred to Freud’s view of repetitive action as an expression of the perception that ‘life is stuck’ (Rexer, 2006:62). I consider the repetitive actions as metaphors for or references to the very marked repetitive characteristics of life; to the various actions carried out by everyone on a daily basis and over a lifetime. These actions also refer to events repeated by each generation which seem to be part of human nature. These actions might be meaningless and even destructive, or meaningful, sustaining life. The repetitive actions and sounds might seem like a stammering way of communicating, similar to SOS signals or might convey the necessity of repeating messages or transmitting these to others or to next generations. These repetitive actions could also be viewed as ‘comments’, as if someone is simply trying to describe what is ‘stumbled upon’ indicating some discovery. Many of the filmed images are footage of very ordinary and mundane actions, such as scrubbing a pot (Fig. 18a), rinsing a razor (Fig. 39), applying lipstick (Fig. 15) or water merely dripping in a basin in Water and rust (Fig. 101). Others refer to violence (the metal planes displayed in Killing time (Fig. 34)) or the hand firing a pistol in Guests (Fig. 61). These actions are accessible or recognisable to any viewer and might add to a heightened sense of universal meaning I intend to achieve. The contemporary viewer might also be more familiar with images displayed on a screen than an encounter with an artwork within a gallery space.

There is a marked contrast between the physical quality of the rusted metal used in the installation and the more ‘illusional’ aspect of the image displayed on the screen as the screen shot is a representation of what was originally filmed, and therefore a ‘second hand’ experience vis-à-vis the viewer viewing the film. Although the images on the screen display mundane rituals, their ‘removal’ from actual, tangible experience and the fact that they are presented in black and white on a flickering screen, seem to me to impart an ephemeral, almost spiritual quality. The cold or neutral colour of the screen also contrasts sharply with the rusted brown metal. Through the use of technology humans have attained abilities that seem astounding and miraculous, almost godlike. I associate technology with the quest or desire to transcend or extend what the
human body is capable of, attempting (amongst others) to gain knowledge of the origins of the universe and of the mysteries and of the unknown. The more advanced the technology, the more we are able to learn about the past and perhaps the future, about the depths of the universe and also the depths of the oceans and the smallest particles. In sharp contrast to the more mundane earthly existence, as represented by the textural and three-dimensional, ordinary objects and structures displayed in my installations, this interest in the unknown and the mysterious has been a recurring theme as revealed throughout this thesis. Although the images on the screen might seem banal, their ephemeral, intangible qualities are important to me.

Apart from the digital screens built into the installations, I frequently also use projections via a data projector, as displayed in Baggage arrival (Fig. 96) and Biegbak/Confessional (Fig 18). In Red carpet/Rooi tapyt (Fig. 88) the actual image of the viewer of the artwork, walking on the carpet, is projected via a security camera and his or her voice is picked up over a microphone. Other devices such as the heater and fan in It’s cold outside (Fig. 15) or baby powder applied in Rooi tapyt/Red carpet (Fig. 88) are also occasionally incorporated to engage other senses apart from sight. I introduced a digital screen with found filmed footage for the first time in the work entitled Bagged baggage (1998) which was discussed in section 3.2.5 (Fig. 45). Here I wanted to underline the notion of labour and subordination and to refer to the past, and have since regularly used filmed footage in my artworks.

In 1999, I was awarded first prize at the national Sasol Scifest art and science competition that took place in Grahamstown, sponsored by the French embassy (enabling my first visit to Europe at the age of forty one). I entered two works namely 6 pm (Fig. 32) and Artifacts (Figs. 60a and b). In the installation Artifacts the presentation of the screen image (this was the second time I incorporated such an image) reveals a distinct cynical undertone.
In this work a computer, complete with a mouse and keyboard is clad with rusted metal but remains completely functional. The animated image of a computer game, “Pinball”,
displaying a virtual little ball continuously nudged in different directions by the player, along with audible sound effects, is visible on the screen, behind metal gauze. The title, Artifacts, reveals references to archaeology whereas the computer in this work might be viewed as an advanced tool, which will also, as years pass, be displayed in a museum. The central image on the screen displays a powerfully built male action figure in blue along with the words SUPER ANDROID. In this work, similar concepts present in artworks such as Killer (Fig. 38) and Killing time (Fig. 34), specifically the notions of ‘war games’ performed by the powerful in their secure and sheltered offices, are reiterated.

The ‘paper’ in Killing time is substituted for a computer, a reference to the sophisticated technology employed within contemporary warfare. Footage of war actions are sold to news agencies and the distinction between reality and fiction (actual events and entertainment) becomes blurred as all the live action is presented for consumption and viewed on a digital screen. The bright primary colours of the screen image underline the frivolous aspect of power games that are prevalent in popular culture. The colours seem to enhance the ‘playful’ and diminish the violence aspects of the game and thereby cause a distorted perception regarding actual war. The references to violence, power and war are accentuated by the incorporation of the work Bosklere (Fig. 48), discussed in section 3.2.5, as part of the installation Artifacts (Figs. 60a and 60b). The rusted metal is a tool used to create a sense of distance, to enable one to view contemporary events as if they are history or an historical event, enforcing contemplation regarding the present. The technological components, as well as the version of the computer game displayed in this installation are eighteen years old as this thesis is being researched and written and have become historical relics. The use of screen images are an important creative component to me because of the visual and conceptual contrasts they create in the installations.
A work in which the screen images add a radical new meaning to the installation is demonstrated in *Gaste/Guests*, created in 2000 (Figs. 61 a, b, c and d) and is also one of the early examples in which digital screens with filmed footage is used. The artwork involves a dining table with four chairs (the actual furniture of the household in
which I grew up) covered with rusted metal. The table has been laid with rusted objects and covered with a ‘net’ (metal gauze). Instead of ‘place mats’, four digital screens representing the image of a hand firing a pistol at regular intervals, with audible sound, are set into the surface of the table. On the four chairs objects are placed such as a briefcase with a tie hanging over the back of the chair, a handbag and a scarf, a bouquet of flowers and a jacket, representing the ‘guests’ or different personas. The artwork comments on the intrusion of the outside world into this intimate domestic sphere. The ‘outside world’ might be represented by the omnipresence of the television sets in our homes, whether we live in shacks or in luxury, but might also be a reference to the unexpected and uninvited ‘guests’ in the form of violent armed invasion of our homes – a phenomenon with which all South Africans are familiar. The screen shot might also suggest the prevalence of domestic violence. The South African artist, Robert Hodgins, reacted to this work, amongst others, regarding the content as well as the use of digital media, in a short essay published in the catalogue Unknown (Hodgins, 2005:28):

What sharpens this [the objects covered with rusted metal], and sharpens it beyond a kind of historicity, is the modest, even sly or shy, presence of the black and white videos, which seldom go beyond narrative further than repetition. Set into the table with the tie on-chair was co-installed a small video of a pistol repetitively fired: no target, no face behind the gun. But an extraordinary vital reminder of how such places, times, objects can generate or repress violences of huge monotony. And in the general brown drabness of a typical van der Merwe installation, often these small videos have the brightness of an eye, interrogating, reminding, demanding.

According to Hoet et al. (1999:209), whereas video was originally used by conceptual artists to record their performances, it later developed into a medium used by performance artists such as Dennis Oppenheim and Bruce Naumann (both conspicuous in the 1960s and 1970s):

…used to incorporate the direct, painful confrontation with physical human conditions as seen in their early performances into their objects and installations. However, the blurring of the borders between public and private nature as a consequence of the digital age gradually shifted artists’ attentions from themselves to their surroundings (Hoet et al., 1999:209).
My incorporation of digital screens into installations ensued without my specific knowledge of this practice by earlier conceptual artists whom were at the forefront at the beginning of my career as fine artist (although I am familiar with the work of prominent digital artists such as Minette Varí and Bill Viola). However, I encountered several examples of this strategy being used by other artists during my research for this thesis. In the work entitled *Battered tears* (Fig. 62) Oppenheim represents the “dusky area between sadness and physical aggression” (Hoet et al. 1999:209) through the representation of two enormous punch-balls, reminiscent of tear shapes, as one would come across in a boxing gymnasium. On two television screens the image of a person, “as if hypnotised, keeps on walking on a moving belt with boxing gloves on his elbows”. Hoet et al. (1999:209) states that in such a work, the direct, painful “confrontation with physical human conditions as seen in their [Oppenheim and Naumann’s] early performances” is incorporated into their objects and installations. In this work there also
seems to be an acknowledgement of trauma but accompanied with a cynical attitude. Dennis Oppenheim (Hoet et al., 1999:209) states that:

I prefer to make work that deals with injustice, a troubled area, some negative human condition. I’ve never been interested in adding to the world of beauty, reinforcing the good, the blessed, the harmonious.

The black and white images on the screen are modest and repetitive and in sharp contrast with the physical presence and dominating forms of the punch-balls. The digital image in this work supports the crafted structures of the installation in a similar manner that I employ this strategy in my work.

I have used materials in a conceptual manner throughout my career and in this thesis I introduced and discussed the use of found objects, rusted metal and digital screens that have been prominent in my installations over the past two decades. However, during this period, I have also, with the purpose in mind to create and convey a specific idea, occasionally made use of other materials. In the installation *Koeëlwas/Bullet proof jacket* (Figs. 63a, b, c and d), plastic and wax are used along with a black and white television monitor positioned on a stand. The Afrikaans title, *Koeëlwas*, (literally translated as bullet wax), is a play on the Afrikaans word *koeëlvas*, which means bullet proof. The television is covered with a ‘bullet proof jacket’ made of plastic and filled with wax bullets. The wax bullets were cast from a variety of molds made from real bullets. Other objects forming part of the installation are made of plastic all filled with wax bullets and displayed on the floor in front of the television stand: two pieces of children’s clothing and two small plastic cases reminiscent of crayon holders (as if children were playing on the floor). Watching images on a screen is a universal activity, where we are involved (amongst other diversions) in a second hand version of current affairs, wars, crime and violence. We experience these images in the safe environment of our living rooms, without any bullets exiting the screen to enter real space. The screen functions as a bullet proof vest, preventing the bullets from causing real physical harm, whilst we could still share in the actual events.
Nevertheless, the soft and seemingly harmless wax bullets have an effect on a psychological level and leave scars, especially from the viewpoint of a child. Our experience of reality is diffused and fragmented, veering between real and virtual, banal and spectacular, meaningful and disturbing and could change within a day, or in an hour. Perhaps future generations would be able to fully evaluate the psychological effects of the electronic and digital revolutions on the present generation. The white trimming of the children’s clothes suggest the chalk markings used by the police to indicate the position of corpses at a crime scene and the plastic containers seem like forensic bags in which ‘evidence’ is sealed off. The wax bullets are reminiscent of wax crayons, accentuating the experience and the world of children. On the television screen the image of a hand repeatedly firing shots from a pistol is visible. A plastic video case filled with wax bullets, is lit from behind, emphasising the transparent qualities of the wax and the plastic. The plastic screens ‘sealing off’ or ‘hiding’ this crime scene are transparent; our exposure to violence is so apparent in our daily lives and in our homes, but we seem to have become accustomed to the underlying realities and consequences and have been reduced to mere ‘consumers’ of images. The emotional ‘distance’, almost a clinical gaze, is suggested by the use of plastic; perhaps a way of ‘protecting’ ourselves from the violence visible on the screen.

![Image of a display featuring a video monitor and plastic screens with the text: Fig. 63a: Koeëlwas/Bullet proof jacket, 2003, wax, plastic, television monitor, video machine and light box, collection Oliewenhuis Art Museum, photograph by author.](image-url)
In the work entitled *Cleaning instructions* (Figs. 64a, b, c and d), an ironic juxtaposing of the actions such as carefully cleaning a gun and cleaning a wound is conveyed. A rusted ammunition trunk is placed on a white hospital bedside trolley. On its one side a small digital monitor is visible on which hands are displayed, ritually busy cleaning a
Figs. 64a, 64b and 64c: Cleaning instructions, 2003 (and details), found objects, television monitor and video machine, collection Oliwenhuis Art Museum, photographs by author.
gun. On the inside of the opened drawer of the trolley, a gun cleaning kit fits neatly next to a first aid kit, both still packaged and unopened. On the rail of the trolley hangs a clean white towel and under the trolley a basin is placed full of used and discarded 2-by-4 pieces of cloth, usually used when cleaning a gun. Next to the bedside trolley on the floor is an ammunition case that has been transformed into a white first aid trunk. Accent is placed on the cautious ritual of cleaning a gun, which, becomes a daily routine, carried out with clinical precision especially during wartime. This artwork could also be viewed as a reaction to the prevalence of violent crime, reported daily in the media. In this work the found objects were very deliberately chosen and assembled to support the concept.

Fig. 64d: Cleaning instructions, 2003 (details), found objects, television monitor and video machine, collection Oliewenhuis Art Museum, photograph by author.
The work entitled *Oogtoets/Eye Test* (Fig. 65) represents an intimate installation consisting of a series in which I modified spectacles taken from my collection of discarded glasses. This artwork was my contribution as response to an invitation by Ian Marley and Franci Greyling from the University of North-West, to participate in a collaborative project with the title *Creative creatures*, which formed part of the Aardklop National Arts Festival in 2007. Each pair of spectacles represents, metaphorically, a different way of looking, seeing and perceiving. The different shapes of the glasses emphasise the limitations and/or enhancements achieved when perception is shaped by a specific viewpoint. The delicate nature of the work as well as the humorous element contrast with the larger installations. The viewer is ‘invited’ to enter the game by ‘choosing’ which pair of glasses fits.

![Image of Oogtoets/Eye Test](image)

*Fig. 65: Oogtoets/Eye Test, 2007, Perspex and found material, collection MAP, photograph by*
Fig. 66: Clairvoyant/Heldersiende (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.

Fig. 67: Double vision/Dubbelvisie (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.

Fig. 68: Tunnel vision/Tonnelvisie (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.

Fig. 69: Sharpsighted/Skerpsiende (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.

Fig. 70: Farsighted/Versiende (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.

Fig. 71: Shortsighted/Kortsigtig (detail Oogtoets/Eye Test), photograph by Carla Crafford.
This discussion of materials and techniques will be concluded by referring to the
technique of scorching, a technique that I had been experimenting with ever since my
third year at art school (1979), as well as in later work. I have mentioned the scorch
marks made with a domestic iron in the work entitled The Star (Fig. 5) in section 3.1.
and referred to the documents burnt to ashes in the work known as Finale
Inspeksie/Final inspection (Fig. 47). During this early period of stylistic development,
whilst an art student, I used heat to produce burnt marks on canvas (Fig. 75) in an effort to create different tonal values. Whilst busy executing these works, I remembered the manner in which cattle are branded through scorching with a hot iron. The marks displayed in Fig. 75 were made on the inside of a circular shape reminiscent of the globe of the earth, as if the surface of the earth has been scorched. The metaphor of destruction or cataclysm by fire returns once again in recent work.

![Fig. 75: Brandmerke nommer 3/Scorch marks number 3, 1979, scorched marks on canvas, collection the artist, photograph by author.](image)

Using an iron to burn textile seems like a crass transgression. However, many of the actions that I carry out during the artmaking process are precisely those actions I am wary of in everyday life, to a point reminiscent of a phobia. I will, for instance, never light a candle in the house and I am immediately put on edge when someone handles a knife
or a pair of scissors in my presence; ironically, also when someone else uses a tin opener. Nevertheless, I am simultaneously fascinated by and terrified of the power of fire and acutely remember the images of a house in our neighbourhood burning to the ground when I was a child. This event occurred during our weekly morning walk to Sunday school; everything was tranquil, but on the way back we were surprised by the dramatic event of this house ablaze. Conflagration seems to me the ultimate destructive force, but when making art, I ‘allow’ myself to play with fire. When material burns to ashes, it appears as an accelerated version of the process of slow death that is such a marked theme in much of my work. In my most recent installations, I have used fire and a blow torch to produce the effects brought on by burning. These larger installations will be the focus of discussion in chapter five.

The Chinese installation artist Cai Guo Qiang has commanded considerable attention internationally in recent years, especially because of his use of unconventional materials, fresh subject matter and strategies of mark making, such as the use of gunpowder and fireworks, amongst others. Not only does his work express his heritage, memories, and cultural identity (fireworks are part of traditional festivities in China) but he also comments on current global issues (Wedell-Wedellsborg, 2010: S.p.). His work entitled Vortex (Fig. 76) was performed in public in Berlin, by igniting gunpowder on a
large paper placed on the ground, covered with stenciled images of wolves. The burnt marks created the effects of a smoky charcoal drawing on paper, whilst the energy and traces of the explosions remain present, almost frozen. According to the artist he is fascinated by “the contradictory powers of violence and beauty…destruction, glory, and heroism”, also specifically pertinent in the history of Berlin (Cai Guo Qiang, S.a.a [Online]). The image of wolves are often used metaphorically in his work and might suggest the pack mentality prevalent within consumer culture (Wedell-Wedellsborg, 2010: S.p), or might be a suggestion that the wild nature innate in humans, other creatures and the environment are encroached upon or are being destroyed. The completed work is presented against the wall of a gallery space (Cai Guo Qiang, S.a.b [Online]) and the immense scale contributes to its visual impact. Apart from his unique artmaking process, I applaud the skill with which this artist expresses a particular cultural identity, whilst at the same time conveying meaning with a contemporary universal relevance as well as poetic mystery.

In this section I provided an overview of the materials and techniques that I employ and have demonstrated that the choices made regarding these features of my work are deliberate and integral to the meaning that I try to convey, although elements of chance and instinct are also vital to the working process. In the next section I will be discussing the importance of the specific strategies of presentation that persist in my work.
3.4 Presentation

My first solo exhibition in 1998,\textsuperscript{26} entitled \textit{Final Inspection}, could be viewed as a transitional point, not only with regard to the use of materials, but also to the strategies of presentation. Whilst creating individual works, I still dabbled in the sensibility of a ‘mixed media’ artist. In some of the works, I used found objects as the foundation on which to work such as the discarded post boxes in the work entitled \textit{Letters from home} (1997), or my grandfather’s toolbox as displayed in \textit{Stargazer} (1997). These works were presented, removed from the wall, ‘in space’ on custom made stands or hung from the ceiling. Raw material (such as ash displayed in the work \textit{Final inspection}\textsuperscript{27} (Fig. 47)) was introduced and presented on the floor as in many other works.

These artworks could not be classified as either painting or sculpture; the term \textit{assemblage} is perhaps the closest and more apt. According to Hoffman (1989:5) the contemporary use of the term \textit{assemblage} refers to the bringing together or assembling of disparate sections (and objects) which include two- and three-dimensional forms or a combination of both. I worked on this body of work for five years with the final presentation being very important to me. The venue, a cavernous empty space in what was then called the African Window Museum in Pretoria, suited me well, due its size, the possibility to control the lighting (as the venue had no windows) and the industrial, neutral ambience it radiated because of the high ceilings and cement floor. The building also carried many traces of the past, as it housed The South African Mint in the pre-democratic era.

\textsuperscript{26} This exhibition, held at the then African Window Museum (now renamed the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History) in Pretoria, formed the practical component of my M. Tech. degree, which was awarded in 1999. This museum collection is housed in the building that formerly (until 1991) was the site of the South African Mint (History of the South African Mint:S.a.). In 1998 large industrial-like spaces in the building were made available for private exhibitions.

\textsuperscript{27} The exhibition as a whole derived its name from this artwork, also entitled \textit{Final Inspection} (Fig. 47).
The layout and lighting of these works were planned with the utmost care. The individual works were bound together by a central conceptual motif, namely that of a soldier or more broadly explained, that of the struggle between personal and official identity. Some of the works alluded to other aspects of a young man’s life as displayed in *Cocktails with Eve* (1997), *Sagte landing/Soft landing* (Fig. 30) and *6pm* (Fig. 32).

The overall title of the exhibition namely *Final Inspection*, a term familiar to a soldier in training, suggests a transition as if an opportunity is provided to look back and contemplate. The individual works, where content was concerned, encompassed experiences and viewpoints from my personal history (before and after the democratic transition in 1994), although there were also distinct references to the socio-political context of my life.
Owing to the coinciding unifying theme as well as the manner in which it was presented, I consider this entire body of work as my first large installation. As is evident in the photograph illustrating the final body of work, (Fig. 77), the walls were invisible in the dark and a space was demarcated by the layout of the individual works as well as by the lighting, producing strong contrasts between light and shadow. The titles of the works were stencilled onto the cement floor and the visitor was enticed to enter the demarcated space and experience the works in a certain order, suggesting a narrative, a journey or a slow march. I kept the notion of an army parade ground or the army barracks in mind during the layout. The viewer entered a dark space before encountering the exhibition as spotlights were carefully positioned, underlining the suggestion that my history and the context of my life was being placed ‘under interrogation’. The almost tomb-like, isolated exhibition space suggested an atmosphere similar to visiting a museum or monument.

Four three-dimensional artworks were placed in the centre of the delimited space. These were the last four works I created to compliment this body of work and they were produced after a period of a few weeks during which my mother took ill and eventually passed away. When I resumed my work for this exhibition, not only did my work process change (as discussed in the previous section), but also the manner in which I conceived and presented an artwork. My visual language evolved and progressed, as I became aware of the concept and strategy of installation. Not only could each of these individual artworks be viewed as installation artworks, but also the four combined as a set of works. When the exhibition took place in 1998, the ‘genre’ of installation art was emerging as a dominant strategy:

The final decade of the 20th century saw the passage of Installation art from a relatively marginal art practice to the establishment of its current role in contemporary art…Earlier attempts to define Installation art by medium alone failed because it is in the nature of the practice itself to challenge its own boundaries. This questioning constitutes a discourse which investigates the relationships between the artist and the audience. Installation is therefore defined by this process, something that has led artists to work with materials and methodologies not traditionally associated with the visual arts (De Oliveira, et al., 2003:13, 14).
Fig. 78: Soldier’s bed, 1998, rusted metal and found objects, collection Memórias íntimas marcas, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.

Fig. 79: Ironing board, 1998, rusted metal and found objects, collection Memórias íntimas marcas, photograph by Christiaan Kotze.
To me the difference in the presentation of these works lay in the manner in which space, and therefore the relationship between the viewer and the artwork was changed. As the viewer moved amongst these works, he or she became an accomplice and not an observer. De Oliveira (2003:15) cites Kabakov who sees installation “as a genre entirely directed towards the viewer” and that “in generating the work, the artist instils a sense of familiarity in the viewer, directing them to their own everyday experience”.

The work entitled *Ironing board* (Fig. 79), was created first with the other three works in this series known as *Soldier’s bed* (Fig. 78), *Clothes horse* (Fig. 80) and *Chair and jacket* (Fig. 81). The rusted soldier’s bed refers to that specific time in my life that had come to an end, but could also be viewed as a monument to all those soldiers or
‘participants in life’ who do not return or whose lives have been interrupted. The importance of the image of an ironing board has already been discussed, referring to domestic activities and my father’s passing. In this instance, however, it might also allude to the personal life of a soldier, who, not only has to take care of his/her own belongings, but also his/her own physical survival whilst keeping the core of a personal identity alive, nurturing a private inner life. These works mark a transition within my working process and choice of materials, but they also suggest an evolving of identity, from a militarised persona to a civilian one. In the work entitled *Chair and jacket* (Fig. 81), my personal jacket (a piece of ‘civilian clothing’) is ‘preserved’ in rusted metal and placed in such a manner as if I was looking back, conducting a ‘final inspection’ of the past.

This exhibition was visited by the contemporary Angolan artist, Fernando Alvím, presently residing in Belgium and he acquired these last four works (Figs. 78, 79, 80 and 81) to form part of an international collaborative project, entitled *Memórias intimas marcas* (intimate traces of the past) (Fernando Alvím:S.a.). This exhibition travelled to Antwerp and Lisbon after it was successfully exhibited on two occasions in South Africa (1997 and 1998), evolving each time it was exhibited as new work by more artists were added. The project consisted of works contributed by South African, Cuban and Angolan artists (representing former opponents fighting each other during the border war) with the intention to reflect on our common history and to facilitate the possibility of healing the scars of the past, through artistic collaboration. The inclusion of my work afforded the opportunity to introduce my work to an international audience for the first time and I attended the opening of the show in the MUHKA museum in Antwerp in February 2000 (Muhka:S.a.). In the MUHKA museum the works *Soldier’s bed, Clothes horse* and *Chair and jacket*, were displayed inside the crates (Fig. 82) constructed to transport them to Europe. This strategy enhanced the idea of the works being viewed as ‘archaeological relics’ or ‘evidence’ of the past.

---

28 The South African Border War, also known as the Angolan Bush War, was a protracted armed conflict between South Africa’s forces and those that fought for the independence of Namibia and Angola. It commenced in 1966 and ended in 1989 (Border war:S.a.).
29 Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (Muhka:S.a.).
My training as a conceptual artist prepared the way for an organic transition to working as an installation artist. I enjoy the wide-ranging possibilities offered by this approach and feel at home when working in an assigned space. Rosenthal (2003:25) states that:

…in the contemporary period, the multivalent character of installation art has yet to be fully grasped. First and foremost, it must be understood and recognised as a medium, however elastic in its material definition, offering the broadest possibilities for investigation and expression…The exalted status of art is undercut by the quotidian-type experience – with its sights, smells and generally ephemeral character – that is central to installation.

These remarks reveal many of the intellectual and creative intentions that are important to me, which I have discussed in previous sections. Although the ordinariness (the quotidian aspect) and recognisability of what I offer in my installations are very significant, especially as they contribute to the accessibility to the work from the point of view of the viewer, the transformation of these objects, where they are made ‘strange’, are equally important. The specific choice of subject matter, strategies of transformation and presentation are the crucial elements comprising a personal visual language that I have developed. Rosenthal (2003:28), in an attempt to simplify the “bewildering” diversity of installation art, proposed a “taxonomy with four poles to the approach” to classify different styles or concepts encompassing installation art. It might be a worthwhile exercise to try and situate my approach within these four “poles” as such an
attempt would offer a context to my work and might lead to new insights. By way of introduction, however, before focussing on recent work, I shall briefly discuss personal experiences as well as experiments within early works where I perceive the early beginnings of what would be made visible in later larger installations, especially concerning presentation.

My earliest memories are of myself in a playpen. As we lived close to the railway tracks and busy roads in Ladysmith, Natal, I was often confined to a playpen, but was always aware of my mother’s domestic chores and the frequent passing of the trains. I also recall an instance of wonder and terror that I felt at the mysterious appearance of a grasshopper on the railing of the playpen, which is stuck in my memory. I have previously remarked on my impulse to demarcate my installations in the shape of rectangles or squares. Perhaps some link could be made to this early experience of a fixed space, especially as I have realised over the years that I am consciously affected by an awareness and associations with specific spaces. The memory of the playpen, logged in my subconscious led to an earlier painting (Fig. 83) in which such a scene is depicted. The emphasis on the baby’s cry echoed by the rippling wave-like shape of the corrugated iron wall in the background, convey anguish and discomfort and is
reminiscent of Munch’s painting, *The Scream* (Arnason, 1977:164). The playpen and the wall reflect early versions that would develop into boundaries in many later installations such as the curtain in *It’s cold outside* (Fig. 15), the barbed wire in *Wag/Wating* (Fig. 21) and *Eclipse* (Fig. 102), the cubicle in *Biegbak/Confessional* (Fig. 18) and the screens in *Kispak/Sunday suit* (Fig. 39) and *Cleaning instructions* (Fig. 64), to name a few examples where these boundaries are present.

In times of crises, one’s senses are heightened. I associate the scent of an apricot tree with the scene of my father’s first heart attack and recall vivid memories of the cramped space inside the ambulance as well as the odours, colours and specific aura of the hospital, where we would spend much time during the following years, owing to my father’s repeated heart attacks. My childhood was overshadowed by anxiety surrounding my father’s illness. The sense of waiting and anticipation was overwhelming and my father’s absence during the long periods spent in hospital seriously affected my young life. Other influential spaces that made impressions on me as a youngster due to specific associations and tone were graveyards, the battlegrounds of the Anglo-Boer war surrounding Ladysmith, the railway yard and the army base (5SAI, an infantry camp). My memories of the Hindu and Muslim communities close to our home are vivid as my imagination was ignited by the architecture (the mosque was in view from our home) and the cultural diversities I perceived. Our weekly visits to the stalls and shops of the Indian vendors where my father had many friends and where we did our shopping and paid our rent (we rented a house, the one visible in Fig. 84, from an Indian owner), were later viewed in a different light, due to the stark contrast, awareness of hierarchy, power structures and the restrictions that awaited me in the army when I was a young man. In the 1980s, I worked as a props maker and décor painter in the State Theatre in Pretoria, on sets for drama, ballet and opera productions. This experience informed my sensibilities regarding the ‘dressing’ or presentation of a space by using lighting, textures, forms, shapes and arrangement to create atmosphere and meaning.
At art school my creative and artistic attitude was one of experimentation. I have previously discussed works such as Zip painting (Fig. 1), Galaxy (Fig. 11) and Skildery vir ‘n pendeltuig/Painting for a space shuttle (Fig. 3) in section 3.1. These works are sound examples of early works where the viewer is lured to interact with the artwork, thus subverting the convention of ‘not touching’. The artworks are precursors to installation art as the distance between the viewer and the artwork is removed with the viewer ‘experiencing’ the artwork as a participant. Rosenthal, writing about installation art, (2003:27) regards this:

…unframed form of art sharing the space of the viewer and being as authentic as any other space in the viewer’s experience [as]…a pinnacle in art’s evolution toward the accurate depiction of space, time and the world. Cohabiting with the environment, installation thereby can be life in some great impersonation. Through this physical convergence and the use of commonplace materials, it can, also, potentially comment on the human condition in a way that is profoundly effective because it is replete with the substance of life. Moreover, by engaging the surrounding space in this intimate fashion, an installation can speak to and about that specific space, to ponder its physical and theoretical being – its identity.

Many of my earlier works demonstrate an attempt to invite the viewer to ‘share’ the space of the artwork and this aspect, as well as other features mentioned in the citation,
developed into crucial strategies and effects in my later installations. In 1986, I exhibited a body of work as the practical component of a Higher Diploma in Fine Art, entitled *Game as art*, which included some of these interactive works (Van der Merwe, 1986:43, 44). I would like to refer to two more examples which formed part of this series. In the work entitled *Pick-up-sticks* (Fig. 85) the viewer could participate and turn a square mounted on a swivel and thereby use chance to ‘create’ the arrangement of the coloured sticks that fell into random positions as the square was turned. The collaged newspaper linked the game to a socio-political context, insinuating that the disempowered are ‘pawns’ in the hands of the powerful. Another work, entitled *Ludo* (Fig. 86), could be connected to those artworks in which the concept of seemingly innocent games, concealing an underlying cynicism towards ‘power games’, are conveyed – a recurring theme as can be seen in works such as *Killing time* (Fig. 34), *Killer* (Fig. 38) and *Artifacts* (Fig. 60).
Ludo (Fig. 86) is not an interactive work, but the impulse to demarcate space is very noticeable. The work was created in 1986 (as was Pick-up-sticks, Fig. 85), when resistance against the political situation in the country reached new and violent levels. The work could be read as a cynical comment on the strategies of politicians to win the race regarding physical space or territory, implied by the map of South Africa visible under the superimposed shapes of the game – suggesting four participants represented by different colours, racing to reach the central ‘home’ square. The use of rectangular shapes in this work is significant, as discussed previously. The artwork was also influenced by the fact that I was an employee at the South African Bureau of Heraldry at that stage, where I had to paint coats of arms with gouache as medium. This required a disciplined application of flat primary colours. It should be noted here that the fields on the shield of a coat of arms are also based on the demarcation of flat shapes and motifs and that references to medieval war practices are an important feature of the traditions of heraldry.

Contrary to the depiction of these flat shapes and to the emphasis on conceptual experimentation, I created a series of paintings in the early 1990s, before I commenced working on the body of work for my M. Tech. solo exhibition. In these paintings the creation of the illusion of space on a flat surface (perhaps stimulated by my experience as a theatrical décor painter) is evident, also visible in the work entitled Opwasbak/Sink (Fig. 17). As mentioned previously, my training at art school included a course emphasising the acquisition of painterly skills. In the work known as Erfgoed (Fig. 87), the placing of personal household objects and furniture in ordinary rooms such as a bathroom, bedroom or lounge is significant, as items and spaces that would later be rendered through installation, are portrayed on a flat surface, creating the illusion of space. These various spaces are depicted on the inside of rectangular outlines. Other motifs recurring in later installations are the television set, the shirt draped over an ironing board, references to mundane everyday rituals and the effort to ‘shed light’ on these scenes or suggest symbolic meaning, through the accent on light fittings in three of these ‘spaces’. The trophies on the central chest of drawers are those that my father
won at darts. They were later (in 2003), filmed for the installation *Showcase* (Fig. 29) and afterwards treated with rust before being displayed inside the vitrine. My preoccupation with specific subject matter, ranging from the intimate to the private, to references regarding a socio-political context (inside versus outside), remained constant whilst I experimented with different strategies, techniques or mediums.

An overwhelming volume of research has been published on the meanings, transformations and manipulations of space within various contexts such as architecture, commemorative spaces, theatre and art, amongst others. I find Rosenthal’s attempt (2003:28) to ‘classify’ installation art concise, insightful and a useful framework when I try situating or placing my own installations. In an effort to place my work within this suggested context, I will be looking at an example of a large installation entitled *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* (Figs. 88a, b, c, d, e, f, g, and h) that was first exhibited at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival in Oudtshoorn in 2002. The “four poles” of
installation art, proposed by Rosenthal, are enchantments, impersonations, interventions and rapprochements, the first two adhering to what could be described as “filled-space installation” with the last two “poles” belonging to a “type called site-specific installation”. According to Rosenthal site-specific installations are “inextricably linked to locale” and moving it is impossible as “the viewer witnesses a dialogue, as it were, between the artist and the space” (2003:28). Filled space installations are more “psychologically inclined – concerned with artifice, private reality, enchantment, or idealisation, even as it is experienced in real time” (Rosenthal, 2003:28), and more easily transferred to alternative spaces. What follows is a summary of Rosenthal’s observations regarding these “four poles”, before I compare my strategies with his insights.

The “enchantment-type” installation transports the viewer into a state of contemplation and awe, where he/she is immersed and enveloped by the vision of the installation artist (Rosenthal, 2003:33). The enchantment draws “heavily on theatrical roots…one witnesses an extreme vision of reality or may have the sense of being inside the artist’s mind, indeed a simulacrum of a consciousness is created”. These works are usually “physically elaborate [and] might involve synthetic and multimedia effects” (Rosenthal, 2003:35). The tableaus by Segal, Beuys and Kienholz are cited by Rosenthal, and “on a small scale”, Joseph Cornell. These artists “all made intimate worlds that one observed in a kind of voyeuristic fascination, the viewer having the sense of being on the verge of trespassing on some private place” (Rosenthal, 2003:39, 40). I identify with these views as these statements seem to be totally relevant when applied to many of the installations I have already discussed, such as It’s cold outside (Fig. 15) and Kispak/Sunday suit (Fig. 39), amongst others, as well as to the larger installations such as The end (Fig. 98). In an “enchantment-type” installation the boundary between art and the everyday world is maintained, as is the viewer’s sense of being before art (Rosenthal, 2003:33), even though they might need to enter the space of the installation in order to experience the artwork.
In contrast to the above description, an “impersonation-type” installation often crosses “that divide, so that the viewer may not even recognize the presence of a work of art” (Rosenthal, 2003:47). The “exalted status” of art is effectively reduced. This strategy was initiated by Duchamp’s presentation of a urinal as an artwork early on in the twentieth century and was followed by other artists such as the composer, John Cage, who stated that “we must bring about music which is like furniture” (Rosenthal, 2003:51). According to Rosenthal (2003:51, 54), Oldenburg’s 1961 work entitled *The store*, “carried the idea of an impersonation to its utmost conclusion”. As a “functioning space” the boundary between art and life was completely dissolved. Such works and other more recent work by Christine Hill and Rirkit Tiravanja “could be described, following Baudrillard’s model, as masking ‘the absence of a profound reality’”.

The “intervention type” site-specific installation is characterised by Rosenthal (2003:73) as “deeply subversive”, often sociological in ambition, “upsetting the bourgeois expectations of the audience: [attacking] all connotations toward timelessness and privilege - for art and its history, for the sites of art, and for its audience, as the social spheres of life are introduced into these areas by the technique of installation”. He cites Vanessa Beecroft who created the “infamous male gaze”...the subject of several of her installations at various art venues. At the Guggenheim Museum, in 1998, women, some of them in bikinis, some nude, “paraded before an audience made to feel voyeuristic rather than aesthetically minded” (Rosenthal, 2003: 70). This type of installation “can effectively investigate the multiple realities and points of view common to one’s experience of life” (Rosenthal, 2003: 71). The meaning that is conveyed or the questions that are raised by Beecroft’s work are derived precisely because of the entire presentation of the “event” in an art museum or gallery, although “intervention type” installations are often also presented in other spaces and contexts, drawing on the effects regarding the setting and juxtapositions in those environments.

In contrast to the “intervention-type” site specific installation, where the effectiveness of the concept is derived from the “shock value” of the settings of these interventions, in
the “rapprochement-type” site specific installation, “the artist sees the site as an accomplice, not an enemy of the work of art” (Rosenthal, 2003:77). In 2011 I commenced with a land art project, entitled Ontwortel/Uprooted (Fig. 123) which is an apt example of a “rapprochement-type” site specific work and will be discussed in detail in chapter five. In such an artwork, a powerful sense of place is established.

In many instances, the four suggested “poles” of installation might overlap. Rosenthal (2003:81) identifies Smithson’s iconic Spiral jetty, produced in 1970, as an example of a combination of “interventionist and rapprochement attitudes. On the one hand, he marked the space of the lake in a dramatic, even transgressive way. On the other hand, the work is certainly integrated there”. Rosenthal regards installation art as an answer to culture’s desire to seek a genuine encounter with the real. He cites Huyssens, who states that contemporary culture is striving “to hide the fact that the real is in agony due to the spread of simulation” (2003:86). Rosenthal describes installation as the “latest manifestation and achievement…offering the most profound contact yet with the real”. He views “the practice of installation” as a new global language that:

...as with music...creates an artistic cross fertilisation, one that …promotes hybridisation of every imaginable kind. The very nature of installation gives the artist an extraordinary opportunity by which to accommodate complex views of time, space, cultural diversity, philosophy, imagination, and cultural criticism (Rosenthal, 2003:88, 89).

More intimate installations such as It’s cold outside (Fig. 15), Biegbak/Confessional (Fig. 18), Kispak/Sunday suit (Fig. 39), No I want my mother (Fig. 36), Killing time (Fig. 34), Wag/Waiting (Fig. 21) and Showcase (Fig. 29), amongst others have been previously analysed in which it seems that very private revelations of absent personas are suggested. In my view, most of my work fits the description of “enchantment-type” filled space installations: “with the viewer standing before [or in] a dream- or nightmare-like world, more often contemplating than participating” (Rosenthal, 2003:41). I have, earlier on, recounted that, although ordinary, mundane and easily recognisable objects are the basis of my installations, it is also significant to me that these objects be viewed as art and that the poetic transformation of the ordinary through craftsmanship and
juxtaposing is of equal importance. What follows is an analysis of the first large scale installation I produced that could be termed a “filled space” installation, namely *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* (Figs. 89a, b, c, d, e, f, g and h).

*Rooi tapyt/Red carpet*, produced in 2002 and exhibited for the first time in a ‘make do’ industrial space at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival in Oudtshoorn, demonstrates an acceleration in the development of a visual language and introduced new strategies that would be implemented in later work. When my application and proposal for an installation was accepted I received the exact dimensions of the space assigned to me. I spent months planning the layout, lighting, electric wiring, digital footage and making the different elements of the installation. I envisioned the quite diverse components as one artwork whilst planning and creating a space that would envelop the viewer. In contrast to the intimate and personal ‘spaces’ I created in many of the above-mentioned installations, *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* is an intimation of a public space, alluding to systems of power and manipulation.

The red carpet, the central motif in this work, is visible to the viewer who approaches and enters the exhibition space from the outside, as its starting point is the pavement in front of the entrance of the selected venue. The carpet is rolled out for the visitor to the exhibition, as for a VIP. Here the visitor has no other option than to walk on the red carpet entering from the outside into the inside of the venue as it is ‘sealed off’ by a red rope and white poles, leading the visitor into the installation. The visitor is ‘manipulated’

---

30 As noted by Rosenthal (2003:28) “filled-space” type installations are “more easily transferred to alternative spaces”. *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* (Fig. 88) has been exhibited six times, each time in a different space. These diverse spaces had a distinct effect on the layout and tone of the installation. As it is an elaborate work, it takes much planning and time to set up. I require assistance and often this is provided by the museum or gallery staff, although I also hire assistants on occasion. Apart from the first exhibition at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival in Oudtshoorn in 2002, this work has also been exhibited on the following occasions:

- In 2002 I was the first artist to exhibit in the newly discovered and renovated Reservoir space at the Olievenhuis Museum in Bloemfontein and the work was exhibited in this underground space.
- In 2003 I was the chief festival artist at the Aardklop National Arts festival where the work was exhibited on the campus of North-West University.
- This work formed part of a solo exhibition in 2004, entitled *Behind the screens*, at the ABSA Gallery in Johannesburg.
- In 2005 the work was exhibited as part of a solo exhibition, entitled *Unknown*, at the Sanlam Gallery in Cape Town.
- In 2006 *Rooi Tapyt/Red carpet* formed part of a retrospective exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum, entitled *The archaeology of time*. 
to assume the role of a VIP and to follow the carpet for a few metres, experiencing the soft texture under their feet. Associations with Hollywood culture or the formal atmosphere of expectancy when powerful personas appear in public are evoked. The visitor might momentarily feel intimidated, uncomfortable or agitated, having been exposed to the spotlight. The viewer sees the carpet in a new context, however, as soon as it is perceived within the framework of the other elements and because the shape of the carpet changes after a few metres, taking on the contours of an enormous puddle of blood. The spectator finds him/herself standing amongst human-like shapes lying on this ‘puddle’ and is forced to look down to inspect these shapes consisting of a variety of items of clothing belonging to men, women and children. The clothes are all completely covered in or made of rusted metal and suggest trodden, mutilated bodies or corpses. The viewer now assumes a new role namely that of a humble witness to some atrocity, a visitor leaning over to pay respect to a survivor or as someone inspecting the detail at a memorial site.

Should the clothes be examined closely, by crouching down or kneeling to see details (as I have seen many viewers do), the visitor will discover interesting details and textures, patterns, buttons, pockets, seams and even ‘labels’ cut from metal tins, displaying words with ambiguous meanings, such as ‘100% pure’, ‘battered’, or ‘no preservatives’. The clothes are ‘personalised’ and the viewer, moving amongst the array of garments, might associate or empathise with the humanity suggested by the details on these ‘remnants’ of individual human beings.

At the end of the puddle shaped carpet, facing the clothes and the entrance, is a podium with a microphone and a ‘rusted’ stack of files lying next to it, as if the ‘crowd’ of downtrodden people are waiting to be or have just been addressed by some absent but authoritative person. As the viewer passes the microphone, a ringing, whistling sound is projected through sound equipment, emphasising the silence and formal atmosphere as one steps away again. When the viewer moves behind the podium, the upright shape turns out to be a steel cabinet with opened drawers, filled with rusted files. In one of the
drawers a digital screen is mounted, displaying footage of hands being guided by other hands to make official fingerprints.

A small, barely invisible security camera is mounted on the front of the podium. This camera records the image of the viewers walking down the carpet, inspecting the clothes. The streaming image of the visitors is visible on a large projection on the side or back wall, alluding to the complicated role of the media in the reporting and portrayal of atrocities. This work also created an opportunity to further question aspects such as sensationalism, voyeurism and the confusion or blurring between the private and public spheres within the digital media. Furthermore, the camera suggests surveillance. The viewers gradually discover that they are being filmed and portrayed as part of the installation and are powerless to take control over this aspect, unless they leave the exhibition space. Petry et al. (2003:21) describe a project by the British collective, Blast Theory, in which participants were filmed and the events “could be watched as a live webcast” on the following terms: “This project parallels the shift from static notions of space and time towards multiple spaces and simultaneous events, a move closely associated with the development of “telematic media””. These remarks reflect the complex simultaneity of spaces, viewpoints and experiences confronting the viewer at the installation Rooi tapyt/Red carpet. As Petry et al. (2003:21) observe, such an experience mirrors the fragmented experience of reality or virtual reality that is a distinct feature of our experience of space and time.

Two other smaller installations on both sides of the red carpet support this central image and are integrated into the work. On a smaller red puddle-shaped carpet, a baby’s playpen is placed, covered in rusted metal. A digital screen on the inside of the playpen displays hands obsessively trying to wash a stain on a child’s dress. A fragile baby’s vest, made of steel gauze, lies on the carpet inside the playpen, along with a child’s toys, consisting of four ‘toy’ blocks displaying the letters S N V L (alluding to the familiar words: sex, nudity, violence and language used in the media in an effort to protect viewers, especially children). On the outside of the playpen two more blocks are visible
lying as if they were thrown out of the playpen, displaying the letters P and G (parental guidance). If one moves closer to this installation, the whiff of baby powder is detectable, evoking associations of the vulnerability of children. Opposite the playpen, close to the exit, a table (which one also might notice upon entering) is placed. On the table, a row of military caps and gloves are laid out, according to formal protocol, as if the hats and gloves were taken off by dignitaries upon entering the space where a formal event takes place. The tablecloth displays the carefully ironed pleats required as preparation for a VIP occasion. The caps, gloves, and tablecloth are all made of rusted metal. A digital screen set into the table, displays footage of two hands pulling off white gloves, displaying the ritual performed at the side table by those with a high ranking, upon entering the space (imitating the practice of actual military protocol). The image of the white gloves being pulled off the hands seems sinister within the context of the installation.

Fig. 88a: Rooi tapyt/Red carpet, 2002, rusted metal, carpet, digital screens, DVD players, data projector, microphone, security camera and found objects, collection the artist, photograph by author.
Figs. 88b, 88c, 85d and 88e Rooi tapyt/Red carpet (details), photographs by author.
Figs. 88f and 88g *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* (details), photographs by author.
The concluding element in this work is yet another digital screen placed directly next to the exit door. The footage on this screen displays the door of a car being opened and closed. Only the gloved hand of the ‘official’ performing the action is visible. The viewer, who notices the image before passing through the exit door on the rolled out carpet, is placed in the position of a VIP again. The work conveys a cynic stance regarding the attitude of those in power towards ordinary individuals whose lives are shaped and affected by policies and propaganda.

The tone of the space defined by the diverse elements in this installation is not personal or intimate like many of the previously discussed installations as the work overtly demonstrates a critical attitude towards a wide public context. This installation is a comment on the ubiquitous occurrence and recurrence of power abuse setting up two oppositional poles: between the powerful and the anonymous or neglected, almost as an exposé of exploitation, manipulation and its effects. A satirical undertone could be detected, signifying that the protocol, the red carpet, the official system and the keeping up of appearances seem more of an imperative to those in power, than the effects of policies on ordinary citizens who are swept along and drawn into or left out of the system, without any choice.
Although the work seems to convey its content openly, I tried to retain a poetic quality through the visual impact of the red carpet, the crafting of the rusted objects and the contrasts achieved through the repetitive images on the digital screens. The work achieves its full meaning when the viewer ‘plays along’ to assume the roles that are ‘enforced’ upon him or her as he or she moves through the installation space. The receptive viewer is prompted to reflect on the issues suggested by the images, metaphors and strategies within the artwork. This work was my first attempt at conceptualising and executing a large scale installation that could be viewed as one artwork, although many disparate components had been placed in one space. This installation was nominated for a SASOL-Kanna Award for Visual Arts at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival in 2002. Although the scale and strategies are different, my pre-occupation with similar subject matter is evident in other works such as _Killing time_ (Fig. 34) and _Ludo_ (Fig. 86), amongst others.

Amongst other artists, such as Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer, whose installations had a significant intellectual and artistic impact on me, are the works by Edward and Nancy Kienholz plus the installations of Louise Bourgeois. I shall briefly discuss an artwork by each to provide a broader context to my own work. In the work entitled _Sollie 17_ (Figs. 89 and 90) by Edward and Nancy Kienholz, an intimate space is created, suggesting a dilapidated hotel room, filled with furniture, an old television set and the sparse belongings of a seemingly lonely man. The passing of time is suggested by the three depictions of the same worn figure, clad only in his old fashioned underpants, as if these are the various ways in which time is whiled away. The viewer moves along the ‘outside’ space, imitating a hotel corridor, to peep through the open door, like a voyeur, who is witness to this miserable existence. Edward and Nancy Kienholz were viewed as prominent assemblage artists of the 1970s, who both expressed cutting edge criticism towards American culture, contrasting sharply with the gloss and glamour exuded within popular culture. Their modern allegories focused on the decay, suppressed sexuality and violence often hiding behind the seemingly ordinary (Barnes _et al._, 1999:234).
I associate this scene with the intimate spaces I created in installations such as *It’s cold outside* (Fig. 15), *Biegbak/Confessional* (Fig. 18) and *Kispak/Sunday suit* (Fig. 39), amongst others, where I also employed household furniture and objects. In my work there is a similar reference to the passing of time although this is achieved through the use of rusted metal. I have also noted the emphasis on lighting, the curtain, the
‘screening’ off of private from public space plus the contrast between inside versus outside as seen in Figure 90. Another similarity is that of scale. Although some of my installations are large with regard to the space that is ‘filled’, the relationship regarding human proportion is maintained and all objects are displayed on a human scale. A significant difference, however, when my installations are compared to Sollie 17 (Fig. 89), is the absence of human figures. In my installations the presence of specific personas are evoked by displaying clothes and other private possessions. I avoid the depiction of the human figure and prefer to rather suggest a presence, very often by way of the images on digital screens (e.g. the hand applying lipstick, opening a door or washing clothes or dishes). In my installations there is a marked absence and an intimation only of human presence, in many instances emphasising a sense of trying to honour those who are anonymous, unacknowledged and unknown, by presenting artefacts left behind. The images and actions visible on the screens are ghostlike and eerily suggestive of a certain memory, underlining an absence or a presence made ominous by presenting only a fragment (such as hands pulling off gloves, or folding a paper aeroplane).

I am also fascinated by the ‘dream rooms’ created by Louise Bourgeois, whose earlier work was also associated with the post-minimalists at the end of the 1960s (Barnes et al, 1999:57). In a work entitled Cell III (Fig. 91), she uses recognisable found objects such as a door, a screen, water taps and a mirror, amongst others, juxtaposed with sculptural work, to create a space that appears like a fragment from a dream or nightmare. Barnes et al. (1999:57) describe her work as full of humour, but that it also conveys despair, threat, angst and uncertainty. The distinct surrealist feature of her work is reminiscent of the mood conjured by a De Chirico painting such as The melancholy and mystery of a street (Fig. 24), due to the merger of the ordinary with the extra-ordinary plus the tone of angst evoked by the presentation of a seemingly trapped or mutilated human being.
A view of the way that Louise Bourgeois’ series of works *Structures of existence: the cells* (Fig. 92) (Louise Bourgeois, S.a. [Online]), is displayed, reveals strategies comparable to mine, namely the use of discarded material and where presentation is concerned, the creation of secluded, interior and intimate spaces that are clearly demarcated and screened off from the outside, similar to the use of space in artworks like *Biegbak/Confessional* (Fig. 18) and *Uitverkoping/Sale* (Fig. 120), among others.

In this chapter I introduced a broad outline of my visual language as it developed throughout the years. In the process of tracing this growth and development, I have
gained many new insights in my own work. I have come to realise that the range of subject matter that interests me as a mature artist, was already present during the earlier experimental years. In hindsight however, it is a revelation as to how these themes were evolved and presented. Ever since my years as a student I have been interested in banal or ordinary objects and materials and this characteristic has remained constant throughout my career. Likewise, ever since my first solo exhibition in 1998, I have employed strategies with more confidence. My approach and visual language developed out of the presentation of an array of juxtaposed images within a single artwork (as viewed in the exhibition mentioned above), to more simplified images where I attempted to pinpoint specific meaning, whilst suggesting more complicated and layered content at the same time. In recent installations I have tried to implement the wide range of visual tools and insights that I have honed over time to manipulate space on a much larger scale.

Ever since the presentation of *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* (Fig. 98) in 2002, I have produced a number of large scale installations. Many of these have been exhibited as part of group exhibitions, but I have also had the opportunity to exhibit a selection of these works in a number of solo exhibitions. Two of these installations, entitled *The archaeology of time* exhibited at the Pretoria Art Museum in 2006, and *Time and space* at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein in 2013 were large scale exhibitions in which I was afforded the opportunity to conceive every aspect of the presentation. Both these exhibitions were held at the invitation of the two respective museums where I was given full freedom to implement the scope of my creative strategies that I have developed over time. In the next two chapters, a selection of works from these two exhibitions will be discussed. I shall be demonstrating to what extent I had made use of the opportunity that I was afforded and how my ideas were strengthened by the freedom I had to manipulate larger spaces. This discussion will also create an opportunity to trace recent new developments and a shift in focus, where content and use of materials are concerned.
Case study 1: *The archaeology of time*, a retrospective exhibition at Pretoria Art Museum, 28 June to 3 December 2006.
In chapter three I related how my visual language evolved over four decades. I introduced examples of early work as well as recent installations to illustrate this development and to delineate my interests, where conceptualisation, the use of materials and techniques as well as strategies of presentation are concerned. In this chapter I will be demonstrating how this visual language was applied in a major retrospective exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum, entitled *The archaeology of time* from 28 June to 29 October 2006. As this was a retrospective exhibition, many early works were included, but the major body of work comprised installations that were produced after my solo exhibition in 1998.

Many of the artworks exhibited in *The archaeology of time*, have already been discussed. In this chapter, however, I will be analysing what I consider to be the major installations, which demonstrate a synthesis of the strategies that I had refined over the span of my career to date. The outline provided in the previous chapter, enables me to embrace concepts and phrases within the present discussion, which have already been investigated and expounded. As an introduction, I shall briefly refer to recent influences on my artmaking process and visual language.

As is evident in the discussions of earlier works, I experimented with a variety of concepts, materials and techniques during the period between 1977 and 1997. The body of work included in my first solo exhibition in 1998, demonstrated a specific focus on personal identity, history and memories, where content was concerned. My career gained momentum after this exhibition; I participated in various national and international group exhibitions and I also presented other solo exhibitions in the following years. Some of my installations were acquired for private and public collections and documented in catalogues. I was the recipient of various awards that enabled me to travel abroad and to visit countries such as France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain and Malaysia. I was afforded the opportunity of a

---

31 According to the museum report, the exhibition was visited by 14074 viewers.
32 The documentation pertaining to this exhibition is presented as appendices.
33 At the request of the staff of the Pretoria Art Museum, the exhibition was extended until 6 December 2006.
34 A CV is attached as an appendix, setting out details regarding my career.
two month stay in New York through sponsorship of the Ampersand Foundation, during which time I also visited Philadelphia and Washington DC. I visited museums, art museums, galleries filled with contemporary art, war museums, graveyards, memorials and monuments, amongst others. Amongst the many contemporary art museums and galleries that made lasting impressions on me, I regard the Dia: Beacon Art Foundation, outside New York as exceptional, specifically the sensitive utilisation of space and presentation of artworks. My views on the effect regarding the manipulation of space and the possibility to convey meaning, tone and poetry through space were confirmed and enhanced. I was struck by the unobtrusive and reverential tone evoked by way of the museum’s policy to display few artworks (often only one work) within large spaces. Very few artists are afforded the opportunity to exhibit their work in spaces of such scale or to define the space through the use of negative space as displayed in Heizer’s *North, east, south and west* (Fig. 93) which was installed in Dia: Beacon. I was profoundly moved by the presence of absence induced by these negative spaces. I understood more fully the extent of the impact of scale and the nature of a particular space on an artwork.

Fig. 93: Michael Heizer, *North, east, south and west*, 1967/2002, installation created through negative spaces in the floor, Dia: Beacon, (Cooke & Govan, 2003: 54, 55).
These new and enriching experiences reinforced my ideas on conceptualisation plus my artmaking processes. I was immersed in the ambience of universal art\textsuperscript{35} and events, also with regard to my visits to memorials and the effect of these commemorative structures and spaces regarding important historic events. Whilst visiting these commemorative constructions, I was moved by the invocation of respect and the impact of place and space, as if the world had come to a standstill for a moment. Apart from a focus on my personal history, a subtle shift occurred as I began conceptualising installations reflecting an awareness regarding universal events where specific cycles seem to be perpetually reiterated such as phenomena of power and its abuse, affecting the lives of ordinary people. A feeling of overwhelming melancholy I experienced at memorials such as the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York as well as the memorials to the Holocaust, reaffirmed the emotional weight of what I try to convey in my installations.

\textsuperscript{35} Many of the works by international artists mentioned in this text were personally encountered, for example the installation entitled \textit{Sollie 17} by Edward and Nancy Kienholz, which is part of the collection of the Smithsonian American art museum in Washington DC.
As discussed in the previous chapter, after my solo exhibition in 1998, I started to experiment with installations on various scales, focusing on the use of material, specifically the use of rusted metal. I searched for ways to convey concepts such as absence, loss, vulnerability and transience metaphorically by ‘shifting time’ in an effort to create an ‘archaeology of the present’. I moved to installation as a strategy and became aware of the possibilities that emerged when objects were placed in a dialogue with each other within a three-dimensional space. The idea to create ‘indoor monuments’ for anonymous ordinary people, who have been caught up within specific contexts during their lifetime, gradually emerged. In these monuments everyday objects have been employed. As discussed in chapter three, the use of digital media alongside tactile materials became an important tool in my installations.

As mentioned previously, I had the opportunity to act as a mentor during workshops for adult mentally handicapped artists at Feniks Unite (now Groep Ubuntu) in West Flanders in Belgium. This experience had an immense impact on the manner in which I perceive the artmaking process as well as the very nature of art. I mentored these workshops during the first decade of the new millennium at the invitation of Johan Timperman (director of Feniks Unite).

These collaborations led to my awareness of the compulsive nature of outsider artists when using certain materials. A new world opened before me, where artmaking seemed honest and natural and where so much more was said with so much less. I recognised features of my own working process such as repetitive acts, hoarding and the recycling of found material as well as a distinct sense of compulsion. It seemed to me that the worlds of the outsider artist and that of the conceptual artist overlap, in the sense that the process of artmaking is placed before all other considerations, such as commercial value. I feel a definite affinity towards outsider artists and I draw inspiration from their instinctive compulsive drive to work with tactile materials and to make art, the process and the end product seem indistinctive.

36 A list of these workshops is attached as an appendix.
During the period before the retrospective exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum in 2006, a few key opportunities gave impetus to my career. In 2003 I was appointed as the festival artist at the Aardklop National Arts Festival in Potchefstroom, and was afforded the opportunity to present a solo exhibition. In 2004 the curator of the ABSA Art Gallery in Johannesburg, Cecile Loedolff, invited me to present a solo exhibition, the first in Johannesburg. Another opportunity was created by Stefan Hundt, the curator of the Sanlam Gallery in Cape Town in 2005. Not only did I present another solo exhibition, but Sanlam sponsored a catalogue entitled Unknown, which included essays, colour representations of recent work as well as a comprehensive overview of my career up to that stage.37

Furthermore, in 2006 I was invited by the curators of the Pretoria Art Museum, Dirkie Offringa (then chief curator) and Dirk Oegema (currently chief curator), to present a retrospective exhibition. This museum, administrated by the City of Tshwane Municipality, has been central to art students and artists in Pretoria over many decades, but especially since 1963, when the collection was moved to the new art museum designed in a modernist style (Pretoria Art Museum, S.a: [Online.]). The museum frequently showcases the work of contemporary South African artists who are at the forefront, contending with pertinent issues regarding the South African socio-political context or with experimental stylistic trends. The museum also hosts national art competitions and the permanent collection is inclusive and diverse. I was honoured by the invitation, as I had often wandered through its exhibition spaces since my first year as an art student and knew it very well. This invitation was a high point in my career and an important opportunity to fill larger spaces with a body of my own work.

The spaces that were assigned to me were the foyer, the large Albert Werth Hall and the East Gallery. I acquired the plans of the museum and started to work on a lay-out that would reinforce the conceptual foundations of my installations when they are exhibited together. An important consideration to me was that the assigned space was

37 This catalogue is presented in DVD format as an appendix.
utilised fully and that I would be able to manipulate it as such that the visitor to the exhibition would be drawn into an experience.

Another key consideration was to contrast the perception of a public space with that of a private space. The strain of balancing private experience with what is required in public life, is a theme that has often recurred in my work. This fascination with the separation and/or blurring between private and public spheres (inside and outside), or the fault line or threshold between these spheres, where vulnerability is revealed, (as is demonstrated in works such as *It's cold outside* (Fig. 15), *Kispak/Sunday suit* (Fig 39), *Baggage arrival* (Fig. 96) and *The end* (Fig. 98)), amongst others, emerged instinctively. The prominence of the concept of absence in my installations also evolved in a similar way, but I have consciously been aware of the importance of these features over many years. The feeling of vulnerability or anxiety might be part of an underlying awareness of mortality, the awareness that ‘life’ is what comes before death. This profound consciousness has to be balanced with the banality and ordinariness that is also encountered every day. Though these tensions are contemplated by philosophers through the medium of language, the visual artist on the other hand is confronted by concrete and practical considerations, such as the manipulation of banal materials, which he/she must solve in order to convey what is instinctively and also consciously known:

> For Heidegger, there is thus an interface between which can be ‘viewed’, namely material objects and the world in general, and that which remains hidden. If read in terms of hermeneutic phenomenology, it could be said that Van der Merwe places the artwork in a position to prompt experience of the interface between the visible and the invisible, and in so doing, presence the absent, which is Being as its own abysmal liminal region...in Van der Merwe's work this relationship between the material and non-material (or the materially absent), is central (Kruger & Van der Merwe, 2011:164).

As a visual artist the blurring of the private and public spheres forms part of one's professional life, as the artwork is a tangible manifestation of private dreams, imaginings, thoughts, longings and observations being put on public display. I tried to
enhance the underlying concepts that had been present in individual works in the manner in which I juxtaposed the installations exhibited in the Pretoria Art Museum. The different ‘tableaus’ or installations created the impression that one was moving through a stage or film set without any actors.

As rusted metal had become a signature medium at that stage, I also considered the concept of a ‘time shift’, as if the viewer moved into an ‘archaeological space/time’, as a significant underlying idea. This notion was reflected in the title of the exhibition, namely *The archaeology of time*. As this title was displayed in large letters on the outside wall of the museum, a hint was given as to what was to be discovered inside the museum space.

At the main entrance to the museum the visitor encountered the work known as *Rooi tapijt/ Red carpet* (Figs. 88a, b, c, d, e, f, g and h). The carpet ran straight through the foyer into the Albert Werth Hall, where it was transformed into a shape reminiscent of a puddle of blood, as described in chapter three. The first section of the exhibition thus imitated a formal or public space with the visitor to the museum who might also have felt
Figs. 96a, 96b and 96c: Baggage arrival, 2001 (and details), rusted metal, found objects, security camera and digital screen, collection the artist, photographs by Dirk Oegema.
uncomfortable as he/she was ‘forced’ to walk on the red carpet and drawn into an official atmosphere where he/she is placed in the ‘limelight’.

Before entering the Albert Werth Hall and facing the rusted clothes strewn in front of the podium, the visitor’s attention was drawn to another installation, also taking up considerable space in the foyer, namely Baggage arrival (Figs. 96a, b and c). Baggage arrival is a kinetic artwork, involving a luggage carousel as one would find at an airport, augmenting the perception that the viewer is entering a public space. The carousel endlessly circulates the various items of rusted luggage, which disappears momentarily behind a screened-off section before re-emerging.

A security camera is mounted inside the partition, filming the luggage as it disappears behind plastic screens. A digital monitor displays the filmed luggage as it moves along the curve inside the section hidden to the viewer. This work remarks on the ‘baggage’ that is dragged along from generation to generation, or personal baggage that has to be ‘claimed’ or acknowledged as one moves through life. In this sense the private or inner life of an individual is kindled the moment the personal luggage items are recognised and claimed, as suggested by the trolley with luggage and jacket placed alongside the carousel. The digital screen might comment on the impossibility of ‘hiding’ the baggage, or on the manner in which personal lives are made public, exploited and manipulated within the digital sphere. The digital screen is important to me as a tool to reinforce metaphorical meaning and to suggest another dimension, removed from tactile experience, it becomes mysterious and spiritual.

Bagged baggage was initially a site specific installation, made for a space that I selected at the NSA Gallery in Glenwood, Durban as a nominee for the FNB Vita Art Award. This exhibition lasted from 7 August to 8 September 2001. An uncanny extra dimension emerged at that time with regard to my perception of the meaning of this specific work, as the 9/11 attacks occurred shortly after I dismantled the installation.
In my mind, the endlessly circulating luggage acquired new meaning in view of the lost lives, especially those innocent citizens who died in the airplane crash, whose luggage remained unclaimed. The melancholic tone suggested by the decayed items is strengthened by their slow movement past the viewer, reminiscent of a funeral march. The perpetual motion might affect the viewer in such a way that a trance-like or reflective mind-set is induced.

Other works such as Koeëlwas/Bullet proof jacket (Fig. 63) and Cleaning instructions (Fig. 64) were also exhibited in the foyer. The intermittent sounds made by the gunshot in the work Koeëlwas/Bullet proof jacket were audible above the sound of the moving carousel.

I transformed the large rectangular space of the Albert Werth Hall by dividing the space into smaller rectangles and squares, using panels provided by the museum or by introducing a dry wall as in the case of a larger space required for the major installation of the work entitled The end (Fig. 98). The play-off between the suggestions of private and public spaces was conspicuous in the manner in which I employed the available space. The work Rooi tapyt/Red carpet emitted the idea of being welcomed as a VIP; a space where those in the limelight face journalists and are ‘on display’ before ordinary people, but was also suggestive of a formal ceremony, such as a memorial service, especially as the carpet transformed once the visitor moved into the Albert Werth Hall and encountered the podium with a microphone, as if ready for a dignitary to address a crowd.

The next section of the exhibition was partitioned off, suggesting the rooms of a private home. My compulsion to demarcate rectangular spaces for specific installations by using screens or floor plates was further strengthened, as each installation was screened off from the other, but linked through the suggestion of separate rooms in a house. In these four ‘rooms’ (with open entrances) the following installations\(^{38}\) were

\(^{38}\) These four installations were discussed in the previous chapter.
displayed: *Gaste/Guests* (Fig. 61), *Kispak/Sunday suit* (Fig. 39) (where the rusted screen was used as a partition), *It’s cold outside* (Fig. 15) and *Wag/Waiting* (Fig. 21). Bachelard (1994: vii, xxxviii) considers the house “as a tool for analysis of the human soul…every house is first a geometrical object of planes and right angles” and he considers “how such recti-linearity so welcomes human complexity [and] idiosyncrasy”. The geometrical spaces of a house gathers meaning when it is inhabited: “inhabited space transcends geometrical space” (Bachelard, 1994:vii). The imprint of human lives was made visible in these rooms, where each tableau suggested a narrative. The overall rusted appearance of the furniture and clothes inside these ‘intimate spaces’ effectively suggested decay and ‘lost time’ with the distinct feeling that one was entering an imaginative museum-like space or a time capsule.

Whilst moving through these spaces, the sporadic audible sounds forming part of certain installations (e.g. *Gaste/Guests* and *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet*), contrasted with moments of utmost silence. Whilst standing in front of the installation known as *Gaste/Guests*, the sound of a gunshot was echoed faintly by the same sound in the foyer (which formed part of the work *Koeëlwas/Bullet proof jacket*). The absence of human personas was ironically underlined by the suggestion of a human presence through these sounds. Also by means of the draped clothes and other personal objects, as if the personas had departed within a previous era, although the effect of their actions still reverberating through time and space:

…[T]he places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time (Bachelard, 1994:6).

This quotation is particularly relevant when contemplating the small kitchen (the memory of the kitchen of my childhood has been discussed in chapter three), which is presented as the installation *Biegbak/Confessional* (Fig. 18), placed further along in the exhibition space, augmenting the lay-out of a private home that is fused with a dreamlike space. The artist acts on the compulsion to physically recreate these spaces of memory and imagination, engendering new meanings.
Smaller installations were placed within the long aisle along the side of the Albert Werth Hall. Some of these works (such as Artifacts, Fig. 60, Bagged baggage, Fig. 45 and No, I want my mother, Fig. 36), also emanated certain sounds. These smaller installations were carefully placed to create conceptual contrasts (e.g. electronic sounds in Artifacts contrasted with the human moaning sound that is accentuated in No, I want my mother), but also accentuating contrasts between sounds and works that were silent, in order for resonances to recede when one stepped away.

The long aisle linking the foyer with the East Gallery was also utilised to exhibit some of my earliest work, beginning from 1977 with works such as Zip painting (Fig.1), Blik/Tin (Fig. 22), Portrait of my mother (Fig. 14), The star (Fig. 5) and Grid (Fig. 4), amongst others. I had not seen many of these works for some time and the experience of viewing my artworks created over a few decades together in one venue, enabled me to gain
valuable insight into the recurring themes and processes displayed in my work. In this aisle, leading up to the entrances to the installation, *The end* (Figs 98a, b, c, d and e) in which a film theatre is imitated, photo documentation of works that were not exhibited\(^{39}\) was displayed, similar to posters being displayed in the foyer of a cinema.

In order to install *The end*,\(^{40}\) I created a rectangle of 12m x 20m, by partitioning off a section of the Albert Werth Hall. This was a new work, conceived for this retrospective exhibition, which I considered the central artwork and a culmination of the visual language and expressive strategies that I had developed over time. The idea to present a film theatre as an installation had been present in my mind for many years. When I stumbled upon a collection of old auditorium chairs that were being discarded due to renovation, I conceived the idea of such a possible installation. Ever since my childhood the film theatre had been a dream space or alternative space of my imagination.

*The end* comprises a hundred and eight film theatre seats arranged in rows. Ordinarily, when a filmgoer enters a movie theatre, he/she enters a public space, but the moment the lights dim and the film begins, the experience becomes private and personal. I tried to echo this duality within the ‘film space’ I conceived for this work. In this installation, when the viewer enters the darkened space from the back of the ‘theatre’, he/she is momentarily blinded by a hundred and eight small lights, fastened to the back of each seat, dimly lighting the objects on the seats within the parallel row directly behind one another. The lights are intended to resemble stars in a dark sky and to transport the viewer into an imaginative space.\(^{41}\) When the viewer’s eyes adjust to the dusky lit room, the installation becomes visible. When he/she moves to the front of the installation and looks back across the auditorium, the lights at the back of the seats are invisible, whilst the objects and chairs are bathed in soft light resembling the dim effect of twilight.

\(^{39}\) A complete list of all the works exhibited as well as those displayed in the form of photo-documentation is attached as an appendix. Not all the works that were exhibited are discussed in this chapter.

\(^{40}\) The installation *The end* was exhibited for the second time in the Reservoir at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein during the exhibition entitled *Time and space* in 2013.

\(^{41}\) The rows of lights resemble the rows of stars in one of my earlier works, entitled *Galaxy* (Fig. 11,) which was completed in 1982.
This lighting effect accentuated the contrasts between day and night; darkness and light as well as other metaphoric connotations such as earth and heaven or reality and illusion, which had been conceptual pre-occupations since very early on in my career. These aspects were discussed in the previous chapter.

On the seats personal belongings of unknown individuals have been placed such as hats, gloves, handbags, purses, spectacle cases, keys, briefcases – representing ordinary people. The objects contain the lives of their owners and suggest life stories with a beginning and an end but also allude to people who are, however, absent, as if they have left their belongings behind in the theatre. All the objects are covered in rusted metal and appear frozen in time, emphasising absence. These objects are suggestive of the very few tactile personal belongings that are left behind when someone dies. The rusted patina might also create a feeling of nostalgia as it might force the viewer to consider and scrutinise the ordinary. There are also suggestions of selected groups of people: a row displaying children’s toys, a group of seats with soldiers’ helmets, women’s possessions such as handbags and flowers as well as common objects which might belong to nobody in particular such as umbrellas, books, notebooks, boxes of popcorn or cool drink cups.

The backs of the chairs resemble gravestones, alluding to the order of layout in older grave yards, with separate spaces dedicated to children, soldiers and ordinary citizens. The markings and visible deterioration on the surfaces of the seats are reminiscent of similar marks on gravestones left by water and other natural elements through the passing of time. These marks also resemble traces of streaming tears. The surfaces of the chairs were individually ‘painted’ by using rusted grains of metal mixed with silicon, which were then treated with salt, water and vinegar. I tried to treat each seat of a chair in a unique manner and regarded the backs of the chairs as surfaces on which I could
Figs. 98a and 98b: *The end*, 2006, (back and front view), theatre chairs, found objects, rusted metal, screen, data projector, lights, collection the artist, photographs by Dirk Oegema.
leave expressive marks, similar to the process of an abstract expressionist. This desire to make marks on material would develop further within a new body of work I will be discussing in the next chapter. I was aware of the fact that each chair might be a memorial to an individual. I recall how my thoughts wandered to those persons whose deaths affected me personally, whilst ‘painting’ the surfaces. Therefore, each chair in this installation represents a memorial to the faceless, the unknown with his/her own personal struggles, or to the human struggle against overpowering forces. The visitor to an old graveyard is always gripped by nostalgia and is aware of the emotions effected by loss, the passing of time and an awareness of vulnerability. This installation attempts to echo these ephemeral qualities and emotions.

The viewer is able to walk between the rows of seats and will notice the seat numbers stencilled on the floor, enhancing the allusion of a graveyard. The ‘journey’ between the rows of seats might also resemble a walk in a maze or a pilgrimage with stations. The objects on the seats are remnants or evidence of lived lives and suggest units such as frozen film frames where a private, personal narrative unfolds. The viewer moves slowly amongst the rows and is forced to look down to inspect the objects on the seats that act as *memento mori*, because of their decayed appearances. In the last row right at the back is a seat with a notebook on the seat and a jacket draped over the back, as if left behind by a film critic. I dedicated this chair to the memory of South African art and

---

42 Wherever possible, I try to accommodate disabled persons to experience a large installation.
theatre critic, Barrie Hough (1953-2004), who was keenly interested in my work. Here I tried to comment on the role of the artist within society and on the reception of art. The film theatre is, amongst other associations, a metaphor for art and its audience. In row nine, on the eleventh seat, two folded ‘paper’ aeroplanes, made of rusted metal have been placed, a reference to the violence and loss that occurred during the 9/11 terror attacks. Although there is reference to the outside world and to disasters taking place on a global scale, a personal memory is also evoked by the placement of intimate and fragile toys of a young child. These objects are dedicated to a specific family member who lost his life at a very young age, leaving behind memories of a game concerning two toy aeroplanes.

As in a film theatre the chairs are placed viewing a large screen. Footage on a continuous loop of images displaying various versions of the words “The End”, gleaned from the endings of approximately fifty films in various type fonts, is projected on the screen on the front wall. This display forms the only luminous lighting in the installation, cascading between bright illumination and more muted tones. The repetition of the words, as with the repetitive pattern formed by the chairs plus the sense of decay and aura of decomposition, might also suggest the cycles within history and in human lives. The repetitive flash of the words “The End” might appear as a distress signal that is desperately being transmitted. In this installation, popular culture (the cinema and Hollywood culture), is employed here as a metaphor. However, the outward glossy layer characterising popular culture is stripped away to reveal the decay underneath. It might also refer to something more spiritual than the ephemeral world of popular culture.

In a sense, the fault line between the tangible and the illusionary is the focal point of this artwork namely that particular moment experienced by all moviegoers when the make-believe world is shattered by the words: The End and the real world has to be faced once again. The end is also the beginning of the actual or real world. In this installation, as in Baggage arrival (Fig. 96), a liminal or threshold space is activated, moving between the realms of the real and the imaginative or illusional, between death and life.
or earth and heaven, the “transition from the material to the immaterial” (Seegers, 2014:218).

Upon leaving the theatre, the first work encountered and installed in the passageway, is entitled Unclaimed (Fig. 99), consisting of eleven Perspex post boxes (representing the eleven official languages of South Africa), filled with rusted envelopes. The transparency of the Perspex boxes makes visible arrested or atrophied human communication transmitting very specific meaning within the socio-political context within South Africa. This installation resonates with the very first work upon entering the East Gallery, namely Unknown (Fig. 100), where two hundred and forty rusted envelopes are linked to form a screen, indicating the bond and desire amongst human beings to connect and communicate. The unopened envelopes represent the stories of the unknown and the nameless who forever remain undisclosed.
Fig. 99: Unclaimed, 2008, rusted metal and Perspex, collection UNISA, photograph by Dirk Oegema.

Figs. 100a and 100b: Unknown (and detail), 2004, rusted metal, collection Sanlam, photographs by Dirk Oegema and Stefan Hundt.
The last installation placed in the hallway of the museum was the work entitled *Water en roes/Water and rust* (Figs. 101a and b), displaying a pulpit, a robe, a digital screen and a baptismal font. This quiet work is suggestive of meditative contemplation and silence. Moisture or water is essential for the process of decaying rust to begin and is also symbolic of the ritual of purification, signalling a new beginning. The viewer or observer, who had entered the foyer on the red carpet, had gradually been led towards more introspective and quiet work. The lighting had also changed to a darker atmosphere, as if the journey through the artworks on display was replicated towards an inner awareness by the viewer, who encountered the work *Biegbak/Confessional* (Fig. 18) next to the work *Unknown* (Fig. 100) in the East Gallery.

---

The work was first exhibited as part of a group exhibition entitled *Reconciliation*, during the Arts and Reconciliation Festival hosted by the University of Pretoria, 14 March - 20 March 2005.
Figs. 102a and 102b: Eclipse (and detail), 2002, rusted metal, barbed wire, gravel, three digital screens, collection MAP, photographs by Dirk Oegema.
The rest of the space within East Gallery was filled with a single installation, entitled *Eclipse* (Figs. 102a, b and c), the last work to be experienced. This installation comprises a gravel path flanked by two barbed wire fences, on which remnants of clothes are attached as if blown against the fence by some force, hanging in an entangled state. These mangled shapes are reminiscent of the clothes presented on *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* and evoke the effect that human bodies were halted and ‘caught’ within these fences. Here the viewer walks down the gravel path experiencing a very different sensation to the luxurious texture of the red carpet in the foyer as he/she becomes aware of the crunching sound of his/her footsteps on the gravel.

![Image of Eclipse installation](image_url)
At the end of this path a ‘memorial wall’ has been installed displaying niches to accommodate funerary jars as well as three digital screens revealing falling petals similar to those strewn at a graveside. I noticed that some visitors to this installation picked up small gravel stones and placed these into the niches. Strong contrasts between light and dark as well as visible shadow effects are noticeable in this work. The lighting effects in this installation have been carefully considered and suggest interrogation as well as reverence. As the viewer walks back on the gravel path he/she might perhaps have been enticed to reflect on issues suggested by this installation.

The barbed wire fence is a metaphor for authority and power, the ability to control and limit freedom. To me the work has gained additional new meaning in light of the current worldwide refugee crisis on the one hand. On the other hand we are living in an era where there seems to be a desire to close borders and to forget about our shared humanity. This work might be read on different levels and could be seen as a comment on any life that has been restricted, or the inner world of any single person, who might have experienced an occasion for reflection whilst walking along the gravel path or whilst standing before the images of the falling petals. The title suggests a termination or an ‘eclipse’ of meaningful life through the severing of contact or by means of excessive control and added restrictions.

The viewer had to leave the space and re-enter the aisle to reach the foyer once again. This visit to the exhibition ended by exiting on the red carpet to face once again the everyday reality of the world outside the museum – leaving the ‘time capsule’. It was my intention with this exhibition to facilitate an experience where time slowed down to such an extent to give the viewer the opportunity for reflection and commemoration. However, it was also my intention to draw the viewer towards the aesthetic aspects of the works such as the visible craftsmanship and creativity as well as the sensory experiences. This exhibition enabled me to gain new insight in my collective body of work and encouraged me to carry on pursuing, exploring and visualising those concepts and strategies that interest me.
In this chapter focus was placed on the application of the visual language that I have developed, with special reference to case study number one, a retrospective exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum in 2006. This exhibition demonstrated mature work in which the progressive development of a signature style could be detected. In case study one the use of rusted metal to express subject matter revealing a preoccupation with memory, commemoration, vulnerability and transience, among others was accentuated. The use of rusted metal as a tool to ‘shift time’ and to creating an ‘archaeological effect’ was discussed, as well as how I utilised the opportunity to fill a large space to apply specific approaches regarding installation art, such as enabling an immersive experience and transporting the viewer into a state of contemplation.
Chapter 5

Case study 2: *Time and Space*, a comprehensive exhibition at Olievenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, 9 July to 8 August 2013.
In 2012 I was invited by the curator of the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein, Ester le Roux, to present a solo exhibition, which took place from 9 July to 18 August 2013. This exhibition formed part of the annual national Vryfees Arts Festival, where I was appointed as festival artist for the year 2013.

Prior to the comprehensive exhibition at Oliewenhuis Art Museum, entitled Time and Space, two exhibitions showcased installations (some of which were incorporated in the exhibition in Bloemfontein), where new developments regarding concept, strategy, process, use of materials and presentation in my artworks could be perceived. The first of these two exhibitions was a solo exhibition, entitled Ontwortel/Uprooted, held at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2009 at the invitation of the curator, Annali Dempsey. The second formed part of a group project entitled Site Specific (International Land Art Event South Africa, 2011:S.p), which took place at Plettenberg Bay under the guidance of the project co-ordinator, Anni Snyman and creative director, Strijdom van der Merwe. I will be referring to these exhibitions when I discuss the applications of new strategies as perceived in the exhibition Time and Space at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in 2013.

In this chapter emphasis will be placed on those major new installations which formed part of Time and Space. However, I would like to briefly mention a few smaller works, some of them not exhibited in Bloemfontein in 2013, in which is demonstrated how I started to experiment with new concepts and use of materials that were eventually applied in larger installations.

---

44 According to the museum report, the exhibition was visited by 14690 visitors.
45 Some of my installations were exhibited concurrently in a satellite space, also incorporated in the festival: the installations Water en Roes (Figs. 101a and 101b), Reisiger/Traveler (Fig. 104) and Diagnose/Diagnosis (Fig. 108) were exhibited in the foyer of the Scaena Theatre, whilst at the same time the work Monument (Fig. 118) formed part of an exhibition entitled Re-envisioning the Anglo Boer (South African) War that took place at the Johan Stegmann Art Gallery. Both these exhibitions were situated on the campus of the University of the Free State and were curated by Angela de Jesus.
In the previous chapters, the concepts of memory, the memorial and the revision of history were accentuated, also with regards to my personal history. After 2006, my interest shifted to the present and I started to explore my personal experiences and identity within context of the present reality, also with regard to socio-political circumstances as captured in certain works. My works developed an intimate and introspective focus where I was investigating an inner space and questioning myself. Where materials were concerned, I was still pre-occupied with ordinary objects, but an enduring interest in mark making was rekindled (this interest, although prevalent in early work, re-emerged when I was treating the backs and seats of the chairs that formed part of the installation *The end*). I also started exploring other surface textures other than rusted metal and developed an intent to suggest a dialogue through the use of presentation strategies, techniques and materials, as if the ‘conversation’ with myself is displayed in a concrete manner. This strategy is illustrated in the work entitled *Time out* (Figs. 103a and b).
In the work known as *Time out*, a man’s jacket is placed on a chair. On the seat of the chair are two ‘paper’ airplanes, of which one is crumpled. These two airplanes might be viewed as metaphors for male and female. The crumpled airplane could also be interpreted as suppressed, frustrated emotion. I have tried to convey inner tension in earlier work, for example through the draped clothing and curtain in *It’s cold outside* (Fig. 15). The crumpled aeroplane and agitated marks against the walls in *Time out*, indicate heightened tension.

Next to the chair on the floor is a suitcase placed in an upright position. All these objects are clad in or made of rusted metal. The installation is intended to be displayed in a corner space of a gallery, utilising the architecture to create a dialogue and suggest exclusion, as the chair is placed with its back towards the exhibition space. Two wooden panels, painted white are placed in the corner space against the walls. Agitated marks are executed on their surfaces using charcoal, suggesting a questioning of personal identity, as if life is stuck and a dilemma is being contemplated. Charcoal dust lies on the floor under the drawing, indicating the intensity with which the marks were made.

In 2012 and 2015 I took part in two different legs of a travelling exhibition curated by Teresa Lizamore of the gallery Lizamore and Associates, entitled *Ik ben een Afrikaander*[^46] (I am an African), an inclusive exhibition in which the diversity of cultural identity in South Africa was explored. For these exhibitions I contributed, consecutively, *Reisiger/Traveler* (2012, Fig. 104) and *Stof op my skoene/Dust on my shoes* (2015, Fig. 105). In the work known as *Reisiger/Traveler* (Fig. 104), a suitcase is placed in such a position as to resemble a gravestone, being contemplated by an absent persona suggested by the jacket draped over the chair. The concept of a traveler might be viewed as a metaphor for any human being whose life, after all, is a slow journey towards the same destination. It is also meant as a comment on fluid identity, or questioning the possibility of certainty regarding identity. *Stof op my skoene/Dust on my shoes* (Fig. 105), speaks of one’s connection with one’s home, one’s work place as well.

[^46]: “When the Dutch settler Hendrik Biebouw declared in March 1707 ‘Ik ben een Afrikaander’ (I am an African), he started a debate about identity that would rage for hundreds of years” (*Ik ben een Afrikaander*, 2012:S.p.).
as the place of one’s birth and death. The daily cleaning ritual becomes a metaphor to prepare oneself anew and it creates an opportunity to reflect. The dust symbolises a homeland and the root of one’s identity, but might also be interpreted as a stain that has to be cleaned continuously.

Personal identity and self-reflection remained a central concern in a series of works I executed over a period of a few years since 2006. Apart from my own investigation regarding identity and self-reflection, these works were also created bearing the ordinary viewer in mind as I also tried to express what might be the experience of any ordinary person. In the work known as Power failure (Fig. 106) the title suggests a hiatus in activity and might be read as metaphorical for a spiritual breakdown, searching or interruption. Three chairs have been placed in front of three television sets displaying...
Fig. 106: Power failure, 2007, found material and rusted metal, collection John Fensham, photograph by author.

Figs. 107a and 107b: Red cushion (and detail), 2012, rusted metal and found objects, collection Jurie Willemse, photographs by Sylvester Mqeku.
empty screens. On the seats the viewer sees an umbrella, a folded newspaper next to a remote control and a briefcase, suggesting human presence and evoking figurative meanings. The chairs facing the empty screens seem as if an effort has been made to connect and to communicate even though the screens remain inaudible and without images. Here a quest to find meaning is suggested. The emptiness faced might lead to an opportunity to reflect and to look inwards.

Both the two works entitled Red cushion (Figs. 107a and b) and Diagnosis (Fig. 108) include items of my personal clothing cladded with rusted metal. Both these works are examples of a series of works in which introspection and self-reflection are emphasised. The red cushion in the work entitled Rooi kussing/Red cushion was made by transforming found material, namely a red-coloured oil can to form the shape of a cushion. The oil can is a reference to wars and power struggles regarding minerals and other precious substances such as crude oil. By sitting on the red cushion, watching
television, one is placed in the position of a passive accomplice. I have used the colour red, juxtaposed with rusted metal in other works to refer to issues of power, for example in *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* (Fig. 88), *Monument* (Fig. 118) and in *Waste* (2004). In the work *Diagnose/Diagnosis* (Fig. 108), a doctor’s suitcase is clad in rusted metal. The ‘diagnosis’ in the title refers to self-diagnosis. Whereas in the work *Cleaning instructions* (Figs. 64), there is a reference to medical procedure, commenting on the phenomenon of violence, in *Diagnose/Diagnosis* the focus is directed at myself, questioning myself.

![Breinfloute/Blackout, 2009, rusted metal, found objects, Fabriano paper and graphite, collection MAP, photograph by Rupert de Beer.](image)

The work *Breinfloute/Blackout* (Fig. 109),47 demonstrates a dialogue between the objects clad in rusted metal, alluding to human presence and a rectangular surface on which marks were made, similar to the work *Time out* (Fig. 103). The entire surface of this large white paper was painstakingly transformed into black by using graphite sticks. This process was extremely time consuming and whilst I was transforming the surface, I was reminded of a ritual of penance. This desire to make marks on a surface has been

47 *Blackout/Breinfloute* (Fig. 109), *Downfall* (Fig. 110), *Power failure* (Fig. 106), *Red cushion* (Fig. 107) and *Diagnosis* (Fig. 108) were all included in the 2013 exhibition at Olievenhuis Art Museum.
present ever since my student days (e.g. *The star*, Fig. 5). Since early on in my
development as an artist, I have admired the work of Antoni Tàpies and the emotional
and spiritual response that the markings on the surfaces of his artworks evoked.
Although surface textures became very important in those works which were clad in
rusted metal, the markings were not gestural. I found emotional relief whilst executing
the drawings in works such as *Time out* (Fig. 103) and in *Breinfloute/Blackout* (Fig.
109). The vast black expanse creates a calming and meditative effect but could also
refer to unending space, the mysterious and the unknown.

The work entitled *Downfall/Documents from heaven* (Fig. 110), consists of a vertical
length of paper that could be either displayed against a wall or suspended from a
ceiling, covered with vertical markings. On the floor, in front of the paper the viewer is
confronted by a disorderly heap of rusted files, envelopes and pieces of A4 sized
‘paper’, made of rusted metal. The vertical marks on the paper suggest traces left by the
files, as if they had fallen swiftly from a great height. The heap of files and documents
resembles discarded items thrown onto a trash heap. This work refers to the loss
caused in circumstances of war or through regime change, when viewpoints regarding
what is considered as important archival matter shifts. Those in power create the
present as well as history with only traces that are left of the lost content of lives. This
work is also known by its alternative title namely *Documents from heaven*, inspired by
the 9/11 events, when thousands of documents from the Twin Towers fluttered down to
earth and landed in the streets of New York.
Fig. 110: Downfall/Documents from heaven, 2009, rusted metal, found objects, graphite on Fabriano paper, collection the artist, photograph by Rupert de Beer.
Figs. 111a and 111b: Paper cut, 2011, rusted metal and wooden panel, collection MAP, the photographs demonstrate the front and back views of the ‘wall’, photographs by Rupert de Beer.
I also made a series of modest works, where I focused on the object as vehicle to carry a figurative meaning, often suggested by the title. The work entitled *Paper cut* (Fig. 111) is large in scale, consisting of two ‘paper’ airplanes, made of metal, piercing a wall, a work that also alludes to the two airplanes that collided with the Twin Towers during the 9/11 attacks. The aeroplanes are visible from both sides of the wall, suggestive of menace from the inside or outside. The title *Paper cut* is a play on the suggestion that innocent work with documents or paper might lead to harm. Interior versus exterior space (inside and outside) is questioned as a ‘no space’ is suggested by the fact of the violent penetration of the buildings by the two aeroplanes holding innocent passengers.

I will also briefly mention a few works displaying single objects, where the title or wordplay is often the point of departure for the process of conceptualisation. I regard the
notion of wordplay as an important aspect of my work and all titles are carefully considered, often implying double meanings, as in the work *Killing time* (Fig. 34). I frequently also include invented words, specifically in Afrikaans, to form part of the titles, e.g. *Biegbak* and *Koeëlwas.*
Fig. 117: *Jacket and tie*, 2012, rusted metal and found material, collection Jurie Willemse, photograph by author.
In the work known as *Papierwerk/Paper work* (Fig. 112), eleven steps that are necessary to fold a paper aeroplane are visualised. The work known as *Paper weight* (Fig. 113), displays a pistol lying on a heap of ‘paper’ made of metal. The artwork entitled *Missing files* (Fig. 115) suggests the removal or misplacing of valuable archival matter or evidence thereof.

*Dwaalkoeël/Stray bullet* (Fig. 114) is a small work, permanently installed in a wall inside the Trent Gallery in Pretoria. The visitor to the gallery might accidentally discover the bullet inside the wall, which transforms the meaning of the space, implying an incident or a tragedy. The phenomenon of the stray bullet is a familiar one to citizens of South Africa, as incidents of children accidentally being caught in crossfire are often reported in the news media. *Verdagte bagasie/Suspicious luggage* (Fig. 116) and *Baadjie en das/Jacket and tie* (Fig. 117), are also examples of a number of works where emphasis is placed on objects.

The work *Verdagte bagasie/Suspicious luggage* resonates with the luggage presented in the installation entitled *Baggage arrival* (Fig. 96) where the luggage seem to be those of innocent victims. In this work (Fig. 116), the title alludes to the way that public places such as airports and railway stations have become spaces of terror within a contemporary context; the piece of luggage is transformed into a weapon. It might also suggest personal luggage and personal accountability, as in the work entitled *Diagnose/Diagnosis*. The installation known as *Baadjie en das/Jacket and tie* (Fig. 117) demonstrates a change from the usual presentation of clothing draped over a chair or a dumb valet. The supporting structure has been removed, the clothes taken off and hung, suggesting the handing over of power and acceptance hereby creating an opportunity for reflection.

In 2012 the director of the Anglo-Boer War Museum in Bloemfontein, Johan van Zijl, invited me to participate in a project titled Universal Suffering, where artists were commissioned to present work commemorating the Anglo-Boer War. A selection of
these works were exhibited at the Johannes Stegmann Gallery on the campus of the
University of the Free State, concurrently with the *Time and Space* exhibition at the
Oliewenhuis Art Museum in 2013 under the title *Re-envisioning the Anglo-Boer (South
African) War*, curated by Angela de Jesus and Janine Allen. The works of all the artists
who contributed to the exhibition *Re-envisioning the Anglo-Boer (South African) War*,
were afterwards taken up in the collection of the Anglo-Boer War Museum. My entry for
the project was titled *Monument* (Figs. 118a and 118b) and consists of a large ball of
‘wool’ (made of barbed wire) pierced by two red ‘knitting needles’, now installed at the
entry to the Anglo-Boer War Museum, directly across the Women’s Memorial that was
erected in 1913 (*Universal suffering*, 2013:3)

This artwork honours those women who were forced into the concentration camps
during the Anglo-Boer War which took place from 1899 to 1902. It is also intended as a
tribute to the famous welfare campaigner, Emily Hobhouse, who fought for the rights of
women and children who were held captive in the concentration camps during the war.
After the war, she established schools where handicrafts such as lace making,
needlepoint, spinning and weaving were taught, to enable some form of livelihood for
those women (van Reenen, 1984:5). The artwork alludes to womanly handicrafts and
skills as a metaphor for survival as well as for healing (as discussed in chapter three)
with the barbed wire as a direct reference to the camps and the hardships that were
endured. The tightly wound wire evoke feelings of torment and tension. These emotions
are prompted in any context where power abuse occurs and this work is intended to
convey meaning beyond references to the Anglo-Boer War. The red knitting needles are
reminiscent of the manner in which the colour of rust was juxtaposed with red as seen
in the work known as *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet* (Fig. 88) to suggest authoritative or
patriarchal power. This work, *Monument* (Figs. 118a and b), is unique amongst my body
of work due to its large scale and also because it is specifically dedicated to a public
figure, namely Emily Hobhouse. Although I execute installations on a large scale, such
as *The end* (Fig. 98), all objects are usually presented on a human scale. In the
work *Monument* (Fig. 118a), however, the scale is exaggerated as the knitting needles are three meters in length dwarfing the viewer with the objects.
In an introductory essay published in the catalogue for the exhibition *Re-envisioning the Anglo-Boer (South African) War*, Christina Landman (2013:7,8) remarks on the two pens “penetrat[ing] the ball of wool”:

> Through them the phallic captivity of the women is brought to attention. This is not only symbolising the past, it is a prophesy of the present and its future. Afrikaans women are still held captive in patriarchal discourses. They are still suffering from the physical and emotional abuse ensuing from a community where both men and women are stylised in hierarchical gender roles in which men are not accountable to women. Van der Merwe thus creates a startling moment of poetic reflection. He has frozen in rusted tin and beauty the dilemma of Afrikaans women today: while their grief is acknowledged and they are celebrated for their care and compassion, they remain in the concentration camps of human indignity (Landman, 2013:7, 8).

As *Monument* (Fig. 118) was exhibited for the first time concurrently with the *Time and Space* exhibition in 2013, the logistical planning was extensive. The Oliewenhuis Art Museum is a national museum and an agency of the Department Arts and Culture. The building (completed in 1941) is a double story mansion in the Neo-Dutch style, situated in a large garden. It was formerly the official residence of the Administrator of the

---

48 Although the work was contextualised in an exhibition pertaining to the Anglo-Boer War, a universal of its meaning is also important to me.

Fig. 118b: *Monument* (detail), photograph by Rupert de Beer.
Orange Free State. It opened as a national art museum in 1989 (Oliewenhuis Art Museum, S.a.). A satellite underground exhibition space was accidentally discovered when a reservoir, dating back to 1902 and excavated out of granite and only accessible through a manhole, was uncovered in the far corner of the garden. This vaulted space, measuring thirty three meters in length, was renovated and transformed into an exhibition space, made viable by installing a lift. This project was completed in 2002 (Oliewenhuis Art Museum, S.a.) and in the same year I was invited to present a solo exhibition in the Reservoir, as it is now known, where I was the first fine artist whose work was exhibited in this evocative space. I exhibited, amongst other works, Rooitapy/Red carpet and Baggage arrival.

The spaces made available to me in the main building at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum for the Time and Space exhibition in 2013 were, firstly, all the exhibition rooms on the ground floor. In the long hallway three installations could be seen namely Reisiger/Traveller (Fig.104), Diagnose/Diagnosis (Fig. 108) and Rooi kussing/Red cushion (Fig. 107). In the rectangular space to the left of the hallway the installations Biegbak/Confessional (Fig. 18) and It’s cold outside (Fig. 15) were placed, separated by a partition.

To the left of the hallway a staircase leads up to the first floor and to two exhibition spaces known as The Annex. Here, the works entitled Power failure (Fig. 106), Water en Roes/Water and rust (Fig. 101) and Downfall/Documents from heaven (Fig. 110) were shown in the first space, whilst Koeëlwas/Bullet proof jacket (Fig. 63) and Cleaning instructions (Fig. 64) were placed in the second. The first floor also houses the permanent collection of the Oliewenhout Art Museum. This collection was not removed for the duration of the Time and Space exhibition as my installation entitled Showcase (Fig. 29) was on display as part of this collection. On the ground floor, behind the long hallway, are three large interconnected exhibition spaces with a wide door leading to the large back garden of the museum. These spaces were the site of a major large scale installation, entitled Ontwortel/Uprooted (Figs. 122a, b, c, d, and e).
Whereas the Pretoria Art Museum was designed with the specific purpose of an exhibition space in mind, characterised by its clinical modernist style and concrete floors, the Olievenhuis Art Museum retains the ambience of a domestic space with its warmer wooden floors within the main building. Certain installations such as *It's cold outside* and *The end*, were included in both exhibitions where the specific characteristics of each space affected the artworks. The Reservoir was assigned to me as an additional space in 2013 and the installations namely *The end* (Figs. 119a and b) and *Uitverkoping/Sale* (Figs. 120a, b, c, d, e and f) were exhibited there. *The end* has only been installed twice, for the first time in 2006 during *The archaeology of time* exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum and the second time in 2013 in the Reservoir.

The manner in which the characteristics of a specific space has an effect on an artwork is particularly evident when one compares photographs of *The end*, installed in the Reservoir, to those taken at the Pretoria Art Museum (where I had a space of 20m x 12m available for the ‘film theatre’). However, the Reservoir suits my work, enhancing the ‘archaeological quality’ and is one of my favourite exhibition spaces. The visitor has to descend via a staircase or a lift to an underground space reminiscent of a vaulted tomb or a bunker, with large pillars supporting the roof. Within this space I had to adapt the layout of the chairs to accommodate the pillars and here the installation was spread over a larger space. The ambience created by this installation was conceptually enhanced by the features of this subdued space with its peculiar subterranean atmosphere and smell.

The process of installing *The end* in this excavated space acquired further significance and meaning, as it resembled a ritual. When the installation was dismantled in 2006, every object was wrapped, labeled and numbered individually according to the layout of the hundred and eight chairs. All the chairs and electrical equipment were wrapped and stored. Eight years later all items were carefully unwrapped and placed where they

---

49 I have no preference for the one space over the other and often prefer the neutral materials within an industrial space.
belonged. This process resembled the activities of an archaeologist or archivist and I found myself cast within a new role, as ‘discoverer’ of my own artwork.

Figs. 119a and 119b: The end, 2006, (installed in the Reservoir, front and back views), theatre chairs, found objects, rusted metal, screen, data projector, lights, collection the artist, photographs by Sylvester Mqeku.
The work entitled *Uitverkoping/Sale* was installed in the entrance hall of the Reservoir and was separated from *The end* by a black curtain. *Uitverkoping/Sale* was executed in 2009 and first exhibited as a showcase work for the gallery Brundyn & Gonzalves during the Johannesburg Art Fair\(^50\) of 2009. The installation consisted of a steel structure measuring 4m x 3m x 2,30m, fitted with Perspex windows imitating a men’s outfitters, with a shopfront where clothes are usually displayed in ‘windows’ on either side: three boxes with folded shirts and ties and a man’s suit on a stand with briefcase and umbrella, all made from rusted metal.

\(^{50}\) Apart from other meanings conveyed by the title, *Uitverkoping/Sale*, it is also meant as a reference to the commercial aspect that is given prominence at an art fair.
On each side of the aisle leading to the back charcoal drawings of clothes were displayed on clothes hangers; shirts on the one and trousers on the other. The drawings were created through the rubbing technique by rubbing actual clothing with charcoal impressed onto large pieces of paper. These paper sheets were then protected by lengths of plastic, imitating new clothes to be presented to prospective customers. A row of ties were presented close to the side window. ‘Shoe boxes’ were stacked at the back in front of the entrances to two fitting rooms or cubicles, with spaces separated by white curtains. Inside each cubicle clothes were casually placed along with a chair, as if they were being tried on – in one space a shirt hung against the wall whilst another was still in its box on the chair and in the other cubicle a shoe box was placed on the chair with trousers draped over a hanger against the wall. The floor of the shop was covered with metal steel plates.

Fig. 120b: Uitverkoping/Sale (detail of stacked ‘shoe boxes’), photograph by Rupert de Beer.
Figs. 120c, 120d and 120e: Uitverkoping/Sale (details), photographs by Sylvester Mqeku.
The title of the installation namely *Uitverkoping/Sale*, might allude to the idea of being redundant and insinuates that a ‘sell out’ is taking place, as if those in power do not heed the ordinary person and that power is misused. The stacked shoe boxes are also reminiscent of the 'memorial' wall in the work entitled *Eclipse* whereas the plastic covers protecting the clothes might resemble body bags. There is a reference to private versus public space, similar to *The end*: the shop is experienced as a public space, but inside the fitting room a private self is faced. Likewise, the cubicles echo the space created in the installation known as *Biegbak/Confessional*, suggesting an opportunity for introspection. In contrast to works such as *It’s cold outside* and *No I want my mother*, where womanliness was accentuated, emphasis is placed on the male identity in *Uitverkoping/Sale*. The transparent feature of the Perspex and plastic is important within this work. The viewer need not enter the space to experience what is inside: all the objects, their textures and details are visible from the outside. The visibility is enhanced by the lighting effects – the objects on ‘sale’ are well lit by spotlights. However, those viewers who do enter become part of the content and are, for a moment, visibly secluded from the outside. The drawings on paper have emerged into a prevalent strategy within recent work, creating a dialogue between two-dimensional images and three dimensional objects.

Fig. 120f: *Uitverkoping/Sale*, 2009, rusted metal, charcoal on paper, plastic, Perspex and found material, collection Frank and Lizelle Kilbourn, photograph by Rupert de Beer.
The most important transformation and new element regarding my visual language is visible in the installation entitled *Ontwortel/Uprooted*. This work comprises seven separate constructions made out of the stumps of uprooted trees attached to the remnants of seven different pieces of household furniture, scorched by fire, along with large stretches of Fabriano paper, marked with charcoal.

This installation was first installed in the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery from 11 November 2009 to 27 January 2010, during a solo exhibition, also dubbed *Ontwortel/Uprooted*. All the works exhibited in this exhibition were created well after I had made a careful reconnaissance and study of the exhibition space of this gallery.
This was the first opportunity where I could create artworks for a very specific space (previously, existing artworks were installed in ‘fixed’ exhibition spaces). The space of the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery is in the shape of an elongated rectangle with a concrete floor. One side wall consists of large glass windows with intersections of concrete whilst the opposite wall is painted white. The space is unassuming with a sense for the industrial. As visitors enter, they are faced by an extended area where the space seems to sweep away into the opposite direction.

During the period of preparation for the exhibition, which also included the installations entitled *Downfall* (Fig. 110) and *Breinfloute/Blackout* (Fig. 109), amongst others, I often travelled between Pretoria and Johannesburg and was struck by the sight of many large trees lying uprooted along roads that were being widened. This sacrifice in the name of progress seemed ironic to me. When travelling by motorcar one cannot help noticing the many memorial crosses and flower wreaths that are placed along the roads by family members commemorating loved ones who died in road accidents at those specific sites. The uprooted trees and memorial crosses seemed to emanate the same meaning.

These impressions were reinforced each time I traveled on specific roads. I started associating the uprooted trees with a specific song by the journalist/singer/songwriter Rian Malan recorded on his album *Alien/Inboorling* (Malan, 2005) and entitled *Bloekomboom* (blue gum tree), in which he mourns the removal of centuries old blue gum trees as they are deemed invasive. The blue gum trees (indigenous to Australia (Eucalyptus, S.a.)) appear metaphorical for a ‘transplanted’ identity. This song might be interpreted as an expression of his questions regarding identity in South Africa. During this period, whilst planning the exhibition, there were many reports of xenophobic attacks within South Africa’s cities, leaving families destitute after their homes or

---

51 I am moved by people’s desire to perform some or other tangible act of commemoration after an experience of trauma. These actions are meaningful, irrespective of the specific symbols or objects used by different cultural groups.

52 The title of Malan’s album of songs is *Alien/Inboorling*. *Inboorling* is translated as ‘native’. The title of his album reflects the complex questions regarding ‘transplanted and indigenous identities within South Africa.'
businesses were burnt down. The issue of identity is pertinent within a global environment where there is a constant flux as cultures inter-connect. The refugee crisis compounds this question as there seems to be very divisive viewpoints regarding the integration or separation of what is considered ‘alien’ cultures.

Many of the redundant trees that I saw along the road were firstly felled, eventually with only the stumps remaining the trunks were severed further and dug from the soil, exposing the roots. This sight reminded me of other associations with trees from my childhood. A grown apricot tree that stood outside my bedroom window, was blown over overnight during a storm and lay on its side the next morning. In spite of the fact that half of its roots were exposed, it kept on growing and bloomed each year. My father had the first of a series of heart attacks under another apricot tree in our garden and in my presence and this event cast a shadow over our household. All these impressions and associations led to the conceptualisation of the installation *Ontwortel/Uprooted*.

I managed to collect some of the tree stumps and attached them to various pieces of furniture such as chairs, a couch, a table, a dumb valet and a showcase, to create the effect that these artefacts ‘grew’ from the stumps. In most of the furniture pieces only the frameworks were used, which created the impression of skeletons. The different pieces were then scorched with a flame until they appeared black, as if they survived some apocalyptic event. Lastly, each piece was placed on a stretch of Fabriano paper on which marks were made, suggesting that the roots and furniture were dragged over the paper, leaving traces of their movement.

My intention was to comment on the idea of displacement. Each piece of furniture was intended as a metaphor for a human being or for a culture with the roots conveying the weight of that identity being dragged along. The items of furniture appeared as if they had been destabilised as they were presented askew, almost as if they had been swept along in a violent current or had been part of some enormously unsettling event. Viewing these items it is obvious that they are not functional objects of comfort anymore.
and are presented as if a disruptive event is taking place or has just occurred. The blackened furniture is an image that has remained with me for many years, after witnessing a house that burnt down and seeing the skeleton of the house and furnishings as a child. The couch and armchair in the installations are pieces of furniture that I inherited from my parents and the other items were collected in second hand shops. The juxtaposing of the tree stumps together with the furniture contrast the organic natural shapes with the more geometric manmade and crafted shapes of the furniture. Apart from the associations with cultural displacement, the installation might also be interpreted as a comment on ecological issues and the exploitation of natural resources, or understood as a metaphor for the transformation processes that are part of artmaking. There is a distinct play with the idea of transformation as raw natural wood, crafted wood, paper and charcoal suggest a cycle of growth and death.
Although I have experimented with charcoal and burn marks early in my career, this installation marks a change. I had been using furniture in my installations since 1998, mostly clad in rusted metal and presented with clothes and other objects associated with the ordinary lives of people. In the installation *Ontwortel/Uprooted* the furniture is stripped of the metal layer, the additional objects and the clothing, as if they are not being ‘preserved’ any more exposing their inner essence. The warm brown colour is substituted for black. The rusted appearance in previous work evoked an elegiac tone as emphasis was placed on decay, but in this installation the objects appear as if the process has come to an end and death has occurred.

The marks on the paper are suggestive of traces that had been left behind. The execution of these drawings were important to me as a form of emotional expression. I created drawing materials by scorching logs in a fire and had to use force to manipulate the heavy pieces of wood, dragging these across the paper to imitate marks left by the tree roots.
During the installation of the final work, I placed the separate pieces in such a way that the viewer first encountered the long stretches of paper, before reaching the pieces of furniture, enhancing the idea of being swept along in the extended gallery space. When the viewer reaches the end of this space and looks back, he/she is confronted by the sight of slanting, upside-down, skeleton-like shapes forming frames or negative spaces through which the whole of the installation becomes visible. When the visitor moves back to the entrance, it seems as if one is moving against a current with the force of this current sweeping the furniture along. The suggestions of flow, movement, weight and discomfort are important elements in the work. In spite of this suggestion of movement, the installation seems more quiet and desolate than other work, as there is less evidence of human lives, as if this is what is left after a flood has subsided or a battle has taken place.

In 2013 I had a second opportunity to exhibit the installation *Ontwortel/Uprooted*, during the *Time and Space* exhibition at the Oliewenhus Art Museum. The work was placed in the main building on the ground floor, in three interconnected rooms which could be entered in the middle section. Directly opposite the entrance, a door leads to the back garden and the Reservoir. This thoroughfare meant that I could not create the same effect as in the Gallery at the University of Johannesburg as the visitor had to move either to the right or left to experience the installation. I used one of the largest of the seven pieces namely the vitrine attached to a large tree stump, as focal point upon entering the middle section. To prevent visitors from walking over the sheet of paper, I had to screen the work on both sides, using small white poles attached with a rope, as is visible in Fig. 122a. This action had a similar effect to the screening off of a crime scene, a danger zone, or the edge of an open grave, preventing the public to enter, whilst at the same time enabling viewing. If one looked to the right or left, the sensation of being dragged into the space, similar to the space of the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, could be experienced. The installation in the Oliewenhus Art Museum seemed more intimate, due to the spaces suggesting three large domestic rooms and also the sense of warmth created by the wooden floors. The well-cared for wooden
floors contributed to the concept of processed wood and the cycle of growth and death, as mentioned earlier.

The pieces of furniture in *Ontwortel/Uprooted*, the chairs and dumb valet, have all appeared in earlier installations, mostly clad in rusted metal and placed upright on the floor space. In *Ontwortel/Uprooted* the dining table (earlier presented in the work *Gaste/Guests* (Fig. 61), is stripped of the tableware, matching chairs, clothes and other signs of human presence and is turned on its side with only one corner connecting the floor. The rectangular shape of a table with its flat surface is a very common sight, seen mostly as level in relation to the floor. The table is often seen as a symbol of stability and human connectedness but here the overturned table conveys an impression of imbalance and disruption.

Fig. 122a: *Ontwortel/Uprooted* (detail of the installation of the vitrine in Oliewenhuis Art Museum), photograph by Sylvester Mqeku.
The overturned and empty showcase or vitrine in this installation as it was presented in the Oliewenhuis Art Museum, served as a focal point as it was one of the largest of the seven separate pieces. Furthermore, it also resonated with the work entitled Showcase (Fig. 29) which forms part of the permanent collection of this museum and simultaneously on display on the first floor. In Ontwortel/Uprooted the showcase is empty and the artefacts collected over a lifetime have disappeared. The border between inside and outside has been removed. The glass insulating the objects has been lost and in place of the halo-like lighting visible in Showcase, the spotlights on the furniture attached to the tree roots reflect the stripped frames of the objects. The size of the root base attached to the structure implies the depth and weight of that which once had meaning and value, such as identity, culture, home, safety, but that has now been disrupted or lost.

Fig. 122b: Ontwortel/Uprooted (details of the installation in Oliewenhuis Art Museum), photograph by Sylvester Mqeku.
Figs. 122c, 122d and 122e: Ontworpel/Uprooted (details of the installation in Oliwenhuis Art Museum), photographs by Sylvester Mqeko.
The blackened forms and silhouettes create a quiet presence whilst the negative spaces within the empty furniture are significant as they carry meaning. A sense of demise is suggested by the scattered, dysfunctional furniture and also indicates an acknowledgement of the end of a cycle and an acceptance of uncertainty and the unknown. The stripping to the ‘bone’ that is suggested in this work might be viewed as a loss, or as an act of purging, enabling a willingness for a new beginning.

From 22 May to 29 May 2011, thirteen artists were invited to take part in South Africa’s first international land art event, entitled *Site Specific* (Randall & Snyman, 2011:4), “conceived by Strijdom van der Merwe and Anni Snyman in an attempt to create more opportunity for land art in South Africa”. In an introduction to the exhibition catalogue, the conveners gave a brief overview of the emergence of land art since the 1960s, and set out the aims of the project, emphasising the opportunity to work “free of the gallery setting” (Randall & Snyman, 2011:4). As I featured amongst the artists who were invited, I grabbed the opportunity to create art within this ‘new’ context and to meet new local and international artists and experience their work processes. I have always regarded my artworks as ‘indoor monuments’, designed to be displayed in architectural interior spaces, art museums and galleries where I had control over aspects such as lighting. With this invitation I considered the project as a new challenge.

The *Site-specific* event took place at the Cape coastal town of Plettenberg Bay where each artist was given the freedom to select a space for his/her project. I decided to adapt the concept I developed in the *Ontwortel/Uprooted* installation, staying true to the strategies that I created. I received permission to uproot Wattle trees on a farm outside Plettenberg Bay and sourced furniture from second hand shops. I created five artworks which could be regarded as further extensions of the pieces made for the *Ontwortel/Uprooted* installation.
Fig. 123a: Ontwortel/Uprooted, 2011, furniture and tree stumps, land art event: Site-specific, Plettenberg bay (detail), collection MAP, photograph by Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau.
Figs. 123b and 123c: Ontwortel/Uprooted (details), photographs by Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau.
Figs. 123d and 123e: Ontwortel/Uprooted (details), photographs by Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau.
I selected a stretch of beach along a walkway with lamps to present the final work, right on the edge between the natural landscape and manmade structures. The separate pieces were placed on the sand along the pathway. During the day the black forms were etched against the light sand and at night they were lit by the lamps along the pathway. The artworks were enhanced by the changing light and moving shadows of the roots across the sand, which gradually withered away as time passed.

The chosen site added meaning to this installation as the artefacts resembled debris washed up on the beach in the wake of a shipwreck. The work seemed to also comment on the displacement of refugees. The shapes, belonging indoors, reveal vulnerability within the natural organic context. This land art project, titled *Site-specific* (2011), was conceptualised to establish and convey meaning with universal relevance namely referring to humans who flee to escape death only to be met by death.

Fig. 123f: Ontwortel/Uprooted, 2011, furniture and tree stumps. Land art event: *Site-specific*, Plettenberg bay (full view of the installation), collection MAP, photograph by Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau.
This project led me to admire the land artists’ sensitive awareness of the natural environment and the creative manner in which accessible natural materials and a specific site are transformed without invasion, focusing on ecological issues in subtle ways.

My participation in the project provided an opportunity to look at my own art from a new perspective as I had to adapt to a space which I could not control or demarcate. Whereas I initially brought the natural materials into the gallery space as illustrated in the installation *Ontwortel/Uprooted* (2009), here the natural materials were displayed outside in a public space. However, in both installations my intentions remained the same namely to create ‘memorials’ for the unknown.

![Fig. 123g: Ontwortel/Uprooted, (details), photograph by Elizabeth Olivier-Kalau.](image)

In this chapter I have shown and analysed how I used the space that was made available for my installation at the Oliwewhuis Art Museum, during a comprehensive exhibition in 2013. I had the opportunity to bring works together that were dispersed and was also able to trace new developments. Where materials are concerned, I have been
using digital media to a lesser extent than in my earlier work and I also started to juxtapose three-dimensional objects with charcoal on paper drawings. In the latest work, the signature material and technique that I have been using since 1998, namely cladding with rusted metal was substituted for a new approach. Although I still employed familiar household objects, they were now presented as if stripped from an outer layer and of their trimmings by applying scorching and deliberate damage for them to appear as remnants of an apocalyptic event.

A change in my visual language is visible when the exhibition *The archaeology of time* is compared to *Time and space*. There is a movement away from the focus on ‘archaeological time’ to a suggestion of apocalyptic occurrences. The cladding of objects with rusted metal – an effort to suggest the ‘shifting’ of time is contrasted with the presentation of objects created by scorching wood. The burnt objects display the present, as if the trauma is being witnessed as it happens, whereas, in previous work, the artifacts were presented as ‘relics’ of the past. The many ordinary objects I used in *The end*, is substituted with more modest skeleton-like structures. In these installations solitary scorched furniture and tree stumps are combined as though these humble possessions have been abandoned with only the emotional essence or spiritual survival remaining. In the exhibition *Time and space*, intimate personal spaces directed towards myself were explored for the first time in works such as *Diagnosis/Diagnose, Reisiger/Traveler* and *Rooi Kussing/Red cushion*. Where abuse of power by the powerful was emphasised in previous works such as *Rooi tapyt/Red carpet*, my empowered persona and accountability was examined in installations entitled *Kragonderbreking/Power failure*, and *Breinfloute/Blackout*.

New concepts such as anxiety, tension and uncertainty have been incorporated into my visual language and most evident in *Ontwortel/Uprooted* (2009) and *Ontwortel/Uprooted* (2011). The marks I created on paper, not only transformed the visual language in my installations, but they also revealed personal emotion which is an important addition to my visual language.
In early work, where the heavens or stars were introduced as subject matter, for example in *Galaxy* (Fig. 11), the atmosphere suggested was romantic and magical. However, in the installation known as *Breinfloute/Blackout* (Fig. 109), the black expanse drawn on the paper by hand, is also a presentation of the heavens or the cosmos. Although the element of mystery is still present in this work, an intensity and darkness is now present and conveyed as such.

Concepts referring to life and death, inside and outside, earth and heaven and the transformation of materials remain part of the ‘vocabulary’ of my visual language, but in an effort to create a poetic moment becomes uppermost as to what I try to convey within my visual language.
Chapter 6
Conclusion.

The aim of this thesis was clearly stated in the title namely **Visual language in the work of Jan van der Merwe**. Visual language is visibly not verbal language, which meant that, for the purposes of this thesis, the visual language or tools and strategies I employed, had to be located and ‘translated’ to reveal a verbal language.

This venture for any practicing artist is not necessarily an easy undertaking as the artist has to construct and develop some distance from his/her body of work in order to ‘speak’ about it. Furthermore, the artist also has to reveal and pinpoint those aspects of the artmaking process that are often ambivalent and intimate and who has, after all, chosen a **visual language** as the preferred medium of expression.

In chapter one the scope of this research was set out together with the aim which was formulated as the examination and documentation of my own working process(es) as it developed through the decades and the contextualisation of these concepts and processes within a theoretical framework. The following key question was formulated in chapter one to serve as a guiding principle for this research project: can I construct a valid theoretical framework within which it is possible to locate and contextualise the characteristics of my visual language, as well as analyse and interpret the body of artworks that I have developed over four decades?

The theoretical framework that was established within this thesis is indicative of those discourses which are relevant to the content and strategies visible in my artwork. This framework also comprises selecting and discussing the work of other artists, whose creative output bares relevance to mine, either with regard to conceptualisation and content, or where the use of materials are concerned. The structure of such a theoretical framework is necessary to ensure that the evaluation of my work has value.
within an academic context, for those who are interested in my work and lastly for myself as a practicing artist.

An investigation into my work was undertaken through discussion, research and analysis underpinned by examples of selected work, which span a long period of time, from 1977 to date. Although these discussions are accompanied by photographs to illustrate and support the written argument, the theoretical document does not include a complete ‘documentation’ as stated in the abovementioned aim. Accordingly, this documentation is presented, amongst others, in the form of appendices and attachments in DVD format to include a complete record of the artworks presented as the practical component of this thesis. This entails photographs and film documentation of the exhibitions which had been presented as case studies, as well as other documentaries. A full list of the appendices is provided in chapter one.

The aim of the theoretical component of the thesis was to ‘translate’ my visual language into words and to reflect on my creative process. Apart from the analysis and discussion of my works, this research included recounting background information in a more conscious manner in an effort to uncover the processes of conceptualisation. This attempt to recount the narrative of my artmaking career by looking back over four decades, was undertaken to demarcate a specific framework regarding my field of interest, to discover certain patterns and to investigate recurring cycles, progress, developments and changes that occurred throughout these years. In this regard it was also imperative to investigate certain themes such as conceptualisation, techniques and materials as well as presentation strategies. Apart from the two key solo exhibitions that were introduced as case studies to showcase the application of the visual language I developed over the span of my career, selected earlier examples of my works and exhibitions were also discussed in an effort to trace the origins of my interests as an artist and the seeds of the visual language that evolved.
A practice-led as well as an auto-ethnographic approach was followed, as the research I undertook, comprised and supported my own practical work. A review of extant theory related to these methodologies was provided in chapter two in order to gain an understanding of what such an investigation entailed and also to establish a research model.

The aim of practice-led research encompasses not merely a description of the themes, work processes or the technical aspects of an artist’s work, but rather acquiring new knowledge. The ‘practice’-component of the term practice-led implies that the knowledge is primarily acquired through ‘making’. The artist embarks on a private and personal journey, working with tangible or actual materials. However, this process also includes intellectual conceptualisation, emotional involvement as well as other arcane aspects of the creative process that often remains undisclosed. Practice-led research is an acknowledgement that artworks are "replete with potential evidence of knowledge" and that they "operate as texts, artifacts, and events that embody cultural meanings" Sullivan (2005:110). Here the artist has an opportunity to reflect on his or her body of work and to gain new insight through his/her effort to formulate intentions and interests, but also to produce knowledge that might be of value to others. Where practice-led research is concerned, such research provides knowledge about action; the artworks have a concrete existence and their making encompasses practical considerations as well as intellectual contemplation.

To be able to engage in practice-led research, it is essential to conceive a model that would qualify as academic research, whilst at the same time do justice to those elusive features which form part of the artmaking process. I have broadly followed the suggestions by Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010:31-44) who acknowledge that such research does not develop in a linear manner, but rather through an “ongoing dialogue between practice, concepts and precedents”. The authors also give validation to the subjective tone that the artist needs to employ in order to write about his/her own art. The model provided by Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010:34) emphasise the following
components namely *situating concepts* or the ‘theoretical’ section of the exegesis, which includes the definition of key terms and relevant issues as well as establishing a theoretical framework; *precedents of practice*, which entails establishing a link between the researcher’s practice, its broader context plus a consideration of the work of other relevant artists and lastly focussing on the researcher’s creative practice. This approach was a means to ensure validity, by providing a context that extends beyond a narrow focus regarding my own work.

I applied these suggestions by structuring the narrative regarding my own art within three chapters. In chapter three I attempted to specifically locate my visual language with reference to concept, materials, technique and strategies of presentation. I subsequently interrogated relevant theoretical discourses and discussed examples of the work of other contemporary artists whose work bears relevance to mine. In chapter four the development of a personal visual language was traced through an analysis of the new methods in which these strategies had been applied. In chapter five the emphasis was placed on the changes that had been occurring within my visual language. These developments and changes were acutely visible in the artworks I presented in the two major solo exhibitions which form the case studies as well as the practical components presented as part of the practice-led research.

Auto-ethnography, as a method that “attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:7), created an opportunity for me to write in a self-reflexive manner about my work gaining, thereby, a “self-cultural” understanding. The juxtaposing of the terms *auto* (personal experience) and *ethno* (cultural experience) (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011:7), requires that this methodology be viewed as a means in which to place personal experience within a cultural context. The research that I undertook on this topic as illustrated in chapter two, served as a guideline and as an endorsement for this academic enquiry. I consciously became aware and mindful of the emphasis placed on a subjective view as well as the significance of “inner knowing”, as it is termed by Duncan (2004:30). The ‘genre’ of auto-ethnography allowed other
‘voices’ apart from the traditional academic methodologies and provided me with the courage to attempt to write about myself and my art.

Auto-ethnography is described by scholars such as Rolling (2008:842) as having the potential to reveal what has been kept hidden. His acknowledgment of the potential struggle that auto-ethnography might involve, is confirmed by the introduction of phrases such as “stammering”, “unspeakable”, “animating struggle for words”, “evocative methodologies” and “scholarship that wears no clothes” (Rolling, 2008:849), and is clear evidence of the author trying to define this term. However, Rolling’s arguments revealed to me that it might be possible to attempt to write about my own work. Chang’s (2008:15) caution on the other hand, that one’s own story should be used to form part of a larger study of others and that auto-ethnography should also encompass critical analysis and not mere self-exposure, has been extremely helpful and guided me in my effort to construct form and method regarding this study.

In chapter one the questions of credibility, validity, bias and reliability were emphasised as “recurrent criticisms” (Méndez, 2013:287) regarding auto-ethnographic research, along with its strong emphasis on the self and the possibility of being “self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective and individualised”. The subjectivity of the researcher was acknowledged accordingly. In my view, the problems of validity, bias and credibility are largely circumvented by the presentation of a concrete body of artwork to supplement this thesis, enabling the reader to judge whether there exists a valid correlation between what is seen and what is written. This auto-ethnographic study or written explanation of evidence is balanced by its link with actual artefacts that exist independently of the written account. The artist is necessarily “introspective and individualised”, but has to ‘externalise’ what is felt and perceived by conceptualising and creating tactile artworks by implementing professional skills. The trained artist works within a tradition and the regular exposure of his/her artwork to the public through exhibitions, impose a certain discipline and corrective as the work is assessed by peers working within this field. A case in point is where the artist’s career spans a few decades, this assessment gathers
depth, even though the artist remains uncertain, as if he or she is continually walking on a precipice. In this thesis however, these artworks were placed within a larger framework of current theoretical discourse and in certain instances compared to the work of other relevant artists, in an effort to move beyond the subjective viewpoint.

Where the accounts of my own artworks are concerned I have, throughout the thesis, emphasised the value that I place on the possible universal interpretations of my artworks, although they might have very specific and personal sources and initial beginnings where conceptualisation is concerned. I have also made the point and stressed that I acknowledge the fact that the artist cannot control the reception of his/her work and that I value the reactions and connotations brought to the artworks by the viewer. In this regard, it is worthwhile mentioning that, at selected exhibitions, I talk about my artworks to members of the public during informal ‘walkabout’ tours. Although I would refer to selected personal background information pertaining to the artworks in the same manner I elaborate on some of the artworks in this thesis, I do not convey the impression that my views and intentions are the only way to interpret the works. My stories regarding a specific artwork might enrich a viewer’s understanding, but I am often surprised by a viewer’s unique reading of an artwork and welcome this reciprocal interaction whereby the works are given new life or new meaning and whereby I can draw inspiration. However, these interactions are the exception. As a rule I am absent and the artworks stand on their own, open for interpretation by members of the public or by academic scholars. When artist’s statements, catalogues or brochures on my work are published, I refrain from personal narratives to allow an interaction with possible open and universal meanings are suggested.

In chapter three I attempted to locate and isolate my visual language as this chapter encompassed the situating concepts- and precedents of practice-components as suggested by Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010:34). Examples of my work were, however, discussed throughout this chapter to illustrate the development of concepts and strategies. I also attempted to present an outline of my interests as an artist and to
provide key phrases and definitions. In this chapter I also placed my art within a current context and drew links to other artists. I structured this chapter by providing three main headings namely concepts and conceptualisation, materials, techniques and process and lastly, presentation.

Nevertheless, it has proven rather difficult to analyse and discuss the artworks within this framework, as concept and meaning is constituted through materials and process. Throughout the span of my career, I have been aware of my particular interests and attraction towards certain materials. However, this exercise of trying to investigate and identify these features through the medium of language, confirmed to me that I might only achieve an approximation of what I am trying to express in my artworks. This realisation has made me aware of my limitations as a writer. I have however, learnt much and have gained new insights with regard to my own art, the work of other artists with whom I feel an affinity and, most importantly, through the theoretical framework and research that I have undertaken.

Where concept and conceptualisation (one of the sub-headings in chapter three) are concerned, I identified five focus areas that could be summarised as memory, vulnerability and transience, the ordinary, ritual and gender. It was difficult to draw these boundaries and I considered extending these themes to add features such as absence, the threshold, time and others but I decided instead, to rather incorporate these aspects into the discussions and disciplined myself to adhere to the focus areas, to prevent overlap and unnecessary repetition. The research conducted on memory was most enriching and very valuable as it confirmed many of the ideas and concepts that I have been carrying out instinctively whilst making art and in my effort to draw the past into the present. The most unexpected discovery was the link between traditional rituals and my conceptualisation, presentation strategies and work processes. This research enabled also new understanding and insights into my own work process.
Apart from the theoretical passages and discussions of work by other artists, chapter three evolved into a rather extended overview of my work, spanning four decades. As with the section on conceptualisation, it was insightful to trace the origins and development of my use of materials, my work processes and also to have noted a consistency which was discernible right from the start of my career, especially with regard to my fascination with mundane materials and objects as well as the ever present notion of decay.

In the first instance these concepts and strategies were not the result of clinical or rational decisions but rather, evolved instinctively and organically. The need to write about these themes led me to trace the patterns more consciously and I have gained so much more insight regarding the reasons for my choices. The strategy of presentation is a key aspect of my work. Although I was trained as a painter, the emphasis on conceptual art during the 1970s kindled an experimental attitude, regarding the use of materials as well as the strategies of presentation and it was this early exposure that initiated my eventual evolvement as an installation artist.

In chapters four and five I focused on my mature work exhibited in more recent exhibitions. The analysis of the development of my visual language in chapter three enabled me to write with more insight on recent work. Although I regularly present other artists’ work and statements at their exhibitions, and am also used to talking about my art, either in lectures accompanied by visual material, or by undertaking ‘walkabout’ tours of my exhibitions, writing on my own art and processes in such depth has not been a familiar experience. I decided to approach the discussion of my work in chapters four and five in a similar manner as addressing an audience. I started off by discussing the works but also by providing sound background information. The accessibility of my work to ‘everyman’ remains an important requisite, particularly to those individuals who are not yet initiated into the world of art.
Looking back at the manner in which this research took shape, I am aware that I have gained much knowledge and enrichment, not only by means of the written document which gave me much more clarity concerning my identity as an artist and the meaning of my art, but also by means of the practical component of this practice-led study. Over four decades of artmaking I accumulated a great volume of ‘archival matter’ in the form of photographs, films, documentaries, interviews, reviews and articles. For the purposes of submitting this research, I assembled and sorted these documents and images, many of which did not exist within a digital format. Much of this archival material was digitalised or listed for the purposes of this submission and is now presented in DVD format, ensuring accessibility for further research.

Although the emphasis was directed towards the documentation of the two case studies as affirmed in the material included together with the films taken whilst these exhibitions were on show, the overall documentation of early work was as meaningful to me. In many instances only photographs of these works existed but with the digitalisation of these images some form of preservation has now been ensured. I am also aware of the fragility of many of my artworks and, as in the case of performance art or land art, the visual documentation of my artworks in some cases might be all that remains.

The auto-ethnographic approach gave me the opportunity to relate aspects of my personal background and the relevance of identity, culture, socio-political circumstances and history precipitated in my visual language. I also narrated the story of myself as an artist and rediscovered artists such as Rembrandt, de Chirico, Tàpies, Bourgeois, Boltanski, Hesse, Kiefer, Kienholz and others. By revisiting their work for the purposes of this research made me aware once again of the underlying reasons why I retain a fascination with their work, especially with regard to notions such as emotional sensitivity, spirituality, mystery, tactility and authenticity.

As I began my research and focussed more intently on my body of work, I was struck by the realisation that many of the concepts and ideas were already present right from the
start of my career. I identified notions such as the idea of being outside or inside, illusion versus reality or tactility, earth versus heaven, vulnerability and transience and an awareness of the process of death, private versus public space, commemoration of the unknown, the presence of rituals, a fascination with mundane objects and materials and a concern with power abuse and manipulation. Although I consciously tried to convey content pertaining to these concepts, some ideas were at the periphery of my focus. Nevertheless, this research project made me far more aware of the full scope of my interests as an artist. Over the years these concepts were conveyed through different materials, techniques and strategies.

As mentioned above, found material had been present in my art ever since 1977, often incorporated into painting or other mixed media work, but since 1998 I introduced a personal visual language with more confidence and more uniquely so. Rusted tin became an important vehicle through which I conveyed my ideas concerning transience and the idea of the shifting or fluctuation of time, as if the presence had been fossilised. The cladding technique I employed became a method whereby I could incorporate those ordinary objects (such as chairs and clothes) that preoccupy my interest, but also to transform those objects and thus transfigure them to become objects of the imagination.

Since 1998 I introduced installation as a strategy and felt completely at home when given the opportunity to fill a space. By tracing the development of my use of techniques and materials, confirmed the evolving progress visible in my body of work, especially as I gradually started to work on a larger scale. Through the development of a signature style, I have been able to say more with less.

This research confirmed my identity and socio-political circumstances as reflected within my body of work as it developed over the years. My solo exhibition in 1998 was a turning point, as the content I wanted to express with that exhibition developed from my interest to convey the notion of transience through the use of rusted metal. Likewise,
recent, mature work reflects a new phase and yet another new development where content and use of materials are concerned. The introduction and procedure of scorched material as illustrated in the installation *Ontwerpel/Uprooted* (Fig. 121), is an attempt to convey spiritual depth and an acceptance and readiness for change. Although the written explanation of evidence can only be viewed as an estimation of what I tried to convey through my artworks, I have reached a point where I might state that I have adequately responded to the research question; that I have constructed a valid theoretical framework within which it is possible to locate and contextualise the characteristics of my visual language, as well as analyse and interpret the body of artworks that I have developed over four decades.

Although I interrogated aspects of the experimental processes in my art, covering a period of four decades, many works had not been mentioned, as they underlined what was already discussed through the presentation of other examples. I have also not referred to a series of drawings and etchings in which I used similar images to those applied in the installations I discussed as examples. These etchings were made in cooperation with the professional printmaker, Tim Foulds. However, for the purposes of this thesis I selected key works and installations to demonstrate the development of a personal visual language.

In view of possible further research, I am drawn to an earlier comment made elsewhere in the text namely to look at the relationship and possible similarities that might exist between the works of conceptual and outsider artists. Over time I developed an interest in those artists who use materials compulsively and also in the metaphorical features that might develop when materials are used in this manner. Another possible area for further research is the relationship between installation art, memorials and land art.

Researching and writing this thesis created an opportunity for me to distil important aspects regarding the content of my artworks as well as the manner in which this content was made visible. Although my artworks might convey a nostalgic tone as a
result of the decayed appearance, I want to reiterate that reminiscence or a certain longing is not important to me. I do not mourn specific events or persons, although there are occasional references to such persons or occasions. In my work I try to reflect on those aspects of life that seem mysterious to me, those features that display my queries and yearning. The vulnerable and transient quality of life is experienced at a universal level, as are the abuse of power and the defencelessness of the powerless. I am absorbed by the fact that these facets of life are timeless and experienced time and again by each generation. These issues are not insignificant as they represent those profound questions faced by everybody. The struggle for survival of ordinary or unknown people living within a specific context, over which they have little or no power, affects me. I try to react to these questions and issues through the use of actual objects and humble materials; by making art that is hopefully accessible and meaningful to ‘everyman’ precisely because these facets are shared and acknowledged. Transforming the ordinary remnants of lives, creating poetry and emphasising spirituality through the use of tangible, tactile materials, remain the essence of what I try to express. The fragility of materials ensue a spiritual and poetical quality compelling me to make use of these delicate resources.

The cycles, processes, archaeological layers and paradoxes both within human lives and in nature inform my art. The cyclical aspect is of particular importance as it implies renewal and regeneration. This is, in my view, also true with regard to the artmaking process, as artmaking becomes a means to survive; the end leads to a new beginning where the process becomes ultimately more important than the end product.
SOURCES CONSULTED

AI WEI WEI. S.a. [Online].
[Accessed 04/04/2017].


ALBERTO BURRI – Artist, poet and creator of the new. S.a. [Online].

http://shifty.co.za/artists/rian-malan/
[Accessed 05/11/2017].

ANDY WARHOL - Commercialism in art. S.a. [Online].
https://bu.digication.com/wr100b6_Epstein/Art_Analysis_Commercialism_in_Art/
[Accessed 18/08/1016].

ANSELM KIEFER. S.a. [Online].
[Accessed 05/04/2017].

ANTONI TÀPIES, PART 1. 2011. [Online].
[Accessed 30/06/2016].


ARTHROB. 2000. [Online].
http://arthrob.co.za/00aug/reviews.html
[Accessed 25/02/2017].


ATLASOBSCURA. S.a. [Online].
http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/jade-burial-suits
[Accessed 13/04/2017].


FERNANDO ALVÍM, S.a. [Online]. https://fernandoalvim.wordpress.com/memorias-intimas-marcas/
[Accessed: 15/07/2017].


GERARD SEKOTO. S.a. [Online]. https://nladesignvisual.wordpress.com/2013/01/19/visual-theory-gerard-sekoto
[Accessed: 30/03/2017].


[Accessed: 14/04/2017].


INTERNATIONAL LAND ART EVENT SOUTH AFRICA. 2011. [Online].
http://www.studio5.co.za/assets/pdfs/sitespecificbrochure.pdf
[Accessed 09/10/2017].

JEFF KOONS. S.a. [Online].
http://www.widewalls.ch/artist/jeff-koons/
[Accessed: 24/08/2016].

JONES, M. 2001. The issue of bias and positionality in cross-cultural, educational studies - enhancing the validity of data through a reflective-reflexive approach. [Online].
[Accessed 02/03/2018].

JOSEPH BEUYS. S.a. [Online].
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/beuys-felt-suit-ar00092
[Accessed: 28/03/2016].


Appendices

Appendix A

Data regarding case study number one: *The archaeology of time*, a retrospective exhibition held at the Pretoria Art Museum, from 28 June to 3 December 2006: invitation/brochure list of artworks presented, copy of opening address, report by the museum director, peer assessment report.

Invitation/brochure:
"My works incorporate found objects, images and junk materials that have been discarded. I use rusted metal and tin that are forged together with inherited objects that evoke memories and serve as starting points. Tin cans are ordinarily utilized for conservation and in the artworks they become metaphors for waste, loss and consumerism - an attempt to preserve transience. At present I work with artifacts of our time and try to transform them into archaeological relics, revealing human passions and weaknesses."

Collections

* Tshimologo University of Technology, Pretoria • University of Pretoria, Pretoria • National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria • South Africa National Portrait Gallery, Pretoria

* National Gallery of Art, Pretoria • National Portrait Gallery, Pretoria

* Private Collections, Johannesburg, South Africa • Pretoria, South Africa • Johannesburg, South Africa

* Private Collections, Johannesburg, South Africa • Pretoria, South Africa

* National & International Private Collections

---

**CURRICULUM VITAE**

- **Date of Birth:** 1958
- **Country:** South Africa
- **Education:**
  - 1974-1979: Bachelor of Fine Arts, University of Pretoria
  - 1980-1982: Master of Fine Arts, University of Pretoria

**Trained and Qualifications:**

- **Formerly:** Taught at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria
- **Current:** Prof. at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria

**Experience:**

- Taught Art at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria
- Taught Art at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria

**Awards:**

- 1982: The Rautenbach, South Africa Award
- 1983: The Kriel Award, South Africa

**Publications:**


**Exhibitions:**

- "Art in South Africa," Johannesburg, 1984

**Nominations:**

- 2002: National Portrait of the Year Award, South Africa
- 2003: National Portrait of the Year Award, South Africa

**Recent Exhibitions:**

- "Art in South Africa," Johannesburg, 2004
- "Art in South Africa," Cape Town, 2005

---

"The loss of the object is a metaphor for the loss of memory, the loss of the object in the context of the modern world, the object is a metaphor for the modern world."
New installation 2006

The installation comprises a hundred and eight film theatre chairs arranged in rows. On the chairs are various personal belongings of individuals: handbags, purses, spectacle cases, keys, briefcases - representing ordinary people. All the objects are covered in rusted metal. The tin is ordinarily used to preserve food - in this case an attempt is made to “preserve” vulnerability and transience. The chemical process of rust is a physical fight against time. To rust is to go back to the original matter - the end of a process and the start of a new cycle - thus recycling.

The rusted patina is a method by which contemporary objects are placed into “archaeological time”, thus forcing us to scrutinize and respect contemporary life, especially the ordinary, while it also has a nostalgic effect.

Each chair in this installation becomes a monument to the ordinary and represents the faceless, the unknown with his/her struggles, also against forces which are overpowering: war, disease, power.

The installation The End is exhibited in the Albert Werth Hall which is “transformed” into a film theatre. The viewer is able to walk between the rows of chairs.

Footage consisting of a continuous loop of images of various versions of the words “The End” is projected against the front wall.

THE END
2006
List of artworks: The Archaeology of Time, Installations by Jan van der Merwe at the Pretoria Art Museum, 28 June to 3 December 2006.

1. *Blik / Tin*, 1977
   Oil paint, rusted tins on wooden panel

2. *Portret van my ma / Portrait of my mother*, 1978
   Acrylics on found wooden lid and canvas

   Zip enamel paint on canvas

   Rust marks on canvas

   Acrylics, tonic, apple shampoo on canvas

   Collage, marks burnt with an iron on canvas

   Cast acrylics and glue, collage on wooden panel

   Cast acrylics and glue, collage on wooden panel

9. *Skildery vir ‘n pendeltuig / Painting for a space shuttle*, 1983
   Enamel on blind

    Found objects, cement, acrylics on wooden panel

11. *Briewe/Letters*, 1987
    Collage of envelopes and pencil on paper

    Oil pastel, charcoal, used car oil on paper

13. *TV 1*, 1992
    Charcoal, oil paint on paper

    Oil on canvas

    Mixed media
16  *Letters from home*, 1997  
Mixed media

18  *Finale Inspeksie / Final inspection*, 1997  
Mixed media

19  *Min dae*, 1998  
Mixed media

20  *Soldier’s dream*, 1998  
Mixed media

21  *Survival kit*, 1998  
Installation found objects

22  *Bagged baggage*, 1998  
Installation found objects, cement, cement bags, TV monitor, DVD player

23  *Artifacts*, 1999  
Installation found objects, rusted metal, computer

24  *Wag / Waiting*, 2000  
Installations found objects, rusted metal

25  *No, I want my Mother*, 2000  
Installation found objects, rusted metal, TV monitor, DVD player

26  *Gaste / Guests*, 2000  
Installation found objects, rusted metal, TV monitor, DVD player

27  *Uitverkoping*, 2000  
Installation found objects, rusted metal

28  *Baggage arrival*, 2001  
Installation found objects, rusted metal, TV monitor, security cameras, electric motor

29  *Rooi tapyt / Red carpet*, 2002  
Installation found objects, rusted metal, TV monitors, DVD players, data projectors, security camera

30  *Eclipse*, 2002  
Installation found objects, rusted metal, TV monitor, DVD player, gravel, security lights

31  *Kispak / Sunday suit*, 2003  
Installation found objects, rusted metal, TV monitor, DVD player

32  *Biegbak / Confessional*, 2003  
Installation found material, rusted metal, TV monitor, DVD player, data projector
33  Kooëlwas / Bullet proof jacket, 2003
Installation wax, plastic, TV monitor, DVD player, light box

34  Cleaning instructions, 2003
Installation found objects, TV monitor, DVD player

35  Luggage trolley, 2003
Found objects, rusted metal

36  It's cold outside, 2004
Installation found objects, rusted metal, TV monitor, DVD player

37  Screen saviour, 2004
Installation found objects, rusted metal

38  Wasted, 2004
Installation found objects, rusted metal

39  Unknown, 2005
Installation rusted tins

40  Water en roes / Water and rust, 2005
Installation found objects, rusted metal, TV monitor, DVD player

41  Vonds / Find, 2006
Found objects, rusted metal

42  The end, 2006
Installation found objects, rusted metal, data projector, lights

43  Unclaimed, 2006
Installation Perspex, rusted metal

PHOTO DOCUMENTATION EXHIBITED AT THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME

1  Galaxy, 1982
Acrylics on chipboard with bells

2  Storyboard I-VI, 1997
Mixed media on wooden panel

3  6pm, 1998
Found objects and rusted metal

4  Soldier's bed, 1998
Found objects and rusted metal
5  *Clothes horse*, 1998
   Found objects and rusted metal

6  *Stoel met blomme / Chair with flowers*, 2001
   Found objects and rusted metal

7  *Showcase*, 2003
   Found objects, rusted metal, TV monitor, data projector, DVD player

8  *Chair and jacket*, 1998
   Found objects and rusted metal

9  *Koffers*, 2004
   Found objects and wire mesh

10  *Ironing board*, 1998
    Found objects and rusted metal

11  *Erfgoed*, 1991
    Oil on pressed wood

12  *Kabinet / Cabinet*, 1990
    Oil on charcoal on canvas

13  *It’s not on top, it’s inside*, 1990
    Oil and pastels, charcoal, used car oil on paper

14  *Drie-enigheid / Trinity*, 1991
    Oil on canvas

15  *Waghond / Watchdog*, 1992
    Charcoal and oil paint on paper

16  *Ludo*, 1986
    Acrylics on printed map of South-Africa, perspex, pressed wood

17  *Killer*, 1986
    Acrylics on newspaper, Perspex, pressed wood

18  *Inflated art / Opgeblaasde kuns*, 1986
    Rubber, rubber tube, air pump, enamel paint on pressed wood

19  *Pick-up-sticks*, 1986
    Newspaper, wooden sticks, Perspex, acrylics on pressed wood

20  *Watchman*, 1996
    Oil and found objects pressed on wood
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Medium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td><em>Co add something special</em>, 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bitumen and found objects on pressed wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td><em>Bliksoldaat / Tin soldier</em>, 1997</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oil and found objects on pressed wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td><em>Soft landing</em>, 1998</td>
<td></td>
<td>Found objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td><em>Please shut the gate</em>, 1990</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oil and found objects on pressed wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td><em>Beware of the dog / Pasop vir die hond</em>, 1987</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oil and found objects on pressed wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td><em>Wip /Trap</em>, 1989</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pencil and charcoal on paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td><em>View of exhibition: Final inspection</em>, 1999</td>
<td></td>
<td>Transformation of the found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td><em>Baggage</em>, 2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>Found objects and rusted metal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jan van der Merwe and the Archaeology of time

How early in the Earth's history did life evolve?

The present estimate is 3.85 billion years ago

At some point in an unimaginable distant past some little bag of chemicals fidgeted to life. It absorbed some nutrients, gentle pulsed, it cleaved itself and produced an heir; a tiny bundle of genetic material passed from one living entity to another, and has never stopped moving since.

It was the moment of creation for us all (termed by Biologist as the 'Big Birth')

What was the earth like some 3.5 billion years ago?

There was no atmosphere like we know it to day. It was surrounded by noxious vapours from hydrochloric and sulphuric acids. A chemical stew was the only atmosphere.

For two billion years bacterial organisms were the only form of life. They absorbed water molecules, supped on the hydrogen and released oxygen as a by-product. In the process these organisms invented photosynthesis-the process involved the release of O2 as a waste product.

The released O2 combined with iron in the earth's crust to form ferric oxides. For millions of years the world literally rusted -oxygenating the atmosphere. After two billion years oxygen levels reached the level of concentration to allow more advanced forms of life to evolve - the type that uses oxygen (like us)

If it wasn't for this major evolutionary chemical process, I won't be standing here making this speech or alternatively imagine, I would be a one cell bacterial organism making my speech at the edge of a murky chemical cauldron to other bacterial organisms who wouldn't have the foggiest notion of what I am trying to convey.
The question is though, where does Jan van der Merwe fit into this equation? He, purely by chance, and because of his interest in the transformation process and the recycling of found elements, has devised a creative methodology that simulates this primordial creative process. By covering objects with thin sheet metal and more often with found rusted metal element that he recycles (old beer tins, canned food tins, etc) collected from our consumer environment, he allows the surfaces of the objects to transform through oxidization - to RUST, quite often accelerating the process by means of chemical intervention.

After a time these objects acquire a surface quality reminiscent of very old iconic relics. The objects now fit into his conceptual paradigm - they comment on their own time - space significance. For Jan they become the echoes from the past, the commentators on the present and even cautious prophetic warnings against an uncertain future.

Like the early primordial oxygenating process - his process has its own creative dynamic. By systematic oxidization on the surface, the objects in Jan's installations are constantly and slowly enhancing in a metaphorical sense, their significance. They become encoded with their own histories, their reference to a state of having been, but at the same time being in a state of becoming.

I don't think Jan would want to claim the distinction of having been responsible for initiating the process that lead to the evolution of the first life on earth. (We have established that he misses that distinction by about two billion years), but we have to agree that he succeeds in exploiting the potential of this process by creating the conditions for experiencing the outcome of his creative methodology within an art context in an interesting way.

I don't intend discussing all the various installations but would rather prefer to only consider his latest project entitled: The End. In the process I will try to address some relevant characteristics pertaining to his art making in general.

Jan prefers installation as the dominant form to express his concepts. This implies that he articulates and demarcates a particular space within a bigger space - quite often a public space. Within this space
he would install various objects, like the seats in his cinema, to become a setting for personal introspection – a private space for the duration of our contemplation. In Jan’s The End the various objects left on the seats testify to the presence of individuals and what they leave behind: an empty popcorn box, a Mac Donald’s milkshake container, a briefcase, a purse, a handbag—all containers. I can’t but come to the conclusion that these choices evoke references to the type of banal baggage that defines our identities— but also the sort of baggage that becomes quite redundant when we eventually depart from our physical presence and physical existence.

In a sense Jan’s installations become a theatrical environment where we become the actors energizing the space and we charge the objects with relevance and context. Jan creates a space where we are given the opportunity to come to terms with our memories, our histories and to some degree reach closure on those encounters that trigger events, situations and memories from our past and also the present. We can have our own private Séance. The objects become the medium through which we reconnect with our memories, our private and collective histories to reach closure and in the process instigate a new beginning. The End-(closure and conclusion) has been attained.

Koos van der Watt
INITIATOR: LèLANI STOMMELINCK & DIRKIE OFFRINGA

HEALTH & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC OFFICER

COMPLETION REPORT
PRETORIA ART MUSEUM SCORE CARD PROJECT

JAN VAN DER MERWE RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION:
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME

CONTENTS

Purpose
Background
Objectives
Outcomes
Recommendations
COMPLETION REPORT
PRETORIA ART MUSEUM SCORE CARD PROJECT

JAN VAN DER MERWE RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION:
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to give feedback on the score card project THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME by Jan van der Merwe to the Strategic Executive Officer: Health and Social Development.

BACKGROUND

The Pretoria Art Museum has for many years not been able to initiate and present a retrospective exhibition of a major South African artist due to financial constraints. However, the Art Museum annually presents several exhibitions compiled from the permanent collection and hosts national and international exhibitions usually sponsored by a foreign embassy or international organisation. Major exhibitions such as the annual SASOL New Signatures Exhibition annually attracts more that the usual number of visitors and generates much publicity but as this is a fully sponsored exhibition, it is not regarded as a Score Card project.

The Jan van der Merwe Retrospective Exhibition, The Archaeology of Time, took place in the Albert Werthe Hall, East Gallery & Foyer of the Pretoria Art Museum from 28 June – 3 December 2006. The educational component involved two training sessions 19 & 23 June 2006 for the Education Assistants of the Art Museum to enable them to interpret these conceptual installations when presenting guided tours for schools.

OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of this exhibition are contained in the Exhibition Proposal.

- The installations deal with the struggles of ordinary people and can be seen as social comment on contemporary issues.
- The work is studied by secondary and tertiary educational institutions and the exhibition can be an educational tool.
- The work is accessible to general public and can also be studied on an academic level.
- As a collaborative project between the artist and the Art Museum, this exhibition is scheduled to go beyond the period of this completion report
and to coincide with National Women's Day 8 August and Heritage Day 25 September 2006. The contents and subject of the artworks have to do with the suffering of women and children and with objects representing the past which become respected "monuments" of ordinary people.

- To afford a contemporary Pretoria-based artist the opportunity to exhibit to a local audience. This exhibition is based on the Pretoria Art Museum's interim exhibition policy and was one of the Pretoria Art Museum's special projects for 2006. The project is a joint project of the Pretoria Art Museum and the artist.
- The Pretoria Art Museum Curators and Museum Workers assisted the artist. As a result of the Art Museum not having a technical assistant, the artist at his own cost contracted a technician and two workers for a period of two months to assist with the display and installations.
- The Museum Custodians and other personnel were required to work overtime on a rotational basis for a period of two weeks before the opening function on 28 June 2006.
- The Pretoria Art Museum insured the artworks for R2 million as was declared in advance through the required CTMM procedure.
- The Pretoria Art Museum assisted with the transport of some artworks from the various institutions in Pretoria and Johannesburg to the Art Museum.
- The exhibition received much media coverage (see Annexures for newclippings). The SABC TV has expressed interest in covering the exhibition as the artist is a prize-winning South African artist who has exhibited internationally.
- Many students and school groups visited the Art Museum for this exhibition as installation art relates to the school culture syllabus. This subject is part of the History of Art programme in many Gauteng secondary schools (optional choice: contemporary South African art) and students of tertiary institutions are required to research installation art. The guided tours by the Art Museum's Education Assistants attempted to make post-modern art accessible to everybody and illustrated to underprivileged aspiring artists that art can produced from ordinary found objects.

The objectives of all Art Museum exhibitions are linked to the Score Cards by way of the Culture Section's purpose: "... to promote Cultural service through ... co-ordinating events promoting cultural awareness. The city priority includes enhancing Tshwane's image as the capital city. This applies to all art exhibitions. Objectives are also linked to the vision and mission of the Art Museum and particularly to the (proposed) Exhibition Policy.

**Vision for art exhibitions**

Exhibiting a variety of artists and (art) media, supplemented by educational activities such as guided tours, making art accessible to schools, local communities, South African and foreign tourists.

**Pretoria Art Museum Vision:** An art museum of world renown, specializing in South African art.
Mission for art exhibitions
A museum and exhibitions of international standard showcasing the best of South African art from the Pretoria Art Museum’s permanent collection, supplemented by temporary national and international travelling exhibitions. 

Pretoria Art Museum Mission: Collecting, documenting and conserving outstanding examples of mainly South African art, researching and compiling exhibitions from the permanent collection, hosting major national and international travelling exhibitions, supplemented by educational activities.

OUTCOMES

▪ A benchmarking, professionally presented exhibition of a major artist’s oeuvre.
▪ A publication in De Arte of the artist and his work which would be relevant to the school syllabus.
▪ Two walkabouts of the exhibition were presented before the launch by the artist as training for Education Assistants / Museum Guides. Guided tours for the general public and students (EAs undertook guided tours in different languages for learners) were presented. Due to the special interest from the students and general public, the artist on his own accord presented walkabouts every Saturday and Sunday morning for the duration of the exhibition.
▪ 9 516 visitors viewed the exhibition for the period 28 June – 3 December 2006. 4 568 children / students came to the museum to view the exhibition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Strategic Executive Officer: Health & Social Development takes cognizance of the contents of the report.
2. That the SEO, Health and Social Development signs off the report of the exhibition THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF TIME as part of the Culture Section’s scorecard for the 2005 / 2006 financial year.
REFEREE’S REPORT:
JAN VAN DER MERWE RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION AT THE PRETORIA ART MUSEUM, 28 JUNE TO 30 NOVEMBER 2006

REFEREE:
DR ELFRIEDE DREYER, DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Jan van der Merwe’s retrospective exhibition that is currently on show at the Pretoria Art Museum is of major national and international significance. This exhibition proves that the artist has now reached the top echelon of South African artists and that his work compares with the best in international art.

Although he has had numerous solo exhibitions and special appearances as National Festival artist amongst others, this exhibition captures the consistency and dedication with which this award-winning artist has been producing quality work over more than thirty years. Not only did the artist’s scope in art production increase, but also the conceptual content of his work refined over the years to culminate in recent awe-inspiring works such as the *The End* installation.

Considering the dates of the works on exhibition, the artist’s dedication to making art is clear: in 1997, for example, he produced four major installations; four in 1998; four in 2000; and in 2003, not less than five ambitious installations were produced, one of which won him the international fourth prize in the sculpture category of the IOC Olympic sport and art contest.

It is however not only the artist’s zest for artmaking that impresses but also the way in which he has fine-tuned his conceptual content over the years. In most of his work of the past twenty years, the artist has been concerned with the human condition in many guises and facets. Whereas earlier works such as *The Red Carpet* (2002) seem to be entrenched in South African military and civil histories such as the Anglo-Boer War, his most recent works function on a wider transnational level where it is about humanity at large. Military life and its specific culture of discipline and uniformity that have inspired
several works since the 1990s, for instance, can be viewed as the artist’s interpretation of the central role of the South African police and the military in its colonial and Nationalist past. These works suggest suppression, violence and abuse, and in *Eclipse* (2002) escalate to a rendering of the atrocities remembered by survivors of concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War. This work seems to stand as a memorial to the men, women and children who were killed during this time. Yet, since many parallels for these kinds of situations and traumas can be found in other cultures, the afore-mentioned works become far more than commentary on vernacular and local history in their application to the human condition in general.

In most of the works on exhibition, several layers of meaning can be uncovered to reveal political, personal, religious, socio-cultural and even spiritual connotations. A moving work such as *Wag/Waiting* could entail a depiction of the bride waiting for the groom who will never arrive due to a war situation, but it could also be read as a reference to the Biblical ‘bride’ waiting for Christ the groom. On an ideological level, it could refer to human beings’ inclination to cultivate ideals and nurture dreams of a better life and future.

This aspect is evident also in works with a direct reference to technology such as *Artifacts* of 1999. In this work the artist seems to express human beings’ innate drive to work and their aspiration to progress and advancement through technology. Throughout the exhibition this positive message is carried forward in images of cleansing, survival and self-protection. It is suggested that human beings possess the capacity to survive even the most severe of disasters and traumas and that we have acquired a tough (metal) armour of preservation instinct. What has been soiled can be washed and ironed (as in *Ironing Board, Clothes Horse and Biegbak Confessional* (2003)) and there are continuous ‘departures’ and ‘arrivals’ (as in *Baggage Arrival* (2001)), which imply that traumas and disasters can be overcome.

The survival instinct that is expressed in numerous of the works on display may moreover be interpreted as a war against time and implicit mortality. The present time and history become invaded by the past and, since the medium of rusted metal is used in the works,
there is concomitant reference to the future – the process of rust continues indefinitely. Simultaneously, the process of rusting of objects entails a transformation of the found in which the wholeness and cohesion of things are destroyed. Apparent order and construct are forced into a state of chaos, collapse and deterioration.

It is on this level of the artist’s innovative and ultra-subjective use of rusted material that this exhibition demonstrates his unique and noteworthy contribution to the art history of South Africa and the world. In his obsessive exploration and exploitation of metal as medium, Van der Merwe can be likened to the German artist Anselm Kiefer who has worked in similar metaphoric way with metal. Whereas Van der Merwe imbues metal with meanings of the passing of time and transformation, Kiefer permeates his lead works with meanings of insulation and survival.

Another similarity between the two artists is the special place that both artists accord to the child in their work. In Kiefer’s work, small babies’ teeth are collaged onto the massive lead surfaces, expressing the vulnerability of the child in the face of the forces of a culture. In Van der Merwe’s *The Red Carpet* a baby’s play pen is combined with military uniforms and children’s clothing stick to the barbed wire in his *Eclipse*, both works expressing similar sentiments of victim and defenselessness.

Another innovative technique of Van der Merwe is the combination of digital technology (in the form of videos playing on monitors, digital sound and webcam technology) with ancient blacksmith technology. His special brand of alchemy, on all levels engendering transmutation, is one that looks into the past as well as into the future. His alchemical corrosion of the surface of objects creates an aesthetic archaeology in which memories and histories emerge through the crevices in the metal planes.

Over the past ten years the artist has progressed from more literal depictions of memory, loss and separation in collage works such as *Min Doe* (1998) and *Wag/Waiting* (2000) to sophisticated renderings of absence and apocalypse in works such as *Unclaimed* and *The End* of 2006. In these works the artist seems to express sentiments of loss that touch and move the viewer on a much deeper level, since they seem to refer to and recollect major
human disasters such as the Holocaust and September 11.

The scope, understanding, sensitivity and immersive impact of The End position it as a memorable work of artistic genius that compares internationally with the best. Most of the artist’s central concerns – repetition, traces, absence, departure and frozen time – are contained in this work of monumental proportions. The work recreates a fictional lifting of a sunken Titanic from the water: the people have all drowned and are gone, but their belongings are left, permanently rusted and adhered to the 108 film theatre seats in the hall of life itself. These banal objects become iconic representations of human presence in absence and depictions of life folded in death, and vice versa. Since the projected words “the end” are endlessly repeated on the screen in different versions, it is suggested that there are many answers to the existential questions around apocalypse and death as metaphor and that the answer to any question might arrest an empty abyss that already presupposes that there is no decidable answer. José Ortega Y Gasset (1968:136) rephrased the same idea as follows:

Life is, in itself and forever, a shipwreck. To be shipwrecked is not to drown. The poor human being, feeling himself sinking into the abyss, moves his arms to keep afloat. This movement of the arms which is his reaction against his own destruction, is culture - a swimming stroke.

The mildness of the social critique in most of the other works is abandoned in this acid and very sad depiction of life as a shipwreck as well as a theatre of cruelty.

A very minor point of criticism is that although the limited space of the museum has been maximally deployed to accommodate most of the artist’s œuvre, here and there the different installations seem to impinge on each other due their close proximity to each other. Ideally every installation should have had its own room so that three and four different installations should not be viewed at the same time.

Due to the fact that this significant exhibition has been a major and expensive undertaking for the artist, I also find it very, very unfortunate that some organisation or institution did not fund the artist for the production of a catalogue accompanying the
exhibition. This could have been a valuable document that would have celebrated the impact and significance of the exhibition as a historical event.

The fact that the Pretoria Art Museum decided to extend the exhibition with another month or so is an indication that the artist is held in high esteem and that the exhibition is considered as a major event in the history of the museum. To my knowledge, many members of the public, artists and students of the Universities of Pretoria and South Africa and TUT, as well as many international visitors visited the exhibition. The work therefore enjoyed exceptional visibility in the public domain.

In my opinion the artist can be maximally accredited for this exhibition as an artistic output and I would pitch it as equivalent to a book.

Source quoted

Appendix B
Data regarding case study number two: *Time and space*, a comprehensive exhibition held at Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein from 9 July to 8 August 2013: invitation, brochures, list of artworks presented, copy of opening address, report by the museum director.
Time and Space

Installations by
Jan van der Merwe
It's Cold Outside, 2004
Installation: Rusted metal, found objects, TV monitor and DVD player
3000 x 1550 x 2050 mm

Diagnose / Diagnose, 2013
Installation: Rusted metal and found material
1000 x 1000 x 900 mm

Cleaning instructions, 2003
Installation: Found objects, TV monitor and DVD player
1050 x 1050 x 1070 mm
"At present I work with artefacts of our time and attempt to transform them into archaeological remnants...
The tin cans are ordinarily used for preservation.
The fragile rusted tins in these works become metaphors for waste, loss and consumerism.
Their use may be seen as an attempt to 'preserve' something transient and vulnerable."
— Jan van der Merwe.

Working primarily in rusted metal, Jan van der Merwe has developed a language that speaks subtly yet eloquently of the South African psyche. His inspiration is often drawn from highly personal sources to develop themes that can be universally appreciated but more intensely so by viewers familiar with the peculiarities of South Africa – its art, society and history. Van der Merwe often refers to his work as 'monuments'. As with conventional monuments, some of the installations impose on a significant amount of space and the viewer is enticed to step up towards the installation for closer examination. These 'monuments' are anonymous or broadly universal; they refer to the memory of the unknown by many. In other works, intimate and private spaces are suggested. The installations seem like film sets without actors.

Jan van der Merwe is known for his installations in which he incorporates found objects with rusted tins. Many artists work in the field of objet trouvè – the 'found object'. They 'rescue' items from being dumped or, ironically, from being properly used, only to re-assign such objects as works of art. In Van der Merwe’s case, it is not the object, but spoil rusted matter littering the countryside that is found and redefined. Through time, oxidation and deterioration, they became discarded by everyone as unusable and undesirable. Through deftness and patience befitting an accomplished weaver he reformulates these unlikely materials into desirable ‘textiles’ and surfaces, finally to stitch and sew them into garments and objects of deeper significance.

Van der Merwe’s working process is also significant. He collects tins from everybody. He describes himself as a compulsive collector who takes all objects discarded by others to his studio where these could be transformed into part of his installations. The tins that he collects are sometimes already rusted, but if new and shiny, he transforms them by initiating the rust process with a mixture of salt, water and vinegar. He covers large solid objects such as furniture with the rusted tins by nailing these with small nails. Clothing is created in a process similar to sewing where he attaches each piece of tin to the next with thin wire and the final finish is created by adding bitumen – a black sticky substance used as part of tar – and sand to create smooth transitions from one part to the next. This technique allows the artist to "shift time", rendering the objects into "archaeological finds".
The End / De Einde, 2006
Installation: Rusted metal, found objects and data projector
25000 x 13000 mm
A brief biography of the artist

www.art.co.za/janvandermerwe

Jan van der Merwe was born in 1958 in Virginia, Free State and grew up in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal, where he matriculated in 1975. He lives and works in Pretoria as a senior lecturer in Fine Art in the Department of Fine and Applied Art, Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). He obtained a Masters degree in Fine Art at the Pretoria Technikon (now TUT) in 1999. His work is represented in a number of museums, public and corporate collections and has also won several awards. These include the prestigious Helgaard Steyn Award for sculpture in 2005 with the artwork Vertoolkas, which forms part of Olievenhuis Art Museum’s Permanent Collection. Since 1976 he has taken part in numerous group exhibitions and has also had several solo shows. Van der Merwe’s works were also selected as part of a group exhibition at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, which then moved to Athens for display at the Olympic Games in August 2004. He also worked together with the organisation 'Onze Nieuwe Toekomst' on an installation entitled Wereldreizigers in the “Kleurlaboratorium” of the S.M.A.K. Museum in Ghent, Belgium in 2007. He has worked abroad on invitation on several occasions – the most recent being in New York for a two month residency as the recipient of the Ampersand Award, administrated by the Ampersand Foundation.

Van der Merwe is listed as a recommended artist in the most recent Visual Arts Curriculum for high school learners and his work forms part of the Grade 12 examination paper for visual art. The textbook on Visual Art for Grade 12, to be published later in 2013, includes a chapter on his art. His work can be viewed at www.art.co.za/janvandermerwe.

Bibliography

16 August 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to confirm that Jan van der Merwe was invited by the Olievenhuis Art Museum’s Advisory Committee to exhibit at Olievenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein in June-August 2013. His exhibition will form part of the Volksblad Vryfoes, an annual art festival in Bloemfontein.

He will have use of the following exhibition spaces: the ground floor of the Main Building, the Annex gallery on the first floor of the Main Building and the Reservoir.

The proposed dates (still subject to change) are:

- **Installation in Main Building**: from 12 June 2013
- **Installation in Reservoir**: from 20 June 2013
- **Installation completed**: 27 June 2013
- **Opening**: 9 July 2013
- **Close in Main Building**: 11 August 2013
- **Close in Reservoir**: 18/26 August 2013

Olievenhuis Art Museum (a satellite of the National Museum, Bloemfontein) looks forward to this extensive exhibition by a distinguished South African artist.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Ester le Roux, Curator Olievenhuis Art Museum
oliven@nasmus.co.za
www.nasmus.co.za
List of artworks: *Time and Space, Installations by Jan van der Merwe at Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, 9 July to 8 August 2013.*

1. *Diagnose / Diagnosis*, 2013
   Rusted metal and found material

2. *Display / Uitstalling*, 2013
   Rusted metal and found material

   Rusted metal and found material

   Rusted metal and found objects

5. *Downfall*, 2009
   Rusted metal, paper and charcoal


7. Installation rusted metal, data projector, found objects and lights

   Installation paper, charcoal, wood and found objects

   Installation rusted metal, charcoal on paper, plastic, Perspex and found material

    Installation rusted objects, found objects and TV monitors

11. *It’s cold outside*, 2004
    Installation rusted objects, found objects, TV monitors and DVD players

    Installation wax, plastic, TV monitor, video machine and lightbox

    Installation found objects, TV monitor and video machine

    Installation rusted metal, found objects, TV monitor, video machine and data projector

    Installation: rusted metal and found objects

    Installation rusted metal and found objects

17. *Monument*, 2013
    Installation: barbed wire and steel (group exhibition re-envisioning the Anglo Boer War, Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, UFS)
Dames en here,

Ons is vanaand hier byeen vir opening van ’n uitstalling wat terugkyk oor tien jaar se werk van die Roesmeester, Jan van der Merwe. Vergun my om eers met enkele literêre verwysings te begin.

Vroeër vandag, onderweg na ’n eerste besigtiging van die uitstalling, draai ek my ou motor se neus op die universiteitskampus in die pad in. By ’n voetgangerroorgang versper ’n ander ou motor die pad. ’n Gryp, ou man met ’n kierie leun moelsaam teen die motor. Dit is een van Suid-Afrika se twee grootste romansiers, Karel Schoeman. Hier is drie uitsprake wat Schoeman graag eens in privaat gesprekke sou maak: 1) “Niks is toevallig nie.” 2) “My werk is om op te teken en te getuig sodat iets behoue bly.” 3) “Niks wat begin het, hou ooit op nie.”

Sou dit toevallig wees dat ek juist onderweg na die uitstalling van die Roesmeester, hy wat ook die tyd teén die vergang van die tyd in probeer bewaar, die ou getuigende skrywer sien?

Dames en here, die Roesmeester se werke spreek op sonderlinge wyse tot die ontvanklike kyker. Dit sou dus nie vanpas wees dat ek as verteenwoordiger van die filosofie dit my verwerdig om vir u te probeer sê wat die Roesmeester se werke vir ons sê nie. Ek kan hoogstens iets sê oor wat ek hoor en sien en voel wanneer ek voor sy werke staan.

Dit doen ek graag in die eerste plek deur nog ’n literêre verwysing. Turkye se grootste lewende romansier, Orhan Pamuk, se jongste roman heet in Engels The Museum of Innocence. Dit vertel die verhaal van ’n man, Kemal, se
obsessiewe, onmoontlike liefde vir 'n vrou, Fuzun. Oor jare en jare kom hy by haar aan huis. Met elke besoek stee hy iets van haar. So bou hy oor jare 'n versameling voorwerpe op wat 'n arglef van sy onmoontlike liefde vir haar word.

Verlede jaar open Pamuk in Istanboel 'n museum vol van die onderwerpe waaroor die roman handel. Die Engelse titel van die museumkatalogus is The Innocence of Objects.

Ek wil u vra om die titel vir 'n oomblik saam met my op die werke van die Roesmeester toe te pas. Want as u voor een van sy werke gaan staan, is die kans goed dat u deur die dinglikheid, die voorwerplikheid, van sy werk getref sal word. Die Roesmeester onderskei hom onder meer in die opsig dat hy van oënskynlik onopsigtelike voorwerpe treffende werke van herinnering, oordenking en verlange maak. 'n Stuk blik word 'n roosknop, 'n ornament word 'n hele lewe, 'n uitgekapte boomstomp word 'n lament. Wanneer ek voor sy werke staan, hoor ek die onskuldige voorwerpe met my praat en my vertel van vergetelheid, van lewens wat eens was, van die dinge wat ons nooit laat los nie.

Dan, in die tweede plek, is dit moeilik om oor die werk van die Roesmeester te praat en nie te verwys na sy spesifieke metode om ironie te bewerkstellig, naamlik deur teenoorgeteldes so teenoor mekaar te plaas dat albei pole skerper en duideliker word, tot dit byna ondraaglik is. 'n Ammunisieklis word 'n noodhulpkis, 'n bioskoop vol lig word 'n donker film waarin die lewe en die dood ontmoet, 'n opwasarea word 'n biegkamer, items waarmee 'n mens op reis gaan is vir altyd versteer.
In die derde plek keer die Roesmeester die verlede en die toekoms om. Deur voorwerpe van die alledaagse lewe, en bowendien dikwels hipervervlietende voorwerpe, met sy alomteenwoordige roes te bedek en te verwerk, dwing hy ons na die proses van verval, vergeet en herinnering nog voor ons klaar is waarmee ons besig is. In hierdie opsig is die Roesmeester ‘n ontydige, onkonvensionele argeoloog: ontydig omdat hy die vanselfsprekende hede ironiseer deur die verouderingsproses kunmatig versnel en daarvan studiemateriaal vir die argeoloë van die toekoms maak; onkonvensioneel omdat hy nie die argeoloog van die verlede nie, maar van die hede is. Hy is ‘n helper van die wat na ons kom, en vir ons vandag ‘n herinnering aan ons vervlietendheid.

Hiervoor sou baie mense die Roesmeester verkwalik. In ‘n wêreld van immerversnellende spoed en die alomteenwoordige illusie van jeugdige onsterflikheid wil niemand tog aan hulle sterflikheid, hulle onvermydelike en onverbiddelike veroudering en vergang herinner word nie. Maar is die Roesmeester nie daarmee soos die jong slaaf wat langs ‘n triomfantelike Romeinse veldheer op sy strydwa tydens sy segetog deur die strate van Rome gestaan het en kort-kort, terwyl die skares hom toejuig, in sy oor gefluister het: “Jy is sterflik”?

Dames en here, as u my dan nog ‘n literêre verwysing sal vergun, hierdie keer van Suid-Afrika se ander groot romansier, J.M. Coetzee, wat in sy Diary of a Bad Year skryf oor die miljoene der miljoene mense wat nooit polities betrokke is nie en bloot stilswyend en met waardigheid so goed as moontlik probeer leef. Ek doen aan die hand dat wanneer u vanaand in die reservoir die Roesmeester se werk, The End, besoek, u ‘n herdenking van daardie miljoene der miljoene mense sal aantref. Dit is een van die aangrypendste kunswerke wat ek ooit gesien het, een waarin onskuldige voorwerpe instaan vir die mense
waaraan hulle eens behoort het of wat hulle eens gebruik het. Daarmee herinner hierdie onkonvensionele argeoloog ons dat diegene wat ons liefhet, ons ná ons dood by uitstek deur ons nagelate voorwerpe sal onthou: ’n kam, ’n hemp, ’n sambreel, ’n koffer.

Dames en heren, dit is nie gebruiklik en selfs nie wenslik om ook iets oor ’n kunstenaar naas sy werk te sê nie. Geleentheid soos hierdie doen hulle egter so selde voor dat ek tog die konvensie wil verbreek deur iets oor die kunstenaar agter die kuns te sê, want ek dink ’n mens kan die integriteit en die ontroering van hierdie spesifieke kuns nie sonder die integriteit van hulle skepper verstaan nie. Vir iemand wat so intens met geweld en die werking daarvan in sy werk besig is, is Jan, nogmaals ironies, seker een van die mees geweldlose mense wat ek ken. Nog meer: hy is iemand wat met absolute nederigheid, toewydig en integriteit omgaan met die mense naby aan hom, maar ook met die wêreld. Dit, dink ek, is wat van hom die onkonvensionele argeoloog maak wat hy is en, ja, die Roesmeester.

Jan, baie dankie dat jy teen alles in uit jou liefde vir die wêreld en die skoonheid aanhou met jou onkonvensionele argeologie. In ’n ondankbare wêreld is ons en almal wat al deur jou kuns geraak is, jou ewig dankbaar.
26 August 2013

Report: Jan van der Merwe, Time and Space exhibition at Olievenhuis Art Museum

It is with pleasure that I write this report on the Jan van der Merwe, Time and Space exhibition that was exhibited from 9 July to 18 August 2013 in the Main Building, the Annex Gallery and the Reservoir at Olievenhuis Art Museum.

The Olievenhuis Art Museum Advisory Committee invited Jan van der Merwe to present an exhibition to coincide with the annual Volksblad Vryfees arts festival, as Jan van der Merwe is an outstanding South African installation artist. The exhibition featured prominent artworks from the last 10 years of the artist’s career. Van der Merwe was the first artist to exhibit in the Reservoir after its completion in 2002.

Time and Space was extremely well received, with people from all walks of life commenting positively on the exhibition. The installations had universal appeal and most visitors made a strong connection with at least one of these works.

Olievenhuis Art Museum received an exceptional number of visitors with 151 people attending the exhibition opening, 53 attending the first walkabout of the exhibition on 10 July 2013 and 63 attending the second walkabout on 3 August 2013. A total of 14 690 people (this includes the numbers above) visited the exhibition from the evening of 9 July 2013 to Sunday 18 August 2013.

The exhibition was opened at 19:00 on Tuesday 9 July 2013 by Mr Johann Rossouw, Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of the Free State. The opening function and the walkabout were attended by a very diverse audience, from school learners and students to elderly art lovers.

The following interviews for TV, radio and print media were organised, set up and/or undertaken for the Time and Space exhibition:

- Kyknet - Fiesta:
  - The team took video clips of the Jan van der Merwe: Time and Space exhibition

Jan van der Merwe was interviewed by:

- Kobus Burger from RSG
- Eunika Smith from SABC Radio and TV
- Eiretha Britz from the Volksblad newspaper
- Nosana Sondiyazi from Love Warrior for Hlasea TV
- Yolanda Maartens from OFM
Media exposure, including printed media, radio, television and web/electronic newsletters numbered 57 items. Educational leaflets were also designed, with 1000 printed and handed out at the exhibition and walkabout.

The exhibition filled all the exhibition areas available at Olievenhuis Art Museum: An installation entitled Ontwerp/Uprooted, consisting of seven separate structures made of the stumps of uprooted trees attached to pieces of furniture, was showcased on the ground floor of the Main Building. The installations It's Cold Outside and Confessional could be viewed in the Dora Scott Annex, also on the ground floor. The artworks Diagnose, Display and Red Cushion were also installed on the ground floor of the Main Building.

The following installations were showcased in the Annex Gallery on the first floor of the Main Building: Traveller, Cleaning Instructions, Bullet Proof Jacket, Water and Rust, Downfall and Power Failure.

An installation entitled, The End, was exhibited in the underground Reservoir. This gigantic installation art work (probably van der Merwe's largest to date) consists of 108 movie theatre chairs arranged in rows, between which the viewer can wander. The seats of the chairs represent film frames, each freezing a moment in time. Walking along the rows and observing, the viewer undertakes a kind of pilgrimage.

Sale, an installation in the form of a male clothing store was also on show in the Reservoir.

The installations Diagnose, Display, Traveller and Water and Rust were initially on show in the Scaena Gallery at the University of the Free State for the duration of the Vryfees (9 July-14 July 2013); after which they were moved to and installed at Olievenhuis Art Museum with the rest of the exhibition.

It was a privilege having Jan van der Merwe present at Olievenhuis Art Museum, as he spent a significant amount of time and energy engaging with viewers and answering questions. Due to the number and extent of the installations, the setting up of the exhibition took two weeks. Two students from the Motheo FET College, as well as a VANSAf Africalia Intern, Sylvester Mqeku, assisted Jan van der Merwe and they gained very valuable experience learning from Jan van der Merwe, who is an excellent and patient teacher.

I will gladly provide additional information should this be required.

Yours sincerely


Ester le Roux
Curator, Olievenhuis Art Museum (a satellite of the National Museum, Bloemfontein)
051 4479609 072
3700673
oliewen@nasmus.co.za
Appendix C

Data regarding Ontwortel/Uprooted, University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, 11 November 2009 to 27 January 2010: invitation, copy of opening address.

Dear Ms Annalé Dempsey

THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY
Cordially invites you to the opening of an exhibition entitled
ONTWORTEL / UPROOTED
With selected installations by
JAN VAN DER MERWE

Opening by Elfriede Dreyer
[Associate professor in Fine Arts, Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria]

Wednesday 11 November 2009
18:30 for 19:00

UJ Art Gallery
Kingsway Campus, Cnr Kingsway and University Road, Auckland Park
Please use Entrance 1A in Kingsway and present your invitation for admission to the Campus.

The UJ Art Gallery proudly ends the year’s activities on a high note with an exceptional exhibition of new works by sculptor Jan van der Merwe. This Pretoria based artist is well-known and respected for his evocative installations made of primarily rusted metal and found objects. He characteristically uses ordinary contemporary artifacts covered by a rusted patina thereby transforming these objects into archaeological remnants. Van der Merwe thus reveals something of the pathos of the fragile human condition and enforces respect for contemporary life and its relics.

This solo exhibition, entitled Ontwortel/Uprooted, addresses the themes of global displacement of people, the loss of identity, a sense of history as well as function and meaning in times of transition. Van der Merwe still uses rusted matter as metaphors for waste, loss, consumerism and a physical fight against time, but also revisits his interest in heat scars through materials, processes and techniques that have interested him since his early days as artist. He adds another dimension to these installations by using scorched tree stumps as instruments to make deeply ingrained charcoal markings on paper, perhaps referencing the historical remnants left behind by events.

The principle installation by the same title as the exhibition, Ontwortel/Uprooted 2009, consists of seven
separate structures made of the stumps of uprooted trees. Pieces of furniture such as chairs, a couch, table, dumb valet and a showcase are attached to these structures, almost as if the furniture grows from these roots. Everything has the appearance of having been scorched and blackened by fire and the uprooted tree seems to have been dragged away across the paper leaving charcoal markings on each sheet. This work refers to the dislocation of people all over the world, but also suggests natural and production processes: from tree to furniture or paper and eventually to charcoal.

Two further 2009 installations, entitled *Ondergang/Downfall* and *Brainflute/Blackout* utilize similar materials and methods invoking the loss of purpose and significance in a world where history is discarded. Some of his more recent work such as *Utterkoping/Safe* (2006), *Onoppe-eis/Unclaimed* (2006), *It's Cold outside/ Dit is Koud* (2004), *VondiFind* (2006) as well as older works will also be on show, amongst them *Grid* (1980) and *The Star* (1982), alluding to his concern with heat and the scars it leaves behind.

Jan van der Merwe was born in 1958, in Virginia, Free State and grew up in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal, where he matriculated in 1975. He lives and works in Pretoria and is a senior lecturer in Fine Art at the Department of Fine and Applied Art, Tshwane University of Technology. He obtained a master’s degree in Fine Art at the Pretoria Technikon (now TUT) in 1999. His work is represented in a number of museums and corporate collections and has also won several awards. He has taken part in numerous group exhibitions and has also had several solo shows since 1976. The Pretoria Art Museum hosted a comprehensive retrospective exhibition, entitled "The Archaeology of Time" of his work in 2006.

An extensive CV is available at [www.art.co.za/janvandermerwe](http://www.art.co.za/janvandermerwe).

Kind regards

Annali Dempsey

Enquiries:
011 559 2099

**Gallery Hours:**
- Mondays to Fridays: 09:00 – 18:00
- Saturdays: 09:00 – 13:00
- Sundays and Public Holidays: Closed
Jan van der Merwe, Opening of Ontwortel/Uprooted, UJ, 11 November 2009

by Elfriede Dreyer

For me, Ontwortel/Uprooted articulates three concepts: trace, loss and the archive. At the entrance to the exhibition, three works provide keys to the history of the artist’s engagement with these concepts: Grid of 1980, that depicts traces in rust on canvas left by a metal doormat in his parents’ home; The New Signatures winning work, The Star of 1982; and the 2006 work Find/Vonds, where the rusted material of the little girl’s dress embodies memories, loss of youth or someone loved, as well as traces of commemoration.

Right next to these three works, we find the monumental Downfall of 2009 that presents the artist’s mature and most recent interpretation of these themes in an impotent charcoal waterfall and pile of rusted, discarded folders and containers. In this work, loss, trace, time and a kind of passing are depicted in the presentation of leftovers and traces of redundant knowledge and information - once important and relevant - which expresses a deep going cynicism about the material world, its objects, games and values.

A central metaphor in the exhibition is the container, presented in many forms: piled boxes, a vanity case and cupboards as found in Uitverkoping, Unclaimed and It’s Cold Outside. The metaphor of the container explores the relationship of chaos to order and, in an existential sense, the narrative of life as a process of making sense of chaos, power and loss. Even the very space of the gallery as “containing” the work becomes a delimitation that functions as a symbolic structure and interment for the preservation and archiving of memories.

Although the installations are object-based, there is strong reference to process and ritual in the artworks tracing the artist’s process, his commentary, ideas and memories. Narration is thus evoked, suggested also in the linear form and shape of the drawings. Yet the story is never fully recounted; talking to the artist reveals anecdotal bits such as that the furniture was his parents’ first; and that Biegbak contains an innate reference to his grandmother who used to pray whilst washing the dishes. The exploration of the relationship of narrative to time through the representation of a “plot” or a story recalls Paul Ricoeur’s well-known postulations on time and narrative in which the story forming the object of the representation in question becomes the mimesis. The connection of narrative with time becomes a kind of remediation of the encoded memories and their preservation; the failure thereof – that is, forgetfulness - in Ricoeur’s existentialist terms would entail a kind of “second death”. According to Milan Kundera in The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, the struggle of memory against forgetting in essence is a struggle with power and, one might add, loss. The narrative structure therefore supports the underlying conceptual framework of lifetime contained and preserved in the archive, as well as the idea of human life being a narrative in time and having a beginning and an end. Through the artworks, their narrative and the archive, though, “extended” human time is created, a sense of time that transgresses the boundaries of human lifetime.

Notions of the trace and the archive are also embedded in charcoaled images of skeletal dysfunctional furniture, cut-up tree roots and drag marks. The black dust of charcoal becomes carbon deposits of a polluted world of smoking factories and machines; the black prima materia of chaos at the beginning of time; black decay; a burnt forest in a time of global warming; and the very substance of the artist’s comment on the world around him. The commonplace and the found objects such as a chair, a tree trunk or clothing attain different meaning through the subversion and transformation of their “original” form, materials and surfaces into rust and black dust. As such the residue of human existence on earth becomes depicted as an archive of remains, simultaneously functioning as a kind of archaeology of experience and memory.

Spatially distanced from the work, the viewer connects with the work; yet, in this directive position, in Adorno’s terms, the viewer is afforded the role of a kind of “gamer” that enjoys some sort of subjective position from which to negotiate the work/text. Such engagement with the elements of the exhibition fosters particular emotional experiences and intellectual understanding. The graphic lines in charcoal become roads, histories, engravings, traces or a form of linear writing where the meaningful shapes of the graphic letters have been lost and dwindled into disheveled traces of words. In the Saussurian definition of writing as

http://www.art.co.za/janvandermerwe/elfriede.htm 2013/07/18
image and symbol, the concept of the graphic implies the framework of the instituted trace, as the possibility common to all systems of signification. In this exhibition, the graphic quality of the skeletal forms and drawings reflect the artist’s framework of meanings which imposes on the objects and materials; similarly, the artist sets up a discourse on absence as well as on presence, but this discourse is never concluded.

The presentation of the black tree roots, a fragment and tragic remnant of a glorious living tree, functions as a kind of post-minimal depiction of the landscape. Several other aspects such as the trace, the fragment, the use of black, the sense of time, the fragment, the ruin and the idea of violence to the object accord a strong New Romantic sensibility to Jan van der Merwe’s new body of work. According to the artist, the title of the exhibition, “Uprooted”, indicates his desire to express the view that, on a personal level, monuments for the ordinary person are disintegrating and disappearing. These symbolic “monuments” can be interpreted in various ways, maybe indicating the disappearance of moral values, integrity, urban security or the global environment. Such disintegration is visually potently rendered in the black abyss in Black-out/Brainflush. It’s also powerfully encapsulated in the skeletal sculptural forms and tree roots that become skulls in a desolate landscape, turning the exhibition into a site of vanitas and recalling a comment by Robert Rosenblum, the crown prince of theorists on Romanticism, that vanitas includes the skull as a reminder that death is everywhere, as a cutting edge to too much contentment with the here and now.”

Vanitas is a type of symbolic still life painting especially associated with Northern Renaissance painters. The word is Latin, meaning “emptiness” and loosely translated corresponds to the meaninglessess of earthly life and the transient nature of vanity.


http://www.art.co.za/janvandermerwe/elfriede.htm

2013/07/18
Appendix D
An extended *curriculum vitae* including the following:

- Awards
- Nominations
- Selected exhibitions
- Collections
- Selected academic articles and dissertations
- List of articles published in newspapers and periodicals
- List of catalogues and brochures
- List of radio and television interviews
- Other recognition
- CV and list of exhibitions
- References to internet web pages
- Career information
- Complete list of exhibitions
- Workshops in collaboration with mentally handicapped artists
AWARDS AS LECTURER
1998: Honourary Colours, international recognition, Technikon Pretoria
1999: Newsmaker of the year, Technikon Pretoria
2000: Rector’s award, Technikon Pretoria
2001: Merit Prize, newsmaker of the year, Technikon Pretoria
2003: Long service award, in recognition of 15 years at TUT
2009: TUT excellence award, Lecturer of the year, Faculty of the Arts
2009: Long service award, in recognition of 20 years at TUT
2014: Long service award, in recognition of 25 years at TUT

NOMINATIONS AS LECTURER
2000: Newsmaker of the year, TUT
2009: Nomination by TUT for the national excellence in teaching and learning Award

AWARDS AS ARTIST
1982: New Signatures, SA Association of Art, Pretoria
First prize, mixed media (van Schaik Award)
Merit prize, painting (Art Association Award)
1998: Kempton Park Tembisa fine art award, second prize
2000: Kempton Park / Tembisa fine art award, second prize
2002: Chief festival artist, Hadeda Art Festival, Tzaneen
2003: Chief festival artist, Aardklop National Arts Festival, Potchefstroom
2003: IOC Olympic Art Competition, national winner, sculpture category, prize: attendance at the senior Delphic games 2005
2004: Olympic Sport and Art Contest, international fourth prize, sculpture category, diploma of recognition, prize-winning entry exhibited at the Olympic Museum, Lausanne, Switzerland and then in Athens for display during the Olympic Games, August 2004
2005: Represented South Africa as installation artist during the second International Delphic Games held in the city Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. Received special international Delphic award during this event for “outstanding presentation in the discipline of art installation”
2005: Recipient of the national annual Helgaard Steyn Award, awarded “for outstanding sculpture”, for the installation Showcase, in the permanent collection of the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein
2012: Recipient of the Ampersand award, administered by the Ampersand Foundation – two month residency in New York
2014: Honourary medallion for visual art (installation art), Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns
NOMINATIONS AS ARTIST
2000: Jakkals award for visual art, sponsored by “De Kat”, Klein Karoo National Arts Festival, Oudtshoorn, one of three finalists
2000: National FNB Vita fine art awards 2001, one of six finalists
2000: Exhibition nominated as one of the top ten events during the Aardklop National Arts Festival, Potchefstroom, Spat Newsletter
2002: Nominated for a Sasol Kanna award for visual art at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival, Oudtshoorn
2004: Brett Kebble art awards
2008: Sasol Wax competition, semi-finalist

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS
1998: Solo exhibition entitled “Final Inspection” at the African Window Museum, Pretoria (practical component of the M. Techd degree, fine art at Pretoria Technikon (now TUT)
1998: Four works selected for an international exhibition supported by Unesco: Memórias Intimas Marcas that dealt with the former South African/Angolan conflict, African Window Museum, Pretoria. The exhibition travelled to Lisbon, Portugal (October 1998) and to the MUHKA Museum, Antwerp, Belgium in 2000 (curator Fernando Alvím)
2000: International group exhibition Magic Moments, Civic gallery, Johannesburg (curator Minette Varl)
2002: Solo exhibition at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein (curator Sharon Crampton), The Red Carpet. First exhibition held at the then new exhibition space at the museum: The Reservoir
2004: Solo exhibition on invitation by Absa at the Absa Gallery, Johannesburg, Behind the Screens (curator Cecile Loedolff)
2005: Solo exhibition Unkown on invitation by Sanlam at the Sanlam Art Gallery, Cape Town. Accompanying comprehensive catalogue entitled was sponsored by Sanlam (curator Stefan Hundt)
2006: Solo retrospective exhibition on invitation by the Pretoria Art Museum, 28 June – 3 December 2006, entitled The Archaeology of Time. The exhibition was viewed by 14074 visitors
2007: Invited to co-ordinate a workshop for an organisation of mentally handicapped artists (Onze nieuwe Toekomst) in Ghent, Belgium. The resulting exhibition entitled Wereldreizigers was held in the Kleurlaboratorium-space, SMAK Museum, Ghent
2008: Solo exhibition entitled It’s Cold Outside, iart Gallery, Cape Town (Brundyn and Gonsalves Art Gallery)
2009/
2011: First international land art event entitled: Site Specific, Plettenberg Bay, 22 – 29 May. Thirteen artists on invitation, curated by Strijdom van der Merwe and Annie Strydom
2013: Group exhibition: Selected South African Sculptors at the William Humphreys Art Museum, Kimberley, June/July
2013: Solo Exhibition: Time and Space, retrospective of the previous decade, at the Oliegewhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, 9 July – 18 August. The exhibition was viewed by 14690 visitors
2013: Solo Exhibition: Time and Space at the Kyknet-Scaena-Foyer, during the Vryfees on the campus of the University of the Free State, 9 – 14 July
2013: Group Exhibition, Re-envisioning the Anglo-Boer War, Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, University of the Free State, 8 July – 8 August
COLLECTIONS

- Tshwane University of Technology
- Memórias Intimas Marcas Collection, Belgium
- Pretoria Art Museum
- UNISA
- National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria
- SASOL
- Potchefstroom University
- Feniks-Unite, Belgium
- SANLAM
- ABSA Bank
- Modern Art Projects, Harrie Siertsema
- Oliewenhuis National Art Museum, Bloemfontein
- Shamwari Townhouse, Port Elizabeth
- University of Johannesburg
- University of Pretoria
- University of the Free State
- University of Cape Town, Faculty of Engineering
- South African High Commission, Maseru, Lesotho
- Collection George and Joan Hornig, New York
- Collection Frank and Lizelle Kilbourn
- Collection Gordon Froud
- Anglo Boer War Museum and Women’s Memorial, Bloemfontein
- Hugo Naudé Art Centre, Worcester
- Several private collections

SELECTED PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED ACADEMIC ARTICLES, DISSERTATIONS AND CONFERENCE PAPERS WITH REFERENCE TO J. L. VAN DER MERWE

BEYERS, C. 2006. *Like poetry for revolution – a perspective on art and expression in response globalisation*, unpublished master’s degree dissertation, University of Stellenbosch. The exhibition *The archaeology of time*, Pretoria Art Museum, was one of the main sources of this dissertation.


DRY, S. 2017/2018. *The sublime in selected examples of the Installation of Jan van der Merwe*, submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree Magister Technologiae (Fine Arts), Tshwane University of Technology. Supervisor: Prof. N. Moodley-Diar, co-Supervisor: Dr. R. Kruger, art advisor: J L van der Merwe, (approved proposal).


ARTICLES (references to or articles published on my work in newspapers, Periodicals, etc)

1998
- Leoné van Niekerk, “Van der Merwe gee roes nuwe betekenis”, Beeld 27 April.

1999

2000
- Laetitia Pople, “Kempton Park / Tembisa-kunsprys” Beeld, 4 July.
2001

- Haddad Viljoen, “Komplekse herwinnings gryp aan die hart”, Spat, Feeskoerant Aardklop Kunstfees, Potchefstroom, 4 October.
- Stephanie Nieuwoudt, “Bagasie Arriveer baie relevant” Beeld, 4 October.

2002

- Braam Muller, “Eerste uitstalling in museum se Reservoir”, Volksblad, 12 Oktober.

2003

- Laetitia Pople, “Installasiekunstenaar Jan van der Merwe”, Beeld, 23 September.
- Robert Hodgins, “Die inhoud van lewens”, Aardklop Feesboek, Potchefstroom
- Lucia Burger. “Doringdraad” Aardklop Feesboek, Potchefstroom
- Stephanie Nieuwoudt, “Die tyd roes mense maar soms so mooi”, Beeld, 24 September.
- Tsabeng Nthite, “City artist to represent SA in Olympic Art Contest”, Pretoria News, 6 May.
- Kenielwe Tlhohle, “TUT lecturer takes art to Olympics”, Rekord, 14 May.
- Eagen Williamson, “Geroeste kunswerke skitter in kompetisie vir spele”, Beeld, 3 June.
- Gerrit Bester, “Jan’s art work displayed at Olympic Games”, TUTor, Staff Journal of the Tshwane University of Technology, Vol. 1, No. 3, June.
• Cathryn Smith, “Pick of the Week”, *Mail and Guardian*, 12 November.
• Bettie Lamprecht, “Roes-kuns nou in Goudstad”, *Beeld*, 18 November.
• Ashley Johnson, “Art and Leasure”, *Business Day*, 22 November.

2005

• Koos van der Watt. “Jan van der Merwe and the patina of Time”, *De Arte 72*, Unisa.
• Skrywer onbekend. “Groot beeldhouprys oorhandig vir optelgoed – installasie”, *Die Burger*, 4 Oktober en *Die volksblad*, 5 Oktober
• (Skrywer onbekend), “Gesogte prys vir Jan se ‘Showcase’ “, *Beeld*, 12 Oktober.
• Carla Lewis, “Roes laat hom nostalgies terugkeer na sy wortels”, *Potch Kampus Beeld*, 17 Oktober.
• Carla Lewis, “Roes van oorwinning smaak soet”, *Potch Kampus Beeld*, 24 Oktober.
• Johan Myburgh, “Die wêreld deur die oë van Jan van der Merwe”, *Beeld*, 25 Oktober.
• Esther Engelbrecht, “‘Vonds’ is aangrypend”, *Beeld Plus*, 1 November.
• Cecile Loedolf en Stephan Hundt, “The ones to watch” *Financial Week*, 4 May.

2006

• Malagosia Kuko, “Life through the centuries on displace in city museum”, *Pretoria News, Focus*, 22 May.
• Christina van Rensburg, “Die Argeologie van Tyd – installasies deur Jan van der Merwe”, *Kakkerlak*, Uitgawe 6.
• Johan Myburgh, “Van der Merwe bewaar met weerlose verganklikheid”, *Beeld Plus*, 28 Junie.
• Pieter du Toit, “Moet doen dinge”, *Sarie*, Junie.
• Hannelie Diedericks. “Dagboek”, *Tuis*, Julie.
• Anelia Blackie, “n Unieke uitstalling van die kunstenaar Jan van der Merwe”, *Rekord East*, 7 July.
• (Author unknown), “Archaeology of time”, *The South African Art Times*, July.
• Alita Vorster, “Jan van der Merwe se blik op die lewe”, *Rapport Tydskrif*, 23 Julie.
• Lauren Anthony, “How art feeds the soul and senses”, *Sunday Times*, 30 July.
• Franci Cronje, “Monumente vir gewone mense”, *Beeld Plus*, 15 Augustus.
• Gerhard Uys, “Hy skep kuns uit ou oomblikke”, *Tshwane Beeld*, 27 September.

Theana Calitze, “Geroes kan bekoor”, *Tshwane Beeld*, 15 November


Jaco Mostert, “Jan van der Merwe, a guru of the senses”, *Centurion News*, February.


Geraldine Fröhling, “Jan loves found objects and he discovered a real gem”, *Pretoria News Tonight*, 14 June.

Miranthe Staden-Garbett, “Getting lost in the art of it all”, *Pretoria News Tonight*, 14 June.


Katinka Kempf, “Roest en Nostalgie”, *Zuid-Afrika (Amsterdam)*, July/August.

Johan Myburgh, “Fees vir die oog op 10 dae, Artdklop” *Beeld Plus*, 13 Augustus.


Didier Peleman, Elizabeth de Schauwer en Yannick Spriet, “Interview met Jan van der Merwe”, *De Krant van de Toekomst*, België, 4 December.


Eunice Basson, “Absa versameling betrek die oog en intellek van die toeskouer”. *Pomp*.


Elretha Brits, “Gaan kyk die kuns – daar is iets vir almal”, *Die Volksblad*, 23 April.


Christa Smuts, “Jan van der Merwe, alledaagse heroorweeg”, *Beeld*, 21 Augustus.


Meredith Randall, “Land art: when the earth is your canvas”, *Business Day*, 21 July.


2016
- Ronel Nel, “Toekoms van herinnerings”, Beeld, Inkkuns, Donderdag, 2 Junie.
- Susan Cililers, “Kuns, sang en kos by die Snowflake in Potch”, Beeld, 6 Oktober.

2017

Catalogues and Brochures

1986-1999
- Reach Out/Reik Uit ’86, Pretoria Art Musuem, Pretoria
- Volkskas Atelier 1987, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria
- Volkskas Atelier 1988, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria
- Volkskas Atelier 1990, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria
- Volkskas Atelier 1991, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria
- Volkskas Atelier 1992, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria
- Volkskas Atelier 1999, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria
- Laurel awards 1999, Technikon Pretoria, Pretoria:

2000
- Shrapnel, Freedom Festival, Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal
- Festival Programme 25 March – 1 April 2000, Klein Karoo Nasionsale Kunstefees, Oudtshoorn.
- Skrapnel, ‘n Installasie deur vier kunstenaars, 25 March – 1 April 2000, Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, Oudtshoorn.

2001
- “Shrapnel”, an art installation by four artists: 7 June – 22 June, Potchefstroom University, Potchefstroom.

2002
- Festival Programme 2002, Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, Oudtshoorn.
- Festival Programme 2002, Hadeda Arts Festival, Tzaneen.
- Die Rooi Tapyt: Jan van der Merwe, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein.

2003
- The Sanlam Art Collection, Sanlam Limited, Bellville.
- Sasol Wax in Art, Sasol, Johannesburg.
- Festival Programme 2003, Aardklop, Kunstefees, Potchefstroom.

2004
- Fusion through Art, Reflections on a Legacy, National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria.
- Art@work, A decade and more of the Sasol Art Collection, 1982 – 1994. Sasol, Johannesburg.
- Brett Kebble Art Awards, Bell-Roberts Publishing, Cape Town.
- **International Olympic Sport and Art Competition 2004**, International Olympic Committee (IOC), Zurich/Geneva/Athens.

2005
- **“Unknown” – Installations by Jan van der Merwe**, Sanlam.
- **Helgaard Steyn Prys**, program toekenningsgeleentheid, North West University.
- **“Reconciliation” – exhibition of selected South African artworks**, University of South Africa.

2006
- **Feesgids: Absa Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees**.
- **Department Entertainment technology: 30 years of entertainment excellence**, TUT.

2007
- **Rendezvous focussculpture**, curated by Gordon Froud, Paul Boilitreau, Christina Naurattel.
- **Feesgids: Absa Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefeeses**.
- **Feesgids: Aardklop 10, Potchefstroom**.
- **Aardkop 10, katalogus 10 Jaar Feeskunstenaars**.
- **Decade – Highlights from 10 years of collecting for the Sanlam Art Collection**.
- **Smak Museumgids, Wêreldreizigers, Gent**.

2008
- **Intervention**, Unisa.
- **Dystophia**, Unisa.
- **Woordpoort: Op die Planke**, University of Pretoria.

2011
- **Site-Specific**, International land art event Plettenberg Bay, South Africa.
- **100 Plates**, University of the Free State.
- **50 Years, 50 works: The art Catalogue**. The Kilbourn Collection 2011.

2012

2013
- **Feesprogram**, Vryfees, Bloemfontein.
- **Time and space**, educational brochure produced by the Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein.
- **Re-envisioning the Anglo Boer (South African) War**, Exhibition catalogue, Johannes Stegmann Gallery, University of the Free State.
- **Universal suffering during the South African War, 1899 – 1902. Women’s Memorial Centenary Collection 2013**.
- **Cool Capital Biennale**, 2014

2015
- **The spiritual in the material**, Group exhibition curated by Les Cohn, Lizamore & Associates, Johannesburg.

2016
- **Saadjies, Cool capital**, brochure: Kunsuitstalling in samewerking met Jan van der Merwe & AHMP, Reneé de Beer.

2017
- University of Pretoria Museums, Department of UP Arts, Edoardo Villa Museum, Sculpture Gallery.
- **Saadjies, Cool Capital 2016**.
Radio and TV interviews and documentation

1998
- Final inspection, Unisa Fina Arts Department on Jan van der Merwe’s Master of Technology exhibition, video documentation (internal publication)
- Radio Interview, Radio Sonder Grenswe (RSG) Hermien de Vos.

1999
- Sasol Scifest Science and Art Competition, Video Interview, April, Sasol, Johannesburg (internal publication).

2000
- “Jan van der Merwe”, Pasella, SABC2, April.
- Interview, “Bagged Baggage” Kunskafee, Kyknet, Johannesburg.
- “Trapped Reflections”, Pasella, SABC2, Johannesburg.
- Radio Interview, Suid-Kaap Stereo, September.

2001
- Radio interview, Radio2, Belgium, June.
- “Installation art: Jan van der Merwe, Kunskafee, Kyk-Net, Johannesburg.
- “Art as therapy”, Ja/Nee, Kyk-Net, Interview with Christina Landman, Johannesburg.
- Geef ‘n Drukkie, Feniks-Unite, Harelbeke, Belgium. (Video documentation of workshop for adult Mentally handicapped artists).

2002
- “Interview on installations in collaboration with Mission Antarctica and Cozololo Aids Orphan Shelter”, Take Five, SABC1.
- “News insert on The Red Carpet – exhibition at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein”, SABC2 and SABC3, Johannesburg.
- “Hadeda Arts Festival, Tzaneen”, Fiesta, Kyk-Net, Johannesburg.
- “People, Planet an Prosperity, ABSA Art Gallery”, Kunskafee, Kyk-Net, Johannesburg.

2003
- “Ysterkuns – Installasiekuns: Jan van der Merwe”, Pasella, SABC2, Johannesburg.
- “Pretoria Lecturers Exhibition, University of Pretoria”, Kunskafee, Kyk-Net, Johannesburg.
- “Jan van der Merwe, Feeskunstenaar, Aardklop Kunstfees”, Pasella, SABC2, Johannesburg.
- “The Red Carpet, Aardklop Kunstfees”, News SABC2, Johannesburg.

2004
- “Olympic Art and Sport Contest”, Monitor, RSG, Johannesburg.
- “Olympic Art and Sport Contest”, Tshwane University of Technology. Community Radio Station, Pretoria.
- “Behind the Screens”, Nightlife, November, ETV, Johannesburg.
- “Installation artist: Jan van der Merwe”, Summit Television, DSTV Channel 55, Johannesburg.

2009
- Ontwortel/Uprooted, UJ Gallery, RSG Kuns, Christelle Webb-Joubert.
2011
- Interview Radio Kragbrong Community radio.

2012
- Die kunstenaar Jan van der Merwe besoek New York / Ampersand toekenning RSG Kuns, Christelle Webb-Joubert

2013
- Interview with Kobus Burger, RSG Kuns on the exhibition Time and Space, Olievenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein.
- Interview by Eunika Smith for SABC TV1 News on the exhibition Time and Space, Olievenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein
- Interview by Nosana Sondiyazi for the programme “Love Warrior” for Hlasela TV on the exhibition Time and Space, Olievenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein.
- Interview by Yolanda Maartens, OFM, on the exhibition Time and Space, Olievenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein.

Other recognition
- Artwork selected for front cover illustrations of published books:
- Work listed as recommended artist in the official national CAPS syllabus for Visual Art, Department of Basic Education.
- Work listed as recommended artist in the syllabus of tertiary institutions, e.g. Unisa.
- Invited to give lectures on my art at high schools, at tertiary institutions, museums and art associations on a regular basis.
- Work used as illustration in the following publication that is distributed internationally: Volks, C, (Guest editor)/ Crewe, M, (series editor). 1012, Third Degree – Aids Review. Published by the Centre for the Study of Aids, University of Pretoria.
- Regular interviews with school pupils, teachers, pre- and post-graduate as sources for study projects.
- Invited to give workshops as community projects (e.g. at Tembisa, Centurion, Bela Bela township and others).
- Invited to co-operate in workshops for mentally handicapped artists in Belgium.
- Section on my art in textbook: Visual art Gr 12, published in 2013, Future Managers.
- Invited as guest speaker, post graduate academic function, University of North West, Department of Visual Culture Studies, October 2013.
A selection of references on internet web pages

- Art.co.za/janvandermerwe (comprehensive information, including examples of artwork)
- Janvandermerwe art
- Janvandermerwe artist
- Janvandermerwe images
- Janvandermerwe art news
- Janvandermerwe articles
- Wwwsaatcchigallery veronica wilson on Jan van der Merwe iart Cape Town

CV AND COMPLETE LIST OF EXHIBITIONS

Jan van der Merwe was born in 1958, in Virginia, Free State and grew up in Ladysmith, KwaZulu, Natal, where he matriculated in 1975. He lives and works in Pretoria and is senior lecturer in Fine Arts at the Department of Fine and Applied Art, Tshwane University of Technology. He obtained a master’s degree in Fine Art at the Pretoria Technikon (now TUT) cum laude in 1999. His work is represented in a number of museums and corporate collections and has also won several awards. Since 1976 he has taken part in numerous group exhibitions and has also had several solo shows. In 2006 the Pretoria Art Museum hosted a comprehensive retrospective exhibition, entitled: The Archaeology of Time. In 2013 he presented a solo exhibition, Time and Space, at Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein. An extensive CV is available at art.co.za/janvandermerwe.

1958: Born in Virginia, Free State, South Africa
1976: Employed by SA Railways
1977-1979: Student Fine Arts: Art Faculty Technikon Pretoria
1899-2001: Lecturer in decor painting and drawing at the Department Entertainmt Technology, Arts Faculty, Technikon Pretoria
1999: Senior Lecturer, Arts Faculty, Technikon, Pretoria
2002-2007: Study leader, Sculpture Department, Arts Faculty, Technikon Pretoria
2008-Current: Study leader, Painting 2nd, 3rd and 4th year practical course. Art advisor to master’s degree students

TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

1975 Matriculated at Ladysmith, High School, KwaZulu Natal
1977-
1979: Student, Fine and Applied Arts, Technikon Pretoria
1984 National Diploma, Fine Arts Technikon Pretoria, (distinction in Painting)
1986 National Higher Diploma, Fine Arts, Technikon Pretoria, (Exhibition and dissertation, Spel as Kuns)
1992 Fine Art IV (practical), Unisa, Pretoria

EXHIBITIONS

1977
- Student Exhibition, Technikon, Pretoria

1978
- Student Exhibition, Technikon, Pretoria

1979
- Student Exhibition, Technikon, Pretoria
- New Signatures Exhibition, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria, Northern Transvaal

1981
- New Signatures Exhibition, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria, Northern Transvaal

1982
- New Signatures Exhibition, SA Association of Arts, Pretoria Northern Transvaal:
  - Awarded First Prize, Mixed Media
  - Awarded Merit Price, Painting
- Student Exhibition, Technikon Pretoria

1983
- The Bata International Art competition, SA Association of Arts, Durban, Natal.

1986
- Reach Out ’86 Exhibition, Pretoria Art Museum: Curator Sandra Eastwood
- Student Exhibition, Technikon Pretoria
- Class of ’79 Exhibition, Ivan Solomon Gallery, Technikon Pretoria
- Solo Student Exhibition: (National Higher Diploma Fine Arts) Technikon Pretoria, Ivan Solomon, Gallery, Spel as kuns

1987
- Volkskas Atelier, 1987, SA Association of Pretoria
- Bureau of Heraldry-exhibition, Pretoria Art Museum
- Transkom Exhibition, RAU
- Development Bank Exhibition Sandton, Johannesburg

1988
- “Hi-Tech” SA Association of Arts, Durban, Natal

1991
- Volkskas Atelier ’90

1991
- Volkskas Atelier ’91

1992
- Volkskas Atelier ’92
- Student Exhibition, Unisa, Pretoria

1994
- Contemporary South African Art, Pretoria Art Museum, Curator Rina de Villiers
- Our World in Art, Pretoria Art Museum, Curator Rina de Villiers

1995
- Pretoria Technikon Lecturers and Students exhibition, Schweikerdt Art Centre and Gallery, Pietersburg, Northern Transvaal
- Mmabatho Culture Centre Group Exhibition
- Centurion Civic Gallery, group Exhibition

1996
- Pretoria Technikon Lecturers Exhibition, Centurion Gallery
1997
- Pretoria Technikon Lecturers Exhibition, Centurion Gallery
- Kempton Park Tembisa Fine Arts competition

1998
- First Public Solo Exhibition: Final Inspection, African Window Museum, Pretoria, April
  (Practical component of M.Tech. degree)
- Memórias Intimas Marcas, African Window Museum, Pretoria (Curator Fernando Alvim, four works selected, international exhibition supported by UNESCO)
- Awarded Second Prize in Kempton Park/Tembisa Fine Arts Award exhibiton
- Technikon Pretoria, Lecturers and student exhibition, Arts Faculty “Art Show 98”, African Window Museum Pretoria
- PPC Cement Sculpture competition, S A Art Association, Pretoria

1999
- Sasol Scifest ’99 Art Competition, Awarded First Prize – Sponsored by the French Embassy and the Institute for Research Development, Grahamstown
- Technikon Pretoria, Lecturers and Students Exhibition, African Window

2000
- Memórias Intimas Marcas, MUHKA Museum Antwerp, Belgium (opening 04/02/2000)
- Skrapnel Exhibition: Main festival Klein Karoo National Festival, Oudtshoorn. 25 March – 1 April 2000
- “Artichoke” exhibition: curated by Dee Venter, Janette Ginslow and Kathryn Smith
- Awarded Second Prize, Kemptonpark/Tembisa Fine Arts Award exhibition, South Africa
- Magic Moments, International Exhibition, Civic Gallery, Johannesburg, Curator: Minnette Vari
- Solo Exhibition, Bagged Baggage, Millenium Gallery Pretoria
- Trapped reflections, African Window Museum, Pretoria. Curator: Koos van der Watt, UNISA
- UNISA Exhibition, Pretoria, Curator: Frieda Hatting
- Weft and Warp. Civic Gallery, Johannesburg

2001
- Installation: Wag/Waiting Exhibited Pretoria Art Museum, New acquisitions
- Installation no I want my mother exhibited, Unisa Art Gallery, New acquisitions
- Skrapnel Exhibition, North West University, Potchefstroom Campus
- Worhskop/Exhibition Geef ‘n Drukkie. Feniks Unite, Mentall disabled artists, Belgium
- FNB Vita Award Exhibition, NSA Gallery Durban
- FNB Vita Award Exhibition, Market Theatre, Johannesburg
- Solo Exhibition, Bagasie/Baggage, Aardklop 2001, on invitation by North West University, Potchefstroom Campus
- Sasol Collection Exhibition, Johannesburg

2002
- Skrapnel Exhibition, Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria
- Gaste/Guests Installation part of Sanlam Collection Exhibition, Cape Town, Curator Stefan Hundt
- Solo Exhibition, Rooi Tapty/Red Carpet, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein (First Exhibition Reservoir): Curator: Sharon Crampton
• Solo Exhibition, Chief Festival Artist, Hadeda Art Festival, Tzaneen
• Installation Wag/Waiting, collection, Pretoria Art Museum
• Six Artworks, TV Production, Isidingo, SABC3
• World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, Ubuntu Village Installation Collaboration Mission Antarctica
• Installation Collaboration Gozololo Aids Orphan Shelter, Johannesburg, Ubuntu Village
• People Planet and Prosperity Exhibition, Art Association, Pretoria
• People Planet and Prosperity Exhibition, Art Association, Johannesburg
• Digital Art Exhibition, The Spacings, UNISA Art Gallery: Curators Elfriede Dreyer, Anja Krejewska, Carine Zaayman
• 11 September, Group Exhibition Minds: Art Space, Pretoria
• Mindsi Art Space, Group Exhibition, Installation Eclipse. Pretoria

2003
• Lecturers’ Exhibition, Art Faculty. Technikon, Pretoria, University of Pretoria, Art Gallery
• Installation Gaste/Guests Part of Sanlam Collection Exhibition: Cape Town, Curator: Stefan Hundt
• Installation Baggage, Capital Park Pretoria
• Solo Exhibition: Chief Festival Artist Aardklop National Art Festival, North West University Campus. Coordinator Visual Arts: Estelle Dippenaar
• Nucleo do Art (Mozambique) Group Exhibition Alliance Francaise Pretoria, Pretoria Art Museum
• Bagged Baggage, Installation exhibition. Permanent Collection, MAP
• Awarded National Winner, Sculpture Category 2003. ICO Olympic Art Competition (Attendance Senior Delphic Games 2005)

2004
• Wag/Waiting, Koeêlas/Bullet protect Jacket, Clearning Kit, Artifacts. Installations. Pretoria Art Museum
• Artcoza Gallery. Group Exhibition, Johannesburg
• Solo – Artefacts, Breytenbach Theatre, Pretoria
• Freedom of Expression through sculpture. Art Gallery, University of Pretoria
• The Brett Kebble Art Awards Exhibition, Cape Town.
• Screen Saviour, Star Gazer, Exhibited permanent collection, MAP, Graskop
• Show Case Installation exhibited permanent Collection, Olievenhuis Museum, Bloemfontein
• IOC Olympic Art Competition, International phase, Switzerland
• Fusion Through Art, Group Exhibition, permanent collection, National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria (Bliksoldaat/Tin soldier, 1998)
• Workshop, Exhibition: Feniks Unite, Mentally disabled artists, Belgium
• Waste Art Project. Curator: Wendy Ross
• Off the record Exhibition, Godart gallery. Curator: Gordon Froud, Johannesburg
• Solo Exhibition. Behind the screens, ABSA Gallery. Curator: Cecile Loedolff, Johannesburg
• Awarded 4th Prize, 2004 Olympic Sport and Art Contest International (65 entries) Luggage Trolley (Diploma of Recognition)
• Luggage Trolley Exhibited Olympic Museum Lausanne, Switzerland
• Luggage Trolley Exhibited during the Olympic Games August 2004, Athens

2005
• Solo Exhibition, Unknown, Sanlam Art Gallery. Cape Town. Curator: Stefan Hundt
- **Reconciliation Group exhibition** as part of The Arts of Reconciliation Festival, hosted by the University of Pretoria: Curator: Elfriede Dreyer
- **Sasol – Art @ Work**, Sasol Collection Exhibition at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival, 2005
- **The Human Condition**, Group Exhibition, Pretoria Art Museum, installation Wag/Waiting exhibited as part of the permanent collection
- **Art from two Metropoles**, Group Exhibition Fried Contemporary Art Gallery, Pretoria: Curator: Elfriede Dreyer
- **Exhibition 2nd International Delphic Games 2005**, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, Fine Art representative, South Africa. Awarded a special international Delphic Award, outstanding presentation in the discipline of Art Installation, Kuching, Sarawak Malaysia
- **Solo Exhibition, Aardklop Arts Festival 2005**, North West University, Potchefstroom Campus, 4 installations exhibited as part of the Helgaard Steyn Award. Invited by Prof John Botha
- **Danie de Jager Art Museum, Group Exhibition**, Klerksdorf
- **Beeldsprak: Series, Beeld** Newspaper 25 Oktober 2005. Artwork Vonds included and published as part of project in, **Beeld Plus**. Curator: Gordon Froud and Chris Diederiks. Work was exhibited and auctioned generating funds for the “Beeld Kinderfonds”
- **International Project: Affection, stolen time**. 730 artists resident in Africa, America were invited to take part in the exhibited started in Bahia, Brazil. The Goethe Institute and also traveled to: Spain, Germany, France, Africa: Curators: Viga Gordhilo, Susana Azevedo. Contact person in South Africa: Celia de Villiers, UNISA

2006


2007

- **Workshop / Exhibition Tactiel-Jassen** at Harelbeke with mentally handicapped artists. Invited by Feniks Unite, Belgium
- **Installation, Eclipse permanently installed in MAP collection**, Richmond, Northern Cape.
- **Inniebos Group Exhibition**, travelled to Graskop
- **Workshop/Exhibition Reamogestswe Centre**, Bela Bela with mentally handicapped artists, Invited by Feniks Unite, Belgium
- **Exhibition Feniks Unite Belgium and Reamogestswe Centre**, Bela Bela with mentally handicapped Artists. Travelled to Aardklop Art Festival, 2007. NWU. Potchefstroom
- **Festival Artists of the past ten years, Aardklop Art Festival 2007**, NWU, Potchefstroom. Curator: Estelle Dippenaar
- **Creative Creatures Aardklop Art Festival, 2007**. NWU, Potchefstroom. Curator: Ian Marley
- **Rendezous, Focus Sculpture group exhibition**. Morningside, Johannesburg. Curated by Gordon Froud, Paul Boulitreau and Christina Naurattel
- **Group Exhibition organised by MAP collection**. Richmond, Northern Cape
- **International Group exhibition Contemporary Visions of South Africa, Artists from Southern Africa and Indian Ocean Islands**, Pretoria Art Museum
- **International Group Exhibition. Installation Wereldreizigers invited by Onze Nieuwe Toekomst VZW, Kleurlaboratorium, SMAK, Museum Gent**
2008

- *Decade, Highlights from 10 years of collecting for Sanlam Art Collection*. University of Johannesburg Art Gallery. Curator: Stefan Hundt
- *Decade, Grahamstown Art Festival 2008*. Curator: Stefan Hundt
- Semi Finalist, Sasol Wax Art Competition, 2008
- *Intervention*, Group Exhibition, UNISA Art Gallery, Pretoria. Curator: Koos van der Watt
- *Rendezvous, Focus Sculpture group exhibition*, NWU, Potchefstroom. Curated by Gordon Froud, Paul Boulitereau and Christina Naurattel

2009

- *Decade, highlights from 10 year of collecting for Sanlam Art Gallery*, Bellville Cape Town. Curator: Stefan Hundt
- *Decade*, iart Gallery (Cape TUWU). Curator: Stefan Hundt.
- *Decade, Oliewenhuis Art Museum*, Bloemfontein. Curator: Stefan Hundt
- *Decade, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Gallery*, Port Elizabeth. Curator: Stefan Hundt
- *Decade, George Museum*, Western Cape. Curator: Stefan Hundt
- *Decade, Durban Art Gallery*. Curator: Stefan Hundt
- *Dystopia Group Exhibition*, Unisa Art Gallery, Pretoria. Curator: Elfriede Dreyer
- *Group Exhibition, Woordpoort*, University of Pretoria. Curator: Elfriede Dreyer
- *Solo Exhibition, Ontwortel/Uprooted 2009*, University of Johannesburg, Art Gallery. Invited by curator: Annali Cabano-Dempsey

2010

- *Group exhibition. Artist’s books. Transgression and Boundaries of Title Page* University of North West. Curators: Franci Greyling, Ian Marley
- *Group Exhibition: Doodles*, Trent Gallery, Pretoria
- *Group Exhibition, Remastered*, Trent Gallery, Pretoria. Curator: Erica Fraser
- *Group Exhibition, Rhino Poaching Awareness Project*. The National Zoological Gardens, Pretoria, Trent Gallery
• **Group Exhibition, Rhino Poaching Awareness Project**, Brooklyn Art Gallery, Pretoria, Trent Gallery.
• **Group Exhibition, MAP**, University of Johannesburg Art Gallery. Curators: Harrie Siertsema, Abrie Fourie

2011
• **First International Art event, Site Specific, Plettenberg Bay**, Thirteen Artists on invitation. Curated by Strijdom, van der Merew and Annie Strydom
• **Group Exhibition, Pretoria Artists**, Ron Belling Art Gallery, Port Elizabeth. Curator: Stuart Trent
• **Group Exhibition, Implemented Environments**, Brundyn and Gonsalves Art Gallery, Cape Town
• **Group Exhibition “Ek ben een Afrikaner” KKNK Oudtshoorn**. Curator: Theresa Lizamore
• **Group Exhibition, 100 plates**, Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, University of The Free State Art Gallery, Bloemfontein. Curators: Marjorie Human, Angela de Jesus
• **Group Charity Exhibition A Night of 1000 Drawings**, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein
• **Group Charity Exhibition, Engage**, Pretoria Arts Association
• **Traveling group exhibition, “Altered Pieces, a tribute to Leonard Cohen**, Curator: Gordon Froud

2013
• **Group Exhibition. Selected South African Sculptors**, William Humphreys Art Museum, Kimberley
• **Solo Exhibition entitled: Time and Space**, on invitation Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, 9 July to 18 August. Exhibition was viewed by 14690 visitors
• **Solo Exhibition: Time and Space**, at the Kyk Net Scaena-Foyer, during the Vryfees on the Campus of the University of the Free State
• **Group Exhibition, Re-envisioning the Anglo Boer War**, Johannes Stegman Art Gallery, University of the Free State
• **Permanent Group Exhibition, Re-invisioning the Anglo-Boer War**, Anglo Boer War Museum and Women’s Memorial, Bloemfontein.

2014
• **Multi-media group exhibition, Shards**, Tina Skukan Gallery
• **Group Exhibition: “20 years of Democracy in South Africa”**, Turchin Centre for Visual Art, Appalachian State University, USA, in cooperation with the University of Johannesburg. Curator: Gordon Froud
• **Group exhibition, Industrial Karoo, Fear and Loss**, curated by Katie Barnard du Toit, Oliewenhuis Art Museum
• **Group Exhibition: Cool Capital Biennale Launch**, Open Window School of Visual Communication, Centurion. Curated by Elfriede Dreyer and Adelle Adendorff
• **Group Exhibition, Helgaard Steyn Prize**, selection of previous winners. Curated by Dr Lydia de Waal, La Motte Museum.
• **Group Exhibition, Twenty one by Fifteen: Etch**, exhibition of etchings by Tim’s Print Studio, Trent Gallery, Pretoria

2015
• **Group Exhibition, Capital: Present**, Fried Contemporary Art Gallery, Pretoria
• **Group Exhibition, Industrial Karoo, Fear and Loss**, curated by Katie Barnard du Toit, Pretoria Art Museum
• **Group Exhibition: Ik ben een Afrikaander**, Lizamore and Associates, Johannesburg
• **Group Exhibition: Ik ben een Afrikaander**, Freedom Park, Pretoria, Lizamore and Associates
Group Exhibition: *Ik ben een Afrikaander*, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, Lizamore and Associates

Group Exhibition, *Twenty, Art in Time of Democracy*, Pretoria Art Museum. Curated: Gordon Froud on behalf of the University of Johannesburg for the Appalachian State University, North Carolina

Group Exhibition, *Seven Deadly Sins*, Trent Gallery, curated by Anna Liebenberg

Group Exhibition, *Letters to the Past or the Future*, Trent Gallery, Pretoria Curated by Stuart Trent and Benale Khoza

Group Exhibition of etchings. “Glimpse” by Tim’s Print Studio at Workhorse Gallery, 2nd Grahamstown Street, Marshalltown, Johannesburg

Group Exhibition, *The Spiritual in the Material, Sculpture exhibition*. Curated by Les Cohn, Lizamore and Associates, Johannesburg

Group Exhibition, *Twenty, Art in Time of Democracy*, University of Johannesburg Art Gallery. Curated by Gordon Froud on behalf of the University of Johannesburg for the Appalachian State University, North Carolina


Group Exhibition: *MAP*, Richmond, Northern Cape.

2016

Group Exhibition, *Ik ben een Afrikaander*, Lizamore and Associates, Johannesburg

Group Exhibition, *[my] object*, Scaena Foyer, University of the Free State, Vryfees, 2016, Curated by Angela de Jesus, July


Group Exhibition, *Cool capital 2016 “Saadjies”*, Aardklop 2016, Project coordinator Jana Kruger, October


Group Exhibition, *MAP Collection, Cool Capital 2016*, Pretoria, Curator: Harrie Siertsema

Group Exhibition, *Desire*, Art Association, Pretoria, Curated by Johan Conradie

Group Exhibition, *Cool Capital 2016, Saadjies, MAP*, Richmond 2016, Project coordinator Jana Kruger, November

2017

Group Exhibition, *Cool Capital 2016, Saadjies*, Coordinator Jana Kruger, Atterbury Theatre

Solo Exhibition, *Ontwortel/Uprooted*, 2011. MAP Collection, Graskop Mpumulanga, Curator: Harrie Siertsema

Group Exhibition, *Art (ed) Staff members*, Tshwane University of Technology, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Pretoria Art Museum. Curator Retief van Wyk
Workshops in collaboration with mentally handicapped artists:

CERTIFICATE

On behalf of FENIKS vzw – Avelgem, Belgium, technical cooperative organisation of the Flemish government, department external affairs,
we confirm that Mr. VANDERMERWE JAN,
Senior Lecturer at the Tshwane University of Technology – South Africa has been conducting several artistic workshops, in Belgium as well in South-Africa, for people with disabilities, during the previous years.

1. Period 16/06/2001 - 08/07/2001 : Geef ‘n drukkie – Belgium (Avelgem)
2. Period 12/06/2004 – 03/07/2004 : Koffers - Belgium (Harelbeke)
4. Period 01/07/2007 - 14/07/2007 : Jassen - South-Africa (Bela Bela)
5. Period 02/12/2007 - 09/12/2007 : Wereldreizigers – Belgium (Gent)

Those workshops were a collaboration between FENIKS and vzw Wit.h (a social artistic organisation) and Onze Nieuwe Toekomst (a self advocacy movement), all of them active in the field of service delivery for people with disabilities.
Each workshop resulted in an exhibition, a publication and some lectures for the general public. 
Mr Vandermerwe organised during September 2007 a general exhibition, compiled of the results of those workshops, at the Aardklop- arts-festival at Potchefstroom.

Mr. Vandermerwe facilitated, in the period 2001-2007, several, 3-months-practicals for students of the Tshwane University of Technology, in FENIKS- Belgium.

For FENIKS
Johan Timperman
Chief Executive Manager

15 February 08

2008/02/21
Uitnodiging

Onze Nieuwe Toekomst vzw bestaat 10 jaar!

Voorstelling van ons nieuwste meesterwerk:

Wereldreizigers

zondag 9 december 2007
in het Kleurlaboratorium van het S.M.A.K.

Reis je mee?

Onze Nieuwe Toekomst vzw werkte 3 jaar lang heel aan “Wereldreizigers”.

Wij nodigen u vriendelijk uit op de voorstelling van ons kunstproject op zondag 9 december 2007.

We werkten hiervoor samen met de Zuid-Afrikaanse kunstenaar Jan van der Merwe.

Dit zal doorgaan in het Kleurlaboratorium van het S.M.A.K. (zie plan).

De officiële afsluiting vindt plaats om 16 uur gevolgd door een receptie.

Geleeve voor 30 november in te schrijven op volgend e-mailadres: Didier.Peelman@ont.be of via bijgevoegde antwoordkaart

S.M.A.K. Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunsten, Gent

Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen
WERELDREIZIGERS


Op 9 december nodigen de ‘Wereldreizigers’ bezoekers uit op hun wereldkaart om tijd te maken voor verwondering, verwarring en existentiële twijfel. Hoe vastgeroest is iedereen van ons? Hoe vervallen we maar al te snel in stereotiepen? Of ook ruimte te geven aan inlevingsvermogen, verbeeldingskracht, alternatieve interpretaties, en nieuwe inspiratie, ontrafelen de ‘Wereldreizigers’ op die dag de symboliek van hun persoonlijke bagage aan de hand van hun rijke verhalen, betekenisvolle loto’s, gedichten en voorwerpen in samenwerking met de Zuid-Afrikaanse kunstenaar Jan van der Merwe.

Onze Nieuwe Toekomst vzw
Jaspisstraat 1 – B-9000 Gent
Didier.Pelem@ont.be en Griet.Roets@ont.be
www.ont.be/wereldreizigers
Appendix E

DVD disk 1: Film documentation

1. *The Archaeology of Time*, installations by Jan van der Merwe, 28 June-3 December 2006, Pretoria Art Museum,
   film documentation by Danie de Waal (2006),
   editing by Waldo Roodt and Jan van der Merwe (2017)

2. *Time and Space*, installations by Jan van der Merwe,
   9 July-18 August 2013, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein,
   film documentation by Green Pepper video production house in collaboration with Oliewenhuis Art Museum

3. Interview on the installation *Time and Space* and on the Oliewenhuis Art Museum by Nosaba Sondiyazi for the program *Love Warrior* on Hlasela TV, 2013

   film documentation by Koos van der Watt (UNISA), Gustav van Heerden (UNISA) and Fernando Alvim (Memórias Intimas Marcas)

5. *Installation Artist: Jan van der Merwe*, 2004, *Summit*, DSTV Channel 55

Appendix F

DVD disk 2: Photo documentation

5. *Time and Space, installations by Jan van der Merwe*, Oliwenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, 9 July-18 August 2013, photographer: Sylvester Mqeku
6. Selected installations:
   *Monument*, 2013, Women’s Memorial centenary, Bloemfontein,
   *Ontwortel/Uprooted*, 2011, Land art event: Site-Specific, Plettenberg Bay, photographers: Neels Nieuwenhuis, Elizabeth Olivier-Kahlau, Carla Crafford and Rupert de Beer