

**The Introduction of British Formalism  
to the Fine Arts Department at the University of Natal  
from 1936 until 1969**

**Volume One**

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**THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO**

**Sue Helm-Davies, who taught me to create art,**

**Ian Calder, who taught me how to comprehend and apply it, and**

**My husband Tony, who has supported me wholeheartedly in my pursuit of art.**

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. This thesis has not been, nor is it to be, submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Amanda Edwina Tracey Bucknall

August 2015

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## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to document and record the reception of British formalism as it was first received into The Fine Arts Department at the University of Natal between the period of 1936 to 1969. That was an enigmatic time for the Department as the influence of British Modernism was predominant, Natal being a former British colonial province requiring British prescriptive governance within its educational system, as it eagerly built and developed its academic institutions to enhance imperialistic values and colonial aspiration. An examination of this momentum provides theoretical review in order to recognise how both the academic representation and interpretation of British formalism were introduced by British art trained practitioners and academics at The University and subsequently became integral and central to the art educational system adopted by The Department and its teaching methodologies.

The Fine Arts Department that was established on the Pietermaritzburg campus of The University in 1936, had been originally founded as the Durban School of Art in 1914 by the British potter John Adams who was succeeded by John Oxley in 1922; the curriculum that was adopted by both reflected the art practice and currency of early modernism in Britain in its infancy. With a refocus on industrial and social needs, art became recognised as a key to nation-building, whether on a practical or propagandistic level, and whether confined to the United Kingdom or as a vital tool for colonial innovation. It was an art training far removed from the ‘fine art’ elitism of the ‘traditional’ Western art institutions, such as the Royal Academy in London. Instead what was taught in The Department was an assimilation of the artisan skills taught by the Royal College of Art in London, essential skills not only required to promote British industry and to develop specialised craft guilds, but also the same motivations and that colonial expansion desired. It was therefore under the guise of ‘craft’ and artisan practice, that ‘fine art’ became received at The University and British formalism was introduced and indoctrinated into The Department.

It was also from a great humanitarian perspective that Oxley developed his art pedagogical perceptions of art and art-making that embraced the orientation of modernism and the currency of art therapy at the beginning of the Second World War, but he also consciously recognised that his methodology was a western phenomenon to be applied in South Africa. It was on the appointment of his successor in 1953, Jack Heath, that Natal witnessed the exposure to late British Modernism, and British formalism as an aesthetic standard became practiced in The Department. It was Heath’s own

work that permitted the exploration of abstract expressionism to a far greater degree, and it is submitted, was far more progressive than its British counterpart. Through art instruction during that time British modernism fashioned the art methodologies within The Department, kindling a formalistic aesthetic at The University that remained for many decades. To analyse this a comparison is made of how British formalism was perceived by both British and South African born lecturers throughout this period in The Department's history, with specific reference to Rosa Hope, Geoffrey Long, Jane Heath, and Hilda Ditchburn.

## **Prefatory Note**

Save for instances when a full detailed referencing is required, the following abridged references have been used throughout this thesis, in alphabetical order:

The use of the definite article when making reference to defined terms (as indicated below in this Prefatory Note) has been used intentionally throughout this thesis so as to distinguish any generic usage of the terms. It is a personal writing preference of the author and is not necessarily included as done as a requirement or at the request of the institution referred, my supervisor or as a prerequisite of the Centre for Visual Arts' *Style Guide: For Postgraduate Texts* (referred to below), but merely is adopted to assist in the identification of a term defined in this Prefatory Note for the ease to the reader.

### **'British Modernism'**

This term has been used throughout this thesis to describe the specific movement that arose in Britain at the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

### **'British modernism'**

This term is used throughout this thesis in its generic sense, as an influence of the movement of British Modernism.

### **'The Central School'**

This refers to the Central School of Arts and Crafts that is located in the City of London, England.

### **'The Centre for Visual Arts'**

The Centre is located on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (formerly referred to as the Fine Arts Department).

### **'The Department'**

This refers to the Fine Arts Department situated on the Durban campus briefly as from 1936 until it was transferred permanently to the Pietermaritzburg campus in 1937 and which, as from 2006, has been renamed The Centre for Visual Arts.



**‘The Durban Art School’**

This term has been used to identify the art school located in Durban which John Adams developed in 1914 and which John Oxley headed from 1922 until that department was relocated to Pietermaritzburg in 1936. However, during that time, The Durban Art School was merely a subsidiary department of an institution that was renamed several times. For clarity, the Durban Technical Institute was founded in 1914 and was subsequently renamed the Durban Technical College in 1915 (Brookes 1966: 7) (with the art school as a subsidiary department being referred to as the Durban School of Art); that name was eventually changed in 1922 to the Natal Technical College. Whilst some of the institution’s departments remained, others, including the art school, were evolved ‘into the nucleus’ (Brookes 1966: 7) of the Natal University College (which had been formed previously in 1919; this association between the Natal University College and the Natal Technical College was finally severed in 1931) (Brookes 1966: 40). Where a specific reference is required in its historical context, the actual name of the institution has been used.

**‘The Poole Studio’**

The company known as Carter, Stabler and Adams co-founded by John Adams (a subsidiary company of Carter Company) will hereinafter be referred to as the Poole Studio located in Dorset, England.

**‘The Royal Academy’**

This refers to The Royal Academy of Arts that is located in the City of London, England.

**‘The Royal College’**

This refers to the Royal College of Art that is located in the City of London, England.

**‘The Slade’**

This refers to the Slade School of Art that is located in the City of London, England.

**‘The University’**

The use of the term ‘The University’ is the generic term used to refer to both the Natal University College and the University of Natal, the latter only occurring in 1949 when the Natal University College combined its dual locations in Durban and Pietermaritzburg (Brookes 1966: 40).

**‘CVA Archives’**

This confirms that the documents are held at the Archives of The Centre for Visual Arts. This Archive

is currently undergoing systematic logging and so, at the time of this thesis, allocated Archive Document numbers are not available for inclusion in this thesis.

In some instances reference has been made consciously to secondary sources within this thesis, the purpose of which has been to focus on the emphasis and interpretation of changes in art theory in Britain from an historical perspective by writers of art theory during the period analysed in this thesis and immediately thereafter. My own analysis leading me to my conclusion has however been based fundamentally on primary sources and current methodology that has enabled me to review the emphasis placed previously by past writers and critics of art history and British formalism, from a revised perspective. Without such inclusion of secondary sources my main research would have been flawed.

The short form of the Harvard referencing has been used throughout this thesis and is applied in accordance with The Department's *Style Guide: For Post Graduate Texts* (Calder 2008).

All images relating to the art works or photographs where referred to in the text, are located in **Volume Two** of this thesis where they are fully indexed with cross-referenced pagination.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The aim of my postgraduate research is to comprehensively document and record the beginning of the achievement of what is currently known as The Centre for Visual Arts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and trace its history, development and expansion from its beginnings as an art school to the present day art centre. This thesis, however, specifically focuses on the period of 1936 to 1969 and constructs a foundation of theoretical review that will allow for a more practical application and interpretation in a subsequent degree where again, lecturers of this period will be re-assessed. Accordingly, this study concentrates on the academic representation and interpretation of British formalism, as introduced by British art trained practitioners and academics, which became central to the art educational system adopted by The Department and reflected in its adopted teaching methodologies, and how this impacted and influenced the reception of modernity within the discipline of art at The University. Attention will therefore be given on how British formalism became absorbed and accepted in The Department from both a lecturing and student perspective.

As a precursory research, it is fundamental to establish the methodological basis for interpreting and understanding, albeit retrospectively, notions of modernity, post-modernity, colonialism and post-colonialism as they were occasioned in the academic curricula of The Department and the impact this caused on the permeation of modernism under the guise of formalism into art-making at The University. This study investigates the influences of The Durban Art School and the specific period in The Department's history that witnessed the greatest influence of British Modernity, from 1936 until the death of the last departmental head in 1969. This evaluation therefore examines the reception of British formalism at The University which was received through interpretations of British imperialism under the pretext of race and gender differentiation and absorbed into an African context.

An examination will be made, where appropriate, of specific art works of those British trained lecturers who came to South Africa and taught in The Department and how each subsequently applied an art interpretation steeped with British art academic and modernist tradition, though it should be noted that the first departmental head, Professor John Oxley, was more of an art educationalist, and therefore his writings have been included in that they reflect on his modernist pedagogical perspectives in art.

An analysis of all of the lecturers and students during the period of 1936 to 1969 is beyond the scope of this thesis, so selective reference to specific artists and staff members associated with The Department have been made. In addition, any understanding of the foundations of The Department cannot however be undertaken in isolation from The Durban Art School that was founded in 1914 by the British potter John Adams, and therefore such an inclusion is necessitated in this thesis as acknowledgement of the origins of The Fine Arts Department that was established on the Pietermaritzburg campus of The University in 1936, having commenced in Durban and his successor John Oxley in 1922. The art course that The Durban Art School, and consequently The Department was modelled on, was based on the curricula taught at the Royal College and in craft guilds across Britain at the turn of the twentieth century. The central influences that are however analysed are those that pertain to the periods of tenure of departmental heads, Professor Oswald John Philip Oxley and Professor John Wood 'Jack' Heath and some of their colleagues during their respective epoch: Geoffrey Long, Rosa Hope, Jane Heath and Professor Hilda Ditchburn, two of whom were also graduates of The University. It is how British formalism permeated into The Department and became institutionalised that this thesis will assess, and will afford the opportunity to reflect on its influence in art tuition and in these selected artists' own art and teaching methods, and further what effect that had on art produced in The Department.

My investigation has revealed that there has been very little written on the history of The Department and very few records have been retained even within the archives at The University regarding its past that offer any structured chronology on art education and methodological practices within The Department. Of the identified texts that are pertinent to the historical period upon which I currently write, these include an undated and unpublished Bachelor of Fine Arts essay written by Russell Toohey, which outlines The Department from 1921 to 1980 and provides an account of the lecturers and their respective disciplines. In addition a paper prepared by the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) candidate Barbara Burnett in 1998 examines the work of Jane Heath and her teaching methodologies and practices. Thirdly, and in support of *The Heath Retrospective Exhibition* held in the Tatham Art Gallery in 2009, papers prepared for that exhibition by both Juliette Leeb-du Toit and Valerie Leigh both reflecting on Jack Heath, the former from a general modernist view of his work within KwaZulu-Natal and the latter from the focus of one of his former students. An interview between Jinny Heath and Ian Calder (prepared and transcribed by Valerie Leigh in 1997), gives an insight into the Heath family; in addition Jinny herself also prepared a personal account of her parents for that Tatham Art Gallery retrospective exhibition. Ian Calder has researched the changes and focus of The Department



from the perspective of the discipline of ceramics, which is published in *All Fired Up: Conversations between Kiln and Collection* and accompanied an exhibition of the same name in 2012. Each of these identified writings has been referred to within this thesis.

There has been much writing on the issue of modernism within the context of European ideology, but how this has been ultimately transposed onto the African continent has been piecemeal as a result of various degrees of European intervention and acculturation. Comparison has therefore been made with an Australian interpretation of formalism, with writer Bernard Smith offering both a useful appraisal of modernism recognised as a formalistic tool from a post-colonial perspective. His perceptions consider that a unique movement, the 'Formalesque', emulated as a Western phenomenon, which has been re-applied onto another art historical period or, in much the same way as postmodernism has developed, is transposed as a vernacular concept onto another country or continent.

It is perhaps inevitable that by appointing British-born lecturers, trained in England during a time when modernism had a distinct currency in the United Kingdom and Europe, that the teaching methods they would bring with them would inculcate a strong British persuasion focusing on modernist thought. But what was introduced into The Department was far from being a mere replication of the British modernist ideology and instead became a mediated translation of modern art re-created within a South African context. Located in Natal, a province historically associated with British annexation and colonial governance, The University adopted education practices that were based on the British University system. Such a catalyst will be analysed extensively through an historical sojourn of the development and expansion of The Department over a thirty-three year period, starting from its inception in 1936 until the death of the second British departmental head in 1969, and in so doing will assess and question, through post-colonial and postmodernist theory applied retrospectively, whether the ambitions for a distinguishable South African modernity were achieved or instead became merely a British formalistic exercise.

The interpretation of modernism, modernity, and modernisation are interlinked terms, but in assessing their impact on art at The University requires analysis from within a formalistic framework. An assessment will therefore be made as to whether, by absorbing formalism into South Africa, the interpretation of the terms 'modernity' and 'modernism' becomes merely an obscure or oblique phenomenon qualified only by a restricted understanding of formalistic reading. Accordingly an appraisal will be made of the differentiations between 'Modernity', 'modernity', 'Modernism' and

‘modernism’, and whether formalism undermines modern innovation when received into South Africa dialogue.

An enquiry will also be made to establish whether the British distinction between the notion of ‘craft’ and ‘fine art’ has been readily and similarly translated onto the African continent or whether, through colonial practice, it has taken a different guise as a result of anthropological and ethnographic surveillance. This evaluation will take the form of a comparative review of the ‘artisan skills’ taught at The Royal College, which in Britain at the beginning of the last century, were distinguished from ‘fine art’ taught at the Royal Academy. Consequently as John Adams and both of the departmental heads, John Oxley and Jack Heath, had attended The Royal College, an analogy will be made between the curricula of The Royal College at that time, and that developed by The Department. This will also necessitate consideration as to how modernism developed in Britain, and how British formalism was its response in South Africa, by noting the diasporic approaches of Oxley and Heath and the impact such cross-acculturation had on their work and those of the British trained lecturers they appointed in The Department.

Consideration of the origins of The Department at the Durban School of Art under the direction of John Adams in 1914 allows for specific review of the effects of early British Modernism and whether the phenomenon of diasporic nostalgia, once internalised through acculturation, alters the recipient’s perspective and vision. A sojourn will be made of colonial British aestheticism founded in the art tuition of Adams and his colleague Alfred Martin, and its associated notion of ‘whiteness’ interpreted as a formalistic vision. This is essential as it assists in foregrounding the pedagogical achievements of John Oxley in the pioneering of art education in South Africa (not only at The Department), mediated from a British and American perspective, and validated through psychological concern.

The introduction of high British Modernism into The Department will also be scrutinised in the work of British artist Rosa Hope and, inter-alia, her mediation of the South African landscape used as a genre to reflect on, and appraise, a new South African identity. Her perception of African-ness will also be considered. Comparison will also be made with the work of South Africa born Geoffrey Long, who develops a metaphorical approach to landscapes in his work, applying a more monumental record of modernisation and industrial achievement in South Africa, removed from any sentimentality, and provides a different perspective of ‘whiteness’ in Africa. Both were in addition portrait artists who retained that occidental tradition in their work, but it is in their perception of South Africa as a ‘developing’ country that this thesis will assess their formalistic interpretation based on a British

formalistic oeuvre. Both lecturers taught in The Department and so analysis will be made as to how both developed their British insight, one as a British born artist and the other as a South African born artist with British immigrant parents.

Late British Modernism, and its reception at The University, will be considered in conjunction with the experimentation of abstract expressionism in Britain and how that phenomenon became to be reflected in the work of Jack Heath. Such an examination will determine how the abjection of his war experience became conjoined with his interest in early British abstract art, with reference to landscape becoming a vehicle upon which to visualise these nuances. Further assessment will also consider whether Heath re-centred his interest and mediation of British Abstractionism once it was relocated in South Africa, effecting a momentary avant-garde period during his late period of experimentation with abstraction. Although his wife Jane also experimented with abstract art, late British modernism appears more readily under the guise of British Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Cubism in her work, and requires a critical analysis to interpret how the British methodologies she deploys are transmuted within formalist discourse to accommodate a South African location. Such consideration will also be made of the Ceramics Department through an exploration of how that overarching desire for 'British' aestheticism premised itself through the influence of British studio potters, and how their techniques and use of medium were introduced into the curricula of The Department through the teaching of Hilda Ditchburn, promulgating through a juxtaposition of British and African inspiration, methodologies that are still practised today in The Department.

This thesis will accordingly examine the effects of British Modernity and how its associated methodologies were used to formulate and develop an art school in the Natal province that has come to command international accolade and is responsible for training many leading South African artists. What was instilled in the teaching methodology at The University is synonymous with the training that the lecturers received, and through their work that British distinction can be seen, and was the method by which British formalism in art became indoctrinated in The Department.

## Chapter Two

### An analysis of modernity and its reception into South Africa

Whilst the empirical practices akin to the idea of modernity may have reverberated through intellectual and creative thought since the beginning of the last century in the West, it is as a European herald that this concept resounded when first introduced to South Africa. When conjoined to the praxis of colonialism, any such analysis of the reception of modernity into South African art and art education brings with it an inherently flawed process of assessment in that it demands the application of a constructed 'standard' in order to determine what modernity is before its reception into South Africa can be interpreted.

#### **The distinctions of modernity, modernism, modernisation and formalism**

The interrelated terms of modernity, modernism and modernisation each bring with them a differing and unique approach to the notion of what it is to be modern. Modernity reflects the alterations of the 'social and cultural condition' (Harrison and Wood (Ed.) 2003: 128) and, as Charles Harrison and Paul Wood describe, it is the ensuing 'form of experience, an awareness of change and of adaptation to change' (Harrison and Wood (Ed.) 2003: 128) that becomes inculcated as both a 'social and an inner experience' (Harrison and Wood (Ed.) 2003: 128). The date of the commencement of modernity is still much debated, but it does appear to be a European phenomenon mirroring Eurocentric history. The art historian Bernard Smith has examined this and challenges Anthony Giddens' assessment that aligns modernity with the period of Enlightenment that emerged in Europe since the seventeenth century and who also accredits its development with the rise of 'capitalism, industrialism and nation-state' (Smith 1998: 15). Smith instead argues that modernity started much earlier, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the periods of the Renaissance and Reformation as it arose in Europe (Smith 1998: 16) and follows a unilinear pathway, 'basing its ontology upon the idea of progress' (Smith 1998: 21).

Consequently it is 'modernism' that subsequently acts as 'a critique of modernity' (Smith 1998: 16) and offers a more fragmented account of the progress and sojourn of the autonomy of modernity.

Smith here considers that ‘modernisms’ are merely constructed for the convenience of the art historian as a means of recognising and recording periods of various avant-garde initiatives within associated chapters of history since the inception of modernity, thus describing boundaries between these periodic styles of art as a means of expedience. In this sense he is retrospectively applying postmodern theory, the use of meta-narratives as a distinctive tool, in order to determine various changes in art over time (Smith 1998: 16 applying Jean-François Lyotard’s principles). Each specific art style or period develops from a micro-narrative, into a narrative and then evolves as an idiomatic expression.

However, even then each narrative effuses further superfluous avenues. Western modernity has varying levels (Wood (Ed.) 2004: 1), many of which are only recently being scrutinised in relation to their impact in interpreting inter-cultural assimilation in South Africa. We are able to recognise early modernism, high modernism (Wood (Ed.) 2004: 1), late modernism, postmodernism, post-postmodernism, vernacular modernism (Wood (Ed.) 2004: 189) and aesthetic modernity (Habermas 1980: 5), within European art but the recognition of these degrees of modernity differ in terms of their application to and manifestations in a ‘new’ continent. Paul Wood examines these differentiations describing each as an ‘avant-garde’ (Wood (Ed.) 2004: 1) and Juliette Leeb-du Toit remarks how ‘late modernism must be regarded as a vital catalyst in the global dissemination of modernism’ (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 1). This late Eurocentric modernism was received as a new avant-garde for South Africa, an ‘international modernity’ (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 1) differing from British late modernism in its structure, a South African modernity emerged that was further inculcated and entrenched in Western ideologies. What was transmuted to this, particularly to a British centred colonial province of Natal, was as an ‘imitation’ (Kocur and Leung (Ed.) 2005: 24) of British modernism as a formalistic form, a re-interpretation of a prescribed discourse whose narrative was entrenched in formalism and supplemented by colonial reference and dominance.

However, by distinction, the term ‘Modernism’ refers to an autonomous movement that only arose as late as 1890 and continued in European art until at least the 1960s (Smith 1998: 18), coinciding with the development of British Modernity, the latter assuming a distinctiveness with its position originating from a different impetus from its European counterparts and appears to be more in align with the conventional assumption that ‘Modernism’ fundamentally appeared with the advent of Symbolism during the late nineteenth century (Smith 1998: 15) and adheres to avant-garde accounts. It is as this entity that British Modernity infiltrated South African art as formalism. Modernity, in this vein, can be perceived as a fluid composite reflecting the ‘shifting, symbiotic relationship’ (Harrison and Wood (Ed.) 2003: 128) it has established with Modernism itself.

The 'avant-garde', as a concept aligned with modernism, having been first applied in 1803 by the Comte de Saint-Simon (Smith 1998: 20), was an idiom that challenged an outdated feudal society. It questioned and re-evaluated the ascendancy instilled by the bourgeoisie causing 'industrialists, scientists, engineers and artists...to develop new attitudes and institutions comparable with the new phase of Modernity' (Smith 1998: 20). It is within this desire for 'advancement' and 'progression', as understood from a European perspective, that the associated term 'modernisation' occurs. Whilst to the West this presents the improvement of society based on renewed knowledge and application as a result of industry, technology and science, when applied in a South African context this merely advocates the supplanting of Western ideology and beliefs in order to 'civilise' the colonised, with the intention of imposed colonial 'advancement'.

Modernism in South Africa, if 'standardised' in this way through colonial discourse, merely thwarts or delays any opportunity for an emergence of independent African narrative (or even a micro-narrative) whilst its centre remains entrenched in Eurocentric dichotomy. The essential intention and principle of Modernism may have been for the attainment of a self-reflexive utopia free of prescriptive engagements, but those appear to be considered as the prerogatives of the Western mind, for as soon as they are applied as a concept of European desire and colonisation, any hope of a subjective ideal is quashed leaving only conformity to an objective, authoritarian interpretation by the colonised.

### **The use of formalism and the Formalesque as a mode of modernity**

Accordingly, it has become almost impossible to speak of a South African modernity void of Eurocentric comparison, having been traditionally foregrounded and located within the aspirations of a European narrative that remained entrenched until re-assessed through the emergence of post-colonial analysis and discourse (Said 1978: 24-27). However, by upholding that 'desire to create a universal art with an authentic European look' (Smith 1998: 29) by the restraints and subjection to colonial patriarchal dialect (Oyewùmí 1997: 257), the result is that this 'aesthetic' becomes entrenched within accepted art aestheticism; a universal aspiration recognised as 'formalism' (Selz 1997: 118).

As an essentially European style, formalism has played a more fundamental role in the foundation of

Western art academies but yet, as Bernard Smith advances, it is within the sphere of Europe itself that the motivational rebellion against an outdated, indoctrinated and institutionalised criteria was felt at the beginning of the last century (Smith 1998: 6). Smith concludes that Picasso's enigmatic development of Primitivism and that existentialist desire to reject established norms and to embrace self-realisation and utopianism provides '[s]upport for seeing the Formalesque as a period style and not as a consequence of distinct avant-garde movements [and] comes from an artist [Picasso] who perhaps more than any other marks in his work and thought a major qualitative and stylistic break with the Formalesque' (Smith 1998: 6). However, it is in the direct form of a 'periodic' style that South Africa receives European art, formalism becoming an autonomous and national signifier of European 'whiteness' that enabled artists in South Africa to reference their identity in a new and unfamiliar country. In Europe its knell may have been heard by the beginning of the last century, but in its colonised territories it continued to be advanced when transmuting this phenomenon to another continent. This nostalgic revival of an 'England lost' is further entrenched by colonial dialectical supremacy; a 'known and familiar' formalism within which migrants are comfortable being a qualifier for their new social position in art whilst abroad in Africa.

Smith describes this phenomenon as the 'Formalesque' evolving in stature to that of a conceptual mechanism, thus delivering 'the story of the reduction of the concept of style to that of form under the over-arching conditions of cultural imperialism' (Smith 1998: 29). When this enigma is parried with colonial parlance, it has a problematic impact on the development of South African creativity. As Kwame Appiah suggests, we have acquired an understanding of modernity and its application through European social theory with the result that we 'will always run the risk of merely reproducing its ideological stance and its cultivated ignorance about its own origins if...we do not also understand modernity from Africa as well' (Geschiere et al (Ed.) 2008: 4).

Smith identifies three distinct periods of the Formalesque, namely early-Formalesque arising between 1890 to 1915, a mid-Formalesque period from 1916 until 1945 and lastly a late or high-Formalesque spanning from 1945 to 1960 (Smith 1998: 5). This coincides with trends in British Modernism namely 'high' modernism (Wood (Ed.) 2004: 189) and late modernism. Smith assimilates such categorisation of art styles as a tool to record shifts in a desired aesthetic value spanning the nexus of modern art from the Renaissance to the present.

## **British Modernism and the distinction between mainstream ‘art’ and ‘other’ when received in South Africa**

‘Modern art’ in most former colonial countries, and its associated research methodology, has traditionally tended to focus on European edification since its inception, but it is really since the emergence of post-structuralism and post-colonial discourse (Said 1978: 24-27) that has retrospectively enabled critical analysis to re-examine the impact of Western narrative; South Africa having been regarded as little more than a non-occidental outsider akin to orientalism (Said 1978: 24). However, to do so requires a departure from European writers such as Herbert Read who pondered the meaning of art itself in accordance with established Western maxims (Read 1931: 16-17). European Art had focused and centred on applied classical aesthetic value, with modern art being ‘a call to order...[deemed as a]... reinterpretation of classicism’ (Cowling and Mundy 1990: 11). It was a re-creation of reality, the ‘real’, as removed from the conceptualisation of form that occupied ‘non-European’ art and primitivism engendered, that attracted the first labelling of a binarism distinguishing ‘mainstream (academic)’ or ‘fine art’ and ‘other’. Indeed, it was initially how expressionism first developed and a conceptual idiom was also distinguished. The introduction of post-colonial theory further recognises another variant unique to the colonised, that of exported Eurocentric art indiscriminately and invariably forming mainstream ‘fine art’ and contrasted with indigenous art consigned as craft work and therefore differentiated as ‘other’. Consequently, even though artefacts may have been ‘other’ in Europe, such as the artisan work taught at British art schools and institutions such as The Royal College, when formalism is applied, such works become elevated and parallel to ‘fine art’ status, solely on the premise that they are from Europe and therefore worthy of advancement.

The innovation of ethnological study at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth polarised the interpretation of art and the distinction afforded fine art. Viewed from an anthropological perspective ‘the object [the artefact] that participates in a sphere of art is more usually referred to as ‘art object’ rather than ‘work of art’...[with]...‘Art’ in anthropology...taken in the original Western sense of the Latin *ars*, making by (prized) skill’ (Westermann (Ed.) 2005: xi-xii).

Rae Beth Gordon recognises that, when advocated within Darwinian theory, ‘other’ becomes a distinguishable term to differentiate between Western providence and the regressive marginalisation of the peripheries of lower standing to the social epitome of imposed European standards (Gordon



2009: 138). The methodology practised to achieve creative exclusion is recognised by Mark Pegrum whereby 'Western modernity is perceived as establishing its dominant discourses in the centre of the world - literally and geographically, but also metaphorically - and banishing its Others to the margins, so that a centre-margins dichotomy is created' (Pegrum 2000: 113). It is in this way that the acceptance of formalism as a revered style has been allowed to prevail within the understanding, reception and definition of modernity, a 'universal' laudation from a centrally controlling force.

However, this polarity again merely advocates an implicit range of criteria or a series of 'standards' associated with European art, but does not address the pragmatic accounts of imposed formalism itself on the art of its colonised regions. In order for South African art and art education to be valued and re-assessed on its own merits and in terms of its autonomy, it is necessary to first traverse many juxtapositions in order to secure its independence from the constraints of imposed parameters, the most fundamental of which emerges as the binarism that Thierry de Duve identifies as the notion of 'imitation' as opposed to 'invention' it constructs (Kocur and Leung (Ed.) 2005: 24). Such a dualistic platform becomes obscured by the unquestioning adherence to and acceptance of formalism itself which is consequently attributed with a false authentication of aesthetic significance proffered by colonial dialect. Despite the opportunity to embrace a new and lived African experience, British artists remained within their known parameters quashed of independence by formalism itself, adopting instead a vernacular approach to art thus suppressing invention, caused by prescribed imitation, which affected the independence of art development in South Africa.

This is a factor acknowledged by Antony Giddens who identifies that '[o]ne of the distinctive features of modernity, in fact, is an increasing interconnection between two 'extremes' of extensionality and intentionality: globalising influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other' (Giddens 1991: 1). His conclusions support the notion that modernity arises as a consequence of relationships; from authoritarianism there is freedom, from objectivity there is subjectivity and so forth and it is as a result of this schism that the quintessence of modernity is formed. However, this desired nuance is indeed plausible if reviewed in isolation from any formalistic perspective as afforded credence in the European mind, but once those principles are exported through colonial patriarchal dialogue, their merits are instead subverted by the construct of formalism itself. The resulting structure becomes tainted by a prescriptive Eurocentric 'standard' which serves to pre-determine the interrelationship that arises and any opportunity of authentic self-reflexion and autonomy is lost.

### **The application of postmodernist theory**

A further transmutation of the reception of formalism also occurs through intercontinental interpretation and translation of the meaning of modernism which constitutes an 'unreal' phenomenon from a postmodernist perspective. For Jean Baudrillard this nexus is represented in the hyperreal (Baudrillard 1976: 1018), thereby the imposition of the term 'modernism' becomes debased by imposed European signifiers and aesthetics, thwarting or suppressing originality desirable in South African art. In this way the notion of modernism 'becomes reality for its own sake, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual examination: the hyperreal' (Baudrillard 1976: 1018). Formalism may have flouted the essence of modernity by falsely constructing its presumed authenticity, but by applying the hyperreal removed from colonial narrative, a vernacular South African art is attained within postmodernist idiom. What postmodernism allows is the fragmentation of narrative directly pertaining to the uniqueness of the location and then builds each construct to re-create the meta-narrative (Lyotard 1984: 34). The result would be a constructed reality de-centred from any imposed text, an 'unreal' reality devoid of any obligatory language usage and would permit unfettered and authenticated creativity in art.

Smith proposes that in order to eradicate formalism, a 'synthetic view' (Smith 1998: 6) should be applied in order to examine European art from an 'indigenous' perspective, which he describes as an 'art history without names view' (Smith 1998: 6) and in this way any problems that arise in the application of formalism are avoided. However, the use of such a description is itself interesting as it again suggests the notion of 'imitation' advanced by De Duve (Kocur and Leung (Ed.) 2005: 24), thus inadvertently endorsing the discourse supposedly countered. It also reinforces a distinction and bases this on the same language premise used in colonial discourse, 'us' and 'other'; the opportunity to recognise originality and invention is thus dispelled, but establishes that it is currently more popular to apply postmodernist discourse as a method of isolating chronologies of style and provide credence to the functionary and aspirational nature of localised modernism, to some extent, at the expense of the recognition of formalism itself (Smith 1998: 6).

For Jean-François Lyotard, the postmodern is synonymous with the modern (Lyotard 1984: 79) and concludes that '[a] work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant' (Lyotard 1984: 79). It is an entity that is both fluid (Bauman 2000: 2) and unstable (Bourdieu 1977: 1021) and

therefore its meta-narrative is only attained through postmodernist theory that remains unvarying. This explains how the reception of British modernity into South African art is distinguished from European modernity in that formalism can be understood as a postmodern meta-narrative and thus its imposed aesthetic values can be treated as a 'constant'. Each narrative and micro-narrative may become influenced by personal experience, cross-cultural interaction and diasporic encounter but its overarching vision remains unchanged.

South African modernity has also suffered a further idiosyncrasy whereby colonialism has legitimised formalism giving it scientific standing and validation (Latour 1993: 3) and in so doing inadvertently imposed a qualitative maxim, one that was adhered to by subsequent European immigrants to Africa. Instead the opportunity to rejuvenate any ostensible autonomy was quashed by instead applying pre-emptive knowledge of accepted European standards and skills as an accustomed 'nature-culture' (Latour 1993: 7), an expression developed by Bruno Latour to describe the outward appearance of a seamless transition in the fabric of culture despite adversity (Latour 1993: 7). It is also here that nostalgia can take precedence so that what is recalled is actually a 'constructed' recollection of a lost homeland and culture which subconsciously has already been modified to edify and differentiate it from the host country.

### **Colonial practice and modernity in Africa**

Whilst modernism had embraced the new and the exotic, offered in bounty from foreign shores, in its pursuit for abstraction and the conceptualisation of forms, South African modernism may have acknowledged the existence of 'traditional habits and customs, and their global impact' (Giddens 1991: 1) but treated such localised stimuli in the same manner afforded artefacts collected from colonial ventures being either dismissive of the pieces' artistic achievement, classifying such craft work as merely 'other' or alternatively incorporating localised signifiers into design or pattern into art modelled and based on Eurocentric style. In this way achievements of colonialism could be recorded as a unilateral sojourn of western progress with 'high' or 'fine art' being maintained as a Western preserve. Therefore the creation of a vernacular pseudo-modernity developed as a reaction to the need for the commodification of art to a Western audience catering to Western taste, something that Ingrid Stevens and Allan Munro refer to as a 'contemporary vernacular' (Stevens and Munro 2009: 9). In this way the European understanding of what was essentially African was given

authentication (Eisenhofer 2010: 15) albeit a quixotic perception of African-ness.

It is with irony that the development of modernism ‘did not begin among the settler communities but in metropolitan centres such as Paris and London’ (Smith 1998: 331) with Bernard Smith acknowledging that even ‘if the Formalist style begins in practice with [Pablo] Picasso’s traumatic interest of African sculpture, that was the very last aspect of the Formalist style that attracted white South Africans. They received it as a European style’ (Smith 1998: 331).

Even as recently as 2006 at an exhibition titled *Picasso and Africa* held in Johannesburg at the Standard Bank Gallery, it has been claimed that Picasso, by referencing African sculptures and artefacts in his work ‘celebrates African aesthetic production, [and reveals] the enormous influence it had on 20th [thus] century Western art’ (The Star, 22 March 2006). This statement does however raise two fundamental flaws regarding the level of influence that African art played in European modernity. Firstly it may be correct to accept that Picasso (and before him Matisse, Derain and others) can be championed for conjoining Western art with African signifiers (and items obtained from other peripheries of the Western world) in a quest to achieve conceptualisation in his art, but this was achieved in ignorance of any cultural or aesthetic traditions in Africa and was used merely as a vehicle for Western fantasy expedited by the sacking of colonies by Western forces. However, what is of equal significance is that African aesthetic production was treated as an inertia by Europe at that time and what was instead recognised by a ‘white’ audience on the African Continent was harbingered instead under the guise of formalism as something unique to Western art tradition.

It is as a direct consequence of the innate European desire to ‘civilise’ Africa and its non-white population, through the legitimisation and colonial sovereignty, that it became accepted that anything non-European should be regarded as ‘other’ and therefore afforded a radically (Geschiere et al (Ed.) 2008: 2) different canvas on which to apply social theory. It was this sphere of European elitism, so inscribed with colonial patriarchy, that formalism was permitted to quell modernism in South Africa from flourishing to its intended goal and realising its own autonomous status. Consequently, as ‘one of modernity’s ‘others’, formalism is usually defined in temporal terms, and coincides with a practice of defining people as unequal by placing them in a time other than that of ‘developed’ people’ (Geschiere et al (Ed.) 2008: 2). So for immigrants to South Africa, once colonial patriarchal discourse became the dominant and accepted modern social norm and stance for diasporic white South Africans, it became impossible to attain an authentic South African art free of European reference or

comparison.

Artists in South Africa were not however insensitive to the principles of modernist utopian ideology and the need to create an art style that was indigenised. For example as late as the 1930s, one such artist, Walter Battiss, noted that ‘South Africa has got to start its art all over again and not imitate what’s happening in Europe...to start right from the beginning and go through the whole primitive thing, finding its roots here’ (Skawran and Macnamara (Ed.) 1985: 16). But ironically that was exactly what the Primitivists and Expressionists in Europe had experimented with as they explored the notion of conceptualisation of form through untainted childhood memory and the development of psychotherapy to extract the unfettered unconscious mind - a return to man’s primitive roots (Rubin 1984: 5). Synonymous with expressionism and early modernism, the term ‘Primitivism’ has been engendered in the context of modern art. Comparison was made to the processes that a child would encounter when they conceive and make art without the hindrances of prescribed taught methodologies in so-called ‘free expression’ (Read 1943: 108). As with Picasso some thirty years prior (Smith 1998: 333), Smith suggests that ‘Battiss...experienced a comparable revelation, that insight central to the Formalesque style - an all-prevailing urgency to return to a ‘primitive’ ordinary [thus]’ (Smith 1998: 333), still fostered within the ambit of European principle, which acted as a qualifier of formalistic vision.

Through the expansion of worldwide travel and migration since the beginning of the twentieth century, it seems inevitable that specific locales would permeate into twentieth century art and have cause to ‘modify the standard narrative...by revealing the vertiginous consequences of travel and migration as persistently recurring factors in the visual arts of modernity’ (Mercer (Ed.) 2008: 7). But the need for originality is something that Jacques Derrida advocates in his refuting of formalism when he examines the mechanisms of reading literature. He recognises that the ‘writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system’ (Derrida 1967: 944). In this sense formalism, as a system, becomes a malignance to the creative modernist mind and even the term ‘modernity’, when used with reference to colonialist narrative, assumes a connection with formalism by common association. So for an artist like Battiss, it may be the intention to implore originality of thought, and indeed he was obviously aware of this need for emancipation (Skawran and Macnamara (Ed.) 1985: 16), but the dominance of the formalist becomes an overreaching catalyst. The ‘self’ and any notion of individually becomes instead an entity forged by the inescapable bombardment of imposed values.

Similarly for Giddens, the self, as with the concept of modernity, is not an inert body but is constantly subject to the bombardment of external influences. Even if these stimuli are localised in nature, the emergent self-identity is still reflective of a globalised social strata (Giddens 1991: 2). This can certainly be acknowledged in the expansion of modernity into a global arena, the preoccupation of postmodern ideology because of its fluidity (Bauman 2000: 11). However, effervescence of modernity cannot avoid the fundamental flaw that, once it is translated as formalism, it loses its independence and remains dogged by the persistent application of inflexible European standards.

Therefore, the effect of globalisation when formalism is indoctrinated, is that it allows little more than the supplanting of its occidental practices to the exclusion of local edification; the result is vernacularism. What it did permit was a renewed desire for the exotic and new non-occidental traits coincident with the development of anthropology (Harrison and Wood (Ed.) 2003: 13) which was then re-interpreted to conform with Western psyche and referenced African art and artefacts, items that were not perceived to challenge assumed European supremacy and intellectual superiority. These curiosities presented themselves within the arena of colonial propaganda with the African continent being regarded as a 'continent with no history' (Eisenhofer 2010: 13). Stefen Eisenhofer argues that instead, the incorporation of African art and the ensuing interest in African 'trophies' was because they were regarded as 'untainted' by Western derogation and that a focus on these works therefore had 'little to do with the works themselves, but [wa]s ultimately a continuation of the social criticism of the European avant-garde artists and their revolt against rationalism, materialism and the loss of fantasy' (Eisenhofer 2010: 13).

Within this lacuna between the desire for the new, whilst at the same time conforming to the social methodologies of culture and recognised art practice, Kobena Mercer has analysed James Clifford's criteria of the museum practice of collecting and distinguishing art and artefacts as a means of demonstrating the effects of what is determined as art and what is culture and how society is presented with these factors from a Western viewpoint. The classification of originality is determined in one of four groups, which Clifford describes as 'semantic zones' (Mercer 2008: 15). Firstly there are those 'original and singular 'art' objects as defined by connoisseurship, the art museum and the art market' (Mercer 2008: 15 quoting Clifford in part). The second zone relates to that art required of a commercial and mass-produced nature including 'commodities, curios, utilities and tourist art' (Mercer 2008: 15). The third zone relates to 'a horizontal polarity in which the material objects

created by collective traditions are allocated to museums of history, craft and folklore' (Mercer 2008: 15) and these are given the label of 'culture' defined by Eurocentric parameters. The remaining fourth zone incorporates 'scientific and technological inventions as well as avant-garde readymades [thus]' (Mercer 2008: 15). It is by this method that modernity is qualified in relation to each or all of these categories and still prevails today for even with postmodernist application; Clifford notes that 'tribal' art may no longer be regarded as having been delegated to the tourist or commodity category by Europeans but still, because of the threads of modernity, cannot be immediately upgraded to the first zone (Mercer 2008: 15). Even today, Black South African art crosses these boundaries of museum selection on a cultural level because of the powerful enforcement of sponsorship afforded predominantly by Western institutions, so entrenched is formalist ideology. Clifford's schematic formula therefore demonstrates how art has been precluded by marginalisation.

As Mercer surmises from Clifford's classifications, another relevant issue identified as a consequence of postmodern theory is the universality of 'travelling cultures' (Mercer 2008: 17) and the effects of globalisation on artistic and cultural production as 'they travel and migrate through settled boundaries of national or ethnic belonging' (Mercer 2008: 17). However with formalism the boundaries are rarely altered - the imposition of superiority has been assumed by white European settlement, the quest to recreate a 'little' England or Europe evidenced, not only by a colonial aspiration for the Eurocentric standard, but also implanting social familiarities such as place or street names borrowed from another continent with no significant localised referencing. However the introduction of modernity brought through the immigration of white settlers into Africa cannot be considered only from one perspective. The exploration of the new, mysterious and unknown may have provided great 'fodder' for the European modernist mind, but conversely this quest for utopia formed a binarism whereby, this interaction marred by the administrative alteration of boundaries by the imperialists, an imposed diaspora (and exile) was created with black communities becoming disseminated by colonial enactment (Walker 2010: 12). The polarity created was one of 'desired' exile from 'imposed' exile.

### **The conceptualisation of form found in Modernity derived through anthropological and ethnographical study**

Any discourse that centres on the West and its associated global achievement, also extends into the field of anthropology and ethnographic study (Pegrum 2000: 113) as foregrounded initially in colonial narrative. This statement is further supported by Ikem Stanley Okoye's observation that 'only a small

number of those cultural anthropologists interested in art or representation ever turned their attention to the art of Western Europe and North America, perhaps in an eerie display of reverence' (Westermann (Ed.) 2005: vii). This methodological application of anthropology at the expense (and exclusion of art history) is equally flawed as its discourse is determined by a system of evaluation that is located within European and Western academic education and scientific analysis. For modernism to truly succeed with its intentions in a colonised country, each point of reference in its quest for an avant-garde must be established to reflect a binarism upon which to distinguish order from chaos and attain a utopian ideal through the duplicity in each of the positive and negative aspects that it proffers (Harrison and Wood (Ed.) 1993: 13). But the binarism that did arise did so in the form of colonial marginalisation of indigenous creativity, as a means of asserting an assumed platform for the retention of European elitist reverence by derogating the quality, beauty and social value of African artefacts (Goldwater 1938: 257).

Across Europe, at the end of the nineteenth century, there was growing debate regarding the contrast between the 'representational' and the 'conceptual' functionality of art with 'recognisable' images being afforded superiority (Greenberg 1973: 133) by some art circles particularly in Britain, whilst Modernism considered this as outdated and moralistic, and looked instead to the conceptualisation of form as a paradigm to explore (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 11). It is therefore with some degree of irony that the notion of 'conceptualisation', which had been traditionally applied by non-Western cultures for centuries (Araeen (Undated): 163), became incorporated as a Westernised device in art by the Modernists, and almost reinvented as a concept. But yet by the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropological and ethnographical studies had positioned 'other' cultures as subaltern and subject to scientific prowess and scrutiny with anthropologists studying and debating 'art and its role in culture, almost always understood as the culture of non-Western, pre-industrial, pre-bureaucratic states...' (Westermann (Ed.) 2005: ix), and marginalising it as 'art negre' (Eisenhofer 2010: 6).

To incorporate conceptualisation of form as a Western idiom, colonial patriarchy dictated that it first had to be recognised as deriving from a 'superior' Western intellect and, once authenticated in that context, it could be accepted, initiated and re-applied as being an uniquely Western idea. Even in this premise, the disciplines of art history and anthropology still continue to decree how each receives non-Western art and artefacts with Kobena Mercer recognising that the 'axiomatic distinction between art and artefact decides whether objects belong to art history or anthropology, but archival ambiguities confound such classificatory separations' (Mercer 2008: 13). When further supplemented by prescribed formalistic values, the autonomy of art history also appears flawed and, instead of



permitting localised signifiers to access the essential utopian ideology of modernism and existentialism, lamentably this opportunity was lost through the supplanting of indoctrinated colonial supremacy revered through formalism itself. The result was a wasted opportunity to nurture localised aspirations and visions in art removed from European patriarchal exploit and instead thwarted any autonomous merit to modernism free from Eurocentric reference.

However Olu Oguibe rejects this claim and hails the spread of modernity as stimulating nationalism in opposition to the ‘ideological foundations of the colonial project and overwrite, as it were, the colonial text’ (Oguibe 2002: 245) and recognises that instead of prescribing to Western principles, Modernity has instead brought emancipation. He supports this by referring to the artists of West Africa (the location from which most of the artefacts seen by Picasso in Paris at the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadero were obtained) and it being generally accepted that they were ‘the earliest to draw and paint in a modern idiom [who] began this practice without formal training’ (Oguibe 2002: 245). This qualifies the belief that the technique of ‘conceptualisation’ is indeed an ancient practice mastered on the African continent long before Western interference, but the art produced in West Africa by ‘non-white’ artists and craftsman were not credited or sourced with any equality in colonial dichotomy. Therefore the liberation that modernity is supposedly to have instilled is somewhat hollow.

Hans Arp remarks ‘[t]he ‘new art’ is as new as the oldest pots and vessels, the oldest cities and laws, and has long been practised by the oldest peoples of Asia, America, Africa, and most recently the Gothic Age’ (Arp 1915: 277). It was the subjective reception of these items that ignited utopian aspiration and conceptualisation by reacting to new stimuli that were unfamiliar and mysterious to Westerners (Chipp 1968: 48). But yet, within the parameters of South African modernity, these ‘artefacts’ were still received as an understanding of art through Eurocentric spectacles and not as localised and familiar African signifiers. Therefore the framework of South African modernity inexplicably remains largely devoid of any direct content from a localised context. David Atwell recognises this as a ‘counterpoint’ by which ‘the world stands in direct opposition to myths of essentialism and uniformity in both colonial and nativist forms of self-representation’ (Atwell 2005: 19). This is also reminiscent of how Western leaders dealt with those marginalised artists that rejected mainstream academic training in the early part of the last century. So, when artists such as Hans Arp whose work was initially dismissed and unworthy of ‘serious’ consideration by the authorities, the result was for them to be segregated from ‘mainstream’ art and likened to the art of children or the mentally insane (Pegrum 2000: 128).

As far back as the late 1970s, Andrew Verster questioned whether there was ‘a South African art or is it still to happen?’ in a paper presented to the ground-breaking conference the *State of Art in South Africa* held in July 1979 in Cape Town (Verster 1979: 28-35) and proposes that the reason for a divided structure of society, and ultimately of art, rests in the social engineering of communities. When coupled with the dualistic notions of colonialism, ‘us’ and ‘other’, the layers of differentiation in ‘multitudinous definitions’ (Verster 1979: 28) and the separate identities defined in different groups (Verster 1979: 28), the complexity of art practice becomes tediously exasperated but still retains its formalistic preserve and qualifier. Smith regards this as a Western longing for a recognised aesthetic which overrides any autonomous virtue in ‘exported’ modernity as it instead becomes nothing more than an institutionalised misconception. He therefore considers how the effect of formalism ‘ceased to be an avant-garde style during the 1920s’ (Smith 1998: 147) in Europe, but became a ‘manufactured achievement’ of modernism’s former success in Europe when it was brought to South Africa (Smith 1998: 330), entrenched in colonial art practice and theorised within formalist art philosophies. Accordingly, European art may have become absorbed with existential theory in the early twentieth century in order to repatriate a degree of humanity amidst Dionysian unrest, but once re-located to South Africa that struggle became one of the inculcation and establishment of ‘whiteness’ in a new and unfamiliar country.

## Chapter Three

A brief historical survey of the establishment of British Modernism, the training received by John Oxley and Jack Heath at British art academies and a comparative review between the curricula at The Royal College and The Department and consequential art theoretical influences

In order to determine how the elements of British formalism became translated into a South African context at The Department, a brief synopsis of the development of British Modernism is necessitated, together with an historical account of the establishment of art education and institution-based design in Britain as occasioned at The Royal College, as it was there that both the departmental heads received their own art training as students. It is therefore pertinent to ascertain whether, through the training that John Oxley and Jack Heath received in England, a mediated interpretation of those methodologies arose in their instruction at The University and equally, because of this commonality, to what extent the art produced in The Department contributed to the development of a distinct identity in South African art.

Edward Lucie-Smith considers that there have been three distinct periods that have etched the development of British art in the nineteenth century: firstly the Romantic painting of landscape, usually with reference to John Turner, secondly the personal mythology conceived within an equally Romantic oeuvre, recognised in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and thirdly those that contain a social commentary (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 42).

### **The establishment of British Modernism and British formalism at the end of the nineteenth century**

The idiom of British Modernism, when it first came to be identified as distinctive, can really be traced back to the first challenge made to a Eurocentric constant, as represented in classicism, by the nineteenth century theorist John Ruskin (Smith 1998: 64), who lived from 1819-1900 (Osborne 1970: 1025), and who recognised that it was as an esoteric response to the need for social reformation that

beauty should be regarded as a creation of God as opposed to the constructed imposition of classicism implied by man. He appreciated that it is through the representation of the landscape, a mirror of God's beauty, that this phenomenon could best be displayed, rejecting all connotations to a constructed 'classical' formalism derived from Greek antiquity (Smith 1998: 65). Instead what was necessitated was a record of the awe, inspired by nature, as untainted by the hand of man. Ironically, it was also from within this genre that the foundations of British Impressionism also developed, seen more particularly in the work of James Whistler (1834-1903) (Osborne 1970: 1210) who commingled this reverence with a personal conceptualisation of the subject as an artwork, interpreting it from the perspective of 'the self' as an artist, and not for the gaze merely its audience. Accordingly Whistler desisted from reflecting the essentialisation of divine inspiration that so motivated Ruskin, and instead sought to experiment with how the 'relative significance of subject matter would give way to preoccupation with technique and with the expressive potential of surface' (Harrison 1981: 17). As advocated by Immanuel Kant, there was a conflict between theological study and the application of fine art (Magee 1988: 171) claiming that '[a] product of fine art must be recognized [thus] to be art and not nature' (Kant 1790: 525). It aimed at a 'purity' of art devoid of any moral exhortation and as such, met with great resistance from Ruskin (Harrison 1981: 17). It was Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1874), seen in **Figure 1 (Volume II: 14)**, that appears to cause Ruskin the greatest offence. Whilst Whistler contends to have been only concerned with 'an arrangement of line, form and colour first,...[making] use of any incident of it which shall bring about a symmetrical result' (Harrison 1981: 15), Ruskin reacted by accusing him of 'flinging a pot of paint in the face of the public' (Harrison 1981: 14).

It was after the French Impressionism exhibition in London in 1887 when it started to become evident that the Royal Academy was already outdated in its notion of art practice and that an art work should instead ignore subject matters such as pious emotion recording love, pity and patriotism, but instead embrace the concept of 'art for art's sake', an anonymous phrase suggested to have been formulated from the writings of Kant (Osborne 1970: 11), and accordingly an 'aesthetic movement' began to develop, allowing an autonomy of art to become a believable idiom (Harrison 1981: 17). The ideology of art making was moving away from the mere accepted technical application and instead incorporated the humanistic values of art.

In further response to the derogation of the social position which in a sense reduced art, in essence, to the implanting of industrialised technology at the expense of interpersonal values, William Morris, artist, craftsman, poet and social reformer (1834-1896) (Osborne 1970: 742), reflected on the

‘condition of art and design in relation to the division of labour within modern society as a whole’ (Harrison 1981: 13) and how the artist, as an individual, was being alienated in society. Morris did not abhor technological advances, but loathed its demeaning of the artists status merely through the pursuit of economic enrichment to the exclusion of social consequence (Harrison 1981: 13-14). What he desired was for the work of an artist to be credited with social merit and be allowed personal spiritual pursuit through his labour (Harrison 1981: 14). To Morris, this was best exemplified in the work accomplished by the Medieval Guilds in Britain and Europe. Their individual craftsmanship was acclaimed and respected, not as with mass-produced products, and so became a symbol of nostalgic revival of the skill attained through apprenticeship and mastery in the form of the Arts and Crafts Movement founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Osborne 1970: 81). It was at this juncture in British art history that many intellectuals willingly sought any relief and independence they could attain for their souls and spirits free from the vexation of the ‘conscious-stricken world of the modern political economist’ (Harrison 1981: 57) and it was the revivalist quality afforded such an aesthetic movement that was able to provide a platform.

The Arts and Crafts Movement across Britain had been a ‘social and aesthetic movement...[with its] origins...found in the idea of teaching manual processes to people of all conditions which derives from J. J. Rousseau, in the widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of manufactured goods’ (Osborne 1970: 81). In effect, therefore, this romantic revival of the last part of the nineteenth century caused a reiteration and review of aestheticism and ‘standardised’ the pulchritude idiom to define what had become quintessentially British and a reference of British taste and it is in this format that formalism was exported.

### **British formalism and the social condition at the beginning of the twentieth century**

Two of the most influential twentieth century British formalist writers, the English critics Roger Fry (1866-1934) and Clive Bell (Adams 1996: 26), were authoritative in Britain when Adams, Oxley and Heath were art students. Fry and Bell were both members of the Bloomsbury Group (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 11), an association that was to play a crucial role in the foregrounding of British modernism at the turn of the last century and in formulating a British interpretation of European formalist methodologies. Accordingly, Laurie Adams suggests that Fry recognises modernism, regarding it as ‘the approach to art that stresses the significance of form over content as the source of a work’s subjective appeal’ (Adams 1996: 16) taking the position that ‘art has little or no meaningful

connection with either the artist who makes it or the culture to which it belongs' (Adams 1996: 16). In his introduction to Maurice Denis' writing, *Cézanne*, he reflects on Fry and '[t]his new conception of art, in which the decorative elements preponderate at the expense of the representative, is not the outcome of any conscious archaistic endeavour, such as made, and perhaps invariably marred, our own pre-Raphaelite movement' (Denis 1907: 40). These statements certainly offer laudatory sentiments and recognise the self-sufficiency for which modernism yearns, but in Britain what was being received as 'modernism' was first championed in Europe in the work of the Post-Impressionists, and as such was instead being received as 'formalism' of a European style (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 13) and as such contradicts the quintessence of Modernism as a champion of self-reflexive utopian ideology and unfettered quality (Neville 1977: 80) and its associated desire for ultimate self-realisation in the pursuit of the modern utopian ideal and personal realisation.

It was however as a reaction to the British social condition at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, that Fry recognised how traditional cultural values had become disseminated in British society and particularly 'the way in which the system of reference once available to all educated men had fragmented and become incoherent' (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 13). At the time of Fry's writing, an economic depression had befallen Britain partially as a result of industrialisation causing mass unemployment, dehumanising production and a derogation in social living conditions and standards. Assumptions could no longer be made that classical texts, historical events or even biblical references that had previously guided moral conduct could be recognised, and for that reason to include such referencing as subject matter in art was futile and outdated (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 13). Fry acknowledged that 'the emotions of the imaginative art are generally easier than those of actual life...[and consequently]...will not produce the same physical sensations of sickening disgust that a modern man would feel if he could assist at an actual event; but they have a compensating clearness of presentment to the conscious' (Fry 1909: 78). So what Fry sought was an ameliorated balance between abstract form and art so that imaginative life could be attained and reached 'through pure emotion directly aroused by visual form' (Fletcher 2003: 114) thereby achieving true aestheticism.

Charles Harrison recognises that Fry considered that the Post-Impressionists had developed a 'visual language of the imagination...free from dependence upon the actual appearance of things in the world' (Harrison 1981: 54), something that had been lacking in the work of the Impressionists who, for Fry, were not 'intellectual' enough (Harrison 1981: 52). Instead the work of Paul Cézanne represented an 'antithesis' to the Impressionist movement proffering a renewed interest in the 'principles of structural

design and harmony' (Harrison 1981: 52). He distinguished between an aesthetic formulated 'imaginative' life from that of an 'instinctive' life, a quality found in the art of 'primitive' cultures and children, a 'formal strength', that was lacking in art made by the 'professional artists of the day' (Harrison 1981: 52). Perhaps too, with his wife suffering from mental illness resulting in her being committed to an asylum in 1910 (Spalding 1980: 123), this difficulty in his personal life also instilled an awareness of the functionality and creativity of the imagination. As a follower of Fry, Bell also noted 'a correlation between [a] lack of 'formal significance' in art and 'spiritual famine' in society' (Harrison 1981: 53) and likewise regarded Cézanne, as an inspirational figure, who could invigorate 'other artists to free themselves from that taste for the literary, the anecdotal and the imitative, which he saw as symptomatic of defective sensibility in the artist and of debased tastes in his public' (Harrison 1981: 53) and even records that '[t]he period in which we find ourselves...begins with the maturity of Cézanne (about 1885)' (Harrison 1981: 46) thus inspiring Bell's writing of 1912, *The Aesthetic Hypothesis*, which considers Cézanne's work along with the world's great masterpieces (Bell 1912: 106).

The Post-Impressionists were first introduced to the British public in November 1910 at the Grafton Galleries in London, the first of two exhibitions organised by Fry and Bell (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 11), with very mixed reviews and included representative works by the French artists Manet, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse, Derain and Picasso, amongst others (Harrison 1981: 45). The British public were, however, not prepared for this 'new' European art, but whilst there was scathing condemnation from British art academics and conservative patrons of art, it introduced art academia to the virtues and practices of Cubism and Fauvism (Harrison 1981: 64). Its effect was to arouse curiosity and intrigue and, as a student of The Slade, Paul Nash recalls that staff members were warned to refrain from visiting the exhibition so that they could not run any risk of 'contamination' (Harrison 1981: 65). The significant impact this exhibition caused in Britain was also duly noted in a caricature by Henry Tonk (a drawing teacher at The Slade, member of the New English Art Club and lecturer to Rosa Hope) in his *The Unknown God, Roger Fry preaching the New Faith and Clive Bell ringing the Bell* in **Figure 2 (Volume II: 14)**. Fry is preaching on a dead cat to the unconverted while Bell blindly proclaims 'Cezannah, Cezannah' (Harrison 1981: 47). Fast approaching was a time when British art training institutions could no longer ignore the pedagogical significance that European formalism was causing, nor could the art world avoid debate on the doctrine of 'Significant Form' (Bell 1912: 108).

At the second Post-Impressionist exhibition, held in October 1912, in addition to French artists

Matisse, Picasso and Cézanne, there were also both English and Russian works, all of which placed emphasis upon ‘plastic design’, a phrase used by Bell in his publication *Art* to identify ‘Significant Form’ when equating it with aesthetic experience (Harrison 1981: 64). But by comparing the works of the Bloomsbury Set, Fry, Stanley Spencer, Edward Wadsworth, Spencer Gore, Wyndham Lewis and even Bell's own wife, Vanessa, amongst others, with works seen at French exhibits, particularly works such as Matisse's *The Dance*, **Figure 3 (Volume II: 15)**, they received poor reviews condemning the British artists for their drab palettes and merely an imitation of their Continental counterparts. Vanessa Bell's *Spanish Lady*, **Figure 4 (Volume II: 15)**, was criticised for being only the beginning of a sketch (Spalding 1980: 158) but Fry's *The Terrace*, **Figure 5 (Volume II: 16)** was recognised for its ‘emphatic structural design, pure colour, insistence upon the permanent and elimination of the transitory elements in Nature’ (Spalding 1980: 158) despite its tertiary colours. The Russian category was represented by art acquired by Boris Anrep at the request of Fry, along with those Soukoff and Komarovsky (Spalding 1980: 156). It is therefore paradoxical that the art from France, rejected some two years previously, had now been accepted as a ‘standard’ against which British Post-Impressionist art should be judged.

What Bell was advocating as the ‘modern movement’ was symptomatically a Post-Impressionist movement which, through the observance and use of form and colour, could allow a composition to incorporate the element of abstraction (Harrison 1981: 64). This was achievable through the use of simplified forms that were accented vehemently with ‘decorative’ designs, an absence of light and bold contours (Harrison 1981: 59-60). It was in this way that modernism began to be integrated into British art, but it was not the only avant-garde attempt in Britain. Although ill-fated in their endeavours, one of the exhibitors at the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, Wadsworth, founded an auxiliary movement with Ben Nicholson (1894-1982) and Henry Moore (1898-1986) in October 1913, the Vorticists, a group that can probably be accredited as being the ‘true creators of a modernist tradition in British art’ (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 16) and who looked directly at formalism derived from continental Europe, forging links with the Italian Futurists (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 14). Vorticism, as a British avant-garde phenomenon, spread across Britain in the immediate years leading up to the First World War (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 14), the word having been taken as a suggestion of ‘a whirling centripetal force which would draw together and concentrate avant-garde energies’ (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 14), whereby consciousness and form would be distinctly expressed through simplistic imagery with a fundamental acknowledgement that ‘all artistic creation must originate in a state of emotional vortex’ (Osborne 1970: 1199). They were consciously aware that by embracing ‘continental avant-garde w[as] to lead British art away from the insularity and



isolationism of Edwardian society...[as]...[t]he new forms of their art heralded a bold and exciting future and mirrored the enormous social change of the period' (Van Raay and Guy 2004: 30). This also reflects the interest aroused through the scientific development of the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung (Neville 1977: 54-62).

Nicholson was a member of the Seven and Five Society, a small British art group concerned with formulating a British avant-garde in the 1920s and 1930s, whilst remaining consciously aware of the art developments in Europe (Sutherland 1976: 237). On a visit to Paris in 1932, he attended the School of Paris with contemporary artists such as Picasso, Braque, Brancusi and Arp and, whilst there, joined the Abstraction-Création, an association which specifically looked towards the methodologies developed by the Constructivists (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 16). Constructivism, a predominantly Russian movement originated by Vladimir Tatlin, questioned the functionality of sculptural form, which for Constructivists, must have a specific function and purpose and not be merely a static mass. They experimented with movement as part of aestheticism (Osborne 1970: 277). It was as a consequence of this visit that Nicholson's work engaged in an awareness of space and the purity of form, incorporating Cubist qualities in his paintings (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 16) as can be recognised in **Figure 6 (Volume II: 16)**, *Untitled* (1924) and **Figure 7 (Volume II: 17)**, Picasso's *Mandolin* and in the monotone relief work as seen in **Figure 8 (Volume II: 17)**, *Untitled* (1934).

Moore by contrast, was more interested in the work of the Surrealists, working initially in stone or wood, looking particularly at the organic 'truth to material' in his sculptures. Like many of his European counterparts, he looked to ancient and 'primitive' cultures, including indigenous ones, as the basis of his inspiration, developing his reclining figures from Aztec signifiers and Celtic forms as seen in **Figure 9 (Volume II: 18)**. Edward Lucie-Smith considers that these act as metaphor for a landscape, concluding that Moore works in a way inherent in the art of the British Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century, that of romantic translation of axiomatic beauty seen in a landscape that is recreated from the nostalgic appreciation of the past (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 16 and 33).

The development of landscape as a genre of painting appears prominently as a metaphoric representation of Britain. One artist who considered this and had particular influence in the twentieth century was Paul Nash (1889-1946), who is recognised as 'one of the most important British artists of the inter-war period' (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 33) and who explored various trends in European art, namely, Cubism, Metaphysical and Surrealist art (Reid (Ed.) 1975: 11) in his attainment

of a distinctive British modernist style. Nash had started his artistic career as a Pre-Raphaelite, a British movement with a concentration on social realism, but after exposure and experiences gained at the Front in the First World War, where he served as an Official War Artist, his remonstrations with the horrific brutality and reality of warfare creating a heterotrophic impact, and his work had, by the 1930s, reflected a romantic visionary approach to landscape synonymous with that of the Surrealist movement (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 33). What Nash began to develop was an imaginary and conceptualised interpretation of landscape; a symbol of nostalgic recollection and foregrounding of British nationality. In *The Shore* (1923) in **Figure 10 (Volume II: 18)**, he accentuates and distorts the abstract shapes of the concrete breakers whilst *Objects in Relation* (1935) in **Figure 11 (Volume II: 19)** is a later work and reflects on the unconscious mind as deployed by the Surrealists; shapes reinterpreted and explored as a recollection and memory of a landscape. Another artist who also had great impetus in British art was Nash's contemporary Graham Sutherland (1903-80) who likewise interprets a localised British landscape through the guise of metamorphic interpretation (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 33). It is therefore not surprising that attempts were made to establish a Surrealist Group in Britain, but the ideologies that appealed to British artists were not a direct translation of Surrealist orthodoxy and therefore as a specific anglicised movement it failed (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 33).

Although individual pioneering artists across Britain were evidently embracing the New Movement, others were not so sympathetic, least of all the institutionalised art academies. As a reaction to the social and political changes that were occurring in the United Kingdom, art served as a gauge, and required prophetic nurturing to embrace these innovations. But instead, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, art academies continued to refute such enigmatic advances in modernism in an attempt to preserve a more 'traditional' art. They ignored the question of the changing functionality of art and design needed for industry, and it was here that another affront to that 'fine art' preserve occurred, with art schools focusing on craft related skills and techniques being founded.

### **Tuition at The Royal College**

The Royal College, distinct from the Royal Academy of Art, had been established to fulfil a responsive need, during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, to institutionalise (and standardise) art and design education for the benefit of industry (Frayling 1987: 13). By the late 1800s, Britain, as paralleled with Europe, had been consumed by the industrial age and development and

consequent changes within its social structures (Pegrum 2000: 9-10). Art therefore had a functional status and was no longer the preserve and luxury of the elite social classes (Frayling 1987: 12).

It is with some irony therefore, that at this juncture modernity crosses with modernism. The motivation of the Expressionists and the pioneers of that avant-garde across central Europe in the early twentieth century to the dehumanisation of individuality by state authority, and consequently a displacement of imposed 'moral' and social values of society, was a response mainly brought about, among other things, by the embracing and replacement of people by machines and commodifying their value (Lunn 1985: 12). Reaction to this need led to the development of specific '[a]rts under the conditions which machinery imposes' (Frayling 1987: 82), but there was an astute awareness that there was a continuing need to embrace the crafts and artisan skills akin to the Arts and Crafts Movement through art schools such as The Royal College. Just as the exclusivity of the art academies was challenged by the Expressionists across Europe and the assumed need to focus art on a humanised centre as a response to industrialisation, the need to supplant design elements in support of commodification was developed. Therefore at this stage, through the establishment of institutions like The Royal College, humanism and industrialisation combined and the distinctions between 'high' art and 'craft' became aligned.

The Royal College, which in 1837 was known as the School of Design and based in South Kensington, was the first English educational establishment to have been provided with government funding (Frayling 1987: 12). Significantly, the State authority was able to directly influence and determine a dominant discourse focused on British nationalist incentives and to control what art training was to be taught. It was in the quest to unify this central inscription of art, design and teaching that a 'network of branch' (Frayling 1987: 12) colleges, radiating from the central School of Design, were developed across the counties and provinces of England in its major towns and cities thereby creating a 'national system of art and design education [which]...pre-dated the national system in any other subject' (Frayling 1987: 12). In this way a nationalised 'standard' of visual design was foregrounded, fuelled by the requirements of a developing British education authority, able to regulate 'the links between an education in 'design' and industrial growth - and the role of 'design' in British culture' (Frayling 1987: 12).

It is therefore quite paradoxical that the inspiration and quest of The Royal College's founder, Benjamin Robert Haydon, was that art should be free from prescriptive patronage (Frayling 1987: 12) when in reality it came to be determined within the auspices of State domination in their quest to

attain British superiority and industrial excellence in the manufacturing and industrialisation sectors of production (Frayling 1987: 13). In much the same framework as the expansion and obsession with colonisation, art education was allied to nationalistic enterprise. Haydon's fray with the Royal Academy came in the form of three arguments, firstly that it was wrong to only promote 'High Art' [thus] and he felt that instead 'painters of inspiring historical tableaux should be given incentives to hang their work in public places' (Frayling 1987: 12). Secondly, he proposed that 'the quality of a country's painting was a clear indicator of the state of that country's cultural and moral health' (Frayling 1987: 13) and therefore this needed special nurturing as 'university-educated officials were not necessarily the best judges of the most effective policy for the promotion of 'High Art'...' (Frayling 1987: 13) and the third persuader, which proved the most convincing, was that 'an education in 'High Art' could improve the performance of the manufacturing industry, increase wealth and refine the minds of a nation' (Frayling 1987: 12-13) in order for The Royal College to receive merit.

It was this latter issue, and a consideration that the positioning of colonial expansion and the Victorian obsession with industrial development that had incited '[c]oncern over Britain's trade and its competitiveness, especially against the main European rivals France, Prussia and Bavaria, led the House of Commons to set up a Select Committee to enquire 'into the best means of extending a knowledge of the Arts and the Principles of Design among the People (especially the Manufacturing Population) of the Country'...' (Frayling 1987: 13). But the term 'design' was deliberately blurred and became a somewhat vague concept so as not to conflict with the Royal Academy 'in the end the emphasis was put almost exclusively on copying motifs from architectural detail...[and]...that drawing from the human figure should not be taught' (Frayling 1987: 16); such a syllabus was accordingly tailored to the bespoke needs of embellishers and decorators, whereby drawing would consist of copying plaster casts and to enhance the student's ability to decorate virtually any flat surface (Frayling 1987: 17) and in this way did not offer any significant challenge to the purveyors of 'Fine Art' [thus]. By 1900, the Art Workers' Guild took over the teaching at The Royal College and endorsed a qualification that could allow the skills of artisan professions to receive equal recognition in art. It was during this period that the focus on the disciplines of 'Design' and 'Handicrafts' were both conjoined and endorsed so as 'to give students some insight into the relationship between design and material' (Frayling 1987: 66). Consequently its teaching methodologies recognised the importance of craftsmanship in art design and craft making; it had become 'a place of research, providing opportunity for the highest specialisation in art and craft, and conducted to meet the fullest educational requirements of both artist and craftsman' (Frayling 1987: 81).

Smith notes that it was during ‘the second half of the nineteenth century [that] the discourse ceased to be confined to European high art and its classical exemplars, developing into one imperial in its scope as art and artefacts from all parts of the world were assembled at South Kensington’ (Smith 1998: 43). British ingenuity was required to provide a benchmark for its imperial impetus in order to illustrate its domination of a substantial part of the globe. Britain was no longer a satellite for European technology, so instead wished to showcase itself as an autonomous power with strong nationalistic identity and industrial superiority (Smith 1998: 43). The aspirations of nationhood had dominated the requirements of art practice in design and industry, with the British government controlling the education, training and purpose of art design, making it a ‘national responsibility’ (Frayling 1987: 9). British modernisation was constructed as a concept to be exported to its colonies. The ‘standard’ that was formed was reflective of British taste and desirability, and so formalism was comparably foregrounded and attached to the pursuit of enterprise. Accordingly, Hilary Cunliffe-Charlesworth notes that The Royal College reflected these sentiments and placed significant onus on commercial design rather than focus on contemporary developments in art. She notes that despite a major Futurist Exhibition being showed in London in 1912 incorporating the work of Picasso and the Cubists, which attracted a huge audience, this was not even noted in The Royal College’s publication of that time and concludes therefore that the impact of modernism was not even considered by The Royal College until after the First World War, and even then during the early 1920s, ‘English art continued to be compared to French Art, and was generally considered inferior’ (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 50). By 1928 however, the debate about the ‘Significance of Form’, that had been instigated by Fry and Bell, was recognised with the prospectus advocating that the ‘study of the human figure and still life painting necessarily takes an important place in the curriculum, but not more than composition, which is the power to say what we mean through form’ (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 574 quoting from the 1928 RCA Prospectus).

The prospectus of 1936 reflects a far more structured course, proclaiming that The Royal College is ‘maintained to give advanced students a full opportunity to equip themselves for the practice of Art in Drawing, Painting, Engraving, Sculpture, and in various Crafts and Design for industrial purposes’ (RCA Prospectus 1936-7: 1). By the middle of that decade, five main schools had been introduced into the curricula whereby ‘the teaching affords students opportunity to acquaint themselves with the broad principles as well as with the practice underlying each of these important branches of Art’ (RCA Prospectus 1936-37: 1). Further classes were also offered in Writing and Illumination, Stained Glass,

Pottery, Embroidery, Furniture Decoration which incorporated Woodcarving and Gesso work, Metalwork and Enamelling (RCA Prospectus 1936-37: 1).

It would seem that what developed at The Royal College was triggered by the inception of modernity rather than any considered pursuit of modernism. Art had been considered as a skill required for a progressive society with industrial needs and not for the idiosyncratic expression of the individual artist. The subject of Pattern and Design Work was to conform to accepted taste and commercial demands and explains why The Royal College Design School taught its students to replicate and copy objects found at the neighbouring Victoria and Albert Museum, particularly those of Japanese Prints and Gothic sculpture (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 557). This practice continued until the commencement of the Second World War (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 88).

The Royal College may have promoted itself as one of the more progressive art institutions in Britain (RCA Prospectus 1936-37: 1), but it still had its foundations vested firmly in State dichotomy and may explain why British Modernism and British Abstraction appears to have been discouraged and only developed with some paucity unlike its Continental counterpart (Hamilton 1967: 358). Cunliffe-Charlesworth identifies The Royal College's reaction to two of its prominent modern sculptors, namely Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Both were tutored by Derwent Wood and developed differing styles in their sculptural works, suggesting also that their inspiration had been located beyond the confines of the Victoria and Albert Museum and rather at the British Museum. Accordingly, their work may not have been 'as modernistic as Picasso or Lipchitz but it was in high contrast to the work in the rest of the College' (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 58). In addition, because of the unorthodox working methods of Moore, he was not considered as an acceptable candidate for the position of Sculpture teacher by the Board of Education, despite having previously been appointed as an assistant at the Sculpture School and was consequently dismissed 'following a series of derogatory exhibition reviews' (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 58-59).

Therefore, although The Royal College was a challenge to the Royal Academy of Art and perhaps its more draconian or 'traditional' practices in art-making, it was not a master of modernist ideology. Instead it had been institutionalised and its curricula entrenched in the dominant State requisitions owing to its reliance on State endorsement and funding. So whilst its principal, William Rothenstein, had endeavoured to embrace the modernist trends in Western art in the early part of the twentieth century as 'with the Royal Academy, the new art being produced by European artists seems to have had little influence [on the students at the Royal College at that time], with the work of the visionaries,

notably Paul Nash, having more effect on work in the Design School' (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 62).

### **The Royal College curricula introduced into The Department**

Although Oxley and Heath (and Adams) had received their foundational art training at other British art institutions, they all had a common nexus, each having attended The Royal College, and so bringing with them a similar appreciation of design as a fundamental quality of art practice, which in turn forged their own teaching methodologies. The strong distinction between the role and functionality of 'art' and 'design' that had been so heralded in Britain, likewise translated into a South African context, but it received a different interpretation. The artisan skills of The Royal College, that so distinguished it from the 'fine art' of the Royal Academy, was received as a 'fine art' introduced undercover of British Modernism brought by formalism. By understanding it from a formalist perspective, British craft was 'elevated' from classification akin to artefacts and instead South African 'craft' was reserved for 'artefacts' of local artists particularly those made by Black artists; thus marginalisation was entrenched into the South African vocabulary as 'fine art' and 'other', the latter referencing that which was non-European in The Department.

The curricula adopted by The Department accordingly reflects on the respective courses offered at The Royal College and deploys the same methodology. Significant emphasis was placed on the concept of design within the course structures but with a particular focus on the History of Art and the Philosophy of Art similar to the syllabi developments in art education across the United States of America, and brought to The Department as a consequence of the research of Professor Oxley (Oxley 1930), as well as to the theoretical critiques of European formalist writers which it introduced in the History of Aesthetics module (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65). Art History had only been added as a generalised paper attached to each of the core subjects of Drawing and Painting (RCA Prospectus 1938-39: 15), Design (RCA Prospectus 1938-39: 16), Engraving (RCA Prospectus 1938-39: 17) and Sculpture (RCA Prospectus 1938-39: 18) at The Royal College introduced as late as 1938 (RCA Prospectus 1938-39).

In 1933, the *University of Natal Calendar* records the disciplines of Painting, Life Drawing, Anatomy, Modelling, Design, History of Art and Philosophy of Art (incorporating the History of Aesthetics) (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65) was made available to art students. In the Painting discipline,

exercises in the application of oil and watercolour of ‘natural and fashioned objects’ (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65) at first year level with life and figure composition being developed in the second to fourth year courses were devised. Life Drawing was taught at second and third year levels studying ‘from life and from the Old Masters in various mediums [and] [d]rawing from the figure and from life in various mediums’ (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65) respectively. In this way the European ‘standard of art’, was regarded as necessary to master and in this way the method of ‘receiving’ the Formalesque style and the composition principles inculcated in Eurocentric aesthetics and stylistic quality. The Modelling and Design courses offered in The Department were, however, a direct application of the curriculum taught at The Royal College in the same period. In Modelling, the four years were spent studying ‘ornament and design from the antique in relief and round, design modelling from life and Design...[and] figure composition’ (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65) just as The Royal College had offered ‘a study of the Plastic Arts in various forms, based chiefly upon the study of the human figure, both in the round and in relief’ (RCA Prospectus 1936-37: 21).

The Design course was likewise a four year course, not only incorporating the concerns and aspirations of the Arts and Craft Movement that had absorbed British art at the beginning of the last century, but also can be viewed as a direct application of the curriculum of The Royal College into The Department. The first year consisted of nature studies and examining and planning decorative works of the past with a view to recreate such designs and also reflected on the study of Illumination and Lettering (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65). The second and third year continued with these skills adding ‘craftwork’ to the former which allowed for specialisation of at least one craft subject that was offered. The choices were made from ‘wood carving, embroidery, metalwork, jewellery, enamelwork and pottery’ (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65). The final year observed the practice of surface design and composition with the requirement that a sample of craftwork was to be submitted for examination at the end of the course. This again is reminiscent of the programmes offered at The Royal College whereby Pottery, Metalwork (incorporating Silversmithing, Chasing and Repoussé, Lathe work, Enamelling and Engraving), Stained Glass workshops, Embroidery, Cotton Printing by hand, Frame-making, Woodcarving, Painting and Decorating, Writing and Illumination and Bookbinding were offered (RCA Prospectus 1936-37: 16-17). This same concentration on design at The Royal College is strongly reflected in the teachings in The Department and was also confirmed by one of The University’s graduate students, Barbara Tyrrell (interview with Barbara Tyrrell on 17 September 2012).

The Pottery Workshops at The Royal College had afforded students the opportunity to throw, model



and turn pottery and to introduce design through the decoration of that pottery and tiles, mould making, slip casting, the preparation of slips and glazes, figure modelling and firing and kiln control (RCA Prospectus 1936-37: 16). This syllabus was replicated into teachings of The Department with the same curricula appearing in the annual *Departmental Prospectus* even beyond 1969 (CVA Archives, appearing in 2009). Again, the influence of studio pottery, as edified by the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, became an accepted 'fine art' practice in The Department.

The importance placed on the History of Art at The University reflects the global interest that had developed in art education as a modernist tool, America being predominant and proactive in this field, but still mediated through Western reference (Mansbach 2008: 97). But the course structure for this subject remained narrated within the discourse of Eurocentric parameters and a British pedagogy retained. In 1933 the curriculum at The University concentrated on a generalised course that examined the antiquities of Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Crete, Greek, Roman, early Christian and Byzantine Art leading to European Gothic and Renaissance architecture and sculpture with an examination of select paintings of the Florentine, Siennese, Umbrian, Venetian, Flemish, Dutch, German, English, French and Spanish artists (Toohey (undated): 15-16) [pages referred to were not located in University of Natal Calendar 1933]. The Philosophy of Art likewise looked at the Greek and central European theory that debated the distinctions between the Apollonian and Dionysian, order and chaos, of social fabrics as noted in classical literature and mythology (Toohey (undated): 15-16) [pages referred to were not located in University of Natal Calendar 1933]. It was not a curriculum that considered or incorporated any element of contemporary South African art or its developments and aspirations. Instead it focused of the supremacy of European art missing an opportunity to re-examine the basis of art within a discourse that was uniquely South African. Formalism had dictated the 'standard' that The University expected, and The Department complied.

## Chapter Four

### Transition of British modernity and formalism within a South African context and its subsequent influence through the teachings in The Department

For the purposes of this thesis, the lineage for the reception of British formalism into The Department has necessitated a review of the influences that arose from the pioneering Durban Art School. It also requires an assessment of the multiple differentiations of British Modernity and the variants of formalism that transpired as a consequence. The transient movement of immigrants into South Africa, particularly those British artists whose art training had been located overseas had, since the beginning of the last century, brought with them varying degrees of modernist and formalist interpretation. The teaching in The Department provides an important insight into the different reflections of British Modernism. John Oxley had received his training in England during ‘early’ modernism and Jack Heath attended The Royal College during the period of ‘late’ modernism in Britain. However, what is equally imperative is how the impact of diaspora, affected by their personal responses to the ‘new’ African continent, altered their understanding of modernity and re-focused their own art training methodologies.

#### **John Oxley and Jack Heath - artists trained in Britain**

What was ultimately received into The Department during the first half of the twentieth century was a mediated response to British art training, an art grounded in British imperialistic values that was subjected to new exotic stimuli. This was a very different notion of ‘African-ness’ from that assumed by European-residing artists or to interloping tourists. What was internalised was a ‘lived’ experience as opposed to a ‘responsive’ one caused by the reality of re-defining, positioning and adapting the self in an unfamiliar environment, a phenomenon that David Atwell describes as ‘transculturation’ (Atwell 2005: 27) because of the effect that exposure to different cultures and beliefs can cause to the individual in changed surroundings. Consequently what Oxley and Heath brought with them was a constant referencing what they knew, the formal British art training they had attained in England, but it became a knowledge transmuted in an awareness of Africa. But any opportunity to develop an avant-garde was lost at this juncture implicitly because of blind adherence to formalistic criteria as

endorsed within the practices of a British education system upon which The University was 'consciously modelled' (Brookes 1966: 1). As 'no narrative can be a neutral 'master' narrative: there are no natural hierarchies; there are only those we construct' (Murphy 1999: 263) and it was therefore as a British 'standard' through which the pursuit of modernity was to be attained within The Department, and one that gazes at South Africa through foreign eyes.

Such an invigorating effect of a new country as an 'African' vision caused a different reaction and inspiration from that of fellow lecturers and students who had been born and raised in South Africa and who had received their art tuition, paradoxically, as a 'constructed' and desired 'European' fantasy, understood as an 'idea of England' (Lamming 1960: 14). For the heads of The Department, with their art training lodged in British academia, their retort to these exoticised stimuli would have been realised within an internalised conception of art making and, as Köhler recognises, '[a]ctions which flow from one determining source tend to appear as one coherent current of visual facts...when action as subjectively experienced consists of relatively segregated parts, the same articulation will probably characterize [thus] his perceived behavior [thus]' (Köhler 1970: 231). How an image is received is dependent on how one is taught to receive it.

### **The diaspora as an important reference in The Department**

The early part of the twentieth century was a time when British Modernism was very much still in its infancy and when the social structure, fabric of political opinion and the position of the 'self' amidst this chaos, fuelled a questioning of the stability of European disenfranchised populations, leading to both voluntary and mass involuntary diasporic movement across the world. The outbreak of various wars, in the name of colonisation towards the end of the nineteenth century and also the two World Wars, had caused the need for many to relocate in order to seek solace both from an economic and social aspect.

For artists, this transient movement was a particular point of reference, with the developing technology for military and industrial use hailing a revision of design needs (Frayling 1987: 77), but it was also reflected in the work of immigrants who were trying to adjust and re-locate their psyche within a new environment, and became a desperate search for cultural recognition, identity and belonging when the familiarities of 'home' were now located elsewhere. The selection of subject matter would, for the diasporic artist, have a different frame of reference. What would provide an

exotic stimulus, used as a vehicle for the creation of modernist utopian ideals through the unconscious discovery of the mystical unknown, would be lost to artists growing up in Africa whose understanding of Modernism was provided merely as a formalist acceptance of a style. It is at this juncture that a binarism can be recognised to adjudicate formalism, for British modernism sees it as a colonial export, but the colonised receives it as desire for 'modernisation' and need to be uplifted to European standards. Such polarity does however only examine the issue from a white perspective, being 'white' 'insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African' (Atwell 2005: 15); it is the need to cling to an essential notion of Europe as a white settler but conversely to acknowledge a divorce from it.

To the immigrant, the familiar becomes a 'fractured universe' (Mercer 2008: 23). If Giles Deleuze's theory of individuation is then applied, this offers the mechanism by which the interpretation of modernity viewed from a formalist perspective, becomes translated and reinvented, providing both an impact and responsive platform. The engagement with the viewer and the subject matter becomes relative and grounded in the selective discourse through which it is received, thus for a European to be exposed to stimuli, such as fresh fruit, coming from a country deprived of such items due to national food rations that occurred as a consequence of the Second World War (conversation with Thomas Sullivan circa 1982), this assimilates the experience of the 'unfamiliar' that inspired European modernists, but for South Africans, such selection of subject matter was not understood as 'exotica' but instead as a tool for the process of art-making (interview with Susan Davies on 30 January 2012) conforming to accepted European fine art teaching methodology. The reception of 'African-ness' caused different interpretations in accordance with the author/reader relationship through the mediation of personal or supplanted discourse (Foucault 1969: 924).

How different diaspora experienced South Africa is very dependent on their acceptance of it. F. W. Rudmin identifies four models of acculturation (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acculturation>). First there is 'assimilation' whereby the individual rejects their own culture and embraces that of the host, secondly 'separation' where an individual retains their own culture at the expense of their host culture, thirdly 'integration' when the individual retains their own culture but also adopts that of their host and fourthly, 'marginalization [thus]' whereby the individual rejects both their own and the host's culture (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acculturation>). Each of these may come about whether by voluntary resettlement or diasporic dispersal based on forced migration. But acculturation is not a phenomenon unique to the traveller; the host too becomes affected by the exposure to change. It embraces the experiences of the traveller with reverence or disdain. It is in this way that any

immigrant to a new country can position themselves within their new location and typically therefore, one or more of these forms of acculturation is adopted so as to locate their new identity, cultural status, professional credentials and in South Africa at the beginning of the last century, colonial subrogation.

The idealisation of Europe, particularly in the twentieth century, juxtaposes the reality of a social structure that was literally ‘ravaged’ by war and had degraded humanist value. It was therefore as a constructed and assumed supremacy formed through nostalgic memory of a re-enactment of the past now lost, that allowed for an invention of greatness. In this sense diasporic modernism is inverted, so that reconstructed memory arises from the abstraction of favourable experience and the vanished past becomes imagined and the object of renewed desire; a vernacular modernity re-centred through nostalgia. Thus, what is emulated through colonial encounter, within this lived experience, are ‘multiple trajectories in which cultural elements were loosened and detached from indigenous traditions and set into motion across a network of travelling cultures’ (Mercer 2008: 7). If postmodernist theory is deployed, it is indeed possible to consolidate each fragmented text of experience and memory and to redefine the ‘self’ as an autonomous vagrant. However, within modernist methodologies, particularly one informed in colonial detachment, a responsive gesture from the local population is caused and becomes a consequential cultural shift lodged within the discourse of formalism.

The importance of loss within personal experience is exemplified by Jean-François Lyotard’s postmodernist writings when he recognises the desire for ‘a peaceful coexistence of minority voices which need no reference to an overarching discourse’ (Pegrum 2000: 12). In this way each micro-narrative builds to form a meta-narrative allowing each text of experience to adjust as a reaction to localised stimuli and is a consequence of acculturation. Following migration and its consequential disorientation, a loss of personal identity and a de-centring motivates a need to re-create the ‘self’ and attach to it social qualification and comparison. In South Africa this was attained by attaching the signification of ‘white’ African as distinguished from other Europeans as a direct consequence of this new engaging and unifying experience (Atwell 2005: 15). The nostalgia that this instils is however a Eurocentric colonial idea, that of the acculturated ‘white’ African and is an imparted memory removed from any ‘black’ reference.

The diaspora has two alternatives in a changed location, to be revered within the new society or to be

marginalised by it. Colonialism pre-empted this dilemma for white settlers impacting on the social position of the indigene. Atwell recognises this as the cause of a ‘long history of symbolic struggle’ (Atwell 2005: 30) which can be viewed as not only a struggle for Black political freedoms from colonial oppression, but also as a struggle for diasporic stability. For White immigrants their tenure in an unknown territory provoked a need for semiotic referencing in order to situate social position and enhancement. So even for those who hailed from the ‘lower classes’ of British society, their status could be upgraded and advanced from their social classifications abroad, it was a time and opportunity to re-create the ‘self’ and to attain social position qualified by ‘whiteness’. This fabricated position has the effect of becoming embedded within disingenuous nostalgia and memory with an outcome that defines the individual as a ‘stranger’ in both the host and the native land (Lamming 1960: 14-18). For Mercer, this condition of the ‘stranger’ is also analysed in the social theory of Georg Simmel which lends itself to the study of cross-culturalism and recognises ‘the stranger’s ambivalent position on the borders of group membership...the condition of ‘unbelonging’ (Mercer 2008: 17). The demarcation of the identified ‘group’ can be reflected in race, national origin or gender.

Whilst that may be the situation for voluntary immigrations, Edward Said also examines the effect that imposed transient vagrancy has on the refugee who becomes an existential ‘outsider’ when confronted with ‘the depersonalised scale of the mass migrations brought about by modern warfare’ (Mercer 2008: 8 referencing Edward Said). What he establishes is that the exile retains a yearning to return to the home and thereby ‘drives a redemptive quest to reclaim a national sovereignty, lead[ing] to a sceptical view of patriotism’ (Mercer 2008: 8 again referencing Edward Said) which would probably never arise if the subject remained at home.

### **Formalism received into South Africa**

Bernard Smith advocates that formalism ‘first appears on South African soil’ (Smith 1998: 331) in the art of the Dutch born artist Pieter Wenning (1873-1921), who resided in South Africa from 1905 (Ogilvie 1988: 740). His work, *Groenplaas* (1917) in **Figure 12 (Volume II: 19)**, provides an Impressionist interpretation of landscape. Esmé Berman describes Wenning as having ‘...introduced a fresh command of medium into South African painting, lending spontaneity and modern spatial perceptiveness to his interpretations of the Cape landscape’ (Berman 1970: 4). However, it is submitted that formalism in fact appeared in South Africa long before Impressionism was conceived as a ‘style’ initiated, in part, in European Romanticism (De la Croix and Tansey (Ed.) 1976: 770) and in fact occurred in eighteenth and nineteenth century landscape and portraiture painting recording the

arrival of white settlers into South Africa (Fehr 1975: 6).

Jeremy Foster remarks, that ‘the African continent was never seen as an Eden [and instead] formed the farthest, most fearsome extremity’ (Foster 2008: 22). So to record the encounter experienced by British artists pioneering across Africa, a very difficult terrain, the sentimental Romanticist style used is reminiscent of the scenes of an idealised rural England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries deployed by artists such as John Constable and seen in **Figure 13 (Volume II: 20)**, *The Hay Wain* (1820). This acknowledges Ruskin’s writings that reveres the beauty of nature as a reflection of God and, by working with nature as hard and physical as it is, humankind is humbled by it. In the same way the South African landscape is visualised as a utopia landscape portraiture but seen through a British gaze; the land has become transformed into a utopian venture and reverence of sublimated memory that expels and detaches itself from the reality of political struggle, disenfranchisement, hardship and physical deprivation to fulfil a basic need of homely belonging that is instilled in mankind.

The reactive scenes of diasporic engagement, which nineteenth century British artists such as John Thomas Baines, residing in South Africa for a total of twenty four years periodically between 1842 and 1875 (Ogilvie 1988: 36), and Edward J. Austen, almost produce a British stereotypical engagement and themed representation in their paintings as they pioneer across South Africa. It is here that the loss of that known constant, the ‘British homeland’, prevails and materialises as a nostalgic encounter as a means of recording and re-establishing the importance of the self within an unfamiliar panorama. In Baines’ *Bloemfontein* (1831) seen in **Figure 14 (Volume II: 20)**, the vagrancy of the immigrant or traveller amidst a vast landscape transcends time and space with no fixed location or sense of place. The scene is romanticised and does not reveal the hardship that such nomadic life would require, the landscape being reduced to a tranquil pastoral scene akin to European landscapes. So too in Austen’s *The Last Man of the Family* (circa 1880) shown in **Figure 15 (Volume II: 21)**, a transcendental encounter of life at a homestead locates a coloniser within an established framework. His imposition as a European settler has imprinted its mark on the territory he has dominated; his position and stability transmuted into the homestead and claimed cultivation of a harnessed environment, as would be the daily encounter of any European on a farm gaining sustenance off the land. It is the reclamation of a nameless wilderness which is useless and unnatural to man that is ‘therefore sublime par excellence’ (Coetzee 1988: 51). Artists likewise undertook to record their encounters with nature in a manner that ‘translated their perceptions in terms of tried and true conventions current earlier in Europe’ (Berman 1970: 2). The mechanism for alienating the

unknown being to translate it into the knowledge of familiar practice.

British formalism accordingly provided a repository of British achievement at the expense of constricting the essential narrative of modernity on another continent, and colonialism provided the vehicle for its promotion with total disregard for many of the achievements and tenets of modernity, but it is in this way that modernity provides the parameters for discourse in a transitional state with no end. Migration of any kind ‘throws objects, identities and ideas into flux’ (Mercer 2008: 7) but as Mercer recognises that such ‘life-changing journeys that transplanted artists and intellectuals from one cultural context to another,...sharpen [the] distinctions between emigration and immigration, between notions of ‘the stranger’ and ‘the other’, and so between experiences of exile and diaspora’ (Mercer 2008: 7).

### **Formalism is introduced through two phases of cultural imperialism**

#### **a) The First Phase**

Bernard Smith contends that formalism was received into South Africa as two distinct phases of ‘cultural imperialism’ (Smith 1998: 332), the first of which was occasioned through a visualisation mediated through colonial narrative. He determines that ‘the full impact of the Formalesque only appears with the paintings of Irma Stern’ (Smith 1998: 331) who, on her return from Europe in 1920, ‘introduced her expressionism to a highly incensed, colonial attitude’ (Smith 1998: 332), but does not give any reference to other artists of the New Group to whom Stern was affiliated who equally reflected prevailing Expressionistic tendencies. He argues that although Stern travelled extensively across Europe and Africa, collecting many artefacts, they ‘did not influence her practice...[but are an] exemplary of a late phase of [the]...first moment cultural imperialism’ (Smith 1998: 332). Smith further considers that her work embodies the stereotypical rendering of an ‘indigene’ which inspired the perception of a colourful exotica so contrived by the Western gaze (Smith 1998: 332) as noted in **Figure 16 (Volume II: 21) *Mangubetu Bride* (1942)**. This is an apparent white ‘outsider’ interpretation of Africa, internalised through engagement with the black subject matter, dictated by colonial values and whilst he feels that Stern’s portrayal ‘was not an unsympathetic vision..., given the cultural climate of the time, inevitably [he finds it]...patronising’ (Smith 1998: 332). Although Stern was born in South Africa (Ogilvie 1988: 634), the prescriptions of academic conventions and



‘colonised’ modernism would have influenced how she recognised and perceived her subjects, with the rendering of her work located within the domain of formalism.

It is however, probably in the work of Jacob Hendrik Pierneef (1886-1957) that the elements of formalism can be best appreciated and demonstrated. Pierneef, a lecturer at The University in 1950 (Ogilvie 1988: 518; Malherbe 1981: 218), had been deported to Holland with his family in 1900 and, during his two years in exile, travelled to Rome before returning to South Africa. He later travelled across Europe and also lived in London between 1933 and 1935 (Ogilvie 1988: 518). His work, particularly his ‘poster-like landscapes of the Transvaal’ (Smith 1998: 331) developed a reference to a mathematical formulae akin to that used and developed by the Cubists in Europe (Smith 1998: 331) and through this application of technique his landscape paintings became very ‘structural with strong use of line and simplified flat planes of colour’ (Ogilvie 1988: 740). This replication of modernist Eurocentric style can be recognised in his work, *Rotse en Rondawels* (1931) in **Figure 17 (Volume II: 22)**, and a later work directly reflecting the Art Nouveau style, *Bushveld, Game Reserve* (1951) as seen in **Figure 18 (Volume II: 22)**. A comparison can be made here with a European contemporary, Henry Van De Velde whose poster *Tropon*, seen in **Figure 19 (Volume II: 23)** is clearly evidenced in Pierneef’s art.

It is perhaps ironical therefore that Erich Mayer perceives the work of Pierneef as aiming to re-define South African art and represents ‘intense patriotic aspirations...devot[ing himself] to the cause of a national art’ and supports his adjudication using a quotation from Pierneef:

We must stop looking through European glasses when we are painting and designing...In South Africa we possess a virgin soil and surroundings with inexhaustible material...Why must we go on copying the past, doing things that have been done before and which to-day [thus] are only worth storing in museums, which after all are nothing more than coffins? Each country and each period has its own style, and why cannot we create a truly South African one? (Hillebrand 1991: 15; [http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?stled=842](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?stled=842) commenting on the text of Melanie Hillebrand).

What undermines these venerable intentions is that any perception of art, as recognised from a ‘white’ perspective, is mastered from within Eurocentric discourse. By applying the same methodology to define formalism adopted by Smith, it seems that, by implication, as soon as a distinguishable ‘style’ received from Europe is ‘recognised’ as such, that this then is received as formalist theory removed

from the avant-garde aims of modernism, almost attaining a post-avant-garde status in the same way that modernism becomes narrated and once determined, needs postmodern discourse to decipher its text.

### **b) The Second Phase**

The second phase of cultural imperialism as defined by Smith, is that of the ‘late’ or ‘high’ Formalist (Smith 1998: 5) which emerges in South Africa ‘with the acceptance of the cultural artefacts created by black Africans as art in the special sense, and the recognition of black Africans as artists’ (Smith 1998: 332). But again such intentions remain tainted by the expectations of a western audience, whereby a European understanding of ‘black’ art, incorporating art and craft artefacts, becomes the accepted benchmark used as a means of distinction, marginalisation and subrogation of such artworks. Consequently, the creation and development of art institutions that focused on the development of black artists, such as the Polly Street Art Centre (Smith 1998: 336; Sack 1990: 15) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church Arts and Crafts Centre at Rorke’s Drift (Smith 1998: 338), nurtured art-making as a European progeny. The result has been for a ‘synthetic’ modernism to emerge, based on a differentiation ‘between a white European and black South African art’ (Smith 1998: 337) which has established a fictional emancipated black modernity, created for the white patron within the control and confines of trained European artists. ‘African-ness’ has been given a generic understanding with different cultural signifiers being misunderstood or not realised, whereby, as has occurred at the Rorke’s Drift Arts and Craft Centre, with both Sotho and Zulu references being amalgamated into a concept of ‘black’ art (conversation with Professor Ian Calder in September 2011) a fictional, synthetic construct has emerged. As Lyotard identifies, it is the resultant ‘knowledge’ of colonial language that perceives ‘black’ art which becomes controlled as a scientific methodology and technology (Lyotard 1984: viii) formulated into ‘recognised’ art narrative.

### **The acculturation of art through formalism**

Bernard Smith considers that it is at this juncture, in the progression of advanced formalism, that a new cultural identity, narrated through colonised dialogue to the exclusion of traditional South African cultures, becomes a constructed idiom and consequently ‘spawns a counter-culture...confronted by ‘other’ traditions’

(<http://www.asai.co.za/print3.php?id=3&cat=132&view=all>). To effect this it follows three distinct 'moments'. Firstly it becomes evaluated as a 'natural mode of Modernity and leads to the devaluation and rejection of the traditional indigenous styles it seeks to supersede' (Smith 1998: 307). Secondly, it is in the format of the Formalesque that art is supplanted into a country's creative idiom and 'at the same time seeks to reinstate the status and values of the traditional indigenous styles' (Smith 1998: 307) and thirdly assimilates it into a localised condition (Smith 1998: 308).

### **The geophilosophy of diaspora**

White settlers to South Africa would also have also experienced a transmutation of their own identify through their experiences in a new country. Their homeland could thereafter never be considered in isolation of their encounters and engagement on another continent. Mercer recognises this as '[d]rawing attention to the lived experiences that differentiate post-colonial perspectives on exile from modernist themes of anomie and alienation, [while] Said foregrounded a multi-perspective outlook in which: 'Seeing 'the entire world as a foreign land'...' (Mercer 2008: 9) makes possible originality of vision.

As Mercer notes '[m]ost people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that...is contrapuntal' (Mercer 2008: 9). This is, however, the same experience afforded any immigrant whatever their motivation for re-location; a twofold persona of experience and memory alters their perception and understanding creating a dualistic identity. It was such a phenomenon and would have been a factor recognised by each of the immigrants teaching at The Department, but for John Adams this played a greater significance in his acuity of Africa in that it was an internalised concept of engagement that became mediated on his return to England and was an influence in his work (<http://pooleimages.co.uk/traditional.aspx>); he was no longer the same immigrant that had travelled to South Africa in 1914, he had the benefit of extended knowledge and altered consciousness.

### **Formalism received into The Department**

Adams, Oxley and Heath had received their art education in Britain during different stages in the

development of British Modernism and as such, the interpretation reflects the different modernist debates that were pre-occupying art critics of those times. Consequently, as each accepted their tenure in The Durban Art School and The Department, so too did the variant modes of modernism reflect in their teaching methodologies. Albeit all had been affected by the consequences and hardships of war to varying degrees, each had chosen immigration in hope of attaining improvement in the quality of life. Adams moved to South Africa at the height of British industrial expansion amidst the turmoil of the First World War, Oxley just after that war and Heath after the end of the Second World War. What distinguishes Adams from the other two, is however, that he returned to live in England, a very different country from the one he had left some eight years previously, and so how he re-engendered and re-invented his artistic perceptions as an ex-colonial, back in his ‘homeland’, is also vital in understanding the effects of formalism.

It is against this background that the curricula implemented by these immigrant artists and art educators at The Durban School of Art and The University respectively must be interpreted, as an assimilation of the principles attained through the foundations at their respective British art schools and particularly at The Royal College which predominantly foregrounded the art of ‘design’ and ‘craft’ skills (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 22); in Britain seen as ‘other’, in South Africa recognised as ‘fine art’ because of its elevation through formalist narrative. Even the name of The Department was changed from The Durban School of Art to that of Department of Fine Art in 1922 (Brookes 1966: 21) before the school’s relocation to the Pietermaritzburg campus (Brookes 1966: 21) in 1936 (The Natal Witness, 4 October 1952). The motive for this was, possibly, deployed to persuade the authorities at The University to recognise the importance of art as an autonomous academic discipline and, in so doing, wanted to offer a course that held synonymous academic standing to that of the acclaimed Royal Academy of Art in London, thereby accrediting The Department as offering a ‘fine art’ pedagogy steeped in a formalist interpretation.

### **The influence and pioneering of The Durban Art School under the leadership of John Adams that exposed the phenomenon of diasporic nostalgia reflected in both South Africa and England**

From the earliest establishment of The Department, significant focus was placed on the discipline of Ceramics (or Pottery as it was then known), not prevalent at other art universities in South Africa (conversation with Professor Ian Calder in April 2011); undoubtedly attributable to John Adams who

pioneered the first art school in Durban, an establishment later headed by Oxley. In Britain, this discipline would have been identified as a craft pursuit and one of the subjects taught at The Royal College, but it was instead received as a different entity in South Africa being attributed with the formalist notion of 'British-ness'. Once authenticated in that genre, as mediated through colonial discourse, it could be introduced as a recognised 'art form' and a desired colonial aesthetic in a South African context.

John Adams (1882-1953) ([http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?styleid=821](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=821)), was born into a part of England known as 'The Potteries' (Newens 1963: 2423) (because of the large industrial kiln productions in the area), which is situated in the County of Staffordshire. At the age of thirteen he left school and joined a studio, commercially manufacturing tiles ([http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?styleid=821](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=821)) where he developed a keen interest in design. Later he trained as a potter at The Royal College between 1908 to 1911 having received a scholarship (Ogilvie 1988: 3), and thereafter taught at that institution between 1912 and 1914 (Frayling 1987: 108). Adams had been exposed to the Arts and Crafts Movement that had flourished in Britain since the late nineteenth century, bringing with it a renewed interest in bespoke hand-crafted items as opposed to those mass produced for consumerist markets, with the work of William Morris captivating the Victorian imagination brought about by Gothic revivalism. Adams attended The Royal College at an enigmatic period of British art history, as the debate about British Modernism was being heralded by Roger Fry and Clive Bell, rejected by art academia and influenced by avant-garde movements received from continental Europe.

Adams immigrated to South Africa in 1914 (Ogilvie 1988: 3) and, having been recommended for the position by Augustus Spencer from The Royal College ([http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?styleid=821](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=821)), was appointed as the first Director to the newly formed Durban Technical Institute, which was subsequently renamed The Durban School of Art in 1915 (Brookes 1966: 20). It was there that Adams created and established a studio pottery (Ogilvie 1988: 3). In 1919 he was appointed as a member of the Durban Art Gallery Advisory Committee, a position that he retained until 1921 when he relocated back to the United Kingdom ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truda\\_Carter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truda_Carter)). That decision had been made following a holiday to England ([http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?styleid=821](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=821)) where he was persuaded to join Harold Stabler and Cyril Carter and establish a company Carter, Stabler and Adams in Dorset ([http://www.graceguide.co.uk/Carter,\\_Stabler\\_and\\_Adams](http://www.graceguide.co.uk/Carter,_Stabler_and_Adams)), which later, in 1964 ([sculpture.gla.ac.uk/view/person.php?id=ms1b2\\_1204574221](http://sculpture.gla.ac.uk/view/person.php?id=ms1b2_1204574221)), was to become known as Poole

Ceramics Studio in the West Country ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truda\\_Carter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truda_Carter)), hereinafter referred to as The Poole Studio.

### **British aestheticism seen through ceramic design in The Department**

The ceramics training that Adams received in England fostered his interest in the application and use of graphic arts as applied to three dimensional ceramic wares, but his focus had been on producing designs that were ‘not limited to decoration but encompassed all the aspects of the process of discerning the shape, texture, decoration and glazing of a ceramic piece’ (Vurovecz 2008: 27). Albeit there had been no set syllabus in the design course at The Royal College until 1919 (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 551), the tuition that Adams had received had consisted mainly of copying exotic stimuli from items found at the local Victoria and Albert Museum (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 551) and in this way he was exposed to European and Chinese ceramics and styles, received as a European formalism and encouraged an interest in Italian maiolica ware (Vurovecz 2008: 27), an example of which is seen in **Figure 20(a) (Volume II: 23)** and **Figure 20(b) (Volume II: 24)** reflecting its characteristic bold motifs of Gothic design (Osborne 1970: 683). In Britain, such medieval iconography had been revived by the Arts and Crafts Movement and by 1894, one of its protégé studios, the Della Robbia Pottery, was established in Birkenhead, England ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Della\\_Robbia\\_Pottery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Della_Robbia_Pottery)), and became inspirational to John Adams (Vurovecz 2008: 27). **Figure 21(a) (Volume II: 24)** and **Figure 21(b) (Volume II: 25)** illustrates their designs incorporated onto a vase of circa 1894-1906, the latter evidencing the tile production, again focusing on chivalric iconography in Harold Stewart Rathbones’ *Gideon* (1900). Another pottery studio that was located in close proximity to where Adams commenced his ceramics career was the Jackfield Pottery located in Ironbridge in Shropshire. Established in 1560 (Burgess 1916: 177), it was here that tiles were produced in the genre of the Arts and Crafts Movement aesthetic, including pieces designed by William Morris and William de Morgan that were used in both public and private commissions. An example of Morris’ designs can be seen in **Figure 22 (Volume II: 25)**. The popularity of this style in Britain is reflected in **Figure 23 (Volume II: 26)**, which examples a fireplace with tile surrounds used in an Edwardian property, *Ebnal House*, in neighbouring Shrewsbury. The effect that this influence had on John Adams can be seen in a memorial at *St. Mary’s Church* in Greyville, that he produced in conjunction with his wife Gertrude (later to become ‘Truda’

Carter) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truda\\_Carter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truda_Carter)) and his fellow staff members Alfred Martin and John Oxley, produced in memory of parishioners who had died during the First World War and as Melanie Hillebrand determines, is the ‘first Della Robbia sculptural panel to be produced in South Africa’ (Hillebrand 1991: 6).

Through the amalgamation of industrial experience, with design training at The Royal College and a keen interest in the British Arts and Crafts ideology, what John Adams brought to South Africa was an modernist idiom, that of a need to reflect a ‘truth to material’ ([http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?stled=842](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?stled=842) commenting on the text of Melanie Hillebrand). It is an encounter that has been articulated through British formalism and overtly displays the essential values of the ‘early formalesque’ (Smith 1998: 5) so described by Smith, that installation of Eurocentric art values directly supplanted on foreign soil.

### **The teaching of John Adams**

Upon his arrival in Durban, it became Adams’ sole responsibility to develop an art school and to determine which artistic disciplines should be taught, and consequently he looked to the teachings at The Royal College for guidance. In addition to Painting, Drawing became an important facet as a means of formulating an understanding of Design, and Adams encouraged life drawing classes contrary to the writings of Clive Bell, who considered that drawing was merely replicative and suppressed originality (Harrison 1981: 22). The subjects offered were later extended to include classes in ‘sculpture, stained glass, lace making, embroidery and, in particular, pottery’ (Hillebrand 1991: 6) with a kiln constructed and first used in 1917 (Vurovecz 2008: 26).

Of the students John Adam taught, many became leading South African artists, with particular reference to those who formed the Ceramic Studio in 1925 that subsequently relocated to Olifantsfontain a year later ([http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?styleid=785](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=785)), including Marjorie Lucy Johnstone, Audrey Frank (who later taught Design at The University under the direction of Professor Oxley (Toohey (undated): 19), Thelma Newlands, Joan Foster Methley and Gladys Constance Short ([http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style\\_det.php?styleid=959](http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=959)). It is through their work that the influence and effect of the British Arts and Crafts aesthetic can be recognised and in particular the impact of British formalism as distinguishable in **Figure 24(a) (Volume II: 26)**, **Figure 24(b) (Volume II: 27)**, **Figure 25(a) (Volume II: 27)** and **Figure 25(b)**

(**Volume II: 28**), a series of riser tiles on a staircase at *Sunlawns* (the family home of Marjorie Johnstone) and panel tiles in **Figure 26 (Volume II: 28)** and **Figure 27 (Volume II: 29)** by Joan Methley and Joyce Oldbrow respectively. Although these ceramists were all born in South Africa, the scenes they depict are reminiscent of the style of nineteenth century British painters who had arrived as immigrants and travellers to an unfamiliar Africa engaging with a hostile terrain (reflected in the Castle of Good Hope Collection and observed by me in September 2012). What has transmuted is an appreciation of the methodology of art production viewed from the perspective of a white colonised subject. Formalism has prescribed the narrative through which art is deciphered and it is as a British vernacular understanding of Africa that it is conveyed.

### **The recognition of race and gender at The University - Mary Stainbank**

Whilst art was not a career that was openly encouraged for women in Europe (Nochlin 1971: 1), in South Africa the position was different with Diana Kenton acknowledging that this is ‘the most distinguishing feature of the fine arts scene here compared with other post-colonial countries’ (Kenton 1985: 10). Although the issue of white South African feminism is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is suffice to briefly consider the important considerations of art in South Africa from a formalist perspective. By virtue of colonial narrative, ‘white’ women were afforded a higher social status to that of their European counterparts as marginalisation under such parlance was reserved for non-Europeans who were classified as ‘other’. Art was therefore encouraged as a hobby pursuit as it did not offer any challenge to a male preoccupation with colonialist nation building. For black women this subjected them to yet another division as Kirsten Holst Petersen advocates that feminism was no longer an issue based on class, but was a process whereby marginalisation was instead ‘based on race that elevated the status of the White female artist thus removing her from the ensuing political debate of Black women’ (Petersen 1984: 235).

So, it is perhaps not surprising that there were such a large number of white female ceramists who graduated from The University, ‘pottery-making’ not causing an affront to colonial patriarchal discourse; but the encounters of one of Adams’ pupils, Mary Stainbank specialising in sculpture (Hillebrand (undated): 1), highlights a distinctive response to the inclusion of women in this discipline abroad and her experiences allow for critical analysis as to how British formalism, once mediated through South African narrative, is then received back into Great Britain.



Stainbank trained under the direction of John Adams from 1916 until 1921 ([scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg\\_BE\\_Mary\\_Stainbank\\_modernism](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg_BE_Mary_Stainbank_modernism)), and then furthered her art instruction at The Royal College which she attended from 1922 until 1926 (Ogilvie 1988: 629). Having been born in South Africa to a British family (Webb 1985: 8 and 10), her childhood was spent living on a farm close to Durban which had the Welsh name of *Coedmore* (Webb 1985: 11; [scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg\\_BE\\_Mary\\_Stainbank\\_modernism](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg_BE_Mary_Stainbank_modernism)) and it was there, from untutored beginnings, that she developed an interest in art. She initiated her skill by carving representations of the black farm workers without tutoring and, in so doing, reflected through her subject matter, a compassion free and naive of any overarching imperialistic inhibition. Technically this was an opportunity for the nuance of modernity to flourish but, as Estelle Liebenberg-Barkhuizen remarks with noted irony ‘that, in the absence of a South African modernist idiom at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> [thus] century, the artist had to acquire a formal ‘language’ in Britain, in order to represent what was for her, truly African’ ([scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg\\_BE\\_Mary\\_Stainbank: 1](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg_BE_Mary_Stainbank:1)).

An early work, *Miserable Elizabeth* (1921) as seen in **Figure 28 (Volume II: 29)**, a degree of this innocence is retained and reflects a personal and familiar sensitivity to the character, but for Stainbank to portray a ‘black’ figure and further one who is ‘female’, crossed an assumed boundary of patriarchal praxis. Its charm has not been derived in the way that Picasso portrayed black Africans as an exotic ‘other’, but from an innate understanding of the individual. Stainbank’s immediacy and sympathetic understanding of the ‘non-Western’ figures, devoid of any stereotype in her early works, was criticised and tabooed by The Royal College who deemed her chosen subject matter as ‘unsuitable’; her gaze was female and she did not try to objectify nor stylise her subject ([scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg\\_BE\\_Mary\\_Stainbank\\_modernism: 4](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg_BE_Mary_Stainbank_modernism:4)), which was cognitive of her interaction with the subject. When compared to her later pieces produced after attending The Royal College, such as *Native Head* (1925) in **Figure 29 (Volume II: 30)** and *Enigma* (1930) in **Figure 30 (Volume II: 30)**, it is evident that her technical prowess had improved albeit her same subject matter had been markedly influenced by the guise of British Modernism and Primitivism ([scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg\\_BE\\_Mary\\_Stainbank\\_modernism: 7](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg_BE_Mary_Stainbank_modernism:7)). Her compositions become a dichotomy of an ‘idea of African women’ ([scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg\\_BE\\_Mary\\_Stainbank\\_modernism: 18](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg_BE_Mary_Stainbank_modernism:18)) located in a mediated expressionism understood in Africa and taught within British modernist teleology.

An important distinction in the advancement of feminism in South African art can be considered at

this juncture. At The Durban Art School, gender difference was inconsequential, but for The Royal College, that stoic dominant patriarchy prevailed and although Stainbank graduated with distinction, she was never formally admitted to The Royal College nor was she permitted to advertise the fact that she was a graduate on the grounds that Sculpture was really not a discipline deemed fit for a woman ([senc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg\\_BE\\_Mary\\_Stainbank\\_modernism: 6](http://senc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/ARTS/ART/Liebenberg_BE_Mary_Stainbank_modernism:6)); nor was it regarded as a discipline women should be encouraged to pursue. After the First World War this attitude changed, Barbara Hepworth for example becoming an acclaimed scholar in that discipline (Frayling 1987: 95), probably brought about by changed attitudes towards the manual capabilities of women brought about by the First World War. The Durban Art School had already embraced this change however, and British modernity, once supplemented with formalism and colonial psephology, became a desired white aesthetic and women indeed elevated from a status of ‘other’, now a term reserved for black Africans.

### **Adams exposed to diasporic encounters**

Coinciding with the inauguration of art education at The Durban Art School at the beginning of the twentieth century, was an increasing national motivation to record colonial achievement and in so doing to showcase the nation of South Africa as an example of imperialistic accomplishment through emergent public art commissions. There was also a reactive desire for a South African ‘school’ to be recognised in art practice (Hillebrand 1991: 15) which could be applied to demonstrate the autonomy of a ‘new’ nation, but it was compelled to remain within entrenched formalistic ideology as it was from a Western perspective that its success had to be assessed. Hillebrand recognises that John Adams was enthused by the desire to create a ‘national style’ (Hillebrand 1991: 15) but whilst he remained in South Africa, this was to remain located within the parameters of art mediated through British parameters. It was only once he left South Africa that the consequence of these motivations can be recognised as South Africa is recalled through his nostalgic memory and ‘South African-ness’ indeed espoused.

As an immigrant to South Africa, Adams demonstrates a dualistic eclecticism which references both Britain and South Africa. His inspiration was foregrounded through localised ‘exotic’ South African signifiers, but were still interpreted from a British perspective, and therefore the ‘exotic’ was transmuted through the unknown flora and fauna that was alien to English experience and translated into an African idiom by the immigrant. It was not an encounter that would have caused the same

reaction in one who had grown up in Africa and was familiar with its environment; that was an engagement unique to the traveller and newcomer. His methodology was still centred in British narrative and, despite being aware of the differences in the medium he was using following his clay research, he did not reference local pottery methods or decoration. He instead taught ‘the technical aspects of throwing and turning, modeling [thus], earthenware glazing, and oxide painting’ (Vurovecz 2008: 26) akin to the practices of European pottery-making.

### **The acculturation of John Adams on his return to Britain**

It is perhaps when John Adams returned to England in 1921 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truda\\_Carter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truda_Carter)) that the impact of formalism and the internalised concept of ‘South Africa-ness’ exudes foremost in his work. The English pottery industry (as with other art disciplines) had, by the 1920s and 1930s, become obsessed with the nation’s colonial advancement throughout the world and its archaeological achievements, with its explorations in Egypt being instrumental in the development of the geometrical pattern of the Art Deco style that spread across Britain as a modernist idiom (Calloway (Ed.). 1991: 417). With Adams, his return to England brought an altered perception of Britain as a country changed, not only as a consequence of the war, but also because of his personal experiences which distinguished and ‘othered’ him from other Britons by virtue of his unique diasporic encounters.

The designs that Adams started to produce at The Poole Studio act as nostalgic points of reference, with his ‘Bush-Velt’ [thus] design, as seen in **Figure 31 (Volume II: 31)**, **Figure 32 (Volume II: 31)** and **Figure 33(a) (Volume II: 32)**, **Figure 33(b) (Volume II: 32)** and **Figure 33(c) (Volume II: 33)**, depicting gazelles, South African animals not found in Britain. Roger Fry reminds us of how the methodology of formalism reveals a ‘double life’; ‘one the actual life, the other the imaginative life’ (Adams 1996: 17). Here the imagination is located in a lost past and nostalgic reference to Africa. Sigmund Freud suggests that by repeating familiar imagery it acts as ‘a remedy for the failure of memory’ (King 2004: 155) and becomes a re-invented ‘South African-ness’ vernacular to Adams. Hillebrand recognises that the ‘introduction of features typically South African, such as the protea, the springbok or kopje, does not give it national value’ (Hillebrand 1991: 15 quoting Erich Mayer) but for Adams the use of semiotic references become orientating icons as he re-positions himself in England instilling personal value. Accordingly, what John Adams ultimately attains, is an integrated acculturation of both Britain and South Africa, which becomes inflected according to the location of

the ‘host’ and ‘native’ country.

### **The Design course at The Durban Art School under Alfred Richard Martin**

Alfred Martin (1874-1939) (Ogilvie 1988: 419), a fellow Briton, was a colleague of John Adams at The Durban School of Art and, although he went on to teach at the Natal Technical College established in 1922 (Brookes 1966: 7), his influence persisted as he remained an external examiner for The Department.

Martin was born in Liverpool ([http://www.the-art-world.com/history/mh\\_martin.htm](http://www.the-art-world.com/history/mh_martin.htm)) and was trained at the Liverpool University College of Art, and later at the Westminster School of Art in London, during which time he was awarded a commission to decorate the mail vessels for the commercial shipping line, P & O Liners. An accomplished sculptor and portraiture painter, he was also a founder-member of the Guild of Decorators in London ([http://www.the-art-world.com/history/mh\\_martin.htm](http://www.the-art-world.com/history/mh_martin.htm)) and in 1919 immigrated to South Africa where he was appointed as a lecturer at The Durban Art School ([http://www.the-art-world.com/history/mh\\_martin.htm](http://www.the-art-world.com/history/mh_martin.htm)).

### **Formalism seen in the work of Alfred Martin**

Just as with the ethnographical interest and African artefacts that preoccupied the founders of Primitivism across Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century, Martin initiated a Eurocentric response to an exposure to localised South African stimuli. His study of a Zulu Warrior, *Mayihlome!* [thus] (1926), translated as ‘*Call to Arms*’ (SA Garden and Home 1986: 103), as seen in **Figure 34 (Volume II: 33)**, delivers an empathetic meditation steeped in Eurocentric modernity in a ‘Picasso-esque’ rendition as an occidental formalist aesthetic and reaction merely supplanted upon a South African reference. This is also evident in his *The Water Carrier* in **Figure 35 (Volume II: 34)**, whereby the composition engenders a reductive style of European Expressionism which is reminiscent of the approach of the New Group artists (Berman 1970: 9-10). The use of flat colour is used to portray the Black figure, disengaged from any individuality other than a mere reference to Africa. In this way it has become a vernacular modernism as inscribed with formalistic practice and has evidently been created for a white audience.

Herbert Read's thesis on the purpose of art education addresses the conjecture of how an unfettered art methodology can be derived recognising that art education has 'at least two irreconcilable possibilities: one, that man should be educated to become what he is; the other, that he should be educated to become what he is not' (Read 1943: 2). This binarism is very apparent in South African art in relation to the promotion and reception of formalism. For both John Adams and Alfred Martin, they were both artists born and trained overseas and, as designers, were aware of the aesthetic taste of British society, but as Read contends, they did not re-evaluate the importance and purpose of art in South African society but relied on formalistic vision.

### **The teaching of Alfred Martin as reflected in the work of Barbara Tyrrell**

The Department, and an overarching interest in design, flourished under the tuition of Adams and Martin, Martin being responsible for teaching figure drawing (interview with Barbara Tyrrell on 17 September 2012). One of Martin's former students Barbara Tyrrell recalls how his passion for design stimulated her interest in the creation of stylised figures and decorative details that she used to meticulously record the ceremonial and cultural dress of Zulu and other African people, recognised in **Figure 36(a) (Volume II: 34)** and **Figure 36(b) (Volume II: 34)**. For Tyrrell, the personal identity of the model was not of importance to her, rather it was the colour and pattern that was inspirational (interview with Barbara Tyrrell on 17 September 2012). This allies with the formalist principles of objective rendering of black subject matter as devoid of any personality, but this was a visualisation taught to her by The Durban Art School upholding The Royal College's British modernist design inertia as taught there.

During her childhood, South African born Tyrrell had travelled extensively with her step-father across Zululand and, both being fluent in Zulu, engaged and interacted readily with the people they encountered (interview with Barbara Tyrrell on 17 September 2012). Having lived in a caravan almost emulating the lives of black villagers, she traversed Natal alone and developed a very compassionate kinship to, and great affinity with, black South Africans (interview with Barbara Tyrrell on 17 September 2012). Yet ironically her almost stylised and picturesque rendering of her black subject matter does not reflect the unique and personal experience she had of black residents, but instead renders her figures completely devoid of any individuality or character. This may be attributable to the patronage she received from Killie Campbell (conversation with Yvonne Winters on 28 August 2011) and, as required by the terms of her commission, was required to portray more of an

ethnographical study of black costume than a sympathetic record of the people she had lived amongst, as colonial dichotomy and British formalism dictated, but so too, Tyrrell's training in British Modernism at The Durban Art School would also have influenced and directed her gaze.

### **John Oxley heads The Durban Art School**

Following John Adams' return to the United Kingdom, he was replaced by Oswald John Philip Oxley. Oxley was a painter of still life and landscapes (Ogilvie 1988: 501), but his tenure in The Department was more as an art teacher rather than as a practising artist (Berman 1970: 100). This appointment occurred at a time when the function of art education and the merits of including it as a subject at both school and tertiary levels, were being debated across South Africa (Oxley 1930: v). The University itself had been modelled directly on a British university style (Brookes 1966: 1) and so the art teaching methods deployed by such institutions were readily adopted. It is a period that embraced 'high' British modernism and 'mid' Formalesque ideals (Smith 1998: 5). It was at this foundational stage in the history of The Durban Art School into which John Oxley was introduced in 1922. Coupled with what British formalism had firmly indoctrinated within its art education system and the emphasis on design, not as an artisan skill, but as accepted 'fine art' practice in South Africa, it aligned firmly with Oxley's own study at The Royal College. With the relocation of The Durban Art School from Durban to Pietermaritzburg (Brookes 1966: 27) in 1936 (The Natal Witness, 4 October 1952), Oxley was able to bring new opportunity to acquire an autonomous identity to Natal, albeit it was to remain one that continued to be mediated through British modernity and formalism.

## Chapter Five

The Department is established on the Pietermaritzburg campus of The University and the teaching from 1936 to 1952 under the directorship of Professor Oxley

### Oswald John Philip Oxley

Oswald John Philip Oxley (also known as ‘John’ Oxley), seen in **Figure 37 (Volume II: 35)**, was born in Helmsely in the County of Yorkshire in England on 17 April 1888 (Toohey (undated): 10); Ogilvie 1988: 501) and died in Pretoria in April 1955 (University of Natal Gazette, June 1956). He received his foundational art training at the provincial Leicester School of Art and then went on to attend The Royal College for which he had received a scholarship before he left England in 1919 (Ogilvie 1988: 501). Upon his arrival in South Africa, he was appointed as the first organiser of the newly formed Natal Education Department (Daily News, 24 November 1952). In 1921 he accepted the position of Head of The Durban School of Art at the Natal Technical College which became the Fine Arts Department at the Natal University College (University of Natal Gazette 1956: 8). He also received the accolade of being the ‘first Chair of Fine Arts at the University of Natal’ (University of Natal Gazette 1956: 8) when he attained his professorship in 1922 (Brookes 1966: 27) and remained head of The Department until his retirement in 1952 (Ogilvie 1988: 501). Whilst at The University he was awarded the Carnegie Grant under which he studied the methodology of art education in the United States of America, which, together with his knowledge of the British art education system, allowed him to create and structure a fine art department at The University and to develop a curricula that was to foreground the methods of teaching still practised at The Centre for Visual Arts today.

### The influence of John Oxley in South African art education

The tenure of Oxley is marked by three specific engagements, firstly that of the development of art education in South Africa, secondly the effects of formalism mediated through his personal training at The Royal College and also received from the study of art education in the United States of America and thirdly, by his exposure to the horrors and macabre engagement of active service in the First World War resulting in his appreciation of how art could be conjoined with psychotherapy and applied as a remedial therapy. He did however apply ‘similar educational principles and practices established

by Adams to promote craft and design, particularly in his teaching' (Calder 2012: 59).

### **a) The development of art education in South Africa**

Very much akin to the historical developments at The Royal College (Frayling 1987: 13), the advancement of art education and practice at The University was somewhat piecemeal, but progressive. By 1933 the University of Natal Calendar of 1933 records Oxley was still the only full-time lecturer in The Department (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 16), with three part-time lecturers recorded as W. B. Oxley (Fine Art), A. R. Martin (Painting and Modelling) and D. C. McDonald (Fine Arts) (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 17) and therefore his personal endeavour was effectively singularly responsible for grounding the practices in art methodology at The University. This rather slow expansion is probably attributable to what Oxley identified as '[art] teachers hav[ing] struggled against great odds in the endeavour to convince the authorities that the subject [art] was worthy of more consideration' (Oxley 1930: 1). His role therefore appears to have been to advocate the functionality of art, to position art education in South Africa and to persuade educationalists of the merits of art production by argument similar to that used to persuade the patrons of The Royal College in the late nineteenth century. In trying to convince educational authorities in Natal of the credence of art education and practice at an academic level, the argument was proffered in imperialistic terms; such bodies being convinced of the supremacy of British art-making in accordance with colonial acculturation. The artisan skills necessitated in the nation's building projects across South Africa were acknowledged in the curricula of The Royal College, and so it was in this vein that The Department structured its courses.

The decision to move the School of Art from Durban to Pietermaritzburg also recognises the social elevation now placed on the significance of art at tertiary level, separating it from a purely technical pursuit and, on that premise, was incorporated into the fabric of the Natal University College (Brookes 1966: 29) affording the subject full recognition in academia. In this way the range of disciplines offered as artisan skills at The Royal College, now became re-positioned and henceforth recognised as 'fine art' at The University and that reverence to British modernity sanctioned.

It is this readiness to accept a 'British standard' and its powerful assertion to adhere to its formalistic qualities as a white preserve, that limited any possible non-European or indigenous innovation in art practice and quashed any avant-garde opportunity for a local modernism to evolve. The mind set of



formalism in the 1930s can be recognised in a paper of South African born Ernst Gideon Malherbe (Brookes 1966: 58) (who later was to become the Vice Chancellor of the University of Natal in 1945 (Brookes 1966: 66)) presented at the *New Education Fellowship Conference* in Cape Town in 1934 (Malherbe 1934: 1-2):

We South Africans are an art-starved people. Though we are by descent a mixture of nations who stand amongst the highest in their contributions to the world's art, we have lacked the training in creative expression through an artistic medium which our natures crave...[with]...the environment of the vast majority of South African children totally devoid of the stimulation which comes from being surrounded by works of art, such as is the privilege of children in Europe (Malherbe 1934: 1-2).

However Oxley was progressive in his pursuits of art education and exercised an awareness and currency of international developments. Upon receiving the Carnegie Grant he was afforded the opportunity to visit the United States of America (Ogilvie 1988: 501) in order to make a comparative study of the reception of British and European art practices into that country and how they translated into American art practice. He reported his findings in his paper *Art Education in the United States of America: Report of a Visit to the United States of America under the Auspices of the Carnegie Visitors' Grants Committee of the Carnegie Corporation of New York* produced in 1930 (Oxley 1930: v). According to C. T. Loram, the Chairman of the Carnegie Visitors' Grants Committee, the purpose of this research was to diffuse knowledge 'whereby selected persons from South Africa have been enabled to visit Canada and the United States to study the methods by which certain social, educational and economic problems are being approached in these countries...in the expectation that they will be of interest and help to South Africa' (Oxley 1930: ii).

For Oxley, the primary purpose of his visit was to examine the methods of art education adopted in the United States of America because, as he states, '[t]he student of to-day [thus] is the artist of tomorrow [thus], and the progress of the country's art is laid in the schools, where definite art education is undertaken' (Oxley 1930: v). But he also recognised that familiar route of students attaining art education in Europe instead of pursuing it in America and noted that '[p]arallel conditions are perhaps to be found in South Africa, and it is to be hoped that with the development of our art education, South African artists will find the training given in our schools as adequate equipment for their future work' (Oxley 1930: v). He also noted that of the major art schools that he visited, although he makes no reference as to which, all of them required that their students first undertake a generalised one or two year course which acted as a foundation before specialising in a particular discipline (Oxley 1930:

13) in much the same way as The Royal College system and the one that The University had also adopted.

Oxley also examined the structures and feasibility of art education with the benefit of psychoanalytic theory that had been prevalent at the beginning of the twentieth century across Europe (Neville 1977: 53), and was something that he was acquainted with following his military service and involvement in the medical field during the First World War (**Appendix 1**). The basis of Primitivism in Europe had led to the development and the recognition of ‘free expression’ in art (Berman 1970: 7) and therefore Oxley was quite perturbed by the outdated methodologies applied in schools in South Africa for teaching art to children. He examined the influence and basis upon which these South African schools, based on the British system of education, introduced children to art and art education practices and was particularly scathing of their failure and found that ‘inadequacy from an educational aspect is apparent. Drawing and painting were regarded as ‘accomplishments’ and something apart from education, for which an extra fee was charged....[and that] [b]y stressing the value of technique and maintaining a restricted view of Art, the spiritual side of the subject has been rejected’ (Oxley 1930: 1-2).

Oxley recognises that there ‘has been a tendency to use a professional standard as the measure for children’s work and the professional artists attitude towards the subject has been too much in evidence...[and that]...[t]he development and appreciation [of art] is of more value ultimately than skill in Drawing and our future education should aim at inculcating the appreciation of beauty of Art and Craftsmanship’ (Oxley 1930: 2). This statement raises two fundamental and paradoxical conjectures. Firstly, it appears to deflect partially from the praxis of British art training and adopts Clive Bell’s hypothesis that drawing is merely a repetitive art of imitation divesting all creativity (Harrison 1981: 22). Secondly, and conversely, it also instils formalism, and questions by what ‘standard’ is the appreciation of beauty compared? There is an immediacy between the child and the artwork being created, and it is within that nexus between the subliminal and the real, that a uniqueness is discharged. What taints that autonomous state is determined by indoctrinated social norms and imposed pedagogy. In an oblique way, Oxley himself recognises this conundrum:

One of the most valuable results of the scientific investigation in art education had been to strengthen the value of self expression and to place less emphasis upon the technique of drawing ...[I]t requires a very skilful and sympathetic teacher to fully understand the value of self expression, and...[if]...allowed to become too free,...the value of the lesson to the child was not being realised (Oxley 1930: 6).

The art education system that Oxley determined would develop and promote art appreciation in South Africa, and was to be one that offered guidance to the child in such a way that it would not be reprimanding, but instead would stimulate further endeavour (Oxley 1930: 6). It was therefore this balance that would attain impunity in art-making. In America, Oxley had noted that merely copying from life was counter-productive and failed to teach the pupil how to resolve the problems of 'light, or colour, or the plasticity of form in space' (Oxley 1930: 13) which were the preoccupation of modernist methodology.

### **b) The mediation of formalism from a British and American perspective**

From Oxley's research in America, he also determined that the expansion and development of art education at colleges and institutions had likewise been necessitated as a response to commercial and industrial expansion (Oxley 1930: 13), but he distinguished what was being produced in the American craft classes as being of a lower quality to that produced in Britain, and that the motivation to maintain higher standards appeared to be lacking. He attributed this to 'a tendency to make a marked distinction between Fine Art and Applied Art, and to consider the latter to be the inferior [and]... doubtful if the high ideals held by many will be attained until craftsmanship takes its rightful place in the wide field of art' (Oxley 1930: 14). Even inadvertently, by evaluating American art production using British modernist 'standards' one merely endorses that nexus between imperialistic values and the notion of supremacy that envelopes colonial formalism from a British perspective, but this contention does raise two very important issues. Firstly, perhaps as a consequence of his own art training from a school patronised by guilded craftsman, he no longer recognises the 'fine art' and 'craft' distinction that haunted art academia in Britain, but, secondly, he has acquired a formalist viewpoint and despite living in South Africa, continues to make British art the benchmark for comparison; such is the formability of formalism when requisitioned outside of Europe through the sinews of colonial narrative.

It was therefore under the guise of British formalism that the orthodoxy for South African 'fine art' is received and opposes the British theorisation of 'fine art' which remained a distinct entity from that of The Royal Colleges' artisan pursuits, and in this context a South African vernacular, based securely on formalist principles, assumes the status of 'fine art'. Oxley acknowledges how, at this juncture in

the ‘development’ of the South African nation in the 1930s, there was a need to inculcate art as a taught discipline and to incorporate it as a subject offered for degree purposes with Oxley remarking that the ‘University of South Africa was the first to offer a Degree in Fine Art, and although it is too early to judge the results of such an action, there is every reason to believe that it will be justified’ (Oxley 1930: 3). Although there are no apparent records confirming the exact date, it would appear that such a degree course was introduced at The University in 1933 (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 59), with The Natal Witness confirming that Professor Oxley inaugurated a Fine Arts degree at The University whilst at the Durban campus (i.e. pre-1936) (The Natal Witness, 4 October 1952) and a curriculum recognising a structured course appears in the University of Natal Calendar of 1933 (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65).

The elements of design were impressed upon in each discipline offered which, in 1933, also included stained glass window production until it was eventually phased out in 1955 (Toohey (undated): 27). Such a skill becomes a synthesised narrative of British Victoriana and Edwardian aestheticism so reminiscent of the Art and Crafts Movement (Calloway (Ed.) 1991: 306) which became universally adopted in colonised countries across the world (Foster 2008: 2).

Of the discipline of Illumination, Oxley was particularly damning in his American report, concluding that ‘basic forms have been lost and the consideration for ‘readableness’ ignored...[but that when] one contemplates the large number of students studying commercial art one realises the extent and importance of this form of art in the development of industry’ (Oxley 1930: 13). Such mastery by the art student appears in the curriculum of The University in 1933 and was obligatory in the Design module for first year students (University of Natal Calendar 1933: 65) and demonstrates a fundamental link with The Royal College syllabus. Although this particular craft skill waned at The Royal College from 1948 (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 54), it continued to be given as vital art training to students in The Department until the introduction of more digital based technology. A prescribed text, *Manual of Illuminations* by J. J. Laing written in 1873, being one of texts that Professor Oxley recommended to Hilda Ditchburn as a training text, was later also used by Sue Davies in the 1990s (note from Hilda Ditchburn to Susan Davies, CVA Archives). **Figure 38 (Volume II: 35)** is an example of the lettering taught at The Royal College and **Figure 39(a) (Volume II: 36)** and **Figure 39(b) (Volume II: 36)** are examples of the work of one of Oxley’s pupils, Hilda Rose.

In the painting discipline Oxley’s own work demonstrates how, through British prescription, that the emphasis on composition becomes translated into a South African context. In Oxley’s *Still Life*, as

seen in **Figure 40 (Volume II: 37)**, early British Modernism is clearly evident and recognises that formalist aesthetic. The composition stills lingers within British realism and is proportionate and uses perspective to direct the eye to focus on a large pawpaw. Had it not been for the inclusion of fruit not of English origin, this could easily have been referencing any British table setting, but the signifiers used locate him and the viewer within an African setting, the combination of colonial elegance in tableware together with ‘exotic’ fruits.

### c) The psychological value of art

At the beginning of the twentieth century there had been major advancement in the science of psychoanalysis whereby a methodology to assess the human mind, as well as the brain, had been founded by Sigmund Freud. This method of analysis was to investigate neurological disturbances of mentally and emotionally disturbed patients as a means of trying to analyse and ‘understand the inner flux of human emotion, thought and fantasy by listening to the individual himself, [and] by drawing on the patient’s own experience’ (Neville 1977: 53). Freud adopted the technique of ‘free association’ whereby the patient would be encouraged to talk openly about himself with the response indicating a ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ subject (Neville 1977: 54). Such a development in this scientific field assimilates the notion of modernity and the understanding of the individual in the preservation of self-hood and its applied psychotherapy deployed on returning soldiers of the wars.

John Oxley had been a Major in the First World War, had been appointed as a Staff Officer for Occupational Therapy at the Royal Naval Hospitals and had also been voluntarily assigned to the Imperial Hospitals across South Africa during the Second World War (**Appendix 1**). It was in that capacity that his extensive experience in art education emerged when he was able to combine his skill as an art tutor, his familiarity with psychotherapy and his knowledge of military service in the rehabilitation of military personnel in Occupational Therapy Schemes (**Appendix 1**). He was also involved with the Pietermaritzburg Branch of the St. John Ambulance Association for Northern Natal, where he was appointed their chairman (The Natal Witness, 4 October 1952). This supports Barbara Tyrrell’s recollection of Professor Oxley as being quite a compassionate man (interview with Barbara Tyrrell on 17 September 2012) and more notably how that humanist repose balances life, art and the psyche of an artist.

In a letter that he wrote to the Director of Medical Services in Pretoria on 14 November 1940, he expresses concern and understanding of the needs of patients suffering from neurasthenia in shell-

shocked soldiers and advocates the practice of handicrafts as a means of recovery. He further recognises that:

The dislocation of the soldier's life, forcing him into an environment in which he has no individuality, and of a temporary nature, is not conducive to the recovery of a nervous patient...[so his time must be occupied with some sort of work of which there are two kinds]...one which 'takes it out of you' and the other which 'puts it into you.' The latter is creative work which can become effective through handicraft. One of the guiding principles of all such creative work for shell shock or nervous cases, is that the work should not be mechanical (**Appendix 2**).

Such re-adjustment, according to Lyotard, arises when 'emphasis can also be placed on the increase of being and the jubilation which results from the invention of new rules of the game, be they pictorial, artistic, or any other' (Lyotard 1984: 80). Creativity allows an escape from conscious reality into the sanctuary of the subliminal mind, but for the mentally wounded soldier this is merely a noetic and transcendental utopia, for once returned back into mainstream society, judgement of the injury is not equated with that of a physical infliction, but instead is dogged by the prejudices of a society ambivalent to the actual effects and consequences of warfare. Accordingly Oxley's position is somewhat unique and his realisation and appreciation of modernism and its teleology is accordingly very astute and advanced for colonial and British society at that time. It should also be acknowledged that Art Therapy, as a therapeutic treatment, claims to have been pioneered in Britain in 1942 by Adrian Hill (a soldier convalescing from tuberculosis in a sanatorium in Sussex, England) and a psychotherapist, Irene Champernowne, who developed the practice with her husband Gilbert (Lee (Ed.) 1992: 40 and 42); this is two years after Oxley was already advocating art therapy for rehabilitation for mentally injured combatant).

Just as modernism across Europe turned to Primitivism and child art as a means of escapism from social malfunction in its art practice, so too did Oxley recognise how the theoretical application of psychology could be used as a vital tool in art education with the psyche of an individual being nurtured through applied art instruction (Oxley 1930: 5). Just as military personnel who had been emotionally shattered by the devastation of warfare, Oxley applied comparable techniques on children thereby the teaching of handicrafts in a school environment 'was thought to encourage [thus] psychological health and manual dexterity' (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 22). Art, for Oxley, was a process of continual experimentation and accordingly he suggests that art courses should be devised for 'the encouragement of creative expression...not framed with the idea of demanding from the pupil a finished work involving a difficult technique, but rather to provide an opportunity for the expression

of ideas arising from the imagination' (Oxley 1930: 6). This premise continues in his critique of professional artists, and lambasted needless criticism of their creativity, as noted by *The Natal Mercury* in 1950, when Oxley impresses upon the public 'not be influenced by Press critiques of art exhibitions but should form their own opinions after an honest appraisal of the works concerned...[and that even] if one did not like the artist's pictures his work should not be condemned, as it represented a part of the artist in his approach to an outlook on the world' (*The Mercury*, 28 November 1950).

This creative aspiration and recognition of the humanist element in art began to permeate into The University, with Ernst Malherbe even appreciating that the emotive side of our personalities should not be repressed, confirming that 'we cannot possibly neglect the emotional adaptations. These lie at the very root of creative work' (Malherbe 1934: 1-2). It is this modernist fluidity that formed the foundations of the teaching methodologies that are still reflected in the contemporary approaches to art education currently practised at The Centre for Visual Arts (interview with Juliet Armstrong on 1 November 2011).

### **The shift in the 'Fine Art' and 'Other' debate**

The 1934 New Education Fellowship Conference held in Cape Town, which was attended by Oxley, explored the methodologies that could be applied to art teaching practices across South Africa. It was noted by one of the delegates, Bernard Lewis, that '[w]hen our people have learned to appreciate art, a South African art will spring from our soil and then culture will look after itself' (Lewis 1934: Editorial). But it was Karl Jung who observes how society's obsession with fixated, or 'standardised', scientific methods applies 'the restrictive onesidedness [thus] of Western culture generally' (Neville 1977: 62) and this assertion likewise is applicable to art practice. That Eurocentric notion and ethnographical philosophy that Africa was completely devoid of history until the impact of Western society is clearly evidenced by Lewis' contention.

Oxley's paper focuses on how, in America, the community and art making are closely interlinked and that art that provides for a 'sympathetic foundation makes for a better understanding of life and better citizenship' (Oxley 1930: 43). But these motivations were made at a time of political and social unrest in South Africa after the enforced relocation of black South Africans as a consequence of both the

Native Land Act of 1913 and the Urban Land Act of 1923 whereby black traditional culture was disseminated (Walker 2010: 19) and any hope of unified citizenship at that time just a fractured initiative. Colonial legislation had precluded black Africans from inclusion in an aspirational nationhood ideal and therefore 'whiteness' became a synthesised South African identity.

The Conference delegates were not ignorant of the importance of the preservation of black art, but by implication, it was through the genre of 'other' that their concern was raised and the imposition of marginalisation asserted. Oxley remarks that 'our art education, [should be]...intimately connected with life. It must be remembered that a race produces great art not by its love of art, but by its love of life' (Oxley 1930: 43), typifying his humanitarian understanding, but such art, albeit an edifying force, was not strong enough to repel the dominance of colonialism. It is perhaps with some irony, therefore, that the paper presented by R. J. Pope-Fincken recognises the 'crisis' faced by South African art and considers that by merely supplanting the art and culture of one country and placing it within another is untenable, but her comments were only regarding black art and cultural practices, the more overriding effect of formalism omitted. However, what she does recognise is the effect caused by quelling creativity in art:

Study, learn to know and appreciate by whatever means possible, all of the arts of all of the ages have to say; but do not transport any art in an undigested lump from one country to another. For even as the Ifa head can only grow alive in the light for which it was created, so can a school of painting, architecture, sculpture only be contentedly alive in its own country. It is horrible when German students try to turn out Bantu work, or English try to become Japanese, or Japanese adopt English, or when Bantu becomes European. It is false and artificial copying, not a real growth and development (Pope-Fincken 1934: unpaginated).

This has two consequential effects and is something that also motivated Oxley. Firstly it clearly recognises the malaise that occurs by removing national art from its immediate point of reference but gives little consideration to the effects of formalistic encroachment. It is perhaps only when one retrospectively applies postmodern deconstruction that this dilemma emerges, and any absence of recognition at that time is instead surpassed by imperialist views. Secondly it also immediately positions the binarism of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' in South African art and, when filtered through imperialistic prowess, reduces the latter to the periphery. This successively explains the importance of consciously 'preserving' black art from being tainted by Western ideology, but fails to recognise the influence that Europeans were to subsequently have on black art.



This desired ‘preserve’ of black art assumed through an almost guardianship position, directly affected the intake of pupils to The Department in the early part of the last century, and more specifically, the conscious decision to exclude black art students from the art courses available. One black student who was rejected by Oxley was Gerard Bhengu (<http://www.tatham-org.za/Gerard-bhengu.html>), but for all Oxley’s purist intentions of maintaining an untainted black art in South Africa, recognising it for its unique aesthetic, Bhengu became patronised by Killie Campbell and as a result of her ethnographic interests, later causes his art to become ‘selectively absorbed and synthesised [in] European education, culture and religion’ (Leeb-du Toit 1995: 33). **Figure 41 (Volume II: 37)** illustrates how Bhengu represents a Zulu warrior in a style that typifies portraiture painting from a European gaze in its stature and rendering.

It was within the realm of ‘whiteness’ that the development and pursuit of art education proceeded in South Africa. Oxley’s motivations were akin to those of the Swedish missionary school at Rorke’s Drift who developed the Rorke’s Drift Art and Crafts Centre in the 1960s and segregated that division from that of its Fine Art School (lecture by Professor Ian Calder in August 2011). Sweden, at its Stockholm National College of Art and Design, had copied The Royal College’s teaching methods in the 1930s (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 29). In this way, the aestheticism of art was paralleled with its British counterpart, both distinctive from central European countries and imparting their understanding of African art from an outsider perspective on black art in South Africa.

Oxley too had connections with Marjorie Pope-Ellis, the latter who had started the Ashburton School, located just outside Pietermaritzburg, in the 1930s (the exact date is uncertain) teaching ‘uneducated’ black girls who lived in the local settlements (Pope-Ellis 1934: (unpaginated) as seen in **Figure 42 (Volume II: 37)**. Its aim was to assist in the promotion of black crafts from the surrounding areas through the development of weaving, with the subject matter determined by what the white tutor perceived as ‘African’. Examples of the items and designs that they produced are seen in **Figure 43(a) (Volume II: 38)**, **Figure 43(b) (Volume II: 39)** and **Figure 43(c) (Volume II: 39)** which incorporated beadwork designs reflecting natural imagery such as trees, hills and flowers. These were conceptualised images, but when a student struggled, these were drawn for the pupil who merely copied it. Pope-Ellis writes that she insisted ‘on a natural, coloured background; otherwise they may use whatever colours they wish (except of course when an order has been filled for a purchaser desiring certain shades)’ (Pope-Ellis 1934: unpaginated). This does to a great extent conflict with Oxley’s art education methods, whereby the freedom of expression should instead be encouraged in children’s art not replication, but it also creates a synthetic vernacular modernism one that is

constructed as ‘African’ from a European gaze and where required, manufactured for Western consumption.

Oxley, nonetheless recognised something distinct about the work of local black artists, not in the colonial sense of inferiority of a marginalised ‘other’, but rather that this was something unique and uncontaminated by British commodification and imposed ideology. In much the same way as Native Americans were acculturated (Oxley 1930), Oxley identified how this could also impact on Black culture through its art. From a post-modernist perspective these benign intentions were probably flawed, for instead of elevating black art, affording it equal merit to that of white art, it merely segregated and ‘othered’ it and allowed for the regression of the modernist ideal and, paradoxically, modernisation would have created a dominant meta-narrative of acculturation in any event. But Oxley’s qualms were not typical of colonial thought, nor supported by it. What transpired ultimately was the subsequent emergence of a ‘colonial’ vision of South African art, which had consciously been re-fashioned and romanticised to ignore any negative aspects of colonialism or contested episodes of history as it remodelled a new identity (Foster 2008: 40). Black art instead was only understood from a Western gaze and was distinct from it. Europeans embraced the perception of the innocuous black person, ‘docile’ and ‘foolish’ like a child, not recognised as the dignified squire, as Dhlomo describes as a patronised individual, ‘the ‘unspoiled nigger’ so loved...[who]...is neither wholly African nor fully European’ (Couzens 1985: 33). This deployment in art is seen in Bhengu's *Skins of the Cat Tribe were Decorative as well as Useful* in **Figure 44 (Volume II: 40)** which shows a characterised African figure depicted as such for a white audience. It was only as the New African who ‘knows where he belongs and what belongs to him; where he is going and how; what he wants and the methods to obtain it’ (Couzens 1985: 33) that fully embodies the aspirational notion of modernity, but this was not tenable because of colonialism during Oxley’s era in South Africa.

### **The expansion of The Department**

During Oxley's tenure, The Department grew to include five disciplines, Painting, Drawing, Design, Sculpture and Pottery. The permanent staff employed to teach these subjects over that thirty one year period were New Group artist Eric Byrd teaching Life Drawing and Painting (replaced by Rosa Hope in 1938) (<http://www.art-archives-south Africa.ch/BYRD.htm>), Audrey Frank, another member of the New Group lecturing in Design, J. H. Bradshaw offering Modelling (the position later occupied

by Hilda Rose in 1941) (Ogilvie 1988: 302) which was later divided into Sculpture and Pottery in 1953, and Geoffrey Long, another New Group member who taught Painting and Design. With a growing awareness of modernist theories and its associated attainment of self-realisation and discovery prevalent in the art movements of Europe, such influences were inevitably to permeate into South Africa art. Critical analysis of all of the lecturing staff during this period of The Department's development is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a select examination is made of Hope and Long, while Hilda Rose will be appraised separately in Chapter Six under her married name of Ditchburn.

### **Rosa Somerville Hope**

Rosa Hope (1902-1972) (Ogilvie 1988: 302), as seen in **Figure 45 (Volume II: 40)**, was born in Manchester and was appointed as a senior lecturer at the University of Natal for nineteen years until 1957 (Ogilvie 1988: 302) replacing Eric Byrd who had briefly taught at the institution from 1936 (<http://www.art-archives-south Africa.ch/BYRD.htm>). Hope had attended the Slade School of Art in London until 1919 and later The Central School of Art, both on scholarships (Ogilvie 1988: 302), specialising in Etching, before travelling to South Africa on holiday in 1935, deciding to remain here. She initially accepted a position at the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa\\_Hope](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Hope)) before transferring to The Department in 1938.

### **Hope's training at The Slade**

The Slade was considered to be one of the more advanced art schools in London at the beginning of the last century (Harrison 1981: 21), with a fervent focus on art that based on an education system that afforded a 'proper' university status and was not constructed to serve the needs of industry (Frayling 1987: 115). As part of its argument for the need to establish The Royal College its report states '[t]here is only room for a limited number or specially gifted artists in the sphere of fine arts' (Frayling 1987: 115), The Royal College thus vital for the development of industrial and commercial design. The distinction, as identified by one of The Slade's pupils, Patrick Proctor is that 'The Slade tradition placed emphasis on painting and research while [The Royal College] stressed the importance of the display object...' (Frayling 1987: 158) and as Frayling considers:

The most ambitious tried for further study at the Royal Academy Schools, the Slade,

or the Royal College of Art. The first two were primarily Fine Art Schools. It was the College that taught design. Looked down upon as ‘applied’ or ‘commercial’ art by those at the purer institutions. At [The Royal College], students could specialize [thus] for the first time in their chosen fields of art and design. It was more than a postgraduate extension of an undergraduate course, and academically perhaps less. Teaching staff at [The Royal College] knew exactly what all their students had been taught, and what they were at least supposed to be able to perform. The first year at the College (the most structured year) was a year for re-assessing a student’s potential and making good deficiencies... Then, as the student progressed through the College, the course became more student-led, until the teaching became critical advice (‘the oblique approach’) from a tutor who was more senior colleague than art or design teacher (Frayling 1987: 173).

It was only in the 1960s that the British Ministry of Schools Committee made a ‘plea that art and design should be considered not merely as professional training towards a vocation but should be treated as an alternative form of higher education in its own right, the equivalent to reading the Humanities at a university’ (Frayling 1987: 174). This had already been introduced at The University in 1936 by Oxley.

Two of Hope’s tutors, Henry Tonks, a draughtsman and professor at The Slade (Osborne 1970: 1146) and the painter Wilson Steer (Ogilvie 1988: 302), had both been instrumental in the development of an avant-garde British Modernism. They were members of the New English Art Club which was a particularly progressive group of artists (Watney 1980: 17), who had studied in Paris and brought back to Britain a mediated English Post-Impressionism with ‘toned-down French ‘plein-air’ techniques’ (Harrison 1981: 21). This description is particularly recognisable in Steer’s work (who had greatly influenced Hope) which partially emulated late nineteenth century French Impressionism, and began to focus on light and atmospheric interpretation rendered in a partially informal manner, as such, a European formalism through a British gaze. Such a style ‘took on more ‘academic’ character in opposition to avant garde [thus] movements’ (Osborne 1970: 377). Osborne considers that ‘[i]n Landscape painting, Steer had been judged the greatest English artist of his generation, carrying on the English Naturalistic tradition of Gainsborough, Constable, and Turner but enriching it with the atmospheric qualities exploited by the Impressionists’ (Osborne 1970: 195), a reactionary response caused by the First World War whereby an idealised almost mythological Britain motivated ‘[military s]ervice for such a land [a]s a sacred duty: death for it is the ultimate privilege’ (Sillars 1987: 138). It was during the last decade of that century that his major contribution to British Modernism can be evidenced, a period when he developed loose and pointillist brushwork and incorporated bright colour in a series of themed ‘sunlit beach scenes’ reminiscent of his French

counterparts (Harrison 1981: 21) as reflected in his *A Summer's Evening* (1887-8) seen in **Figure 46 (Volume II: 41)**. It was this use of liquid brush strokes and tonal quality that was to become incorporated into Rosa Hope's own painting technique recognised in her earlier works.

Hope's exposure to painting in England in the 1920s and 1930s provided her with a more contemporary vision of the developments that had occurred in British painting since Oxley's training two decades earlier, albeit John Sutherland notes that the 1920s was not a great period for British painting and was certainly not reflective of the aspiring and prolific literary thought and activity of that time (Sutherland 1976: 47). However, by this time, the impact of the theorist Roger Fry was beginning to be reflected in English art academies, and so his 'passionate conviction that modern art must inevitably be a matter of form rather of representation' (Hamilton 1967: 229) had become less enigmatic and instead more indoctrinated as a norm in modern art education. Hope was both a landscape and a portrait artist, but it is the former that this thesis will analyse as a topic that has been used so symbolically in British art and literature throughout the two World Wars and has become a metaphor of 'self-hood' for its inhabitants (Appleyard 1989:14).

### **Hope's use of landscape as a reference for South Africa**

The impact of a vast overwhelming landscape in Africa, compared to the confined space and diffused light of Europe, would have been startling to any new arrival, but particularly more so for one who was visually trained to respond to such stimuli at The Slade such as Hope. One of Hope's South African landscapes, *Orange Orchard at Glenaholm, Pietermaritzburg* (1945) seen in **Figure 47 (Volume II: 41)** encapsulates her British modernist art training interpreted through a South African narrative. This oil painting, rendered from the perspective of the white colonial gaze, depicts two gardeners working in an orange orchard. The black figures are indistinct and void of any individuality, but it locates the painting within a non-European context. British formalism is here achieved by the responsive use of colour used to record the harsh South African sunlight that so distinguishes it from the muted tones of British landscape paintings, but it is also distinctly not of European origin and is rendered within the genre of the English Post-Impressionist style. The use of light is reminiscent of the Impressionists' obsession with atmospheric change and the pointillist use of the brush is likened to that of French artist Claude Monet (Osborne 1970: 639), but the composition does not appear as fluid as is notable and is comparable to the conservatism seen in British Modernist works. This commingling of Western style with supplanted African signifiers is what Bernard Smith recognises

as cultural imperialism (Smith 1998: 307), not only has a distinct continental style been internalised and diluted into British modernist narrative (Leigh 2002: 55), but it also remonstrates as a receptor for colonial hedonism, becoming understood as South African art which Smith suggests is the ultimate impact of the ‘high’ Formalist (Smith 1998: 5).

In Hope’s later work *Winter in the Transkei* (1969) seen in **Figure 48 (Volume II: 42)**, this immediacy between the landscape and the artist appears to be lost and instead replaced by a more stylistic representation of a serene winter setting, albeit retaining its formalistic quality. The scene has become one of a nostalgia and sentimentality void of any sense of realism. Were it not for the inclusion of one distinct reference, an African homestead in the foreground, it could easily have been considered a typically British image. This gouache work on paper no longer proffers any awareness of the environment and instead stylises the scene. Formalism here has maligned any opportunity for a distinctive South African avant-garde and this painting in particular regurgitates an almost ‘tired’ riposte in a British genre.

Land itself creates its own identity being a core to political, economic, social recognition and belonging. The dissolution of a unified South African identity is etched in the landscape over which many lives have been affected and sadly lost. Political battles have raged and individual aspiration broken and charred, but commonplace throughout is that land is an edifying factor determining that desired place and identity. The landscape is a retreat which encapsulates a place of belonging. Duncan Brown recognises that the authenticity of identity lies in the longevity of narrative within a community and that by storytelling, this identity and social bond is rekindled and affirmed (Brown 2006: 15) and it is in this way that British modernism flourishes through the romanticising of the South African landscape in the quest to re-locate the self in the host country but at the same time to absorb memory and a nostalgic comfort of a native England within formalistic ideology.

This is identifiable in a commemorative tableau that Hope created in 1940 to mark the centenary of the *Greak Trek* which was produced for the Irene Post Office near Pretoria ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa\\_Hope](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Hope)) and seen in **Figure 49 (Volume II: 42)**. An acknowledgement of the hardship and struggle endured by white settlers traversing and exploring South Africa, particularly when faced with such a large and diverse continent, and was something that Hope would have been familiar with as she frequently travelled across the Transkei and the Drakensberg during vacation times from The University (Berman 1970: 146). But, the history that was being depicted was part of the struggle of Afrikanerdom and was not part of British imperialistic

achievement and is therefore reveals a further important significance as it serves as a generic record of 'white' progression as a colonial achievement, not from the select British or Afrikaner gaze, but as 'white' embodiment. Such a notion can be appraised through Colin Richards' analysis of the apartheid system in which he establishes that any '...struggle for liberation and the maintenance of the status quo is often cast in terms of nationalism...through the idiom of cultural commonness and difference' (<http://www.asai.co.za/print3.php?id=3&cat=132&view=all>). So for the diaspora who had only been in South Africa for two years before this work was created, the inclusion in a new nation and its nationalistic aspirations assimilates a longing and the aim to build what can be described as a 'Second Empire' (Hauser 1962: 57), the homeland now lost and the host embraced through acculturation.

So for Rosa Hope, her British art training brought her into the foreground of the development of British Modernity and it was in this idiom that she reflected these principles in her work and in her teaching at The Department. British culture in this sense had been exported through art and its self-reflexive tenets retained, such was its perceived supremacy. What British artists were producing was a reflection of a new country interpreted through a foreign gaze, but its impact was also procured in the mediation this training had on South African students, one of whom was Geoffrey Long, a pupil of Oxley and later a lecturer at The Department.

### **Geoffrey Kellet Long**

Geoffrey Kellet Long (1916-1961) (Ogilvie 1988: 389) as seen in **Figure 50 (Volume II: 43)**, was born in Durban to British parents (Berman 1983: 268-269) and commenced his career as a draughtsman ([http://www.the-art-world.com/history/lh\\_long.htm](http://www.the-art-world.com/history/lh_long.htm)) before enrolling for art training under the tutelage of Professor Oxley at The University in 1932 (Ogilvie 1988: 389) where he was appointed as a Senior Lecturer in 1946 until 1954 ([http://www.the-art-world.com/history/lh\\_long.htm](http://www.the-art-world.com/history/lh_long.htm)). With such an art training centred on design, this reflected in his ability to construct and conceive theatre set-designs (The Natal Witness, 8 April 1964). However, it was as a war artist with direct experience in active service (<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol116as.html>) that he has today been remembered, but through a brief analysis of his work (The Natal Witness, 8 April 1964; Malherbe 1981: 254), the impact of British formalism as received by a South African art scholar can also be assessed.

During the Second World War, Long was exposed to the devastation and inhumanity of warfare, often

accompanying ‘the most dangerous missions in order to fulfil his role as a pictorial reporter of conflict’ (Berman 1983: 269), and ‘who risked his life in doing real war pictures’ (Malherbe 1981: 245) but unlike the European Expressionists who emphasised the war’s impact and derogation on society, recorded scenes with draftsman-like precision, in a very controlled manner, as Esmé Berman acknowledges, he understood his responsibility and limitations as a war artist, albeit his style became more expressionistic in later life (Berman 1983: 269). Long acclaims that war provided an opportunity for growth and development in South Africa, and as a time for creating a progressive nationhood, modernism being likened to modernisation and the aspirations of the individual being surpassed to the cause of patriotism. Consequently Long’s response is to record the industrialisation that had enveloped the West, not as a divisive depersonalisation, but instead as a laudable nationalistic oeuvre, a juxtaposed perspective on the nostalgic romantic vision of an idealised British landscape. Long provides his motivation for his work, recognising that a:

new landscape is springing up; the industrial land-scape [thus]...It is perhaps the most important step in a young history and of all our assets probably holds the greatest hope for our future. Today this industrial effort is directed towards war: it is making a magnificent response and the fact is definitely worth recording (<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol116as.html>).

What distinguishes Long’s art here is how he interprets the landscape, no longer from the view of a diasporic immigrant, but as an internalised native terrain, a first-generation South African. The romanticism seen in Rosa Hope’s work is absent and instead he embraces and admires modernisation through the recognition of British modernity in its technological advancement as opposed to British modernism’s nostalgic recognition of a landscape lost to industrialisation. Ironically however, what remains constant is the method of recording these ‘advancements’ which are still rendered as dialectically formalistic and are edified as colonial and imperialistic achievement positioning South Africa, for the first time, as a technological centre attached to Europe, but no longer wholly reliant on it. In Long’s paintings *Home Front* (1941) in **Figure 51 (Volume II: 43)** and *Key Man* (1941) in **Figure 52 (Volume II: 44)**, he advocates the ‘new and industrial’ South African age, not as an adversary of humanity, but as a juxtaposed harmony, man and machine interlinked. Initially this would appear to contravene the artisan and modernist training of Oxley, but his time in South Africa had permitted him to recognise how machinery should be used for the advancement of man and to be used for the perfection of personal skill and acumen, though not to the exclusion of it, and accordingly promoted an ‘intelligent use of leisure time, which tends to increase with the development of machinery’ (Oxley 1930: 44).



## **The position of The Department in 1952**

Professor Oxley was pivotal in defining an art schema upon which the South African art education system could build and it is through this vision that The Department has matured. His keen focus on the appreciation of art, the development of art techniques that could nurture self-expression and art education for teachers as well as pupils (Oxley 1930: 44) denotes his humanitarian perception of art practice that foregrounded art education at The University which is still applied today. In fact, The Mission Statement for The Department in May 1991 includes the aspirations of Professor Oxley as the first Chair on 29 July 1933:

There is a tendency for all our university courses to be too vocational. The character of university life and its general atmosphere are factors which should be used to stimulate the artistic perceptions of our students, who otherwise are likely to remain indifferent. While in some cases a mild interest may develop an indispensable and personal spiritual outlet. This of course applies to all Arts. The restless and artificial lives of certain sections of the younger generation are causing them to miss some finer experiences through lack of a cultural background. The university should aim at helping a student to live as well as make a living (UNP Department of Fine Art and History of Art Departmental Mission Statement, May 1991: Paragraph 6.1).

Albeit a new chapter in the history of modernity awaited The Department on the retirement of Oxley in 1952 (The Natal Witness, 4 October 1952; The Daily News, 24 November 1952) as Jack Heath was appointed, it was as a British Modernism mediated through formalism that became inaugurated into the pedagogy of The University. Susan Helm (now Susan Davies) writes that '[f]or practical purposes, most first year students should be regarded as having had no previous art training' (Helm (undated): Introduction) and accordingly it was directly through a prescribed and constructed curricula lodged in formalism, that art students could be moulded and developed at The University.

As a tribute to Professor Oswald John Philip Oxley and the contributions that he made to art education at The University and throughout South Africa, a lecture theatre, currently located at The Centre for Visual Arts and used for art history and media lectures, was named after him and is known as the John Oxley Lecture Theatre.

## Chapter Six

### The Fine Art Department headed by Professor Jack Heath from 1953 to 1969 and the reception of late British Modernism

It was perhaps with the arrival of Jack Heath to The Department in 1953, that the greatest impetus of British formalism is demonstrated in both the art education that was taught at The University and in his own art work. Heath was pragmatic in introducing the influences of late British Modernism that he had received some two decades after John Oxley and so, through his training at the Birmingham School of Art, an institution that focused on the technical and artisan aspects of design, and later at The Royal College, together with his embrace and interpretation of more contemporary influences afforded late British Modernism, allowed for a metaphorical zephyr to regenerate and revisit formalism and its ideologies in The Department.

#### John Charles Wood Heath

John Charles Wood ‘Jack’ Heath, seen in **Figure 53 (Volume II: 44)**, was born in Cannock, Staffordshire in England, on 22 May 1915 to a working class family (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 1). This area in England lies in the Midlands and on the peripheries of the City of Birmingham, which, owing to its heavy industrial and coal mining production is known as the Black Country. In 1932 Heath won a scholarship enabling him to attend the Birmingham School of Arts and Crafts and a further scholarship allowed him to enrol into the Engraving School at The Royal College (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 2) from 1936 until 1939 (Ogilvie 1988: 284) where he received his tuition under the direction of Malcolm Osborne (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 2). In 1938 Heath was awarded the prestigious British Institute Empire Scholarship in Engraving, and the Drawing Prize at The Royal College in the following year, but unfortunately was not able to take up the final scholarship offered to him in 1939, the Fourth Year Extension Scholarship, following his enlistment into military service (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 2).

Heath immigrated to South Africa in 1946 with his wife Jane and his two young children, Jonathan and Jinny (Burnett 1998: 1). Britain, in the wake of the Second World War, was consumed with the difficulties of post-war depression, rationing of food, limited housing and accommodation and vast unemployment that was faced by returning from the armed services (conversation with Thomas

Sullivan circa 1982). For Heath the opportunity of employment in South Africa (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 3) posed the chance of a better standard of living for his family. Having initially accepted a position at Rhodes University and a year later being appointed as the head of the Art School at the Port Elizabeth Technical College (Burnett 1998: 1), he was appointed as Professor of Fine Arts at The University in 1953, a position he would retain until his untimely death on 16 June 1969 as a consequence of a cerebral haemorrhage (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 5).

### **Late British Modernism**

At the time of Heath's art training, British Modernism was no longer an avant-garde initiative, but had become established as an idiom with a constructed British art history (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 14) that was not a mere response to its European counterparts, but was still perceived as 'lagging behind' it in its progression (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed.) 1988: 11). According to Paul Nash, British art had 'one crippling weakness - the lack of structural purpose [and]...immunity from the responsibility of design' (Harrison 1981: 241). Its journey had traversed many distinctive British art movements, notably those of the Pre-Raphaelites, who reflected an intellectual response brought about by a literary interest whose most typical works are illustrations to Shakespearian plays and the writings of Keats and Tennyson (Lucie-Smith et al (Ed) 1988: 13). The Arts and Crafts Movement had also been instrumental in reviving Gothic medievalism and the British Post-Impressionists had embraced the work of the French but in a far more conservative response. Despite The Royal College, and other artisan institutions focusing on the elements of design for commercial application, Britain did not have the equivalent to the German Bauhaus whereby artists and designers could work together 'towards some putatively social, if utopian, end' (Harrison 1981: 238) and neither had there been any social revolution upon which a reaction could be lodged. It was, however, through abstraction and non-representational form (Harrison 1981: 234), that the genre of British modernism was to truly flourish once exported to South Africa and a time of great political struggle and transformation.

Up until the late 1920s, the success of British artists on the European Continent had largely depended on their 'British-ness' recognised by their limited English context, what Charles Harrison refers to as an 'insular modernism' (Harrison 1981: 232), a term derived to reflect British interest from an isolated island perspective as distinct from the continental advance to the Modern Movement. But for artists such as Nash and Ben Nicholson, 'the effects of several years of technical application and of measured assimilation of the transformations of European modernism were now manifest in their work'

(Harrison 1981: 232) and this was a platform upon which British abstraction was to expand.

### **Heath and his War Experience**

Like John Oxley and Geoffrey Long, Jack Heath had also been personally subjected to the immediacy of warfare and the insidious effect that this caused on the human subject which, for a young artist, was to have a considerable forbearance in his early work. For Heath, his active service in Italy and his involvement in the notorious Allied Normandy Beach Landing, an occasion when he was injured (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 2), exposed him to the directness of military conflict and enabled him to journal instances of incongruity in his drawings, such as those reflected in **Figure 54 (Volume II: 45)**. This image reflects the dehumanisation of soldiers, one unidentified corpse lying in water where he fell, divested of all personal identity, even his head, with a cloth unceremoniously placed over his torso; an embodiment of the human machine; the individual is left with no framework for belief, a conceptualisation of warfare. Heath is no longer documenting the devastation as Long had recorded, he is instead portraying the emotive effect and response. The loss of life and needless waste, be it in war or as part of the production of machinery of warfare, is also achieved without a direct use of the figure, only shrouded corpses, which is particularly relevant in his earlier works such as *Mining Disaster* (1934) in **Figure 55(a) (Volume II: 45)** and the study for it in **Figure 55(b) (Volume II: 46)**. But it was perhaps through Heath's postings to military units involved in the development of camouflage in the Second World War (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 2) that became a significant catalyst in the advancement of abstraction in his later work (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 6) accompanied by the changing debates regarding abstract art that had been preoccupying post-war Britain.

An early example of abstraction in Heath's work can be identified in his *The Seaside ABC Series* (circa 1950) in **Figure 56 (Volume II: 46)**, which consists of a series of gouache compositions and designs rendered in muted colours that are almost reminiscent of camouflage and concealment techniques that Heath had developed during the respective wars. Each design uses distinct landmarks that are then absorbed into their surroundings on a tilted picture plane, emphasising not only a focus specifically on form and design, but also how the points of reference are transmuted within their surroundings again losing their distinctiveness. These works clearly embellish the illumination techniques that Heath acquired from The Royal College as had been taught in its Design School and incorporates the controlled use of lettering applied to manuscripts; it also positions the work to a time in British history, after the Second World War, when maps were being redrawn and cartography was

deployed through Ordinance Survey drawings. Albeit these illustrations were produced in South Africa clearly as a tool for alphabet training, in much the same way codes and acronyms had been used, in the dialectical sense, during the War years in civilian Britain to identify locations following the removal of place and street names undertaken to confuse enemy forces (conversation with Thomas Sullivan circa 1990).

Applying a postmodern reading, *The Seaside ABC Series* uses lettering in a manner that becomes a deployment of semiotics which, in this way, although conjectural, is reminiscent of Roland Barthes' translation of a work into a 'Text' or meaning that allows understanding through experience and reaction to a sign, and notes therefore, that the 'logic regulating the Text is not comprehensive...but metonymic' (Barthes 1971: 967) and is consequently dependent on external signifiers to provide its full meaning. In this way the viewer's perception locates the image. However it is in this same way that formalism becomes authenticated, the interpretation of the Text nestling within the language of colonialism which, as the theorist Paul Sartre contends, renders an individual powerless to determine the course of his own life as this was intrinsically interlinked with an imposed social responsibility 'from which there was no justifiable escape' (Neville 1977: 89). Therefore any influences or imposed discourse would mould the individual according to this exposure to external stimuli, whether this was in an accepting or reactive stance would depend on narrative. This is apparent from one of Heath's book jacket designs for the University of Natal Press in 1962 as seen in **Figure 57 (Volume II: 47)**, combining his artisan skills with design and a new vernacular reference to African signifiers.

### **The landscape as a vehicle for early Abstraction and Abjection**

The England that Heath had left, was attempting to reconstruct national esteem following the years of deprivation during the war years, its victory in the War used to heighten nationalistic and patriotic pride. At The Royal College, its curriculum focused on skills needed to re-build Britain (Frayling 1987: 126); this desire for a new identity in art was recognised by Paul Nash who was a lecturer in the School of Painting at that time (Cardinal 1989: 126), with the functionality of art facing a dilemma if Britain continued to do little more than replicate European modernism as absorbed by Cubism in the 1910s, Abstract Constructivism ten years later and Surrealism in the following decade (Arnason 1977: 538). In response to this inertia, Nash founded an artist's group in 1933, known as Unit One, which aimed at qualifying the position of, and formulation of, a unique British art (Appleyard 1989: 59), albeit this was a distinctiveness that remained unresolved for art scholars and still much debated

at that time. However, for all the remonstrations of Continental art, Nash's work remained transfixed with combining 'surrealist qualities of strangeness and emptiness with romantic interpretations of the British landscape' (Arnason 1977: 538-539). As Laurie Adams contends, it was this process of constructing a British style, 'the popularity of formalist criticism paralleled, to some degree, the development of abstraction' (Adams 1996: 34).

By the early 1930s, Nash had travelled extensively in Europe at a time when Surrealism was becoming influential, and this is apparent in his work, and indeed become reflected in Heath's earlier works. The abstracted forms, with which Nash developed and experimented in the late 1920s, are expressed in his use of abstract expressionism as he enveloped more structural components in his work (Reid (Ed.) 1975: 21), and as Norman Reid remarks '[i]t was in this area that Nash worked out a tighter more methodical application of paint which was to become the hallmark of a new painting style in 1929' (Reid (Ed.) 1975: 21). In the same way, as landscapes had been used to extrapolate such ideas by Nash, Heath too incorporated the landscape as a divisive 'English' tool to stylise human destruction, a juxtaposed symbolic expression of romantic idealism of the idealised British homeland with actuality of the human cost as a reality of its preservation as seen in *Bombing Raid* (circa 1939) in **Figure 58 (Volume II: 47)**. Emotion is revealed through the distortion and use of random objects and form, and is something that Heath develops as he moves more towards abstraction. In *Bombing Raid* the figures are distorted and reduced to become little more than part of the twisted remains of a collapsed building.

Harrison reflects on how, to Nash, there are two necessities in the attainment of his ideal of British Modernism, firstly:

the pursuit of form: the expression of the structural purpose in search of beauty in formal interaction and relations apart from representation. This is typified by abstract art. Second the pursuit of the soul, the attempt to trace the 'psyche' in its devious flight, a psychological research on the part of the artist parallel to the experiments of the great analysts (Harrison 1981: 241 quoting Nash).

These elements become increasingly prevalent in Heath's work, particularly as Heath attended The Royal College at the time that Unit One was founded and consequently such theoretical currency inevitably was absorbed in the teaching at that institution. These concerns are also clearly evident in two of Nash's own works, *A Night of Bombardment* (1919-20) seen in **Figure 59 (Volume II: 48)**

and his later composition *Monster Field* (1939) in **Figure 60 (Volume II: 48)**. Both make reference to warfare dated respectively in the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars, the first attempting to give an aspirational account as to the motivation for the War portraying a normally idyllic country scene worthy of losing life over, historically so desired as a British genre (Appleyard 1989: 14), but then the second instead becomes distorted and frightening; a combination of nostalgic memory with daily reality faced by a nation at war. So the interrelationship that was formed between landscape and its abstraction, used specifically for the purpose of design with the forms and shapes becoming patterned subliminal threads instead of making specific representation.

This translation of the psyche and emotional reaction was something that was translated easily into abstraction, and was a style and technique that was adopted and developed by Heath in his *The Great Wool Fire* (circa 1951) (produced in South Africa) seen in **Figure 61 (Volume II: 49)**. This composition has been rendered as comparable war zone, and its intermingling fibres are reminiscent of the scouring of humanitarianism and eradication akin to the effects of warfare within a fractured landscape. This work records abjection caused by a devastating fire (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 7) and assimilates Nash's work. The date of *The Wool Fire* also coincides with protest action and strikes that occurred Port Elizabeth. It was here that Heath was teaching at the time, at the Port Elizabeth Technical College (CVA Archives), when mass rallies by the War Veteran's Torch Commando carrying burning torches publically opposed the South African government's *Separate Registrations of Voters Bill*, with the declaration of judicial sovereignty removing Coloured franchise rights effectively '[l]ighting the fire of protest' (Oakes (Ed. 1992: 395). Port Elizabeth, being an important wool processing city in South Africa (Joyce 1989: 395), was an industry affected by the strikes. So here Heath combines abjection, abstraction and political referencing in his work.

Another very prominent British artist who clearly influenced Heath was Graham Sutherland, for while 'Nash was more of the eighteenth century, Sutherland was a full-blooded Romantic' (Causey 1986: 23), possessing a reaction to the human spirit 'through metaphor amplified by the evocation of mood' (Causey 1986: 24), emphasising 'the drama and mystery of the landscape, and often anthropomorphized [thus] natural forms, to bring out... 'the anonymous personality of these things'...[responding as part of the War Artists' Scheme] to the devastation caused by bomb damage... as well as to scenes of human endeavour such as the Cornish tin mines and foundry workers whose uncomfortable labours he recorded' (Compton (Ed.) 1986: 446). **Figure 62 (Volume II: 49)**, Sutherland's *Welsh Landscape with Road* (1936) reflects a landscape, scarred and 'pitted' through acts of man leaving its beauty disjointed and disseminated by slag heaps, the bi-product of coal mining

and slate production, and reflecting what Read considers, ‘an art concerned not with beauty but with tragedy, neurosis and sentiment’ (Causey 1986: 220). Again, in a later work produced during the Second World War, the landscape is represented in a more symbolic representation as a *Red Landscape* (1942) in **Figure 63 (Volume II: 50)**, the human cost of warfare over the protectorate of land symbolically staining it.

### **Heath and British formalism brought to South Africa**

At the time that Heath had left England in 1946 abstraction had already become internalised as an integral aspect of late British Modernism with that unique ‘British’ style and entity starting to emerge as ‘[a]n agglomeration of Modernist movements and individual activities set the stage for the public enjoyment and international recognition given to British art in the Fifties and Sixties’ (Gore 1986: 12). However, whilst the effects of European formalism received into Britain may have waned, this nexus was exported from Great Britain to South Africa and recognised as the period of the ‘high’ Formalesque in South Africa (Smith 1998: 5), particularly as two different kinds of abstract art had started to develop, those of a geometrical and non-geometrical genre (Schapiro 1978: 23). Heath had also come to South Africa at a time of political change and was present especially during the struggles in the 1960s. Unlike his British contemporaries, he did indeed have the opportunity for his art, through a combination of abstraction and political motivation, to use British formalism as a device to record the political instabilities of the country (as had the European Continental artists previously undertaken to make partisan statements). It is at this juncture that Heath’s work differentiates from British abstract art, not by the devices and techniques that he employs, but instead focuses on formalism as a platform for narrative and social commentary.

#### **a) Socio-political changes in South Africa**

Albeit an in-depth analysis of legislative changes and consequence is beyond the scope of this thesis, some very significant references to the causes of social unrest are relevant in positioning The Department during the period of Heath’s tenure and how this reflected in his own work. Heath was appointed as departmental head in the same year that the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was passed and white nationalism began to take supremacy. From a political position, the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952 had made it compulsory for passes to be carried by all African nations, with



criminal sanction afforded those who disregarded it or remained in urban areas longer than their three day permits allowed giving local authorities the power to remove apparent ‘undesirables’; it was a law that ‘was composed with very little regard as to how it would break up families, increase poverty and criminalise a large section of the Black population’ (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 377). That, however, was the ignition for the revolt and crowd uprisings in June 1952 as a provocative act to defy unjust segregation by blatantly ignoring the forbidden ‘Europeans only’ areas; coupled with the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act following in 1953 when the African National Congress responded with the Defiance Campaign (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 385). This was a tumultuous time for any artist to record, and was as insidious as the actions during the wars with an assimilated consequence of de-humanisation. In June 1955, a Freedom Charter was advocated by Chief Albert Luthuli, but this was not endorsed and was instead followed by the treason trials of approximately five hundred African National Congress Activists in September (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 388-389).

Through a solidarity reflected by both the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress, an anti-Pass campaign was motivated, with such an announcement being made in December 1959 which was to ignite international awareness. As a consequence, an ‘international trade boycott of South Africa was motivated, ‘with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan[’s] famous speech [made on 3 February 1960 (Ovendale 1995: 455) whereby]...he warned that the winds of African nationalism were blowing everywhere in Africa’ (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 401) as seen in **Figure 64 (Volume II: 50)**. Such a culmination of events caused an upsurge of resistance across South Africa, particularly in Durban (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 401). It was on 21 March 1960 that this struggle began to gather momentum in Sharpeville, outside Johannesburg as crowds gathered with police and military riot control deployed. The consequence was that sixty-nine people died and one hundred and eighty were injured (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 401), impacting on both a national and international level. On 8 April the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress parties were banned (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 407 with their respective leaders fleeing into imposed exile (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 369).

Even the education system at tertiary level was not immune from the effects of racially motivated political intervention with ‘[a]partheid education... extend[ing] to university level in the late 1950s, despite strong protests from English-language universities that they wished to continue admitting black students...[causing]... a serious inroad into academic freedom’ (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 379). By 1959 ‘the Extension of University Education Act [thus]... got the establishment of ‘non-white’ universities, and empowered the Minister of Bantu Education to admit only members of specified

‘Bantu’ ethnic groups to particular colleges. Africans who were already enrolled at ‘white’ universities were to leave by the beginning of 1961’ (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 379).

### **b) Heath’s incorporation of Design into his work**

British Abstract Expressionism therefore may have been developed as a responsive movement trying to develop an autonomous nationalistic identity apart from Europe to distinguish itself ([http://thesis.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/handle/10443/461?mode=full&submit\\_simple>Show=f](http://thesis.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/handle/10443/461?mode=full&submit_simple>Show=f)), but through the guise of formalism it became a catalyst for immigrants who had relocated to the subcontinent to construct ‘a sense of themselves and their place in the world, not so much as rational schemers - economists, social scientists, and empirically-minded historians - but also as dreamers, storytellers, and fantasists, caught up in a ‘thick’, lived-in world of experience and memory’ (Foster 2008: 4). It again revisited that diasporic engagement to the ‘exotic’ and the ‘new’ (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 10 quoting Jinny Heath), but now could be afforded a renewed impetus and interpreted from its metaphysical effect. Formalism by this time was no longer mediated through the auspices and ‘standards’ kindred by the British Arts and Crafts Movement and artisan perfection, but was understood as an endemic British Abstract Expressionism, still lodged within a Western centre, but rekindled in an African context with an African political awareness.

It is in Heath’s *Scythian Nightmares* (1961) seen in **Figure 65 (Volume II: 51)** that the elements of design and drafting, skills synonymous with the teachings at The Royal College are joined with precision in a metaphorical quality as British formalism is combined with narrative. The title relates to the Scythian people who were nomadic and inhabited Europe and Asiatic Russia in the sixteenth century (Onions 1986: 1917), but can also be speculatively seen to prophetic ramifications of the dissemination and forced exiles caused by governmental due process of the time, and the nightmare of forced vagrancy imposed by legislature, the two beasts, whether Black nationalism or Colonialism, tearing at each other.

### **c) Abstract Expressionism with a South African centre**

A good friend of Walter Battiss (telephone conversation with Jinny Heath in October 2011), Jack Heath would have been aware of Battiss’ desire not to ‘imitate’ the art of Europe but to find the

essential core of South African art (Skawran and Macnamara (Ed.) 1985: 16). But such intentions were quashed because modernism had become so firmly entrenched within white colonial discourse. Juliette Leeb-du Toit recognises that '[i]ronically it was in South Africa that Heath was able to experiment with modernism and its many associated freedoms, largely unfettered by the critical gaze to which his work would have been subject in Britain' (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 9). However being in South Africa also allowed Heath an opportunity of self-creative pursuit that evaded many artists working in Britain at that time; for although social, political, commercial and an institutionalised British formalistic vision of art-making within the ethos of British-based University education blighted that utopian freedom, and hampered any opportunity for a purist South African modernism hailing a continuous desire to 'carry the cause of British art in South Africa (Adams 1987: 153), the artist gaze was renewed. As described by Sidney Nolan of his Australian art after his relocation to Britain, this opportunity did permit Heath a different social narrative on which to focus his art, as had been the motivation and distinction afforded the Abstract Expressionists in Europe.

It was as a desire to create an art style that would be unique to South African art that motivated Battiss to explore the origins of art made in this country empathetically incorporating a reference to San Art into his work, not a mere anthropological study, but in a desire to extrapolate 'South African-ness'. In his *Boy and Rocks* (1942) in **Figure 66 (Volume II: 51)**, despite his intentions, the apparent route to originality is evaded by indoctrinated European formalism, an aspect that Charles Baudelaire's recognises as a characteristic of modernity, with its consequential 'particular relationship to temporality - characterised by keen attentiveness to the passing moments...[thereby] identif[ying] the modern artist's challenge as one of seizing the eternal within the 'contingent, fleeting, volatile' present' (Rainbow (Ed.) 1994: xxxii). Accordingly, what Battiss aspires to is undermined when its theory is merely translated as western Primitivism replicating an innocent naivety brought from another continent removed from its source with its immediate spontaneity lost.

However Jack Heath's use of abstraction in art, which he developed in South Africa, marks a clear distinction in approach. Clement Greenberg acknowledges that in the West, as late as 1954, there had been much criticism of abstract art with some apologists for abstract art considering non-representational art as being inferior (Greenberg 1973: 133) and merely 'a symptom of cultural, and even moral, decay' (Greenberg 1973: 133), and others he noted refused to accept that abstract art could in any event be completely abstract (Greenberg 1973: 133). However this raises two propositions for the development of abstract art in a South African context. Firstly, whilst the Eurocentric formalist debate used to determine the boundaries of 'high' and 'low' art became a

preoccupation in Europe, what was received as a formalistic style into South Africa had already been validated and authenticated as a European concept and so that distinction was instead between that which was European and that which was not. This consequently impacts on the second proposition raised by Greenberg, that complete abstraction cannot be attained in art.

By virtue of its mediated format as a European style, formalism disparages any opportunity for a completely unilateral edification in abstract art and despite its apparent nebulous content, Greenberg correctly surmises that it can never attain a totality of abstraction. As soon as the artist manipulates the paint on the surface of the canvas, the composition becomes a construct, whether a title is attached or not, it still locates it within a known or prescribed Text whatever the intentions of the artist (Barthes 1971: 966). Michel Foucault considers that the manifestation of formalism can be accredited with a redeeming quality. Whereas the action of ‘othering’, so pertinent to colonial supremacy may marginalise, it can also be used as a device to predetermine modernity and authenticate the self. For Foucault ‘otherness is both a force and a feeling in self, something whose seemingly endless metamorphoses his work reflects and shapes’ (Said 2001: 191). Therefore by expanding this polarity further, it can act as a gyroscope to qualify individuality.

Therefore, although Heath’s use of abstraction, became a hybridity of both British modernism and a South African mediation of European art, it was not until 1957 that Heath returned to Britain on Sabbatical (**Appendix 3**) which had afforded him the opportunity to develop his art in isolation from any immediacy of British influence, as indeed ‘[p]ainting the unfamiliar was impossible without a period of adaptation, of self-transformation’ (Benjamin (undated): 92) which was necessitated in any relocation to another country. The reason he gave to the University Council for requesting sabbatical leave to England for July 1957 to February 1958 was that he had ‘not been in Europe since 1946 (in the Army) and am very much out of date...[and therefore need]...TO STUDY [thus] the teaching methods in Schools of Fine Art in London and the Provinces’ (**Appendix 3**). It is therefore ironic that Heath had assumed that Britain was more artistically advanced, such is the preoccupation of formalism, when in fact his own originality in his work had by that time had been altered from the trajectory of abstraction expressionism in Britain. One of the current exhibitions at the time of his visit that focused on British Abstract was *Dimensions, British Abstract Art 1948-57* held between 6-21 December 1957 at the O’Hana Gallery in London (Grieve 2005: 269). Although there is no evidence that Heath attended this exhibition, both its currency and the way in which Heath’s own art changed theoretical and methodological techniques appeared to reflect those concerns by the exhibitors, particularly those of Victor Pasmore and Kenneth Martin, on his return to South Africa

and also the influence and polarity of Graham Sutherland's work.

It is Herbert Read who recognises that man possesses an 'origination' which allows his fantasy and mythical symbols to become universally valid objectives but only 'by virtue of the principle of form' (Read 1943: 33). In this sense, an artwork using the prescriptions of art making learned in one country are simply internalised and form part of the unconscious of the artist, but then conversely this methodology is stimulated by external factors and stimuli re-creating that mediation into an intuitive image locating any 'strange' encounter, '[a]n unconscious process of integration' (Read 1943: 188). In Heath's work, such an exploration exploits the metaphysical as he grapples to balance this with a focus on structural elements of the composition (Hamilton 1967: 358), as revealed in *Thornveld Purple* (1961) in **Figure 67 (Volume II: 52)**. The colours used are vivid and intense, referencing Africa and exposure to its harsh and inhospitable landscape coupled with the variety and 'extreme tones under the African sun' (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 10 quoting from an interview with Jinny Heath) but they are fragmented engagements, reminiscent of Cubism, that evolve to position and distinguish his location from that of the muted and tertiary colours applied to English landscape paintings. Such is suggestive of the symbolism and metamorphosis of an object portrayed by Sutherland in his *Black Landscape* in **Figure 68 (Volume II: 52)** and with the mathematical geometrical structuring and precision that Victor Pasmore had been experimenting in Britain with in the late 1940s as in his *Spiral Motif in Black and White: The Wave* (1945-50) in **Figure 69 (Volume II: 53)**. This interpretation of the South African escarpment is as a typified English gaze, exotic and forbidding, but still to a great extent romanticised in the British genre deploying a formalistic, but still very controlled technique. It is an energised vortex which, from a post-colonial reading, speculatively reflects the eruptive political time in which it was painted in a constitutionally troubled South Africa.

It was perhaps Sutherland's use of thorn bushes in his work, and the distortion this conjures as an abjective response to nature, that elevates these spikes and branches to an almost spiritual and metaphysical level; something that likewise begins to appear, and further developed, in Heath's work. It was the twisted and organic forms that inspired Sutherland to de-centre them from a conventional perspective (Van Raay and Guy 2004: 73). In Sutherland's *Red Tree* (circa 1936) in **Figure 70 (Volume II: 53)** and his later work, following a visit to southern France, he observes how the sharpness of thorn bushes could be so warmed by the Mediterranean sun (Van Raay and Guy 2004: 73), a similar phenomenon experienced in the African sun by Heath, as seen in Sutherland's brighter palette. Of Sutherland's later work *Thorn Head* (1947) in **Figure 71 (Volume II: 54)** the artist states:

For the first time I started to notice thorn bushes, and the structure of them as they pierced the air. I made some drawings, and as I made them, a curious change developed. As the thorns re-arranged themselves, they became, whilst still retaining their own pricking, space-encompassing life, something else - a kind of 'stand in' for a Crucifixion and a crucified head [...]. The thorns sprang from the idea of potential cruelty - to me they were the cruelty: and I attempted to give the idea a double twist, as it were, by setting them in benign circumstances: blue skies, green grass, Crucifixions under warmth (Van Raay and Guy 2004: 73).

Similarly, this is also a theme that Heath explores with the use of thorns as seen in his *Thornfield Equinox* (circa 1960) in **Figure 72 (Volume II: 54)**, the equinox indicating equality between two extremes, night and day (Onions 1986: 675) and *African Spears* (1961), speculatively a conjectural and responsive political statement in **Figure 73 (Volume II: 55)**, as its date coincides with the motivation and emergence of *Umkhonto we Siswe* (Spear of Nation) as an armed struggle against apartheid legislature. In this way the British formalism, evidenced in these works in both application and theme, offers a platform upon which to mediate an African vernacular.

However, Heath also uses a dynamism in his work that was very current to abstract art theoretical circles in the 1950s in Britain particularly, and although he had immigrated to South Africa, his interest in British art development was clearly maintained. The British artist Francis Bacon was experimenting with figures, not simply 'opened up, as in Cubism, [but instead he]...peered [into]...bodies without sides, with no shin or shell to mediate between the viewer and the expression of an intense, almost animal, vitality' (Causey 1986: 24) and had 'adapted the Surrealist use of 'chance' in painting as a trigger of emotional release, and to show how chance, used in this way, can express energy, even violence in the human figure without recourse to the traditional outline drawing...' (Causey 1986: 23). In South African history this period coincided with great political unrest and racial division and, although not incorporated in his teaching instruction (CVA Archives), was something that Heath's own art appears to have embraced.

As Bernard Smith determines, imperial acculturation in formalism also requires the mediation of local stimuli and signifiers through the reception and interpretation of the white Western gaze (Smith 1998: 307). In Heath's *African Voodoo* (1961-65) seen in **Figure 74 (Volume II: 55)**, the title provides a melodrama of Africa and African culture for a white audience fulfilling all the prescriptions of British formalism. The reference to 'voodoo' is not akin to the religious orders in South Africa but is a Western signifier of 'other'; such '[a]esthetic appreciation and criticism of the material culture of Africa [being]...a Western invention' (Wassing 1968: 6). As with the Fauves at the beginning of the

last century, Heath likewise did not necessarily obtain the items that he used in his art from their sources (Rubin (Ed.) 1984: 7), but would often frequent an African Curio Store in Durban that catered for a local and international clientele (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 10). In this sense he acquired an 'African' iconography which had already been mediated, such items having already been selected as significantly 'African' for the Western eye and consumption. The subsequent interpretation and reception of Eurocentric modernity in art, once transcribed through colonial imposition, forms an authenticated vernacular based on the incorrect Western misinterpretation of the African 'other' culture.

What remains, *prima-facie*, consistent with formalist principles is the indiscriminate use and conjoining of non-Western artefacts within the narrative of British modernism. However, when deciphered within the political commentary in South Africa at that time, from both a post-colonial and post-modernist appraisal, 'voodooism' instead can be have a more direct, sinister and symbolic interpretation, one synonymous with sorcery and with sacrificial rights (Onions 1986: 2491); a critique on whose rights were being sacrificed and at what cost. The bird form that *African Voodoo* depicts is an intimidating entity with one piercing eye and another almost reminiscent of a Central African mask, its marking can be likened to tribal warrior markings so feared by the British forces in the formidable Anglo Zulu wars nearly a century before; a premonition perhaps, of the political unrest that was besieging South Africa. It is an imagined and metaphysical interpretation of a contemporary 'African-ness' with no identity or character, and gives no suggestion of its intention; a vulture ready to prey on the vulnerable, be it government process, racial disharmony or just an all-seeing eye of international politics and embargoes, indeed brought about by changed winds over colonial domination across Africa. It is a composition made from the substances of Africa, oil with sand and stones on board and therefore, so no matter how fettered its visual impact through formalistic mutation, the use of these materials sourced in South Africa elevates the art work's very being into something indisputably African. It differs fundamentally from Heath's earlier work *Swazi Huts* (1957), in **Figure 75 (Volume II: 56)** which merely embraces formalism from a British perspective, as foreigner, instead *African Voodoo* demands the viewer's response.

But it is perhaps in Heath's *Lazarus* (1962), in **Figure 76 (Volume II: 56)**, that this theme of abjection combines so readily with his personal encounters of human despair and the insidious position and reality of being buried within the chaotic scenes of warfare or through the muting of a political voice. As an art student attending art history lectures in the John Oxley Lecture theatre, where this compositions hung for many years, I have always found it an unnerving composition of helplessness

reflecting the unimportance and dispensability of the subject whose outreach for help in his struggle for life is ignored. For Lazarus, an internationally and traditionally accepted figure of a poor beggar, Heath has entombment the subject matter in a manner reminiscent of the process of mummification used by ancient Egyptians (Shaw and Nicholson 2002: 190), whose concluded dynasty and subsequent excavation has disseminated ancestral roots. From a postmodernist evaluation, this symbolically is reflective of the South African political situation following the *Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959* whereby approximately three and a half million African were relocated to reserves' (Bennett 2010: 56). As Brett Bennett comments, '[t]he land reserved for the homelands...where the traditional lands of the Nguni-speaking peoples that had settled over the past hundreds of years' (Bennett 2010: 56). Cheryl Walker makes reference to Cosmas Desmond's writings of 1969 who considers the effects of such legislative policy up until 1983:

...the bewilderment of simple rural people when they are told they must leave their homes where they have lived for generations...their cries of helplessness and resignation...the suffering of whole families living in a tent or a tiny tin hut,...children sick with typhoid, [or] their bodies enunciated with malnutrition and dying of plain starvation (Walker 2010: 20).

It is through Heath's response to such narrative and discourse that abstract expressionism flourishes as British formalism, now re-positioned, matures to a strong degree ahead of its British counterpart ([http://thesis.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/handle/10443/461?mode-full&submit\\_simple=Show=f](http://thesis.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/handle/10443/461?mode-full&submit_simple=Show=f)). What had started in Britain by, amongst others, Roger Fry and Paul Nash as a notion to attain a British style proffering British idealism in art concertedly in the 1930s, 'Abstract Expressionism was presented to the British public through literature and exhibitions after 1947, but it was not until 1956 that Abstract Expressionist paintings became accessible in any quantity in Britain' ([http://thesis.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/handle/10443/461?mode-full&submit\\_simple=Show=f](http://thesis.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/handle/10443/461?mode-full&submit_simple=Show=f)).

The development of Heath's abstraction is reflected in his *The Winds of Fear* (1964) seen in **Figure 77 (Volume II: 57)**, which Leeb-du Toit perceives, with the benefit of postcolonial reading, as a protagonist stance of the political situation in South Africa (Leeb-du Toit 2009: 10). It is a pun on the title of British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan's speech the *Winds of Change* that was made to the South African Parliament in 1960 (Oakes (Ed.) 1992: 401) and uses both vivid colour and metaphysical symbolism to portray a fearsome crowned entity (mask-like) with beady eyes flanked by vultures preying on a female form. Steven Mansbach determines that by the middle of the last



century modern art was becoming an historical progression that was assimilated as ‘an evolution of style, affirmed as Hegelian unfolding of the absolute ‘spirit of abstraction’...’ (Mansbach 2008: 101), but, in Britain that was being lauded at the expense of ‘activist politics, idealist ideologies or nationalist aspirations for which abstraction was originally conceived’ (Mansbach 2008: 101), which therefore distinguishes Heath’s work by virtue of British formalism.

The pinnacle of British formalism combined with his moment of acculturation is furthered when formalism becomes assimilated into a localised condition (Smith 1998: 308) as can be identified in **Figure 78 (Volume II: 57)**, *Drakensberg Arabesque* (1966-1969); an integration of references authenticating an invented ‘vernacular’ modernity. The term ‘Arabesque’ referring to a ‘mural or surface decoration in colour or low relief, composed in flowing lines of branches, leaves and scrollwork fancifully intertwined’ (Onions 1986: 97). It contextualises the esoteric sensation of Africa to an immigrant which is then rendered as a subjective encounter, qualified and ‘standardised’ as an internalised reaction through the prescriptive norms constructed in a Eurocentric style and reflects on a central core. Reference to the ‘Arabesque’ is used as an exotica and is circumspect, and serves as an example of how Jack Heath transcended that British romanticism and the nostalgic recollection of the landscape in a symbolic construction and attained pure abstraction of form. This has proceeded beyond representation attaining an almost ‘kind of posthuman geological narrative’ (O’Sullivan 2013: 2)

Any attempt to categorise Heath’s work is therefore complex, particularly his later works. Still firmly fixed within formalistic discourse, Heath’s use of abstraction by the time of his untimely death in 1969 (**Appendix 4**) does not however become a mere ‘aesthetic modernity’ (Habermas 1980: 5) as late British abstractionism had tended to produce, but is more reminiscent of a combination of that metaphysical and utopian quest that defined the early modernist avant-garde in Europe. But these aspirations were not, however, reflected in the teaching in The Department which remained firmly centred on the art of a classical Europe (CVA Archives), which did not include a South African narrative or synthesis in its curricula.

### **Professor Heath’s teaching at The Department**

Despite Heath’s prowess in painting and drawing, it was in the discipline of the History of Art that he taught art education to the students at The Department (interview with Henry Davies on 30 January

2012). He also introduced Sculpture as a ‘major’ subject that could be taken for the Fine Arts degree (Heath on Jack Heath 2009: 4). The curriculum focused on the developments of art in Europe (CVA Archives) and the formalist interpretation that had been occasioned by British art scholars from their continental counterparts. His teaching methodology made particular emphasis of the writings of the Frenchman André Lhôte (Leigh 2009: 58) and the application of classicism in art; his methodology of art education remaining located firmly within a more traditional art ideology and focus of the pre-modernist era, which does not readily integrate with the advancements he had made privately in abstraction in his own work, but offers a more ‘traditional’ and academic teaching of art. It was Lhôte who advocated a very formal approach to art-making, disseminating the composition into each of his respective elements of line, tonal quality, shape, colour and arrangement (Leigh 2002: 58) and whose ‘principles of morphology, that is, that natural plastic manifestations, whirlwinds, waterspouts, shell or plant structure, contain in the proportions of exciting and reassuring elements such as underlie the geometry of art’ (Leigh 2002: 59-60). However, it was also this compositional structuring that was being experimented and preoccupied the British Constructivists in the formation and development of abstraction in British art in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which termed ‘the Golden Section’ (Grieve 2005: 231), which was particularly theorised and deployed in the work of Victor Pasmore and Kenneth Martin, the explanation of which is contained as a diagram in **Figure 79 (Volume II: 58)** and how it is applied to a geometrical form is seen in **Figure 80(a) (Volume II: 58)** and how it is applied to geometrical movement in a composition in **Figure 80(b) (Volume II: 59)**.

Heath’s acute understanding such technical principles of this mathematical technique, deployed by classical art scholars during the Renaissance and by the Greeks (Leigh 2002: 2) and experimented with as a theoretical construct by British abstract artists in the last century (Grieve 2005: 237), is evidenced in Heath’s composition in **Figure 81 (Volume II: 59)**, *Crucifixion*, which demonstrates how this classicist device of attaining balance can be achieved, but this method of working in fragments was also applied to energise his abstract works. An engaging diagnosis of this process is noted in the Natal Daily News:

Before the painting was started, the canvas was divided up by drawing diagonals and squares in a fine mesh. The whole composition was then worked out in such a way that each individual shape in the picture bore a definite geometrical relation to other shapes. The colours of the painting are impressive - the flesh is painted in tones of vivid greens and greenish-yellow (Natal Daily News (undated)).

Closely resembling Sutherland's *Crucifixion* (1947) in **Figure 82 (Volume II: 60)** in its rawness and proportions, British formalism in Heath's work demonstrates the influence and development of British Modernism. However, although Heath instructed his students to the theory and history of art and introduced them to the principles of the Golden Section or Mean into Department assimilating the currency in British abstractions, it was particularly through the tuition of his wife Jane, who was appointed as the senior lecturer in the discipline of Painting at The University, that this idiom was realised.

### **Jane Heath**

Jane Tully Heath (née Parminter) (1913 – 1995) (Heath on Jane Heath 2009: 1), as seen in **Figure 83 (Volume II: 60)**, was born in Cumberland on 21 December 1913, the daughter of a pastor, and married Jack in 1940 (Heath on Jane Heath 2009: 2). In contrast to her husband, Jane had been brought up in a rural setting, removed from any reference to an industrialised urban environment, and so exposure to such sociological abjection when she attended the Birmingham School of Art, within a city environment, would have had a substantial impact. Despite life in an apparent idyllic setting, her exposure to warfare was not remote, with Jane losing two of her siblings in the war (Leigh 1997: 10).

Jane had attended the Birmingham School of Art on a scholarship where she trained under Professor Harold Holden, and from which she graduated with a distinction winning both the School's Drawing and the Painting Prizes (Heath on Jane Heath 2009: 2). She was also awarded a further scholarship to attend The Royal College from 1937 to 1941 (Burnett 1998: 1) where she was tutored by Professor Gilbert Spencer (Ogilvie 1988: 283), again attaining a distinction as well as, in 1939 receiving the Henriques Bequest for the Most Outstanding Painter in 1939, and the following year, the Gold Medal from the Painting School (Heath on Jane Heath 2009: 2) after which she was also offered a further scholarship for post-graduate study.

### **Jane Heath and British formalism**

Jane's work can perhaps be regarded as a portfolio of the changing tastes and influences of art making in Britain, and recognises the various experimental elements in her art produced as a student and how, once she immigrated to South Africa, those transcendental applications became formulated and

cemented. Accordingly, her art can readily be distinguished into two groups, one appears to be her earlier work which remained experimental, incorporating different elements and styles to which she would have been exposed as a student and young artist in England. In fact, with British Modernism still in its infancy at the beginning of the last century and even three decades later was still foregrounding its autonomy, such influences of her contemporaries in Britain would have been influential and stimulating to any developing artist exposed to it at that time. The other arose on her immigrating to Africa which allowed a range of experimental opportunity to embrace and develop her art to reflect and encompass her new surroundings as an embrace of South Africa, mediated through British formalism, abstraction and eclecticism.

### **Jane Heath's early work**

At the time of Jane Heath's training at the Birmingham School of Art and The Royal College, the developments of British Modernism had already favoured Post-Impressionism and Post-Cubist European Art as a vehicle to extrapolate a distinctiveness in art making in England (Harrison 1981: 233). The effects of the Second World War are evident in work of this time and typically *The Militia* (circa 1940), in **Figure 84 (Volume II: 61)**, examines the effects of warfare, not only from a military presence, but also how this increases the need for industrialisation and manufacture of armoury which alters and scars the landscape. The soldiers are portrayed as stylised figures indistinguishable from the tertiary colour of the background and have become merely transmuted as cogs in a military machine.

But it is through Jane's early paintings, notably *King Street* (1940) in **Figure 85 (Volume II: 61)**, that the brutal urbanisation and a city's depression caused by poverty and mass unemployment provides an extreme juxtaposition to her own upbringing. It is a responsive comment on the harsh living conditions and environment as a consequence of industrialisation, urbanisation and forced collective habitation rendering that inertia of early modernism, recording dehumanisation through a very uncomfortable, cramped and severely foreshortened perspective. Likewise in *Pit Closed* (1941) in **Figure 86 (Volume II: 62)**, Jane uses a similar method to comment on the social impact caused by mass unemployment in the aftermath of industrialisation. The 1920s had, in particular, witnessed an era of strikes and industrial action whereby many coal mining pits and factories were closed as a consequence of government policy, strikes or capitalist redeployment of funds (Harrison 1981: 167). *King Street* and *Pit Closed* are both very poignant and political art works, albeit British painting at

that time still persisted with apolitical desensitised subject matter, as recognised in the theories of Roger Fry and Clive Bell, who considered that aesthetics ‘should be immune to social expression’ (Harrison 1981: 56) and art should ‘provide an imaginary immunity or escape from the determinations and obligations of social life’ (Harrison 1981: 56). Jane therefore demonstrates a very keen political awareness, with her canvas used as a social commentary.

As Edward Lucie-Smith confirms, there is no one movement that can be deemed responsible for the development of British Modernism (Lucie-Smith et al. (Ed.) 1988: 42), and in much the same way Jane’s art has followed a similar course. Her early work in **Figure 87 (Volume II: 62)**, *Portrait of a Lady* (1941), adopts the traditional format of British portrait painting, viewed through the vision of a romantic style as advocated by the Camden Town Group of artists in the early part of twentieth century, but is one that remains a very formal composite and is clearly in complete contrast to her much later work *Self Portrait* (1975) in **Figure 88 (Volume II: 63)**, which demonstrates the use of strong linear form and colour, completely devoid of sentimentality. It is this continuous experimentation throughout Jane’s art career that mirrors the shifting British modernist idiom and adopts the effects of British formalism.

The influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement across Britain at the end of the nineteenth century had been incorporated into the art tuition that Jane had received at the Birmingham School of Art and at The Royal College and is certainly evidenced in the style that she applied in her book illustrations and Christmas cards, an example as seen in **Figure 89 (Volume II: 63)**, which combines narrative with a very constructed sense of design in accordance with the English graphic tradition learned as an art student with a South African centre.

It was upon Jane’s arrival in South Africa that a revivalist British Romanticism is reflected in her art, developing that nostalgic and diasporic representation of landscape recalled by the diaspora. It is also a recollection of a romanticised Britain, but one that permits a Post-Impressionist interpretation. In **Figure 90 (Volume II: 64)**, *The Family Home, 11 Roberts Road* (1959), its subject matter acts as a semiotic binarism that may not only instil a memory of England with its bowling greens, the City Hall and the little Victorian house on the hill (Leigh 1997: 20) but it also situates the family domain demarcating her locale. The very bright colours used are atypical of any English scenery, but the effect of nostalgia and an overwhelming feeling of a ‘reconstructed’ English-ness, is achieved even if the subject matter is only a connection with Britain through its occupants; it authenticated relocation through a formalist gaze. This work is similar to the work of the British artist Mary Martin, whose

*Houses and Trees* (1949) in **Figure 91 (Volume II: 64)** start to develop the spectre of an urban street in terms of cubes and concentration on the use of space and form and, as seen in Jane work, stylises the imagery with loose brush strokes.

### **The formalism of British Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Cubism in Jane Heath's work**

It is through Jane's mediation of British Post-Impressionism, with a strict understanding of significant form as introduced by Roger Fry and developed at British Modernist art schools some two decades later, which connects Jane's work with British formalist interests and no longer inculcates romantic overtones; instead pursuing an aesthetic sensibility and truth to material. However Jane admits that she, and her fellow students, remained critical of Fry's theories albeit 'he did say some sound and sensible things' (Burnett 1998: 4 quoting Jane Heath in 1984). Jane does however acknowledge her strong homage to Cubism confirming that she was also inspired by Paul Cézanne as an artist, and as a teacher would recommend her students to study the work of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists with a particular focus on the art of both Georges Braque and Cézanne (Burnett 1998: 6), as was the interest also in Britain at that time with the article in written by British artist Victor Pasmore in 1951 *The Artist Speaks* (Grieve 2005: Appendix i) and Kenneth Martins' *Abstract Art* also composed in 1951 (Grieve 2005: Appendix ii). There was, however, a balance in Jane's art that combined technical skill and knowledge within the composition focusing on the structural considerations of form, but not one removed from the consideration of the subject matter (Burnett 1998: 5). Observation was crucial to Jane's work (Leigh 1997: 23) with her constant insistence on the skills and development of drawing necessary as the anchor for any art practice. She was particularly fastidious about this and impressed this upon her many students (interview with Henry Davies and Sue Davies on 30 January 2012).

It is through a combination of the Impressionist concern for light and the Post-Impressionists interest in significant form that Jane extracts her formalistic idiom. Jane's *The Yellow Chair* (1947), seen in **Figure 92 (Volume II: 65)**, was produced in the year that she immigrated to South Africa. Her palette suddenly reflects a vibrant spectrum of colour and is very distinct from her early work that she had produced in England. That Impressionist obsession with the reactive absorption of light and effect becomes exposed to the bright African sun, an escape from the sombre tones that defined England in

the mid-1940s both physically and metaphorically. The use of an avocado pear locates the setting within a South African exoticism defining it as distinctly ‘non-English’. Similarly, in Mary Martin’s early abstract work, one example *Still Life with Fruit* (1948) in **Figure 93 (Volume II: 65)**, albeit dated the following year to Jane’s canvas, inculcates the British abstract experimentation with geometric and mathematical constructs with flat colour and lines divided into planes. Martin, however, uses bright complementary colours in her earlier works (although she later radically favoured black and white compositions), just as Jane started to develop her full colour spectrum as she developed her abstraction in her work.

Again in *Still Life with Knitting* (1958) in **Figure 94 (Volume II: 66)**, the ordinary is no longer the drab and disdainful but instead has been translated into a beautiful form and metaphorical solace. The use of fragmented light cast on the subjects recognises the formalist structural quality of design and form, but at the same time is used to emphasise each object in the composition in contrast to its immediate background, but then combines to form a unified whole. It is a study of the polarity of light and dark allowing the viewer to ‘discover’ the idiosyncrasies within the painting without specific focal reference. It makes use of the subtlety of geometric shapes qualified by natural contours, organic forms and tonal contrast in such a masterly way that there is something new to the audience at every viewing (Leigh 1997: 23 in which Jinny Heath describes one of mother’s paintings as ‘tireless’).

### **Abstract Expressionism in Jane Heath’s later work**

Abstraction was certainly a genre that Jane experimented with throughout her career, but characteristically it was also an investigation that remained firmly lodged within Jane’s established principles of art-making. Jane recognised that no matter what was being created, it was only through the discipline of drawing, whether in pencil or paint, that the composition could be constructed. As Jane advocates ‘I do not believe that this science in any way interferes with individual artistic ability - originality - spontaneity, imagination...I think it stimulates all these things - because it provides the student or pupil with an eye training system’ (Burnett 1998: 4 quoting Jane Heath in 1984). Abstraction was accordingly only attainable through a strict adherence to the requirements of form as provoked by an emotional response to design (Harrison 1981: 54).

Jane’s own exploration of abstract expressionism can be identified by comparing one of her early

works with one produced a decade later. *Forest Abstract* (1961), seen in **Figure 95 (Volume II: 66)**, remains loyal to the geometric patterns used in the Cubist tradition and contemporary to the experimentation in British abstraction and geometrical forms used particularly by Kenneth Martin as seen in **Figure 96 (Volume II: 67)**. Jane's forest has been transformed as a natural entity into a geometric angular vision, a technique that allows the imaginary to be comprehended as a translation of organic life forms and perceived as a human construct (Burnett 1998: 4). The later work, *Blue Wave Forms* (1971) in **Figure 97 (Volume II: 67)**, has developed this apparent transmutation further and has introduced another element into the composition, that of movement as another aspect of British formalist investigation. The perpetual movement of the sea is captured as a series of fragmented shapes which proffer a cognitive understanding of the intangible motion and quality of the waves as had preoccupied Victor Pasmore. It is this concern for the rhythm of the water that is central to this work, but as one detached from the signifiers of a seascape.

### **Jack and Jane Heath's work compared**

Adrian Grieve remarks that the development of British abstraction recognises two distinct, but interconnected streams of thought, firstly there is the 'figurative, poetic and mysterious...parallel to dreaming; the other is abstract, mathematical and lucid...[and ] is parallel to thought' (Grieve 2005: 218) and in much the same way the two genres of British abstraction have been reflected in the art of Jack and Jane Heath.

For Jane, the ability to enhance the imagination of the artist need not move into the realms of the fantastical which was more recognisable in her husband's abstract art works, but instead was one more derived from teasing out the fantasy from the ordinary. It was the use of form, tone and colour that was combined to instil the unusual. Even as she experimented more with abstraction, Jane's art remained constructed and takes on a different guise to that of her husband. Both draw on seemingly opposing facets of the British formalism, Jane incorporating Post-Impressionist notions of Romanticism and the Cubist constructed vocabulary of a composition whereas Jack focused on the Surrealistic and abstract intentions in his work. Each, however, still reflect and constitute formalistic interpretations, but each proffering a distinct approach to that formalistic desire and British obsession with geometric precision and mathematical calculation to attain balance within each composition.



## **Hilda Ditchburn**

Hilda Lutando Ditchburn (néé Rose) (1917-1986), as seen in **Figure 98 (Volume II: 68)**, was born in the Orange Free State (Ogilvie 1988: 178) but moved with her family to Natal in 1930. She attended The University from which she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts Degree in 1938 and received her art tuition under the tutelage of Professor Oxley (Vurovecz 2008: 1). Having attained a teaching diploma a year later, she initially taught as an art teacher with the Natal Education Department from January 1940 to 1941 until she accepted a staff position in The Department to teach ‘modelling [thus], Pottery and History of Art’ (Vurovecz 2008: 2). In December 1947 Ditchburn attended The Central School in London whilst on study leave, where she remained until February 1949. It was there that she studied the techniques of stoneware and glaze chemistry under the instruction of Dora Billington. A visit to England also afforded Ditchburn the opportunity to travel extensively across England and Europe to investigate oil kiln designs and firing methods. Hilda Ditchburn was also appointed as acting head of The Department in the years of 1957 and 1966 (CVA Archives). She would also attain the accolade of being ‘one of the longest serving members of staff on the campus’ (**Appendix 5**).

Pottery had been taught at The Royal College and had been introduced as a subject in the initial stages of The Department’s development by John Adams and later recognised as a discipline that could be taken at university degree level by John Oxley (albeit it was not until 1971 that it could be taken as a major subject) (interview with Ian Calder on 31 October 2011); but it was as a consequence of Hilda Ditchburn’s tenure at The University, which spanned that of both Oxley and Heath, that her impetus in the development of a Ceramic studio at The University is identified. Initially referred to as the ‘Pottery Department’, this discipline has continued to flourish at The University to the present day, but so too with this genre of art practice, the impact and influence of British Modernism and formalism is evidenced.

### **The influence of The Central School on Hilda Ditchburn and her interest in stoneware**

Ditchburn had been introduced to ceramics by John Oxley, and so his British modernist focus had already grounded her reception of formalism recognised through pottery, but this was then furthered through the teachings of British ceramist Dora Billington. Billington had trained in Pottery and had worked as a ceramic decorator (<http://alcollector.com/b/bi/billington-dora.html>) before further study

at The Royal College where she later lectured with John Adams; having been appointed as the head of the Pottery Department at The Central School, an art school that provided specialist training for workers in the craft industry, it was as a consequence of her teaching that Ditchburn developed her interest in studio pottery and the application of stoneware (Vurovecz 2008: 14-15), which was her specific motivation for attending the school. Ditchburn remarks that ‘I wanted to find out about stoneware: you see stoneware wasn’t used in this country [South Africa], and I wanted to expand the work of the department [thus] to higher temperatures, so that was the reason why I went’ (Sgaffitti, No: 24: 9). This was also the preferred medium used by British studio potters.

Stoneware can be distinguished from earthenware because of its method of production which requires the clay to be fired at a much higher temperature, 1200°C instead of 1000°C (conversation with Professor Ian Calder on 3 October 2011), and consequently requires a specialised kiln able to reach that desired temperature. Owing to its prohibitive cost and its unsuitability to commercial ceramic manufacturers, such stoneware kilns were not available in South Africa at the time of Ditchburn’s visit to Britain. Consequently tuition at The University had also only been conducted in terms of earthenware application and it was through this medium that throwing techniques, hand-building methodology, glazing, decorating and the application of maiolica painting was taught (Vurovecz 2008: 32). But it was the formalist taste and aestheticism that prescribed the ceramic market in South Africa, it was one devoid of any reference to Black traditional pottery, and instead remained centred on a preferred ‘English ceramic style’ (Vurovecz 2008: 48) which earthenware could easily reproduce. The glazes that were available in South Africa consisted essentially of English imports of pre-mixed consistencies obtained directly from the manufacturers such as Wengers (conversation with Professor Ian Calder on 3 October 2011). It was therefore inevitable that the wares produced by South African ceramic studios took on a distinctly British guise. One example is John Adams’ *Stoneware Dish* as seen in **Figure 99 (Volume II: 68)**.

The time spent in England studying under Billington ignited Ditchburn’s life-long passion for glaze chemistry and technology which was introduced into the Pottery Course at The University. As Candice Vurovecz acknowledges, Ditchburn used a combination of local raw materials and commercially prepared grounds supplied by Wengers and in so doing ‘pioneered the mixing and testing of her own glazes which were based on glazes she had acquired at the Central School’ (Vurovecz 2008: 50). Ditchburn fastidiously recorded the experimentation with glaze recipes in a manner that defined the spirit of modernism. Within her personal journals she has recorded endless experiments with glaze and kiln usage and noted the mistakes and later improvements of her tests

(recipes held in the CVA Archives). She noted and adapted one of Professor Oxley's recipes for the composite to be applied in illuminated lettering. Although, with her focus firmly fixed on her teaching and constant experimentation with ceramic materials causing her to be deprived of personal accolade as an artist (Vurovecz 2008: 4), her advances in ceramics are still recognised in the teaching in The Department today (Calder 2012: 63).

### **The reception of stoneware into South Africa**

It was on Hilda Ditchburn's second visit to England and her attendance at a Conference at Dartington Hall in Devon in 1952 that she was able to research the construction methods required for a stoneware kiln, the convention receiving studio potters attending from 'the Far East, Scandinavia, the United States and European countries' (The Natal Mercury, 27 March 1952). As one of the delegates that Ditchburn was also introduced to the trends in studio potteries across Britain as well as to figures who were to prove very influential in her work. As a consequence of a meeting with Muriel Rose, the Officer for Crafts at the British Council, Ditchburn was introduced to Bernard Leach at St. Ives in Cornwall with a view to seek his advice on kiln building and firing (Vurovecz 2008: 45), having himself constructed such a kiln in the 1930s (**Appendix 6** and **Appendix 7**).

The information and guidance that Ditchburn gleaned during her visit enabled her, on returning to South Africa, to persuade The University of the merits of such a structure and, having attained authority and funding from The University, the first stoneware kiln in South Africa (The Natal Daily News, 22 December 1954; The Natal Mercury, 12 March 1954) was constructed in The Department, with the assistance of a local Durban firm and The University's Engineering and Physics departments (Vurovecz 2008: 46). The first firing of this kiln occurred in the week ending 12 March 1954 and its success was reported in The Natal Mercury (The Natal Mercury, 12 March 1954) as Ditchburn pioneered this medium.

However, it is somewhat paradoxical that whilst stoneware was readily applied and recognised by British studio potters that reflected the Arts and Crafts Movement, an essentially 'English' style, in South Africa, stoneware was not readily accepted and, even more ironic, it was in the less 'British' provinces of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State where it received greater popularity (Vurovecz 2008: 46). This presents a conundrum for here British formalism, as advanced in British studio potteries, was not received into South Africa in the same way as other Eurocentric phenomena.

Instead, formalistic ‘taste’ coupled with an understanding of ‘British-ness’ supersedes; so what was desired was more akin to imported commercial tableware, as a replication of English patterns applying glazes manufactured in Britain so as to obtain this effect. Accordingly the market for stoneware was very limited and the only professional ceramist using stoneware in South Africa as from the second half of the last century was Esias Bosch (lecture by Professor Ian Calder on 24 October 2011), whose work is seen in **Figure 100(a) (Volume II: 69)** and in **Figure 100(b) (Volume II: 69)** who had also been trained by Dora Billington and had worked with British potter, Michael Cardew (Clark and Wagner 1974: 14).

### **The influence of British Studio Potters in Hilda Ditchburn’s work**

It was during her visits to England, and particularly her participation at the *Dartington Conference*, that Ditchburn was afforded the opportunity to reflect on the contemporary work that was being produced in Europe at that time and it is quite disconcerting that she considered that in South Africa she worked in apparent isolation, stating to the Conference that ‘the talk on tradition is something that has interested me particularly, working as a European with European students but with no European tradition, in South Africa, in pottery’ (Peter Cox's Report on the Dartington Conference in 1954 held at CVA Archives).

Her meeting with Michael Cardew had a substantial influence on Ditchburn and in the development of her own work. Cardew worked extensively with stoneware as seen in **Figure 101(a) (Volume II: 70)** and sought to preserve an ‘English’ tradition, reminiscent of slipware techniques used in the seventeenth century in Britain, an example of which is seen in **Figure 101(b) (Volume II: 70)** depicting a slipware cider flagon, an application that interested Ditchburn immensely, particularly as it focused on more traditional British pottery methods removed from the contemporary influences of an ‘Oriental style’ emulated in the work of Bernard Leach (Vurovecz 2008: 32). Albeit Ditchburn was likewise not enthused by Leach’s orientalism, she admired the medieval aspects of his work and his application of glazing techniques (Sgraffitti No. 24) and in particular the use of over-glazing in his work, an example of which is seen in **Figure 102(a) (Volume II: 71)** with a detail in **Figure 102(b) (Volume II: 71)**, and was a method adopted by Ditchburn. She would also paint, scratch and apply resist patterning in the same manner as Leach as recognised in **Figure 103 (Volume II: 72)** This piece also illustrates such a method with the application of a second over-glaze.

The common methodology that both Leach and Cardew inspired was a great concern for the functionality of a piece and the overarching premise of British Modernism being whether ‘form followed function’ (Vurovecz 2008: 60). The applications of Ditchburn’s decoration and design demonstrates this modernistic idiom, which Vurovecz purports such ‘designs were based on organic forms such as shells which she would develop into a stylized [thus] pattern which she felt would suit and enhance the ceramic form’ (Vurovecz 2008: 51), the preparatory work depicted in **Figure 104(a) (Volume II: 72)**, **Figure 104(b) (Volume II: 73)** and in **Figure 104(c) (Volume II: 73)**. Her interest in pattern and design, a Japanese sample booklet located from her former office (CVA Archives) in **Figure 105 (Volume II: 74)** and its translation onto a plate can also be seen in **Figure 106 (Volume II: 74)**. Likewise **Figure 107 (Volume II: 75)** depicts a tea cup and saucer, utility objects which combine a sense of modernist simplicity in design and balance. Ditchburn worked fastidiously on the elements of design as represented in samples of her numerous personal sketchbooks held in the CVA Archives, as exemplified in **Figure 108 (Volume II: 75)**.

### **The juxtaposition of British and African inspiration**

It was during an interview that Ditchburn confirms that her admiration for Cardew’s work was due to the ‘English-ness’ that he attained in his work and was a particular aspect that greatly influenced her own work (Sgraffitti, No. 24). But this edification and Cardew’s concern for the preservation of ‘English-ness’ applied in his craft can perhaps be afforded a degree of scepticism. Cardew, likewise was living in Africa at the time of the *Dartington Conference*, having been in colonial service on the West Coast of Africa since 1942 where he taught pottery at an African school. A fanatical Marxist, he deplored colonialism and was very vocal regarding the Colonial Administration’s decision to close the school forcing his return to Britain in 1948. By 1951, a year before he met Ditchburn, he was again living in Africa having been appointed as Pottery Officer in the Department of Trade and Industry in Nigeria ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Cardew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Cardew)).

Accordingly, his notion of ‘English-ness’ that Ditchburn praised and so admired, was actually one that had been grounded in diasporic nostalgia, in much the same way as recognised in the work of John Adams. Cardew’s renewal of English pottery methods could also be tantamount to an act of romantic revivalism. He greatly admired African pottery, but a comparative review between any influences this had on his own work are beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is suffice to speculate whether Cardew’s recognition of ‘English-ness’ assimilated that of African-born Ditchburn, whose

own understanding was also a formalistic narration. That Ditchburn perceived 'English-ness' as something other than the orientalism of Leach's work, despite his work already attaining great nationalistic favour and popularity in Britain, is also intriguing. Accordingly, it is submitted that what Ditchburn recognised and perceived as 'English' had already been constructed and authenticated as a mediated interpretation understood from the perspective of someone immediately removed from a British centre. It was formalism that had dictated how aestheticism was to be appreciated in South Africa.

### **The position of The Department in 1969**

The passing of Jack Heath closed the dynasty of British departmental heads under whose direction The Department had grown and through their own legacies had instilled British formalism into The University, forging a distinctive style in art making in Natal and something still recognisable in the high standard of art produced at the institution today. Heath's untimely death in 1969 may have brought to a close the immediacy of British Modernism and influence, but it also opened a gateway for the subsequent emergence of South African departmental heads who were able to build on the very solid foundations that had been established over a period of thirty three years.

In recognition of the achievements and contributions made by Professor Jack Heath to The Department, the art gallery currently located in The Centre for Visual Arts, was named the Jack Heath Gallery in 1977 (The Natal Witness, 23 September 1977) as seen in **Figure 109 (Volume II: 76)**.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

Just as British Modernism had determined its position and autonomy in the United Kingdom as a distinct variant of modernity from Europe at the beginning of the last century, so too had a parallel challenge been faced by The Department as it negotiated each nuance within a South African context, and more particularly one located in the former British colony of Natal. Yet whilst such sentiments and aspirations seem synonymous, The University had faced another hurdle, one of an imposed 'British-ness' mediated through the concept of formalism which precluded any opportunity for an 'independent' and 'autonomous' art. At each phase in the development of The Department over the first three decades, it witnessed the various facets of British Modernism re-interpreted through the contributions made by the respective departmental heads and their British trained staff. Their pedagogical approach to art-teaching may have directly reflected their own art training in England and a prescriptive expectation from a university entrenched in British narrative, but it was the ideological application of modernism, altered by their own diaspora, that subtly distinguished their interpretation of art as British formalism altered their perspective. They did not merely supplant English tertiary art education onto the African continent, but through a revitalised and re-centering of their own understanding of modernity, visualised from a foreign British gaze, they instilled in their students a formalistic understanding of 'British-ness' in art. It is as a consequence of such a binarism that South African modernism, albeit at a provincial level, was launched as a reactionary vision of a British idiom.

It is the result of British formalism, coupled with colonialism, which allowed for a reviewed theorisation of the definition of art to be received into Natal. British imperialism demanded a demarcation between 'white' and 'black' art, and as with Eurocentric discourse, the 'high' and 'low' art division permitted an opportunity to authenticate 'white' art as 'fine art' and 'black' art as 'other' under the guise of formalism when translated onto the African Continent. This was reinforced by anthropological and ethnographical study that negotiated the status of art from a 'white' perspective; such an evaluation diffused through the concept of formalism, allowed for the 'artisan skills' taught at The Royal College to be recognised as 'fine art' when transmuted into The University. The curricula that The Department had followed was that of The Royal College, with each stage of development at

that institution being recognised in the art teaching and disciplines offered at The University and the establishment of its Fine Art Department.

Through the establishment of The Department since 1936, the teachings of John Adams reflected predominantly in the methodologies and the effects of early British Modernism, an entity that was still very enigmatic in British art and the topic of much deliberation, debate and criticism in its native land. What was therefore translated from Adams' and Alfred Martin's perspective, and influenced John Oxley, was a presentation of British aestheticism witnessing a British taste and its associated notion of 'whiteness' interpreted as a British formalistic vision. The prominence of women students in The Department differentiates the attitude of colonials to art-making, but it was as a 'white' pursuit that art at The University was initiated with a 'white' gaze reflecting Africa. Just as occurred in Europe, African iconography was recognised as a signifier of the exotic and the 'new' and was comprehended as a Eurocentric reading. When Adams returned to England it was as a nostalgic engagement that his perception of 'African-ness' prevailed in his designs.

It was Professor John Oxley who founded The Department and incorporated the curricula for teaching art at The University, and who also pioneered the methodologies of art education in South Africa, researched from both a British and American perspective. It was particularly his recognition of the significance and currency of psychology that permeated his approach to creating art and with it a concern for development of the psyche in attaining untainted expressionism in the praxis of modernity. Although his own art work reflected a direct representation of early British formalism, his greatest contribution to The Department and to South African art education was of an administrative agenda.

It was however Oxley's staff who, having trained in Britain at a later time, introduced 'high' British Modernism into The Department, with British artist Rosa Hope, as a former student of The Slade that had by that time absorbed the ideology of the conceptualisation of art and the idiom 'art for art's sake' that had so resonated in the debate of British modern art at the beginning of twentieth century. Her work is inscribed with the hallmarks of a later period in the development of British art that had, by her time as an art student, become recognisable as a British response to French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, but still retaining strict academic prowess. Hope's use of the landscape genre conjoined the notions of her diasporic experience with her subsequent acculturation of Africa, capturing the esoteric experience of another continent within the framework of formalistic report, and acting as a vehicle for her appraisal of her re-location and romanticised new South African



identification. Such a rendering contrasts to the work of South African artist, and pupil of Oxley, Geoffrey Long. Instead, through an allegorical approach to landscapes, Long, paradoxically embraced modernisation, industrialisation and the impact of the Second World War, issues that so mired European artists. His focus instead demonstrated the impact of that binarism of formalism that utilised the same subject matter as his European counterparts, but recognised their virtues from a re-located centre, not admonishingly, but as a positive inertia of modernisation advocating colonial achievement.

The reception of late British formalism in The Department is recognised in the appointment of Professor Jack Heath and specifically his experimentation and development of British Abstract Expressionism as reflected in his art. His exposure to warfare received a different response to that of Long, and his abjection conjoined with his interest in early British abstract art, exploits this ultimate form of conceptualisation. His notion of landscape and a means of locating his art and his applied medium, became a geo-philosophical adventure, effecting a momentary avant-garde period in South African modernism during his late period of experimentation with abstraction, far advanced of his British contemporaries as his work remained focused on a core political awareness that differed from the mere Constructivist notion and theory of abstract art employed by his British contemporaries. This development of abstraction, however, remained personal to him as it did not have cause to alter his strict structure of art teaching methodologies centred on classical European art practices. Jane Heath also experimented with abstract art, but her work can be more readily understood under the guise of British Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Cubism received as a formalistic European style.

It was that same overarching desire for 'British' aestheticism through formalistic appreciation that had inspired the early developments of the discipline of Pottery in The Department that had premised, and similarly influenced, Hilda Ditchburn and her understanding of studio pottery and the making of ceramic wares. She had been exposed to the discussions of British studio potters after her travels to Britain and Europe, and had received the idea of 'English-ness' visualised in British ceramics and understood through their techniques and use of medium, but one obtained through a South African gaze already located within the prescriptions of a British formalistic art education.

The reception of British modernity into Natalian art at the University of Natal from 1936 until 1969 brought a melange of formalism, colonialism, acculturation and nostalgia, and in so doing prevented any opportunity for an autonomous and unfettered South African modernism from developing at the institution. The foundations of The University educational system had already, by its inception, taken

on a British guise and, with lecturers being appointed directly from England, it was inevitable that such understanding of art teaching would greatly reflect that of a British character. However, whilst the discourse of modernity may have remained inherently British, the art of the lecturers at The University offered a record of how their own African experiences not only affected their work, but also how the notion of British formalism, altered through such diaspora, was received by its students mediated from a South African perspective. John Oxley and Jack Heath may have each focused their teaching on the preserve of their own British art training, but what they introduced into at The University was far from mere duplication, instead it was an inspired platform for a distinctive university 'style' of art, albeit one lodged within British formalistic parameters.

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## Interviews

Interview with Juliet Armstrong on 1 November 2011.

Conversation with Professor Ian Calder in April 2011.

Conversation with Professor Ian Calder on 3 October 2011.

Conversation with Professor Ian Calder in September 2011.

Lecture by Professor Ian Calder in August 2011.

Interview with Professor Ian Calder on 31 October 2011

Lecture by Professor Ian Calder on 24 October 2011.

Interview with Henry Davies on 30 January 2012.

Interview with Susan Davies on 30 January 2012.

Telephone conversation with Jinny Heath in October 2011.

Conversation with Thomas Sullivan (circa 1982), on the circumstances of being demobbed from the RAF after the Second World War.

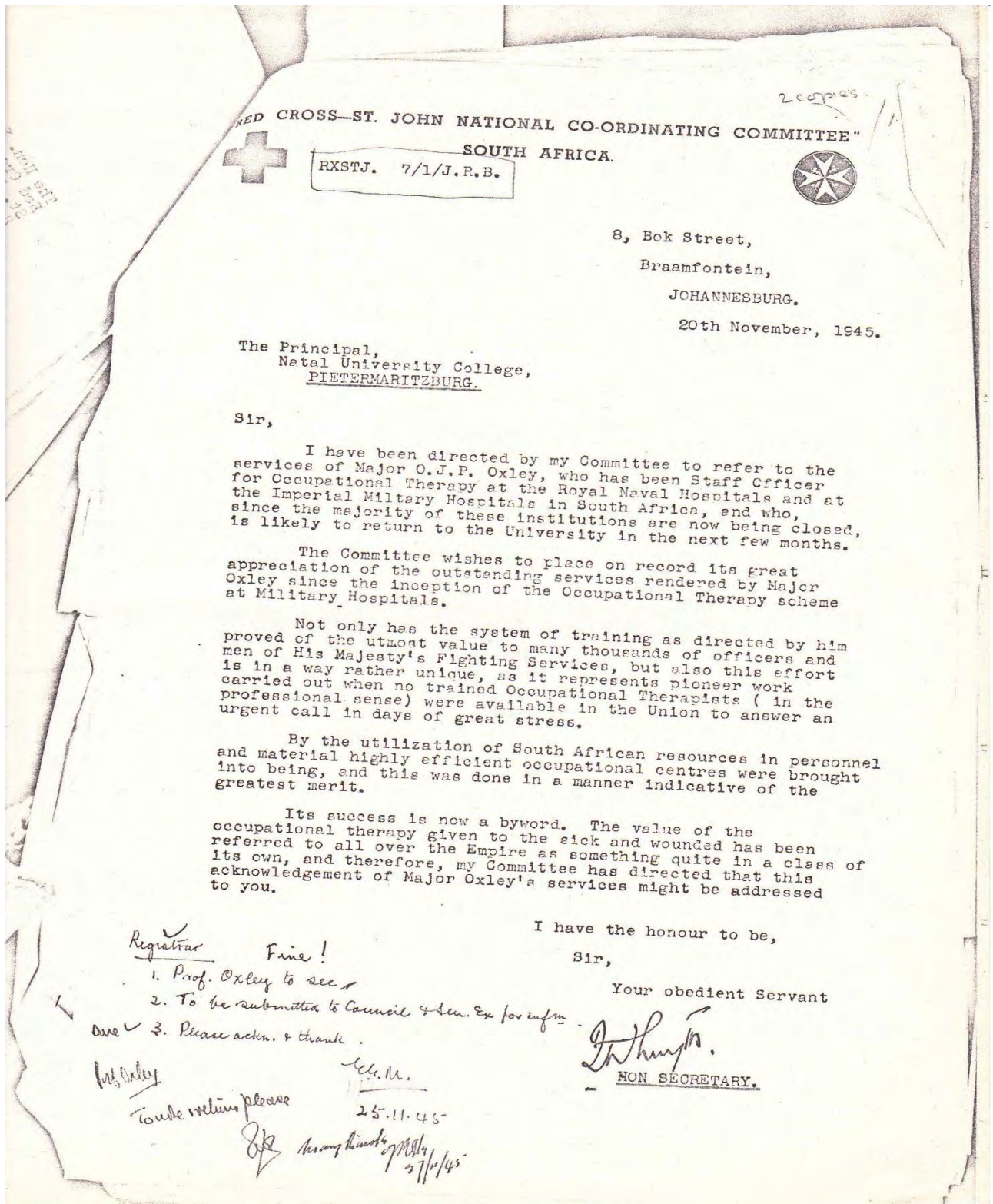
Conversation with Thomas Sullivan (circa 1990), a former British cartographic surveyor employed by the Ordnance Survey immediately after the Second World War.

Interview with Barbara Tyrrell on 17 September 2012.

Conversation with Yvonne Winters on 28 August 2011.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Copy letter from the Red Cross to the Principal of the University of Natal, 20 November 1945. (CVA Archives).





**Appendix 2.** Copy letter from Professor Oxley to The Director of Medical Services, 14 November 1940. (CVA Archives).

1/  
OJPO/ER

14th Nov., 1940.

The Director of Medical Services,  
Defence Headquarters,  
PRETORIA.

Sir,

There are indications that members of our forces, and those of the Imperial Government, are returning from active service to hospitals in the Union, for medical treatment.

There may be many who are suffering from various forms of neurasthenia, and it is in connection with such patients that I am writing. Towards the end of the last war I was in charge of an occupational depot for shell shock cases, a form of neurasthenia, and if you are considering the opening of such depots, attached to your military hospitals, I offer my services to assist in the organisation and work. It is unnecessary for me to enlarge upon the value of occupation through handicraft for such cases. When men have no form of occupation they are not likely to recover quickly, and the nature of the complaint is inclined to make them stand aside from life - not face up to things, and also to look for distraction of the mind in the cheap and non-profitable forms of amusement. This, if allowed to continue, does not help but has an undesirable effect.

The dislocation of the soldiers' life, forcing him into an environment in which he has no individuality, and of a temporary nature, is not conducive to the recovery of a nervous patient. While a convalescent in a camp or hospital the patient should not be allowed to simply count the moments as they pass.

There are two kinds of work - one which "takes it out of you" and the other which "puts it into you." The latter is creative work which can become effective through handicraft. One of the guiding principles of all such creative work for shell shock or nervous cases, is that the work should not be mechanical.

I do not wish/

I do not wish to write in detail, but merely to bring to your notice an avenue of assistance to many men.

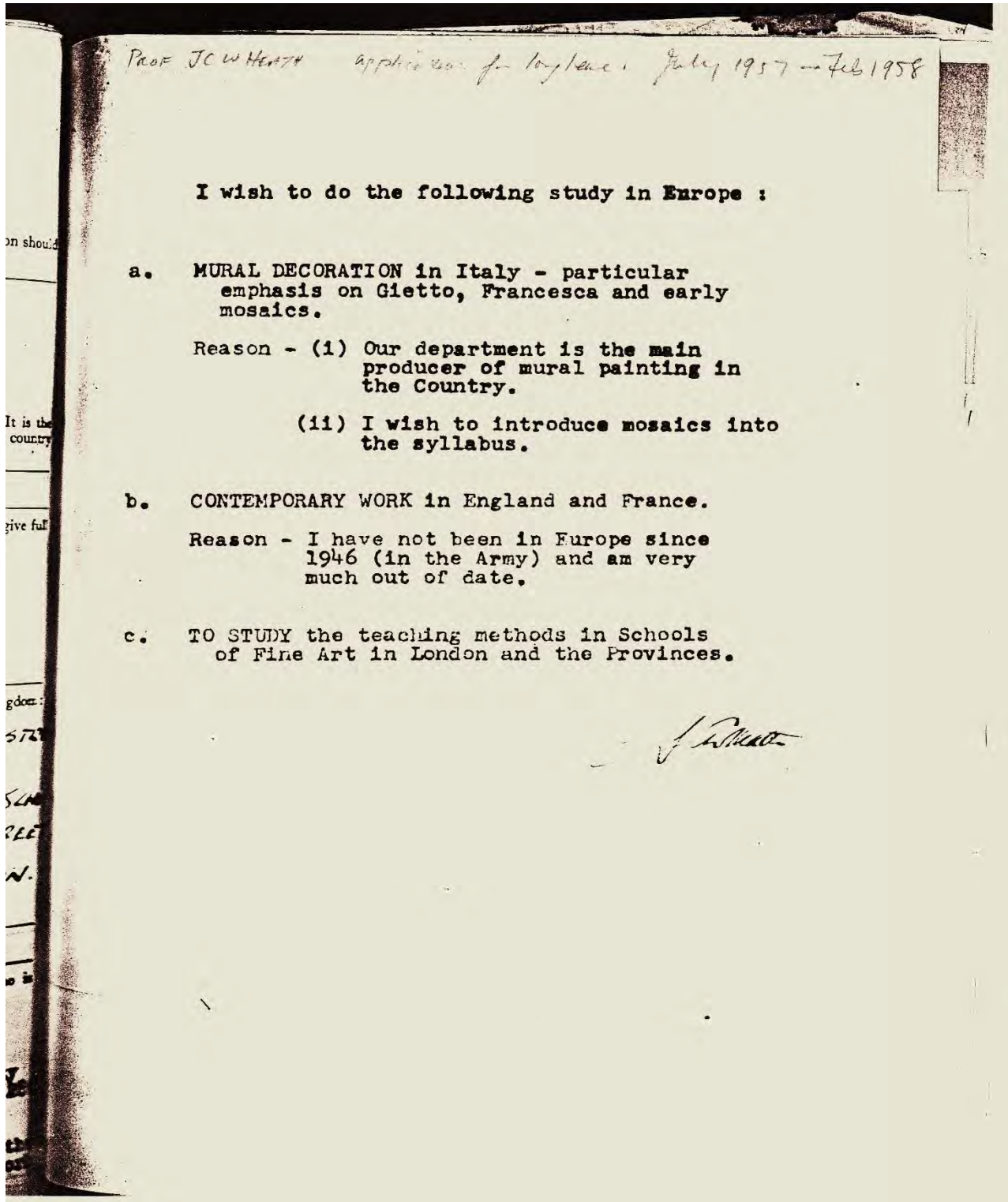
During the last war I held a commission, and am acquainted with army life. It is because I feel that work such as I have suggested is essential to so many, not only in the immediate present, but as part of a reconstruction scheme for the post war period, and in such work I may be of service, that I make these suggestions.

Yours faithfully,

PROFESSOR OF FINE ARTS.

1  
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**Appendix 3.** Copy of Jack Heath's application for sabbatical leave from July 1957- Feb 1958. (CVA Archives).



Appendix 4. Obituary written by Dick Leigh, 1969. (CVA Archives).

STUDENTS' NEWSPAPER • UNIVERSI



*Prof. Heath at work on the memorial window for the chapel at Treverton School. This was constructed in a new style from perspex segments.*

### IN MEMORY OF PROF. JACK HEATH

"I first came to know Prof. Heath when I enrolled as a student in the Fine Art Dept. ten years ago. After leaving University four years later I kept in touch with him as far as my circumstances allowed. For the past six months I have had the privilege of working under him on the Fine Art Dept. Staff. I am qualified therefore to write of him as Professor, friend and colleague.

He was a good professor, a good friend and a good colleague. Of all his qualities I would list his abundant generosity first. He would always go out of his way, as unobtrusively as possible, to help anyone, not only students, who were in trouble or need. I could quote many instances for there are many people, myself included, who owe him a debt of gratitude. He had the generosity to have a large measure of human feeling, sympathy and humility. He was no lover of verbosity or sham and his good share of common sense gave rise to a very robust sense of humour. He was so burly and seemed so formidably bluff, but in reality he was a shy, kindly man.

His students loved and respected him. He never talked down to them and kept in close touch with them as individuals, but, again, in this he was inobtrusive. When asked for advice he always tried his hardest to help and generally his advice was intuitively sound, which is something rare

even in the best of teachers. I never heard him give merely negative criticism and he had infinite patience with even the weakest of students, and never ceased to encourage.

From its small beginning he steadily built up the Fine Art Dept. to what it now is. At a time when standards in Art teaching are rapidly falling I think it can fairly be claimed that the Fine Art Dept. of the University of Natal has kept up a good standard. This was due, in large measure, to Prof. Heath. He was a lover of books and a great reader and won a wide knowledge of the History of Art which enabled him to make a worthwhile course of Art History and Appreciation. The very good Fine Art section in the Library is, again, in large measure due to him. I would like to pay tribute to his knowledge and love of early Renaissance Italian painting. He managed to pass on some of his knowledge and a good deal of his love to a large number of students. This achievement alone, would, I think, be enough to justify any academic career.

This is not the place to enter into a critical appraisal of his work as an artist. He would not have approved of my making any extravagant claims for him. Let it suffice to say he was sincere one, he loved Art and gave of his best in her service."

D. M. LEIGH,

Lecturer in Painting, F.A. Dept.

**Appendix 5.** Copy motivation letter from The Department for The Professor Alexander Petrie Award, 16 April 1981. (CVA Archives).

B10-52259/1

## UNIVERSITY OF NATAL

Tel. Add. "UNIVERSITY"  
Dept. of Fine Art and History of Art  
TELEPHONE 63320



P.O. Box 375  
PIETERMARITZBURG

16 April 1981

PROFESSOR H L DITCHBURN

Professor Ditchburn has built up the ceramics section of the Department of Fine Arts and History of Art from its very beginning to make it one of the best Ceramics Sections in the country. Many of her former students are full time practicing ceramicists or potters - evidence of the high quality and thoroughness of the training they received under her supervision. Throughout the years when Heads of the Department of Fine Arts have come and gone with regularity, Professor Ditchburn has always been the person responsible to act as Head and keep the Department together. Only because of her outstanding ability for organizing and administration coupled with her teaching ability, has the Department been able to weather the storms.

Professor Ditchburn is an active member of the South African Association of Potters and a member of their selection committee in Natal, and is an associate member of the Craftsmen Potters Association of Great Britain.

Professor Ditchburn has given outstanding loyal and devoted service to this University over the past 45 years. She is one of the longest serving members of staff on the campus. She has been the one stabilizing factor in the Department of Fine Arts and History of Art, when she has seen members of staff come and go with frequent regularity. It would be an apt honour for Professor Ditchburn to be awarded the Professor Alexander Petrie Award.



M. & S. MASSEY, LTD. of 4, Bernard Lane, E.C.4. Continued Sheet No. 2.

We should be much interested to hear what success you have with this, or any other bumper you decide to try.

Yours faithfully,

For M. & S. MASSEY, LIMITED.  
*Charles A. Hayton*  
DIRECTOR

Encls. 32118.  
Sketch. 104448.

Appendix 7. Copy letter to Bernard Leach from John F Askam, 6 November 1930. (CVA Archives).

TELEPHONE EAST 1179

TELEGRAMS: "ASKAM & CO. BIRMINGHAM"  
CODE: A.B.C. 514. EASTON.

# JOHN F. ASKAM

## FURNACE DESIGNER AND MANUFACTURER

ALL TYPES OF  
OVEN, CRUCIBLE, CONVEYOR FURNACE, ETC.

AVENUE ROAD WORKS,  
ASTON,  
BIRMINGHAM.

Nov. 6th 1930.

Dear Sir,

Referring to your call yesterday, and our discussion regarding the 3-chamber Pottery Furnace you have in use. I have fully considered the question of applying oil to this particular Furnace with our engineer, and we have come to the conclusion that you would not get very good results. If the Burners were applied to the present firebox we are afraid that the first kiln only would get properly heated. Supposing we were to supply auxiliary burners to the remaining two chambers it is more than likely that there would be local heating.

In our opinion, the circular kiln referred to would give much better results.

Yours faithfully,  
*John Askam*

GAS FIRED FURNACES  
OIL FIRED FURNACES  
COKE FIRED FURNACES  
COAL FIRED FURNACES  
PRODUCER GAS FURNACES

Our Reference 374/MS.

Bernard Leach, Esq.,  
The Leach Pottery,  
St. Ives,  
Cornwall.

ALWAYS IN STOCK:  
FIRECLAY  
WUFFLES  
CRUCIBLES  
SPECIAL MOULDED BRICKS  
FITTINGS AND BURNERS



**Appendix 8.** Obituary written by Henry Davies, 1986. (CVA Archives).

1986.  
8.10.25

IN MEMORIAM

Hilda Lutando Ditchburn who retired from the Department of Fine Arts and History of Art on 30th June 1981, died on Wednesday 19th February, a mere two weeks after the death of her beloved husband, Leonard.

Hilda was born in the Orange Free State and moved to Natal in 1930. She studied for her Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts) degree in Durban, before the Department moved to Pietermaritzburg under Professor John Oxley in 1937. After World War 2 she went to London, where she studied at the Central School of Art under Dora Billington.

During the 40 years' service that Hilda gave the University, she developed the Ceramics Department into the country's finest. From the beginning of 1970, it became the only one in South Africa where a student could study for a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts degree, majoring in Ceramics.

Forever humble of her own achievements, she was a master of her discipline with an extraordinary knowledge of clay bodies, glaze chemistry and kilns. Hilda pioneered the growth of stoneware ceramics in South Africa by building the first stoneware kiln, the plans of which were later used by Bernard Leach's son, Michael at the famous pottery near St. Ives, Cornwall.

She was a dedicated and patient teacher and sacrificed her best creative years to the well-being of her students and the Department she loved. Under her watchful eye, even the most untalented and clumsy student was capable of transforming a formless lump of clay into something closely resembling a pot to be proudly borne off, suitably decorated and glazed, to some doting parent. Such was her work-load that she never had time to exhibit widely, so her ceramics still awaits due recognition. Whilst the University was in session she stayed in University Hall, only returning to her husband and home in Pinetown over week-ends. For many years until the creation of an additional post, Hilda taught all day and would then sit up late into the night packing and firing kilns.

From the early to mid 1970's, Hilda was called on to act as Head of Department many times while the Department suffered one professional crisis after another. She shouldered the extra load each time as she always did; quietly, efficiently, without complaint and with a minimum of fuss. It was indeed fitting that she was promoted from Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor several years before her retirement.

Her plans for an active and creative retirement were cruelly dashed by her husband's illness and shortly after, her own. Throughout both, she never lost her courage or sense of humour. Each day would bring new ideas and plans for the future, excitedly communicated to friends and colleagues.

All who knew Hilda will share with her family the loss it feels. In the death of this modest and gracious woman the University has lost a loyal friend and teacher; and the Department of Fine Arts has lost its mother figure.

Compiled by Mr. Henry Davies, Dept. of Fine Arts and History of Art.