Personal history and collective memory: images of social and political history in the art of four South African women artists

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Supervisor's Consent

I have approved this dissertation for examination.

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Professor Ian Calder

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Date

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I would like to thank Professor Ian Calder for his meticulous guidance, Faye Spencer for her editorial work and Marilyn Fowles for making sure the technicalities were always in order. I would also like to thank Uwe and Zelda Kühl, Ian Dickinson, Macc McTaggart and Jess Cherry for their constant support and encouragement throughout this dissertation.

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Abstract

This study examines the means by which four South African woman artists, namely Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe, Lien Botha and Tania Kühl use memory and history as themes to represent social and political events in South Africa. The foundation of this investigation is a critical study of the meaning of history and memory within the context of the candidate's contemporary social and political milieu. This investigation is facilitated by a number of published and unpublished works by various authors relating to the issues in visual arts; particularly social and political history as applied to personal memory and history.

Chapter one explores these terms particularly in relation to the visual arts. Chapter one identifies terms that are vital to the dissertation and some of the literature and methodologies used in the research. These are divided into the subheadings of: terms; women, politics and art; art and documentary photography; literature review; methodology and conclusion..

Examples of each artist's work are selected for a comprehensive analysis in chapter two. These examples are methodically studied by media and techniques used to produce the artworks and include a critical analysis of the subject matter of the artwork. The examples were selected primarily for their content in connection with the candidate's own productions of practical work towards the MAFA degree. Chapter two is divided into four main sections, one dedicated to each artist: Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe, Lien Botha and Tania Kühl. These four sections are divided into three subsections: medium and techniques; subject matter and conclusion.

Chapter three points out similarities and differences in the work of the four selected artists in order to conclude the candidate's findings during the dissertation.

Prefatory notes

This dissertation is submitted in partial (50%) fulfilment of the theoretical component of the Degree of Master of Arts in Fine Art. The other 50% consists of a practical examination of artworks completed in 2008 and 2009 by the candidate.

The total length of this dissertation including the preliminary section, text body, images and documentary section is 67 pages. Without the additional images, preliminary section and documentary section the text body is 49 pages.

This dissertation is written using the Harvard short form method for referencing citations and no footnotes, endnotes or Latin references are used. When information from sources is obtained, the source is acknowledged in parenthesis at the end of the quote. The reference cites the name of the author, date of publication and page number where applicable.

Titles of books, journals, newspapers and websites are enhanced with italics. Underlining is used only for electronic sources. Titles of images within the text and in the list of images at the end of the dissertation are in italics. A line spacing of 1.5 is used except for long quotations and the bibliography which are both single-spaced.

The term 'figure' refers to any images, photographs, or charts used to illustrate the text and is consecutively numbered, captioned and acknowledged.

Declaration

Except where the contrary is acknowledged, this dissertation is the original work of the candidate and is submitted for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Tania Kühl

Introduction

This dissertation will analyse the work of Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe, Lien Botha and Tania Kühl and their use of history and memory as recurring themes in representing social and political events in South African history. The aim of the dissertation is to support and clarify the candidate's practice of art and create a better understanding of the parallels between process and subject matter. Representative works by each artist will be analysed methodically in order to explore how formal elements, such as medium, as well as subject matter can be used to achieve a specific meaning.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter consists of the broader framework including a brief history of politics in South African art in connection with women and art, a literature review as well as a section on the methodology used during the research process. This chapter will contextualise the terms 'history' and 'memory' and 'social' and 'political' as used in this dissertation. More general issues will be discussed, such as, a brief history of politics in art as well as women and art. This chapter will also explain the contextual meaning of the terms 'history' and 'memory' and clarify the use of the terms 'social' and 'political' as used in this dissertation. Chapter 1 includes a section on documentary photography in art-making; significant also in the candidate's own productions.

The second chapter forms the core of the dissertation divided into four sections on the works of Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe, Lien Botha and the candidate, Tania Kühl. A brief background of each artist will be before discussion and analysis of their work. The aim is to show how each work contains elements of memory or history which references social or political history in South Africa. The format for each artist's section consists of medium and technique, subject matter and conclusion.

Chapter 3 compares the four artists in their representations of social and political history, regarding ways in which they use memory and history to create 'content' in artwork [in referencing social and political themes].

The conclusion identifies points of identifying similarity and difference in the media, techniques and subject matter used by the four artists.

A list of illustrations, with sources, and a bibliography appears after the final chapter.

Chapter 1

This chapter outlines the background to the research in discussions about the larger academic issues regarding the works of South African women artists that are dealt with in the main body of text to follow. The main point of this chapter is to provide contextual material, and to define terms that will be applied in the chapters that follow. The chapter is divided into subsections that define terms; women, politics and art; art and documentary photography; literature review; and methodology. However, the initial part of the chapter deals with terminology and definitions of key concepts that occur in the dissertation.

Defining Terms

Certain terms that are crucial to this dissertation require definitions within the context of the research. Contextualisation of these terms involve studies of their previous or alternative use in similar contexts as well as their intended use within this dissertation.

'Social' and 'political' are two terms that are frequently referred to in this dissertation. Whether described as 'social and political events' or 'social and political history', they share the role of describing South Africa's past, specifically its society and its politics. Thompson defines 'social' as being 'concerned with the mutual relations of human beings or of classes of human beings' (Thompson 1995: 1319). In this dissertation, the term will be used to define anything relating to a constructed society and the relations between human beings. The term 'political' is described as anything 'concerning the state or its government, or public affairs generally' (Thompson 1995: 1057). 'Political' is used in this dissertation to described anything to do with the government and its authority.

When discussing social and political history or social and political events, the candidate refers to anything in the past relating to the relations between human beings or to the government or state that organizes those human beings. Apartheid is an obvious example as it is a government inflicted 'policy or system of segregation or discrimination on grounds of race' (Thompson 1995: 56). Apartheid deals with relations between human beings (physical segregation of race) as well as the government that controls these laws.

The term 'history', as used in this dissertation, assumes two different functions. It is used to join the terms 'social' and 'political' as well as functioning as one of the key concepts of this research. When using the terms 'social' and 'political', the term may be referred to as 'social and political history' which refers to any social or political occurrence in the past, in other words, anything that happened in South Africa before the specific art pieces discussed in this paper were made.

The more important use of the word 'history' in this paper forms a key part of this research and is used in the title of this dissertation. This 'history' refers to a 'continuous chronological record of important or public events' (Thompson 1995: 643). In other words, history is an ongoing documentation of known events. In this dissertation, 'history' will imply the documentation of South Africa's social and political events. The term will be analyzed as part of a process in which an artist represents social and political events. For example, Sue Williamson's installation *Messages from the Moat* uses the 'transaction documents' of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) as the first colonizers of the Cape of Good Hope as her source in representing slavery. The 'transaction documents' serve as a recorded history used in describing slavery, a social and political event. The work as a whole serves as a recovery of 'a hidden history' (Williamson 2003: 70).

The term 'memory' shares an equal importance in this dissertation. In the second chapter memory will be analyzed as part of a process through which an artist represents social and political events. While the meaning of memory can become quite complex, for the purposes of this paper it is defined simply as the 'faculty by which things are recalled to or kept in the mind' (Thompson 1995: 643). Memory refers to the storing of images in the mind. Unlike history, it is not necessarily a publicly known event and can therefore only be used as a personal means of documentation.

Hence the term 'memory' will refer to the events which may either be personal or collective. 'Personal', referring to the memory of one individual and 'collective' implying that many people share a similar memory that does not necessarily form a documented history. For example, Sue Williamson's *Messages from the Moat* is based on the years from 1658 to 1700, 'the time of the rule of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the first colonizers of the Cape of Good Hope' (Williamson 2003:

70). Sue Williamson's own personal memories cannot be used in the representation of this work as she was born in 1941, however, she could have used the documented memories of some of the slaves through diary entries or letters. This example illustrates the possibilities of history and memory functioning as a means in which contemporary social and political events can be imaged. Together, the terms 'history' and 'memory' will be used in describing the works discussed in Chapter 2 and how they function as a part of the process in representing social and political events.

Women, Politics and Art

The topic of this dissertation was chosen by the candidate for specific reasons that comment to her own productions of art. Although this dissertation is not presented from a feminist point of view, a conscious decision was made to use only female artists. This decision stems from a personal motivation as the dissertation is written from the perspective of a female South African artist writing about other female South African artists. This creates a better understanding of the artists and their position in society. Choosing only female subjects forces one to look at the differences between male and female artists and how men view art by women. Marion Arnold wrote that 'the main problem men had in evaluating women's art was in making a connection between their concept of women, and their concept of Art' (Arnold 1990: 9) and she further explains, 'either this is not Art, or the producers are not true women'. This view needs to be considered within the history of South African art and specifically that of women, needs to be emphasised. A classic example of the struggle for women artists to be recognized, not only in the art world but in society as well, can be seen in comparing Mary Cassatt's *Woman in Black at the Opera* (Figure 0.1) to Pierre-Auguste's *La Loge* (Figure 0.2). Renoir's depiction of a man and woman at an opera 'forces the viewer to focus on the sensuous and beautiful female who stares back at the viewer unabashedly' (Strieter 1999: 244) while the man looks through the opera glasses. The woman, appearing to show little interest in the opera, is there purely 'so she could be seen' (Sullivan 2002). In Cassatt's |painting of a similar scene she represents the woman as an independent, important figure as she is looking through the opera glasses, 'those prototypical instruments of masculine specular power' (Sullivan 2002). Her strong silhouette suggests dominance over the man who gazes at her from a distance. This deliberate re-enactment of a scene depicted from a man's

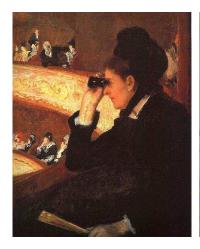point of view is an example of a woman artist struggling for recognition and creative autonomy in art.

Figure 0.1 (Left): Mary Cassat, *Woman in Black at the Opera,* oil on canvas.

Collection: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

(Source: http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/forum/cassattopera.jpg, Accessed by Tania Kühl 2010)

Figure 0.2 (Right): Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *La Loge*, oil on canvas, 80cm x 63cm,

Collection: The Courtauld Gallery, London.

(Source: http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/forum/renoirloge.jpg. Accessed by Tania Kühl 2010)

Understanding the collaboration of politics and art involves studying previous ways in which art served as a visual manifestation of social and political content. The theory surrounding politics and art is that of art being a visual representation of politics or a means of contesting politics, 'an increasingly common, increasingly significant occurrence – the use of art objects for contestatory purposes in the multicultural milieux we all now participate in' (MacClancy 1997: 2). While art may be used for contestatory purposes it is also used for personal expression and representation of social and political circumstances. Art can also serve as a tool that gives voice and allows personal expression of social and political views that may not otherwise be expressed, 'aesthetics nurture the spirit and provide ways of rethinking and healing psychic wounds inflicted by assault from the forces of imperialist, racist, and sexist domination' (hooks 1995: 5). Placing this theory in the context of a dissertation about women subjects, it is impossible to ignore 'the infamous f-word', as Marion Arnold would introduce it. Feminism 'has had a particularly difficult reception and passage in

South Africa' (Arnold 1996: 70). Although this dissertation views the art of women, it is not from a feminist perspective but for the interest of analyzing the work of a gender to which the candidate can relate.

Art and Documentary Photography

As a section of this dissertation is devoted to photographer Jo Ractliffe, it is necessary to define various aspects of photography, including the large and complex topic of art photography and documentary photography. During her studies in Fine Art at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the candidate wrote her BA Honours theory paper on the issues of the medium of photography as an art form and how this style differentiates and intersects with documentary photography. The works of Roger Ballen and David Goldblatt were used as examples. By using photographers that are also artists to illustrate her point the research can relate to Jo Ractliffe who is considered an artist but whose work has elements of documentary photography. In the paper, Kühl wrote:

> Fine art photography, or simply art photography, refers to the branch of photography dedicated to chiefly producing photos for aesthetic purposes. This kind of photography, often housed in museums and galleries, is mainly concerned with presenting objects in aesthetically pleasing ways to convey intensity and emotion. It might be assumed that fine art photography shares a similar function to other art forms such as painting and sculpture (Kühl 2007: 1).

This similarity in function 'defines a mode in which photographers share with painters certain visual characteristics such as detail, form, contrast, imagery, pose, costume, surface, composition and manipulation' (Weaver 1989: 1).

Documentary photography, however, refers to the area of photography in which images are used as historical documents:

> Rather than serving initially as a source of artistic or visual pleasure, documentary photography may often be used to influence political and social change due to its ability to capture the apparently accurate nature of an image or location. This approach to photography aims to use pictures as documented evidence of a particular situation (Kühl 2007: 1).

Hence a key element to documentary photography is that the 'photograph should be untouched, so that its veracity, its genuineness might be maintained' (Weaver 1989:

264). The term 'documentary' is defined as 'providing a factual record or report' (Thompson 1995: 398) and is therefore an unposed, uncontrolled look at the world.

Photographing social and political history is often 'mistaken for a messenger of truths' (Enwezor 2007). Photographing human interaction has been confounded to represent the truth but it is possible that this truthfulness or lack thereof is what separates art photography from documentary photography. This allows photographers to cross paths between the two branches. Art photographers may choose to capture the truth but not use it as evidence, but rather as an emotionally expressive aesthetic piece that does not hold a reporting function.

The issue of documentary photography in art-making is a complex one with many tangents. For this dissertation, it is necessary to understand that photography is considered a tool used to record reality but can be used in art, whether in a manipulated form or not.

Literature Review

In order to expand on the above-mentioned theories, key publications have been overviewed during the production of this dissertation and these will be reviewed.

The main reference work used in this dissertation is by author and artist, Marion Arnold. Arnold and Brenda Schmahmann edited a book entitled *Between Union and Liberation: Women artists in South Africa 1910-1994*, which consists of ten essays written by women who study the lives and achievements of women in different cultural groups and social contexts.

Each essay covers specific or broader themes surrounding South African women artists who worked during a period of 'complex political circumstances' (Arnold: 2005). The essays explore the impact of modernity on South African art making, particularly the ways in which the social and political circumstances between 1910 and 1994 affected art making of South African women. The latter of the two is a vital part of this research as the core of the paper deals with South African women artists and their visual representations of social and political circumstances in South Africa just before the advent of democracy. Three essays were particularly relevant to the research.

Marion Arnold's *Visual culture in Context: The implications of Union and Liberation* provides an anchor for the book as a whole. This essay deals with segregation and discrimination in race and gender in South Africa. Another essay in this book by Marion Arnold entitled *European Modernism and African Domicile: Women Painters and the Search for Identity* proved to be of great importance. Here, Arnold compares two women artists: Bertha Everard and Irma Stern. The essay examines how each of the women's work is affected by modernity and the domestic lifestyles women were forced to take on and how women artists had to defy popular taste and define themselves 'as serious artists contesting feminine stereotypes and the male authority' (Arnold 2005: 52).

The third essay that is of value to the dissertation is Brenda Schmahmann's *Representing Regulation – Rendering Resistance: Female Bodies in the Art of Penny Siopis*. This essay examines Penny Siopis's use of female bodies in her art and the exploration of the 'history of disciplining the female body through legislative acts and political structures that bolstered white authority in South Africa' (Arnold 2005: 197). This essay provides a detailed, descriptive look on some of Siopis's work.

A large part of the research on Penny Siopis comes from Kathryn Smith's *Penny Siopis.* This is a detailed account of Siopis' career as an artist. Smith analyses Siopis' techniques and subject matter in great detail, from her very early works to her more recent *Shame* series.

An electronic source that was particularly informative is a website on the artist Lien Botha, *Music of Silence – The Art of Lien Botha*. This site provides an extensive look at the work of Botha, including a thorough archive of images, a section on reviews and interviews with Botha, a short biography and a full Curriculum Vitae.

Other books overviewed during this research are Brenda Atkinson's artist book from the Taxi series on Jo Ractliffe; Ashraf Jamal's book from the Taxi series on Lien Botha; *Liberated Voices*, edited by Frank Herreman, that covers a wide range of contemporary South African artists specializing in various media as well as numerous other books, periodicals and journals.

A variety of sources were used during the production process of this dissertation. Although these sources proved to be informative, they act as a support to the candidate's own theories.

Methodology

This section surveys the issues of research methodology in the standard texts of three social science publications. The body of the methodology section will focus on Gary D. Bouma's *The Research Process* with reference to John Gerring's *Social Science Methodology: A Criterial Framework* and Michael D. Myers's *Qualitative Research in Information Systems*.

The primary stages of this dissertation starts with John Gerring's idea of concept formation. Concept formation involves the development and arrangement of ideas before the core research takes place. These concepts refer to terms and ideas thought of before the topic itself is established. 'It is impossible even to conceptualise a topic, as the term suggests, without putting a label on it.' After this step, reconceptualization of the subject takes place, as 'concepts are not static'. (Gerring 2001: 35) Concept formation involves the initial thoughts and eventual keywords of the research topic.

As a practitioner of fine art –a discipline requiring the performance of visual analysis and description - the qualitative method is more appropriate approach to research as opposed to a quantitative method that involves numbers. As stated by Bouma, 'Quantitative research is designed to give numerical results, which can be reported in tables, graphs and charts telling the number of something, the proportion of something, or what the trends are' (Bouma 1996: 169). The quantitative method focuses on numbers rather than thoughts and ideas.

The qualitative method involves three steps. These were applied during the process of this dissertation. Phase one consists of the essential first steps such as selecting a research problem, background reading, stating the goal, objective or central question and sampling. This phase involved brainstorming around the candidate's desire to write about South African women artists. The brainstorming involved background reading on some of South Africa's well-known and lesser known women artists. Through this phase many aspects of South African women artists were incurred and

the question of social and political representations by women artist developed. A common link between particular artists became apparent: history and memory. Hence the research problem connected these terms and became an analyses of South African women artists and their representations of social and political history through the use of memory and history as recurring themes.

Phase two of qualitative research deals with key data collection methods. This phase involves the reading and analysis of source material on various tangents surrounding South African women artists and social and political history. The collection of date is achieved through extensive reading, gallery visits and keeping notes.

The final phase (phase 3), according to Bouma, is reporting on qualitative research. Bouma writes that 'it is important when writing up the results of your research to remind yourself of the question or research objective that guided your research' (Bouma 1996: 185). During this phase, the data that had been collected during the second phase is arranged and combined with the ideas and theories of the candidate and eventually forms a dissertation which is then refined and edited. Throughout this process the research question is kept in mind: How do South African female artists use memory and history in representing social and political events in South Africa?

Myers explains qualitative research as being 'designed to help us understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live'. (Myers 2002: 4) He suggests that qualitative research data collection includes observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions. Qualitative research involves an intense analytical study of a particular subject, and in the case of this dissertation, the comprehensive analysis of the work of four South African women artists.

Conclusion

In this first chapter the following terms were defined: memory, history, social and political. These terms are central to the contextual understanding of the dissertation. The reasoning behind the selection of the particular topic were identified and

explained. Chapter 1 also includes a review of the literature used during the research process of this dissertation, as well as a methodology review.

The terms were defined and alternative uses were explored. It was clarified which definition of each term is to be used in the dissertation.

The literature section reviewed key sources that form the theoretical support of this dissertation and builds on the ideas and theories of the candidate rather than overpowering them. The literature is used to inform the candidate of existing theories that may help support ideas and presumptions on which this dissertation is built.

Three phases of the qualitative method were explained and how these were applied to the production of the dissertation. The methodology section concluded that the research process used in this dissertation is the qualitative rather than quantitative method.

The next chapter applies these issues to the works of four contemporary South African artists, including the candidate.

Chapter 2:

Chapter 2 is the main part of the dissertation. This chapter is divided into sections Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe, Lien Botha and Tania Kühl. Each section contains an introduction of the artist followed by three sub-sections.

The first sub-section deals with media, technical issues and elements of style. The style of an artist's work refers to the formal elements that is characteristic of his or her work. It is the 'distinctive manner of a person or school or period especially in relation to painting, architecture, furniture, dress etc' (Thompson 1995: 1385). The style is the well-defined technique that allows a viewer to recognise an artist's work.

The formal elements of art, also referred to as the visual elements, are the basic units and the means artists use to create and design works of art. These formal elements include line, colour, composition and texture. In order to achieve a specific style, certain techniques are used, for example, specific brushstrokes or means of applying paint onto a canvas. These techniques will be discussed under this sub-heading.

Medium refers to what a work is constructed out of. For example, Penny Siopis' medium in *Melancholia* is oil on canvas as she used oil paints and a canvas to construct a finished product. Jo Ractliffe's medium is photography as she uses this to achieve an artwork.

The second sub-section is headed 'subject matter' which refers to the 'the literal, visible image in a work of art, as distinguished from its content, which includes the connotative, symbolic, and suggestive aspects of the image' (Lane 1998). The subject matter is the visual content that is represented in a work. It is also the themes and meanings behind what can be seen. For example, a painting of a house can represent the themes of 'home' or 'family'.

The third sub-section concludes each artist's section and provides a summary of the main points made.

Penny Siopis

'Penny Siopis is one of the most influential contemporary artists working in South Africa today' (Smith 2005). Her identity as a South African woman has been highly influential on her art. She defines her identity as a South African as well as her identity as a woman through her art. Her vast variety of media and subject matter provides a unique body of work, rich in meaning, colour, detail and texture. Among a variety of subject matter, the work of Penny Siopis is 'widely interpreted as a powerfully gendered take on the spoils and excesses of colonialism'. Her ironical 'history' paintings were often labelled as 'Resistance Art' by critics and were produced during 'a time of radical social and political upheaval' (Smith 2005: 4). An example of one of her history paintings is *Patience on a Monument: 'A History Painting'* (Figure 1.2) which will be further discussed under the sub-headings. Siopis continues to be a highly productive and prominent South African artist and holds the post of Associate Professor in Fine Arts at the University of Witwatersrand.

The candidate chose Siopis as one of four main subjects for this dissertation not only for her social and political content of her work, but for her unremitting awareness of being a 'woman artist' in South Africa as 'she is among the few contemporary South African artists who openly espouse a political feminism' (Arnold 1996: 70). It is this oeuvre of personal representations of womanhood and social and political history that makes Penny Siopis a key focus for this dissertation. She maintains the ability to create a work that is rich in political meaning while continuously being aware of her identity as a South African woman throughout the process. This relationship between social awareness and artistic process provides the candidate with the opportunity to examine an artist's representation of social and political history from a woman's perspective.

Medium and Techniques

When writing a critical analysis of Siopis' work, it is difficult not to get lost in a web of complex, intricate tangents. Her techniques alone are unorthodox in the sense that she combines seemingly impossible mediums to create beautifully disturbing, enigmatic surfaces 'burdened by the weight of accumulation' (Law 2002: 21). Her

work is aesthetically pleasing while simultaneously being disturbing in content with disordered, cluttered imagery or objects of naked women, dolls, masks and bones. Her diversity of medium includes, among others, painting, installation, video, tableaux and collage. In many of her works, these are combined to create a rich, cluttered surface that has been described as Siopis' 'incredible devotion to clutter' or 'bravado in shoving so much into one picture' (Smith 2005: 4). Works such as *Melancholia* (Figure 1.1) are so stuffed with objects that the focal point, if there is one, is not clear. This could refer to the chaos and disorder in a socially and politically unstable country such as South Africa.

Painting is perhaps Siopis' most prominent medium within her interdisciplinary style. The way in which she primes her surfaces is as important as the finished result. Siopis' primer is not a simple coat of paint, but a build-up of 'photocopies, film and paint, found objects, illusionistic and literal space, time, mirrors, sugar, blood, glue and varnish, and her image archive drawn from popular representations of art and history' (Smith 2005: 14). Some of these 'ready-mades' may not even be seen in the finished product, but to Siopis it is there and it plays a major part in the process of representation.
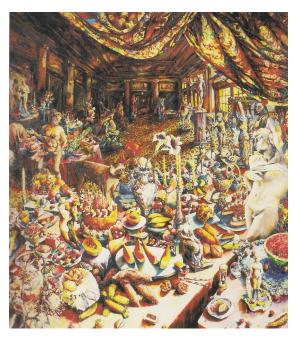

Figure 1.1: Penny Siopis, *Melancholia,* oil on canvas, 197.5 x 175.5cm, collection: Johannesburg Art Gallery (Source: Smith 2005: 13)

A 1986 painting that has gained recognition through history of art courses or gallery-visit-worksheets, is *Melancholia* (Figure 1.1). Colin Richards described this painting as having a 'congested, claustrophobic, telescoped space, overwhelmed by paint, painted objects, painted references' suggesting the 'scarred surface of a wounded history just beyond the picture frame' (Smith 2005: 14). *Melancholia* can be used as an example which illustrates Siopis' complex painting surfaces, and her process of building a surface.

It is difficult to choose a single work that characterizes Siopis' creative process. Her work and technique have varied over the years but there is a certain furtive undertone that remains constant, one that allows her work to be recognised aesthetically. Siopis' 'cake paintings' where she applied paint to the canvas the same way in which one would ice a cake, her impasto technique which can be seen in *Melancholia*, and her gathering of objects as seen in *Patience on a Monument* are all examples of her earlier works. These works have characteristics that remain constant throughout her career: the creation of depth and layers through the build up of materials and the accumulation of iconic imagery. Her painting techniques later develops into three dimensional works such as *Reconnaissance* (Figure 1.3). She speaks about using oil paint in a 'radical, even conceptual manner, for all its sensuous qualities' and how she 'moulded it three-dimensionally, in defiance of convention' (Isaacson 2005). This unconventional way of using oil paint is evident in her 'cake paintings' and her impasto technique where she applies paint onto the canvas directly from the tube.

Her painting and installation is accompanied by video installation, printmaking and collage. In Jennifer Law's essay on Siopis' exhibition, *Sympathetic Magic*, she appropriately describes Siopis' transition between painting and installation: 'Over the years, these coagulated objects slowly turn three dimensional. It is as if the painted surface of the earlier works could no longer restrain the urgency of objects which leak from the surface, gradually oozing over into installation' (Law 2002: 22). Siopis' techniques allow the subject matter to literally and figuratively become an in-depth, intricate bundle of aesthetic information. Her impasto technique allows her to apply the paint thickly onto the canvas which creates depth along with the hundreds of objects squished into the composition that gradually fade into the background where they become blurry and unrecognisable. Her work is characterized by a 'self-critical,

interdisciplinary integration of technique and concept and a vigorous energy that both seduces and challenges' (Smith 2005: Cover). It is this energy and vibrancy of her painting technique that draws focus to each and every object shoved into the composition and the lack of focal point in her installations that suggests every object is equally important.

Subject Matter

As mentioned Siopis' techniques, medium and subject matter are closely linked and work together to achieve a specific content. There are many examples in her work of how her chosen medium supports the subject matter, particularly focusing on memory and history within society and politics such as *Patience on a Monument: 'A History Painting',* her *Shame* series, *Reconnaissance* and *The Baby and the Bathwater*. These works will be further discussed in the next few pages.

Siopis' inclination toward social and political subject matter can be seen in many of the works throughout her career. An oil and collage work Siopis produced in 1988 entitled *Patience on a Monument: 'A History Painting'* (Figure 1.2) features collaged images that appeared in history textbooks read by schoolchildren during the apartheid years and represents a history of South Africa 'that is not only characterized by heroic action and productive change, but which also links courage and progress with white agency' (Arnold & Schmahmann 2005: 212). The title of this work alludes to Patience, the subject of the painting, in a position of power as she is seated on top of a monument. The monument itself, however, seems more like a junkyard than a shrine as it is littered with pieces of history. This diminution of character is further emphasized by Patience peeling a lemon which is a domestic task most likely performed by a woman. The title is also a line from William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*:

> Duke. And what 's her history?
> Vio. A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
> But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
> And with a green and yellow melancholy
> She sat like patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief. (Shakespeare 2007: 53)

From this speech it can be assumed that the woman who is spoken of does not reveal her true emotions and although there seems to be a reason for her to be happy, she hides a poignant displeasure which is illustrated in Thomas Nast's cartoon entitled *Patience on a Monument*. The cartoon featured in *Harper's Weekly*, an American political magazine, in 1868 and shows a 'sympathetic view of blacks, who still wait for justice even after "emancipation"' (Zunz 2001). Siopis' painting is possibly the South African version of Nast's cartoon and Patience waits for justice even though the painting was done long before Apartheid came to an end.

Patience on a Monument: A History Painting, as in a number of similar such paintings, Siopis represents the effects of a social or political history on an individual rather than recording it. She does not necessarily use her art to document a history but to represent the affects of history. The individuals she signifies are mainly women. She represents a provocative, somewhat distasteful look on the effects of human actions in a country 'where history shadows and commands every action in the present' (Smith 2005:5). Siopis commented on her history paintings in the 1980s as 'not only being the representation of politics, but the politics of representation as well' (Smith 2005: 5). Here she suggests that her work does not only references social and political history but simultaneously comments on the controversy that comes with representing politics in art and how it was difficult, especially as a woman artist, to express one's opinion of politics through art.

In her 1997 installation of found objects, *Reconnaissance*, (Figure 1.3) Siopis represents a mixture of past social and political events. Among others, she makes reference to Umtata, capital of what was apartheid 'homeland' of Transkei in the 1930s.

In one of Siopis' more recent works entitled *Shame* (2002) (Figure 1.4) she 'signals to scenes of the social in South Africa: to the gendered violence evident in high rates of rape and abuse, and also to the ways in which the child, especially the girl, is always the radical locus of the uncertain society' (Smith 2005: 141). The *Shame* series comments on the position of a young girl in society. This can be assumed to be an extremely vulnerable position as the girl child carries the status as a powerless female as well as the innocence of a helpless child. This vulnerability allows those in

authoritative positions, such as men, to over-assert their power through acts such as rape. The series reveals the bodies of young girls in various positions, mostly head-down, rarely making eye contact with the viewer. This suggests the girls portrayed are ashamed of what had happened to them. The figures are mostly painted in a child-like manner that references the innocence of a child. The relationship between violence and innocence is emphasised in many of the images through the contrast of a harsh red against a solid white background.

Figure 1.2: Penny Siopis, *Patience on a Monument,* oil and collage on board, 200 x 180cm, collection: William Humphries Art Gallery (Source: Smith 2005: 11)

The above section discusses selected examples of Siopis' representations of social and political histories in South Africa. Underlying themes in these representations, are memory and history. Siopis' work 'has always held hands with history' (Smith 2005: 70) and her work contains a subtle yet powerful theme of memory. In *Reconnaissance*, for example, 'there exist layers of personal, public, political, cultural, and art-historical memory' (Smith 2005: 70). The installation contains references to historical events which members of the public may remember as well as particular items which Siopis herself personally remembers. Among these objects are candleholders, dolls, statuettes, stationary, memorabilia and items of clothing. These piles of objects not only represent memory but is also a 'politically loaded disarray'

(Smith 2005: 72). It is a frenzy of objects that hold political meaning placed against the backdrop of the Metro Theatre in Umtata which was set up by Siopis' grandfather. The word 'reconnaissance' is defined as 'a survey of a region, especially a military examination to locate an enemy or ascertain strategic features' (Thompson 1995: 1148). The definition of the title of the work could suggest that these objects were found during a military recon mission and acts as evidence or clues as to the whereabouts of the enemies or the layout of the objects on a black slab could represent the layout of a plan or a map. The repetition of the chairs in the theatre backdrop adds to the clutter of the objects laid out before it. The combination of the two creates a sense of depth, looking over the objects in the foreground into the distant curtain of the theatre. This spatial relationship could mean that the objects are a continuation of the chairs in the theatre and that each object represents a person. If these objects are personified, the definition of the title, *Reconnaissance*, suggests the theatre was one of the places surveyed for enemies during a military recon mission.

Left: Figure 1.3. Penny Siopis, *Reconnaissance: 1900-1997* (detail), Installation of found objects
(Source: Law 2002: 9)

Right: Figure 1.4. Penny Siopis, *Shame* series (detail), Mixed media on paper, 18.5 x 24.5cm
(Source: Smith 2005: 142)

Siopis produced a series of ironical 'history' paintings including *Patience on a Monument: 'A History Painting'* which refer to images used during apartheid as a means of propaganda for white supremacy in South Africa. Kathryn Smith described

these paintings as being 'profoundly reflexive' and having reference 'to the culturally freighted history paintings which cumulatively helped to constitute white identity in South Africa' (Smith 2005: 50). Siopis' awareness of South African history and her memory, as well as the memories of others, of what effect this history had on individuals is a key aspect of her subject matter. There exists a delicate balance between Siopis' own identity, a woman artist in South Africa, and the social and political history she represents in her work. As Kathryn Smith stated in the introduction to her book, *Penny Siopis*:

> This 'woman artist' who wore her political and feminist heart on her sleeve (or, as much as it was possible to at the time) embodied creative ambition, desire and integrity, taking pleasure in flying in the face of the old guard and imbuing painting with such emotive and critical possibilities that it had people wondering whether she was celebrating or undermining the very act of painting itself (Smith 2005: 3).

Siopis was impulsive in expressing her views on social and political history whether favourably or not. She painted in such a reckless manner, taking huge steps away from the traditional form of painting where she showed no boundaries or rules within the medium. Her disregard for traditional painting emphasises her open display of political views.

Although her expression of locality and self identity existed as an important part of her process throughout her career, her work phases through 'increasingly personal, more subjective' (Williamson 1996: 130) representations. This kind of representation can be seen in Siopis's *Baby and the Bathwater* (Figure 1.5).

The Baby and the Bathwater is a frenzy of paint and collaged images including black and white pictures of various body parts, Greek figurative amulets, native African women performing every day tasks with their children and photographs of her baby son. These images are all worked into or stuck onto a lurid red background.

Figure 1.5: Penny Siopis, *The Baby and the Bathwater* (detail), 1992, Mixed media on board, 250 x 800cm, artist's collection

The title of this work could suggest the bonding of the mother and child during an activity such as bathing. It could also reference the helplessness and vulnerability of a child at a very young age. The more obvious interpretation of the title can relate directly to the idiomatic expression 'throw out the baby with the bathwater' which is used to suggest the process of eliminating something bad but simultaneously getting rid of something good. The healthy developmental process of a child brings forth the child's awareness of its social status along with negative aspects of society such as racism and violence. If this awareness is eliminated, the child's desire for identity remains unfulfilled. Elements of identity are represented by images of Greek amulets as Siopis is a South African of Greek descent. Race is referenced through images of black women and children and photographs of Siopis' son, some of which are inverted suggesting the awareness and subconscious judgment between races. All these figures haphazardly placed on an intense red background looks almost like a battlefield drenched in blood which reminds one of a violent crime scene.

Siopis' subject matter is sometimes obvious to the viewer and other times hidden beneath layers of seemingly unrelated imagery as in *The Baby and the Bathwater*. Her subject matter can sometimes have a variety of meanings, depending on the way the viewer deconstructs it based on his or her own knowledge. This can be seen in *Patience on a Monument: A History Painting* where the Shakespeare line and the American cartoon offer different histories to the painting.

Conclusion

Penny Siopis' has experimented with and refined a variety of media including painting, installation, video and collage. She uses a variety of unorthodox painting techniques such as applying paint with a cake-icer and impasto where she applies paint directly from the tube. Her impulsive art-making has lead to interesting combinations of media such as installation and video, and painting and collage. Siopis characteristically layers of objects, paint, and images to build up a surface.

Like her media, Siopis' subject matter consists of layers. To deconstruct the works, the layers need to be peeled away mentally to understand the history of the work. The meaning often depends on the viewer and his or her understanding of social and political history.

Siopis' subject matter is evident through the imagery she uses. History and memory play vital roles in her work. As Kathryn Smith wrote, 'Siopis' practice has always held hands with history' and there is 'a kind of aesthetic memory, a physical quality to her work' (Smith 2005: 70). The personal memories can be seen in *The Baby and the Bathwater* where she uses images of her own son in remembering his childhood development. Simultaneously, collective memory is used in this same painting by using images of other mothers with their children.

History can be seen in most of her works. *Patience on a Monument: A History Painting* reveals various tangents of history. The painting itself carries a history as it references global American history as well as a play by William Shakespeare, but particularly a local past.

Whether the memories are personal or those of others, Siopis manages to incorporate these memories with an unspoken history that is injected into her work with great care and consideration.

Jo Ractliffe

Jo Ractliffe, Johannesburg-based photographer, currently teaches at the Fine Art Department at the University of Witwatersrand's new school of art. Her work encompasses photographic techniques and imagery to investigate various histories of southern Africa.

Ractliffe was chosen as a subject for this research paper because of her approach to subject matter through medium, in other words, she was selected as a subject because of the deliberate link between the camera and the scene being photographed. Ractliffe is also an appropriate subject as she represents social and political history in the form of photography that borders on being documentary. Her work seems critically undemanding at first but the social and political content behind the scenes viewed in her photographs carry an enigmatic power filled with history and memory. Its subjectivity and neutrality refers to the past from an particular position and encourages being read in a certain way.

Medium and Techniques

Ractliffe uses various methods of photography, including snapshot, documentary, forensic and studio photography, as well as installation video and projections. Ractliffe works predominantly in black and white photography but occasionally has utilized colour photography.

Ractliffe's choice in medium is deliberate. Brenda Atkinson wrote in a catalogue essay, 'Ractliffe has chosen photography as the medium most suited to her thematics. Photography occupies a beautifully, maddeningly awkward space between otherness and the real, between art and documentary journalism' (Atkinson: 1999). This space between art and reality is what draws Ractliffe to photography. She 'achieves a means to reconstruct what is real and what is art, and in the process dissolves several of the distinctions involved' (MacGarry 2005). In an article Sean O'Toole wrote for Frieze magazine he quotes American novelist Richard Ford to describe Ractliffe's unusual documentary photographs as being, 'the afterlife of what journalism can achieve' (O'Toole 2008). Her interest lies not with what happens at the very moment an action

takes place but, as she told O'Toole in an interview, with the 'stuff that circulates around it, the felt experience' (O'Toole 2008).

Ractliffe's choice in medium varies in technique. In 1999 she shot a work entitled *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (Drive-by Shooting)* (Figure 2.1), a series of black and white photographs, using a toy Holga camera. Although the reason for using the Holga camera is uncertain, assumptions as to this choice can be made. The Holga camera allows true-to-the-eye images, in other words, what one sees through the lens is how the picture will develop. Photographer David Roberts explains: 'the Holga allows me to offer a truer representation of the events that unfold before me. Moreso than long lenses and fisheyes, which often distort true vision, the Holga helps me capture on film what my eyes actually see' (Roberts 2007). This close capture of reality is possibly what influenced Ractliffe's choice in camera for this series, her desire to capture a raw, unfiltered image of Vlakplaas, a farm near Pretoria that was the headquarters of the South African Police counterinsurgency unit during Apartheid.

The Holga camera was mass produced in the early 1980s, around the same time South Africa was creating resistance against apartheid and 'a time in South African history resonant with political friction' (Atkinson 2000: 15). By using a camera made during this time, Ractliffe provides an even more truthful look at the events represented in these photographs.
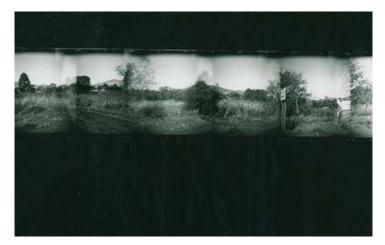

Figure 2.1: Jo Ractliffe, *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (Drive-by Shooting)*, 1999 (Detail), panoramic photographic series. Source: http://www.barrybester.com/joractliffe.htm. Accessed by Tania Kühl 2009

Similarly to Ractliffe's use of a toy Holga camera she used its predecessor, the Diana camera, to photograph *Shooting Diana* which looks at family album photography.

The *Vlakplaas* photographs are accompanied by a video of the same desolate landscapes and is followed by a sequel, *Vlakplaas 1999/2000* which is a two and a half minute film of the Vlakplaas scenery (Figure 2.2). The scenery shown in the video reveals what seems like an ordinary farm: expanses of dried grass with the occasional cluster of trees, long dirt roads and wire fences. It is the title that reveals the history of the place which changes how the viewer sees the film.

Figure 2.2: Jo Ractliffe, *Vlakplaas 1999/2000* (stills from film)
Source: http://www.fundacionbiacs.com/site_en/artist-pages/69_artist.htm, 2009.
Accessed by Tania Kühl 2009

Subject Matter

Ractliffe's techniques hold a very close relationship with her subject matter, as she stated: 'What interests me are things that are ephemeral - desire, loss, longing - and

their relationship to photography' (Ractliffe 1999). She is interested in the momentary and transience of things and how these brief human feelings relate to photography. Perhaps it is the emotions that drives one to take a photograph in the first place that interests her or the emotions evoked through the nostalgic process of viewing a photograph.

Ractliffe's photographs are documents of things she witnessed through her own eyes, and so she assumes the role of an artist as well as a social documentary photographer. Her photographs are 'somewhere beyond social documentary and art photography' (De Vries 2009). The social documentary element of her work is characterized by her desire to capture the 'verisimilitude of what she calls "the real"' (Atkinson 2000: 15), in other words, capturing something that has 'the appearance or semblance of being true or real' (Thompson 1995: 1557). This element of 'the real' may or may not be a reproduction of actuality, but holds the closeness and possibility of being reality. The element of mystery is what characterizes her work as being art photography. It is perhaps the aim of reproducing reality that holds the documentary side of her work and the process of breaking down that reality through processing, developing and manipulating the photographs that makes it art photography.

Her work is a 'never-ending exploration of *Elsewhere*, the space between real and fiction', writes Fred De Vries, 'which only she with her awkward sensibility sees' (De Vries 2009). Ractliffe takes a deliberate step away from reality but at the same time she stagnates within its limits. In other words, she creates images that are not entirely truthful but appear to be real rather than surreal. This eschewed literalness in her work can be seen in her *Nadir* series created in the 1980s (Figure 2.2). This 'reworked montage process' creates 'surreal visions of a perhaps outcome, spatio-temporal distortions that throw us into another world' (Atkinson 2000: 15). *Nadir* plays with the idea of an altered reality: a barren landscape with vicious dogs in the foreground. The landscape is real, the dogs are real but the image is deceiving. The dogs were photographed while in training and superimposed onto the photograph of the landscape. This combination of images creates an untruthful representation of events. The use of dogs could symbolize a number of things. The dog in *Nadir 6* reminds one of a police dog attacking a fleeing person. Although dogs tend to be loyal guardians, the dog in this image represents something to be feared rather than loved. The word

nadir can be defined as 'the part of the celestial sphere directly below an observer' or 'the lowest point in one's fortunes; a time of deep despair' (Thompson 1995: 902). Considering this definition and then looking at the *Nadir* imagery, it reminds one of a post-apocalypse scene where domestic dogs become wild, forming packs that roam around the ruins of a once urban land.

Although Ractliffe sees herself as a 'political outsider' (Atkinson 2000: 16), some of her work comments on South African social and political history in subtle ways. The *Nadir* series, for example, deals with the 'historical trauma of displaced peoples' (Atkinson 2000: 15). Seemingly violent dogs are placed within barren areas of Cape Town, the West Coast, the Karoo, Johannesburg, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. These barren areas are meant to evoke a sense of loss and it is the lack of information that stimulates these feelings rather than what can be seen in the photograph. The displaced peoples and the violent dogs refers back to the post-apocalypse scene where people become violently removed from their familiar surroundings, forced to start over. The dogs, displaced from their domestic limitations, naturally form pack and territories in their new wilderness.

Figure 2.3: Jo Ractliffe, *Nadir 6,* screen printed, photographic lithograph
Source: http://www.axisgallery.com/photographers/ractliffe/index.html. Accessed by Tania Kühl 2009

A less subtle take on social and political history can be seen in *Vlakplaas*: *2 June 1999 (Drive-by Shooting)* comprising of photographs of the Pretoria farm known as

Vlakplaas where torture was inflicted during the Apartheid era. 'Between 1983 and 1993, Vlakplaas operatives were responsible for the abduction, torture and murder of thousands of activists. The bodies of their victims were buried secretly, or burned or dumped in the nearby Hennops River' (Morris 2004: 289). The subtlety lies in the mystery of the first impression of the photograph. It seems to be a photograph of a farm with no particular significance but Ractliffe offers clues, such as the date and title of the work which will be further discussed.

Her focus in *Vlakplaas* is the former commander of the farm Eugene de Kock and his 'gruesome expositions' (Atkinson 2000: 12) during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. During these hearings he revealed 'details of its counter-insurgency operations to a nation stunned to hear confirmed what anti-apartheid activists had suspected all along. Vlakplaas, operational home to apartheid's most ruthless death squads, was drenched in blood' (Atkinson 2000: 12). Atkinson further explains these expositions:

> Its operatives, trained to follow orders with sycophantic obedience, maimed, tortured, and buried bodies as mechanically as breathing. Rewarded with alcohol and beach braais, their tax-sponsored leisure time was as much an opportunity for murderous strategising as were their formal planning sessions (Atkinson 2000: 12).

The date in the title of this work (2 June 1999) also carries political significance. Even though this photograph was taken years after Vlakplaas was closed down and Eugene De Kock was sentenced to prison, it is the memory and history of Vlakplaas that these photographs represent.

The date 2 June 1999 was South Africa's first follow-up election to the first democratic election in 1994 where the 'country witnessed a large-scale transformation from a racially exclusive apartheid regime' (Muthien 1999: 1). Taking a photograph of Vlakplaas on this specific day is a memorialization rather than evidence as her photographs 'privileges absence over presence, fragments over wholes' (Enwezor 2007). In other words, the focus of Ractliffe's photographs is what you cannot see. Ractliffe's Vlakplaas photographs show barren landscapes of the farm that seem far from what it once was. These images represent the quiet memories and hidden

histories of a place that was once used to torture and murder people. Rather than using photography to document what occurred at Vlakplaas, she 'subverts the expectations placed in both her medium and that which it has historically been used to provide: evidence' (Enwezor 2007). Instead of using photography as a means of recording a historic event, such as Vlakplaas, Ractliffe challenges the medium and photographs the farm long after it closed down.

Conclusion

Jo Ractliffe's medium is primarily black and white photography although she has occasionally utilized video and colour photography. Her medium directly references her subject matter as seen in her Vlakplaas photographs where she deliberately used a toy Holga camera to capture raw, unfiltered images of the farm.

The use of photography as a medium is a conscious choice made by Ractliffe. The assumed connection between reality and what is photographed is what draws her to the medium. She uses this relationship between photography and reality in an almost mocking way. She 'twists' the truth by manipulating her photographs through cutting, pasting and stripping the images of colour. This manipulation can bee seen in the *Nadir* series where she photographed landscapes and dogs in training separately and then combined the images in order to create an entirely different scene. This mixture of imagery creates a deceptive representation of reality that makes Ractliffe's function as a documentary photographer debateable.

Ractliffe's photographs may or may not represent reality. Her work can arguably fall into the categories of documentary or art photography, or even both. If the sole purpose of documentary photography is to provide evidence of events, Ractliffe leans more towards art photography. She purposefully avoids the expectations of documentary photography: to record evidence. Instead, she photographs empty landscapes that once carried strong political histories. There are no signs of the location of these landscapes or what it is meant to represent. It is the lack of information that is of essence in Ractliffe's work.

Lien Botha

Cape Town artist, Lien Botha, runs a professional photographic practice and works as a part-time lecturer at several institutes including Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town.

Botha worked as a press photographer and then studied Fine Art at the University of Cape Town. Working in photo-based media, Botha has participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions locally and internationally. Like Siopis and Ractliffe, Botha's exploration of memory and history through her photographs, collages and installations is the motivation for her inclusion in this dissertation.

Medium and Techniques

Botha's approach involves photographs on their own or combined with found objects, drawings or used in installations. She 'extends the conventional boundaries of the photographic image by combining it with other mediums, surfaces and sculptural forms' (Chandler: 1997). Her layering of images has been characterized as 'mysterious, impenetrable and cryptic' and compared to a 'layered poem shrouded in off-beat metaphors' (Corrigall 2009). In her 2005 series, *Safari*, she digitally superimposed line drawings onto photographs of various South African landscapes, including Loxton, Goegap, Swartruggens and Middelpos (Figure 4.1). Although these places do not present an obvious significance, they are all small towns surrounded by mountains and plains that stretch further than they eye can see.

In *Tale bring twis*, one of the photographs in this series, a line drawing of two men boxing is superimposed onto a photograph of tall grass and a dry, mountainous background. In addition to the 16 photographs of the *Safari* series, there are about 1000 colouring books with the same line-drawings that are superimposed onto the photographs. These colouring books serve as catalogues to the *Safari* exhibition as well as ordinary colouring books for children. The photographs of these desolate spaces were taken with a Yashicaflex camera, a camera developed in the 1950's. The use of this camera is appropriate as her work is closely linked to history, as she spoke about the *Safari* series in an interview with Cobus van Bosch, '*gestalte te gee aan 'n*

tydlyn wat sowel outobiografies as generies ontrafel' (Van Bosch: 2004). The series is meant to give stature to a timeline that unravels autobiographically as well as genetically. The Yashicaflex is also used to create the 'contrast between nebulous landscape and the sharp line of contour drawing' (O'Toole 2004). The camera enhances an indefinable landscape's monotony that is contrasted by a clear, sharp line drawing.

Figure 3.1: Lien Botha, *Tale bring twis, Safari*, 2003, Digitally Enhanced Photograph. Collection unknown. http://www.lienbotha.co.za/safari.shtml. Accessed by Tania Kühl 2009.

Subject Matter

The imagery in Botha's work is cryptic in the way that it combines very different images that often seem incongruous or out of context. This incongruity is deliberate as Botha aims to create works containing cryptic clues, both in the visual content as well as the title. The mystery in her work allows her to 'forge a fantasy or abstract-driven mode of expression' (Corrigall 2009). Sean O'Toole wrote of this 'mystery' in her titles and aesthetics: 'while her words might not make any sense of her picture, they do reveal the emotional intensity of a photographer whose art is an oblique, almost surreal, comment on modern life' (O'Toole: 2006). The title of the *Safari* photograph, *Tale bring twis* (Figure 4.1), can be translated from Afrikaans to English as 'Languages brings dispute'. The mystery behind this image and its title lies in the connection between the dispute of languages and two men boxing in front of a

desolate, grassy, mountainous background. To understand this image, and others, it is necessary to understand the reoccurring themes throughout Botha's artistic career.

The 'comment on modern life' that O'Toole speaks of is a prominent theme in the subject matter of Botha's work, socially and politically. Marion Arnold writes of Botha's work that her images, 'speak of human pain, distress and violence' (Arnold cited in Jamal, 2002, p1). In her 1995 series, *Portrette,* she constructed a series of three portraits: *History Portrait, Gender Portrait* and *Religious Portrait*. This series comments on the social and political position of South Africa at the time in that it references the race, gender and religious differences that segregated groups within our society.

Ashraf Jamal wrote that Botha's commentary on South African social and political history can compare to the writing of J.M. Coetzee. Coetzee stated in 1987 that 'the deformed and stunted relations between human beings that were created under colonialism and exacerbated under what is loosely called apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life' (Coetzee, 1987, cited in Jamal, 2002, p6). This connection between Coetzee's statement and Botha's imagery can be seen in *Portrette. History Portrait* (Figure 4.2), one of the three pieces in the *Portrette* series, shows a family photograph set against a grassland backdrop. Grassland referring to large expanses of uncut grass. The family photograph is of a man, presumably the father, holding an open book with a child, the son, seated on his lap.

The white father figure, disguised by a black mask, wears a dark three piece suit which 'is one of the most enduring outfits in the male wardrobe' (Simpson 2007). This outfit has been worn by men of all classes since the 17th century. The mask 'introduces the black male, the ascendant figure in South Africa's emergent history' (Jamal 2002: 6). It references the rise of the black male in post-Apartheid South Africa. The white man and the black mask are brought together by a suit that shows no distinction between races.

The white son is dressed in sailor suit which is a 'style of child's clothing based on the traditional uniform worn by seamen enlisted in the Royal Navy' (Simpson 2007). The sailor suit is significant because it was said to have been 'the first style of child's

fashion which stripped away class distinction and heralded the classless fashions of the future' (Simpson 2007). The blurred lines between social classes represented by this suit, like the father's suit, emphasises the presence of the black man in a white society, the turning point of social segregation of South Africa and the introduction of equality.

The date of the work shows it was made the year after apartheid was brought to an end, it is easy to assume the inclusion of this mask as a comment on the post-apartheid integration of races or the replacement of the power figure. The idea that the mask was simply pasted on top of the photograph could suggest the naivety of thinking that after years of oppression, the end of apartheid will bring immediate reconciliation between racial groups.

Figure 3.2: Lien Botha, *History portrait, Portrette*, 1995, Photograph. Collection unknown. http://www.lienbotha.co.za/portrette.shtml. Accessed by Tania Kühl 2009.

The inclusion of the book in the portrait suggests that the man in the photograph is powerful and knowledgeable, much like renaissance portraiture where certain objects, such as books and jewellery, were boastfully and dutifully included to emphasize class and wealth. The backdrop of grassland possibly suggests the homeland or property of the man in the photograph, a 'sacred cipher for the *volk*' (Jamal 2002: 6).

This grassland could simultaneously refer to the rural homes of the previously oppressed. History and memory both play significant roles in this work. The photograph shows a family portrait, a personal memory that does not necessarily belong to Botha. The composition, the black and white imagery, the clothing worn by the subjects and the state of the actual photograph and its corroded edges suggest it is an old photograph, a history photograph. It is a photograph taken in the distant past, a long time before the work was created.

The second work from the *Portrette* series, entitled *Gender portrait* (Figure 4.3), is an image of a woman that looks like it had been stuck onto a surface and then peeled away (as if removed from society, tearing away the eyes and parts of the body). This erasure of the woman's face 'further exacerbates women's supplementary status' (Jamal 2002: 6). In both *History Portrait* and *Gender Portrait* the faces of the portrait subjects are obliterated in some way. In *History Portrait* the face is covered by a mask, representing a new identity: a man replacing a man. Whereas the face in *Gender Portrait* is completely ripped away, stripping and defacing the identity of the woman subject. There is a trace of a frame around the portrait with a wire used to hang it on the wall in front of the image. This suggests that the photograph was placed facing the wall which degenerates the female subject even further.

Figure 3.3: Lien Botha, *Gender portrait, Portrette*, 1995, Photograph. Collection unknown.
http://www.lienbotha.co.za/portrette.shtml. Accessed by Tania Kühl 2009.

This comments on the social position of women in history and the fact that 'education, professions, and the vote were not open to women and that married women had no civil rights or property rights' (Taylor 1993: Executive Summary). They were 'stripped' of their rights and at world conventions they were 'required to listen to proceedings from behind a curtain' (Taylor 1993: 1). It is this forced silent presence of women that Botha suggests through indicating the portrait faces the wall.

The third and final photograph of the *Potrette* series, *Religious Portrait* (Figure 4.4), shows yet another obliterated face. This time it is the face of a man that can only be assumed to be Jesus Christ. The bearded figure is shown peering through a split in a creased surface. On top of this surface are plants and seeds that could represent growth and nature.

The creased foreground looks like tissue paper that had been ripped and even though this covers most of the image, it is the dark portrait that peers from underneath that dominates. The figure, seemingly human, represents the 'mortality and a reified and fanatical sphere of deification' (Jamal 2002: 6).

Figure 3.4: Lien Botha, *Religious portrait, Portrette*, 1995, Photograph. Collection unknown.
http://www.lienbotha.co.za/portrette.shtml. Accessed by Tania Kühl 2009.

Conclusion

Although Botha is known for never stating the exact intention or meaning of her work, she leaves the viewer with numerous clues. Enough to draw the viewer's own conclusion of the meaning behind her work. Sean O'Toole commented that 'if you're expecting a tidy explanation, something that ties all the disparate elements together, forget it, the photographer doesn't speak about her work that way' (O'Toole: 2006). Botha does not provide reasoning to her work but allows the viewer to come up with his or her own explanation. Through doing this, the candidate realised that subject matter does not have to make sense and does not have to be explained for a work to be visually and thematically interesting.

Even though the secrecy in Botha's work prevails, there is a recurrent reference to social and political history and a continuous use of history in representation. Botha subtly references memory. Jamal wrote of Botha's 'distinct signature' as being 'the boundary between memory and loss, the privations that are the sum of the history of a displaced people' (Jamal 2002: 2). Her work comments on the line between what a person remembers and what that person has lost. It has an element of nostalgia juxtaposed by social and political history.

Tania Kühl

In this section, the candidate reflects self-critically on her own works; in specific comparison with technical and conceptual issues outlined in the work of Siopis, Ractliffe and Botha in preceding sections. As an artist practitioner, the candidate finds processes of self-reflection relevant in her creative productions. Self-reflection is defined by David Kaulemu as 'the inherently negating state of the self' (Kaulemu 2008: 187), in other words, the self naturally seeks negative criticism of itself. This negative criticism is used to reflect on what we have done and learn from that experience. Karl Popper, however, describes self-criticism as the 'constant reconsideration of ideas' and 'the often relentless corrections' which is made to those ideas (Popper 1996: 41). Kaulemu describes self-criticism as a process of bringing down one's own ideas in order to achieve a higher level of success. Popper describes this process as an amendment of ideas rather than negating.

In this section self-criticism is used to describe the artist's influences and processes of creating. The self-reflection process involves asking the same questions that were asked of Siopis', Ractliffe's and Botha's work and considering it a self-interview. The candidate will ask herself questions about her working process as well as her subject matter.

Tania Kühl began her studies in Fine Arts at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 2003. She is currently completing her Masters at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg.

In experimenting with various mediums she has developed her focus primarily on painting and photography. During the first three years of her studies in Johannesburg, her work was strongly influenced by two of her mentors, Penny Siopis and Jo Ractliffe. This simultaneous stimulus of two different media encouraged her to continue utilizing both media, dealing with the same subject matter: memory.

Kühl spent her childhood in a small town surrounded by conservative Afrikaners which exposed her to many aspects of oppression and narrow-mindedness. Personal memory of past events has thus become an ongoing theme in her work.

Kühl as an artist and student was influenced by the techniques and subject matter of Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe and Lien Botha. Even though Siopis, Ractliffe and Botha are still working artists, it is important to compare them to a more recent developing artist with similar subject matter such as Tania Kühl. Having a strong interest in South African history and personal memory, Kühl has used these in her often abstract representations of social and political change.

Medium and Techniques

During her six years of studies, Kühl has experimented with installation, video, photography, sculpture, painting, printmaking and performance art. Like Siopis, she has an interest in found objects and used these in her art sporadically throughout her studies. In 2003, she put together an installation entitled *Senti(mental)ity* (Figure 3.1) which consisted of hundreds of personal objects suspended from a ceiling, centralized by a mannequin wearing a personalized dress, a doll and a birdcage containing more objects. This interest in objects and the strong meaning and sentimentality of objects surfaces in her work throughout her studies. Some of her painting surfaces are crowded with splashes of paint, glue and various objects stuck directly onto the canvas. Her paintings, installations and mixed media works carry a strong relationship between paint and object and the changing of an object's surface through the application of paint. This approach particularly reflects on the reading of Siopis' work. In *Senti(mental)ity* this can be seen in the detail (Figure 3.2) of the customized dress. Personal objects such as pill packets, receipts and sections of letters and photographs are stuck or sewn onto the dress and, in some sections, splattered with paint. This accumulation of objects and paint was highly influenced by the techniques used by Siopis in works like *Melancholia* (Figure 1.1) and her hoarded installations such as *Reconnaissance* (Figure 1.3).

Senti(mental)ity sparked an interest in dresses and the idea of working with dresses and altering them to the point of disfunctionality brought on the next project, a series of five dresses, including the same dress used in *Senti(mental)ity*. Each dress, being a different type and different size, was altered in a different way, suspended next to each other and revealed to the audience, as if looking at somebody's washing line.

Figure 4.1: Tania Kühl, *Senti(mental)ity*, 2003, Installation

Figure 4.2: Tania Kühl, *Senti(mental)ity (Detail)*, 2003, Installation

Figure 4.3: Tania Kühl, *Teabag Dress*, 2003, Dress and Mixed Media. Artist's Collection.

Figure 4.4: Tania Kühl, *Teabag Dress (Detail),* 2003, Dress and Mixed Media. Artist's Collection.

One of the dresses, a child's everyday casual dress, was covered with sewn-on sweet wrappers and another, a size 30 young woman's dress, was painted with wood varnish. The third dress in the line was the same dress used in *Senti(mental)ity* and the fourth was an old wedding dress being held together by men's ties. The fifth dress, a child's christening gown, was covered with sewn-on teabags, each teabag altered in a different way (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). Later on, this dress was exhibited as a single work and remade while studying at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

While having this interest in objects and their connection with memory and commemoration, Kühl also had a fascination with the directness of photography. The instant correlation between the eye and the lens and the creating and capturing of an idea into a neat, rectangular, flat surface as opposed to the layering of collage and the depth of painting as seen in her works influenced by Siopis. Her interest in the directness of photography was influenced by Jo Ractliffe's ability to create a seemingly barren scene that for Kühl carries significant information in a single image captured in time. Originally working with darkroom black and white photography, Kühl later moved on to digital photography. Through her photography, her fascination with textures in old, abandoned or neglected buildings and other surfaces started to develop (Figure 3.5 and 3.6). These textures and expanses of neglect and often abandonment runs parallel with the subject matter that will be further discussed under the next subheading.

Figure 4.5: Tania Kühl, *Constitution Hill (One of series)*, 2004, Darkroom photograph. Artist's Collection.

Figure 4.6: Tania Kühl, *Toevlugs Oord (One of series),* 2005, Digital Photograph. Artist's Collection.

In her more recent work, Tania explores these textures through painting by creating layers with rich, tactile, vibrant textures that represent the layering of memory and history.

Subject Matter

Kühl has explored a variety of subject matter during her studies from 2002 to 2009. Political history, the role of women in society and more importantly memory. Her interest in gender roles lies in the power relations between men and women. A work that demonstrates this interest is *Duty*, 2003. This work consists of an ironing board with faces of women and irons printed onto the fabric covering the board (Figure 3.7 and 3.8). Once again, there is a strong relationship between object and image that can be seen in many of Siopis' works such as *Reconnaissance* (Figure 1.3) where she places objects in front of an image that allows the viewer to question the meaning of both object and image. Kühl was also interested in Lien Botha's *Portrette* series specifically in Botha's fusion of object and image together.

Duty shows the domestic duties attached to being a woman and the role of the woman in the household. The title is short and descriptive. The ironing board stands ready and waiting and the title expects the viewer to understand its expectations, just as men expected women to know their place in society without question. *Teabag Dress,* 2003 and the 2007 remake of this work shows similar themes. Botha's *Gender portrait* was another object-image juxtaposition that comments on gender roles, only Botha tears the image itself and adds objects, in this instance a frame.

Figure 4.7: Tania Kühl, *Duty* , 2003, Found object and fabric transfers. Artist's Collection.
Figure 4.8: Tania Kühl, *Duty (Detail),* 2003, Found object and fabric transfers. Artist's Collection.

In the *5 Dresses* Series of which the *Teabag Dress* is a part of, she explores women as victims of men in power. The wedding dress with men's ties signifies the immediate power position men take in a marriage where the dress built up with sweet wrappers

signifies the innocence of a child before becoming enrolled in the world of gender equality. The varnished dress represents a young woman objectified by the male gaze as the varnish makes the dress appear fleshy, like a piece of meat. Her interest in the subject of women extends to a personal level, as she herself is a woman living in South Africa. She further explores the subject of women in various situations, such as being vulnerable to crime. Similarly, Siopis explored this vulnerability in her *Shame* series; in which 'the viewer is confronted with images of gross violation and devastating injustice, which evoke strong emotive responses of desperation and outrage' (Mills 2007). Kühl's depiction of violation is more cryptic as seen in *Senti(mental)ity* (Figure 1.3).

In her 2003 installation, *Senti(mental)ity* (Figure 3.1 and 3.2), she suspended hundreds of her own personal belongings, ranging from childhood dolls to private letters, from the ceiling at the Wits School of Arts against the backdrop of Johannesburg Central. The idea behind this project was to reveal the feelings of violation experienced by someone whose home has been burgled. Private possessions are exposed to the intruders as well as handled and sometimes broken. Through this installation she explored the incident of break-ins in South Africa as seen on the news, read in newspapers or friends and family's experiences. The title is a deconstruction of the word *sentimentality* which is defined as something 'showing or affected by emotion rather than reason' (Thompson 1995: 1262). Kühl took objects that were of sentimental value to her and exposed them to the public. In the title, the word *mental* is isolated from the rest of the word by brackets. This emphasises that having an attachment to an object is a mental process that is constructed through the object's emotional worth and broken down more severely than an object without sentimental value by acts such as theft or breakage.

Kühl's interest in politics stemmed from her childhood, having grown up in a small town, Bethal, surrounded by racial conflict and social oppression, 'even living in a large city like Johannesburg could not compare to the narrow-mindedness and extreme conservativeness of the small town I lived in'. She describes incidents like 'teenagers getting beaten up for wearing black, wives getting beaten into submission or girlfriends getting shot for falling pregnant'. Even though these incidents take place everywhere, 'in a small town it's in your face all the time'. This direct exposure to

these social injustices sparked an interest in smaller scale social and political histories and the literal and figurative debris of those histories.

These stories she obtains from her environment, for example, local newspapers or family and friends. She also references her own memories of the different environments she has experienced. She speaks of the after effects of such issues, the remains or debris of history as well as those 'fading memories'. In 2004 she returned to the town she grew up in and took a series of black and white photographs entitled *Fragments* to document certain spaces she remembers from her childhood (Figure 3.9 and 3.10). Through this work she represents her memories as photographs and she explores the history of the town through witnessing social and political changes as well as physical changes in buildings and other structures. Influenced by Ractliffe's work, she shares a similar interest in 'the stuff that circulates around it, the felt experience' (O'Toole 2008) of an environment. Kühl is interested in Ractliffe's ability to capture a 'felt experience' and allow the viewer to share that experience with a photograph that contains very little information. This 'minimalist' approach can be seen in Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* images where feeling overpowers content.

Figure 4.9: Tania Kühl, *Fragments Series* , 2004, Digital Photograph.   Artist's Collection.
Figure 4.10: Tania Kühl, *Fragments Series,* 2004, Digital Photograph. Artist's Collection.

Further social and political themes can be seen in Kühl's series of photographs, *Constitution Hill* (Figure 3.5). This is a series of photographs of the architecture of Johannesburg's Constitution Hill, the Old Fort Prison Complex where thousands of people, including Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, were brutally punished before the dawn of democracy in 1994. Through these photographs she captures the

barrenness, once again influenced by Ractliffe, of Constitution Hill. Using an analogue camera she moved from the cold, dark spaces of the isolation cells to a similar yet completely different atmosphere of the darkroom. The idea of the process becoming a part of the meaning of the work was also influenced by Ractliffe as she explores the feelings surrounding the photographic experience.

Although Kühl's earlier work comments on social and political history, the prominent subject matter in her work is personal memory. The referencing of her own memories can be seen in her *Timeline* series where she documents various stages of her life. The title refers to a linear representation of events in her life and compares it to a timeline one might find in a history book. This series, divided into three parts (*Platteland*, *Dorp* and *Stad)*, represents a timeline of her life from the age of one until her mid-teens. The series is divided into the time in her life that she lived on a farm, in a small town and a city. These times are juxtaposed by historical events that took place during those times, whether she was aware of them at the time or not. Each of the three paintings are collaged with family photographs taken during the referred time and images of South African social and political events that took place in those years. This series acted as an experiment to test her memory of personal and political events and the outcome was realizing how selectively she remembered things and how little awareness she had of politics as a child. It is also a comment on remembering things, whether accurately or not, because a photograph shows that it happened.

Platteland, which is one of three paintings from the *Timeline* series, represents the five years (1985-1990) spent living on a farm just outside Carolina in Mpumalanga. She collaged personal photographs taken while living on the farm onto a painted surfaces as well as found images of social and political events that took place during that time, for example, the accusations against Winnie Mandela for the murder of 14-year-old James (Stompie) Mokhetsi Seipei which was reported in the New York Times when she was found guilty 'of murdering a 14-year-old youth who had been abducted with three men and held in her home in late 1988' (Wren 1990). The use of historical photographs can be seen in Siopis' use of imagery from local textbooks in her *Patience on a Monument* (Figure 1.2).

Figure 4.11: Tania Kühl, *Platteland, Timeline*, 2009, Oil, acrylic and collage on canvas. Artist's Collection. Photographed by Tania Kühl 9 November 2009

The second and third paintings in the *Timeline* series, *Dorp* and *Stad*, represent the time she lived in a small town and in a city. Similar to *Platteland*, the juxtaposition of personal memories and social and political history is evident in the images she used. Kühl's exploration of a variety of subjects has had the constant connection to memory, which has developed into her primary focus.

Conclusion

Kühl has experimented with a variety of media but her main medium is painting. She works in oils and acrylics on board or canvas and builds layered surfaces through texture, collage and paint. Her choice in medium and technique are deliberate as they emphasise the subject matter. This can be seen in her more recent work, *Timeline*, where the layering of images, texture and paint represents layers of memory that disappear or fade when another one is added.

Kühl has explored a variety of subject matter during her studies. Social and political history is a recurrent theme in her work. This can be seen in *Constitution Hill* and more subtly in the hidden political imagery of *Timeline*. Her interest in the role of the woman in society can be seen in *Senti(mental)ity*, *Duty* and *5 Dresses.* These two themes (social and political history and the role of women in society) is underlined by the continuous theme of memory. *Constitution Hill* references the memories of the brutally punished prisoners that occupied the cells where *Timeline* is a documentation of Kühl's own memories. Even though her work explores different subject matter, memory provides the backbone to those themes.

Chapter 3:

Conclusion

The first chapter of this dissertation clarified the terms memory, history, social and political within the context of the dissertation. Chapter one also explained the motivation behind the selection of the topic and provided an overview of literature and methodologies used in the research process.

The second chapter was the core of the dissertation and contained the body of the text. In this chapter each of the four artists were analysed in detail with examples of their work: Penny Siopis, Jo Ractliffe, Lien Botha and Tania Kühl. Appropriate biographical information, techniques, media, subject matter and selected works were discussed.

Chapter 3 was divided into sections based on the candidate's conclusions on a variety of subjects. Social, political and history is the first subsection that concludes the candidate's findings on these themes in the work of the four artists. The candidate explored intersections between personal and public memory in those works as well as choice of medium, technique and the importance of titles. The chapter ends with a section in which the candidate self-reflects on the dissertation.

Social, Political and History

The aim of this dissertation was to analyse the work of four artists and their use of history and memory as recurring themes in representing social and political events in South African history. The next few paragraphs will reflect on social and political history as seen in the themes of the work of the four artists. Memory will fall under the next sub section. The candidate's analysis of the subject matter on a broader basis established that all four artists include these themes in their work using a variety of imagery that will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Penny Siopis represented social and political history through her use of layering paint with images and objects. In *Patience on a Monument: 'A History Painting'* her

images used to layer the monument on which Patience sits were derived from history books. This was a direct link to history. She also referenced social and political history in *Reconnaissance* using an image of the Metro Theatre in Umtata which had great significance during the Apartheid years. The placement of a collection of found objects in front of this image could have commented on military recon missions during the Apartheid years. The display of personal objects being invaded by the eyes of the public could have represented the invasion of military recruits in Umtata. This social vulnerability was also explored in her *Shame* series where young girls were represented as victims of society. These figures were placed in weak positions, exposing their vulnerability to the viewer. This work represented the history of male social dominance and references the female as being the weaker sex. The figures were presented in bright red paint, mostly placed on a pure white background. Siopis possibly used the clean white background as a reference to the innocence of a child and the vibrant red as an indication of violence and sexual abuse.

Jo Ractliffe referenced social and political history in a more subtle manner (she does not take imagery directly from history books, for example). Ractliffe chose to reference social and political history indirectly. This implicitness was seen in her *Vlakplaas* photographs where she chose to photograph an area where social and political events took place years ago, rather than using imagery of the farm while it was still running. Her subtle references to social politics could also be seen in *Nadir 6* where she photographed seemingly vicious dogs and placed them against a deserted barren area. Although nothing seemed to reference history at first, reading into the work brought up some questionable aspects of her themes. For example, the dogs reminded the candidate of police dogs and their ostensibly aggressive nature suggested violence. The placement of the dog imagery on top of the background suggested an act of invasion through the serenity of the barren area being charged by aggressive dogs.

Lien Botha's social and political content was as cryptic as Ractliffe's. It was evident that there was a connection between Botha's work and South African history but the candidate had to search for clues in order to find out more. In Botha's *Portrette* series the candidate had to investigate all the details that Botha provided, such as the clothing worn by the subjects and the background behind them. Some of these clues,

like the clothing, involved research to learn what their possible significance could be. Botha's representations of social and political history was more difficult to read than Siopis' but more involved than Ractliffe's. Where the candidate assumed Ractliffe's subject matter through her own reading, Botha's subject matter required more research which helped the candidate understand Botha's choice in imagery.

Tania Kühl's approach to the subject matter was more abstract through her painting than in her photographs. In her *Timeline* series, the historical and personal imagery she used were hidden by layers of paint and varnish. The pieces were more for the candidate's private knowledge than it was for the public understanding of the works. Her photography was far more accessible with regards to understanding the meaning behind the work. Her series *Constitution Hill* were photographs taken of the prison. Similar to Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* series, these photographs were unaltered and taken of a place that homed social and political history years ago. The photographs were taken years after the prison was closed like Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas* images were taken long after the farm was shut down. The reflection on spaces previously occupied by historic events was also evident in *Fragments* on a more personal level as Kühl photographed the town she used to live in and where she experienced social oppression.

Intersections between personal and public memory

In this dissertation the candidate explored the theme of memory in art. She concluded that two aspects of memory can be noted in the work of the four artists: personal memory and public memory. The candidate explored the intersections between these two types in the work of the four artists.

Siopis' references memory in *Reconnaissance* through a display of objects that may have had sentimental value either to herself or someone else. Her obsession with objects that could have stemmed from their nostalgic attributes are hoarded together into a public space where memory and history collide. The historical reference being Umtata (Transkei's homeland during Apartheid) and the memory is referenced through the sentimentality of objects. Siopis' connection to this work was her personal memories of her grandfather as he set up the Metro Theatre in Umtata.

The intersection between personal and public memory was also noted in *The Baby and the Bathwater* through the representation of the mother and child relationship of others as well as her own. She achieved this personal reference through incorporating pictures of her own son in between those of other children.

Ractliffe's intersection of private and public memory was investigated in her *Vlakplaas* series. The farm where hundreds of people were tortured referenced the memories of those victims and those who inflicted the torture. Ractliffe's own visit to the farm to take photographs on a significant date (the first election after Apartheid) represented her own memory of that day (2 June 1999). Through her visiting the placed she photographed, she added an element of personal memory to the public memories that already existed from when the farm was still running.

Lien Botha's reference to memory was apparent in *History Portrait* through her use of a family photograph. Whether this photograph was of her own family was unclear, but the use of portraiture referenced memory as a photograph could be used to remember certain people or places. Botha's link to memory was more subtle than Siopis' and Ractliffe's.

Tania Kühl's use of memory was more dominant than her use of history. Her *Timeline* series represented time periods in her life. These personal memories were referenced through family photographs but public memory was incorporated through found images of social and political events.

Choice of medium, technique and title

Medium and technique was one of the sub-headings under each artist. Here, the chosen medium and creative process of the artists were discussed. It was apparent in the work of all four artists that medium is a deliberate choice and supports the subject matter whether it is used subtly or powerfully. The techniques used in all four instances inevitably play a role in the representation of the subject matter.

The candidate also explored the titles of the studied works and discovered that in many instances the titles provided an important indication as to the meaning of the works.

Penny Siopis used a wide range of media, including installation and video, although she has always been considered a painter. She utilized a variety of techniques in her painting such as impasto and combining found objects with her paint to create a unique unorthodox style of painting. Every object and image was considered carefully and whether these combinations formed part of a painting, video or installation, they were a direct reference to the subject matter. This was seen in *Patience on a Monument* in the way she derived images directly from history books and built up a surface on which she eventually painted. The painting and collage worked together to represent the intended themes of the work.

Siopis' titles were not as cryptic as Ractliffe's and Botha's. The *Shame* series represented subjects who felt ashamed and this could be understood through looking at the way in which these figures were portrayed. *Reconnaissance*, however, required a definition as well as a history on Umtata in order to understand the work as a whole. *Patience on a Monument: 'A History Painting'* originally aided the candidate in the understanding of the work but further expanded these ideas when the title was better understood through researching its origin.

Unlike Siopis, Jo Ractliffe did not take images from history books to directly reference social and political history but subtly suggested this, for example, through the use of a specifically chosen camera. This could be seen in her *Vlakplaas* series where she deliberately chose to take the photographs with a toy Holga camera which had a less obvious link to the subject matter portrayed in the image of the farm. Her process was also more subtle than Siopis' as she did not directly portray the social and political history but rather the empty spaces of where this history occurred. If it were not for the mention of *Vlakplaas* in the title of this work, the photograph would have been seen as an image of a barren landscape with no particular significance. Another clue as to the meaning of this work was noted in the date used in the title. 2 June 1999, having strong political significance for South Africa, is the date she photographed Vlakplaas which was also the date of the first post-apartheid elections.

Her choice in medium also held an almost 'sneaky' quality as she deliberately defied the original function of photography: to record the truth. She cut and pasted photographs over other photographs to twist the truth. This can be seen in the layering of images in *Nadir*.

Lien Botha's medium of photography and collage was similar to that of Ractliffe's. She photographed and manipulated scenes, perhaps in a less subtle way. Unlike Ractliffe, she made the manipulation obvious. In her *Portrette* series she pasted things like photographs, tissue paper and found objects on top of other photographs. In the *History Portrait*, for example, she pasted an image of a black mask over the face of a white man. This choice directly contributed to the subject matter. Like Ractliffe, her work is mysterious and elusive and does not always show the viewer directly what she was trying to convey. But, also like Ractliffe, she leaves clues in the title, date and choice in medium. The date of the *Portrette* series was the year after the end of Apartheid which questions the political relevance of the work. The titles of each work in the series (*History portrait, Gender portrait, Religious portrait*) all pointed at parts that form a society.

Like Siopis, Tania Kühl has also used a variety of media. Her choice in installation, photography and painting was a conscious one. For each work the medium was specifically chosen to reinforce or build the subject matter. In *Senti(mental)ity* installation was used to create a feeling of violation, if not for the viewer, for herself. She used specifically chosen personal objects and suspended them from the ceiling for all to see and touch. In *Constitution Hill* she uses photography in a similar way to Ractliffe: by recording history after it has happened. Instead of using imagery of the space while it was still a prison (as Siopis may have done), she goes back after it had been converted into a museum to portray its history that may not be evident in the content of the photograph. The *Timeline* series was a build up of photographs, found images and paint that represent the lost, forgotten layers of memory and history. She chose painting as her medium in the *Drain* series as she could simply paint over certain things – a direct reference to the loss of memory.

Self-reflection

The dissertation largely contributed in aiding the candidate's understanding of her own production process and how the use of specifically chosen media can enforce the overall meaning of the work. The candidate was also ascertained that the subject matter in an art piece does not always have to be clear to the viewer and may require a lot of reading before comprehending what the work is trying to comment on.
The candidate also discovered constructive ways in which the viewer can be aided in understanding a work. The title, for instance, was found to be more important and significant than the candidate originally assumed. The date on which a work was created may also be of significance.

Overall, the candidate has explored a variety of ways in which she can enhance her visual representations of social and political history and memory and has gained through this experience.

List of illustrations

The dimensions of the works or in the case of video works, the durations, are given where known. In the case of installations and digital photographs, dimensions are not given.

Penny Siopis
The Baby and the Bathwater (1992)
1.5   Mixed media on board
250 x 800cm
Artist's collection

Jo Ractliffe
Detail of *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (Drive-by shooting)*, 1999
2.1   Panoramic photographic series
Dimensions unknown
Collection unknown

Jo Ractliffe
Video stills from *Vlakplaas 1999-2000*,
Audio and video
2.2   Duration: 2 minutes and 30 seconds
Collection: Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary Art,
Johannesburg

Jo Ractliffe
Nadir 6 (part of series), 1987
Screen printed, photographic lithograph
2.3   37.5 x 50.5cm
Collection: Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary Art,
Johannesburg

Lien Botha
Tale Bring Twis (From *Safari* series), 2003
3.1   Digitally enhanced photograph
Dimensions unknown
Collection unknown

Lien Botha
History portrait (From *Potrette* series), 1995
3.2   Collaged Photograph
Dimensions unknown
Collection unknown

Lien Botha
Gender portrait (From *Potrette* series), 1995
3.3   Collaged Photograph
Dimensions unknown
Collection unknown

Lien Botha
Religious portrait (From *Portrette* series), 1995
3.4　Collaged Photograph
Dimensions unknown
Collection unknown

Tania Kühl
Senti(mental)ity, 2003
4.1　Installation of found objects
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Senti(mental)ity (detail), 2003
4.2　Installation of found objects
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Teabag Dress, 2003
4.3　Mixed media
Dimensions unknown
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Teabag Dress (detail), 2003
4.4　Mixed media
Dimensions unknown
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Constitution Hill (part of series), 2004
4.5　Darkroom photograph
15 x 10cm
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Toevlugs Oord (part of series), 2005
4.6　Digital photograph
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Duty, 2003
4.7　Fabric transfer onto found object
Dimensions unknown
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Duty (detail), 2003
4.8   Fabric transfer onto found object
Dimensions unknown
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Fragments (part of series), 2004
4.9   Digital photograph
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Fragments (part of series), 2004
4.10   Digital photograph
Artist's collection

Tania Kühl
Platteland (From *Timeline* series), 2009
4.11   Oil, acrylic and collage on canvas
50.8cm x 101.6cm
Artist's collection

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