CURATORIAL PRACTICE AS REFLEXIVE INQUIRY:

A CASE STUDY OF AN ART MUSEUM EXHIBITION

By

Jennifer Ann Rosalind Stretton

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DECLARATION

CURATORIAL PRACTICE AS REFLEXIVE INQUIRY:

A CASE STUDY OF AN ART MUSEUM EXHIBITION

I, Jennifer Ann Rosalind Stretton, declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination through any other institution. All the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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APPROVED FOR FINAL SUBMISSION

Supervisor: Dr John Roome

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Co-Supervisor: Dr Philippa Kethro

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PREFACE

REFERENCING STYLE USED

The referencing style used is that given in the Referencing guide: Harvard referencing style (Mitha et al. 2016). Endnote 8 was used to generate the Reference list, using the DUT Harvard Endnote style 2015.

Direct quotations are placed in inverted commas and indented.

Intext quotations are placed in inverted commas.

The mannequin comments are italicised and placed in inverted commas.

Comments made by the Collaboration are italicised.

Titles of exhibitions are italicised.

Artworks are italicised.

Artwork captions are as follows: artist's name; date of artwork; title of work; medium; size; collection.

ABSTRACT

The exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts: has the female stereotype changed?,* which forms the focus of this case study, was held in the Durban Art Gallery, 30 March – 28 May 2017 and extended to 31 July 2017 (Appendix 1). The gallery has a colonial and patriarchal history and the exhibition sought to overcome public associations with this past by inviting engagement from traditionally marginalised sectors of society. To this end, Giddens's view of reflexivity is applied in this study to curatorial practice as reflexive inquiry into public and community issues around feminism.

Collaborative curation was seen as promoting reflexive inquiry, and involved the conceptualisation of feminist themes, selection and sourcing of artworks, the planning of gallery space for maximal visitor engagement with the exhibition, and the elicitation of public response.

The methodology detailed the ways in which these curatorial interventions provided avenues of curatorial inquiry. The gallery space was seen as an ethnographic field in which the experiences, attitudes and beliefs of visitors could be observed. The use of a mannequin on which visitors could pin notes recording their responses allowed privacy and therefore authenticity. As a result visitor responses showed strong engagement and were often confessional and cathartic. It also became evident that visitors experienced the exhibition in richly varied, intersectional ways. Intersectionality spoke of a differently positioned and located community for whom a variety of influences, such as sexuality, spirituality, subjection, gender, class, race, age, motherhood and belonging, all connected with feminism. With hindsight, the collaborative and reflexive planning of the exhibition had taken an intersectional approach to curation, using themes such as Abjection, Dolls, The Usual Suspects, Smoke and Mirrors, Spirituality & Ritual, Who's Looking at Whom?, Unspoken, and A Mother's Love.

The inquiry concluded that an intersectional approach is appropriate for the curation of exhibitions dealing with controversial and unresolved social issues. Further, the study bore out the notion of reflexivity through collaboration. Recommendations are made for extending the study through community research and the archiving of exhibition data as a curatorial resource.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

PREFACE v

ABSTRACT vi

TABLE OF CONTENTS vii

TABLE OF FIGURES xi

Chapter One Introduction: Curatorial Practice in a Public Art Museum 1

1.1 Introduction to the Study 1

1.2 Background to the Study 4

1.3 Significance of Study 6

1.4 Research Aims and Questions 7

1.5 Methodological Approach 7

1.6 Chapter Outlines 8

Chapter Two: Literature Review 9

2.1 Introduction 9

2.1.1 Evolving Role of Curator 9

2.1.2 The Independent Curator 11

2.1.3 Perspectives on Curation 12

2.2 The Changing Form of Exhibitions 15

2.2.1 Documentation of Exhibition Process 16
2.3 Gallery Space and Place 17
2.3.1 Patriarchy and Gallery Space 18
2.3.2 The Colonial Presence of the Durban Art Gallery 19
2.4 Curatorial Intervention of the study 20
2.5 The Curatorial Intervention and Reflexivity 21
2.6 The Curatorial Intervention and Feminism 24
2.6.1 Positioning Feminism in South Africa 26
2.6.2 Feminist Exhibitions in South Africa and their Driving Concerns 28
2.6.3 Feminism and Curatorship: Reflexive Feminisms 31
2.7 The Exhibition as a Vehicle of Research Inquiry 34
2.7.1 Rationale for the Exhibition: Reflexive Collaboration 35
2.8 Conclusion 36
Chapter Three: Exhibition Making as Methodology 39
3.1 Introduction 39
3.2 Reflexive Qualitative Research Approach 40
3.2.1 Curatorial Collaboration as Primary Data Generation 40
3.2.2 Selecting the Curatorial Collaborators 42
3.3 Exhibition Curatorial Process 43
3.3.1 Deciding on the Exhibition Themes 44
3.3.2 Criteria for Selection of Artworks 45

3.3.3 Exhibition Themes 49

3.4 The Gallery as a Field Research Setting 95

3.4.1 Place, Space and Subjectivity: Reflexive Interventions 97

3.4.2 Transforming Gallery Spaces 99

3.4.3 Placement of Artwork in the Gallery 103

3.4.4 Curator Responses to the Curation Process 113

3.5 Public Primary Data Sources 114

3.5.1 Mannequin 114

3.5.2 Guided Talks 117

3.6 Data Analysis Approach 117

3.6.1 Ethnographic Reflexivity 118

3.7 Conclusion 119

Chapter Four: Findings and Data Analysis 120

4.1 Introduction 120

4.2 Exhibition Feedback Mechanisms as Primary Data Sources 120

4.3 Curators' Comments on Exhibition Themes 125

4.4 Mannequin Comments 128

4.4.1 Criteria for Analysis for the Mannequin 131

4.4.2 Layers of Analysis for the Mannequin 131

4.4.3 Life Experiences and the Mannequin 132

4.4.4 Feminist Reflexive Reaction to Life Experiences – Feelings: for the Mannequin 133

4.4.5 Social Groupings 139
4.4.6 Cultural Politics 139
4.4.7 Social and Economic Strata 140
4.5 Guided Talks – Visitors' Comments 141
4.6 Conclusion 145
Chapter Five: Conclusion 148
5.1 Research Aims and Questions 148
5.2 Development of the Research Inquiry 149
5.2.1 The Literature Review 149
5.2.2 Research Methodology 150
5.2.3 Data Analysis 150
5.3 Reflection of Key Findings 150
5.3.1 Intersectional Curation 150
5.3.2 Curatorial Reflexivity 152
5.3.3 Collaboration 152
5.4 Limitations of the Study 152
5.5 Potential Research Possibilities 153
REFERENCES 155
APPENDIX 1 165
APPENDIX 2 166

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Sibande, M. 2014. Cry Havoc, resin cast, 380 x 170 cm, Gallery MOMO Art Collection 48

Figure 2 von Herkomer, P. c1890s. Queen Victoria, oil on canvas, 164.3 x 117.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery 50

Figure 3 Sibande, M. 2008. They don't make them like they used to, digital print on cotton rag matte paper, 62 x 60 cm, The UNISA Permanent Collection 51

Figure 4 Sibande, M. 2011. Everything is not lost, digital print on cotton rag matte paper , 87 x 113 cm, Durban Art Gallery..... 52

Figure 5 Saunders, F. 2015. Songs of Lamentation for the Widows of Marikana, cotton & wire armature, H 2.5 m, Durban Art Gallery 53

Figure 6 Alexander, J. 1995. Stripped 'Oh Yes' Girl, mixed media, 182 x 63 x 50.5 cm, ... 54

Figure 7 Artist Unknown. c440 BC. Venus de Medici, marble, H: 160.9 cm, Durban Art Gallery 55

Figure 8 View of the gallery showing the white sculptures 56

Figure 9 Arnott, B. 1991. Eve, bronze, H: 38.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery 57

Figure 10 Kathe Kollwitz, K. 1938. Die Kage (lament), bronze, 26.5 x 25.3 cm, Durban Art Gallery... 58

Figure 11 Siopis, P. 2002. Civil War Series, water colour on paper, each 14 x 20 cm, The UNISA Permanent Collection..... 58

Figure 12 Solomon, J. 2016. Window carved in Flesh, oil, pastel, aluminium tape on canvas, 178 x 165 cm, Durban Art Gallery..... 59

Figure 13 Magadela, T. 2012. Kulungile 2 (calm after the storm), panyhose, wood, 75 x 75 cm, Durban Art Gallery 60

Figure 14 Armstrong, J. 1977. Body I, stoneware, 60.4 x 36.4 cm, Durban Art Gallery..... 61

Figure 15 Croeser, M. 2001. Birth Control Versus Infinity 2001, charcoal on paper, 207 x 56.3 cm, Durban Art Gallery 62

Figure 16 Lindner, R. 1971. Girl with the hoop from Fun City, serigraph on paper, 60.4 x 50.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery 62

Figure 17 Ximba, L. 2005. Co-wives & babies, fibre, metal, wood & plastic, 58.4 x 31.7 x 13.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery 63

Figure 18 Cleary, M. 2011. Pool portrait, reclining "New Year's Day" series, colour photograph, 100 x 75 cm, Durban Art Gallery 64

Figure 19 Cleary, M. 2011. Portrait of young girl with shower cap "New Year's Day" series, colour photograph, 100 x 75 cm, Durban Art Gallery 64

Figure 20 Cleary, M. 2011. Portrait of young girl in floral bathing suit "New Year's Day" series, colour photograph, 100 x 75 cm, Durban Art Gallery 64

Figure 21 Williamson, S. 1983. A Few South Africans 1983, Albertina Sisulu, etching & silkscreen on paper, 70.2 x 52.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery 65

Figure 22 Williamson, S. 1983. A Few South Africans 1983, Winnie Mandela, etching & silkscreen on paper, 69.8 x 52.1 cm, Durban Art Gallery 65

Figure 23 Williamson, S. 1983. A Few South Africans 1983, Nokukhanya Luthuli, etching & silkscreen on paper, 70.1 x 52.5 cm, Durban Art Gallery 66

Figure 24 Williamson, S. 1983. A Few South Africans 1983, Helen Joseph, etching & silkscreen on paper, 70 x 52.4 cm, Durban Art Gallery 66

Figure 25 Searle, B. 2003. Untitled (Colour Me Series), hand coloured photographs, each 42.5 x 52 cm, Durban Art Gallery..... 67

Figure 26 Knight, L. 1925. The Lipstick, etching on paper, 24.6 x 19.7 cm, Durban Art Gallery..... 68

Figure 27 Dix, O. 1923. Sitzende mit Zigarette, lithograph on paper, 56 x 43.5 cm, Durban Art Gallery 69

Figure 28 Petersen, T. 2016. Avarana, video, 2 min 22 secs, courtesy of the artist 70

Figure 29 Nsusha, N.B. 1998. Play that tune my Fohloza, 98, oil, wood panel, leather, PVC plastic,. 71

Figure 30 Makara, M. 2003. Memories, mixed media installation, size variable, Durban Art Gallery .. 71

Figure 31 Magwa, L. 200. Iziphandla (bracelets), wood, iron, fur & animal skins, size variable, ... 72

Figure 32 Francken II, F. c1630. Salome with the head of John the Baptist, ... 73

Figure 33 Galdhari, F. 1996. Depths of Devotion, etching on paper, 50 x 51 cm, Tatham Art Collection 74

Figure 34 Galdhari, F. 2001. Purdah, silkscreen on paper, 48.9 x 21 cm, Durban Art Gallery 75

Figure 35 de vlieg, g. 1985. Bishop Tutu at Mass Funeral, KwaThemba, Ekurhuleni 24 July 1985, black and white photograph on Hahnemuehle paper, 45.6 x 29.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery 76

Figure 36 McCann, M. 1992. Afrikaner Wedding, Johannesburg, black & white photograph, 30.4 x 38.7 cm, Durban Art Gallery..... 76

Figure 37 Clark Brown, G. 1995. Painting reality 1995, hardground aquatint on paper, ... 77

Figure 38 Ndlovu, B. 2001. Virgin Test, bead, cotton & metal, 27.3 x 13.8 x 22 cm, Durban Art Gallery 78

Figure 39 Makhoba, T. 1995. Great Temptation in the Garden, oil on canvas, 42 x 59 cm, ... 79

Figure 40 Mkhanazi, M.S. 2015. Sara Bullman, charcoal, soft pastels on paper, ... 80

Figure 41 Gaza, H. 2003. Ubani Ozosinda Kwi-AIDS, acrylic on canvas, 102.5 x 150.1 cm, ... 80

Figure 42 Alice, B.K. 1993. The Espera, Jelutong wood & oil, H: 70.8 cm, Durban Art Gallery..... 81

Figure 43 Triquet, J.O. c1910. Winter, oil on canvas, 197 x 97 cm, Durban Art Gallery 82

Figure 44 Krams, I. 1985. The Monument, cement fondue, resin & oil, ... 83

Figure 45 Goldblatt, D. 1975. Joubert Park, Johannesburg 1975, black & white photograph, ... 84

Figure 46 Muholi, Z. 2006. Condoms and Feet, Lamda print, 700 x 375 cm, ... 84

Figure 47 Alexander, J. 1984. Woman in a two-piece, 1984, photomontage on paper, ... 85

Figure 48 Droesbeke, A. 1928. Marionettes, oil on board, 79 x 97 cm, Durban Art Gallery 85

Figure 49 Goldblatt, D. 1970. Zondi, Soweto 1970, black & white photograph, ... 86

Figure 50 Makhoba, T. 1999. Jabula Mphimbo Uzoqwinya, oil on card, 56.1 x 81.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery 87

Figure 51 Hugo, L. 1996. Olympia, oil on canvas, 119.8 x 95.1 cm, Durban Art Gallery 87

Figure 52 Söderlund, J. 2009. The Rings, photographic giclee print on archival paper, ... 88

Figure 53 Goodman, F. 2006. Hungry Heart, beads, silk & thread, 41 x 33 x 10 cm, ... 89

Figure 54 Goodman, F. 2006. Fading Hope, beads, silk & thread, 57 x 33 x 7 cm, ... 89

Figure 55 Goodman, F. 2006. Coup de foudre, beads, silk & thread, 35 x 30 x 8 cm,..... 90

Figure 56 Cain, C.W. c 1920s. On the Baghdad Roof, etching on paper, 25 x 27.9 cm, Durban Art Gallery 91

Figure 57 Maks, C.J. c1950s. Two Women of Amsterdam, oil on canvas, 51 x 69 cm, Durban Art Gallery 91

Figure 58 Brundrit, J. 1992. Untitled (Sexuality), kallitype on paper, 12.5 x 9.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery 92

Figure 59 Brundrit, J. 1992. Untitled (Paché), kallitype on paper, Durban Art Gallery 92

Figure 60 Brundrit, J. 1992. Untitled (Summertime), kallitype on paper, 13.5 x 11 cm, Durban Art Gallery 92

Figure 61 Nzama, G. 2002. Sexual Harassment 2002, bead, fibre, metal, wood, various sizes, Durban Art Gallery 93

Figure 62 Victor, D. 2003. Disasters of Peace 'Kom Vrou bring die kinders', etching on paper, ... 94

Figure 63 The entrance door showing the beaded curtain on the left and the mannequin past the door 98

Figure 64 Gonzales-Torres, F. 1992. Untitled (Blood), 247 x 362 cm, Artsy Magazine 99

Figure 65 Pink corner in Gallery 1 100

Figure 66 The beaded curtain in the background 104

Figure 67 A Mother's Love 106

Figure 68 Partially showing the theme Abjection 106

Figure 69 The theme of Dolls 107

Figure 70 The theme of The Usual Suspects can be seen in the background 107

Figure 71 Smoke & Mirrors 108

Figure 72 The theme of Spirituality & Ritual is partially shown 108

Figure 73 Who's Looking at Whom? 109

Figure 74 Unspoken is partially shown 109

Figure 75 van Coller, I. 2002. Elsie and Genevieve, mixed media,107.5 x 40 cm, Durban Art Gallery 111

Figure 76 Chiurai, K. 2012. Revelations VIII, digital print on paper, 100 x 150 cm, Tatham Art Collection.....111

Figure 77 The mannequin showing comments attached to the skirt 115

Figure 78 Close-up of the comments attached to the skirt with safety pins 116

Figure 79 Illustrated above is the process of analysis 131

Figure 80 Illustrated above is the meta reflection diagram 132

Figure 81 Illustrated are how the data sources answered the research questions 147

Chapter One Introduction: Curatorial Practice in a Public Art Museum

1.1 Introduction to the Study

This research involves a case study of an art exhibition in a public, municipal art gallery. I have used the exhibition to critically interrogate curatorial practice in Durban's post-colonial, public art museum, known as the Durban Art Gallery. This study researches reflexive curatorial identity and practice, as expressed in the title *Curatorial Practice as Reflexive Inquiry*, with the exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts: has the female stereotype changed?* (hereinafter referred to as *Beauty & its Beasts*) as its focus. Giddens explains "A person's identity…must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self" (Giddens 1991: 54). In addition, I also applied my own self-reflexivity of critical self-awareness and reflection to monitor, absorb and understand the research process.

This chapter will explain the background to the study and how the art museum is framed in terms of space and context. The significance of the research is discussed in relation to curatorial influences. Research aims and questions are presented and the methodological approach is briefly discussed. Chapter outlines detail the context and rationale for the approach taken.

The exhibition involved a curatorial collaboration through all stages of planning and from this point onward I will refer to this group as the 'Collaboration'. This collaboration encompassed joint conceptualisation of the discursive intent of the exhibition, the selection of artworks appropriate to the discursive intent and the management of the exhibition space for maximised visitor engagement.

Curatorial work traditionally referred to the professional services of a curator, whose job it was to 'curate', explained in the Oxford English Dictionary (Anon 2018: para. 1 line 1) as "to act a curator of (a museum, exhibits, etc.); to look after and preserve". However, nowadays the term 'curate' is used more loosely. It appears that this buzzword describes "any activity that involves culling and selecting" (Williams 2009: para. 4 line 4), and is applied to a wide variety of interests from boutiques who

‘curate’ couture collections, food vendors who ‘curate’ food stands to appeal to shoppers in flea markets, bloggers, disk jockeys etc.

This suggests that the word ‘curator’ has extended to non-traditional usage and slipped into a cultural phenomenon that goes way beyond the established museum and gallery norms. Farquharson describes ‘to curate’ as a verb, “where once there was just a noun…new words, after all, especially ones as grammatically bastardised as the verb ‘to curate’…emerge from a linguistic community’s persistent need to identify a point of discussion” (Rugg and Sedgwick 2007: 15).

As evidence of this, widely-known contemporary curator Hans Ulrich Obrist also elucidates that the words ‘curator’ and ‘curating’ are now used in much wider areas; that booklists on Amazon are being curated and that Chris Anderson calls himself the curator of *TED* and that even conferences are being curated (Pilhofer 2014) is evidence of this. Obrist draws the conclusion that “curating goes far beyond the museum” (Obrist 2011).

It is impossible to trace who organised the first art exhibition and the concept of curating. Balzer (2015: 24) asserts that the title ‘curator’ can be traced back to the Roman Empire where *curatores* were bureaucrats appointed to oversee public works programmes. He further explains the Latin root of the word is *cura,* meaning care, and *curatore*, caretaker (Balzer 2015: 24). In medieval times the title, *curatoures,* was assigned to parish priests whose role was to administer to parishioners through law and religion. Balzer advances art writer, David Lévi Strauss’ notion of curator as *bricoleur* who, in contemporary terms – like the caretaker – looks after artworks but also functions as mediator and agent of the museum as an institution of power. Balzer further identifies the etymology of the word *cura,* which the Oxford English Dictionary (Anon 2018) definition describes as three primary senses ‘care, concern and responsibility’, as informing a curator’s duty. This role Balzer elucidates as being tied to the 16th century understanding of the role of a curator as one who takes care of objects (Balzer 2015). It is important to note that when the word was historically used in relation to museums it was tied to a civic responsibility because museums were controlled by the state. It could thus be associated with propaganda – art and culture may be used to send a message tied to a political agenda or to communicate a particular political expectation. It could also be associated with the exercise of care,

as in using one's own education and understanding of culture as a departure point for extending care to others.

Balzer maintains that "the history of the curator can … be seen as one of successive subservience: to institutions, objects, artists, audiences, markets" (Balzer 2015: 27). In fact, compliance with the institution and audience was the modus operandi of the curator until the 1960s. However, during the Conceptual Art movement (mid 1960s to mid1970s), the autonomous curator materialised and took ownership of the job description as one who independently cares and assembles. Curators have continued to change the way we think about curating. Institutions, museums and galleries have provided opportunity in terms of space, structure and conditions for curating to transform exhibition practice. Although it is not my intention to provide a historical time line of significant curators, it is important to track expanding curatorial practice through significant contributors.

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) opened in 1929 in New York with Alfred Barr at the helm. Barr strongly promoted the notion of a museum for living artists and was successful in establishing a permanent collection at MoMA comprising a significant collection of 20th century art. He was instrumental in developing the idea of art movements and was the first to teach a course on modern art and to map the influences that developed the categorisation of contemporary art. In 1936 he produced an exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* where he devised a flow chart art-movement map which, while integrating design, theatre and architecture, examined cubism and abstract art across all forms of artistic expression. During his tenure MoMA became known for the promotion of 'high modernism'.

Alexander Dorner (1893-1957), museum director at the Hannover Landesmuseum, promoted the idea of integrating the modern and the contemporary and rejected the concept of separating culture from life, and the current from the past. He believed curating is integral to the way museums can approach their exhibitions and what a museum could be, and he created 'atmosphere rooms'. Dorner turned to artists for inspiration, rather than turning artists into movements and classifying them as Barr had done. He was the first curator to transform the museum into a laboratory space and use the institution to experiment, strongly rejecting the institution as a fixed and

static space. By using this process, history could become malleable and different lenses were operationalised to express different points of view.

1.2 Background to the Study

A significant shift in thinking about exhibitions and museums was yielded by Harald Szeemann (1933-2005) who claimed independence from the institution by releasing curating from the institution to exist in and of itself. The Board of Trustees of the Swiss Kunsthalle, where he was director, disapproved of the way he presented contemporary art in his 1969 exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes become Form (*(Buckner 2009)*)*. As a result, he left the institution to set up a business he called Agency for Spiritual Guest-Labour and claimed that, as a 'curator', he would create his own institution comprising himself and an agency of collaborators. He developed a new form of curating, rejecting the title 'curator' as he felt it was too attached to institutions; he instead called himself an exhibition maker that he described as an administrator, an amateur, an author of introductions, a librarian, a manager and accountant, an animator, a conservator, a financier and a diplomat (Smith 2012: 227). Szeemann treated the exhibition space as a studio and many of the artists invited to exhibit made their works onsite and installed the works themselves. He shifted the exhibition from a static position to one that was process driven with the participation of the artists in that process. In 1972 he was Artistic Director of *Documenta 5* and worked with a team of curators, thinkers and administrators to create the exhibition. Szeemann shifted the boundary posts of the *Documenta 5* by directing it as a ninety-day event where the exhibition was constantly shifting. Birnbaum romanticises him as "a kind of artist himself...a meta-artist, utopian thinker, or even a shaman" (Birnbaum 2005: 55). However, feminist curator Dorothee Richter states: "Szeemann's pose is a distinctive positioning based on historical schemata, especially of the curator as a god/king/man among artists" (2013: para. 8 line 1).

Having reconceptualised the role of the curator it is important, also, to revisit the role and influence of the museum space and audience in an exhibition setting.

> The museum is really an impresario, or more strictly a régisseur, neither actor not audience, but the controlling intermediary who sets the scene, induces a receptive mood in the spectator, then bids the

> actors take the stage and be their best artistic selves. And the art objects do have their exits and their entrances; motion – the movement of the visitor as he enters a museum and as he goes or is led from object to object – is a present element in any installation. (Duncan 2005: 81)

The quote above speaks of the museum as a designed space which potentially sets a stage for a public conversation and powerfully mediates interaction between people and art. The museum is then a liminal space for the exhibition encounter. The art museum space also functions to engender shared responses that may enrich people's lives.

Hooper-Greenhill (2006) recognises that museum visitors are now conceptualised as individuals who form part of communities where before they comprised a generic public mass. Visitors are now respected for active meaning-making and interpretation as well as being informed by exhibitions. Macdonald verifies this shift in the way audience engagement is perceived, and comments as follows:

> this turn to the audience is also paralleled in shifts in public culture which have taken place over the past twenty years. In particular, there are those changes that are widely seen to accord consumers new levels of authority, and which mean that their views need to be gathered and taken into account. (2005: 119)

Recognising that visitor engagement often comprises active engagement, rather than passive consumption, supports the notion that visitor interaction with exhibits may provide the opportunity for visitor experiences, opinions and attitudes to be evaluated and inform curatorial approaches to exhibitions. Research into visitor experiences has resulted in a field of museum visitor studies, emphasised more in science and children's museums but gaining momentum in social history and art museums.

Building on this concept, where the experiences of the museum visitor can be extracted and a deeper understanding of visitors' worldview gained through their perceptions of the exhibition content, visitor relevance may be seen in a new light. This drives my interest in the visitor responses, perceptions and participation in the museum exhibitions hosted at/by the Durban Art Gallery, in particular the exhibition entitled *Beauty & its Beasts*. That the 'public debate' style of exhibition reaches beyond the walls of the gallery and extends into meaningful dialogue and conversation is a compelling reason to take cognisance of visitor viewpoints. The

White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage states: “Artists create and heritage practitioners preserve artistic and cultural diversity. Their work is an essential contribution to the renewal, development and preservation of the heritage of society” (South Africa 2017: 44).[1] The widely divergent audience who visited the Durban Art Gallery and engaged, through the medium of the exhibition, on the pressing issues women in South Africa endure, offer a rich resource for ensuring relevance in ongoing museum work at the Durban Art Gallery.

The traditional role of the art museum is to collect artwork of significance and preserve, research and present those artworks to the public for the purpose of education and enjoyment. Today, art museums must become agents of change and reach out to every sector of society by reflecting the expectations of the community they serve (discussed in detail in 2.2). Through exhibitions and programmes associated with community concerns, art museums can potentially use their collections to develop a cultural awareness and social conscience and thus become relevant to broader society. A curator’s responsibility can be seen to be brokering this process. This is explored further in the Literature Review and in the concluding chapter, Chapter Five.

1.3 Significance of Study

The Durban City Hall was opened to the public in 1910 to promote the colonial socio-political climate of the times and stimulate interest in European values and culture. The grandeur of the Durban Art Gallery is expressed by its imposing structure, monumental gallery spaces and the majestic, red carpeted marble staircase.

The study sought to challenge the patriarchal and colonial influence of the Durban Art Gallery on the public it is required to serve. In order to do this a collaborative approach was taken in the planning of an exhibition exploring feminist discourses.

The curation approach emphasised curatorial reflexivity in line with feminist values and in accordance with the need for public-art-gallery curation to serve the interests of the community. Developing reflexivity effects agency with which to question values, beliefs and attitudes and in the process surfaces unconscious or implicit

[1] This point is drawn from the South African revised February 2017 Policy White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage Chapter Six

biases. Reflexivity changes the vocabulary of communication and interaction with peers and, in this study setting, between the curator and the public. Reflexivity therefore forms an integral approach to this research and methodology.

1.4 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this research was to explore curatorial practice through reflexive inquiry in an exhibition in an art museum.

- How can curatorial collaboration foster curatorial reflexivity?
- On what evidence, following public engagement with *Beauty & its Beasts*, could public critical awareness of feminist issues be gauged?
- What is the significance of *Beauty & its Beasts* for reflexive curatorial practice?

What is the significance of *Beauty & its Beasts* for reflexive curatorial practice?

To answer these questions the exhibition, *Beauty & its Beasts,* was mounted. The study also presented an opportunity to practice a feminist curatorship. The Collaboration conceptually framed and shaped the exhibition to interrogate a colonial space constructed for a particular patriarchal ideology. In this context, the feminist content of the exhibition disrupts the dominant masculine paradigm by promoting a reflexive feminist perspective. Patriarchy is further examined in Chapter Three where the gallery is discussed as a field research setting and the implications of the masculine environment as a product of Western modernity interrogated.

1.5 Methodological Approach

Strategies for reflexive and collaborative mounting of the exhibition formed one dimension of the case study. Visitor responses to the exhibition formed a second dimension and visitor comments during the guided talks formed a third dimension. These sources of data formed the basis for examining the curatorial approach.

1.6 Chapter Outlines

Chapter Two, the literature review, brings theoretical ideas about reflexivity, curation, patriarchy, colonialism and feminism to bear on the curation of the exhibition as a research inquiry.

Chapter Three, the methodology chapter, details the rationale for the curatorial approach and explains how exhibition planning and exhibition space were conceived as data sources. The curatorial process of the exhibition is detailed, including how the curatorial collaborative was selected, decision making on exhibition themes and the selection criteria for the artwork for display, and placement in the gallery space. Reflexive ethnographic aspects of the case study, as it provides for the observation of people and their beliefs within the exhibition environs, are explained. Data sources obtained from both the curatorial planning of the exhibition and the exhibition itself are detailed. The analytical approach to multiple data sources is then explained.

Chapter Four examines data generated by the collaborative planning of the exhibition, visitor responses to the exhibition artworks and visitor comments during guided talks. The analysis then weaves together themes from these three data sources in order to reflect on curatorial practice.

Chapter Five recapitulates previous chapters and the research questions of the study in order to draw conclusions and suggest further avenues of research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review explores theoretical concepts, such as reflexivity, curation, patriarchy, colonialism and feminism, that motivated and influenced the curation of the exhibition as a case study for research inquiry.

A survey of related literature contextualises the curation process of the case-study exhibition as a response to the historical change in the role of the public art gallery and the role of the institutional museum curator. The role of the art museum in the twenty-first century has become one that is socially responsible to its community. The case study is located in Durban's colonial-styled Art Gallery. However, the subject of the exhibition encompassed local community perceptions of women and the stereotypes embedded in their positioning. Notwithstanding the above, I am bound by my personal history to draw on the Western history of practices and discourses.

The idea of working with a curatorial collaboration is not a new one, either locally or internationally, and in fact has become common practice. However, the discursive intent of the exhibition revealed gaps in terms of feminist representation. Feminism in South Africa is still not well-defined and this provided an opportunity to explore such gaps through an exhibition within a municipal, and therefore public, art museum. In addition, the research explored exhibition histories as described in the discussion on the selection, special planning, juxtapositions and sequencing of display.

2.1.1 Evolving Role of Curator

Until recently the public South African art museum was largely aligned to ideas that developed in nineteenth-century Europe in which, Hooper-Greenhill proposes, it "concerns itself mainly with transformations in those practices of classification and display – and of the associated changes in subject positions these implied – that are internal to the museum" (Bennett 2013: 13). Post-apartheid has seen the curator of the South African art museum moving into a more socially-relevant terrain, particularly in the last few years. The role of the curator is no longer the authority and bearer of expertise to passive receivers. Importance now placed on museum and visitor relationships has impacted on the role of the curator. The responsibility of the

curator has evolved with the times, and curatorial practice is becoming immersed in contemporary social relevance. The current understanding that the space the South African art museum occupies is paid for by the public recognises that the exhibitions therein must be pertinent to civil-society engagement.

Szeemann's (1933-2005) concept of curation, i.e. interpreting exhibition-making as a method, shifted the position of the curator to become the central subject of evaluation, which O'Neill terms 'curatorial criticism' (2007: 36). Curatorial criticism was different to traditional art criticism in that its discourse and subject matter included curating as a practice and the role of the exhibition curator.

Obrist defines the curator as "the caretaker of objects in a museum" (2011). This description defines the role of the curator but also specifies the focus of care (objects) and confirms their belonging to a museum environment. Traditional or museum curatorial practice presents the curator as a caretaker, conservator, guardian and custodian (Pilhofer 2014: 29). Pilhofer explains that in addition to care, the curator's job description includes the audience they serve, the placement and display of artwork, signage in the gallery space and the responsibility for interpretation in labels and catalogues (2014). Hamilton and Skotnes state that, "If curation can be understood as concerned with the organisation and preservation of collected items in a wide range of museums, curatorship is the term increasingly used in the disciplinary practice of curation in the fine arts" (2014: 1). This suggests a wide divide between the independent curator, as outlined in Chapter One, and the museum curator and situates the latter as foregrounding activities relating to the preservation of the art archive.

Pilhofer emphasises that the curator has no function without the existence of artwork to care for and curate (2014: 30). This obviously supports Obrist's notion of "curating always following art", and she refers to Obrist's study of Joseph Beuys who developed an "expanded notion of art" which he then developed into an expanded notion of the practice of curation Obrist (2011). Obrist posits that "curating always follows art, that it is not the other way around, and that an expanded notion of art somehow had to lead to an expanded notion of curating" (2011).

Emerging also is the ‘citizen curator’, a term largely aligned with those who are visible in the online environment. Rebecca O’Neill goes as far as to claim that “humans are curators by default…The citizen curator organises, prioritises and edits information and objects whenever their personal means allow” (2014: 2). This recognition is pertinent to this study in terms of the public participation in the exhibition. The Web has altered the dynamic of the passive audience and this has in turn changed the way the public use the space of the museum - they engage in critical citizenry.

2.1.2 The Independent Curator

The 1960s saw the professional museum curator moving towards a more independent practice. Rogoff called this “the possibility of framing those exhibition-making activities through a series of principles and possibilities” (2006: 132) which Paul O’Neill suggests attracted attention of the curator (2007: 36). Around the seventies the identity of the curator as author or artist became contested. Paul O’Neill mentions terms that began to be used, *Ausstellungsmacher* (in German) and *faiseur d’expositions* (in French), to represent an institutional-type figure redolent of the counter-museum professional who organised large scale, independent contemporary art exhibitions (2007: 25). This contributes to the idea of the contemporary curator as an autonomous being whose resource of artwork is not confined or attached to a museum and whose walls or space are not fixed. These are, of course, freelance and independent curators whose care for objects has moved into interest driven by concepts motivating artworks. Independent curating was instrumental in transforming modern art into contemporary art where the idea dominated the material. Therefore, the strict boundary that existed previously between curating and art, namely the curator’s toolbox (understanding of art history and formulating a context for an exhibition in terms of theme and designing spaces for the placement of artwork within), was blurred so that now the terrain of the artist extends into that of the curator and vice versa, the curator’s licence extended into the realm of the artistic.

The eighties represented a considerable “departure in the learning of curatorship, from museum work with collections” (O'Neill 2007: 13), to understanding that curating could be an “independent, critically-engaged and experimental form of exhibition-making practice” (O'Neill 2007: 13). At this time, curatorial practice became an area

of academic study and a professional career possibility. The label of ‘freelance’ and ‘independent’ curator is now incorporated into the landscape of definitions of modern art phenomena. The authors of The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms confirm that the role of the curator has evolved over the last two decades into that of freelance or independent curators who “have their own idiosyncratic ways of making exhibitions…and curate…exhibitions in a wide range of spaces, both within and outside the established gallery system, and online” (Wilson and Lack 2008: 58). This highlights the freedom and creativity associated with the independent role. Obrist describes the present-day definition of curating:

> Today it is much more than filling a space with objects. It has to do with filtering, it has to do with enabling, it has to do with synthesizing, with framing, also with remembering; and it’s definitely become clear, sort of seeing the exponential growth of the use of the notion of curator on the internet, that the proliferation of ideas, of information, of images needs somehow, obviously, a guiding and it seems also that within this whole information explosion curating is used more and more. (2011)

This understanding of the curators’ role is very prevalent in current independent practice. Fowle (2014) calls this ‘generative’ curating, where a concept is released or set in motion as opposed to presiding over objects and artworks. This contemporary approach to curating and exhibition making has expanded into the institution and influences the ways in which exhibitions work by generating a new flexibility to exhibition making. Moreover, the way the museum is conceptualised in South Africa is changing, and there has been a global push for the transformation and reinvention of the institution of the museum into a space of relevance. However, curators’ work is still governed by parameters; the kind of space curators have access to; the period of time; the politics of the space. While acknowledging institutional constraints, I recognise also that I have been given the freedom to manoeuvre and contribute a meaningful exhibition initiative within my institution (The Durban Art Museum) using conceptual practices and approaches (starting points) from the independent curator’s toolbox.

2.1.3 Perspectives on Curation

My definition of the museum curator is based on the social and political environment in which we operate. Curating is about how we express ideas of social, community

and civic perspectives through the medium of the exhibition as a platform for exchange and discourse. The making of an exhibition, from my viewpoint, should be motivated by a societal concept and provide a cultural experience through artworks. The institutional curator serves a local community and should be constantly building a database of exhibitions relevant to the societal and cultural issues of this community, over time. Generally, institutional curators do not commission works for exhibitions thus their relationship to artists represented in their collections is fairly remote. Through mechanisms of acquisitions procurement, curators make contact with artists in their community in order for purchase. However, the conversation between curator and artist is limited in terms of exhibition contact, unless the curator involves the artist in an installation. The exhibition may offer a site of discussion, depending on who is involved.

For Anton Vidokle (Mabaso 2014), curators work differently from artists in that the assembling of an exhibition involves some distance between artwork and the production of an exhibition. He argues that artists and the work they produce is intimate and involved with self. He claims that many curators do not understand art and that there is a vacuum at the core of curatorial work because they are primarily subjective in their selections. Although Vidokle makes the claim that the curator is not a primary producer, which I reject, his recognition of the subjectivity of the role of curator is important to engage. To expand, I acknowledge that subjectivity cannot be separated from the essence of any artistic practice. In an interview with O'Neill, Schafhausen states that exhibitions are all authored, and the selections and how the work is placed in a space involves curatorial control and power (O'Neill 2007: 130). He states, "a curator is not an artist, but curating is an artistic production, it's like being a director, but this doesn't not mean that you are using the individual artists" (O'Neill 2007: 130).

The artist as curator has also emerged as a result of curatorial independence. Artists functioning as curators will temporarily shift their core interest of making artworks to making exhibitions, often collaborating with other artists. The artist's field thus expands to encompass performing as curator and in this scenario becomes the artist-curator. This type of experimental practice, which combines positions that are usually kept separate and are typically in competition, has the advantage of destabilising

traditional approaches, where artists were the primary producers of art, and curators the custodians and exhibitors, and thus brings added dimensions into the reflexive process (mediation). Noack states, “the other of the artist as curator is not the curator as artist, nor is the other of the curator as artist, the artist as curator, in fact the other of the artist as curator is the curator…adversely the other of the curator as artist is, the artist” (cited in Doubtfire and Ranchetti 2015: para.11 line 1). This implies that the independent curator performs in similar terms and can be understood to be the artist-curator.

In investigating different interpretations of ‘curator’ and various curatorial approaches, my understanding of my role as curator has expanded to encompass a curatorial practice tailored to my current institutional situation, which embraces a broader perspective on curatorial work. The freedom associated with independent curatorial practice enables the pursuit of a larger scope of artworks to draw into the exhibition, since any institution collection is limited; independent curators are not tied to a collection and can deliver specific inputs for a specific project. These artworks may be gained, firstly, by commissioning work from artists for a planned exhibition; secondly, cooperation with other institutions regarding borrowing and lending of artworks also increases the scope of material available for selection. Furthermore, this collaborative approach may be extended by involving others in the conceptualising and planning of an exhibition. By inviting and receiving their curatorial and personal inputs regarding the discursive intent and selection of work to best effect this, a reflexive space is created that enables the practise of reflexivity as conceptualised by Giddens. For the purposes of mounting the *Beauty & its Beasts* exhibition, I assembled a team of co-producers who took on the role of curator and, since most of the participants were practising artists, artist as well. I refer, throughout this study, to this team of free-lance participants, headed by myself as the Curator of Collections of the Durban Art Gallery, as the ‘Collaboration’ as stated in the Introduction. The purpose of this experimental partnership was to reflexively create an exhibition ethos using unorthodox exhibition materials and experiences, for engagement by team members and an audience unfamiliar with the collection.

2.2 The Changing Form of Exhibitions

The quote below speaks to the re-positioning of the visitor to the museum space and how knowledge is co-created with the audience.

> The 19th century museum positioned the visitor/learner as passive, understood knowledge to be objective and information based, and saw authoritative linear communication as one of the main purposes of the museums. Today…post-colonial cultural politics…position the visitor/learner as both active and politicised in the construction of their own relevant viewpoints. The post-museum must play the role of partner, colleague, learner (itself) and service provider in order to remain viable as an institution. (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: xi)

In addition to the evolving role of the curator, the exhibition form has also transformed to such an extent that traditional formats of solo, historical, survey, group and thematic shows have developed into practices of displacing the autonomous art by emphasising the exhibition itself. Paul O'Neill argues that during the 1960s, the primary discourse around art-in-exhibition began to shift from the focus of the artwork as an autonomous object of study to a form of curatorial criticism, in which the exhibition and the space itself was given critical precedence over the objects of art (2007). Exhibitions, particularly biennales, institutional exhibitions of contemporary art, art fairs, and extensions to museums specifically to show contemporary art exhibitions, are now referred to in the category of relational aesthetics which Bourriaud (2002: 18) refers to as an "area of exchange"; the exhibition is primarily research or project-based, providing opportunity for the production of discourse. The tradition of the authoritative and static exhibition has been influenced by the temporary exhibition and this approach is permeating the museum exhibition convention.

Many of the smaller South African art museums are still located in a traditional curatorial practice of curating objects rather than knowledge. The exhibition for this case study in a small way reversed this by taking an issue of public interest as the point of departure. The biggest challenge was recognising the value of artworks held in the permanent collection of the Durban Art Galley for a feminist exhibition. However, a thematic combining of these artworks with artworks selected and borrowed from beyond the Durban Art Gallery holdings enhanced the exhibition

considerably. It was possible to recognise the potential for feminist debate of items in the existing Durban Art Gallery collection, and to achieve an integration of the feminist theme with collection holdings and outsourced artworks. Thereafter, the challenge was the sequencing and placement of the materials in the gallery to produce mindful and contentious narratives. Rugoff describes this:

> Like an orgy, it brings things together in stimulating and unpredictable combinations. It immerses us in an experience of shifting yet interlinked viewpoints, and multiple climaxes. It juxtaposes works whose overlapping concerns resonate in ways that transform our experience of them. And it invites us to explore a seemingly newly discovered territory of art that contains within it more than we can hold in our heads at any one moment. (cited in Marincola 2007: 44)

The aesthetic dimension of producing something spectacular is obviously a strong factor for consideration in an exhibition, therefore highlighting singular artworks, and their interrelated positioning in the space, is important for audience entertainment. There is a strong push to understand how history can continue to impact perspectives, so in this exhibition (*Beauty & its Beasts*) it was important to demonstrate how the feminine stereotype still exists and will, possibly, continue to exist.

2.2.1 Documentation of Exhibition Process

Two decades ago, Staniszewski instigated an important discussion on the history of exhibition installations that is still pertinent to museum practice. This is that while curators and art historians focus on the historical context of an artwork, the work almost never stands alone; it is always an element within a permanent or temporary exhibition created in accordance with historically determined and self-consciously staged installation conventions (Staniszewski 1998: xxii). The object within exhibition space is read in the context of the dynamics of politics, economics, geography and subjectivity. In addition, Staniszewski also references the importance of installation design as a historical category. The way artworks are seen, displayed and placed one next to the other are an important record for exhibitions and institutions (Staniszewski 1998). The History of Art exists as a discipline, recording individual works and the stories of individual works and movements, but the history of exhibitions – particularly in South African art museums – is a scarce archive. The

placement of works in relation to one another and in relation to an audience and how to tell that story is somewhat similar to a performance; it lasts for a particular time period and then it is gone.

The recoding of the history of the exhibition has been an area that has segued into computer software programmes such as SketchUp, a 3D modelling software application where an exhibition using selected images scanned in by the curator can be placed and sequenced in a space as an option. South African art museums are not consistently recording the 'history' and documentation of the exhibition installation i.e. the floor plan with the intended arrangement of artwork, a final (empty of visitors) photographic memory of the space, the list of artworks displayed, the educational programme and the publicity programme. This is a gap in South African institutional museum practice as methodologies and exhibition design can offer up social codes and historical limitations for analytical use later. I was informed by all of the five biggest art museums I phoned, to ask about their records of exhibitions, that installation shots of the exhibition are 'sometimes' kept but this is not consistent practice. This observation will be drawn to the attention of other curatorial staff at the Durban Art Gallery who will be encouraged to keep records of exhibition designs for the archives.

2.3 Gallery Space and Place

Another tension for a curator working in an institution is the type of space the building represents. The Durban Art Gallery represents a colonial edifice constructed in 1910, the year of the Union of South Africa. Exclusivity is embedded in the architectural structure of the building and in presenting the Durban Art Gallery, a tension exists in trying to stitch a unity between the outside and the inside of the space. Brown asserts that the building "ultimately acts as a container for the representation of culture – a culture which is constructed by the categories and boundaries which embody assumptions about the populations it serves" (Brown 2005: 2). The Durban Art Gallery has traversed a wide scope of political interests from the initial establishment of the city to espouse the culture and values of the British Empire, through settlers in 1824 to the Nationalist party who legislated apartheid in 1948 and more recently, African National Congress ideologies informing the current governing party.

2.3.1 Patriarchy and Gallery Space

“Space is the medium in which ideas are visually phrased. Installation is both presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation” (Storr 2007: 23). The Durban Art Gallery is a social space where visitors not only connect with an exhibition and the experience of the artwork but also with other visitors sharing the space and interacting with one another. The space of the gallery is not virtual or two-dimensional like a social media platform but encompasses a living dimension of shared human activity. Jenny Kidd writes, in the introduction to *Challenging History in the Museum*, that museums are now expected to be “live sites of struggle, through and in which groups and individuals have questioned authority, ownership, voice, absence and silence” (2014: 3). The Durban Art Gallery has undergone enormous transformation post-1994, effecting significant changes in display and exhibition strategies. No environment is neutral and, in light of the architectural space of the City Hall, the implied power of the building – such as the elevation off the ground, the grandeur of entrances, the red-carpeted stairway from the ground floor to the second floor – speaks strongly to a patriarchal authority, which can be defined as a system where men exercise authority over women in all circumstances of society.

A relational aspect of the exhibition in the institutional South African space opens up the idea of redressing the balance for social and political contexts. Interestingly the Durban Art Gallery space has, since the mid-nineties when South Africa’s new democracy was established, been an arena where possibilities exist for marginal and contested issues. The Durban Art Gallery has served both as a space of resistance and as a space for cultural reinforcement in the past. Post-1994, inclusive exhibition and education strategies have been the priority of the institution through debunking implicit racial hierarchies such as the debate concerning how to distinguish between art and craft, promoting the South African artwork collection over European artworks, and exhibitions exploring HIV/AIDS’ impact on locally-affected communities.

In this respect, the vision of the Durban Art Gallery has been guided by the observations of Duncan Cameron who argued that museums were previously spaces resembling churches and temples, limiting access to the privileged only (1971). Re-envisioning has encouraged the Durban Art Gallery to change from temple to forum where debate and dialogue can emerge. In *Civilising Rituals* Carol Duncan argues

that art museums are neither sheltering spaces for objects nor objects of architectural design (2005). She views art museums as environments structured around scenarios of contemplation and weighs in on how art museums can offer up trust and ethics in the special encounter. This way of reading space has been an important marker in my curatorial progress; Duncan has established a conceptual point of departure for examining how these values and beliefs can be represented through the form of the exhibition in current South Africa.

While it has been my experience that the person heading up an institution (such as the Durban Art Gallery) guides the vision, mission and culture of the institution, I recognise that the politics of the country have also played a significant part in formulating the culture of the Durban Art Gallery. Reflecting the socio-political climate post 1994 the eThekwini municipality is widely thought to have become strongly political which in turn has negatively affected the development, management and operational practice of the Durban Art Gallery.

2.3.2 The Colonial Presence of the Durban Art Gallery

The outside of the Durban Art Gallery i.e. the fabric/structure of the City Hall complex, prescribes a specific context and still reads as a masculine and patriarchal place, particularly as the building remains the seat of local government. Interventions during the former director's tenure (1996 to 2006) included installing a red ribbon around the City Hall during the Aids 2000 conference, thus altering public perception of the elitism of the building. The installation of the ribbon was created to intensify the sense of gallery ownership, by Durban citizenry and the broader population, through the social concerns of HIV/AIDS. By wrapping the building in a red ribbon, the façade was altered, thus inviting fresh, reconsidered public perceptions. Another initiative in the nineties was Red Eye @rt, intended to attract a young audience formerly alienated by the symbolic old order. Red Eye @rt took place on the outside and inside of the building in the form of a multi-media event held on the first Friday of the month from six to eight p.m. The event opened a wide variety of platforms to younger artists, including experimental visual artwork such as performance, installation and dance, and among members of the Red Eye @rt committee, skills such as event management, marketing, finance, and curating. The event lasted eight years and was reinstated for another two years later in 2009. An important feature of Red Eye @rt

was the integration of the Durban Art Gallery with the city, thus eschewing the institution's former colonial exclusivity.

However, a constant countering of the colonial context of the architecture of the City Hall still necessitates a shifting within. It is therefore important to negate the assumption that the inside reinforces the former colonial ideology presented by the architectural fabric. With this understanding, the content of Beauty & its Beasts becomes an important avenue for the expression of a feminist perspective of the exhibition.

2.4 Curatorial Intervention of the study

The literature review has provided information and insights into the evolving role of the curator, and fresh perspectives on the field of curatorship. I have developed an argument in support of an approach (fundamentally different from the traditional) in my institution, by synthesising new and older interpretations of the discipline of curation. In addition, books, journal articles and current online sources have illuminated my thinking around spaces and places, particularly the Durban Art Gallery where I am a curator. The venue of the City Hall has embedded histories and traditional positions which provide the rationale for the curating of an exhibition whose subject matter was chosen specifically for its power to disrupt and subvert the dominant narrative. Diaz Ramos contends that feminism is seen as a marginal or fringe value system and is seen to be on the periphery while the institution remains the centre, or the core, and argues that there is a contradiction between feminist values and institutional values (2016: 7); from this perspective, the Durban Art Gallery continues to impose a visible expression of continuity and power. For this very reason I chose to install an exhibition generated by the theme of feminism. The authority and status represented by the colonial building is at odds with feminist values and women's issues in our society. The exhibition provided an opportunity to reposition the gallery as a social institution with a focus on multiple feminist views as a political idea for generating feminist dialogue and feminist cultural histories.

2.5 The Curatorial Intervention and Reflexivity

In the book, 'The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating', edited by Jean-Paul Martinon (2013), Rogoff and Martinon distinguish between the terms 'curating' and 'the curatorial' (2013). They regard curating as a set of professional practices associated with exhibition making whereas 'the curatorial' involves the process of making, and the making of knowledge. The former suggests the production of an exhibition whereas the curatorial presents ways of thinking about an issue. In affirmation of this understanding of the curatorial, reflexivity is essential to the role of the curator identifying how the focus of an exhibition may serve the public in a very specific way.

Reflexivity involves understanding biases, assumptions and perspectives in which all the components of the exhibition case study I am undertaking are situated, the interrelationships between them and how the components fit together, and also if the individual components fit the whole. In the case of my research the ongoing story is about a reflexive *curatorial* identity and practice. As a curator, the guiding reflexive focus for this case study was my concern with how people in the world beyond the art gallery might understand gender issues.

Bauman explains the term reflexivity as existing "in the context of ideas like attention, consciousness, subjectivity and interaction" (Berger and Del Negro 2002: 64). Reflexivity is a broad and unclear term because it can be used to describe a wide range of "personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences" (Mauthner and Doucet 2003: 425). Bauman identifies "the capacity of subjects to be aware of themselves as subjects and to be aware that they are the focus of another's attention" (Berger and Del Negro 2002: 63) as central to reflexivity. Reflexivity in this sense describes the exploration and consideration that informed my position in relation to my Collaboration and vice versa; I self-referenced myself in the exploratory curatorial process. Baumann identifies that the capacity for reflexivity is "grounded in an underlying awareness that both self and the other are subjects, that both self and other have the potential to experience the work and share their experiences with others" (cited in Berger and Del Negro 2002: 85). This is the approach I adopted to develop the curatorial enquiry into my research. I saw myself as performing the social role of curation and participating with the collaborators in the co-creation of meaning; being self-

conscious of this identity and that of the collaborators – in this case as both participants and audience for the duration of the exploratory curation – enabled the use of reflexivity as a socially-cohesive tool. Bauman also believes “that performance is always framed – introduced by metacommunication that establishes the behaviour as a performance” ((cited in Berger and Del Negro 2002: 64)). Bauman’s perspective: “framing informs all the behaviour that follows and constitutes that behaviour as performance” (cited in Berger and Del Negro 2002: 64), is used in the approach I followed with my Collaboration – that the social role determines reflexive communication and that the participants are performing in a particular interaction framed as a curatorial experiment within the confines of a traditional museum environment. Bauman further deliberates on types of reflexivity by emphasising the formal framing as a device to raise awareness of reflexive consciousness of all participants.

I am also interested in Gidden’s belief that feminism has unlatched the discussion of modern self-identity by drawing convergences between personal life and political and social issues. With feminism, the body itself becomes subject to reflexive awareness as people become aware that the self is socially constructed as well as biologically given (Tucker 1998).

I understand reflexivity to be the way in which my background, values, beliefs and attitudes influence my approach to researching the topic. Matters such as political influences, assumptions, cultural bias and the way we construct our understanding of the world are formed on the knowledge we have accumulated. Reflexivity involves deepening our understanding of the different facets of these interrelationships (Weber 2013). Qualitative research is largely subjective, but a reflexive monitoring of research processes allows the researcher to examine her own beliefs and actions in light of the beliefs and actions of others. As stated in the Introduction, Giddens claims that in a post-traditional society, self-identity “must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going 'story' about the self” (Giddens 1991: 54). Giddens is a formative text, particularly as he argues: “most aspects of social activity are subject to constant revision in the light of new information or knowledge” (1991: 54). Individual social actors, likewise, must constantly revise their identities in light of the changing social categories at hand. In

opposition, Stjepan Mestrovic implies that Giddens presents an optimism that appeals to a middle-class Western sociologist where “he advocates the self-diagnosis of emotional problems and the remedy to such problems in the same manner that one would fix a faulty carburettor” (cited in Gauntlett 2008: 88). For my purposes Giddens promotes a reflexive, reflective individual where Mestrovic seeks out the traditional and conservative by arguing people function without consciousness.

A reflexive approach to curating incorporates positions of geography, time, and process. Geography is relevant to space, and the location of the Durban City Hall includes interwoven complexities such as history, politics, social structures, representation, community and culture among other dimensions. Included in this context is the idea of the space as the local culture of the site; this privileges local communities as the source of the knowledge produced within the circumstances. The space of the City Hall and its location in the central city was key to navigating the exhibition concept. Addressing the inequality of women in South Africa responds to the masculine, patriarchal governance of the location and its central position within the city of Durban. The gallery is not simply a venue – it presents a particular representation of authority. Time is a facet to be considered in terms of connecting the past with the present. Issues in feminism have made slow progress locally and as mentioned this subject was the focus of the exhibition. By situating the content in time, the histories of feminisms became evident through the selection of artworks from an extended time period. Process informed the wayfinding of the installation by engagement and mediation with the curatorial collaborators. Critical reflection and knowledge sharing produced the outcome by shaping the exhibition content.

By questioning bias I am practicing professional accountability in line with the role of a curator who is accountable to the public. By being accountable for improving my practice, I can be aware of any bias that might negatively impact on the curation I am providing. It is vital to keep my practice public-centred, and to practise feminist reflexivity so space is not closed for change, but rather open to options and reflection that facilitate evolution of change. It was important to include many voices in the selection of appropriate artworks, and not impose my values onto the format. Bias

and prejudice are part of being human as we each view the world through a lens formed by our worldview.

2.6 The Curatorial Intervention and Feminism

In addition to a reflexive framework, I used a scaffold of feminisms to influence the exhibition and shape parameters. By its very nature, feminism is collective in spirit and intent; this is discussed in depth in the next chapter under Reflexive Strategy: Curatorial Collaboration. Feminism began as a political movement for reforms where women mutually faced shared inequalities and oppressions.

It is widely accepted that feminism embraces a range of attitudes, and that the broader agenda has been strongly aligned to movements originating in North America and Europe in the late 19th century, a social current which was dominated by white, middle-class women.

Feminism can be defined as a critical interrogation of the patriarchal system aligned with a demand for equality in a world that privileges masculinity. Griselda Pollock sees feminism as a political philosophy whose objective is transform the lives of men and women:

> To be feminist at all work must be conceived within the framework of a structural, economic, political and ideological critique of power issues of a society and with a commitment to collective action for their radical transformation…it is feminist when it subverts the normal ways in which we view art and are usually seduced into a complicity with the meanings of the dominant and oppressive culture. (1987: 93)

Judy Chicago pitches feminism as a political revision, "…a set of principles, and a way of looking at the world that…is rooted in a redefinition of power – from power over others to empowerment" (Broude, Garrard and Brodsky 1994: 72). Morris considers feminism as a social, political and cultural issue which varies from place to place, from person to person, from generation to generation and involves people across race, gender, age and history, so there is no feminism but feminisms (Diaz Ramos 2016: 61). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary announced that the most looked-up word in 2017 was feminism (Merriam-Webster 2018).

Feminist scholarship is marked by many movements which all identify as feminist but vary philosophically. There is no single, unified feminism but rather a variety of feminisms subject to a process of constant definition and redefinition. Current feminist theory draws from historical positioning which arose from the 1840s to the 1920s and is known as first-wave feminism. First-wave feminism focused attention on woman's suffrage and improving conditions of economy, politics and education, mainly for women of privilege (Gamble 2001).

The second-wave of feminism commenced in the early sixties in the United States, drew on the civil rights movement and sought to achieve equal rights. Second-wave feminism spread throughout the Western world and took on many faces – liberal, radical, Socialist, Marxist, with cultural perspectives focusing on class division and capitalism developed up until the mid-nineties. A shift at this time towards plurality, diversity and difference saw emphasis on 'difference feminism' which argued that sameness is not necessary for men and women, and masculine and feminine values, to be treated equally (Voet and Voet 1998).

French feminism of the 1970s and 1980s, with advocates Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, rejected binary oppositions typical of patriarchal thinking. Post-modern feminist Judith Butler, who argues 'woman' is a socially constructed gender, reinforces this; she believes gender is a performative word and there is no basis for women's subordination.

Third-wave feminism started in the 1990s and continues to this day. It has focused on expanding feminism to include women of all races, classes and cultures, and expunging gender-role stereotypes.

A fourth-wave feminism, emerging in 2012, is associated with social media. Centred on the workplace and street harassment, campus sexual assault and rape culture, it has garnered strong support through projects adopting the phrase 'the personal is political'. American former film producer, Harvey Weinstein, accused by female employees of sexual harassment and assault, was largely the reason 2017 was a pivotal year for feminism, among other key movements, #MeToo and Time's Up.

A further offshoot of feminism, started in the sixties in the United States, is Womanism (Woman of Colour Feminism) which emphasises the violent, radicalised

nature of women of colour's experience, and grounds black women centrally within a feminist tradition. I mention this because it relates more to the South African situation, given demographics, and has more in common with reception of current African feminism. Alice Walker coined the term Womanism in her 1983 book, *In search of Our Mothers' Garden* Walker (2004). This movement includes black, Hispanic and Asian-American women who believe their oppressors are not men but a white, racist society and that men of colour are equally oppressed by racial and class discrimination. Women of colour in western countries and non-western countries have criticised the automatic assumption that the universal woman is middle class and white. Diaz Ramos refers to Marsha Meskimmon who contends that: "Anglo-American perspectives have dominated feminist criticism and vast geographical areas have been largely ignored or dismissed in mainstream critical feminist literature" (Diaz Ramos 2016: 13).

Transnational feminism is a movement for the social, economic and political equality of women across national boundaries. It argues for scrutiny of feminism within and between cultures, addressing the oppression and discrimination experienced by women worldwide. The movement is involved in activist campaigns and in creating international alliances and networks across race, class and national boundaries (Diaz Ramos 2016: 15).

A variety of feminist positions exist as a result of diverse perspectives. My understanding of feminism is strongly influenced through challenging questions of power but also rejecting binaries, which hem in society. I think it is crucial to change the patriarchal narrative and understanding of histories and visual cultures by expanding them with feminist perspectives.

2.6.1 Positioning Feminism in South Africa

South Africa's history of feminism has been seen by some feminists to have been peripheral because the struggle against apartheid took centre stage. Historically, huge differences have shaped the lives of South African women from different racial backgrounds, but patriarchy has been the one, constant, "profoundly non-racial institution" across all communities (Sachs 1993: 13). Gender politics as a separate movement was basically suspended until national liberation was achieved.

Multiculturalism, in line with the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, guaranteed equal rights for citizens regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation but, while equal rights were promised by the new democracy, complex politics have interfered in their realisation. Aside from gender parameters, feminism in South Africa encompasses a further pressure, that of race and class. Although race has been pivotal in tensions in the United States and Europe, local-historical contexts are unique and South Africa has been more profoundly shaped by the legacy of apartheid, the legalisation and institutionalisation of racism.

Feminisms, giving rise to different articulations in South Africa, are largely culturally or racially coded. Feminism is often seen as being anti-male, anti-religion and anti-culture. White dominance has been at the forefront of the feminist platform since the early nineties. Jennifer Wilkinson referred to President Mbeki's call for an African Renaissance in the 2000s, observing "there is a very real danger of a conservative interpretation of the African form of communitarianism as being a return to tradition with women being persuaded to assume traditional roles of subservience in the name of preserving cultural values" (Von Veh 2006: 29). The proponents, led by conservative government, religious and traditional authorities were, in early 2015, still at a point where they were encouraging opposition to women's political and economic autonomy, according to Mail and Guardian journalist, Nompumelelo Motlafi (2015). In fact, during this time the ANC Women's League declared that South Africa was not ready for a female head of state but eighteen months later they withdrew this declaration and on 7th January 2017 they endorsed Dlamini-Zuma as their candidate for party leader. The ANC Women's League continues to uphold patriarchy and in the not so distant past, when Angie Motshega was its president, she went on record stating it was not a feminist organisation.

Motlafi asserts that tensions between white and black feminists continue to be problematic because white women dominate women's human rights and pit black women against African cultures. She also asserts that patriarchy remains embedded in South Africa because "the figure of the 'strong black male' leader continues to be the vanguard of the liberation" (Motlafi 2015: para. 21 line 23). Chandra Mohanty (Mohanty, Russo and Torres 1991) argues this issue, her rationale being that patriarchy exists in all third-world situations where western women place themselves

as the primary precursor. Gayatri Spivak, on one hand, asserts a difference between 'speaking of' and 'speaking for' in her project of 'measuring silences' where the violence of representation is explored (2010). Laura Wright, on the other hand argues that: "a white South African feminist agenda is silenced through self-negating narratives and a positioning in-between two patriarchal systems of oppressions – as white women are aggressors as colonisers but subjected as women" (Frenkel 2008: 6). Internal conflicts and debates have always been part of feminisms and this kind of tension formed the basis for the way I approached my exhibition. I anticipated that this calculated perspective would spark healthy debate in inclusive sessions, firstly regarding the selection of the exhibition pieces and thereafter in accounting for the selections made.

2.6.2 Feminist Exhibitions in South Africa and their Driving Concerns

While there are plenty of feminist artists there are few examples of exhibitions in South Africa which reflect a feminist curatorial – a practice that has been slow to start. Added to this is the complication of feminism as theory, as the subject of the exhibition, or as process i.e. the curatorial production using feminist mechanisms.

As previously mentioned, 'feminist curation' is more commonly associated with exhibitions of artwork made by women artists and has largely been the work of women curators and allied groups, usually as peripheral entities within institutions or galleries. Ironically, South Africa has a history of art museums headed up, until very recently, by white women. This stimulated the perception that a woman curator was regarded as a "keeper of culture (rather than producer) or, as Elizabeth Macgregor argues with some irony, 'a hostess'" (Marstine 2008: 65).

Some examples of feminist curatorial projects include *Through the Looking Glass: Representations of Self by South African Women Artists,* an exhibition and book of the same title produced by Schmahmann (Schmahmann 2004). Schmahmann expressed her feminist interest in showing women's relation to their communities, in addition to a range of social concerns, through self-representation. The exhibition was presented in themes such as memory and body politics. The title was tethered to the themes through Alice's encounters with mirrors, which are historically used by artists to make images of themselves. Schmahmann follows a feminist curatorial

approach but in the interests of changing negative attitudes around feminism she curated a feminist exhibition by challenging the universalism of male culture. She also presents herself as the single author. In more radical feminist practice this could be perceived as counter to the ethos of feminist curatorial production where the role of the single author raises questions about the glorification of greatness associated with patriarchal structures. Though the clever context of the exhibition she places herself as Alice, as it were, as the storyteller, thereby side stepping this potential criticism.

In 2006, Jeanine Howse and Amy Watson mounted an exhibition *Women: Photography and New Media,* with the feminist curatorial objective of unpacking the preference among women artists for new media in a post-liberation SA (Gray 2006). The exhibition was shaped to expose the surge of technology in the hands of women artists but was criticised for being oriented to a survey (Gray 2006). Critic Brenden Gray asserted that “the subjectivities of artists are not problematised or interrogated through the curatorial process, but taken as givens to be arranged into neatly bordered identity units leaving essentialised artistic positions un-interrogated, and unfairly reducing open and unstable artistic positions” (Gray 2006: para. 12 line 4). He further stated, “Very rarely do such pluralist exhibitions take on the selected artists in a critical way” (Gray 2006: para. 12 line 13).

Zanele Muholi is a visual activist who promotes the culture of the African queer community in South Africa through photography and film. At the opening of the *Innovative Women* exhibition in Johannesburg in 2009, which included photographs by Zanele Muholi as well as nine other black South African female artists, the Minister of Arts and Culture Lulama ‘Lulu’ Xingwana walked out before giving her proposed opening speech. The minister found certain images on the show offensive in their display of “naked bodies presumably involved in sexual acts” (Pillay 2010: para. 7 line 3). Aside from the political controversies this exhibition elicited, it should be noted that the curator, Bongi Bengu, had defined herself as the single author, whose curatorial direction was to promote the work of contemporary black South African female artists.

Speaking Back, an exhibition curated by Natasha Becker, focused on exclusively black female artists from Africa and the diaspora. The press release stated:

> Speaking Back seeks to reveal deeply significant dimensions of culture and subjectivity, history and struggle, by bringing women together as diverse artists to find out what each in her artistically signified yet gendered/racial/sexual, cultural singularity is offering to the world, to us all. (Matakala 2015: para. 2 line 1)

The exhibition was reviewed by Nkule Mabaso, who argues that the exhibition ran the risk of championing suggestions of primitivism and tokenism by privileging "narration, which, as a point of focus, lends itself as an easy escape from the ideologically fraught possibilities that the works actually open up" (2015: para. 1 line 6). The exhibition content was approached by appealing to a work's narrative and limited the scope of the shifting landscape of the black woman in the post-colonial framework. Mabaso's closing remarks suggest that although the individual artworks have agency, the framing as an exhibition shows *Speaking Back* is ambivalent as a narrative (2015).

More recently, a storm raged in Cape Town at the South African National Gallery. Titled *Our Lady,* the exhibition curators comprised a team of three women, from two museums, who used the collections of the two institutions to populate the exhibition. The curatorial statement text highlighted the exhibition mandate as showing how the female subject is depicted in visual representations revealing of unequal gender relationships (Breitz 2017). The inclusion of a work by murder-accused and acclaimed artist Zwelethu Mthethwa, who was at the time on trial for allegedly kicking a 23-year-old sex worker, Nokuphila Khumalo, to death in April 2013 (Mukadam 2013), drew heated debate in a public meeting hosted at the South African National Gallery on 15 December 2016. An open letter, penned by artists on the exhibition, was sent to the curatorial collaborators in response to the curatorial statement that introduced the exhibition:

> Despite three (white) women curators having co-curated *Our Lady*, it is impossible to overlook the fact that 75% of the artists included in the exhibition are men. This fact alone renders the curatorial claims cited above disingenuous and highly objectionable. While it might be argued that the exhibition seeks to bring a historical perspective to the issues that it sets out to frame, the many historical works by men that are included (the majority of which represent women through the staid conventional lens of patriarchy), could quite easily have been supplemented by a broader selection of works which, in juxtaposition with these historical works by men, might have

> challenged the visual language of patriarchy and given voice to alternative narratives... (Breitz 2017: para. 3 line 1)

The *Our Lady* exhibition foregrounded many issues associated with feminism and it is clear that the topic of feminism drew heated debate. Women artists demanded that the South African National Gallery take down 'their works' which belonged to the South African National Gallery collection. The institution adhered to these demands and, in my opinion, this has set a dangerous precedent for future exhibitions. In future, institutions' curators may find themselves in a position where they have to ask permission before compiling a show. By contrast, the artists – many of whom identify as feminists – argue that the curatorial line had been overstepped in this particular case. The artists used a kind of informal 'kangaroo court' justice to punish the artist but in fact punished the curators instead, by insisting their work be withdrawn from the exhibition.

In describing feminist exhibitions in South Africa, and their driving concerns, I have cited a few examples of feminist strategies used to approach art curation and feminist exhibition content. It is within this context that my institutional curatorial exploration will advance a curatorial approach by exploring content and using Collaboration.

According to Homi Bhabha the stereotype, as the major storyline of the exhibition, is "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 1994: 66). In its current state of disquiet, South Africa often turns to the stereotype, which entrenches social categorisations. To extend issues of gender bias and prejudice, *Beauty & its Beasts* offered a way to probe feminisms across diverse forms of oppression.

2.6.3 Feminism and Curatorship: Reflexive Feminisms

The emergence of feminist art exhibitions in the seventies can be linked with the rise of feminist art history. Deepwell (2006) distinguishes between women's art, the work of all women artists, and feminist spheres in art history, curation, and art criticism. Where an exhibition of art is made by women, this does not automatically make the exhibition a feminist one. To define what is feminist in the curation of women artists' work, it is necessary to determine the connections between feminist theory and

feminist art history in the planning of the exhibition. The understanding of the women's movement, particularly from the seventies, raised new questions, issues, and subjects for art. By drawing on these records of knowledge, feminist curatorial strategies have moved forward into radical and reforming approaches.

Diaz Ramos defines feminist curatorship as:

> changing the museum on three levels: firstly by rethinking collections, transforming exhibitionary practice through opening up other stories and including other voices; secondly, by challenging the hierarchies which exist in the museum, destabilising the institution and making it more collaborative; and finally, by empowering communities the museum serves and engaging audiences. (2016: 10)

A new revisionist art history has developed, emphasising the work of art in its socio-historical context rather than genre, style etc. Privileging high art over low, fine art over craft and men's art over women's art has been succeeded by a focus on gender difference and acknowledgment that all art forms are open to multiple interpretations and meanings. Likewise, new paths are emerging in curatorial directions and feminist curatorship is emerging slowly and becoming visible in South African institutions and museums.

Richter (2016: 64). argues that curating is a form of knowledge production, and that to make a curatorial project a feminist one the following categories should be addressed:

- gender equality in terms of numbers in exhibitions because the imbalance is still overbearing;
- embedding a transgressive practice, creating new forms in terms of authorship, reception, new forms of communities and of working together, of production and of organisation;
- disturbance through the image, through the display, the production of meaning can give rise to an encounter that looks at the viewer;
- institutional critique, always calling into question the context of the exhibition and using curatorial methods to unsettle patriarchal orderings and attitude (2016: 64).

Institutional curating primarily involves working with collections and looking at works and making choices about which to include. Curating is also about constructing histories or intervening in existing narratives and is motivated by what is important – how and what to see, and what is displayed in the museum space. By reflexively interrogating the curatorial practice, the feminist histories are written into the exhibition, with feminist perspectives in mind, by expressing new ideas about the past.

In 2007 an exhibition curated by Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly exposed a Western Eurocentricism of feminism. Titled *Global Feminisms* the exhibition challenged hegemonic curatorial production by exploring situations of socio-cultural, political, racial and class circumstances. The curators contend it is not possible to talk about 'feminism' in the singular but advocate for the plural 'feminisms' to describe diversity and plurality.

> Feminism is not…the object of a singular history but, rather a term under which people have in different times and places invested in more general struggle for social justice and in so doing have participated in and produced multiple histories. (Kavka 2001: xii)

In the United States the absence of women's artwork from contemporary and modern art exhibitions in the 1960s, in the midst of the escalating women's liberation movement, led to the beginning of moves to redress this exclusionary practice in mainstream institutions. *Women Artists: 1550 to 1950 curated by* Linda Nochlin and Linda Sutherland Harris was commissioned by Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1976. The show expanded Nochlin's 1971 essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (Nochlin 2003). The approach taken by Nochlin and Harris to feminist curating exposed the exclusions within mainstream institutions and discourses that feminists were fighting against (Jones 2016).

In 1979 Judy Chicago first exhibited *The Dinner Party*, a collaborative installation that took five years to create. Chicago was a pivotal figure in the development of the feminist art movement as both teacher and artist. In the early seventies she taught at the California Institute for the Arts where she established *Womanhouse*, the first art exhibition space to exhibit a female point of view. In this space she strove "to empower women by moulding their 'personal' stories into 'political' feminist art and

performance and also by teaching them how to make and build things" (Jones 2016). Her curatorial approach was to focus on the women's experience.

The next important exhibition was *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* at the New Museum in New York. Curated by Kate Linker and Jane Weinstock it showed *avant garde* feminist artists such as Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, and Sherrie Levine (Jones: 2016). The exhibition had the important role of opening up the commercial US art market to the artists (Jones 2016).

Reflexivity links with the topic of feminism because by developing the reflexive self and a reflexive collaborative team, questioning values, beliefs and attitudes can expose unconscious or implicit biases. This changes the vocabulary of communication and interaction with peers and in the case of the curator, the public. Explicit bias is conscious, quite identifiable and apparent, whereas the implicit bias is unconscious. However, once beliefs and values are examined these hidden biases can be revealed and unpacked. I relate to Probyn's insistence –

> that reflection on the lack of fit between our own sense of being and the world's judgement upon us constitutes a kind of feminist reflexivity, a negotiation of the difference between whom one feels oneself to be and the conditions of possibility for a liveable life. (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015: 153)

I understand this to be a mindful linking of the feminist process with whom women are expected to be in social terms, and prioritising feminist activity over belonging. This rationale helps to underpin community and collaboration as an engaging basis to advance the curatorial approach to the exhibition. Complementary arguments are put forward by Liz Stanley and Sue Wise who suggest that "feminism appeals because it means something – it touches deeply-felt needs, feelings and emotions" (2002: 66), indicating an affective dimension.

2.7 The Exhibition as a Vehicle of Research Inquiry

The exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts* was a vehicle of inquiry to interrogate what exhibition making could bring to this conversation. The exhibition explored gender and power implications through the medium of the stereotype. The exhibition also

explored the degree of change that has occurred in perceptions of the stereotype over time.

Artworks as singular objects have a biography and can be read in their singularity. However, an exhibition brings a further dynamic and presents a collective form that enables a dialogue. In this form the artworks join feminist circuits of narration and are mobilised as activist objects.

2.7.1 Rationale for the Exhibition: Reflexive Collaboration

The exhibition rationale was to facilitate new understandings of stereotyping and of feminism in South Africa and for the public to interface with the exhibition and feel connected to its own community. The subject of the exhibition spoke to all generations of both women and men and other genders. The exhibition arose from points and positions of discomfort and the issues raised had been experiences of unpacking prejudice and stereotype. By reinterpreting traditional views showing the stereotype, feminism influenced the (public) mindset through examination and juxtaposition.

The exhibition curators were encouraged:

- To raise an awareness of feminist consciousness by revealing bias in society;
- To give more presence to women at the Durban Art Gallery;
- To think about gender and power relationships, which can be considered to be a feminist methodology.

I elected to take a collaborative approach to guide the curatorial path of the exhibition. The definition of collaboration implies power sharing, communication, trust and solidarity which contradict the hierarchical structure of the institution, hence my motivation for engaging the participation of collaborators and thus creating the potential for reflexive collaboration.

The curation and the problematics of installing an exhibition need to be continually adjusted to resonate with the public. For instance, it is essential that the curator bring experience and successful initiatives from former shows, while simultaneously rethinking and reworking to break new ground is an important activity where a

curatorial collaboration can be highly effective. Working with the collection representative of extended historical periods, the Collaboration could reflexively explore the historical repetition of the stereotype. Time periods are an important way of focusing the issues in the present.

The interaction with collaborators was obviously about the dynamics and the relationships between people who comprised the group, and how they reached a critical consensus on the selection of artworks. Through reflexive exploration of a wide scope of local artwork mediums formerly relegated to the craft category, the introduction of a South African context cemented the exhibition geographically.

2.8 Conclusion

Since the late 1980s the group exhibition has become the preferred primary site for experimentation by incorporating multiple artistic positions. In early 2000 Hooper-Greenhill asserted that a big hurdle facing museums was a disconnect between the educational role of exhibitions in relation to questions about culture in broader society. Education is no longer perceived to be confined to formal institutions but recognised as occurring daily throughout life in countless circumstances (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). The approach South African museums followed until the middle nineties was to present museum ‘collection’ exhibitions in formal and authoritative displays to an audience perceived to be from a middle-class European heritage. These exhibitions, generally singly authored, followed a chronological sequencing or that of a subject i.e. war or a monographic exhibition. Museums in South Africa, post 1994, have come to acknowledge the diverse composition of society and the multiple culturally-determined attitudes of communities who visit. Current thinking is that it is simply not enough to exhibit halls or galleries of artwork in a didactic, authoritative fashion.

“Art historians have analysed the works included in an exhibition and a show’s effect as it is received within aesthetic, social and political discourses. But they have rarely addressed the fact that a work of art, when publicly displayed, almost never stands alone” (Staniszewski 1998: xxii). From the seventies on, the subject of an exhibition became inclined to be the exhibition as a work of art not the display of artworks. The understanding now is that art becomes known through the medium of the exhibition.

Artworks have a shifting relationship to interpretation that is dependent on their placement in relation to other artwork or to space. Artworks can be viewed from different 'positions', political, cultural, societal, historical, etc. Curators invest the same artwork with multiple concepts and interpretations. Groups of artworks as presented in exhibitions generally stimulate various interpretations and the role of the curator is to encourage an open-ended reading where no one interpretation is the right one.

The museum is a social space and a public space and the Collaboration's ability to invoke a discussion around the subject of the stereotype represented a shift in the accepted role of the institution. The context advanced dialogue and the potential to initiate action for future exhibitions where the subject matter can directly speak to pertinent social issues in society. The exhibition offered a format where the immediate and personal relationship with artworks gave viewers a meaningful experience by presenting them with various predicaments they may not have confronted or experienced.

I have approached the literature by focusing on a theme emphasising the development of curation and its current location. I also examined the patriarchal implications of the colonial place and space to anchor the intervention of an exhibition exploring a feminist theme. In addition, I described history and current situations as factors considered in the refining the study. Finally, the survey of literature gave rise to questions reiterated below.

The aim of this study is to explore curatorial practice as reflexive inquiry, through the consideration of the following:

- How can curatorial collaboration foster curatorial reflexivity?

- On what evidence, following public engagement with *Beauty & its Beasts*, could public critical awareness of feminist issues be gauged?
- What is the significance of *Beauty & its Beasts* for reflexive curatorial practice?

These questions influenced the approach to methodology detailed in the next chapter, Chapter Three. In Chapter Four the findings from data generated are

examined in terms of their bearing on the above questions. Finally, conclusions are drawn in relation to the above questions in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three: Exhibition Making as Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Methodology used in this study employs a reflexive ethnographic approach to coordinate the curatorial collaboration of a public exhibition. Data sources deriving from both the curatorial planning of the exhibition event and the event itself are described in detail. The analytical approach to multiple data sources is then explained.

I applied a twofold approach, the first layer of which was reflexive, empirical research concerning the selection of the artworks and the relevance of the choices for the storyline of the exhibition. The second layer was curatorial practice i.e. the processes and activities of making an exhibition that produced the material focus for my research. This twofold approach addresses the aims of this study, as expressed in the literature review:

- Contextualising the case study exhibition and the curation process as a response to historical change in the role of the public art gallery and the role of the curator;
- Exploring/understanding the collaborative curation, which takes a reflexive view of curation in general and the feminism topic of the exhibition.

Danaher and Jamieson (2016: 160) state that practice-led research "is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. …The primary focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice, or to advance knowledge within practice". 'Practice-led' research refers to research into the professional practice of a particular occupation e.g. engineer, nurse, vetenary surgeon, curator. When research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led (Candy 2011).

Approaching the study from the vantage of a practitioner I attempted to advance practice-led research driven by reflexivity.

In addition to reflexivity, I was interested in feminisms and extended the process to reflexive feminist practice. The curatorial intention of *Beauty & its Beasts* was to

challenge power and hierarchy by foregrounding women's concerns with bias and stereotype. Feminisms supported the approach to the research and through a curatorial collaboration which attempted to limit subjectivity. However, subjectivity is not a dirty word because the point of gaining knowledge is to use it. In the case of this exhibition it was to be applied to engender a new awareness of gender and patriarchy for a local and diverse audience.

The format of the art exhibition aimed to gather information on how the audience reacted to pervasive gender issues affecting people in society, that is, the issue of stereotyping and bias. Much of society continues to believe male opinion is the authority and by interrogating female histories and contemporary life through the exhibition story-line we sought to gauge the diverse audience reaction and experience.

3.2 Reflexive Qualitative Research Approach

In the case of this research the ongoing story is about a reflexive *curatorial* identity and practice. As a curator, my concern was about how people in the world beyond the art gallery might understand gender issues that was the guiding reflexive focus. I understand reflexivity to be the way in which my background, values, beliefs and attitudes influence my approach to researching the topic. Matters such as political influences, assumptions, cultural bias and the way we construct our understanding of the world depend on the knowledge we have accumulated. Reflexivity involves deepening our understanding of the different facets of these interrelationships(Weber 2013). Qualitative research is largely subjective but a reflexive monitoring of research processes allows the researcher to examine her own beliefs and actions in light of the beliefs and actions of others. As Giddens (1991: 54) maintains, in a post-traditional society self-identity "must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the on-going 'story' about the self".

3.2.1 Curatorial Collaboration as Primary Data Generation

In the traditional art museum collecting and curating are strongly intertwined. However, the role of the museum curator has been insular and institutional in practice until recently. Working in a museum such as I do promotes strict institutional

practices and formalised procedures. Most often I work alone and only have contact with colleagues when technical logistics have to be organised in an exhibition. By contrast, in the case of the research exhibition the idea of forming a collaborative curatorial team presented alternative opportunities. These concerned the reflexive practices of dialogue and discussion, debate and argument that would be consistent with a feminist approach. The idea of working within the constraints of traditional individual curatorial practice could be pushed to the periphery. The collaborative approach to curation in the case of this exhibition enabled reflexivity in curatorial ways of seeing and of working. The participants in the research exhibition all reflexively understood the theme of feminist discourse.

In addition to a reflexive framework, I chose to use a scaffold of feminisms to shape the exhibition and define the parameters of how it was configured and structured. Feminist collaboration linked with the methodology therefore presented a symbiotic advantage. By its very nature feminism is collective in spirit and intent. It began as a political movement for reforms where shared inequalities and oppressions were mutually faced by women. Lorraine Code's Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories offers this definition of its collaborative nature:

> Collaboration encourages shared decision-making, prizes cooperative initiatives, strives for egalitarian interactions, values multiple perspectives, and attempts to mediate power imbalances between the researcher and the researched. It extends from a conviction that feminist research for and about women is most effectively accomplished when women join forces with each other to form communal rather than hierarchical models for scholarship. (2002: 126)

Being a South African resident in a particular age group, I benefitted from the third wave feminism during the apartheid era in South Africa. Feminist emphasis pre-democracy largely expressed the experiences of middle-class white women. Other groups and cultures were marginalised despite a very active movement within groups and organisations of black women. Apartheid society and its practice of division not only supported patriarchal authority but also racial power.

The storyline of the exhibition addressed women's concerns with bias and stereotype while investigating concepts of power and hierarchy as systemic structures defining gender. As discussed in the literature review, feminist reflexivity forms the framework

of my research because feminism encapsulates a distinctive value position that can be essentially described as human values and not just those of a woman's, but rather a diverse, perspective (Stanley and Wise 2002). To extend rather dogged and clichéd issues of gender bias and prejudice present in the exhibition, current feminist theory offered a way to probe feminisms across diverse forms of oppression.

There are few examples of exhibitions in South Africa that reflect a feminist curatorial practice – a method that can be described as *hazy practice* at this point. Feminism as 'theory' is the subject of the exhibition in addition to 'process' – the curatorial production using feminist mechanisms.

3.2.2 Selecting the Curatorial Collaborators

I invited nine people to join me in defining and refining a curatorial concept for the exhibition. The final group numbered nine participants, including myself, which comprised eight females and one male. Two males were invited however only one accepted the offer to take part. The women ranged in age from early 20s to 70 plus, and were from African, Indian and European racial groupings. The male was European and in his early fifties. All participants are art practitioners in a range of disciplines e.g. architect, curator, lecturer and professionals practicing visual artists.

I specifically chose people from the art realm who have a strong visual vocabulary and are able to read and contextualise images for the purposes of telling stories and creating narratives and dialogues with the intention of posing questions for an audience.

Of the eight women involved four were mothers, and of those four one was an African woman from a country bordering South Africa. Only one of these women was married and the other three were single parents. Two of the mothers were over 65 and this was important for my study as I recognised they had life and work experience directly in the art world. Three women were in their 20s, two in their 30s, one in her 40s, one in her 50s, one in her 60s and the eldest woman was in her 70s. The male in the group was in his early 50s.

Given South Africa's racialised past and the racial preoccupation of South African politics, the demographic of the participants, which is not a true reflection of the

make-up of South African society, can be seen as a limitation to the study. The group was predominantly European, comprising one third African and Indian participants. However, it can be argued that participants made up a diverse grouping whose life experience could add to the bias experienced in their lives and feminist attitudes they may have. I deliberately chose the majority to be women as South African society is patriarchal. I assumed the power influences in their lives could be a lived and very personal experience in shaping the exhibition. The emotional biographies of the collective were important as each person had a viewpoint that would influence the reflexive response of the selection. As indicated by Code (2002), women working on feminist pursuits tend to work in communal rather than hierarchical mode.

Another limitation to the design of the Collaboration team was the fact that there were simply too many participants. This resulted in people breaking away from the main point of exchange and having exclusive dialogues on the periphery. Time was spent shepherding and herding the curatorial collaborators to participate in one conversation. However, flexibility as a group is important to reach consensus about curatorial decisions. The group, bound by their common background of art practice, quickly found ways of developing perspectives, identifying weak areas and understanding each other's viewpoints.

3.3 Exhibition Curatorial Process

The curatorial process began with a session in which conceptual points of departure for the exhibition were discussed. I gave a a preamble of my interest in feminism and proposed a process of identifying works that 'spoke' to each collaborator based on the storyline of the exhibition which was examining the 'female' stereotype. The subject matter of the stereotype was collaboratively decided, following a discussion about the exhibition *My Lady* held at the South African National Gallery (mentioned earlier) which had caused uproar. Issues around feminism and stereotype are continuously evolving, culturally and societally. As a society we are all subjected to bias and stereotyping and perpetuate these ourselves. Gauntlett mentions that "the performance of gender is something which is learned and policed, and which has to be constantly worked on and monitored" (2008: 75). This concept reinforced the subject matter; the storyline of the stereotype was dynamic and contentious and

suited the framework of feminist reflexivity. This curatorial meeting became a primary data source (Curatorial Conceptualisation 2017).

3.3.1 Deciding on the Exhibition Themes

A decision was taken that a range of 'stimulus' themes, which I was briefed to pinpoint prior to the next session, should be identified within the existing collection of works the Collaboration had selected. I asked the professional curator in the Collaboration to work with me on this task and in a separate session we surveyed and started grouping the works. Classifying groups was based on multiple criteria and accomplished by adding, removing and changing. Some themes were achieved by building similar images around a noun e.g. dolls. Others came together through conceptual contestation, in particular the word 'gaze', which was sufficiently nuanced to suggest three thematic possibilities. The socio-political context of South Africa resulted in a discussion of period-based portraits of women. Feminist understandings of positioning women in a societal context emerged from a number of the themes and shaped important focal points. We consciously found subject matter that would press uncomfortable social buttons, such as relationships between women, women abuse and gender discord. Illustrating themes proved difficult as the collections were limited; this is discussed later in this chapter. The undertaking of constructing themes as dialogues necessitated the process of excavating further works from the holdings as thematic connections and associations opened tangential directions. We also recognised that the inclusion of a diversity of art mediums would accomplish wider audience appeal and consequently included photography, beadwork sculpture, video and mixed media installations, among more traditional Western art mediums such as oil, marble, etching, charcoal etc.

Initially 10 themes were identified although three of these – Male Gaze; Female Gaze; - Who's Looking at Whom – were collapsed into one. These became *Who's Looking at Whom?* This decision was taken at the second collaborative session where the discussion had become very lively around the concept of 'gaze', particularly given the context of the exhibition in terms of power relations. Exploring the concept of gaze not only connected gender and racial 'oppositional gaze'

dynamics but resonated with the idea of ‘imperial gaze’ in the post-colonial theme of *A Mother’s Love*. We finally agreed on eight themes:

- A Mother’s Love
- Smoke & Mirrors
- The Usual Suspects
- Abjection
- Dolls
- Unspoken
- Who’s Looking at Whom?
- Spirituality & Ritual

Generally, museum protocol prescribes the use of five or six themes to interpret a storyline for an exhibition. However, we had the luxury of the use of two gallery rectangular spaces sitting adjacent to one another, offering 35 x 10.5 metres in each, and were so able to accommodate additional themes. This curatorial meeting became a primary data source (Curatorial Selection of Exhibition Themes 2017).

3.3.2 Criteria for Selection of Artworks

The curatorial process took place over several Saturdays where the group reflected on the works drawn from the collection by myself. The collection initially comprised over four thousand works of varying media, and to streamline the final selection we completed three edits or ‘sweeps’ where works were selected, and the assortment pruned until finally one hundred works were chosen for potential inclusion. Each time we reduced the selections I was careful to retain works that may present an opportunity for discussion and fit the exhibition storyline of *Has the female stereotype changed?* The curators had access to the works rejected by way of an album of images which were documented at each sweep.

The ‘sweeps’ were important for processing how the exhibition would eventually look and read. By debating, analysing, negotiating and rejecting, the conceptual girding of the subject matter gained momentum and resonance as the storyline was constructed. The exercise led to fine honing of the final selection by immersing myself in reflexive action based on Gidden’s writings, describing identity:

> Self-identity … is a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography. Self-identity has continuity - that is, it cannot easily be completely changed at will - but that continuity is only a product of the person's reflexive beliefs about their own biography. (1991: 53)

This principle also applied to the Collaboration, whose voices underwent the same subjective processes.

The criterion for the selection stipulated visual and metaphorical representations of women across all art mediums including oil on canvas, sculpture in wood, and beadwork, fibre, photography, digital, charcoal on paper and mixed media pieces. At this point the dominant voice in the selections was mine. I was an individual following reflexive action. Armed with this knowledge I knew the addition of multiple and diverse voices would fulfil the brief of authentic reflexive action through 'brainstorming' – the process of generating ideas. A collective voice would add the complexity required to explore the storyline of the exhibition through different ways of looking, or ways of developing the subject matter. According to Giddens, questions of identity are integral to our existence in 'modern' society and "all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour…[and]…when tradition dominates, individual actions do not have to be analysed and thought about so much, because choices are already prescribed by the traditions and customs" (Gauntlett 2008: 76), reinforcing the need that society "becomes more reflexive and aware of its own precariously constructed state" (Giddens cited in Gauntlett 2008: 76). Giddens' concept of reflexivity speaks directly to utilising reflexivity as a system for engaging the exhibition, not only on an individual level but also as a collective.

Full-colour photocopy images were printed of those works that were too large and unwieldy to physically take to the gallery from the storeroom for the initial Saturday assembling session. Works that were small and intimate and works on paper were transported to the venue so that the Collaboration had access to many of the originals. The works were laid over several tables interspersed with the photocopies of those too big to bring. Alongside each work the empirical details were included so the Collaboration could ascertain who the artist was, the title and date, the medium and the size of the work. To stimulate discussion during the second selection process I printed out some questions about feminism and hung them on the walls in the venue.

The methodology I chose to frame the perimeters was to give the Collaboration twenty minutes initial browsing time on their own to absorb the selection followed by forty minutes to make their selection.

Each collaborator was given thirty cards and asked to select thirty artworks, to place the card alongside the chosen work and write a sentence, comment or word as to the reason for that choice. Not every person selected thirty works and the number of works would have greatly exceeded the space allocated for the exhibition had they all been used. Some cards were placed without comments in front of a work selected. The general intention, however, was to debate and justify why particular works would suit the storyline of stereotype in a general sense. This method was also chosen to sustain the reflexive ethos initiated at the outset.

This curatorial selection of artworks became a primary data source (Curatorial Selection of Artworks for Exhibition 2017).

Extensive dialogue and reflection ensued and the Collaboration expressed dissatisfaction with the range of the artworks put forward to contextualise the storyline. Following our conversations and debates we physically set works aside, about which people felt strongly, and I was tasked to return to the storerooms to unearth other works that spoke to the current selection. The total count after the first session numbered one hundred works.

Collaborative observations and conversations were ongoing throughout the exploratory process of selection and the final installation. The reflexive paradigm appears to be a suitable fit for the curatorial research, as Giddens' writings substantiate that "… self-identity becomes a reflexive project - an endeavour that we continuously work and reflect on. We create, maintain and revise a set of biographical narratives – the story of who we are, and how we came to be where we are now" (Giddens cited in Gauntlett 2008: 78).

It must be noted that the emphasis on the selections was based on artworks and not the artists who had created the artwork. Our mission was to present a series of conversations based on the main discourse of the stereotype, and not a feminist selection of only women artists. The artworks were selected to show how hierarchical narratives are mechanisms that effect marginalisation. In addition, the selection

ignored the demographic of the artist as we were seeking images to represent the stereotype narrative. Some artworks selected from other institutions (referred to in more detail below) were important finds, for instance, Mary Sibande's *Cry Havoc* (Figure 1) was a major addition to the exhibition in terms of physical size and conceptual gravitas. That the artist is a black woman made this, in racially sensitive South Africa, an important addition to the final line-up. In the next paragraph the limitations of the collection are discussed, highlighting the issues of working with restricted choice.

Figure 1 Sibande, M. 2014. Cry Havoc, resin cast, 380 x 170 cm, Gallery MOMO Art Collection

The Collaborations' choices were influenced by the restricted nature of what was available for selection. Cultural and patriarchal heritage has served the nationalistic imperative of most Western countries, including South Africa, and in this regard the Durban Art Gallery's collection follows the historical priority of the former Nationalist government. Post-apartheid South Africa has seen dramatic changes in the acquisitions policy of the Durban Art Gallery, influenced by the socio-political climate.

In the final survey of what was chosen, the dialogue with the group revealed a perception that the selected artworks as a group lacked high points and dramatic

pieces to provide impact and spectacle. More works were discarded, further revealing the restrictions of representing women's issues to suit the curatorial storyline from the holdings of the Durban Art Gallery collections. The Collaboration suggested borrowing from other art collections to expand and illustrate our exhibition narrative. Using networks across museums and galleries, additional artworks were sourced and added to the exhibition.

3.3.3 Exhibition Themes

Gallery 1 A Mother's Love

Once passing through a beaded curtain, evocative of a bedroom, the visitor was confronted by the first theme of *A Mother's Love.* The curtain was that transition. The viewer was encouraged to interrogate the roles of biological mother and constitutional mother, with reference to the British Empire's 'mother' of the nation, Queen Victoria. The idea of the caregiver role of the mother inspired this selection. Included in the concept was the notion of queen and country and love for the mother of all mothers – the head of the (British) empire.

Mary Sibande's *Cry Havoc* (Figure 1) confronted the viewer slightly right of the space and towards the corner of the gallery. Assertive and imposing, this life-size artwork literally charged towards the viewer on entry to the gallery, immediately commanding attention – as intended by the Collaboration. The domestic worker depicted by Sibande, *Sophie Ntombikayise* Sibande's alter ego, interrogates the stereotype of the black female body by eliminating class and inferiority. By positioning *Cry Havoc* within such a position of authority in the space, flanked by other depictions of Sophie in two-dimensional photographs behind on the wall, these depictions of black women were placed to urge the viewer to consider how power can be both affirming and destructive.

"She (Sibande) inverts the social power" (Scheffer, Stevens and du Preez 2017: 10) embodied by Victorian costumes by reconfiguring the domestic worker's 'uniform' into that of a queen's attire, adding to the complexity of "the colonial relationship between 'slave' and 'master'" (Scheffer, Stevens and du Preez 2017: 10) in a postcolonial context. The Victorian costumes add a theatrical element which heightens the drama of the work. A Victorian work from the older collections, *Queen Victoria* (Figure 2) by

Professor von Herkomer, was sequenced to sit in the background of the centre of the grouping and watch the fury and majesty of Sophie as she literally spills her guts, with her hounds circling her and providing protection. This coupling made sense as South Africa began the dialogue around post-coloniality and the violent gender stereotyping. *Queen Victoria,* positioned among the contemporary photographic portrayals of Sophie, further highlighted the dissipation of power through the arrangement of the work. The effect of combining works from such diverse time periods and of such different mediums was to metaphorically engage the viewer in the postcolonial conversation.

Figure 2 von Herkomer, P. c1890s. Queen Victoria, oil on canvas, 164.3 x 117.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Colour was also important in drawing the audience to the first work to view – creating a focal centre. Imperial purple, an important signifier of Sibande's earlier work, references the Purple March an anti-apartheid protest held in Cape Town in 1989,

shortly before South Africa's racially segregated parliament held its elections (Mofokeng 2013). A police water cannon with purple dye was turned on thousands of Mass Democratic Movement supporters who poured into the city in an attempt to march on South Africa's Parliament. The characteristics of colour, as political nuance and social position, placed this work firmly in the South African realm and *Queen Victoria* provided a foil for further contemplation. The sequencing also reinforced the question posed, of whether the female stereotype had changed, beneath the title.

On either side of *Queen Victoria* were other depictions of Sophie by Sibande: *They Don't Make Them Like They Used To* (Figure 3) shows Sophie repairing a Superman outfit. "She becomes a seamstress, servicing the grand ambitions of others with little space for her own. However, her eyes are closed as if she daydreams, suggesting that she is perhaps not entirely confined" (Stielau 2013: para. 6 line 5). In the artist's words "Sophie's identity is intrinsically bound by these markers that she is a maid, but her imagination, her fantasy, is her escape... If she opened her eyes, it would be back to work – cleaning this, dusting that. Her dress would become an ordinary maid's uniform" (Stielau 2013: para. 6 line 7).

Figure 3 Sibande, M. 2008. They don't make them like they used to, digital print on cotton rag matte paper, 62 x 60 cm, The UNISA Permanent Collection

On the other side of Victoria, Sibande uses female soldiers instead of males in her work *Everything is not lost* (Figure 4), because her mother and grandmother have been her primary role models.

> I am presenting an extension on my work about Sophie and I am moving away from her slowly. I am introducing an absent masculine. It's an autobiography… my father will be Sophie, he will have breasts. My parents separated when I was two years old and I was surrounded by my mother's side of the family. How to include him, how to introduce him? He is in the army so I worked on developing an army of Sophies'… *(silence) …* I am a storyteller above all. (Balboa-Pöysti 2011: para. 19 line 11)

This photographic work was an important addition by the Curatorial Collaborators who wanted to stress the stereotype of the gender roles in South African patriarchy.

Figure 4 Sibande, M. 2011. Everything is not lost, digital print on cotton rag matte paper , 87 x 113 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Gallery 1 Abjection

This theme arose through the number of artworks dealing with sorrow and lament. The Latin root of abjection is *abjectionem*, which is literally a 'throwing away'. Abject art describes work that explores themes which transgress and threaten our sense of cleanliness and propriety, particularly with regards to the body and bodily functions (Bartlett and Henderson 2016).

Women fulfilling stereotypical caretaker roles such as mother, nurse, volunteer, are prevented from integrating these aspects of themselves into a whole – instead, they are expected to live that function. These works illustrated the notion that a woman is intrinsically incomplete.

History shows the female stereotype has changed very little and this was strongly illustrated in a dialogue between Fran Saunder's *Songs of Lamentation for the Widows of Marikana*, Jane Alexander's *Stripped, Oh Yes Girl* and *Venus di Medici* by an unknown artist, three life-size sculptures in close proximity across the gallery floor and bound by the colour white.

Songs of Lamentation for the Widows of Marikana (Figure 5) is a 2.5 metre hand-crocheted lace shroud wrapped around a metal armature suspended in space, referencing the platinum of the Marikana Mine. Thirty-four miners died at Marikana on 16 August 2012 and very little focus was given to the women left widowed after this event. The artist pays tribute to the widows who were mainly Xhosa by drawing inspiration from the Xhosa wedding cape which is made of white cotton. She crocheted this variation of the cape and left the edges to unravel to symbolise the 'unravelling' of their lives. A pulsing, red heart of fabric, bleeding within the enclosure of the capsule, is created from a design used in science to describe the chaos theory.

Figure 5 Saunders, F. 2015. Songs of Lamentation for the Widows of Marikana, cotton & wire armature, H 2.5 m, Durban Art Gallery

The second sculpture placed in a straight line across the gallery floor from the *Widows* also reveals a suspended figure, which resembles Grunewald's *Christ on the Cross*. Alexander's *Stripped, Oh Yes Girl* (Figure 6) shows violation and the post-mortem horror of cultural practices that women follow to conform to society's expectations of beauty, be it cosmetic surgery or circumcision. Alexander's work

> in essence is about the fact that woman as subject is invariably reduced to woman as object…The body is not handled consistently: it has areas of flawless beauty (the youthful breasts) and areas of mutilation (the damaged back, side and kneecaps), expanses of tension (the lower arms) and regions of relaxation (the upper chest). (Arnold 1996: 116)

The figure strongly suggests abuse and victimisation of women.

Figure 6 Alexander, J. 1995. Stripped 'Oh Yes' Girl, mixed media, 182 x 63 x 50.5 cm, Tatham Art Collection

The last pair in this triangular positioning across the centre of the gallery floor was the pristine marble of *Venus di Medici* (Figure 7) whose ideal proportions 'faced off' against Jane Alexander's *Stripped, Oh Yes Girl*. The *Venus*, idealised in immutable stone, contrasted strongly with Alexander's work constructed from modern and formable fibreglass. By placing these opposite one another, Alexander's work played with volume and texture (punctured, empty and routed) in opposition to the solid, institutional and authoritative marble of the establishment.

Figure 7 Artist Unknown. c440 BC. Venus de Medici, marble, H: 160.9 cm, Durban Art Gallery

The placement of the works stimulated much debate amongst the group of Curatorial Collaborators who wanted viewers to realise connections and distinctions between these white sculptures (Figure 8). Context is the curator's wand and the positioning offered up ways of reflecting on colour, history and medium.

Figure 8 View of the gallery showing the white sculptures

Drawing an imaginary line across the gallery with the white sculptures and up and along the wall, a wall-mounted showcase was placed to provide an intimate, illuminated space for two small bronze sculptures. Bruce Arnott's *Eve* references the *Venus of Willendorf* (Figure 9), one of the earliest images of the female body made by humankind some 25 000 years ago. The work was included to question why prehistoric humans were stimulated by such an image of exaggerated buttocks, breasts and stomach. It could be that the makers of this statue lived in the ice-age and the characteristics of fertility and a healthy weight would have been advantageous to successful reproduction.

Figure 9 Arnott, B. 1991. Eve, bronze, H: 38.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Parallel to Eve we placed Käthe Kollwitz's bronze self-portrait titled *Lament* (Figure 10). German artist Kollwitz who was born in 1867, and lived through World Wars I and II, established herself in an art world controlled by men by concentrating on the portrayal of women and the working class (Borzello 2000). Her representations of women focused on anxieties of war and insecurities brought about by the role of representation in the arts dominated by men. The loss of her son during World War I led Kollwitz on a lifelong exploration of the subject of grief (Borzello 2000). The subject of grief is the scenario of many mothers in South Africa, through the devastating impact of HIV/Aids and other illness, thus the inclusion.

Figure 10 Kathe Kollwitz, K. 1938. Die Kage (lament), bronze, 26.5 x 25.3 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Extending the theme of *Abjection,* we placed works by Siopis from her *Shame: Sorry* works titled *Civil War Series* (figure 11). Siopis began the *Shame* paintings which reference the traumatic proceedings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in 2002.

Figure 11 Siopis, P. 2002. Civil War Series, water colour on paper, each 14 x 20 cm, The UNISA Permanent Collection

> Shame is part of conflict, and current global conflicts have reinserted a sense of shame onto the public stage. But however powerfully shame is recognized and represented, it has neither a single face nor a common language. It exists rather in fragments - in the cultural detritus left over from unexpected trauma, and in the imagined spectres of fear, loathing, loss and fright which surface in our visual cultures in the wake of traumatic woundings. (Siopis cited in David Krut Projects 2004: para. 2 line 1)

She is continually interested in binding the traces of human vulnerability and the dramatic effects of sweeping historical narratives which spoke eloquently to the *Abjection* narrative.

Janet Solomon's *Window carved in Flesh* (Figure 12) could be seen as post-apocalyptic. The work references *Lucia of Syracuse*, also known as *Saint Lucy*, or *Saint Lucia*, who was a young Christian martyr who died during the Diocletianic Persecution. She is revered as a saint by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Orthodox Churches. In medieval descriptions, prior to execution her eyes are removed but when her body was prepared for burial her eyes appeared intact. The graffiti inserted by the artist on the work references that of a wall she encountered outside the mausoleum in Turkey. The figure is iconized by means of the use of the silver foil in the background of the work (Solomon 2015).

Figure 12 Solomon, J. 2016. Window carved in Flesh, oil, pastel, aluminium tape on canvas, 178 x 165 cm, Durban Art Gallery

The foil to the *Abjection* wall arrangement was a piece by Turiya Magadlela. *Kulungile #2* (figure 13), translated as 'calm after the storm', is from a body of work titled *UFeela* "featuring permutations of stretched pantyhose compositions. These abstract works also function as visual dialogues surrounding a fictitious character called *Feela* (whose name is derived from 'to feel', a popular shortened women's

name in Zulu, and a township skipping game involving stretched pantyhose)" (Garnham 2016). Working primarily with a common yet loaded fabric, pantyhose, Magadlela has created an abstract composition by cutting, stitching, folding and stretching this material across a wooden frame. By using pantyhose, a material suggestive of discreet femininity and eroticism, she articulates her experience of being a woman and motherhood. The composition is double-edged, suggestive of sexual intimacy and violence. The work could quite reasonably be understood to reference a hymen. Simultaneously, the work is aesthetically seductive, playing on colour, line, and form, highlighting stereotypes of 'vamp' and 'femme fatale'.

Figure 13 Magadela, T. 2012. Kulungile 2 (calm after the storm), panyhose, wood, 75 x 75 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Projected onto the floor and spatially completing an illusory circle around the theme we placed Juliet Armstrong's *Body I* (Figure 14), a planar ceramic form of a woman's torso encompassing breast and pelvic areas. This work was placed on a grey plinth waist high; thus, the viewer looked down onto the piece. The assemblage has the quality of components prior to assembly or following dismemberment. In either of the two cases, it is clear that this woman cannot be whole. There also resides an element of the archeological and that is distinguished by two qualities, object and the quality of curiosity – the ultimate objectification.

Figure 14 Armstrong, J. 1977. Body I, stoneware, 60.4 x 36.4 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Gallery 1 Dolls

This section encouraged the exploration of the implications of the role of dolls in young girls' lives, and how these shape the role model of social behaviour. Adults push particular labels onto their children through mimicry, dressing them in adult 'costumes' such as weaves and encouraging the model, 'the sexual imprint', at a young age. How society socialises its girl children to mimic was evident in this collation. Dolls are objects of particular influence because they are proxy humans encountered at an age when crucial imprinting is taking place. Humanoid sculpture is also a doll of sorts and vice versa; both dolls and sculptures are imbued with artistic meaning, power and potential life and both are at risk of being stereotyped.

The works selected for the theme formed a shallow U shape around the wall at the far end of the gallery. The end wall is punctuated with two colourful stained-glass porthole windows and we placed a panorama by Michael Croeser, creating a perception of landscape, across the space. Titled *Birth Control Versus Infinity* (Figure 15), the labour-intensive charcoal drawing features a 'Barbie' doll floating on her back in space. Absurdity and mutation are the artist's recurring interests and the figure of the doll takes on a purposeless existence in a chaotic universe.

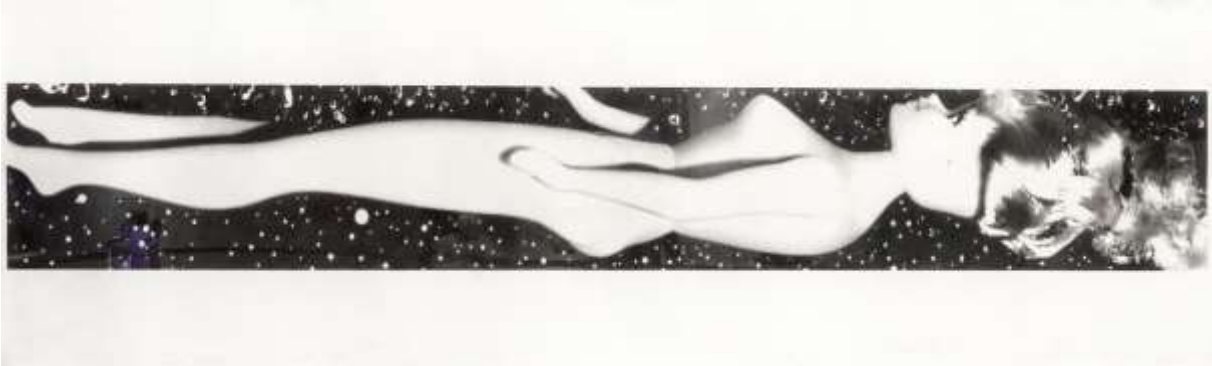


Figure 15 Croeser, M. 2001. Birth Control Versus Infinity 2001, charcoal on paper, 207 x 56.3 cm, Durban Art Gallery

We placed Richard Lindner's *Girl with Hoop, 1969* (Figure 16) on one side to inject a tongue-in-cheek element to the theme. The artistic universe of Richard Lindner was driven by mechanical eroticism. He started his artistic career at the age of 40 in metropolitan New York. In this exciting and unruly environment, he created powerful images of robot-like heroines in the 60s and 70s.

Figure 16 Lindner, R. 1971. Girl with the hoop from Fun City, serigraph on paper, 60.4 x 50.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

In front of Croeser's *Birth Control Versus Infinity?*, Beauty Ndlovu's *Co-Wives* (Figure 17) highlighted the social issue of polygamy in current South Africa. Until fairly recently, this work would have been classified as craft. The beaded artworks

produced (typically by African women) are still described as traditional craft but interesting to the Collaboration was that the artist had chosen to underscore the practice of polygamy. The Collaboration were interested in juxtaposing the work in the theme as it has a naïve quality. Nonetheless, the content is highly contentious despite the diversity of South African society. Polygamy is legitimate in South Africa under the Customary Marriages Act but illegal under the Marriage Act and the Civil Unions Act.

Figure 17 Ximba, L. 2005. Co-wives & babies, fibre, metal, wood & plastic, 58.4 x 31.7 x 13.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

The last work selected for the theme of *Dolls* was Melanie Cleary's portraiture series *New Year's Day 2012* (Figures 18, 19, 20) capturing the essence of post-apartheid South African cultural rituals and traditions. Three individual portraits of young girls drew forth a heated and contested reaction from both the Collaboration and the public, and viewpoints around this work will be discussed in depth later in the chapter. This work, arranged as a triptych, continued the 'gallery' of portraits intended to interrogate the complexities of role models.

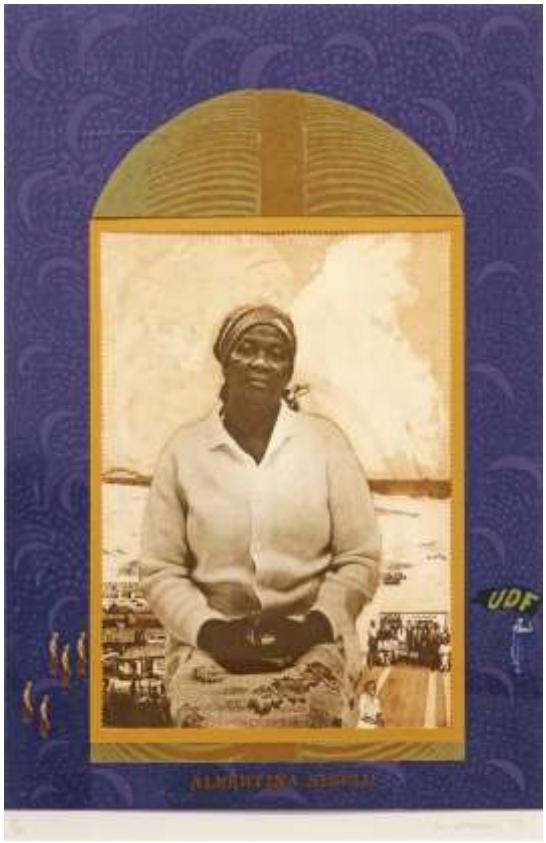
Figure 18 Cleary, M. 2011. Pool portrait, reclining "New Year's Day" series, colour photograph, 100 x 75 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 19 Cleary, M. 2011. Portrait of young girl with shower cap "New Year's Day" series, colour photograph, 100 x 75 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 20 Cleary, M. 2011. Portrait of young girl in floral bathing suit "New Year's Day" series, colour photograph, 100 x 75 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Gallery 1 The Usual Suspects

The viewer was encouraged to continue clockwise past the beaded curtain onto the theme *The Usual Suspects*. The work on this theme was illustrated by *A few South Africans* by Sue Williamson (1983) (figures 32, 33, 34, 35). This artwork comprises 12 silkscreens in the portfolio. The Collaboration decided four of those twelve would fully describe the series and picked images of *Albertina Sisulu* (1983) (figure 32), *Helen Joseph* (1983) (figure 35), *Winnie Mandela* (1983) (figure 33) and *Nokukanya Lutuli* (1983) (figure 34). The usual suspects are the people you would expect to be present somewhere or doing a particular thing. South Africa's history of feminist activity can be directly connected to many of the women portrayed in Williamson's portfolio. This series, presented as a type of mugshot line-up, was made to celebrate the history of women who had played a role in the struggle for freedom. An element of injustice exists in this title but illustrates the statistical truth that women are more likely to be the accused because a general imbalance exists in society in the way the two genders are considered before the law.



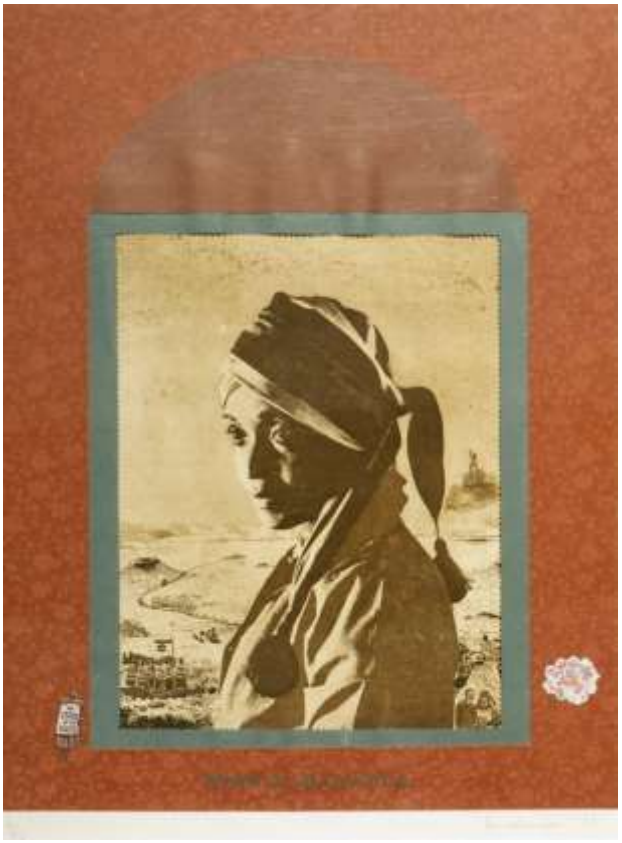


Figure 21 Williamson, S. 1983. A Few South Africans 1983, Albertina Sisulu, etching & silkscreen on paper, 70.2 x 52.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 22 Williamson, S. 1983. A Few South Africans 1983, Winnie Mandela, etching & silkscreen on paper, 69.8 x 52.1 cm, Durban Art Gallery

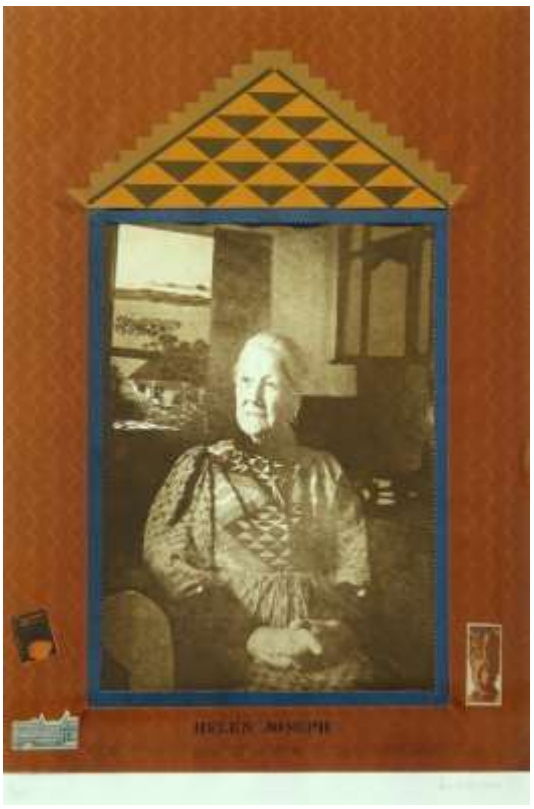


Figure 23 Williamson, S. 1983. A Few South Africans 1983, Nokukhanya Luthuli, etching & silkscreen on paper, 70.1 x 52.5 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 24 Williamson, S. 1983. A Few South Africans 1983, Helen Joseph, etching & silkscreen on paper, 70 x 52.4 cm, Durban Art Gallery

All the women depicted in the Williamson series are leaders and women of courage. However, the particular images selected by the Collaboration for the exhibition are more recognisable characters in terms of South African memorialisation. The following notes on each woman, compiled by Williamson were placed underneath the works in the exhibition:

> Nokukanya Lutuli was a teacher when she married her husband, Albert, in 1927. He became president of the African National Congress and, in 1960, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent opposition to apartheid. Nokukanya was always deeply involved in community and social issues; in his acceptance speech for the Peace Prize, Albert said his wife deserved the prize as much as he did (Williamson 2014c) .
>
> Winnie Mandela in the 1980s social worker Nomzamo Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was regarded as one of the heroines of the struggle. Her husband, the great political leader Nelson Mandela, had been in jail for many years, and Winnie herself had undergone detention, house arrest and solitary confinement in prison. In 1977 Winnie was banished from her home in Soweto to the small, dusty Afrikaner dorp of Brandfort in the Orange Free state, where perpetual harassment extended even to the confiscation of a bedspread (Williamson 2014d).
>
> Helen Joseph was one of the nationally-revered leaders who read out the clauses of the new Freedom Charter at the Congress of the People at Kliptown in 1955. In 1956, she was one of the four women activists who led the 20 000 women who marched to Pretoria to protest against the carrying of passes by African women. The famous saying ‘You strike a woman you strike a rock’ comes from this march. Her activities led to her house arrest in 1962, a restriction which lasted for ten years (Williamson 2014b).
>
> Albertina Sisulu was one of the most important anti-apartheid activists in South Africa, and the wife of fellow activist Walter Sisulu. During her husband’s imprisonment on Robben Island from 1964 to 1989, Albertina, who worked as a nurse, also underwent detention and ten years of house arrest. Nonetheless, she continued to work for human rights, focusing particularly on the strengthening of women’s organisations (Williamson 2014a).

Gallery 1 Smoke & Mirrors

The last theme encountered, that of *Smoke & Mirrors,* was placed on the other side of the beaded doorway. The source of the title of this theme was based on the magician's illusion where objects can appear or disappear with the aid of smoke and mirrors moved around the stage. The intention of this theme was to focus on South Africa's obsession with racial classification which saw evil magic at work as people were turned from South Africans into Asiatics, Coloured or more confusingly Native. But women still bore the greater burden as, in addition to the racial bigotry, they suffered profound sexist abuse from a structurally-violent patriarchy which was strongly underlined in Berni Searle's *Untitled (Colour Me Series)* (Figure 25). Searle experiments with her body as subject and point of departure. She coats her body with layers of coloured and scented spices so her skin looks like it has been subjected to trauma or damage. Cloves, turmeric and paprika, spices central to the Dutch East India trade, brought white colonists and slave trade to the Cape of Good Hope (Perryer *et al.* 2006). Interrelations with local inhabitants and slaves produced children of mixed race or what South Africa terms 'Coloured'.

Figure 25 Searle, B. 2003. Untitled (Colour Me Series), hand coloured photographs, each 42.5 x 52 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Searle's work confronts, head on, this history and the obsession with racial classification. Naming the work *Untitled (Colour Me Series)* highlights her subversion of racial othering. The impermanence of the coloured spices shows the superficiality

of definitions of race, allowing Searle to reinvent herself. The work is autobiographical and photographic which intentionally situated the viewer into the here and now.

This theme also explored the stereotype of woman as ‘narcissist’. Narcissism and confidence are often confused, especially by men who see confidence as threat. The independent woman is a stereotype phase in the evolution of women. Past inequalities have propelled this transitioning from dependent woman to independent woman, and women can finally claim gender equality under the new South African Constitution. Two works that suited the theme through confusion and narcissism were *The Lipstick* (Figure 26) by Laura Knight and Otto Dix *Sitzende mit Zigarette 1923* (Figure 27). Both works show independent women who are from different eras and countries yet confront the same perpetual struggles experienced by women through time.

Figure 26 Knight, L. 1925. The Lipstick, etching on paper, 24.6 x 19.7 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 27 Dix, O. 1923. Sitzende mit Zigarette, lithograph on paper, 56 x 43.5 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Gallery 2 Spirituality & Ritual

On entering the second gallery through the north door the viewer encountered the theme of *Spirituality & Ritual*. Substantial sculptures placed within the floor space obstructed fluent passages of traffic in the space, prompting both free-flow and delineated movement. The theme of *Unspoken* took on an intimacy produced by the placement of the sculpture.

The theme of religion and ritual spirituality provided an arena where behaviour is strictly prescribed. The authoritarian format relies on broad moral strokes; the template has no room for human complexity and here the stereotype flourishes. Magical thought that conceives of a virgin birth also allows for gender-based differential morality. Imagery that reinforces a stereotype must be unambiguous and consistent for it to be accepted and internalised.

The first work in this theme was a video piece which we placed at the opposite end of the gallery to the theme of *Unspoken*. Thania Petersen's *Avarana* (Figure 28) refers to a Sanskrit word meaning to conceal. Simbao asserts that,

> below the surface of typical interpretations of the *hijab*, she looks inwards to personal pain and personal faith, questioning the ways in which women's stories are often told from the outside and not from within. The video draws from the story of *Hājar* — the wife of *Ibrāhīm* who many believe is buried beside the *Kaaba* [pilgrim shrine] in Makkah/Mecca. Petersen questions, on the one hand, simplistic assertions that Islam oppresses women, when in fact Hājar is revered as a woman and a mother in the Islamic faith and, on the other hand, the fact that the Qur'an has been translated by men and Hājar is not actually mentioned by name. In the video she walks in protest through the colonial Castle of Good Hope by recalling *tawāf*, the counter-clockwise circumambulation of *hajji* [pilgrim to Mecca] around the *Kaaba*, and deliberately walks clockwise, refusing to be labelled from either side. (Simbao n.d.: para. 7 line 8n.d.)

The video had a sound component which permeated the environment of Gallery 2. A poignant chant accompanied the obscured figure as she moved through the colonial space of the Castle.

Figure 28 Petersen, T. 2016. Avarana, video, 2 min 22 secs, courtesy of the artist & Everard Read /CIRCA Gallery

Nhlanhla Ben Nsusha's *Play that tune my Fohloza, 98* (Figure 29) was the lone work occupying the wall on the other side of the video installation. In this scene a musician forges ahead of his partner, playing a guitar. She stoically follows, baby on back, another in her belly, sports bag on her head and luggage in both hands – slog labour for her while he gets to be having fun. This represents a stereotype of domestic drudge in a patriarchal system that perpetuates the struggle.

Figure 29 Nsusha, N.B. 1998. Play that tune my Fohloza, 98, oil, wood panel, leather, PVC plastic, 147.3 x 126.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

We placed Mamatakane Makara's *Memories* (Figure 30) across the floor on a diagonal. Measuring 12 metres, the installation created a striking line across the gallery. Family and motherhood are a standard within the sphere of the stereotype and *Memories* charters the journey of a woman's pregnancy within a cultural realm. In this artwork the fragile mediation of bringing a child into the world takes the shape of search along a path, bringing forth objects and ideas of navigating a new identity.

Figure 30 Makara, M. 2003. Memories, mixed media installation, size variable, Durban Art Gallery

Close by, Langa Magwa's *Iziphandla* (bracelets) (Figure 31), occupied a generous space on the gallery floor. The bracelets, made from *Imizi* grass, iron, wood, rabbit, goat and cow skins and plastic rope, have been woven in the traditional African manner, a process which the artist considers as metaphorical, and a mark of identity and race (Brown 2003). The scale gives the bracelets a monumentality, removing them from their original function into a different realm. They provided both a literal and metaphorical 'space' within which the viewer could enter, be enclosed and be sheltered. The shape of a circle is one which indicates wholeness and suggests ritual ceremonial magic in many cultures. The circles in these sculptures have openings allowing the inner and outer worlds to connect. On entering the sculpture, the smell of grass and skin surrounded one, connecting one with nature and giving a multi-sensory experience (Brown 2003). The idea of facial scarification can be extended to body adornment and the artist has used the imagery of the bracelet in his *Iziphandla* sculpture (Brown 2003). The Collaboration included the work to explore visual connections to body ornamentation that runs through cultures.

Figure 31 Magwa, L. 200. Iziphandla (bracelets), wood, iron, fur & animal skins, size variable, Durban Art Gallery

Between the doors on the centre wall of the two galleries, two-dimensional works illuminating the subject matter of *Spirituality* & *Ritual* were grouped tightly to underpin

the conceptual foundations of the theme. We framed the topic by turning a work by Dutch artist Frans Francken II *Salome with the head of John the* Baptist (Figure 32) to the wall on one side of a faux half column edging the main theme. The work was placed adjacent to the door to interrupt the authority of the space and the topic; its positioning is later discussed in further detail.

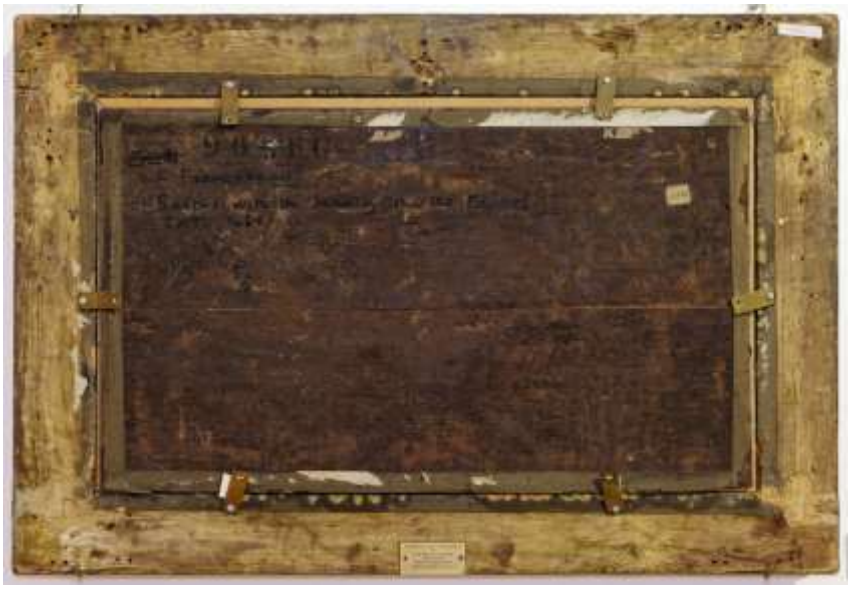


Figure 32 Francken II, F. c1630. Salome with the head of John the Baptist, oil on canvas, 43.7 x 74 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Works by Faiza Galdhari, *Depths of Devotion* (Figure 33) and *Purdah* (Figure 34) were chosen to speak to the position of the Muslim female in society. Galdhari expresses the belief that her innate sexuality and desires are sustained in what might otherwise appear to be a closed and gender restrictive society (Hobbs and Rankin 1997). She sees her femininity swathed in the protective robes of Islam, rather than restricted by them. Within *purdah*, the practice by Muslim women to hide their faces from men or strangers, she discerns the body of a sensual, loving woman, mother, and wife. In her work she attempts to instruct the western and Islamic viewer about what it is to be a Muslim and the essential role of women in Islam, her role couched in a hybrid language – the result of her western training and traditional belief system (Hobbs and Rankin 1997). The role of the female in Islam is contested and the addition of Galdhari's works in the exhibition provided material for debate and discussion. Framed against these works we placed gille de vlieg's *Bishop Tutu at Mass Funeral, KwaThemba, Ekurhuleni 24 July 1985* (Figure 35) and Mike McCann's

Afrikaner Wedding, Johannesburg 1992 (Figure 36), both reflecting a Christian ideology and ceremonies. de vlieg identifies herself as a feminist and like bell hooks chooses to write her name in lowercase to place focus on her work rather than on her name and who she is.

Figure 33 Galdhari, F. 1996. Depths of Devotion, etching on paper, 50 x 51 cm, Tatham Art Collection

Figure 34 Galdhari, F. 2001. Purdah, silkscreen on paper, 48.9 x 21 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 35 de vlieg, g. 1985. Bishop Tutu at Mass Funeral, KwaThemba, Ekurhuleni 24 July 1985, black and white photograph on Hahnemuehle paper, 45.6 x 29.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 36 McCann, M. 1992. Afrikaner Wedding, Johannesburg, black & white photograph, 30.4 x 38.7 cm, Durban Art Gallery

The last work in this central tableau, *Painting reality 1995* (Figure 36) by Gabriel Clark Brown, references abortion, commodification and the domestic reality of the housewife. Many of the elements in the work reference classical formats such as the nude, religious iconography and the monochromatic rendering of the print. In discord are the contemporary references of the domestic appliances. The fact that the narrative is corrupted by wall paper of repeated corpses indicates a state of mind, the subject's internal obsessive musing.

Figure 37 Clark Brown, G. 1995. Painting reality 1995, hardground aquatint on paper, 75 x 108.9 cm, Durban Art Gallery

We placed a beaded sculpture by Beauty Ndlovu, *Virgin Test* (Figure 38), as an end to this theme, on a waist-high plinth. The work went unnoticed by many because it was small, and dismissed by many as 'craft'. However, when viewers looked closely they grasped the contentious subject and the work drew powerful reactions. The practice of virginity testing has always been controversial, with several calls to outlaw it over the years. While traditionalists value the practice as a part of their culture and see it as necessary, particularly with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, human and women's rights groups consider it archaic and a violation of young women. Each time I conducted a tour the same questions arose. How is virginity

inspection conducted and by whom? Is it even possible to know if a woman is a virgin or not?

Figure 38 Ndlovu, B. 2001. Virgin Test, bead, cotton & metal, 27.3 x 13.8 x 22 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Gallery 2 Who's Looking at Whom?

How is a woman's gaze different from that of a man's? How does that difference influence the ways in which the two genders view the world? This theme invited the viewer to imagine how the work might have turned out had the gender filter been reversed. In this selection the works raised questions about real existence: is the *femme fatale,* for example, real and independent or simply a male fantasy?

The theme of *Who's Looking at Whom?* was the largest and we took the practical decision to place this theme on the longest wall with the least interruption of decorative embellishment. Before we arranged the works, we had to consider how to create forceful and interesting juxtapositions. The first 'conversation' of artworks grouped together comprised works by Mkhwanazi, Makhoba and Gaza, featuring women as the protagonist in similar sexist scenarios. Makhoba's controversial *Great Temptation in the Garden* (Figure 39) shows an acidic commentary of '*umlungu*', a

Zulu term meaning a white person the utopian setting of her garden. She squats and tempts the labourer she has employed to tend her domain. Makhoba clearly reveals his viewpoint that sexism and racism are the cause of the ills of the black social order.

Figure 39 Makhoba, T. 1995. Great Temptation in the Garden, oil on canvas, 42 x 59 cm, Campbell Collections, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Next to this Mlamuli Siboniso Mkhanazi's *Sara Bullman* (Figure 40), documents history through the social engineering of Sarah Baartman. This artwork shows a sensitivity to the history of one of South Africa's abused women. In 1814 Baartman was taken to France where her identity as a sexual black female became the target of scientific and medical research. She died the following year but, even after her death, Sarah Baartman's body was used in imperialist scientific investigations. Her sexual organs and brain were displayed in the Musee de l'Homme in Paris as recently as 1985 under the auspices of science. In 2002 the French returned her remains to South Africa and she was buried in the Eastern Province. This was an important inclusion into the exhibition because the issue is so topical in South African history. The colonial exploitation in addition to the sexual currency of displaying

Baartman as a freak of African womanhood underpins the historical stereotyping of the black female body.

Figure 40 Mkhanazi, M.S. 2015. Sara Bullman, charcoal, soft pastels on paper, 165cmx78cm, Durban Art Gallery

Completing the conversation, we hung Hilton Gaza's *Ubani Ozosinda Kwi-AIDS* (translated as *Who is going to survive with AIDS?)* (Figure 41) on the other side of Makhoba's *Great Temptation in the Garden* (Figure 39). This depiction of HIV AIDS infers women are the perpetrators of the disease. There are further sexist implications of women as either whore or Madonna. In this work Gaza associates women with moral decay in black township life. These are conversations that currently resonate in South Africa and the works brought that 'gaze' to this section.

Figure 41 Gaza, H. 2003. Ubani Ozosinda Kwi-AIDS, acrylic on canvas, 102.5 x 150.1 cm, Durban Art Gallery

A few metres in front, Bonita Kim Alice's *The Espera* (Figure 42) piloted a charge towards the gallery floor. Ignoring the sexism at her back she was positioned frontally to engage a different conversation, metaphorically that of place and connection to place. Translated from Spanish, *espera* is a feminine noun referring to a wait; the positioning in the gallery intended the expectant attitude, portrayed by the woman, to linger while waiting in the space.

Figure 42 Alice, B.K. 1993. The Espera, Jelutong wood & oil, H: 70.8 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Alongside, the debate of seeing and being seen continued, with the differences between the male and the female gaze, and how women are objectified for male appreciation, made explicit. A conversation was set up between the works of Jules Octave Triquet, Isolde Krams, Zanele Muholi and David Goldblatt to consider the objectification of the female body. Triquet's Victorian *Winter* (Figure 43) depicts a coquettish, nubile maiden who embodies male ideals. She shyly hides her breasts, while the intention of promise is convincing. She is of course the object of desire; this

was the male gaze, the visual representation of the ideal, with sensuous curves and virginal allure.

Figure 43 Triquet, J.O. c1910. Winter, oil on canvas, 197 x 97 cm, Durban Art Gallery

In attitudinal opposition and confronting this conversation, Isolde Krams' *The Monument* (Figure 44) celebrates her independence and challenges the stereotypical hooker image. She is proud of her career choice and refuses to accept the stereotype of fallen woman. Sitting cross-legged on a freestanding column revealing her legs and displaying her breasts through a netted vest, this sculpture of a curvaceous, sexy woman was placed three metres away from the wall to look over at another working woman. The subject of David Goldblatt's photograph *Joubert Park* (Figure 45), also a prostitute, is objectified by denying her identity to the viewer by

cutting off the photograph at the collar and focusing on legs in a short skirt, sitting waiting. The woman's gloved hands are placed demurely on her lap. Directly below Goldblatt's photograph, Zanele Muholi also hides her subject in the work *Condom & feet* (2006) (figure 46). One assumes that as a photographer documenting lesbian issues, Muholi may have chosen to protect the subject's identity by adopting a similar cropping tactic. It is possible that anonymity was similarly Goldblatt's intention in *Joubert Park.*

Figure 44 Krams, I. 1985. The Monument, cement fondue, resin & oil, H: 183 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 45 Goldblatt, D. 1975. Joubert Park, Johannesburg 1975, black & white photograph, 37.9 x 30.4 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 46 Muholi, Z. 2006. Condoms and Feet, Lamda print, 700 x 375 cm, The UNISA Permanent Collection

Moving along the wall, the last conversation in *Who's Looking at Whom?* talked to the objectification of women but also alluded to voyeurism. In the male gaze women are visually positioned as 'objects' of heterosexual male desire. This scenario is evident in Jane Alexander's *Woman in a two-piece* (Figure 47). The protagonist,

whose facial features are obscured to the viewer, is observed by a male figure holding a cigarette and seated out of the picture frame. The room is clearly masculine, revealed by a cupboard displaying ties and shirts. The woman is possibly also a prostitute given the environment in which she is framed as spectacle. A similar composition exists in the adjacent work, *Marionettes* (Figure 48), by Albert Droesbeke. Here the female protagonist's keeper leers proprietarily at her from the left-hand corner of the painting, indicating possession and in effect, woman as object. She poses for him by lifting her arm above her hair to define her breasts. The idea of object is further reinforced through the title *Marionettes*.

Figure 47 Alexander, J. 1984. Woman in a two-piece, 1984, photomontage on paper, 40.3 x 30.4 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 48 Droesbeke, A. 1928. Marionettes, oil on board, 79 x 97 cm, Durban Art Gallery

The last three works in the conversation feature women lying on beds. David Goldblatt's *Zondi, Soweto* (Figure 49) shows a portrait of a woman relaxing on a bed smoking a cigarette. Goldblatt spent six months photographing people and scenes in Soweto. However, this work does have an echo of the observer which is why it was included in the theme. Here was the 'other'. 'Freaky, foreign, white' the photographer described himself in this instance (SAHO 2011), seemingly imposing himself in a domestic situation at the end of the day. Her attitude appears somewhat bemused as she ignores the photographer. Next door, Trevor Makhoba's *Jabula Mphimbo Uzoqwinya* (Figure 50) which, translated to English, means *rejoice the voice will shrink* attracts the male gaze and becomes a scene of sexual possibility. The woman is positioned with her back to the viewer as she waits expectantly for her lover to make a move. The inclusion of this work twists the idea of the observer who in this instance becomes the female. There is no female equivalent because the male gaze supports patriarchal power imbalance.

Figure 49 Goldblatt, D. 1970. Zondi, Soweto 1970, black & white photograph, 38.1 x 30.3 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 50 Makhoba, T. 1999. Jabula Mphimbo Uzoqwinya, oil on card, 56.1 x 81.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Completing this dialogue, Liza Hugo's *Olympia* (Figure 51) is modelled after the famous painting *Olympia* by Édouard Manet, the work first exhibited at the 1865 Paris Salon showing a nude white woman, Olympia, lying on a bed being presented flowers from an admirer by her black servant. Olympia's confrontational gaze caused shock and astonishment when the painting was first exhibited because details in the picture identified her as a prostitute. Hugo also references Paul Gauguin who changes the power dynamic by taking on the role of Lothario by handing Olympia flowers. Andy Warhol is also referenced in the background with the multiples of Marilyn Munroe. The work speaks to the objectification of women by suggesting a sexualised way of looking that empowers the man.

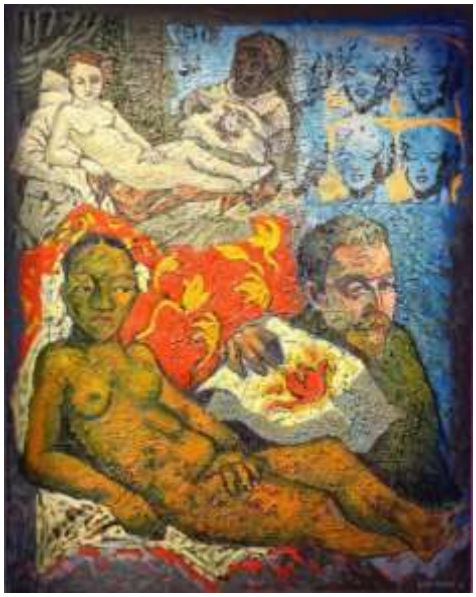


Figure 51 Hugo, L. 1996. Olympia, oil on canvas, 119.8 x 95.1 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Gallery 2 Unspoken

Configured to echo the 'landscape' arrangement *Dolls* from the previous gallery, *Unspoken* was arranged using a panoramic photograph by John Soderlund, *The Rings* (Figure 52), centrally placed between the porthole windows, creating a visual link. This theme talked to widely-held thoughts on actions and relationships that are deemed impure or inappropriate for public display. Acting within a frame that is inevitably male, white, and heterosexual, the stereotypes in this realm were portrayed as deviant and threatening to society as a twist to the theme.

Figure 52 Söderlund, J. 2009. The Rings, photographic giclee print on archival paper, 196.2 x 65.7 cm, Tatham Art Collection

Soderlund's *The Rings* (Figure 52) features a single transgender figure clasping onto a fence, both arms up as if under arrest. A building in the background appears to be a prison and the fence surrounds the property. On closer scrutiny, the figure is outside the confines of the fence but still finds oppression in the metaphorical system. The fence seemingly provides protection. By placing this work centrally on the back wall, the protagonist literally opened herself up to the contents of the gallery space.

Frances Goodman's Bead Series comprised three oval wall sculptures constructed of heavily embroidered beadwork and was placed immediately to the left on entering the gallery. Each convex oval has beads and sequins embroidered in words depicting an emotion: *Hungry Heart* (Figure 53)*, Fading Hope* (Figure 54)*, Coup de foudre* (Figure 55) (English translation: 1. a thunderbolt. 2. love at first sight). "The obsessive, repetitive nature of the embroidery production and the sumptuousness of

the shiny beads become foolish vanity rather than modest reflection…The labour involved in such urgent declarations of extreme emotion provide cathartic closure to the painful obsession" (Goodman 2004: para. 3 line 1). Visually, this series referenced the three Cleary photographs on the other side of the wall. These works became three portraits of a material kind.

Figure 53 Goodman, F. 2006. Hungry Heart, beads, silk & thread, 41 x 33 x 10 cm, The UNISA Permanent Collection

Figure 54 Goodman, F. 2006. Fading Hope, beads, silk & thread, 57 x 33 x 7 cm, The UNISA Permanent Collection

Figure 55 Goodman, F. 2006. Coup de foudre, beads, silk & thread, 35 x 30 x 8 cm, The UNISA Permanent Collection

Sandwiched between Goodman's embroidered work and Soderlund's photograph we placed a small, obsessively-rendered etching *On the Baghdad Roof* (Figure 56) by Charles William Cain, and an oil by Cornelius Johannes Maks titled *Two Women of Amsterdam* (Figure 57), discussed earlier in contested placements. The placement in the corner was slyly done to accentuate that these sexual identities are not always available to particular sectors of society. Another subtle work concerned with identity, sexual orientation and gender was placed on the other side of Soderlund. Jean Brundrit's photographs (Figures 58, 59, 60) highlight stereotypes and identity. Being an 'out' lesbian artist is important to Brundrit; it is a political position. She questions prejudice by taking on lesbian and feminist issues and emphasises these areas of discrimination.

Figure 56 Cain, C.W. c 1920s. On the Baghdad Roof, etching on paper, 25 x 27.9 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 57 Maks, C.J. c1950s. Two Women of Amsterdam, oil on canvas, 51 x 69 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 58 Brundrit, J. 1992. Untitled (Sexuality), kallitype on paper, 12.5 x 9.6 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 59 Brundrit, J. 1992. Untitled (Paché), kallitype on paper, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 60 Brundrit, J. 1992. Untitled (Summertime), kallitype on paper, 13.5 x 11 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Gabi Gabi Nzama's two beaded sculptures, both titled *Sexual Harrassment* (Figure 61), were placed in front of the works mentioned in the previous paragraph at waist height on a plinth to link to the two-dimensional works and push the boundaries of the theme *Unspoken*. Again the 'craftwork' description presented a powerful twist to the nightmare of the subject. That these works dealt so directly with issues of violation in society was to put the viewer in contact with unwelcome sexual advances by looking down into the two scenes of physical violence.

Figure 61 Nzama, G. 2002. Sexual Harassment 2002, bead, fibre, metal, wood, various sizes, Durban Art Gallery

The theme was concluded on the right with the placement of a work titled *Kom Vrou bring die kinders* (Figure 62) from Diane Victor's series *Disasters of Peace*. By placing the work at the end of the wall the illusion was that of the edge and this work contextually reinforced that emotion. Victor directly references Francisco de Goya's *Disasters of War* in this work. She illustrates the perpetuation of violence after war (in the case of South Africa) after the end of apartheid. Highlighting overlooked and everyday violence, the work accentuates a desensitized gaze or tolerance of violence pervasive in society in the present. The artist says of her work:

> The images I am working with are taken from our daily media coverage of recent and almost commonplace happenings in newspapers, on TV and on radio of social and criminal acts of violence and ongoing unnecessary deaths – occurrences so frequent that they no longer raise an outcry from our public, yet they still constitute disaster in peacetime. (Art.co.za n.d.: para. 2 line 1)

Figure 62 Victor, D. 2003. Disasters of Peace 'Kom Vrou bring die kinders', etching on paper, Tatham Art Collection

The description of this final artwork concludes the explanation/description of the artworks in their entirety save for two works (Figures 75 and 76) which will be in Placement of Artwork in the Gallery. The remaining challenge was to find an exhibition title that resonated with the collection. The Collaboration brainstormed possible titles for the exhibition. After much online and book research I presented the following alternatives to the group:

- Face to Face
- From Cradle to Grave
- What's in a Name?
- Labels
- Beauty & its Beasts
- Girls just wanna have form
- Production Line

and the elected title became *Beauty & its Beasts,* with the by-line *has the female stereotype changed?* The title is a play on the traditional fairytale *Beauty and the Beast*, written by French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, published in 1740 in *La Jeune Américaine et les contes marins* (*The Young American and*

Marine Tales). The story tells of a beautiful young woman whose father trades her as a possession for his release from a 'monster beast'. Because the status of women in general publication is often infantalised it made sense to exploit this tension.

As a superlative, beauty is never un-assailed in its exhibition. In the physical sense, men will want to own it, the media attempt to exploit it as an unattainable goal that ensures that those 'lacking in' will continue to chase it. It is, however, always denied, controverted or challenged, it is never neutral. Sitting on the shoulders of any popularly beautiful woman are Diabolus and Raphael, the devil and the angel that bring affirmation and doubt in equal quantities.

The Collaboration decided that the information about each theme should be made available on text panels so that viewers had the option of reading about the themes if they so desired. A text label elucidating the views of the Collaboration was positioned discreetly on the side of each theme to facilitate a wider understanding of the curatorial intention. In gathering information, Curatorial Collaborators were asked to write eighty words or less on the themes they were attracted to for whatever reason. Each presented a very personal response to the theme and their names were included at the bottom of the text they had written. These panels of information afforded the viewer insight into the selections and the voice of that particular collaborator.

I authored a curatorial statement of the exhibition and placed this in Gallery 1 (Appendix 2). The curatorial statement was duplicated and placed in the foyer at the entrance of the door to Gallery 1 for visitors' information on the intention of the exhibition. Inside Gallery 1, a panel was placed alongside the curatorial statement explaining the exhibition had been curated collaboratively with a photograph and biography of each participant.

3.4 The Gallery as a Field Research Setting

There is an ethnographic element to the case study of *Beauty & its Beasts* in that the museum space can be regarded as an ethnographic field in which people can be observed as they interact with artworks.

The Durban Art Gallery was inaugurated in 1892 to establish British culture in the burgeoning city of Durban but moved to its current position in the City Hall only in 1910, when the building was completed. As the Durban Art Gallery's collection grew it consolidated the Durban citizens' preoccupations with European values mandated by the city council. The 1948 introduction of Nationalist apartheid legislation had little impact on the collection and management policies of the Durban Art Gallery which continued with its municipal governance.

As Brown elucidates

> Space was one of the main ways in which people in South Africa were separated and controlled. These spatial strategies were echoed in institutions such as the Durban Art Gallery where subtle signs, such as grandeur of entrances, elevation above the ground, closing off of the outside world, surveillance cameras, instructions to be silent, had always attempted to exclude rather than include. (Brown 2005: 5)

Thus, the building in an architectural context becomes a personality for the representation of culture it embodies. No environment is neutral, and the institution of the museum was shaped as a masculine product of Western modernity.

The relationships between artworks and the building in which they are displayed can give them an authority and substantive status and this aspect worked in the favour of the exhibition. The feminist leverage allowing for differences, positions and oppositions and how the art is shown and mediated became (with the exhibition) the new tenant in the building, owning the space.

To interrogate the narrative of the exhibition two adjacent rectangular galleries (figure 3) were allocated, offering up generous space. This was initially disappointing as our preferred location was the circular gallery; the Collaborations' consensus was that the rounded space was a feminine statement. However, the gallery allocation worked to our advantage as the two spaces dispensed very distinctive atmospheres once the artwork was mounted. In addition, the continuity of the adjacent galleries ensured progression and cohesion for the flow of the themes. The galleries are open to one another, with two doors punctuating the long wall in between, connecting the exhibition through field of vision. Gallery 1, situated directly off the Foyer, was the entry and exit point of the exhibition.

The works were ordered into eight thematic groups over the two gallery spaces, initially through deliberation on floor plans, although this planned layout changed once the artwork was brought into the space. This is a common occurrence since the physicality of the works – size, shape, medium of works – only becomes evident when in the demarcated space, and often the context simply does not suit the area initially chosen.

3.4.1 Place, Space and Subjectivity: Reflexive Interventions

Pile emphasises a mapping metaphor in geography which can be conceptually threaded into exhibition and artwork co-ordinates, such as body, self, identity and subjectivity (1995: 5). These ideas are deliberated by Catherine Nash:

> a flat, two dimensional map articulated masculinist and colonial desire to control the land and place…suggests that post-colonial discourses gave the map 'volume and height' where the map subverts its own authority by disclaiming its ability to re-present the true real world. (Nash cited in Pile 1995: 5)

By incorporating these abstracted understandings of space, the "co-ordinates of subjectivity" can be released from "static, uniform, transparent notions of place and being, which seemingly inform the way the subject is thought of" (Pile 1995).

It is the nature of patriarchal authority that the exhibition attempts to confront. By installing an exhibition of feminist logic i.e. exposing traditional histories through the subject of stereotype, ideas of subjectivity and otherness are framed in questions rejecting traditional canons. The space is transformed into a forum of interrogation and inquiry.

At the end of the second session the collaborators were given homework to think of ways of reflexively exploring the space and place, to counter the colonial and patriarchal identity, reflexively and collaboratively. The shaping and design of the exhibition was to elicit responses to feminism through reflexive and collaborative intervention.

The architect in the group delivered a powerpoint presentation which included lighting and colour options. This led to a reflexive discussion about the curved walls at the end of both galleries and the Collaboration decided to illuminate these areas with

pink light to emphasise the stereotype of the colour pink with the female gender. The title of the exhibition was placed on the wall bathed in the pink wash in Gallery 2. In Gallery 1 the title was placed behind the height-line of the most dominant sculpture in the space.

Another member of the group offered to loan the exhibition her beaded curtain (Figure 63), a prop from an earlier exhibition referencing Felix Gonzales-Torres' *Beaded Curtain Series* (1992) (Figure 64). This addition became a pivotal element of the exhibition because while it was not an artwork it functioned as a playful disruption to 'touch' the visitor on entry into the environment, discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Figure 63 The entrance door showing the beaded curtain on the left and the mannequin past the door

Figure 64 Gonzales-Torres, F. 1992. Untitled (Blood), 247 x 362 cm, Artsy Magazine

3.4.2 Transforming Gallery Spaces

A member of the Collaboration suggested hanging one of the older works facing the wall to exclude the visitor access to the work. This was executed with a Dutch painting of *Salome with the head of John the Baptist* (Figure 32). The back of the work showed the detail of the fixtures to the frame; however, the only information about the content of the work itself accessible to the visitor was through the title. The metaphor was to show how issues are not always revealed but often kept secret. This work fell into the *Spirituality & Ritual* theme but in hindsight the equivalent action would have also succeeded within the themes of *Who's looking at Whom?* and *Unspoken*.Transforming Gallery Spaces

It is unfortunate that the gallery walls include a moulded dado rail one metre from the floor. This impacts on the placement of works on the wall. Huge works cannot be placed a few centimetres from the ground, as installation must take into account the protruding wooden dado rail at waist height running the entire circumference of both galleries.

Ideally the centre of any work should engage the viewer within the physical space of their height, and the Collaboration chose to conform to these museum protocols in

most instances – larger works had to be placed above the dado rail to lie flush with the wall. Long walls are often perceived to be difficult to hang but these vast surfaces suited themes with a greater quantity of works. This is not to say, however, that the long spaces could only serve the purposes of fuller themes as we also broke the wall spaces up by creating intimate areas through theatrical lighting. Surfaces in an older building such as the Durban Art Gallery, with architectural features such as the porthole windows, faux half columns, decorative mouldings and pilasters, added resonance through embellishment to the environs and we used these elements to explore the vocabulary of the exhibition by accentuating their existence. The exhibition comprised very diverse sizes of work and we spent considerable time creating dynamic and interesting designs on the wall. The same applied to the floor space where the various colours, textures, variation in shapes and form of the objects had to be deliberated and arranged.

Parting the beaded curtain into Gallery 1 set the scene of the intimate space of the exhibition. At the far end of the rectangular space the wall curves and as mentioned earlier it was here the Collaboration decided to emphasise the ‘feminine’ qualities of the space by throwing a pink wash onto the wall (Figure 65). The pink glow on the curved walls was generated to play with the gender aspect of the exhibition by injecting the colour as a tongue-in-cheek witticism. This intervention was criticised by a lecturer who commented that the curve was an obvious choice and that the light could have been directed up towards the ceiling where the lines were straight and ‘masculine’. On later reflection with the group, when I shared the comment, we agreed that our choice was a construct that would be understood by a wider and more diverse audience.

Figure 65 Pink corner in Gallery 1

Each gallery projected a different ambiance owing to the diverse themes and the selections of works. Gallery 2, as mentioned earlier, had a background noise accompanying the *Avarana* video. This element to the space enhanced the subject matter of *Spirituality & Ritual* and the theme of *Unspoken*. The lyrics to the song were vocalised in Arabic and understood by a small percentage of visitors only, so the voice became background noise rather than lyrics. The installations and sculptures occupied a sizable amount of floor space in Gallery 2. The transversal design of Takara's *Memories* (Figure 30) in particular, as it was situated on the floor, forced visitors to migrate around the work thus curtailing freedom of movement.

The visual graphic elements of text in the space were designed for legibility, understanding and message. The typography in the exhibition was chosen carefully for exhibition elements such as the labels and the title, vinyl text. Museum protocols exist regarding the size of the lettering and the choice of 'sans' or 'sans serif' typefaces to brand an exhibition, and these conventions were followed for emphasis and ease of reading.

We used the colour, lighting, level and height of the artworks and other visual and physical mechanisms to encourage shifts in the viewer's attention and generate interest in moving on to the next space. Size of artworks is fundamental to the placement within the space and, as mentioned earlier, the permanent fixture of a furniture rail onto the wall limited hanging plans. Nonetheless, we played with the height level of works, choosing a centre line across the horizontal field. The deliberate choice, during the selection process, to use a variety of sizes of artworks was made to stimulate interest and to compel the viewer to encounter each work. To avoid exhibition fatigue, consideration was taken to avoid the walls resembling wall paper by leaving sufficient wall space between the themes, thus allowing individual artworks to breathe. Pause and reflection between works was achieved not only by the careful positioning of the works, but also by the lighting.

To do justice to the narrative of the exhibition the interiors were kept dark, and light was focused directly onto the artworks to emphasise intimacy and heighten dramatic impact. The lighting had an intimate quality designed to concentrate on each artwork, rather than ambient lighting where the focus becomes diffused. This approach mobilised the intention of focusing on each artwork.

A lighting designer from the theatre industry was employed to install the luminaires. He created magical moments by using barn doors which he manipulated to form a rectangular or square shape the exact size of the 2-D artwork. This apparatus had the effect of lighting the two-dimensional artworks in such a way that they appeared to be illuminated much like light-boxes. In addition, the lighting designer was able to expand the *untold* story around many three-dimensional works by throwing a directional, dramatic shadow along the floor. This technique worked particularly well for Fran Saunders' *Songs of Lamentation for the Widows of Marikana* (Figure 5) since the work spoke directly to absence. The lengthened shadow across the floor beyond the meat-hooked figure served to allude to loved ones who had lost their lives and were now part of the earth.

In Gallery 2 the lighting designer framed a crisp edge on the transverse work of Makara's *Memories* (Figure 30) where the journey of pregnancy to motherhood was dramatically escalated by the focused light. Each artwork in the gallery was illuminated so the visitor was drawn to the next work by the light. Ambient and diffuse lighting through the galleries was kept to a minimum to orchestrate interaction by accentuating each work. The porthole windows at the end of both galleries did however introduce limited filtered daylight into the themes of *Dolls* and *Unspoken*. While these effects were achieved successfully in Gallery 2, Gallery 1 was a lighter space altogether and required a different approach. Neutral white light colour was used on the majority of the artworks while the white sculptures in Gallery 1, comprising the female figures, were intensified through an artificial 'daylight white' globe to contrast the details on the sculptures.

The movement in a room can be directed by the way the artwork is placed and can also determine the type of experience the viewer will have in understanding an intention. In the exhibition we endeavoured to influence the movement of the viewer by lighting each artwork with theatre and drama and this subconsciously invited ways people could move from theme to theme within the spaces. The human eye follows lines, so we used diagonals and curves to activate the central spaces and lead people along in predetermined ways to move onto the next exhibit.

In the typical art gallery scenario, rooms where visitors gather or commune for a common purpose are generally seen as 'collecting spaces', much like an auditorium

or a classroom. Zones where visitors can move through from one area to another through doorways are regarded as transitional spaces and in this instance, as a metaphor for birth canals. Recognizing these inherent characteristics in the design of the exhibition was useful as the shape of three-dimensional objects and the context of the themes could be managed to coax the visitor along particular routes. To influence movement from one theme to the next we encouraged the natural behavioural tendencies of visitors rather than confining them by prescribing a specific route. We chose a perimeter circulation pattern interspersed with free-form pattern circulation. The perimeter circulation, which basically defines a path, suited the two-dimensional wall mountings since our objective was that each theme was visited. We endeavoured to install both a perimeter pathway and free-form pattern in both galleries to make sure the visitor traversed the wall space but also provided opportunities for deviation by way of positioning sculptures within the bounds of the central floor spaces. The sculptural works suited a free-form pattern, providing free, random self-direction and circulation around the floor.

The way people navigated the exhibition was recorded on printout floor plans of the gallery spaces. The movement of the audience, seen in the data collected, revealed most of the themes were viewed, thus our intentions of theme exposure were met.

3.4.3 Placement of Artwork in the Gallery

Myriad possibilities exist for the juxtaposition of artworks in an exhibition. Juxtaposition/placement is refers presentation, arrangement, display, hanging and installation (Newhouse 2005: 8). She comments how the physical place affects the context of artwork by referring to Marcel Duchamps' everyday urinal which he transformed into an avant-garde sculpture by exhibiting it upside down in an art gallery in 1917 (Newhouse 2005: 8). Institutional framework certainly changes the perception of the artwork, and the institution of the museum/gallery further endows value on the artwork. Placing artwork is very subject to styles in vogue. Chronology, genre, school, among other subjects have dominated the organisation of the traditional museum exhibition. The length of time exhibitions are on view has also changed radically. In the past, fixed permanent displays were the norm of the traditional art-museum space. Temporary installations are now the trend of most art

museums and in more recent years, art as social comment and on the other end of the scale, as entertainment, has strongly influenced the approach of installation.

A number of autonomous curators, such as Hans Obrist, have impacted strongly on trends appearing in other contexts as discussed in the literature review. Mega forms of exhibitions, such as the recent proliferation of art fairs, blockbusters and anthologies, have also challenged the traditional approach. “Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions – especially exhibitions of contemporary art – establish and administer the cultural meanings of art”, according to Greenberg (1996: 2). Art exhibitions have taken on a political element where the artwork becomes a site of critical exchange and, as a collaboration, we were mindful that creating a dynamic, conceptual space was to purposely engage the viewer as an active participant rather than passive onlooker. This attitude set the stage for the placement of the works and in addition we thought to involve the viewer by physically ‘touching’ them as they entered the space. The beaded curtain mentioned earlier accomplished this function (Figure 66). Lengths of large red beads installed above the entry door had to be parted to gain access. Beads, often associated with adornment, in this respect acknowledged the influence of the female gender. The authoritarian space of the Neo-Baroque building was immediately neutralised through this intervention with the gentle, audible ‘voice’ of the swinging beads and a strong sense of intimacy when one parted the beaded curtain. A feminist juxtaposition of artworks was directed toward maximum contrast and disjunction/proximity for provocation.

Figure 66 The beaded curtain in the background

Installing the exhibition was accomplished conceptually on paper. However, space itself can change initial plans and it was only when the artworks were brought in to inhabit the space that the final placement was made. As stated previously, works were drawn onto a floor plan of Galleries 1 and 2 although this design changed once the Collaboration started placing the works. Discussions around eliciting emotional responses from the viewer were key to creating drama in the space to intensify concepts of the stereotype. Creating spectacle and juxtaposing dominant zones with quiet intimate areas became important factors in the placement.

The Curatorial Collaborators had to think about issues such as visually drawing the viewer by heightening mystery and encouraging specific movement through which the exhibition could be encountered without being too prescriptive. This activity was influenced by carefully considering how the works should be sequenced and installed to activate the space. We literally took on the role of the conductor who interrupts by moving towards and against space. We thought about the act of viewing and how placement could be unpredictable. With these aspects in mind we decided to incorporate very different sizes of artworks so the viewer would be forced to get up close and personal or would have to walk back to fully engage with a work. Disrupting the physical body within the space was done to engage the audience in uncomfortable dialogues reinforcing the tense subject matter.

Once the final selection of artworks had been agreed the mediation of placement commenced. Gallery 1 contained the following themes,

- A Mother's Love
- Abjection
- Dolls
- The Usual Suspects
- Smoke & Mirrors

and Gallery 2

- Spirituality & Ritual
- Who's Looking at Whom?
- Unspoken.

A Mother's Love (Figure 67)

Emerging from the beaded curtain portal (birth canal) the closest exhibition space was the righthand wall of gallery one. Being received by this maternal material is analogous to the birthing process and introduces the viewer to the most primary victim of female stereotyping – mother.

Figure 67 A Mother's Love

Abjection (Figure 68)

Moving from mother the primary object', to woman as 'functionary', reflected the early confinement women experience at being forced to slot in to a predetermined role. The syntax was designed to shock: first the affirming love of a mother then the visceral breakdown of that model into bits.

Figure 68 Partially showing the theme Abjection

Dolls (Figure 69)

It made sense to move from ‘dismembered woman’ to ‘fantasy woman’ in the shape of dolls. It was a return to the childhood after the fragmentation of the previous sequence. In this way viewers were rested and able to continue their journey.

Figure 69 The theme of Dolls

The Usual Suspects (Figure 70)

After the trauma of *Abjection* and the emotional recovery of *Dolls, The Usual Suspects* invited the viewer to invest emotion by way of pride in struggle heroes, a sequence offered up as mugshots.

Figure 70 The theme of The Usual Suspects can be seen in the background

Smoke & Mirrors (Figure 71)

The last station in Gallery 1 reflected on make-up as armour, camouflage or embellishment. Using the curved wall as a distorted substrate, the images had movement and mystique. It was felt that it was appropriate to end with a ‘question’, leading the viewer on to Gallery 2.

Figure 71 Smoke & Mirrors

Spirituality & Ritual (Figure 72)

To enter Gallery 2 was almost stepping into another world beginning with symbols of myth and legend. The second ‘chamber’ was the more difficult conceptually and it was agreed that beginning with spiritual and ritualistic images would prepare the viewer for the voyage into the subconscious.

Figure 72 The theme of Spirituality & Ritual is partially shown

Who's Looking at Whom? (Figure 73)

By placing this sequence at the far end of the gallery the viewer got a sense of perspective and the distance; it framed the act of 'viewing' which is ultimately what informs the making of stereotype.

Figure 73 Who's Looking at Whom?

Unspoken (Figure 74)

This final sequence was the most challenging in terms of where we as South Africans find ourselves. The sequence demanded that we confront sexual identity not simply as a choice but as one of the primary liberties people fought and died for. It was fitting that this last theme should be the most developed social challenge South African society faces.

Figure 74 Unspoken is partially shown

The Collaboration did not agree on all the decisions taken regarding the placement of the artworks, for instance, the positioning of *A few South Africans* by Sue Williamson, which comprised 12 works in the series, was contentious. The inclusion of all 12 was challenged as people decided the amount of space they would occupy was too extensive and the images basically repeated biographies of courage and selfless service to the anti-apartheid struggle. Finally, we all agreed that the intent of the works was to a large degree duplicated, and the strength was in a more intimate portrayal of fewer works, rather than more. We resolved that the four images finally chosen spoke more intensely to the struggle than an 'assembly line'.

Two works from other themes were place alongside the *Usual Suspects*. The theme of *Who's Looking at Whom?* required editing due to space constraints, and to counter the strong criticism of a generic male gaze that had overwhelmed the selection. These two works were relocated into Gallery 1 alongside Williamson's *A few South Africans.* Two of the group believed this was unsatisfactory because the works were placed without the concept of the theme they had originally been selected for – they could have become random images without a proper context. However, it transpired they could be placed tangentially within the *Usual Suspects* increasing the potency of that conversation. The group decided that both the works suited their new placement. *Elsie and Genevieve 2002* (Figure 75), by Ian van Coller, features a very intimate portrait of a child and 'nanny'. The white infant in the arms of the black carer, as an issue of stereotypical servitude in South Africa, consequently resonated with the theme of *Usual Suspects,* as did Kudzanai Chiurai's *Revelations VIII 2012* (Figure 76), showing the worn old stereotype of women as trophy.

Figure 75 van Coller, I. 2002. Elsie and Genevieve, mixed media,107.5 x 40 cm, Durban Art Gallery

Figure 76 Chiurai, K. 2012. Revelations VIII, digital print on paper, 100 x 150 cm, Tatham Art Collection

Initially we placed the work of Jane Alexander, *Stripped Oh Yes Girl* (Figure 6), closely to the theme of dolls even though it was included in the *Abjection* theme. One voice from the collaboration drew the others' attention to the fact that the woman is presented on a pedestal associating her as an object. The piece has references to the Barbie doll who could not stand unaided when first marketed in 1959 and was supplied with a frame so she could be dressed. *Stripped Oh Yes Girl* therefore had to be moved forward and pulled into the central conversation of the white sculptures including Venus de Medici and *Lamentations for the women of Marikana*. The group then discussed how the work would face the audience? Was she to be at a diagonal towards the entry door or facing off against the Venus. The final decision saw her facing Venus so the back of the form was revealed in detail as the viewer exited the theme of *Dolls*.

Originally the theme of *Smokes and mirrors* defined a comprehensive representation of artworks, although we decided some images were simply too strong in terms of colour, and Searle's *Untitled (Colour Me Series)* (Figure 25) would suffer dilution. Much disagreement ensued regarding the final choice of works that added to gender stereotypes of women being vain and narcissistic.

A similar argument occurred around Nhlanhla Ben Nsusha's *Play that tune my Fohloza, 98* (Figure 29), which we resolved by placing the work on the other side of the entry door to Gallery 2. The work is highly coloured and large in scale and immediately draws the eye. Ironically, by isolating the piece, the stereotype of woman in service to man was highlighted.

Initially Frans Francken II's *Salome with the head of John the Baptist (*Figure 32), was placed among the more contemporary South African works, but proved a difficult piece to position satisfactorily. Because it showed history and reinforced the idea of the stereotype of woman as seductress we wanted to retain the work in some remarkable way. One of the group suggested turning the work towards the wall and isolating it by sandwiching it between the entry door and the faux wall column to occupy its own space. The label would be included to inform the viewer it was Salome and how she was banished (as it were) because of her gender. Another argument ensued from one member who felt it was disrespectful and dishonouring the artist to turn the work to the wall. She questioned if we had the right to do that

and that the curator and artist relationship was somehow distorted though this type of action. Her understanding was that ‘our’ power position was dishonouring the artist’s work and as curators we were practicing conceptual arrogance. However, another member thought the act of curation in itself is a creative act, a process in itself, and a different vision in a different way. She asserted that following the traditional way of presentation is not necessarily the way to do things – after all, the exhibition was posing the question of ‘Has the female stereotype changed?’ Talk turned to an exhibition put up a few years ago by curator, Andrew Lamprecht where the entire exhibition was composed of works turned to the wall. Another person pointed out that the information on the backs was probably more interesting than the fronts and spoke of history and provenance. This raised an issue for the Collaboration which they then needed to resolve. Should we install a shelf to lean the work against so the viewer could turn the work and look at it? This however was out of the question because the space is a public museum and the safety and security of works is paramount. Eventually, we agreed to turn it to the wall to evoke a strong statement both in terms of the artwork and the theme, and in terms of the tradition of the building.

On the Baghdad Roof c1920s (Figure 56) by Charles William Cain and an oil by Cornelius Johannes Maks, titled *Two Women of Amsterdam* c1950s (Figure 57), were works suggesting content concerned with same-sex attraction. Social freedom of lesbians is a constitutional right in South Africa but women in same-sex relationships still experience persecution and rejection, particularly in more conservative circles of society. Both works are very subtle in their message and one of the Collaboration felt very strongly we were overreaching on the point of same-sex attraction. The group dynamic found in favour of the inclusion of both of the works primarily to press the point of sexual freedom.

The curatorial discussions around placement of exhibition artworks in the gallery became a primary data source (Curatorial Discussion of Artwork Placement, 2017).

3.4.4 Curator Responses to the Curation Process

I asked the curatorial collaborators to write a paragraph on how the curatorial process had impacted on them. I also collected primary data by asking the collaboration to write paragraphs on three or more of the exhibition themes. These paragraphs were printed out on large boards and placed on the wall adjacent to the

beginning of a theme, for the visitors' information. Each person wrote from a very personal point of view, extending their encounters and observations. They were given the freedom to choose which theme to write on and what they would write about. The curatorial responses to the curation process became a primary data source (Curatorial Response to Curation Process, 2017).

3.5 Public Primary Data Sources

3.5.1 Mannequin

I secured responses from the public by means of a mannequin (Figure 77) on which visitors pinned handwritten labels, which served as a 'visitors book', traditionally a log of people visiting a venue or event. From this point onward I will refer to the visitors mannequin 'book' as the mannequin. The visitor information (written on the labels) was extracted from the mannequin's skirt once the exhibition was dismantled, to be used for data analysis.

The mannequin was the mechanism through which I was able to invite tangible participation from the viewer with the intention of gaining insight into visitors' experience and thoughts about the exhibition, and access visitors' points of view on its subject – the feminine stereotype. This qualitative research method of using unobtrusive participant observation. facilitated a two-way flow, comprising an artistic and a consumer response. I was inviting the viewer, also a participant, to make an artistic contribution.

The design and set-up of the mannequin – reflected on the trans-cultural practice of pinning money to wedding dresses or mannequin (Figure 78). This was for my purposes the 'bride of art', referenced more locally to the Zulu coming of age ceremony, *Umemulo*. The tradition of keeping a 'visitors' book extends back to the sixteenth century in Aldrovandi's museum where, frequently, a list of names, with professions and residence details, was logged (Macdonald 2005: 121). Nowadays, visitors books are available commercially and are printed with name, address, telephone number, email address and, finally, a column for a comment.

Figure 77 The mannequin showing comments attached to the skirt

Figure 78 Close-up of the comments attached to the skirt with safety pins

The placement of the mannequin slightly past the entrance of the beaded curtain acted as a prompt to visitors to prepare a comment to accompany their departure from the exhibition. This required that the viewer absorb the exhibition, then contribute a comment. The back and forth of artistic energy created between the material and consumer/receiver culminated in the final remark on exit. A distinction can be drawn between a book and the mannequin; normally a 'visitors' book records the patron as part of a collective context by way of inscribing details following on from the previous entry, whereas the mannequin provided an opportunity for each viewer to make an individualised and personal contribution. The act of drawing out a blank card from the bag harnessed around the figure, and writing a statement or word using the attached pen hanging as a necklace, followed by attaching it to the mannequin' skirt, required volition and manual interaction with the mannequin itself. Further, its creative dimension as a sculpture subconsciously invited the visitor to

contribute artistically to the exhibition. The mannequin formed a primary data source (Mannequin Public Commnents, 2017).

3.5.2 Guided Talks

Field notes were saved from guided tours where the public became active participants through verbal discussion and debate. The responses from these four sources of data are organised, and connections and categories analysed, in the data analysis chapter. Guided Talks formed a primary data source (Public Guided Talks, 2017).

To sum up, primary data sources for the purpose of analysis therefore comprised the following:

- Curator Comments on Collaboration (comprising Curatorial Conceptualisation; Curatorial Selection of Exhibition Themes; Curatorial Selection of Artworks for Exhibition; Curatorial Discussion of Artwork Placement; Curatorial Response to Curation Process 2017.)
- Curators' Comments on Exhibition Themes
- Mannequin Comments
- Guided Talks Comments

3.6 Data Analysis Approach

There are different views on approaches to qualitative data analysis for case study research. Using multiple sources of evidence can elevate the rigour of a case study. Strøm and Fagermoen (2012) argue that the researcher can be guided by the data as to how to find a path for analysis. Primary data was collected from the public and the Collaboration. The curators, an informed group of professionals, experts in their fields and highly articulate, contributed a professionally-informed opinion, whereas the public constituted a lay opinion. While the data comes from four different sources, each source deals with multiple and varied themes.

In contrast to Strøm and Fagermoen's view of data integration, Houghton, Casey and Smyth (2017) say that although multiple data sources are needed to confirm findings, clear-cut sources of evidence are essential to relate to the aims and objectives and

must be designed from the beginning of the study. They emphasise that qualitative methodology is for thematic patterns and a bounded context, and therefore clarity from the beginning of the project is essential as contradictions may arise. Denzin (2001) and Patton (1999) advocate four types of triangulation as methods for using multiple data sources for understanding. The triangulation approach can be regarded as controversial, as a way of corroborating evidence and of validating findings which on their own may be inconclusive. This assumes a viewpoint that a deficiency in one method will be offset by another and I did not expect the public to corroborate curatorial voices. For my case study, I chose to find a match between data sources and research questions. This meant that while a data source might illuminate a research question, all four data sources suited other research questions.

3.6.1 Ethnographic Reflexivity

As previously stated, the exhibition space functioned as a field-research setting where it was possible to become informed about the beliefs and perspectives of the exhibition visitors. But as Agar (2006) warns, ethnography cannot simply be the lived experience of the researcher but needs conscious reflection on the part of the researcher. Therefore, my observations of the Collaboration and of the visiting public needed to be tempered by a constant consciousness of the public good that should result from visitor engagement with the exhibition. According to Goodall, new ethnography “has been fashioned by a way of working, a way of entering the world every day, which privileges asking questions about others in cultural contexts constructed and understood by a self whose presence is very much in the text” (Goodall 2000: 21). The inside view was key to building relationships with the Collaboration. The approach was then an ethnographically-conceived examination of feminist issues in the Durban community. Information was gathered chiefly through conversations, written comments and observations recorded through field notes.

Permission for using the exhibition (space) as a site of research was requested through the Director of the Durban Art Gallery who signed a consent form. Consent forms were issued and signed by each collaborator. Consent forms covered issues of credibility and trustworthiness.

3.7 Conclusion

The intention of the research was, through the medium of the exhibition format, to stimulate reflexive conversations about stereotypes and changes in traditional museum spaces through a collaboration exploring a feminist curatorial practice. The methodological approach was geared to answer research questions arrived at through the literature review:

- How can curatorial collaboration foster curatorial reflexivity?
- What evidence is needed to gauge public critical awareness of feminist issues resulting from the exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts: has the female stereotype changed?*
- What is the significance of *Beauty & its Beasts: has the female stereotype changed?* for reflexive curatorial practice?

The mounting of an exhibition displaying a wide variety of artworks exploring multiple feminisms and concerns about bias, intolerance and stereotype enabled a response encompassing a wide public perspective. I had wanted to draw a diverse audience and extract historical and contemporary ideas about feminism and about social groups' attitudes, and tendency to typecast, through reflexive mechanisms using curatorial practice. In addition, the exhibition was intended to 'rehabilitate' the space and offer up a more socially-acceptable dynamic where conversations affecting society are present and at large. The mannequin mobilised visitor agency to facilitate access to visitor understandings and experiences. The content of visitor expression was calculated to be shaped by the format of the 'book' in the form of a mannequin. This resulted in a nuanced offering of insight discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings and Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

To recapitulate, the exhibition focus was on a topic that remains current in society, namely feminism. The exhibition comprised a range of visual representations of issues women encounter in their daily life. A feminist stance was applied to address the complex and diverse social role of women within a South African context. The societal views and expectations of an exhibition reflecting feminist principles form one of the central underlying tenets analysed in this chapter, as does reflexivity.

In this chapter I analyse the outcome of the exhibition by discussing four sources as feedback mechanisms of data analysis.

4.2 Exhibition Feedback Mechanisms as Primary Data Sources

In reporting and explaining my findings, I examine data from the four sources mentioned in Chapter Three and group these different forms of data under the category of exhibition feedback mechanisms (listed below). Each source, although different had common intersecting paths.

- Curator Comments on Collaboration
- Curators' Comments on Exhibition Themes
- Mannequin Comments
- Guided Talks – Visitors' Comments

I discuss the Collaboration's reaction to collaboration, taking into consideration the curators' paragraphs on the themes; my central method of analysing reaction to the exhibition focuses on visitor responses from the public, through the mechanism of the mannequin; and I explore diverse conversational-style public responses to the guided talks I conducted.

Curator Comments on Collaboration

In the methodology chapter, I stated that one of the methodological tools I used was a curatorial collaboration. These 'tools' need examination because the process had the potential to produce an outcome that is stereotypical, in spite of selecting this

method. I chose to use multiple curators to avoid a stereotyped outcome. This to me was a feminist intervention in that this approach was guided by the insight that women work in communal rather than hierarchical models (Code 2002: 126). However, to further unpack this approach, an examination of each individual contributor will produce information to interrogate the process itself, possibly exposing the shortcomings and limitations inherent in having multiple voices.

The Collaboration were the forum in which ideas and reactions were debated and consensus reached in terms of which selected artworks would go on exhibition, and which would be filtered out (Curatorial Comments on Collaboration 2017). The feminist reflexivity of the process was assessed and inevitably, the material filtered through the Collaboration's perceptions was coloured by their life experience, their artistic proclivity and their socialisation, thus giving a unique result in each case. In terms of South African history how would one expect the collaborators to process the artwork? This is a valid question as it speaks to the inherent nature of prejudice and by choosing to unpack reflexively places the curator simultaneously inside and outside the process. For example, to frame the process of interrogating their participation in the exhibition I asked the curatorial collaborators to answer the following question:

In one short paragraph please share how the curatorial process impacted on you if at all – were your expectations fulfilled or frustrated?

I received a variety of comments which showed their multifaceted styles of social interaction and academic experience. I have numbered each curator for the reader:

Curator One:

To answer the question then as to whether my expectations were fulfilled or frustrated, I would say that they were largely fulfilled. There were minor frustrations but that will always occur with compromise and the actuality of available resources.

Curator Two:

The curatorial process was useful in that the members of the team, although having a common interest in women's issues, came from different points of reference and were diverse in their conceptualisation of the theme. The group dynamic worked well

as there was mutual respect for the individual differences of viewpoints as well as for the main curator who encouraged debate and openness. Working as a collective produced a more layered exhibition and was enriching for me in encountering challenges to my own ideas.

Curator Three:

I found being part of the Curatorial Collaborators extremely invigorating, also challenging and sometimes frustrating, but ultimately I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. More importantly, I learned a lot and therefore gained tremendously from the experience. Working within collaboration requires the skill of compromise even if the group is like-minded. A similar focus does not necessarily mean that there will always be agreement or consensus.

To be the sole male point-of-view, albeit a pro-feminist viewpoint, within a group of strong feminists was extremely intimidating. As a male speaking about issues regarding women I had to negotiate my input carefully. Therefore, admittedly sometimes I would only observe but this allowed me to gain a tremendous amount of insight for further projects. However, I did not hesitate to express my understanding of the selected artworks and how they should be presented and installed.

Curator Four:

Being part of the curatorial team provided me a personal opportunity to engage with dynamic thinkers. I was influenced by the conversations had in the group by individual members. How members articulated their thought processes in the selecting of work. How members came up with and generated ideas around 'other' curatorial approaches. How members interpreted specific artworks. How members connected and coordinated from an existing collection to form this exhibition.

Curator Five:

Through Beauty and it's Beasts, I was able to learn about the different aspect in curating, collaboration, conversations around the specific theme and the role of a curator.

The workshop was a space where the participants could express, challenge and develop each others' ideas. The selection of art pieces inspired me on many levels, as an artist, architect, individual and woman.

Being part of the curatorial process has contributed positively in my journey as an artist, towards my visual literacy and on a technical level. Consequently, I have co-curated numerous exhibitions.

Based on the success of the exhibition, I believe that the inclusion of participants from various background and level of expertise, contributed to a broader view on the theme thus infinitely expanding the interpretation of Beauty & its Beasts.

Curator Six:

With regards to the collaboration, I learned a lot from the whole experience. It uncovered a lot of my weaknesses. The fact that I can't work with other people, not confident with myself and my opinions. However I think it was also a lesson to come out of my [shell] and comfort zone.

Curator Seven:

Working in this curatorial team was a new experience for me as I had never worked with such a large group when putting together an exhibition. I found the experience refreshing and insightful given that there were many different perspectives and approaches in the process. It could have easily been a frustrating journey with many opinions in one room but I found as colleagues we respected each other and also learned a lot from each other. I truly appreciated being a part of this experience.

Curator Eight:

It was a wonderful opportunity and privilege to be part of the Beauty & its Beasts curatorial team. I thoroughly enjoyed the environment of the Durban Art Gallery that we worked in and the structure provided. A mix of new ideas and responses to the older, the heralded and the traditional. I was engrossed in the discussions we had throughout the process, the agreements and disagreement and listening to various points of view around one artwork on its own as well as in relation to the works laid out. It is amazing how much content can grow from a work of art, I was reminded about the deeper interpretations and multiple representations that artworks offer us

when you really look, or in our case; put them in front of a collection of critical thinkers from a wide spectrum of creativity and allow them to chew.

Engaging in discussions around the traditional roles of women versus the reality of women throughout time was probably the highlight of our discussions for me.

Overall, I am grateful to have had a part to play in the critical conversations around humanity, history and gender in order to shape and reshape a lens that we so often bypass.

These responses echoed the reflexive and multifaceted dimensions of the process of collaboration.

1. Interaction between two or three people or any fewer than the total (in this case nine) can lead to factionalisation which is not verbalised but remains vested in the communication e.g. ‘reserved’ versus ‘opinionated’ or, in the case of the male collaborator, intimidation by the strong ‘gang’ of feminist voices despite being pro-feminist himself.
2. Regarding the overall result that comes from diverse voices ultimately arriving at consensus or at a result that may not be consensual, dissent is acknowledged and the politics of collective curation recognised.

The diversity of comments on feminism and the fact that they relate to many social and cultural issues broadened and deepened the feminist exhibition theme. It becomes evident through the comments that the process affected the collaborators’ perspectives on the exhibition in that many indicated that their own attitudes had undergone transformation. Terms such as *layered, dynamic, differentiated, broadened and multi-perspectival* speak of an enhanced reflexivity. Curators’ experiences of collaboration stimulated thought and opened up their minds to different possibilities. These responses to the collaborative process resulted in staged processes and brainstorm of exhibition conceptualisation which served to answer the first research question:

- How can curatorial collaboration foster curatorial reflexivity?

4.3 Curators' Comments on Exhibition Themes

Once the exhibition was installed in the gallery spaces according to the emergent exhibition themes, I asked the curatorial collaborators to contribute to three or more themes by way of a written paragraph (Curators' Comments on Exhibition Themes 2017). Their reflections on the themes were placed alongside the themes in the exhibition, giving the audience an opportunity to experience the different viewpoints or criticisms from the diverse curatorial voices.

Comments emerging from the Spirituality & Ritual theme

- Curator EIGHT displays a strong questioning style throughout her contributions. The scope of her comments is vast, examining space and time, referencing how connecting power dynamics relating to religious convictions and spirituality change over time and can be shaped depending on their geographic positions and macro forces. Arising out of this theme, curators' comments diverged from spirituality and ritual to space and time.
- Curator FIVE adopts a poetic style taken directly from her own experience, she references karma.
- Curator THREE, the only male collaborator, is strongly critical of the rituals that have been designed to denigrate and belittle women.
- Curator SIX challenges the mechanisms by which spiritual and ritualistic power is used as a controlling force over women.
- Curator ONE calls for ritual and spirituality to be seen outside their roots.

Comments emerging from the Abjection theme

- Curator EIGHT seeks transcendence from the physicality of body.
- Curator TWO elected to focus keenly on one work and expand its political significance through the history of its elements, citing chaos theory.
- Curator SIX rejects the classical defence of appreciating women's bodies, instead supporting artwork empowering women artists who explore their own issues of sexuality and body politics.
- Curator THREE focuses, in this paragraph, on the fate of women as discards.

Comments emerging from the Smoke & Mirrors theme

- The only collaborator to write on this theme was Curator FOUR who wrote at length on the symbolism of objects in relation to women.

Comments emerging from the Dolls theme

- Curator THREE highlights the difference between comfort objects of boys and girls citing nurturing habits as early training to cement a woman's place in society.
- Curator FOUR explores the supernatural power of dolls and the composed nature of the body whose limbs can be detached or disintegrated.

Comments emerging from the Unspoken theme

- Curator FIVE takes a lyrical approach with messages to the viewer signalling self-appreciation in order to arrive at self-acceptance.
- Curator FOUR excavates the nature of gender as human or object.
- Curator SEVEN emphasises sexual difference and diversity in society constrained by the blinkers of patriarchy, characteristic specifically of the white, heterosexual male.

Comments emerging from the Who's looking at Whom? theme

- Curator TWO again chooses to focus on a single artwork interrogating the history of the black female body, using cattle as a metaphor.
- Curator THREE highlights the dynamic nature of the observer and the observed.
- Curator ONE plays with stripping out the sexual connotation from the gaze.
- Curator SEVEN asserts that male and female objectification has blurred.

Comments emerging from the A Mother's Love theme

- Curator EIGHT expands of the role of patriarchy and whether it can be exchanged to have a woman who is not malevolent in a position of power.
- Curator FIVE denatures a mother's love into its universal/cosmic components.
- Curator SEVEN plays with the role of matriarch/political leader and suggests that our history has forced mothers into positions of leadership because fathers have been absent (migrancy).

The feedback from the collaborators elaborated on the themes in interesting and sometimes surprising or unanticipated ways. I have extracted comments from this text, that assist to make the collaborators' views explicit. They are listed below:

religious convictions

geographic positions

references karma

denigrate and belittle women

spiritual and ritualistic power is used as a controlling force over women

ritual and spirituality to be seen outside their roots; transcendence from the physicality of body

empowering women artists who explore their issues of sexuality and body politics

fate of women as discards

symbolism of objects in relation to women

difference between comfort objects of boys and girls citing nurturing habits

the supernatural power of dolls and also the composed nature of the body whose limbs can be detached – disintegrated

self-appreciation in order to arrive at self-acceptance

gender as human or object

sexual difference

white, heterosexual male

black female body using cattle as a metaphor

sexual connotation

male and female objectification

expands on the role of patriarchy

denatures a mother's love back into its universal/cosmic components the role of matriarch/political leader

fathers have been absent (migrancy)

Comments extracted from these texts (noted above) support the perception of a multi-faceted, pluralistic curator view of the exhibition.

Differences between the collaborators' perspectives were evident too. Curator TWO, in response to Abjection, cites current political events. It is the only paragraph that positions itself in South Africa in its commentary. The other comments in this section are universal and not geographically defined. Another instance of divergence is Curator TWO who departs from the stereotypical idea of a mother as divine nurturer to postulate that a mother could also be a divine dictator in the theme A Mother's Love.

In summing up, I have illustrated that several mechanisms are at work when using a group of curatorial collaborators through unpredictable and the expected outcomes. This was evidenced in the styles and content of the thematic commentaries.

4.4 Mannequin Comments

The mannequin was the portal by which I was able to establish a dynamic relationship with the viewer with the intention of extracting data using unobtrusive participant observation (Public Mannequin Comments 2017). Ethnographic study helps making the invisible visible and the familiar strange in the field site (Sabeti 2017). Through this primary data source i.e. the mannequin, and the theoretical understanding of ethnographic reflexivity, I was able to extract insights and information about audience viewpoints and how the audience experienced and understood the exhibition.

> Reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and the process of doing research. (Aull Davies 2008: 4)

An interactive flow existed in responses from viewers as participating artists and consumers. I was inviting the viewer, also a participant, to make an artistic

contribution. The active audience was invited to make meaning by using its own voice.

The mannequin could be criticized for promoting a ritual that enforces patriarchal positioning by selling women off in marriage, however, my intentions were to capture the audience and invite participation by turning this practice into one of empowerment. The authority of a traditional book may have possibly constrained the responses. If I think back to when I was at school we were taught not to write in books and even though a 'visitors book' asks for a comment, it is a coercive frame that dictates a polite comment. The comments in the book format are very visible to others writing in it. That said, in their responses to this exhibition, visitors themselves also looked at comments made by other viewers because they were pinned on open to public gaze and it followed that other people would read their opinion even though the contributors were not identifiable. In general, people will formulate their viewpoint once they have positioned themselves in relation to others (Macdonald 2005).

The exhibition viewer was not asked to supply details of identity (such as name) but rather a comment. Personal information about the viewer was therefore not extracted i.e. demographic, age, gender etc. This was a deliberate consideration and positioned the viewer as anonymous thus unrestricted and free to write any observation or judgement. This action was designed as a feminist method in that the communal context overturned the hierarchical context. That said, more than half of the comments were accompanied by names which revealed race and gender. In some cases, age was also supplied, more so by children e.g. 'David aged 7'.

In general, the comments came in all kinds of responses and showed reflective, educational, and philosophical responses to the exhibition. Many placed comments in what could be metaphorically described as a 'selfie' group because they resemble the photograph that one takes of oneself typically with a smartphone or webcam and then shares via social media. The selfie places the author in a particular space by way of photographic image. In this instance I see it as a way to affirm one's presence in the form of a card rather than an image. The selfie allows the writers to place themselves within the artistic experience – as part of it. Even though comments may not refer exclusively to the exhibition, they may nonetheless be relevant if only to reference they were there, as a roll call.

Many people wrote comments that basically said “X was here”, in other words, a type of graffiti which signified they were in the place but their presence was not particularly about the space. However, by acknowledging their presence in the place, an unconscious appreciation of the space was literally acknowledged by their marking of a comment card; visitors were somehow identifying themselves with the politics of a feminist exhibition.

There were many first-time visitors to the Durban Art Gallery and the question is why people, who had never visited the gallery before, present at this particular exhibition – was it coincidental or were they drawn to the subject matter or were they tourists to Durban? Comments like:

“*Learnt new things*” suggests that the viewer was reacting to the questions posed by the exhibition.

Another comment read: “*She give us a lot of courage*”; this could be interpreted as being feminist in nature.

“*My first trip was exciting and spiritual*” suggests a change of consciousness in terms of the content of the exhibition experience.

The question posed about reasons for first-time visitors cannot be answered definitively because there was no survey attached. However, these respondents expressed surprise at the dynamic nature of the feminist material.

Four streams of negative and threatened emotion were discernible:

- Puritanical prejudice e.g. “*All art involves naked people*”
- Gender anger e.g. “*All men must die*” and “*Quit telling the world I deal with you*” suggests abuse in its tone.
- Male hegemony: “*Woman must change because men say they must stay true to themselves”*. To me this comment suggests that the author is reflecting upon patriarchy in terms of which gender is the figure, and which gender is the ground. The writer eloquently points out that man is immutable constant and all powerful whereas women must adapt to a patriarchal model.

- Dissatisfaction – *"I can't get no!"* It would have been unrealistic to expect that an exhibition of this size and duration would not produce a few naysayers, the comments were not placed in context, and were non-specific.

The exhibition space had become an alternative communication medium, a confessional; instead of phoning Lifeline[2] people wrote on a card at an exhibition.

4.4.1 Criteria for Analysis for the Mannequin

The exhibition was curated to unpack the female stereotype in different reflexive formations by considering gender, race, class, religion, economic divisions and cultural diversity. The opinions that materialised as comments on the mannequin revealed data about life experiences, feelings about life experiences and statements of group affiliation. I felt it was important to analyse the comments by examining them in layers which presented themselves.

4.4.2 Layers of Analysis for the Mannequin

It became clear, from a reflexive feminist view, that the analysis entailed processing on three different levels, namely:

- Life experiences
- Feminist reflexive reaction to life experiences/feelings
- Social groupings

Figure 79 Illustrated above is the process of analysis

[2] A crisis-call centre where callers engage with experienced counsellors to assist manage their crisis

Figure 80 Illustrated above is the meta reflection diagram

My feminist life experiences were an integral part of understanding audience responses. The audience was highly diverse and therefore presented multiple subjective responses. The second layer of analysis treated life experiences as individualised 'feelings' where the nature of the comments become personal. The final layer indicated social groupings and the diverse implications of cultural politics and economic and social strata.

4.4.3 Life Experiences and the Mannequin

The first layer of analysis to be discussed speaks of life experience. What is strongly evident, through the comments, was that the visitors encountered highly disparate life experiences. As I worked through the comments, I found both positive and negative experiences from a wide variety of groupings: culture, social strata, economic strata and sexuality. This dimension was discernible from comments made in different languages, such as English, isiZulu and Afrikaans, and comments passed by visitors from other countries including New Zealand, Gabon, France etc. Some visitors placed their sexuality on record by, for example, noting their 'gay' identity.

Important in the analysis was how the visitors experienced and understood time and space. Different kinds of knowledge are situated within the elements of time and space, and our interpretation of life is constructed on where we live and interact (Warf 2008). The dimensions of time and space impacted the experience of visiting an art gallery in a colonial building. The art gallery space is liminal to a more spiritual experience. The feminist exhibition provided a safe place of contemplation and reflection enabling an authentic and, at times, confessional response from the visitor.

The context of confessional is referenced through the feminist reflexive response to life experiences: Germain Bazin (cited in Duncan 2005: 81), a Louvre curator, wrote that an art museum “is a temple where time seems suspended” and Swedish writer, Goran Schildt (cited in Duncan 2005: 81) describes museums as settings in which we pursue “detached, timeless and exalted” meditation that “grants us a kind of release from life’s struggles and … captivity in our own ego”. The place, the arrangement of the artworks, the lighting and the architectural space provided a stage set and a cue for a ritualised performance. Thus, on exit from the exhibition and passing by the mannequin, the visitor felt compelled to perform (by commenting) and to show witness and in some cases their perspective, through a type of absolution, by comment.

4.4.4 Feminist Reflexive Reaction to Life Experiences – Feelings: for the Mannequin

Feelings are emotions which manifest when personal experience, beliefs, and memories arise. To identify visitors’ feelings, or emotional responses to the exhibition, I began by reading through all the 274 comments and mentally noting issues that seemed prevalent and kept appearing. Once I had been through the comments I started to formulate a set of headings. My strategy was to generate categories of emotions that spoke to similar issues or positions. Finally, I was able to extract the following categories:

- Resilience
- Solidarity/sisterhood
- Confessional
- Belonging/othering
- Affirmation
- Alienation
- Exclusion
- Contrition

By reflecting upon these ‘feelings’, it is apparent that I was employing a reflexive lens, perceiving the human condition in a feminist way. As mentioned in the literature review, Archer defines the term reflexivity as the “regular exercise of the mental

ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and *vice versa*" (Archer 2007: 4). Thus, reflexivity empowers one to become critical about self and one's social environment. To accomplish these ends, one engages in intrapersonal conversation. Consequently, reflexivity consolidates the bond between structure and agency and provides a way to broker social change.

Krasny raises issues about feminism itself:

> A feminist method, as one might argue, is the resistance to definition, the refusal to be tied down by any one monolithic and definitive definition. On the other hand, the question of what feminism is also pushes the need for ongoing processes of negotiating re-definitions and the quest for changing definitions. (2015: 51)

I make mention of this because it influenced the findings and how I came to define a way of unpacking various 'feelings'. The literature review also notes feminism as constantly shifting and engaging a dynamic of reflecting and questioning at every juncture.

From my reflexive, feminist point of view, the above range of 'feelings' could be identified in reaction to life experiences. But, as illustrated in the previous paragraphs on experiences, they come from very diverse life circumstances. This leads to an understanding of the audience as configured by the interaction of different social positions e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, status, among others.

- **Resilience**

I identified a small proportion of the comments relating to the noun resilience. Very personal and touching testimonies could partially be explained by the subject material. It was, however, plain that the space and context of the exhibition – the staging and subject matter chosen – brought forth a level of trust in what for these viewers became a confessional dynamic. What was surprising was that in spite of the anonymous format some visitors decided to sign their comments.

Resilience reflects determination and tenacity on one hand and vulnerability on the other. The comment, "*Sometimes in life we end up in situations that we don't expect but we keep persisting because it feels so right and believe that someday, somehow,*

things will be alright and all our hardships will just be one bad memory!! LYK HER" speaks of affirmation and willingness to show vulnerability. To be a feminist is not only to be politicised and resilient but encourages mutual trust to expose frailties and this is what the exhibition draws forth,comfort from affirmation .

"*I am so unhappy pregnant and alone. I can't tell anybody cos I feel judged. But I am woman and this too shall pass. Women are resilient* ♥♥♥ *I have hope"*. In her vulnerable position of finding herself pregnant and alone this woman feels free to speak about her condition and finds the exhibition space affirming and comforting. She has the strength to continue on her journey because she knows she will overcome the obstacles in her current state.

- **Female solidarity/sisterhood**

This category of comments basically praised women but could be further divided into two sub categories, namely Female Superiority, and Beauty and Women.

Female superiority: This section referred to woman as not only resilient but superior, and the following examples demonstrated this interpretation: "*Woman are the future for all mankind*"; "*WOMXN = POWER*"; "*Beauty is woman and its beasts are the beholders*"; "*Women, we are born to slay*"; "*To be woman is to fight to be*"; "*We can do it, fight for your rights, woman power, mother divine*". By definition, the comments were strident and militant with a few signing off "*#GalPower*". The spelling of 'womxn' in these sign offs, explicitly demonstrated a more inclusive, progressive alternative term for 'women' by several voices. Using 'womxn', the visitors revealed the prejudice, discrimination, and institutional barriers women have faced, and demonstrated that women are not the extension of men (implied by Adam and Eve) but their own free and separate entities.

Beauty and Women: Of the nine comments in this section, seven referred to aspects of beauty, physical and spiritual, for example: 'To find such beauty in the midst of chaos is truly remarkable'; 'Feminism is beautiful – this art is empowering – women are beautiful beings'; 'Feminism is a work of art'. These comments aligned beauty with feminism and sought a positive understanding of women as holistic beings.

Eighteen people contributed comments as a collective voice calling for an end to women abuse e.g. “Inspiration on cultural movement and stop abusing”, is a support for gender activism through art. Many comments employed the active voice, the imperative e.g. “Women empowerment, stop human trafficking”; “Stop abusing”; “I have the right to be a woman”; “Man must respect”; “Do not abuse”.

- **Confessional**

The viewers had distilled from the exhibition a very personal response referring to intimate struggles involving sexuality and emotional trauma. A gay woman was comfortable to speak about her breakup with her lover: “*2017 This year changed so much, the person I thought I loved left me for another woman (I’m a gay bitch) She lied. I still love her. Always will*”. It appeared the gay woman felt safe in the environment of the feminist exhibition and perceived no judgement from sexual bigotry but felt safe to express her new single status.

The comment, “*And today is the day I became a streetchild*” (homeless child living on the streets), expressed how lived realities could be simultaneously linked with social dynamics. The space of the gallery had become a spiritual retreat where the child felt safe to seek absolution.

Another comment addressed the author: “*Dear Self, You have been through a lot. I hope you find love and let love find you*”. The reference to self is distinctly non-religious, the speaker is at the centre of her universe, not asking for intervention but taking responsibility.

- **Belonging/othering**

“I am in love with the theme: ‘Beauty & its Beasts’. It opened me up to an entirely unnoticed realm within our patriarchal society. I have learned about the incredible hardships and sacrifices made by the Woman. How woeful is her life because of her sexuality. She deserves praise, passionate love and Peace (above all)”. The sense of ownership of the exhibition and the idea of working towards social justice is strongly evident in these words. Many comments signed off with hashtags such as *‘#Love African Black’; ‘#Black Power’; ‘#Africa and Art’,* reiterating the idea of belonging in the space in addition to owning the exhibition through its content.

A comment about othering stated: *"It is still quite disappointing that this space continues to ignore transformation by systematically gatekeeping on artists exhibiting and this makes the place even more oppressive. In addition, if feminism is a central theme in the works presented, it still does not move the display forward as the works have a biased view towards its understanding of maleness and masculinity. The idea of othering is still quite stark and makes the work less conscious. The space is incredibly utilised and lightly interpretative"*. This comment linked the system and power structures (in this case the Collaboration) to the way individual experience was shaped and experienced.

- **Affirmation**

Apart from the obvious platitudes, the general sentiment was supportive but not in a militant way (e.g. 'Believe in women') with an illustration of a flower and comments such as "*To love is to be loved. A woman's love can never be compared to anything on this world for there is nothing as great. Women are more than what meets the eye. Males stop looking at lust and start connecting emotional*": "*To be woman is more than our bodies. To be women is to fight to be*"; "*Art does so much for society. Never let this go" and "Art changes people perspectives of they view life*". Other comments included, for example, "*Awesome experience women rock*"; "*Let's embrace our ladies*"; "*My mind has expanded because of this project. I one day hope to do the same for someone else. The future begins now don't look back look front always focus*"; "*We should all be feminists!! We are women and we shouldn't take that lightly, we should be proud. This was an uplifting experience!*".

Included in this section were several comments marked with makeup. Written in lipstick, the writers expressed a profound sense of connection with the artwork; "*I found myself*" can only be interpreted this way. The writer signs off as "*Queen Sane*", a moniker that indicated her elevated and affirmed emotional state after having viewed the material. A sequence of repeats in the form of lipstick impressions are feminist approvals becoming almost an auxiliary artwork in themselves. "*Women are beautiful*", also penned in lipstick, and a message of solidarity from New Zealand ending with "*love and respect*" emphasised the global feminist element of this section.

- **Alienation**

In addition to the 'confessional' feeling attributed to the statement earlier, alienation was also strongly encountered in the comment, "*And today is the day I became a streetchild*". The feminist exhibition positioned by the viewer as the confessional gave comfort and liberated the person who had also signed her name.

- **Exclusion**

The following comments appear to have been voiced by men:

"*When we speak about freedom of women do we always have to see & talk about vagina. There is so much MORE to us!!! Please speak about more than vagina*". References such as this statement indicated a kind of strange vagina envy. In this gender-based dialogue the man railed against his own stereotyping and voiced his dismay at being dismissed simply because he does not have a vagina and consequently cannot understand women's issues.

"*Quit telling the world that I deal with you*", suggests that the writer fears judgement and indicates a sense of having been othered.

- **Contrition**

Contrition was also a 'feeling' and these reactions appeared to be those of three male voices, stating: "*Never will I think to correct a woman with violence*"; "*A simple 'Yes' made me think of you as a property*"; "*I am in love with the theme: 'Beauty & its Beasts'. It opened me up to an entirely unnoticed realm within our patriarchal society. I have learned about the incredible hardships and sacrifices made by the Woman. How woeful her life is because of her sexuality. She deserves praise, passionate love and Peace (above all)*". I have labelled this category contrition because the comments strongly indicated remorse. Contrition is a core concept in much of Christianity and this became a salient focus of the aforementioned 'confessional' of the space of the gallery.

4.4.5 Social Groupings

Social groups came in a multitude of sizes and diversity. In the instance of the exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts*, the group comprised visitors who elected to walk up the external stairs of the Cultural block of the City Hall to engage with an exhibition of artworks questioning the stereotype and the bias and prejudice evident in society. A group may share some characteristic behaviours such as values, interests and cultural backgrounds. A defining feature of social groupings is social interaction, and it is within social behaviour that a further level of analysis takes place, again stressing the emphasis of feminist reflexivity in that people belong to more than one social category simultaneously and have synergy of different social locations, structures and processes.

4.4.6 Cultural Politics

Responses were directly associated with the cultural politics of feminism. A few comments were made at the lack of representation of Indian art on the exhibition: "*Please can we have some Indian art here, but some awesome paintings, keep it up*". Another comment identified the writer as Indian: "*A proud South African Indian woman ♥ loved this exhibition"*. These comments expressed reservation about exclusion of the Indian voice but supported the overall feminist content of the exhibition. The total works in the exhibition numbered sixty-three, of which three were artworks by Indian women. The works dealt with their particular cultural contexts with obvious *Indian* religious/social focus. These included Purdah, and incorporated different views of the Islamic faith, from the oppression of women and the apparent care of women provided they conform with established and accepted conventions of domestic behaviour.

Cultural positioning was noticeable, particularly around the themes of nation building. However, the following comment, "*We have come a long way Africans. Art is You & Me. Together We're Culture*", was re-appropriated in part from a well-known marketing slogan for American Virginia Slims cigarettes for women. In 1968 a new cigarette directed at women was launched onto the market, featuring the slogan "*You've come a long way, baby*". Intended to capture a new era of equality the iconic advert is ironically an insult to the women's movement and in this context has been

re-appropriated for use in race politics in the comment above. Part of this, "*Art is You & Me*", says for art to function it must be positioned within a context, without which it cannot function.

"Dis baie mooi" in Afrikaans expressed delight at the installation and several comments were recorded in isiZulu. These comments were generally prosaic and characterised by a recurring comment, "*uphilla butepo*", which my colleagues translated as "*wishing the reader was in a comfortable position*". "*Ubuhle bamanguni kiyancomeka*" translates as: "*African beauty is pleasing, is beautiful, we are happy*", which is a positive statement acknowledging African identity and the importance of the positioning of Africans in society. This was an issue before the fall of apartheid and the representation of the black body is still a highly contested site. The words, "*you strike a woman, you strike a rock*", appear in Zulu: "*Wathinta ababfazi….lhe..uzozizwela*", with an added reproval or veiled threat at the end – "Be Careful". The statement is one from the famous resistance song symbolising the courage of South African women's refusal to comply, demonstrated at the Women's March of around 20 000 women in 1956 to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, to hand over a petition to the then Prime Minister, Hans (Johannes Gerhardus) Strijdom. It has become an iconic phrase in South Africa's political landscape and has essentially outgrown its context and has in itself become a brand.

4.4.7 Social and Economic Strata

Class is generally synonymous with socio-economic groups sharing the same economic, social, cultural, political or educational status. Social strata are a means of ascribing societal divisions according to a hierarchy. South Africa's former ruling National Party institutionalised a system of racial segregation and discrimination to impose that hierarchy, however, the post-apartheid divisions still in existence but are now economically based on the legacy of apartheid. "*And today is the day I became a streetchild*", is evidence of the political history of the country. Poverty, urbanisation and unemployment have contributed to the phenomenon of 'streetchildren'. By contrast, the contrast between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' can be illustrated by the comment, "*Enjoyed all of it (Honeymoon trip) lots of love, the Onia's xoxo*". A honeymoon trip suggests an economically viable couple enjoying intimate time before embarking on domestic life together.

Sexuality/gay/othering

Subjectivity 'and the role it plays' has been a strong debate in feminist theory. Judith Butler argues that subjects are constituted in, and not situated within, social settings or contexts. Subjects are created in power structures and there is no subjectivity outside of a power environment (Butler 2002). I make mention of this to situate the understanding of subjectivity debates around identities within social groupings. Simone de Beauvior's declaration: "He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (Chanter 2001: 28), indicates how women have been systematically subordinated. "In Western culture the mind and reason are coded masculine whereas the body and emotion are coded feminine" (Paul 2006: 7). In other words, if women identify with the rational mind they are then inducing a masculine image. This social grouping is an important underlying nuance of the exhibition which underlines the censuring and stigmatising of the feminine.

Sexual orientation is also a concern of feminism as a social and political movement. "*2017 This year changed so much, the person I thought I loved left me for another woman (I'm a gay bitch) She lied. I still love her. Always will*".

The feedback mechanisms for the comments from the mannequin evinced different intersecting considerations, processes and structures which in turn, influenced issues of diversity and inequality.

The range of curators' comments above shows the diffuse and varied nature of their different perspectives and approaches to the feminist exhibition themes.

4.5 Guided Talks – Visitors' Comments

To enter into an exhibition curated to provoke a particular discussion requires an act of the imagination on the part of the audience. When a viewer first looks at an artwork the particulars are comprehended and then the viewer has to participate in the work and in the other works placed close by. The exhibition is somehow now perceived by the viewer to be landscape, and s/he is part of it. The space is now a subjective world made meaningful by cognition, belief, culture, intuition, imagination and sensation. The experience can be further enhanced by interpretation through a

guided talk. In *Beauty & its Beasts* this was not a one-sided experience but an experience where I, as the tour guide, and the visitors participated in a conversation.

During the period the exhibition was on view I (as researcher) conducted a number of guided talks (Public Guided Talks – Visitors' Comments 2017) Ethnographic study, as discussed in the methodology chapter, provided a direction to the research. Ethnographic study assists with making the invisible visible and the familiar strange in the field site (Sabeti 2017). I hosted a number of senior school groups with their teachers and on more than one occasion two schools joined together for a talk so a new dynamic was at play in the audience. The talks were designed to last one hour but on every tour the length of time extended to one and a half or two hours. This was due to the format I applied; the talks were conversational and at times visitors interpolated, expressing diverse viewpoints and asking questions. I began each talk with an explanation of the physicality of the building and the gallery spaces and the entry into the space through the beaded curtain. I found this to be the best way to introduce the viewers into the feminist content of the exhibition. I researched all the fictional and real-life women on display in the exhibition so that I was able to tell stories about pioneering women and feminist issues and the feminist movement.

The storytelling was an important element in the tour because it epitomised the struggle women have had to endure. Storytelling has a democratic potential and has developed within feminist democratic theory to highlight power relations and cultural conventions. The 'personal is political' can illustrate how stories are used to make meaning. To make an example I used the theme, *A Mother's Love*, to overturn the perception of Queen Victoria's role (as ruler of a 'mighty' empire) to show a personal side to this monarch. I spoke of Victoria's complicated relationship with food. Victoria was an iconic figure to colonialism and, juxtaposed against Sibande's Sophie, the conversation does invoke a postcolonial conversation. Food historian Annie Gray (Anon 2017) revealed in an interview how food was central to Victoria's life. Forced onto a diet as a child by her mother she subsequently used food as a means of control and became anorexic. As an adult she gorged on food and ate whatever she liked, whenever she liked. When Victoria lost her husband Albert and became the widow of Windsor, she fell into deep depression, added quite a few extra pounds and

this adds a personal edge to her colonial persona. Somehow, the knowledge that she had failings reveals a vulnerable side.

One of my collaborators also took his UNISA students, along with two other lecturers, on a walkabout and offered up information not dissimilar to my own experiences of the guided tours. Works on the exhibition raised issues, particularly European photographers photographing African subjects. 'Othering' was a contentious concern about Melanie Cleary's *New Year's Day* (Figures 18, 19 and 20), with debate around the right of the artist to present photographs of young African girls while the photographer herself is a European woman. According to a few participants on the walkabout, the photographer profiteered on the sale of the works to the gallery and suggested the photographer was in some ways continuing a colonial exploitation by voyeuristically representing the 'other' in an exotic frame. This position was taken up by participants in three guided tours and again in the UNISA tour. David Goldblatt's *Zondi, Soweto 1970* (Figure 49), raised a similar debate where issues around voyeurism and the gaze were debated in addition to the ghettoization of framing race groups in a sexual social position.

The same series of photographs evoked a feminist discussion, in one of the tour groups, around the lexicon associated with photography. The use of the word 'shot' points to the violent potential of photography and speaks to a conflict with the masculine association with the camera. Using a reflexive approach, the conversation with this group regarded aggression as implicit in the photographic nomenclature.

Another work that gave rise to heated contention was Beauty Ndlovu's *Virgin Test* (Figure 38). I found this so interesting because generally the audience walked past this work until attention was drawn to the title and the context. Thereafter multiple voices became involved, traditionalists in the defence of cultural practices, and at the other end of the scale, woman's rights activists who consider the practice archaic and a violation of women's rights. The work itself is a small sculpture composed of fibre and beads and traditionally associated with the era of craft, although these works are now classified 'fine art'. This art/craft conversation raised its head yet again, and debates ensued about the context of the physical material/medium and the framing of the repressed groups in society. Feminism has challenged the hierarchy of different

media and all media in contemporary art practice are now understood to be equally received.

By including works of contemporary history, such as the piece by Fran Saunders titled *Songs of Lamentation for the Widows of Marikana* (Figure 5), emphasis was given to the materials used and the handcrafted discipline of crochet. Again, this medium was the subject of much lively discussion about the notion of twinning feminism and the tradition of feminine craftwork. The work suspended in space from a butcher's meat hook reiterated the predicament of the women of Marikana who have been left to raise children and find an economic space in a hostile environment. This metaphorical discord resonated especially with the school groups of girls who were largely from middle-income families (as evidenced in the visitor attendance register filled by schools for the purposes of recording the number of people) but were now faced with uncomfortable South African realities.

I noted strong and diverse reactions to Turiya Magadlela's (Figure 13) work, where I had an encounter with an older white male visitor who was extremely dismissive and angry about the work, and that money has been paid to add this to the Durban Art Gallery's collection. Composed of pantyhose, the work speaks directly to intimate materiality. He would not be drawn as to whether his strong reaction was to the simplicity of the work which he described as "*piece of rubbish*". On the other hand, a young female Muslim visitor said she understood it to be a metaphor for a broken hymen.

The tours elicited a number of questions for me. How do the curator's and the teacher's approaches differ in terms of the exhibition interpretation? What kind of knowledge should the curator be intending to produce? What alternate formats can be used to convey knowledge to high school groups and should knowledge be conveyed differently to adult groups? Should the gallery teaching format be a democratic and participatory process? What is the difference between the collective and the individual experience to the artwork? How can a structure be created to foster creativity and curiosity? While these questions may seem infinite, what this did for me was to open a channel of issues to be explored with the education officers at the gallery and the school teachers. As a tool of inquiry, the mechanism of guided

tours made me cognisant of the participants' different cultural, political, economic and societal contexts that should be taken into consideration.

The talks can be regarded as having confirmed the mannequin comments in terms of themes of gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, and religion, among others. The third and fourth data sources – the mannequin and the guided talks – both answer the question I posed about the evidence needed to gauge public critical awareness of feminist issues resulting from the exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts.*

Sections 4. 5 (The Mannequin) and 4.6 (Guided Talks – Visitors' Comments) answer the second research question posed in this study:

- What evidence is needed to gauge public critical awareness of feminist issues resulting from the exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts: has the female stereotype changed?*

Both these data sources allowed visitors to experience the exhibition, reflect on it and comment without fear of exposure, especially when intimate and confessional remarks were made through the medium of anonymous mannequin notes. It may be that the opportunity to respond in writing in a very personal way allowed visitors the freedom to engage verbally with a curator during the guided exhibition talks.

The four data sources served to answer research question three which is *What is the significance of Beauty & its Beasts for reflexive curatorial practice*? This is discussed in the concluding section.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the outcome of this exhibition by discussing four sources as feedback mechanisms of data analysis. Multiple data sources revealed corroboration, rich integration and contradiction.

There is an important complementarity between the curatorial collaborator data and the visitors' data because they talk to the same issues, for example, sexual difference, gender, blackness, motherhood, social strata and cultural groupings, and they are, therefore, complementary.

The data sources each contained multifacted and divergent views on feminism but, as revealed by the investigation, they were all multifacted in an intersectional way. Intersectionality has been theorised as advancing an understanding of human beings as positioned by the different interaction of social locations within a context of connected systems and power structures (Hulko 2009; Dhamoom 2011; Grace 2011). Each data source intersects repeatedly so each mechanism i.e. the commentaries by the curatorial collaborators, the mannequin and the guided talks intersect concerns like gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, religion etc.

In summary, it has become strongly evident that intersectionality is the key component of collaboration and the resulting selection of works for the exhibition had been viewed through the multifaceted lenses of the various voices, revealing that through "such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression, shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy, are created" (Hankivsky 2014: 2). In the aftermath of this curatorial process, it is apposite to ask how the curatorial collaborators were changed. The collaborative curatorial dynamic worked on the project but the project worked on the collaborators, proving the dynamic nature of this style of curation. This diversity is never the outcome of singular factors which instead are the result of the intersections of different societal positions and power relations. Diversity is present in the feedback from the layperson i.e. the public response, and the authority or professional i.e. the Collaboration, as well as the exchanges arising from the guided talks. Each feedback mechanism accrues to 'curatorial practice as reflexive inquiry'.

Considering the summaries of data sources, the curator comments on collaboration, the curator comments on exhibition themes, mannequin comments and the analysis of the guided tours, the data themes are complementary and therefore can be integrated. The four data sources show an intersectional response because all the different factors are being linked and can be further linked. This can also be said about the Collaboration who broadened reflexively and opened up to the process.

Figure 81 Illustrated are how the data sources answered the research questions

The directions encountered in the comments crossed paths showing feminism is intersectional, which is the understanding I as a curator learned from this exhibition. The understanding I have gained from feminist reflexivity will influence how I will approach curation in the future. More particularly, if I curate exhibitions dealing with a public discourse, such as feminism, race, gender, colonialism or post-colonialism, that is inherently intersectional, I will practice a collaborative and reflexive approach. Equally important, the curatorial strategy and conceptualisation when dealing specifically with public discourses is to plan and to think intersectionally to fully explore these avenues of dialogue.

In the next chapter I discuss the implications of these findings for curatorial practice as reflexive inquiry.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

To conclude this study, I discuss how the research questions are answered by calling on the findings described in Chapter Four. Inferences are drawn from these findings in order to answer the questions posed for the research. To support the conclusion, I show how each chapter contributes to the overall argument. I then look at limitations of the study and finally I indicate possibilities for further research.

The Durban City Hall was erected to promote the colonial socio-political climate and serve interests in European values and culture. The intention of the exhibition was to destabilise and resist the masculine context.

The exhibition comprised a range of visual representations of issues women encounter in their daily life. A feminist position was applied to seek an alternative approach to their curation. The content of the exhibition was framed through a feminist lens to address the complex and diverse social role of women within a South African context.

From the outset I have seen the role of the museum curator as invested in social and political debate that has community relevance. I also believe there is need in our current environment to embark on alternative curatorial approaches to open up social, community and civic perspectives. The making of the exhibition was to challenge and explore a relevant topic affecting society. This study also addressed the potential hierarchical relationship between the curator and the audience by encouraging social engagement with the exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts.*Such engagement was intentionally planned for in the collaborative and reflexive planning of this exhibition.

5.1 Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this research was to explore curatorial practice through reflexive enquiry into an art museum exhibition.

- How can curatorial collaboration foster curatorial reflexivity?

- What evidence is needed to gauge public critical awareness of feminist issues resulting from the exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts: has the female stereotype changed?*
- What is the significance of *Beauty & its Beasts: has the female stereotype changed?* for reflexive curatorial practice?

To answer these questions, I mounted *Beauty & its Beasts* using exhibition content and the gallery space to challenge conceptions of the role of women in society. The curatorial aim was to conceptually frame and construct the exhibition in such a way as to interrogate an institution constructed on the basis of a colonial, patriarchal worldview.

Curatorial collaboration was a strategy for reflexive debate around conceptualisation, selection, placement and spatial experience of the exhibition by visitors. The exhibition presented ideas to consider and experiences of engagement with feminist issues.

5.2 Development of the Research Inquiry

A brief recapitulation of the chapter arguments is given here, in order to link conclusions with the foregoing arguments and to put conclusions in perspective.

5.2.1 The Literature Review

The literature review engages theoretical viewpoints such as reflexivity, curation, patriarchy, colonialism and feminism to motivate for and shape the curation of an exhibition as a research inquiry.

The literature review enables different interpretations of ‘curator’ to ultimately define my own interpretation, particularly in an institutional situation. A survey of literature defines the larger context of reflexive feminism in relation to the essence of curatorial practice. Feminism and curatorship are positioned within the South African context and reflexivity within this paradigm validates the approach to the methodology. The resulting collaborative curation takes a reflexive view of curation in general, and the feminist topic of the exhibition in particular. The Durban Art Gallery is a social space and the building was constructed as a colonial place.

The above theoretical aspects informed the collaborative curation of the *Beauty & its Beasts* exhibition. The literature review underlines the importance of revisioning the masculine and patriarchal space by mounting an exhibition that visits feminisms. The exhibition itself is a medium or form to mobilise artworks as activist objects to stimulate feminist issues.

5.2.2 Research Methodology

The methodology chapter argues for the curation of the exhibition and the exhibition event itself as methods for generating and analysing data. Ethnographic characteristics of the gallery space as a field research setting in which beliefs and life experiences are brought to light are described. Data sources obtained from the collaborative curatorial approach and visitors' responses to the exhibition are detailed.

5.2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis used four data sources to address the three research questions. Overall, the data analysis showed that the Collaboration promoted reflexivity and that both curators and visitors took a varied, multifaceted view of the feminist theme of the exhibition. This was considered to represent an intersectional exhibition effect.

5.3 Reflection of Key Findings

Here I seek to draw conclusions based on findings, and to connect these conclusions to the research stages and arguments presented above.

This case study centred on a collaborative conceptualisation of *Beauty & its Beasts* and a collaborative implementation of all aspects of the exhibition. Further, the elicitation of public response was collaboratively planned. These dimensions of curatorial practice formed the nexus of the reflexive inquiry of the case study.

5.3.1 Intersectional Curation

As mentioned in Chapter Four the curatorial approach of this case study generated intersectional responses to feminist themes in the exhibition *Beauty & its Beasts.* An intersectional response is desirable in order to promote critical citizenry on the part of

the public. In this regard it can be claimed that visitors were faced with unfamiliar yet stimulating art objects.

Intersectionality is an approach positioned to understand human differences and similarities across a wide variety of groups. It advances an understanding of human beings as positioned by the different interaction of social locations within a context of connected systems and power structures (Hulko 2009; Dhamoom 2011; Grace 2011). It also offers a more advanced way of analysing difference by focusing on the associations between determinants and mutually-established processes that produce difference. A multiple approach to analysing difference considers more than one factor. A unitary perspective focuses on one primary difference as a marker to explain a social issue but ignores the relationships and influences within these issues.

An intersectional perspective reveals how bias, injustice, and discrimination are never the consequence of a single circumstance but rather the intersections of diverse social locations, power relations and experiences. Intersectionality is based on several salient principles which acknowledge that humanity is multi-dimensional and complex and that lived realities are moulded by disparate circumstances. Social issues are complexities that need investigation. Relationships and power systems change over time and social locations are different in geographic positions. Privilege and oppression are experienced simultaneously, I take my own position as an example: white privilege and woman however woman in patriarchal circumstance. The positive aspect of an intersectional approach is the positioning towards transformation and constructing unions among diverse groups towards an alliance of social justice.

Where controversial social topics form the impetus for an exhibition an intersectional response is desirable and collaborative curation can be seen as the best way of achieving this. Intersectionality can expose fundamental social problems and how human beings are shaped through the interaction of systems and structures of power, of religion, media, politics and the economy.

5.3.2 Curatorial Reflexivity

With hindsight the reflexive strategy of the Collaboration was intersectionally conceived and therefore it is not surprising that the exhibition elicited richly-varied public responses. This is really a question of the curatorial willingness to be informed by the public instead of regarding curators as orchestrating the expression of societal discourses.

It becomes evident that the curation of exhibitions that tackle controversial issues necessarily requires reflexivity on the part of curators if public reflexivity is also to be stimulated. Where there is a need to deepen public awareness of issues such as decolonialisation, transgender rights, living 'off the grid', or recycling, repurposing, upcycling as ecological concerns, the ability to understand these issues in multiple ways, as they affect multiple social concerns, is crucial.

5.3.3 Collaboration

Through the experience of *Beauty & its Beasts* my curatorial approach has been broadened by achieving greater insight into the curatorial process through collaboration. The curatorial options and objectives that are possible have been exposed through a collaborative influence. Having always had the power in my own curatorial projects I initially found it difficult to work collaboratively yet I can say at the end of this process my position has shifted to that of critically unpacking the feedback and the debate involved with professional and public engagement. Public interest should also be considered from varied and contradictory viewpoints.

Once again it becomes obvious that reflexivity is the pivotal element of collaboration.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

In the paragraph above of key findings I refer to myself as a white, middle-class woman whose experience of the world is confined and limited.

I pursued a reflexive encounter by broadening the environment by means of curatorial collaborators. Collaborators enabled a platform to expand racial, cultural, class and gender perspectives within this particular exhibition space.

A limitation in the Collaboration was that the sole male voice was European, and my efforts to attract the participation of a young African man in his twenties were unsuccessful. The racial composition of the Collaboration could also be viewed as a limitation in that it was largely European (one third was composed of African and Indian participants who comprise 80-90% of South Africa's population) and thus potentially could have represented a historically more privileged point of view.

I purposely chose a large group with which to collaborate but this became a limitation. The larger group proved somewhat unwieldy, complicating the ethnographic observation and collection of information. The group dynamic needed active managing and to ensure that all voices were equally represented, I asked every person to write and provide personal comments which are discussed in the findings chapter.

Time constraints impacted the extent of the curatorial collaborators' availability and thus inputs, which resulted in many aspects of the exhibition being crafted by myself and presented to the curatorial collaborators for acceptance or change, rather than originating from the broader base I had envisaged.

Durban Art Gallery's collection, in itself, was another limitation. Although the collections of the Durban Art Gallery comprise a vast range of interests from the colonial era up to the current time, the range of artworks selected for the exhibition revealed gaps in the service of feminist issues, resulting in the need to borrow from sister institutions. Fortunately, these loans secured significant representations and the limitation of suitable material within the institution was effectively addressed.

5.5 Potential Research Possibilities

I have discovered that gaps exist in South African museums' archival records of exhibition history, with reference specifically to floor plans, works included in exhibitions, the spatial arrangement of exhibition forms and how exhibitions have been staged. In the future in my own curatorial work I will archive the presentation of this history for the museum library files and this will provide a rich curatorial resource.

Curatorial reflexive action is reflexive in that it attends to the world of actions and effects. This case study provided a means of feedback from visitors in intersectional

ways through the mannequin and the guided talks. Research could be conducted in civic structures such as schools, health clinics and churches in order to find out what additional issues might be explored, taking intersectionality into account. This is further research that I perceive can inspire much engagement and thus address the cultural capital or the lack of societal mobility in the gallery visitor.

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APPENDIX 1

The Director and Staff of the
Durban Art Gallery invite you to
the opening of

Beauty & its Beasts

Has the female stereotype changed?

The exhibition will be opened by
Lliane Loots, Lecturer in Drama
and Performance Studies,
and Artistic Director of
Flatfoot Dance Company

on Thursday 30th March 2017 at 18:00
The exhibition closes on 28th May 2017

Durban Art Gallery
2nd Floor, City Hall,
Anton Lembede Street, Durban

APPENDIX 2

Beauty & its Beasts

has the female stereotype changed?

What's in a stereotype, it's a label to enhance or reduce an ego, and rarely one's own choice. Some stereotypes are flattering but more often they are used to insult or belittle. Defined as: a fixed, exaggerated and preconceived description about a certain type of person, group or society, it's a notion based on prejudice rather than fact which by repetition and with time becomes fixed in people's minds.

Stereotypes are born in popular culture and have a strong connection to language and graphic design. TV, Social Media, magazines, internet, music and newspapers are the most influential practitioners of stereotyping and wield enormous power over this projection.

Stereotypes can only exist as singular incontrovertible truths and are vulnerable to interpretation and analysis, processes that might cleave the monolithic belief into several indefensible parts. This curatorial approach was thus designed to involve many voices, predominantly women, who would bring multifarious influences in an attempt firstly to neutralize the perception of the artist/curator as genius, a phallocentric tradition and secondly to shatter the crystalline integrity of stereotypical representations of women.

The works on view were selected primarily from the collections of the Durban Art Gallery and where gaps were identified works have been borrowed from other collections. The viewer will be guided by the wall text identifying themes and it is here the voices of the collaborators bring resonance and add strata to the selections.

The exhibition is designed to stimulate contemplation about women both as subjects and as artists and raise questions about the way we create, perpetuate or allow stereotypes.