

# My people and other animals: Jacques Fuller's picaresque sculpture

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The work of the Bloemfontein sculptor, Jacques Fuller, an interesting case of rural art at the margins of the mainstream artworld, has recently become known through a touring exhibition curated by Oliewenhuis Art Museum and the Sanlam Art Collection. This essay situates his sculptural work in the picaresque tradition of satirical art.

## **My mense en ander gediertes: die pikareske beeldhoukuns van Jacques Fuller**

Die werk van die Bloemfonteinse beeldhouer, Jacques Fuller, 'n interessante geval van plattelandse kuns op die rand van die hoofstroom-kunswêreld, is onlangs bekendgestel in 'n reisende tentoonstelling georganiseer deur Oliewenhuis-kunsmuseum en die Sanlam-kunsversameling. Hierdie essay plaas sy beeldhouwerk binne die pikareske tradisie van satiriese kuns.

Jacques Fuller featured in a recent exhibition of sculptural work, organized by the Oliewenhuis Art Museum and the Sanlam Art Collection, currently on tour to a number of South African museums.<sup>1</sup> This event counts as the first national exposure for a local Bloemfontein artist. His is an interesting case of rural or peripheral art, often stereotyped and marginalized in the mainstream artworld by such epithets as provincial, ethnic, folk, naïve, minority or eccentric art and artists. Stefan Hundt (2001) touches on this situation in formulating the aims of the exhibition:

No doubt Fuller's work is eccentric and does not engage with modernist sculptural aesthetics but his approach is certainly not naïve or unschooled. His working method and subject matter are intimately derived from modern-day life and contain a clear socio-critical dimension animated by humour, satire and caricature.

The cultural marginalization of a centre such as Bloemfontein has occurred over many years. This has exacerbated the inability of regional museums to prepare travelling exhibitions to provide exposure for the treasures that they keep and the talents they nurture. This exhibition aims to begin correcting this trend and will hopefully contribute to countering the ten-

dency to disregard an artist's work simply because it is deemed to be 'provincial'.

An ex-Namibian in his early forties, Fuller works in relative (local as well as national) isolation as a freelancing sculptor on a smallholding to the west of Bloemfontein where he and his wife live in a semi-rural setting populated by a rustic mixture of people, farming land and derelict machinery, domestic and wild animals. In the nearby city as well metropolitan regulation blends easily with quasi-rural rhythms, as the city itself still has strong cultural and family ties with declining farming communities from the rural outback. No outsider or relic from the past, Fuller is a marginal or liminal figure in a manner corresponding with the German term *Grenzgänger*. This role appears from the fact that the materials, idiom and import of his work invoke nature/culture interfaces and ambivalent interactions of social perspectives at urban/rural as well as "metropole"/periphery boundaries.

With the Bloemfontein art collector, Dr Frikkie Scott as animator (ever since his long Belgian sojourn a passionate follower of modernist art, especially Flemish expressionism), a

number of Free State artists gained prominence during the 60s and 70s, among others Frans Claerhout and several black artists in his tutelage. In the wake of this so-called "Bloemfontein group", Free State visual artists are said to be partial towards expressionism, pre-disposed towards expressive interpretations of this landscape and its inhabitants.

It is tempting to read Jacques Fuller's sculptural pieces in this vein, as if they were motivated by a simple variety of folk authenticity or as if they were merely naïve expressions of the common regional experience of a rural community caught in a time warp — perhaps reflecting small-minded frontier or outback mentalities in a post-apartheid time capsule, filled with the ghostly remains of assorted characters culled and updated from Pauline Smith and Herman Charles Bosman. We catch a glimpse of this motley crowd in Stefan Hundt's (2001) description of Fuller's social setting —

From the black tenant farmer eking out a living, to the lazy, overfed policeman looking for guilty dagga growers; the nouveau-rich neighbours with their high-bred canine companions touting bible and sjambok, to the inscrutable gallery curator, 'doped-out' fellow artist to the 'fancy' prostitute down the road

— "plotting" or squatting in as yet not entirely urbanized social conditions in the smallholding areas around divided apartheid cities.

Fuller's art indeed bears the cultural imprint as well as the blemishes of this milieu but it does not merely reflect, depict or simply express localized conditions. One might describe these social conditions as a contradictory and uniquely South African blend of disempowered subaltern freedom, carefree independence and endangered survival, cunning and hospitality, poverty and endurance. Instead of offering mere passive reflection, his often droll,

vulgar, grotesque and marvellously offensive "in your face" figures engage this social situation's entangled strands of complicity, resistance and defiance in satirical vein, embodying a distinct sculptural intelligence craftily rooted in local indigenous knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

His pieces' frequently acerbic, rude and blunt social commentary testifies to the artist's complex posture of distance and engagement, isolation and involvement, critique and solidarity. The primary satirical target being his "own" rather than "others", the basis for Fuller's appeal beyond "provincial" limitations is the intensity and earthy conviction of his localized involvement and his critical solidarity with his subject matter.

It is in particular as a self-aware and thoughtfully artisanal sculptor that Jacques Fuller deems resistance to social conditions worthless when the dissent lacks a material basis — sturdy physical forms, concrete bodily shapes or sustained actions in which artists wager their existence in a corporeal sense. Always suspicious about intellectualist or elitist escape routes, he is outspoken in his misgivings about the rising tide of politically correct conceptual, installation or performance art. It would be incorrect, however, to typecast him as a simpleton, in the part of "a sort of sculptural Pieter-Dirk Uys", as Michael Coulson (1989) does in a *Financial Mail* review of a Johannesburg exhibition of works by Chris Pretorius and Jacques Fuller at the Gallery on the Market. Fuller and Uys may indeed share a certain perverse capability, a mocking fusion of artist and artiste roles. But the sculptor applies blunt instruments, sturdy metal and a brusque if not heavy-handed brand of maverick humour rather than ephemeral cabaret topicalities or the sharp and ebullient wit of the campy gagster's light-hearted patter. Unlike the cross-dressing, cross-cultural communicator, the intention of Fuller's

masquerade is to reveal the creatures of his own world to themselves, taking his cue like Gerald Durrell from the animals.

Possibly Fuller adopted the sculptural idea of “playing the fool” from Frikkie Potgieter, his sculpture teacher during the 80s at the University of the Free State. But where Potgieter’s self-styled “Boere Pop” pieces excel in the playful use of wood and carved textures, often involving witty *trompe l’oeil* effects, Fuller works primarily in metal, a medium that matches the sharp and jagged edge of his harsher, more “metallic” sense of humour.

Appropriately done in dull lead and sitting on the wall like a mounted hunting trophy, his 1988 *Self-portrait* (no 15)<sup>3</sup> presents the image of the roguish trickster — the fictional identity that one finds projected in all of Fuller’s works (Fig 1). This self-portrait’s pathological edge brings to mind the self-reflection of the eighteenth-century physiognomic *Charackterköpfen* by Franz Messerschmidt. In a *Weekly Mail* review of the earlier Johannesburg exhibition, Ivor Powell (1989) uses the following terms from the domain of comic book caricature in describing the identity of this authorial presence in Fuller’s pieces:

A standard distortion takes place, a rendering of specific form in terms of a self-conscious and deliberately cretinising formula. Features are coarsened, mouths are rendered as a simple overhanging moron’s upper lip, eyes become globes swimming in gaping sockets — and something which would be a gallery of disgust if it were not all somehow so affectionate is created in the process.

The crucial feature of the frontal self-portrait is a winking right eye. With its origin in the early modern genre of Fool’s portraits, this sign of a trickster mentality and of spectator collusion alerts us to the presence of a satirical strategy of comic inversion — a cardinal feature of the picaresque tradi-

tion’s view of an upside-down world, of a disjointed and oppressive social universe.<sup>4</sup> Such portraits ensnare their spectators, discovering them in the role of the Fool, the dupe filled eventually with a mixture of collusion, folly, amusement, mortification, chagrin and *Schadenfreude*. Fuller is fully at home in this critical tradition of subversive art — a tradition that embraces comic and satirical artists as diverse as Pieter Bruegel, Jan Steen, William Hogarth, Honoré Daumier, Georg Grosz and Roy Lichtenstein. True to this tradition’s rhetoric of inversion and its characteristic projection of the artist *persona* in the guise of a Fool, the winking eye divulges spectator entrapment as a basic ploy in Fuller’s sculpture.

In Fuller’s case, however, “playing the fool” is a serious enterprise, an ultimate commitment in facing a bleak world. A profound, almost geological sense of massive nature’s spatial vastness, possibly instilled early on during his youthful experiences as a game ranger in Namibia, is a pervasive, if invisible, ingredient in his work. In his sculptural pieces space becomes almost tangible as an imaginary force of nature ponderously bearing down upon and immobilizing all forms of sentient life. Its presence and its effects may be sensed, for instance, in a marked difference in Fuller’s renderings of animal bodies and of human figures.

His animal and insect pieces have the primeval quality of fossil remains, with vital and feral bodies compressed into compact organic shapes and obdurate forms, like so many impenetrable carapaces against the massive threat of a vast space and of a menacing, life-threatening environment. This can be seen in expressly non-anthropomorphic examples like *Dungbeatle* (no 4), *Pangolin* (no 23), *Chameleon* (no 25), *Warthog* (no 32) and *Grasshopper* (no 38).

Romantic dreams about savage African wildlife — based on sculptors

like Antoine Barye's observations and fantasies in European zoological gardens — are today still being rehearsed *ad nauseam* by popular wildlife artists and by photographers specializing in ecotourism industry's packaged "Big Five". In contrast, Jacques Fuller's hardened animals are weird relics, at once natural and denatured, canny and uncanny, shaped to survive in primeval wilderness but increasingly also to endure human cruelty and to weather natural habitats blighted by industrial pollution. As a leading figure of the Free State Raptor Society, Fuller has first-hand and close-up, personal experience of countless victims suffering the effects of destructive environmental conditions. He has noted the telling systemic and pathological parallels between the phenomena of natural and social pollution, with marginal zones as the social rubbish dumps of consumer societies. This perspective casts the artist in a role of "rag picker" and "caretaker" of itinerant social rejects.

One gets the impression that Jacques Fuller truly values as sculpture — as elemental formations of "natural sculpture" — the tough and primal wildlife forms in the lower regions of the food chain. Such creatures are hardened and steeled by interminable and instinctive adaptations to a ruthless Darwinian struggle for survival in relentlessly changing habitats. He seems to share their fear of humans. For him these animal species seem possessed, shaped and animated by the essential sculptural qualities of the hunted hunter or ambushed scavenger. These include the instinctively frozen but alert shape of a patiently focussed stance and ready movement; inert yet coiled for attack or defence; watching while being exposed to inspection; a seasoned and assertive durability and vitality — in short, self-containment and self-reliance coupled with a wary environmental awareness.

Describing the animals in these terms seems to generate endless chains of metaphors that resonate with the implicit meanings of Fuller's sculptural pieces. They reflect the essential characteristics of a special sculptural idiom in which he has become proficient. Moreover, the sculptural qualities also seem to connote a distinctive existential attitude. One may well describe this attitude of "natural suspicion" in terms of Darwinian and Freudian suspicions regarding the archaeology of instinctive responses to conditions that threaten existence — namely a drive to flaunt and by inversion unmask and question the pretension and affectation of cultural trimmings, exposing such posturings as defence mechanisms devised in reaction to the hidden and unexpected bedrock of a topsy-turvy world.

For Jacques Fuller himself, the animal pieces represent a set of sculptural problems that has already been resolved. Of late the artist himself considers them more as potboilers to sustain his own survival, to have bread and water on his table while continuing with his work. On the other hand, their emblematic value is gaining greater prominence in recent works — for instance in *Pieldapjie* (no 14) and *Three blind mice* (no 27). Yet, like his collection of small and large animal skulls — itself a veritable taxonomy of "natural sculpture" — the straightforward animal pieces continue to embody the primary source of inverted allusions in his sculptural vision. Compared with these, the varying degrees of ungainliness or awkwardness in many of the pieces with anthropomorphic features, especially those devoted entirely to the human figure, exhibit signs of bodily feebleness combined with rampant penises and the coarse gaucheness of a rude, if ultimately sad joke. Typically vulgar examples of penis fixation include *Waterwyser* (no 33), *Lovely Rita* (no 12) or *Blow Job Fairy* (no 51).

Like Bruegel's earthbound and bawdy peasants, Hogarth's burlesque Londoners or Barlach's early folk art figures, the grotesque and foolhardy ungainliness of Fuller's human figures stem from their brazen posturing and carnivalesque showing-off of lower-body functions. Thus his display series of *Dresses* on old-fashioned stands has the appearance of *prêt-à-porter* body armour, parts of which return in many of the separate pieces in the exhibition. Wilhelm van Rensburg (2002) saw that the *Dresses* series also alludes to a sadly feminine Crucifixion scene of shroud-draped crosses. The brash display of roguish or foolish armour and virile penises serves to mask human duplicity and chicanery, donned to compensate for the experience of human vulnerability and bodily frailty — attributes entirely absent in the natural constitution of his animal figures.

The very existence of rhetoric and its flowering at historical junctions like our own postmodern times have at times been attributed to negative conceptions regarding human nature — taking human deficiencies or shortcomings, either bodily or spiritually, as *raison d'être* for resorting to the persuasive effects offered by the deployment of rhetorical strategies.<sup>5</sup> In other words, in such views human nature is considered a cultural extension of the struggle for survival and rhetoric as the assertive projection and threat of physical violence, rather than actually resorting to it. The grotesque display of Fuller's figures seems to corroborate this pessimistic position on the threatened and threatening nature of human interaction.

The contrast that Fuller spells out between the animal kingdom's simple but hardy creatures and the barre foibles of human display reiterates an age-old theme in animal fables, folk tales, emblem and comic books. In the satirical manner of Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*, this approach involves the drawing of

human lessons from the animal world by means of comically inappropriate comparisons between animal creatures' humble wisdom and the grotesque and ridiculous manifestations of human folly, here unveiled in a number of quintessentially South African marvels. Works like *Public Protector* (no 3), *Prinses van Piele* (no 20) or *Chauvinist* (no 57) display this caricatural frame.

Playing on brass band connotations, Wilhelm van Rensburg's (2002) review in *Die Beeld* catches the picaresque élan of a noisy parade on exhibition:

Ononderbroke blaasorkes-musiek sou nogal gepas gewees het by Jacques Fuller se omvattende uitstalling van geelkoperwerke. Die beelde het die[...] klatergoud-kwaliteit van dié robuuste tipe musiek. Hulle is luid, tergend, opruierig en wulps. En hulle wil net-net in gelid val en op die maat van die musiek marsjeer. So 'n optog word gelei deur Fuller se vertoonstuk *Openbare beskermheer*, kompleet met skild, lans, borswering en helm. Die beeld is 'n kruis tussen Don Quixote en Mad Max: ridderlik, heldhaftig, maar soos in die roman, heel oneffektief. Hierdie heer word gevolg deur 'n aantal karikature: *Jan Taks*, *Dominee*, *Chauvinis*, *Boer* en *Rugbyspeler*. Hulle lewer skerp kommentaar op 'n skynheilige patriargale samelewing.

In similar vein, Ashley Johnson (2002) of *Business Day* highlights the veritable thesaurus of bad taste, grotesque and picaresque references: Mad Max movies, Mad Magazine, Victorian freak shows, comic books.

Since the late 80s Jacques Fuller has been exploring the sculptural potential of a number of materials — wood, lead, mild steel, red copper, yellow copper or brass, separately as well as in various combinations. At present he favours welded brass, a medium that suits the technical procedures he has mastered and that accords with his sculptural vision. The basic material of his work consists of sheets of brass, scrap metal and found metal objects, mainly tooled and cast

brass parts from discarded industrial machinery.

The arduous struggle to shape the unyielding metal is both time-consuming and backbreaking. He prefers not to work from preliminary sketches or from scale models but rather to improvise, devise and compose each new piece directly in metal. Each work is assembled piecemeal by annealing, bending, folding, twisting, buckling, molding, layering, driving, hammering, welding, grinding and polishing the metal components. In the course of the construction process he learns from and is constantly guided by the unique tensile traits of the metal, step by step elaborating his sculptural vocabulary of basic shapes, joints, contours and textures, redeploying them anew with each construction.

Next to the animal and insect forms, the properties of metal constitute the other major source — again non-human, base and humble — of the foolish wisdom informing the picaresque sculptor's sly intelligence. Being unyielding and pliable at once, brass holds untold nuances of affordance as well as resistance to human formation and deformation. A labourer in his medium, Fuller has fully mastered the imaginative potential inherent in the tensile properties of his preferred medium. He extracts his sculptural idiom and picaresque vision directly from the brass and from his bodily efforts in tooling and shaping the metal.

Jacques Fuller speaks of plans to investigate the arcane field of chemical patinas but up till now he has relied solely on natural patinas. He seems unsure about the impact that artificial patination would have on his sculptural vision and is therefore reluctant to move beyond plain metal surfaces polished for natural patinas. He values the unadorned metal's forthright honesty, possibly fearing that this would to some extent be compromised or demeaned by a deceptive manipulation of surface

values. On the other hand, he is aware that patination — signs of physical aging in enduring environmental conditions — might well enhance his pieces' import. Till now he has deliberately elected to keep this process as natural as his animal source material. Verging upon the "colours of rhetoric", artificial patination might inject duplicity into a valued area of his work, a treasured source of inspiration that he wishes to protect or preserve unsullied like undomesticated animals.

Fuller's formal vocabulary emerges from a combination of machine and hand tooling. The ancient Greeks already had a term for sculptural production in this "mixed" or "combinatory" manner of assembly. It was called "toreutics" to distinguish this sort of work from bronze casting ("plastics") and stone carving ("glyphics") — a universal category of sculptural construction whose significance has long been overlooked since it clashed at first with neo-classical and later with classically modernist ideals of "aesthetic purity" à la Brancusi or Moore. Still, the conviction of working in a venerable artisanal tradition of construction, with historical roots in Europe as well as in Africa, has ambiguous effects for Fuller's work, inspiring as well as frustrating his endeavours.

Existentially conscious of the sculptor's plight in contemporary South Africa, he envies the support of numerous public commissions enjoyed by, for instance, Jeff Claerhout, a Belgian sculptor also specializing in the use of brass, whom Fuller has visited. He envies the Belgian sculptor's many opportunities for public sculpture and for corporate commissions. In South Africa, in comparison with more developed countries, the occasions are rare indeed for corporate patronage and for public commissions of large-scale sculptural projects, uncontaminated by

demands for corporate advocacy and political propaganda.

Thus he relished the rare opportunity of participating in the construction of Oliewenhuis Art Museum's *African Carousel*, a group project of public sculpture funded by the National Art Foundation and initiated by the then curator of Oliewenhuis, Stefan Hundt. The reality of a fully functional and operational carousel in the museum garden, with working animal parts, tallied with the inherently carnivalesque vision of Fuller's pieces. Included in the current exhibition, the maquette of Fuller's Carousel piece (no 52) shows that all his pieces could be understood as parts of an imaginary playground carousel. They refer to the showground at derelict urban spaces and to visiting circus companies, freak shows and Gypsy wagons as the industrial city's version of regular premodern carnival seasons. In addition, the carousel project suited a form of sculpture that may even be appreciated as something of a Fuller speciality — "utilitarian sculpture" conferring often surprising and startling meanings on ordinary domestic fixtures. These are not represented in the exhibition however, as such pieces are fixed components of functional settings.

As a rule the figures in Fuller's pieces are represented in stationary postures. Their power is primarily manifested in their desire to absorb, to withstand and to subvert some unseen hegemony. Besides posturing they seldom perform significant actions of their own. They gather their lumbering energy from elsewhere. First and foremost from the sculptor's dogged mental and physical exertion in the tenacious application of tools and forces to metal during the labour of construction, followed by the subsequent release of energy from the public exposure of the fruits of the sculptor's strenuous efforts, in

particular from his comic guile in engaging the audience.

Another source of discursive energy enters the scene with his pieces' "in your face" encounters with spectators, and with the latter's troubled negotiations of meaning. Due to Fuller's strategy of spectator entrapment in the inverted semantics of caricature, such affective encounters are never simply straightforward, harmless or innocent. Our efforts of meaning spring from uneasy feelings of exasperation and embarrassment at being discovered in the role of a dupe. Caught in snares of complicity, the spectators never prevail, are never allowed to achieve full command or control of the ambiguous implications of Fuller's pieces. As a consequence, spectators involuntarily inject unforeseen, defensive yet energizing and liberating discharges of imaginative laughter into the figures. His pieces were made to solicit such unsettling responses of subversive humour and, by means of this low mode interaction, securing a protected area or period of liberated social space.

## Notes

1 Cf. Hundt & Crampton (eds) 2001. Fuller is also discussed in Rankin 1994: 53-54.

2 I am thinking here of Thomas Crow (1999) and his adaptation of the anthropological idea of local knowledge — "the intelligence of art" — he discovers as a cultural universal in "primitive" as well as "modern" societies. The example closest to the Fuller case is Crow's discussion of early modern German limewood sculpture as construed according to Baxandall's "florid" style notion.

3 The numbers correspond with the numbering in the catalogue of the exhibition curated by Stefan Hundt and Sharon Crampton.

4 Cf. Van den Berg 2001 on the picaresque strategy of spectator entrapment, especially pp. 160-165 on representative examples of the early modern genre of Fool's portraits.

5 Hans Blumenberg (1970) offers the most persuasive case of this anthropological

conception of rhetoric — an approach related to Umberto Eco's semiotic definition of the sign as anything that could be used to lie.

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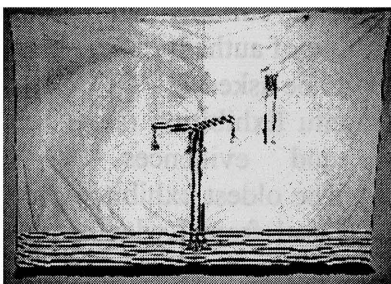
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## REVIEW

### Ubuntu, a shared experience?

Between February to June 2002, the Parisian cultural scene was offered an extensive exhibition on the arts and cultures of South Africa. Nearly two hundred pieces, mainly from South African and French collections, were on display at the National Museum for African and Pacific Art in Paris, under the title "Ubuntu", a Zulu word meaning "people who share and respect one other". This was a unique occasion indeed to present South African art and cultures to the French audience, more familiar, for historical reasons, with western African art and cultures. Initiated in 1997, the project was intended to offer an historical perspective on continuity and change and to add a significant section on contemporary art to the present selection of traditional art. The idea was also to take the exhibition on tour to South Africa and perhaps elsewhere in Europe and northern America, after it closed in Paris.



**Thembu. Piece of the grandfather costume, from the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris**

Even if its scope has been reduced from the 1997 brief, the Ubuntu Exhibition remains an exceptional one and the catalogue, opening with 16 papers by some outstanding South African and French scholars, presents a striking synthesis of the various concerns of contemporary South African art historiography. Some shortcomings have been unavoidable, however, such as the missing bibliographies to Becker's and Hooper's articles.

A discussion by Davison and Madiba on the current South African heritage policy with its particular emphasis on traditional African art opens the catalogue. The historical precision of the collection is revealed in contributions on the various collective migrations that shaped the country's cultural landscape (Valentin), the Khoekhoe who disappeared as a group but whose cultural contribution has been decisive (Smith). The influence of the white Africans on the history of the nation (Jatti Bredekamp).

It is worth stressing that the most interesting aspect of the exhibition lies in the attempt made to show how exchange, confrontation and conflict can be revealed in artefacts. At first glance, the display can be easily understood as a mere aesthetic arrangement of exotic works of art (all of them in a perfect state of preservation), classified thematically (the expression of power, every-day life, ancestral rituals), then by function (lances, canes, pipes, tobacco boxes, head-rests) and then sub-classified by means of formal characteristics. However, the intellectual project goes further and aims at evaluating the ways in which exchange and reciprocal appropriation occurred. Since the exhibition was originally conceived by specialists of ethnology, it cannot be assumed that the ordinary western visitor, often lacking in specific references and the necessary distance, will be able to grasp the concept of cultural transferences. Will everybody understand that even if beads were introduced to Africa as a result of triangular trade, the beadwork on display dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up to recent times is the result of a full appropriation by the local people? Will every western visitor, educated in the rigid conception of the nation state postulating one nation, one state, be sensitive to the fact that each section of the exhibition

offers works originating from different cultural groups? Will every western visitor also be sensitive to a confrontation with works originating from different cultural groups classified in terms of traditional western ethnic categories? The precise purpose of the sectional display is to lead the viewer to a reflect on the specific situation in South Africa where it is impossible to draw a distinction between the various iSintu groups, and even more broadly speaking, between South African people in general, at least in terms of these traditional western ethnic categories.

The exhibition vacillates between an impressively emotive presentation and a more didactic demonstration. This indecision may certainly be seen to be partly the result of the debates that have ranged in non-western art museums in France over the past few years. A merger is planned between the main institutions who curated the Ubuntu Exhibition, the Museum of Mankind and the National Museum for African and Pacific Art (formerly the Museum of Colonies prior to its name change in 1960) and other institutions, to form a larger institution that should be open in 2004. The future Musée du Quai de Branly as it is presently known, indicating simply its location in Paris rather than anything more that could give rise to polemic, is foreseen to be the keeper of a collection of more than 300 000 pieces representing a vast range of non-western art from all the continents.

In line with a long tradition in France (its first ethnological museum was founded in 1827), the present project to establish a new museum is aimed at creating a wider recognition of this ethnological heritage and drawing the public's attention to the value of what could, without doubt, be considered a neglected part of the world culture. There has not, as yet, been any final decision made on the criteria according to which the pieces on display will be chosen and what space will be allowed for didactic information for the visitor. Nevertheless, one stream of thought

is to exploit the intrinsic aesthetic value of the pieces, independently of their original culture. It is not clear whose values will then apply: those of the people who produced the works or those of the French curators? If this were to be the case, it would become a "museum based on mystery", attempting to catch the visitor's attention through emotion, to quote Jean Nouvel, the architect who won the competition to design the new building. Another viewpoint allows for the reconstruction of a new ethnological approach focusing on the artefact, and rejecting the traditional evolutionist view that tends to classify in terms of stages of technological development. However, if the evolutionist trend is rejected, it may be asked what will then become of history: ethnic cultures are not static and their cultural production evolves over time. Advocates of the heritage tendency also strongly recommend breaking with past museum practices and displaying only authentic pieces, strictly avoiding any reproduction and reconstruction. The extent to which these cultures were concerned with the notion of authenticity, is a question that has yet to be asked.

The Ubuntu Exhibition raises the same questions and evidences the same hesitations. The oldest exhibited pieces are a terracotta head from Lydenburg and the famous golden rhinoceros from Mapungubwe dating back to between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, after which the exhibition moves on directly to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the time when Europeans first started collecting artefacts made by black people. History has disappeared into the gap: what the people made during the intervening six centuries is unknown and the problem is not even mentioned. If one limits ones experience of the visit to what the visual documentation provides, everything simply happens as if history does not exist. In the section on contacts and conflicts, one can see two European representations of the Khoekhoe. The rest of the exhibition broadly illustrates the way

in which African objects appropriated western components. However, there is a silence on the way in which the white cultures of South Africa were influenced by the iSintu cultures, which is a crucial investigation to be made if one intends to decolonize the mind. A contact implies at least a twofold and mutual interaction and this should be more than only implicit in the framework of the exhibition. While the catalogue is comprehensive and brings to light many key issues, the discrepancy between it and the visual content of the exhibition is too wide for the exhibition to succeed with the general audience, barely prepared for the South African realities. It is my hope this is a first step and that South Africa, which has a very positive image in France, will enjoy a growing presence in cultural events.

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