Between Union and Liberation
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Women Artists in South Africa 1910–1994

Edited by
Marion Arnold and
Brenda Schmahmann
Contents

List of Plates vi
List of Figures vii
List of Contributors xii
Acknowledgements xiv

1 Visual Culture in Context: The Implications of Union and Liberation
   Marion Arnold 1

2 Florence Phillips, Patronage and the Arts at the Time of Union
   Jillian Carman 33

3 European Modernism and African Domicile: Women Painters and the Search for Identity
   Marion Arnold 51

4 Constance Stuart Larrabee’s Photographs of the Ndzundza Ndebele: Performance and History Beyond the Modernist Frame
   Brenda Danilowitz 71

5 Art, Gender Ideology and Afrikaner Nationalism – A Case Study
   Liese van der Watt 94

6 Technologies and Transformations: Baskets, Women and Change in Twentieth-Century KwaZulu-Natal
   Nessa Leibhammer 111

7 Breaking the Mould: Women Ceramists in KwaZulu-Natal
   Wilma Cruise 132

8 On Pins and Needles: Gender Politics and Embroidery Projects Before the First Democratic Election
   Brenda Schmahmann 152

9 Narratives of Migration in the Works of Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Sebidi
   Jacqueline Nolte 174

10 Representing Regulation – Rendering Resistance: Female Bodies in the Art of Penny Siopis
    Brenda Schmahmann 196

Index 223
List of Plates

(between pages 32 and 33)

1 Bertha Everard, *Looking Towards Swaziland*, 76 × 102 cm (30 × 40 inches), oil on canvas, c.1920/21, Collection of the Pretoria Art Museum.

2 Irma Stern, *Bibi Azziza Biata Jaffer*, 91.7 × 84.8 cm (36 × 33½ inches), oil on canvas, 1939, Collection of the Rupert Art Foundation, Stellenbosch, Republic of South Africa.


4 Salphina Maluleke (of Chivirika embroidery project), *Crocodile, Trees and Two Birds*, 147 × 110 cm (57½ × 43½ inches), embroidery on black cotton, c. late 1980s, Private collection. Photograph by Obie Oberholzer.

5 Mmakgabo (Helen) Sebidi, *Modern Marriage*, 183.7 × 267.2 cm (72½ × 105½ inches), oil on canvas, 1988, Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery.


7 Penny Siopis, *Embellishments (detail)*, 150 cm × 202 cm (59 × 79½ inches), oil and plastic ballerinas on canvas, 1982, Collection of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Photograph by Wayne Oosthuizen.

List of Figures

1.1 South Africa in 1910. 2
1.2 South Africa in 1982. 8
1.3 South Africa in 2003. 10
1.4 Regina Buthelezi, Once There Came a Terrible Beast, 145 × 257 cm (57 × 101.2 inches), tapestry, c.1968, Collection Durban Art Gallery.
1.5 Ijogolo (bridal apron), Ndebele, South Africa, (h) 63 cm × (w) 72 cm (24.8 × 28.3 inches), hide, beads, c.1910, Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Galleries). Photograph by Wayne Oosthuizen.
1.6 Gladys Mgudlandlu, Landscape, 61.9 × 60.9 cm (24.4 × 24 inches), gouache on paper, 1962, MTN Art Collection, Johannesburg.
1.7 Now You Have Touched the Women You Have Struck a Rock, 58 × 40 cm (22 3/4 × 15 3/4 inches), poster designed by Judy Seidman, silkscreened on paper by Medu, 1981, South African History Archive in Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
1.8 Wilma Cruise and Marcus Holmes, Strike The Woman Strike The Rock: Wathint' Abafazi Wathint' Imbokodo, Monument to the Women of South Africa, 2000, grinding stone, part of the installation at the Union Buildings, Pretoria. Photograph by Adam Cruise.

2.1 Antonio Macini, Portrait of Lady Phillips, 25.5 × 20.4 cm (10 × 8 inches), oil on canvas, 1909, Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery.
3.1 Bertha Everard, The New Furrow, 88 × 156 cm (34 1/2 × 61 1/2 inches), oil on canvas, early 1930s, Collection of the Pretoria Art Museum.
3.2 Irma Stern, Three Swazi Girls, 98 × 97.5 cm (38 1/2 × 38 1/2 inches), oil on canvas, 1925, Collection of the Irma Stern Museum, University of Cape Town.
3.3 Irma Stern, Zanzibari Dancer of the Lelemama, 63 × 47.5 cm (24 1/4 × 18 1/4 inches), charcoal on paper, 1939, Collection of the Pretoria Art Museum.
LIST OF FIGURES

4.1 Constance Stuart Larrabee, Portrait of Ndebele Woman, South Africa, photograph, between 1936 and 1949, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Image no. EEPA 1998-060528. 72

4.2 Cover of Natural History LVIII (9), November 1949. 77

4.3 Constance Stuart Larrabee, Ndebele Woman, South Africa, photograph, between 1936 and 1949, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Image no. EEPA 1998-060531. 79

4.4 Constance Stuart Larrabee, Man Taking Photograph of Ndebele People, South Africa, photograph, between 1936 and 1949, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Image no. EEPA 1998-060576. 82


4.6 Constance Stuart Larrabee, Area near a Ndebele Homestead, South Africa, photograph, between 1936 and 1949, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Image no. EEPA 1998-060876. 86

4.7 Unknown photographer, Constance Stuart Larrabee with Ndebele Men, South Africa, photograph, between 1936 and 1949, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Image no. EEPA 1998-060866. 87


5.1 Anton Kannemeyer (alias ‘Joe Dog’), Seks Dwelms Geweld Plesier, 14 × 10 cm (5½ × 4 inches), postcard, 1995. 95

5.2 Anton van Wouw, Vrouemonument (Women’s Monument), over life size, bronze, 1913. Photograph by Paul Mills. 98

5.3 Members of the Woman and Mother Movement of the Afrikaanse Taal-en Kultuurvereniging (embroidery) and W.H. Coetzer (design), Birthday, 91.5 cm (36 inches) high, wool on tapestry gauze, 1952–60, Collection of the Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria. 101
5.4 Members of the Woman and Mother Movement of the Afrikaanse Taal-en Kultuurvereniging (embroidery) and W.H. Coetzer (design), *Exodus*, 91.5 cm (36 inches) high, wool on tapestry gauze, 1952–60, Collection of the Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria.

5.5 Members of the Woman and Mother Movement of the Afrikaanse Taal-en Kultuurvereniging (embroidery) and W.H. Coetzer (design), *Vegkop*, 91.5 cm (36 inches) high, wool on tapestry gauze, 1952–60, Collection of the Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria.

5.6 Members of the Woman and Mother Movement of the Afrikaanse Taal-en Kultuurvereniging (embroidery) and W.H. Coetzer (design), *Symbolic Résumé*, 91.5 cm (36 inches) high, wool on tapestry gauze, 1952–60, Collection of the Voortrekker Monument, Pretoria.


6.2 Beauty Batembile Ngxongo, coiled basket, MTN Collection, Johannesburg.


7.1 Nesta Nala, *Beerpot (Ukhamiba)*, 32 × 39 cm (12 1/2 × 15 1/4 inches), earthenware, c.1990, Private collection. Photograph by Doreen Hemp.

7.2 Joel Sibisi, wheel formed pot, about 29 cm (11 1/2 inches), reduced stoneware, c.1990. Photograph by Doreen Hemp.

7.3 Dinah Molefe, untitled anthropomorphic pots possibly representing a Zulu bride and groom, 27 × 17.5 cm and 26 × 17.5 cm (10 1/2 × 7 inches and 10 1/4 × 7 inches), reduced stoneware, 1982, Private collection. Photograph by Doreen Hemp.


8.1 Unknown artist of Xihoko project, *Two Peacocks*, 230 cm × 225 cm (90 1/2 × 88 1/2 inches), embroidery on white cotton cloth, 1990, Private collection. Photograph by Obie Oberholzer.
8.2 Salphina Maluleke (of Chivirika embroidery project), *Nceka*, 100 × 143 cm (39 1/4 × 56 1/4 inches), embroidery on ‘Nduna’ mielie meal bags, 1980s, Private collection. Photograph by Obie Oberholzer.

8.3 Unknown artist of Kaross Workers project (‘Polina’), *Chicken*, 47 × 48 cm (18 1/2 × 19 inches) excluding fringe, embroidery on black cotton cloth, Private collection. Photograph by Obie Oberholzer.


9.1 Noria Mabasa holding clay relief sculpture. Photograph by Jacqueline Nolte.

9.2 Mmakgabo (Helen) Sebidi, *At the Party*, 73 × 51 cm (28 3/4 × 20 inches), oil on board, 1985, Sasol Collection, Johannesburg.


10.1 Penny Siopis, *Embellishments*, 150 cm × 202 cm (59 × 79 1/2 inches), oil and plastic ballerinas on canvas, 1982, Collection of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Photograph by Wayne Oosthuizen.

10.2 Penny Siopis, *Melancholia*, 197.5 × 175.5 cm (77 1/4 × 69 inches), oil on canvas, 1986, Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

LIST OF FIGURES

10.4 Penny Siopis, *Dora and the Other Woman*, 153 × 120 cm
(60 1/4 × 47 1/4 inches), pastel on paper, 1988, Private collection. Image cropped on left.

10.5 Figure of *Nubia* outside the Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Photograph by Penny Siopis in 1988.

10.6 Penny Siopis, *Cape of Good Hope – ‘A History Painting’*, 182 × 123.9 cm (71 1/2 × 48 3/4 inches), oil, wax and collage on board, 1989–90, Private collection.
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The editors of this publication had a vision: we wanted to bring the work and lives of South African women artists to the attention of the western world. Although South Africa was readmitted to the world community in 1994, long years of political and cultural isolation had curtailed the circulation of information about twentieth-century South African women artists. Their stories need to be told to an audience beyond Africa and the works they made should be visible. This book attempts to address these issues.

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Marion Arnold and Brenda Schmahmann
CHAPTER ONE

Visual Culture in Context
The Implications of Union and Liberation

MARION ARNOLD

‘I believe that an attempt to base our national life on distinctions of race and colour . . . will . . . prove fatal to us’.

Union is a seemingly innocuous word but it has a sting and Olive Schreiner (1855–1920), well-known feminist, writer and activist, foresaw the dangers that lay ahead for a proposed Union of South Africa. The political process of bringing parts together is seldom devoid of tension as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics all discovered after attempting to establish national identities after territorial mergers. The Union of South Africa was created in 1910 and, until liberation from apartheid rule in 1994, successive white minority governments tried to forge a nation, on their own terms, from fractious parts and peoples with radically different histories.1

The British Parliament established its new African dominion from four colonies, the Cape, Natal, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, the last two being former independent Boer states that had fought Great Britain in the Second South African (Anglo-Boer) War (1899–1902). After an election in 1910, in which only men voted, General Louis Botha (1862–1919) became Prime Minister of a country that was anything but unified politically, although it comprised a logical geographical entity (Fig. 1.1). The population was composed of white settlers, predominantly of Dutch, British and French Huguenot ancestry, nine major black groups – Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Venda, Sotho, Ndebele, Tsonga, Swazi, Pedi2 – as well as a mixed race, ‘coloured’3 group, and people of Asian, mainly Indian, ancestry. The people spoke English, the ‘Dutch’ tongue that officially became Afrikaans in 1925 and a variety of black languages, while the dominant religions were Christianity, indigenous African religions, Islam and Hinduism.4

After Union, three cities were accorded capital status: Cape Town (the Mother City) became the legislative capital, Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State was the judicial capital, and Pretoria, the city from which the Boer leader Paul Kruger (1825–1904) had ruled the South African Republic, was proclaimed the administrative capital.5 It was decided to construct new
Fig. 1.1 South Africa in 1910.
administrative buildings in Pretoria and the architect Herbert Baker (1862–1946) seized the opportunity to design a symbol of unity. He chose a prime hill site overlooking Pretoria and his monumental buildings, redolent with imperial grandeur, were completed in 1913.

Although stylized, Rossinah Maepa’s representation of the Union Buildings, *New South African Rule* (c.1993–94; see jacket illustration and Fig. 8.5), shows their impressive structure and distinctive profile. Between the semicircular frontage of the building are two towers; Baker intended them to represent unity between the Afrikaners and English. The prime aim of Union had, after all, been to heal the deep rift between white South Africans rather than to address black–white relations. Always fraught with tension, attempts at achieving unity between Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans, let alone black and white communities, were finally quashed in 1948 when the Afrikaner Nationalist government assumed power under Dr D.F. Malan (1874–1959).

By the 1950s, the concept of union no longer had any meaning within South Africa. The Nationalist government was systematically introducing apartheid and enforcing its separatist ideology in legislation that promoted racial discrimination and divided black and white people socially and territorially. Moreover, the government resented the historical relationship between the Union and the United Kingdom and decided to sever the ties. On 31 May 1961 South Africa became a republic and ceased to be a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Britain’s former dominion, long accustomed to geographical separation from Europe, drifted into political isolation, a condition that was exacerbated as the world community condemned apartheid and initiated economic sanctions and academic, cultural and sporting boycotts.

The Nationalists ruled South Africa from 1948 until 1994 when peaceful, democratic, adult suffrage elections were held. Nelson Mandela (b.1918), who is identified in Maepa’s enchanting embroidery portrait by his name rather than his distinctive appearance, was inaugurated as the first black President of the Republic of South Africa at the Union Buildings on 10 May. The ceremony took place amidst optimism that unity would finally be achieved as the ‘new South Africa’ was born and the ‘rainbow people’ (Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s memorable phrase) initiated a process of reconciliation. In her embroidery, Maepa updates the symbolism of the Union Buildings by introducing the new, colourful South African flag that flies above them.

Appraising the period between Union in 1910 and liberation from white minority rule in 1994, it is apparent that South Africa embarked on a process of nation building that was flawed from the outset by hostility between English- and Afrikaans-speaking Europeans, and by black–white racial tension. Although the race issue had dominated South African life from the time of European settlement at the Cape in 1652, after the 1948 election racial
classification permeated and affected every level of political and social interaction. From the 1950s the Nationalist government systematically entrenched racism in the legislation of a non-democratic society that promoted inequality and enforced separation.

Residential apartheid was strictly administered and, under the Group Areas Act, the government also controlled segregation in places of entertainment, libraries and even churches in white areas. Access to buildings such as post offices and shops was established by separate entrances, while public transport, benches and beaches bore the signs ‘Europeans’ and ‘Non-Europeans’. There were separate health facilities and schools for different population groups and, after 1957, apartheid was extended to university education with the founding of four ethnic university colleges.8 Given the fact that it was difficult to make meaningful daily contact across the colour barrier, it was not surprising that women were unable to share experiences ranging from childbirth to domestic violence and patriarchal oppression.9 In effect, apartheid not only divided people along racial lines but also suppressed the politics of gender while strengthening patriarchal power and attitudes: discrimination against women was masked by racial discrimination.

The women’s movement was slow to gain credibility in South Africa. Both white and black men mounted propaganda against it: white people were informed that die swart gevaar (the black threat) was the primary danger while black people were told that ‘a woman’s place is in the struggle’. This popular catchphrase appeared on 1980s resistance posters and although the visual language of the struggle posters included women, they were invariably placed behind their male comrades.10 Individuals were urged to see race, not gender, as their primary identity because race determined experiences of privilege or oppression, opportunity or deprivation, wealth or poverty, freedom of movement or restriction. It promoted or impeded access to education and health facilities, and defined opportunities for personal growth and economic empowerment. Although women’s rights were addressed in the post-liberation 1997 South African constitution, the rule of men continued to prevail nationally, locally and domestically. Furthermore, the horrific level of male violence against women, which characterizes post-1994 South Africa, indicates that liberation is still a concept rather than a reality for many female South African citizens in the twenty-first century.

Politics and Women

When considering the political decisions and events that shaped twentieth-century South African history, some are particularly relevant to understanding women’s lives and their cultural productivity.

In 1908, just prior to Union, the Women’s Enfranchisement League was
established in Cape Town and Olive Schreiner was appointed vice-president.11 In 1911 Schreiner’s important feminist text *Women and Labour* was published12 and in the same year suffragists met in Durban to found the Women’s Enfranchisement Association of the Union (WEAU). In 1912 the African National Congress (ANC) was founded, and the following year the Bantu Women’s League (later the ANC Women’s League) was established within the ANC under the presidency of Charlotte Maxeke (1874–1939). Despite this recognition of black women, the 1919 ANC Constitution denied women full membership and voting rights, and only in 1943 did the organization commit itself to a policy of universal adult suffrage and include women in the definition of ‘adult’.

In 1930 the vote was granted to all white women over the age of 18 but, far from being a liberal gesture made by a government committed to addressing women’s rights, this was an expedient attempt to enfranchise more white voters and dilute the black vote. It successfully reduced the African electorate from 3.1 to 1.4 per cent of the total electorate.13

For black women, and white women with left-wing leanings, the 1948 electoral victory of the National Party inaugurated a period of systematic racial oppression and human rights abuse. In 1952 the ANC launched its Defiance Campaign of civil disobedience against unjust laws and a number of women – black and white – assumed prominent activist roles. Apartheid legislation built on earlier ‘native policy’ such as the Native Land Act (1913), which imposed territorial segregation,14 the Native Affairs Act (1920), which determined political representation, and the Natives (Urban Areas) Act (1923), which controlled urban living. New laws, designed to augment the social engineering policies of apartheid, included the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), the Population Registration Act (1950) and the Group Areas Act (1950). Blatantly racist, these laws determined marital relations, how people were classified (which, in turn, determined social opportunities or restrictions) and where they could live. In short, legislation controlled and policed human contact.

This had profound implications for cultural development since art cannot remain innocent of its circumstances of production and distribution. The Group Areas Act was especially damaging to cultural activities. Black and coloured people were subject to forced removals from areas that the government wanted to develop as white residential zones. Both Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town had multicultural communities and long histories of vibrant cultural activity; this ended when the populations were expelled and buildings were demolished.15

The 1950s apartheid legislation raised political awareness and colour consciousness throughout South Africa, helping to foster a new spirit of cooperation amongst ethnic groups and political organizations which had not automatically become allies merely because they were not Caucasian whites.
A ‘Congress of the People’ was held in June 1955 and from it came the Freedom Charter. Equally important for women was The Women’s Charter, drawn up and adopted on 17 April 1954 at the inaugural conference of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW). The preamble states:

We the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives, Africans, Indians, European and coloured, hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and custom that discriminate against us as women, and that deprive us in any way of our inherent right to the advantages, responsibilities and opportunities that society offer to any one section of the population.

(cited in Barrett, Dawber, Klugman et al., 1985, p. 238)

Referring to ‘National Liberation’, the Charter proclaimed solidarity with men, affirming, ‘we march forward with our men in the struggle for liberation’ (p. 239). Helen Joseph (1905–92), National Secretary of FSAW, commented in 1957, ‘The fundamental struggle of the people is for National Liberation and … any women’s movement that [stands] outside this struggle must stand apart from the mass of women’ (in Walker, 1991, p. xxxi). The struggle drew women into it but made no special acknowledgement of gender issues.

In 1952 a Natives (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) Act required all black women as well as men to carry reference books with personal details. Passbooks were designed to control access to urban areas and in 1956 moves were made to implement the law and issue these documents to black women. Motivated by labour organizations, black women mobilized, burning passbooks and demonstrating publicly. In May 1955 the Women’s Defence of the Constitution League, a largely white anti-apartheid organization, was founded. It was popularly known as the Black Sash. The League’s women, wearing trademark black, mourning sashes, protested courageously against social injustice on innumerable occasions by staging silent vigils in public spaces where they endured verbal abuse.

Apartheid history – and with it, women’s history – is punctuated by events and dates that became engraved upon national consciousness. One of the most memorable occurred on 9 August 1956. Thousands of women attired in traditional dress or the green, black and gold ANC colours marched through Pretoria to the Union Buildings, unwittingly echoing the public spectacle of British suffragette processions decades earlier. The words they uttered, addressing the Prime Minister, have become legendary: ‘Strydom, you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock.’ From then on, women became increasingly active politically and many were arrested, imprisoned, banned and subjected to house arrest. They became part of struggle politics but did not seek to create a women’s liberation movement.

Black activism reached a bloody climax on 21 March 1960 when 69 people were shot dead and 180 were injured at Sharpeville for protesting against the pass laws and increased rentals. In April the ANC and PAC (Pan-Africanist
Congress, founded in 1959) were banned, ending 50 years of peaceful struggle and initiating underground militancy\textsuperscript{30} and repressive retaliatory measures by the state.

The next violent and memorable watershed in resistance politics occurred on 16 June 1976 when an illegal student march in Soweto, near Johannesburg, was stopped by police gunfire. Although the black students had been protesting against the compulsory use of Afrikaans (deemed ‘the language of the oppressor’) as a medium of instruction, resentment was part of widespread antipathy to the inferior schooling offered to black students. Here it should be noted that black education was designed primarily to impart literacy and manual skills; there was little or no art tuition at state schools. Mission schools, the most significant of which was Rorke’s Drift,\textsuperscript{21} played an important role in providing some art tuition. Traditional skills, valued for their assertion of group identity, became a complex and contentious issue when co-opted into school curricula that had been devised and controlled by white, government education officials.

From 1976 onwards, unrest simmered, helping to shape the Black Consciousness Movement and to politicize urban black youth.\textsuperscript{22} The urban black population tested the ingenuity of the Nationalist government. While black labour was required to drive the economy, a permanent black urban population was deemed undesirable. Thus resettlement programmes were disguised as attempts to ‘share’ power with ethnic groups located in their own ‘homelands’. This term is deeply ironic: for many urbanized black and coloured communities the ‘home’ they knew was not the place once inhabited by their forebears, and ‘land’ was something owned only by whites. The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 imposed citizenship (determined on the basis of language and culture) of one of the ‘homelands’ (bantustans) on all black people in the Republic despite the fact that many of them had never resided outside ‘white’ urban areas. Eventually self-government was conferred on homelands and finally ‘independence’ was granted to compliant territories (Fig. 1.2).\textsuperscript{23}

The state’s malevolent manoeuvres with identity led to yet more fragmentation when it devised a new parliamentary system that again co-opted culture to legitimize it. The Tricameral Parliament was an attempt to woo Indian and Coloured communities by offering them opportunities to elect their own members to their own legislative chambers where they could determine issues deemed to be ‘own affairs’.\textsuperscript{24} Loosely speaking, ‘own affairs’ were ‘cultural’ matters. (In South Africa ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ are words fraught with particular instability and innuendo.)

The Tricameral Parliament system stimulated a reaction that led to the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella organization uniting workers’ groups, trade unions, women’s organizations and anti-conscription groups. At last a large opposition block became functional and
Fig. 1.2 South Africa in 1982.
began organizing the civil disobedience campaigns that dominated South African life in the late 1980s. These eventually culminated in the momentous events of the 1990s: the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and SACP (South African Communist Party), the release of political prisoners, lifting of media restrictions and suspension of death sentences.

On 11 February 1990 Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela walked to freedom after 27 years in jail and in 1994 South Africa achieved political liberation under a black president and a government of national unity. The country was re-designed with nine provinces and eleven official languages (Fig. 1.3), a reconfiguration of parts characterized by people of different colours bearing their individual and collective histories. Significantly, the constitution of the new South Africa conferred rights on all citizens, giving women the hope that they might be able to contribute to all aspects of national life.

Visual Culture and Modernity

Throughout the twentieth century South African visual culture evolved steadily against a background of simmering political unrest. However, much of what was achieved within the visual arts failed to be known beyond the country’s borders, especially throughout the years of isolation when South African art was deliberately ignored and excluded from international exhibitions owing to the cultural and academic boycotts. In 1994 academic links were re-established, cultural exchanges were promoted and South Africa was reinserted into the global art community. Although renewed international interest in South African art was welcome, it was often selective, seeking to construct what the West perceived as an authentic black African identity and overlooking the fact that cross-cultural exchanges had shaped the contradictory character of visual production in South Africa.25

To understand contemporary South African art, especially that produced by women, cognisance must be taken of a long history of picture and object making within different communities, and of many convoluted, troubled stories and the ways in which they affected women’s creativity. The years between Union and Liberation provide the art of ‘the new South Africa’ with a context, enabling it to be more securely positioned in relation to its historic and regional origins. It can also be related to art elsewhere in postcolonial Africa as well as being understood within a framework of twenty-first-century postmodern, global pressures and trends.

Although burdened by a weighty political history that inevitably impacted on the visual arts, the period between 1910 and 1994 spans the decades when the country’s economy changed as it came to terms with the imported condition of modernity and processes of modernization. Initiated in the industrialized West, modernization impinged on colonial South Africa
Fig. 1.3 South Africa in 2003.
primarily because Europe needed its colonies to fuel its own economic development. On the receiving end of what they had not negotiated, African countries – especially those colonized by Britain – were compelled to adjust to the exploitative demands of western capitalism.

Compared with Europe, the pace of change in South Africa on all fronts was slow. In the art world, the principles of European modernism were received with suspicion. By 1910 France had experienced twentieth-century avant-gardism in the form of Fauvism and early Cubism, and Germany was witnessing the emergence of Expressionism. All leading European cities had expanded rapidly to accommodate huge population influxes generated by the nineteenth-century industrial revolution and the ‘look’ of modernity was imprinted on spaces and forms as diverse as city design, slum tenements, suburbs, domestic interiors, factories and transport systems. At the time of Union, Cape Town was characterized by 258 years of European history. Devoid of any vestige of modernist style, architecture displayed Dutch gables or British, Georgian-influenced façades, while the new city hall, built in 1905 in pseudo-Renaissance style, contributed assertively to the grandeur associated with imperial buildings.

The South African War speeded up industrialization and Durban’s harbour soon outstripped Cape Town’s because it was more accessible for Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand. Johannesburg, founded after gold was discovered in 1886, was a brash, expansive mining town, known in 1910 for its large community of white, working-class residents. As Egoli – the place of gold – it would become the pulse of South African modernity and drive the economy, exacting a terrible human price from migrant workers, who manned the mines, and their families, who remained in the rural areas.

The divide between rural and urban communities was deep. Outside of urban centres, twentieth-century technology hardly intruded on rural consciousness. White settlers, who had imported vines, grain and sheep from Europe, farmed the richest arable lands and, on poorer lands, black communities practised subsistence farming and maintained long-established communal activities sustained by well-defined gender roles. There was little discernible evidence of the ‘modern age’.

What the West understands as ‘modernism’ – at best always a convoluted concept devoid of a definitive consensus about meaning – cannot be neatly transported to societies on the periphery of western influence and values. The ways in which modern ideas – political, cultural, technological and economic – were assimilated or rejected in South Africa depended on whether particular groups interpreted them as threatening or advantageous, and whether they substantially altered lifestyles for better or worse. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the contest in South Africa was not necessarily between progressive and traditional ideas but, in many instances, between shades of conservatism entwined round concepts of identity espoused by different ethnic
groups, each of which invoked ‘tradition’ to validate its self-concept. As part of this process, those seeking to sustain or acquire political power and status often manipulated visual culture; invariably realism and symbolism were favoured to promote explicit (politicized) meaning, while stylization and metaphor might suggest progressive or oppositional ideologies.

The strongest influence on early twentieth-century white South African art was British but Britain had embraced the visual dynamics of modernism much more cautiously than continental Europe. Just as 1910 was a turning point in South African history, so it was a pivotal year in Britain. The succession of George V signified a final break with Victorian values and social change was evident in the enhanced tempo of life and activities of the suffragette and labour movements. A sense of insecurity was exacerbated at the end of 1910 when the art world was shaken by an exhibition that introduced modern French art to an astonished British public. ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’, organized by art historian, critic and painter Roger Fry, issued a radical challenge to notions of art as a mirror of appearances and a repository of moral values but in South Africa these principles continued to be esteemed.

Ironically, although modern art was of little interest in 1910 in South Africa, Union created an opportunity to raise the profile of the visual arts in the new nation. For art to become visible it needed places of permanent display and Florence Phillips, wife of Randlord, Lionel Phillips, became the driving force behind the foundation of the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Her initiatives led to the acquisition of a core collection of modern, western art funded by the Randlords and assembled by Sir Hugh Lane. Involvement in the arts offered Phillips, whose political instincts were strongly imperialistic, a philanthropic way of ‘civilizing’ Johannesburg’s citizens, supporting working-class and colonial upliftment and, after 1910, promoting nation building.

The decision to collect ‘modern art’ for the new gallery was partly pragmatic; it was less expensive than a second-rate old master collection would have been. But Lane’s choices of ‘modern art’ also indicate how fluid this concept was in 1910. Compared to French modernism and the work with which Roger Fry scandalized London (paintings by Van Gogh and Cézanne drew particularly vitriolic, hostile comments), Lane’s collection was bland, although it contained examples of advanced painting and works by four women artists.

Florence Phillips’s activities at the time of Union raise issues around the implications of ‘modern art’ and ‘national art’ in South Africa and, indeed, the very meaning of ‘art’ itself. Phillips, seeing no reason why crafts should be marginalized, presented the Johannesburg Art Gallery with a valuable collection of old lace, needlework and embroideries, crafts long practised in Europe.

For the earlier part of the twentieth century, South African art was dominated by western aesthetics and the ‘fine arts’ (predominantly figurative painting and sculpture) were theorized as superior to utilitarian crafts. ‘Art’
was believed to provide evidence of the imagination and intellectual fibre of an advanced civilization. It was easy to argue that ‘art’ was the province of white artists, predominantly male, since – on the available evidence – black people produced ‘craft’ and three-dimensional objects such as pots and headrests which, Europeans assumed, were exclusively functional. In Europe, art was displayed in art galleries while artefacts were placed in ethnographic collections and South African curators followed this model. Western art, and western-derived art, displayed in public art galleries throughout much of the twentieth century, persuaded many white South Africans of the superiority of European civilization, while the absence of ‘art’ made by black South Africans seemed to confirm assumptions about their ‘primitive’, unsophisticated nature.

From the time of Union, assessments of European and colonial art were ones of qualitative difference. Imperial paternalism regarded colonial art as backward at worst and transitional at best in relation to advanced western art. Similarly, the colonial mindset of many South African artists saw them deferring to Europe and yearning for international approval. Only with the collapse of modernism, and scepticism about formalism as a critique, was South African art able to assert its multicultural nature, and to theorize its identity in postmodern and postcolonial terms. When it did so, the cultural heritage and activities of all South Africans were acknowledged and the nation’s art was revealed as extraordinarily rich and diverse. It also became obvious that women had always made a substantial contribution to a broad range of visual arts and not merely to modern art, where white women artists had become particularly conspicuous.

In the decades when modernism dominated the South African art world, ‘art’ was promoted in opposition to ‘craft’. Postmodernism, however, embracing inclusiveness, abandoned purist definitions of practice and offered a way of acknowledging cultural creativity and diversity. South African revisionist art historians and exhibition curators, abandoning reliance on western definitions of art, expanded creative concepts of visual culture to accommodate African artefacts and aesthetics as well as objects defined as ‘women’s work’. It is useful to note that in twentieth-century Europe the art/craft debate shifted to art/design, a terminology more suited to highly industrialized societies. However, for much of the twentieth century in South Africa, ‘craft’ continued to acknowledge the characteristics of functional, handmade objects created outside of the requirements of mass production and beyond the competitive demands of industry and manufacturing.

The re-definition of ‘art’ meant that embroidery, tapestry, ceramics and basketry, largely created by women, were collected and accorded a visibility which, for many years, had been obscured by the authority of western modernism and gender-based definitions of cultural work. Although challenges to art terminology can be attributed to the politicization of culture in the 1980s, shifts in collecting practice and patronage begin earlier. In the
late 1960s the South African National Gallery and the Durban Art Gallery both acquired tapestries woven by women who had studied at Rorke’s Drift (Fig. 1.4). It is perhaps significant that tapestry, being predominantly pictorial in its concerns, may well have been easier to assimilate into a collection of paintings and sculptures than objects which belonged to what were termed the ‘functional’, ‘decorative’ or ‘ethnographic’ arts.

While the history of classification and division within South African art endorsed the supposedly superior creativity of certain groups, once modernist ideas were challenged, visual creativity benefited. The economic potential of ‘craft’ facilitated a reassessment of ‘women’s work’, which was identified as a way of initiating personal and financial empowerment, especially for rural black women. From the perspective of art theory, the political nature of culture in colonial and apartheid South Africa emerged strongly when objects of material culture (including beaded clothing; Fig. 1.5) as well as paintings, prints and sculpture were studied in relation to their ethnic and gender origins. Furthermore, their makers began to be identified by name. Individual black women became visible.

Women and Modernism

When considering the relationship between women artists and modernism, it becomes apparent that in some instances the integrity of women’s visual expression, and especially the narration of personal objectives, could be respected.

Fig. 1.4 Regina Buthelezi, *Once There Came a Terrible Beast*, 145 × 257 cm (57 × 101.2 inches), tapestry, c.1968, Collection Durban Art Gallery.
only by refusing to make concessions to modernist styles. However, the antithesis is also true: a self-conscious identification with modernity (and the ‘look’ of modernity) offered opportunities for diversification, the redefinition of female creative roles and routes to self-assertion. In all instances women, confronting the pressures exerted by black or white nationalism as well as patriarchy, were compelled to reach quite personal decisions about the importance of their cultural origins, places of domicile, the economic imperatives of their lives, private and social existence, and the goals of their art-making.

Fig. 1.5 *Ijogolo* (bridal apron), Ndebele, South Africa, (h) 63 cm × (w) 72 cm (24.8 × 28.3 inches), hide, beads, c.1910, Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Galleries). Photograph by Wayne Oosthuizen.
In the early twentieth century, while Florence Phillips led a campaign to promote ties with British culture and the Johannesburg Art Gallery displayed its new core collection of European art, the Women’s Memorial at the Women’s Monument (Vrouemonument) at Bloemfontein drew attention to Afrikaner women. Over 26,000 women and children had died in the British concentration camps during the Second South African (Anglo-Boer) War and a plan to commemorate this loss was proposed. The commission was awarded to the South African sculptor Anton van Wouw (1862–1945), who designed a three-figure, freestanding bronze depicting two women and a child (see Fig. 5.2). The memorial was inaugurated in 1913, and the realist style and symbolism satisfied conservative Afrikaners. Ironically, although the memorial was intended to honour the memory of Afrikaner women, the Women’s Monument project became subsumed by the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism. This remained a potent force and the 1938 centenary of the so-called Great Trek (the emigration of Afrikaners from the Cape to the north) ignited strong emotion in Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. Celebrations culminated in the construction of the Voortrekker Monument near Pretoria. Its associated projects were devoted to narrative, symbolic art, and the tapestry panels woven by Afrikaner women from male-originated designs depict Afrikaner history in highly idealized terms.

While some Afrikaner women artists looked back nostalgically at history, a number of English-speaking South African women artists embraced modernity enthusiastically and their commitment to the present often initiated transgressive, non-stereotypical female behaviour. For sculptor Mary Stainbank (1899–1996), painters Bertha Everard (1873–1965) and Irma Stern (1894–1966), and photographer Constance Stuart Larrabee (1914–2000), art offered opportunities to locate themselves as individuals in the modern world who rejected a conservative art canon. The artworks created by these women demonstrate a tension between their adoption of modernist visual language and African subject matter, and between formal language and social content. Their careers have little in common and much that indicates how difficult it is to use modernism as a prism through which life and art outside Europe can be refracted.

These women, and many others, gained visibility in the art world because they utilized the facilities to which they – as white people – had access. Stainbank, Stern, Everard and Larrabee studied and travelled in Europe and, on returning to South Africa, they exhibited their work publicly in individual and group exhibitions. Although Stern gained a national reputation, Stainbank’s and Everard’s works were undervalued in their lifetimes, and Larrabee left South Africa to settle in the United States. These artists, and others, competed with men under conditions imposed by men. Their art was invariably assessed in formalist terms that contributed to rendering it marginal to political activity and ineffectual in alerting the public to relationships between gender and art practice, and to the politics of representation.
While white women were able to study art in South Africa or Europe, black women had neither the financial resources nor the opportunities under segregated education to study art at South African art schools. The women who created murals on walls of rural homesteads or produced ceramics and baskets were trained within their communities, usually by female family members, and their work, if it reached museum collections, was invariably catalogued without recording their names. The absence of named black women artists in written documents until the 1980s (with a few telling exceptions) is as poignant a comment on the idiosyncrasies of South African culture as the presence of many white women who produced distinctive, iconoclastic work.

Urban black women had even fewer opportunities than those in the rural areas to express themselves visually. When opportunities are restricted, the first person to break through barriers acquires historical significance as a role model. Gladys Mgudlandlu (1917–79), who was largely self-taught, achieved the distinction of being the first black South African woman easel painter to acquire a reputation that was sustained in press coverage. Her achievements summarize the tension between freedom and restriction that operated in the art world that women artists attempted to enter, the complexities of which were exacerbated for black women.

Mgudlandlu, called ‘the African Queen’ by the residents of the Nyanga township near Cape Town where she lived from 1944, grew up in the Eastern Cape and learnt about Fingo and Xhosa cultural heritage from her grandmother. Having begun to train as a nurse, she moved to Cape Town, became a teacher and, in 1961, held her first exhibition. Her success was a combination of luck and ability. Like Irma Stern, Mgudlandlu attracted the attention of the media (both artists were presented as ‘characters’ with decisive, robust personalities). She also gained the support of white women who promoted and bought her work. But she was an anomaly – a black woman artist – and the print media that promoted her career, patronized her by playing on the human-interest aspects of her achievements. White art critics appraised her images in formal terms and failed to interpret her content in relation to the social disruptions she had experienced, while the black writer Bessie Head (1937–86), who believed that art should render social commentary, was sharply critical of Mgudlandlu’s ‘escapism’ (cited in Miles, 2002, p. 7).

Mgudlandlu worked for herself. Her imagery is not drawn directly from observation but dredged from memory mediated by the apartheid legislation that determined what work black people could undertake and where they had to live. Living in a small ‘matchbox’ township house, Mgudlandlu transformed life into resonant, colourful, broadly brushed images that enabled her to transcend her immediate circumstances. Whether evoking rural life, and speaking of communal activities as in Landscape (1962; Fig. 1.6), or portraying a bleak huddle of homes on the barren Cape flats, Mgudlandlu made painting an act of personal affirmation.
Permeating the work of many twentieth-century South African women artists is a deep consciousness of working in South Africa. Even artists who disengaged themselves from direct socio-political commentary created artworks that refer obliquely to local circumstances and the inflections given to female creativity by the paralysing weight of racial identity, racist institutions and patriarchal authority. As South African society became increasingly politicized in the late 1970s, cultural activity assumed an activist role. A turning point was a conference organized at the University of Cape Town in 1979. Delegates at ‘The State of Art in South Africa’ passed two important resolutions. One demanded that educational facilities be opened up to artists of all races and the other asked artists to boycott all state-sponsored
exhibitions until the first requirement was met. Notably absent from the debates was direct reference to gender discrimination.

Not until the 1980s did gender emerge as a significant political and cultural issue. By this time postmodernism offered South African art ways of theorizing complexity, contradiction and ambiguity, of utilizing intertextuality and re-reading history. In 1985 the art–gender debate was aired in works shown in a series of important exhibitions. Although women artists raised issues embedded in feminist theory, in some quarters these were seen as relevant only to white, not black women (black men were particularly hostile to feminism and vocal about ‘our culture’, by which they meant black culture, in which women assumed secondary roles to men). But, increasingly, women were committed to exposing the politics of representation.

**The Essays in this Volume**

The essays gathered here explore the years between Union in 1910 and Liberation in 1994. They focus on and analyse the lives and achievements of women artists and cultural workers, while exploring the asymmetrical power relationships that defined, controlled, restricted or sustained women’s participation in visual culture. They do not offer a comprehensive history of South African women artists. Instead they draw attention to the diversity of ideas and practices – vibrant, affirming, courageous and colourful – that determine years which are, in so many respects, dominated bleakly by black and white tensions.

Any study of the years between Union and Liberation must reflect the historical realities of the time. Hence those essays in this volume that explore art in the first part of the twentieth century focus on the achievements of white women. They were visible in the art world. They were acknowledged as artists while creative black women were hidden by an interpretation of cultural production that effaced them. Black women artists only became the subjects of serious research and exposure through exhibitions when art history itself became politicized and reassessed its parameters. Black artists had to be retrieved from the past and information is still incomplete and, in some instances, speculative.

Research into art made by black women is rendered difficult by a paucity of black women historians and art historians within South Africa. There is no history of commitment to western-derived ‘fine art’ in the black community since apartheid education offered no art teaching and, although increasing numbers of black women are now acquiring university qualifications, few elect to study art history or fine art courses. For black parents and students who face the financial burden of tertiary education, degree courses must offer reasonable wage-earning prospects and, for young black women, the art world
makes no such promise. And so the question – where are the black women researchers? – delivers the answer that they have not yet emerged in significant numbers. Furthermore, the middle-class black community does not offer significant patronage to the visual arts and has yet to be convinced that the visual arts (and academic, art-oriented research) offer competitive career prospects, especially for women.

With ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ being such value-laden, politically sensitive concepts in the new South Africa, and both political correctness and charges of racism hovering as menacing presences over interpretation, historical studies are contentious. They require a commitment to speaking about (not claiming to speak for) women. Women’s twentieth-century histories must be written so that the palimpsests of the period, created by women in paint, print, thread, cloth, fibre, wood and clay, can feed their narratives into the post-1994 period and contribute to understanding women’s struggles and achievements.

Our examination of the years between Union and Liberation commences with Jillian Carman’s study, ‘Florence Phillips, patronage and the arts at the time of Union’. In a careful examination of archival sources, Carman presents the forceful personality of Lady Florence Phillips who, although motivated by an imperialistic vision of ‘civilization’, nevertheless ensured that Johannesburg gained a notable art gallery and a valuable permanent core collection. Her battle for an art gallery pitted her against civic bureaucracy and wealthy, potential patrons.

Carman’s account of the early history of the Johannesburg Art Gallery explores Florence Phillips’s battle with the Randlords who had made their money from South African diamonds and gold but were reluctant to assist the development of South African culture. The desire to replicate western culture in a colonial mining city had repercussions on the Johannesburg Art Gallery’s acquisitions policy, and the subsequent visibility and invisibility of artists. This case study raises issues about institutional power and the contributions made by art museums to a theory of visual culture that dominated much of the official story of twentieth-century South African art. Concluding that Florence Phillips was probably outmanoeuvred by the men with whom she interacted, Carman suggests that Phillips ‘is remembered for a project that was incomplete and not a true reflection of her original intentions’.

In my study, ‘European modernism and African domicile: women painters and the search for identity’, I consider the fractured sense of identity experienced by Bertha Everard and Irma Stern. While both artists rejected picturesque naturalism and adopted modernist styles characterized by expressive colour and mark-making, their experiences of modernism, womanhood and South African life were as different as their personalities. Both women rebelled against feminine stereotypes, tried to reconcile womanhood with life in a colonial, masculinist society that accorded a low priority to visual culture, and were deeply affected by the space and
inhabitants of Africa. By studying the lives and work of Everard and Stern in Europe and Africa, it becomes obvious that white women artists – even those who embraced modernist ideas – cannot be understood generically; differences outweigh similarities. However, for Everard and Stern, modernism as a culturally inherited mental map was a personal reality that was quite as important as their lives and travels in Africa. While Stern managed her career astutely and became South Africa’s most famous artist, Everard failed to insert herself into the South African art world during her lifetime. Her life story indicates that the opportunities white women enjoyed in relation to black women of the period offered no guarantees of artistic success and acclaim.

Brenda Danilowitz discusses the work of another woman who consciously explored modernist aesthetics, which had been learnt in Europe, practised in South Africa and subsequently defended in the United States, where she settled in 1949. In ‘Constance Stuart Larrabee’s photographs of the Ndzundza Ndebele: performance and history beyond the modernist frame’, Danilowitz alerts us to the power of the documentary photograph and the power of artistic contrivance expressed through formalist aesthetics. Like Stern, Larrabee saw black women as beautiful, exotic objects. Danilowitz explores Larrabee’s relationship to her Ndebele subjects and she demonstrates that while the photographer wanted to exclude social readings of her images, the very nature of documentary photography (even when intentionally aestheticized) invites contextual interpretation.

Larrabee controlled her image construction, privileged form over content and attempted to control the surrounding discourse. However, as Danilowitz explores the different contexts where Larrabee’s images, with text and/or titles, were displayed, she indicates how history seeps into Larrabee’s realist photography despite the photographer’s desire to present her subjects as timeless.

While Danilowitz focuses on images of black women constructed by a white English-speaking South African, Liese van der Watt considers Afrikaner culture in ‘Art, gender ideology and Afrikaner nationalism – a case study’. Van der Watt analyses the volksmoeder (‘mother of the nation’) and reveals how Afrikaner men and women revered this idealized concept of domesticity and loyalty to both family and people (volk). She traces the visual manifestation of the volksmoeder in a narrative frieze of tapestry panels, woven by women from male-originated designs.

Suggesting that the tapestries, housed in the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, are much more than didactic representations of a feminine stereotype, Van der Watt argues that the images are a complex manifestation of ideology that forged a subordinate identity for Afrikaner women. Women’s lesser status is confirmed pictorially, just as the medium in which they worked is positioned as ‘craft’ rather than ‘art’. In her analysis of the panels Van der Watt relates a complicated story of gender relations, and power play between agency and
canons of propagandistic representation that made Afrikaner women’s work a site of both conflict and self-realization. She alerts us to the way in which the Afrikaner woman (quite as much as the black woman) was urged to conceive of her identity in ethnic rather than gender terms.

In ‘Technologies and transformations: baskets, women and change in twentieth-century KwaZulu-Natal’, Nessa Leibhammer examines the impact of the modern world on basketry, a functional art form that possesses complex social origins. Her research reminds us that conjecture is still a significant component of theory when examining what are deemed to be ‘traditional’ artforms. She indicates that we do not know who the historical basket makers were in KwaZulu-Natal. Historical sources are contradictory and contemporary informants do not know whether fibre utensils were made exclusively by men or by women.

Leibhammer traces the background to gender-specific labour with regard to carving and metalwork but suggests that, because fibrous materials were freely available, their use was not subject to royal authorization. This indicates that women as well as men probably produced woven forms. However, twentieth-century migrancy upset the balance of labour and women assumed more of the work. Today, when mass-produced containers are readily available in rural areas, baskets – crafted by women – are produced commercially but are marketed as ‘traditional’. These objects have made the transition to the modern world from rural communities without disclosing either the original identities of their makers or the politics of changes in production and reception.

Wilma Cruise’s essay, ‘Breaking the mould: women ceramists in KwaZulu-Natal’ discusses three different groups of women ceramists whose work reveals the fusion of western and African ideas and practices. She indicates that indigenous techniques were not encouraged at the Rorke’s Drift school, where the forms and decoration of studio ceramics were influenced by the input of Scandinavian teachers and the requirements of the Swedish market. In contrast, rural, black, women potters in the 1980s, typified by the Nala family, were encouraged to market pots with ‘African’ identity. Cruise analyses the ways in which Nesta Nala and her daughters adapted the form and character of Zulu beer pots, and revived pottery as ‘women’s work’ while gaining new economic and social empowerment with their apparently authentic African pottery.

At the University of Natal (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal), female mentorship is traced from Hilda Ditchburn to Juliet Armstrong to Fé Halsted-Berning, the Ardmore ceramic studio and Bonnie Ntshalintshali. Ditchburn, eclipsed by forceful male potters working in the Anglo-Orientalist tradition, emerges as a significant teacher. White and black women of different generations are seen to respond to clay as a medium and to diverse visual and technical stimuli which yielded works that broke ‘the mould’ of expectations about women’s work with clay.
‘On pins and needles: gender politics and embroidery projects before the first democratic election’ is a closely argued discussion in which Brenda Schmahmann examines the economic empowerment of rural black women through the development of embroidery projects. Tracing the evolution of four projects where functional cloth articles were decorated by designs embroidered in colour thread, she analyses the complex intersections between rural poverty, social relationships damaged by apartheid and efforts to attain a degree of economic independence.

She studies three needlework projects in the Limpopo Province – Xihoko, Chivirika and Kaross Workers – and the Mapula project in the Winterveld, in the North West Province. Illustrating her study with reference to particular women’s lives, she reveals the complex social structures and customary law within rural communities in apartheid South Africa where women were neglected by the authorities and frequently abused by their menfolk. Once skills had been acquired, the needlework projects offered employment and upliftment to the most economically disadvantaged South Africans and many of the initiatives have been extended since 1994 as ‘craft’ has become a growth point in the economy.

The issues Schmahmann raises about African, ethnic and female identity formation structured by apartheid legislation, also constitute the focus of Jacqueline Nolte’s essay, ‘Narratives of migration in the works of Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Sebidi’. These two artists used sculpture and painting respectively to explore their cultural origins and personal experiences of loss, displacement, racism and sexism. Investigating the provisional nature of settlement for black women, Nolte traces the life stories of two courageous women whose lives transgressed the norms established for rural black women. She identifies the censure and social disapproval that the women faced in their own communities for undertaking activities that were not culturally sanctioned and discusses the strictures of apartheid as experienced in Venda (Mabasa) and Bophuthatswana (Sebidi).

Both Mabasa and Sebidi attribute great significance to their ancestors whose manifestation in their lives occurs through dream, vision and spirit possession. In detailed analyses of works by Mabasa and Sebidi, Nolte unravels the ways in which the artists express their connectedness with their cultural past and deal with the presence of their works in the capitalist art market of the present.

In the final essay in this book, ‘Representing regulation – rendering resistance: female bodies in the art of Penny Siopis’, Brenda Schmahmann applies a number of the themes that recur in earlier essays to work by Penny Siopis. The period from Union to Liberation was dominated by regulation; it permeated the lives of all South Africans but, for creative women, art offered opportunities – covert and overt – to express resistance to the politics of exclusion and the operation of patriarchal power. Feminist artist Penny Siopis
sites her resistance within the female body and its intimate relationship to the body politic.

After South Africa rejoined the international community in 1994, Siopis’s work received considerable attention, particularly for its resonance in a postcolonial framework. Schmahmann’s study connects such work to its origins and to the feminist perspective that permeated Siopis’s work from the 1980s. Offering an assessment of Siopis’s iconography and strategies of pictorial representation, Schmahmann explains how the imagery was formed by specifically South African experiences. She focuses on representations of the body, finding the concept of the ‘abject’ body particularly useful for validating interpretations of work made to protest regulation. In concluding that the personal always occupied a role in Siopis’s work (and continues to do so), Schmahmann alerts us to an important fact about all the women artists in our book. They were, and are, individuals and their feminine consciousness and lived female experiences have been, and are, forcefully present in their art.

Liberation?

Our narrative ends in 1994, a year of liberation that many had thought would never be attained peacefully. Remarkably, negotiations between the Nationalist government and the black liberation movement succeeded. Apartheid ended. South Africans, believing that a new, democratic South Africa had been created, were hopeful that things would change. They did. And they didn’t.

Promises can be made and paper constitutions can be printed, but for social transformation to occur, attitudes have to change. South Africans had to confront racism. This they knew. They also had to acknowledge the existence of sexism but, since patriarchy continued into the new South Africa, the concept of liberation meant different things for men and women. Sexism continues to be a festering wound after a decade of black government.

Post-1994 South Africa was launched on a wave of optimism with a new constitution that acknowledges women’s rights. In 1999, a Monument to the Women of South Africa was proposed at the Union Buildings where there are many statues of ‘great’ (white male) South Africans. After an open competition inviting the submission of proposals for the monument, Wilma Cruise (b.1945) was awarded the commission. Mindful of the history of Pretoria’s Union Buildings, the symbolism associated with the space and the memorable gathering of women on 9 August 1956 (Fig. 1.7), Cruise (in collaboration with architect Marcus Holmes) created Strike the Woman Strike the Rock: Wathint’ Abafazi Wathint’ Imbokodo (2000), (Fig. 1.8).
Fig. 1.7  Now You Have Touched the Women You Have Struck a Rock, 58 × 40 cm (223/4 × 153/4 inches), poster designed by Judy Seidman, silkscreened on paper by Medu, 1981, South African History Archive in Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.
The multi-media installation (Fig. 1.8) utilizes an imbokodo, a Zulu grinding stone. It is placed on a polished, circular bronze disc set on a dark, matt bronze octagonal plate that rests on the sandstone floor of a vestibule in Herbert Baker’s Union Buildings. Baker’s imposing, cathedral-like space is the point where the east and west wings of his design meet to symbolize the reconciliation between the English and Afrikaners desired at the time of Union. The vestibule, defining the north–south axis of the building, offers a view of Meintjies Kop to the north and the city to the south. Thus the site assumes particular significance for Cruise’s installation: while celebrating South African women it is also intended to symbolize reconciliation between black and white in the new South Africa.

The memorial gains a documentary dimension from the steps leading to the vestibule. The risers of the steps carry key phrases, rendered in metal, extracted from the protest letters, *The Demand of the Women of South Africa for the Withdrawal of Passes for Women and the Repeal of the Pass Laws.*
Within the vestibule words become sound as the presence of viewers activates a sound text, a chorus of voices whispering, ‘You strike the woman, you strike the rock’, in the eleven official languages. The memorable words, carrying the history of the famous 1956 protest march, resonate in the presence of the ovoid, grinding stone, womb-like in appearance and evocative of the literal and symbolic nature of women’s labour.42

The memorial, unveiled on 9 August 2000 (Women’s Day), confirmed the important contribution that women had made in the past and implied that they were now equal with men in the new South Africa. But as happens so often in women’s history, deeds not words render finality.

The Union Buildings are no longer accessible to the public. They have become a restricted zone. The memorial, installed with high hopes, cannot project its homage to history or insert its presence into twenty-first century rhetoric about justice and equality. Anyone wishing to view the Women’s Memorial now has to make an appointment, well ahead of the expected visit, via the Office of the President.43

In the new century, women’s art continues to represent uncomfortable social facts. The era of union has gone. Colonialism belongs to the past. The long, sad years of apartheid ended a decade ago. But, as long as inequality continues to permeate opportunities available to South African women and men and the appallingly high level of violence against women persists, women’s liberation remains incomplete.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive history of South Africa see Davenport and Saunders, 2000.
2. South Africa was first settled by hunter-gatherers – Bushmen, also known as San, Khoikhoi or Khoisan, who were displaced south by invading negroid Bantu peoples. In 1652 the Dutch established a permanent presence at the Cape of Good Hope. The British occupied the Cape in 1795 during the Napoleonic Wars, and again, permanently, in 1806.
3. ‘Coloured’ will be used to define the mixed race group because, although the term was employed during apartheid as a category of racial classification, it endures post-1994 being used by many ‘coloured’ people to acknowledge their historical identity. It is still used for census purposes. In the 1997 census the population was 42.3 million, composed of 75.6 per cent black Africans, 13.6 per cent whites, 8.6 per cent coloureds and 2.6 per cent Asians. Blacks (over 75 per cent of the population) earned 28 per cent of the income, while whites (13 per cent) earned 61 per cent, and white farms (87 per cent of the land) produced 90 per cent of the agricultural output. The classificatory terms cited above were used in the census.
4. The Jewish population, although relatively small numerically, exerted a decisive influence on the economy and many Jews were important cultural patrons.
All major cities can be located on the three maps that indicate the political geography of South Africa; see Figs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3.

The literal translation of *apartheid* is separateness. Although apartheid ideology occasionally paid lip service to the idea of separate and equal, draconian legislation enforced discrimination and inequality.

In 1969 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Resolution 2396 requesting ‘all states and organizations to suspend cultural, educational, sports and other exchanges with the racist regime and with other organizations and institutions in South Africa which practice apartheid’ (Campschreur and Divendal, 1989, p.174).

The colleges were at Bellville (Coloured), Ngoye (Zulu), Durban (Indian) and Turfloop (Sotho-Tswana). Fort Hare University, at Alice, in the Eastern Cape was founded in 1916 and many African leaders including Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Mangosuthu Buthelezi studied at it. A collection of contemporary black South African art was begun by the Department of African Studies in 1964 and a Department of Fine Arts was established in 1971, enabling black students to obtain degrees in Fine Art.

One point of daily contact between women was within the homes of white women but the ‘maids and madams’ interaction was defined by economic power relations (see Cock, 1989).

She left the movement in protest when coloured women were not allowed to vote. Schreiner’s famous novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) was first published under the pseudonym Ralph Irons to avoid contemporary prejudice against women novelists.

In the concluding sentence of her tract, Schreiner appeals for ‘Labour and the training that fits us [women] for labour!’ (Schreiner, 1978, p. 283).

Although after 1930 white women could participate in government they were slow to do so; in 1936 Mrs Denys Reitz became the first elected woman member of parliament; in 1989 President de Klerk appointed the first woman cabinet minister. The most celebrated woman MP is Helen Suzman (b. 1917) who entered Parliament in 1953. She was the sole Progressive Party representative for 13 years and was acclaimed internationally and within South Africa for her uncompromising stand on human rights and her trenchant, courageous opposition to apartheid. For short biographies of prominent South Africans see Joyce, 1999, and for longer entries see *They Shaped Our Century: The Most Influential South Africans of the Twentieth Century* (multiple authors, 1999).

The Land Act deprived Africans of the right to own land outside of designated reserves that constituted about 13 per cent of the land.

In 1956 Sophiatown was re-zoned for whites and renamed Triomf. In 1966 some 60 000 people were forcibly removed to the inhospitable Cape Flats. District Six was not developed by the government; it remained as a scar, devoid of people, within the Mother City until February 2004 when former South African president Nelson Mandela handed over symbolic keys to the first two homeowners to resettle in District Six. An estimated 4000 homeowners are to be resettled in the area over three years.

The Freedom Charter commences,

> We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:
that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white,
and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based
on the will of all the people;
that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land,
liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality.

For the full text see Campscheur and Divendal, 1989, pp. 242–5.

17. FSAW was the first women’s organization in South Africa to assume a major
political role. It drew members from the Congress Alliance, the African National
Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured
People’s Congress and the Congress of Democrats.

18. By 1951 the percentage of black women living in urban areas had increased to
over 21 per cent, more than treble the 1921 figure, and only 23.7 per cent of all
women were economically active. The state considered the primary function of
black women to be reproductive rather than productive.

19. For an account of this and other political activities see Walker, 1991.

20. In 1961 Nelson Mandela established Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK, Spear of the
Nation), the militant wing of the ANC.

Drift include ceramist Dinah Molefe and Allina Ndebele who designs and
weaves tapestries. Also see Sack, 1988.

22. The Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko, detained and subjected to severe
assaults by the police, died of his injuries on 12 September 1977.

23. In 1982 the independent homelands (dates of independence are in parentheses)
were the republics of Transkei (1976), Bophuthatswana (1977), Venda (1979)
and Ciskei (1981). The self-governing homelands, some of which had refused
the offer of ‘independence’ were Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele,
KwaZulu, Lebowa and Qwaqwa.

24. The three parliamentary chambers were a House of Assembly for Whites, a
House of Delegates for Indians and a House of Representatives for Coloured
people.

25. The contribution made by white artists to contemporary South African art is
virtually ignored in Kasfir (1999), a text which is otherwise a useful overview of
contemporary African art, although – in the South African discussion –
dependent on material supplied by art dealers.

26. By 1910 Cape Town possessed a public library and museum. However, it did not
get an art gallery until the South African National Gallery was opened on 2
November 1930 with a ceremony organized by Lady Florence Phillips, who had
devoted considerable energy to its establishment.

27. The Randlords were a small group of mining magnates who amassed enormous
wealth from South African diamonds (first discovered in 1866) and gold
(discovered on the Witwatersrand in 1886). The name was applied to the men
when they settled in Britain and adopted lavish lifestyles.

28. Interestingly, Fry responded favourably to Lane’s collection when it was shown
in London prior to going to Johannesburg, commenting ‘the new gallery which
Johannesburg has just founded is already far more representative of the whole
scope of modern British art than anything that we have in England. Not only so,
but … this able director has managed to get exceptionally good examples of each
of the many artists represented’ (1911, p.178). The women whose work was
purchased were Annie Swynnerton, Laura Knight, Mary Davis and Emma Ciardi (my thanks to Jillian Carman for this information).

29. Believing that the working classes might be educated culturally if they could be exposed to examples of good art and design, in March–April 1910 Phillips organized the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition in South Africa. It displayed artworks loaned from local citizens and had a section for ‘native work’, consisting of mats, pottery and basketry.

30. The Durban Museum, established as a natural history museum in 1887, included items such as spears and pots, collected from South African groups and Australian Aboriginals. In 1892 moves were made to establish a separate art gallery and this was achieved in 1911.

31. By the 1980s a number of exhibitions offered evidence of socio-political commentary and a desire to erode barriers separating creative genres and different people. ‘Tributaries’ (1985) was sponsored by BMW, the German auto manufacturer, the Rembrandt Group sponsored four national Triennial exhibitions from 1982; the Standard Bank sponsored the annual National Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown.

32. In 1967 the South African National Gallery purchased The Lions in the Fire (n.d.) by E. Mdluli. In 1968 the Durban Art Gallery acquired Once There Came a Terrible Beast (c.1968) by Regina Buthelezi (b.1928). Mdluli and Buthelezi studied at Rorke’s Drift, the Evangelical Lutheran Arts and Crafts Centre. Information on them is scant and the best known of the Rorke’s Drift tapestry artists is weaver-designer Allina Ndebele (b.1939). (My thanks to Philippa Hobbs and Brenda Schmahmann for alerting me to these purchases and to Hayden Proud for confirming Mdluli’s initial, which is incorrect in the 1985 SANG catalogue, Women Artists in South Africa.)

33. This beautiful Ndebele bridal apron (ijogolo), made of hide and beads, dates from about 1910 when Florence Phillips was drawing attention to craft items and the need for South Africans to become conscious of their national cultural identity. But exquisitely designed and worked items such as this did not become part of the discourse of the period. The apron was purchased in 1986 by the University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries.

34. The English pacifist Emily Hobhouse (1860–1926) championed the monument proposal. She had espoused the Boer cause during the war and her ashes were interred at the Monument after her death in 1926.

35. For details of the commission see Arnold, 1996, pp. 34–6.

36. The most concerted effort to assert modern values in art and indicate that South Africa had progressive artists came with the formation of The New Group in 1938 (the same year as the nostalgic, nationalistic Great Trek celebrations). The initiative united Cape and Transvaal based artists and included a significant number of women painters. See Berman, 1983, and Schoonraad, 1988.

37. Other significant twentieth-century women artists who trained in Europe include Maggie Laubser (1886–1973), Dorothy Kay (1886–1964), Maud Sumner (1902–85) and Cecil Higgs (1900–1986). Allina Ndebele, of a later generation (see note 32 above), received a Swedish scholarship in 1964 to train as a teacher-weaver and is probably the first black woman artist to undergo formal study in Europe.

38. The first monograph on Gladys Mgudlandlu is Miles, 2002. Mgudlandlu was given her first retrospective at the South African National Gallery in May 2003.
Miles (1997, pp. 89–90) draws attention to Valerie Desmore, a ‘coloured’ artist who exhibited in 1942.

39. Some interesting parallels can be drawn between Mgudlandlu’s work and that of Mahasa and Sebidi whose use of memory in relation to migration is discussed by Nolte in Chapter 9.

40. The exhibitions were ‘Tributaries’, the Triennial exhibition, a Women’s Festival of the Arts presented in Johannesburg, and ‘Women Artists of South Africa’, mounted at the South African National Gallery, Cape Town.

41. This poster, designed by Judy Seidman, was made when she was living in Botswana in 1981. Produced by Medu, it was printed in black, marbled with green and yellow at the bottom. The text is from the song sung on the historic women’s march, of which slightly different versions exist in English.

42. For a fuller commentary on the memorial see Becker, 2000. I am grateful to Wilma Cruise for discussion on her work.

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