

**A foundational approach towards the relationship between
mark-making, freedom, and meaning in selected works by
David Koloane and Dylan Graham**

by

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SUMMARY

The artistic phenomenon referred to as 'mark-making' is a foundational artistic process in creative practice. In this practice based artistic research project, I will explore the relationship between mark-making, freedom and meaning by investigating the works of the South African artist David Koloane (1938-2019) and myself, Dylan Graham.

I will explore the process of mark-making as a basic human impulse to express our thoughts, emotions, and experiences and to give external form there to through art. I will also discuss how marks can allow us as viewers to have emotional and empathetic responses to the artwork and its subject matter. In order to do so I will perform a formal analysis of artworks, provide historical context and utilise an autoethnographic approach (specifically when discussing my own artistic practice and education). The dissertation has to be read in conjunction with the artistic outcomes of my practice-based research. These were presented as a solo exhibition titled *Regardless* (15 July - 29 July 2022) at the UP Student Gallery at the University of Pretoria and were subsequently collated in a catalogue of the same name presented as part of this submission.

Keywords: Mark-making, Expression, Race, Freedom, David Koloane, Resistance Art, Painting and Drawing.

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Prof. Ingrid Stevens (1952 - 2019).

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SIGNATURE



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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Brief overview of the study

In this research project, titled 'A foundational approach towards the relationship between mark-making, freedom and meaning in selected works by David Koloane and Dylan Graham', I will discuss the artistic phenomenon of 'mark-making' as being a foundational artistic process in creative practice. With more focus, I will scrutinise the relationship between mark-making, artistic and personal freedom and meaning by investigating the works of David Koloane and myself, Dylan Graham.

In chapter two, I will explore the process of mark-making not only as a foundational process to art-making, but also as originating from a basic human impulse to express our emotions, our inner world, and to give external form to our understanding thereof artistically. I will then also discuss how marks can allow us as viewers, and as human beings, to have emotional and empathetic responses to the artwork and its subject matter. Crucially, as will be shown in this study, marks add a secondary layer of interpretive possibility to the artwork that exceeds the limit of figurative representation alone.

Ultimately, this leads me to chapter three, where I will investigate with more intensity the use of mark-making in the works of other artists — in this case, David Koloane — and thus also investigate mark-making as a trans-cultural and trans-historical phenomenon. I will discuss David Koloane as a pioneer in late twentieth-century South African Art, and also as a black expressionist painter. Apart from reacting against his political subjugation as a black man living in apartheid-era South Africa, Koloane was also fiercely vocal about his rights as a human being and as an artist to create freely, without any limitations related to his status as a black man. My reason for writing about Koloane is not merely because Koloane's struggle for freedom makes me aware of my own need for personal and creative freedom but also because his marks make me feel something. Even though his application is largely different to my own, I resonate with his obsessive and expressive use of marks.

In the following chapter, I will discuss my own upbringing in South Africa, my subsequent development as an artist during my studies, and finally the variety of meanings and processes in my work related to mark-making. In addition to this, I will then, through a form of correlation between Koloane's and my own practice as an artist, explore how mark-

making can function in both a transhistorical and transcultural sense as a primordial human impulse. In this sense, I argue that mark-making is both intrinsic to human creativity and may also be read as a signifier of creative freedom - freedom from constructed narratives of race, artistic practice, culture and history, for example. Primary theoretic sources for this investigation in this study will include John Berger (1980), Richard Shiff (1978), James Elkins (2005), Clement Greenberg (1971), Steve Biko (1996), and Sue Williamson (1989). Through a brief historical background, I will touch on the origins of mark-making by referring to the work of Ellen Dissanayke (1996), John Berger (2015), and André Leroi-Gourhan (1982).

1.2 Aims and objectives

My research aims will be as follows:

1. To investigate mark-making as a foundation for two-dimensional art-making. I will focus on mark-making in painting and drawing. This will be done by looking at the writings of John Berger (1972/1980), Clement Greenberg (1971), Gilles Deleuze (2005), James Elkins (1999), and Richard Shiff (1978) among others.
2. To analyse selected works by David Koloane and myself. This will be done to explore how, in both a transhistorical and transcultural sense, both can be said to work from a primordial impulse towards mark-making and creative self-expression.
3. To outline the concept of mark-making as a creative human endeavour by briefly looking at the broad history of mark-making from prehistoric to contemporary art.
4. To apply these insights to the discussion of selected works by David Koloane and Dylan Graham, namely *Rhythm* (Koloane), *The Journey* (Koloane), *The Scavengers III* (Koloane), *Worlds Apart* (Graham), *Malleus Maleficarum* (Graham), and *No.* (Graham). These insights will also be applied to the discussion of untitled quick notebook sketches and as a series of doodles by myself.

1.3 Theoretical approach to the study

Since this dissertation involves a highly personal account of myself as a practising artist, the style of writing is closer to a literature paper as opposed to a literary theory study. In this sense, the primary theoretical approach in this study will be autoethnographic. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011:273), "Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal

experience in order to understand cultural experience". I will turn to the writings of John Berger (1972/1980), Clement Greenberg (1971), Gilles Deleuze (2005), James Elkins (1999), and Richard Shiff (1978) to investigate mark-making not only as a phenomenon that has been observed through various periods of history and been the topic of philosophical debate but also as an endeavour that I practise and subject myself to daily.

Although this study briefly touches on some aspects of anthropological research, which I think is of some importance seeing that it deals with actions and experiences that are historically unique to the human species, it originated from my need as a practicing artist to gain deeper insight into the impulse that drives me to the act of mark-making. In this sense, the study is practice-based (a thought to which I return in the next section). However, the study has systematically evolved into a closer theoretical investigation into my own personal, more emotional interests surrounding mark-making. As an artist, and in this case a mark-making artist, I feel that there is a certain amount of redundancy when it comes to the analysis of the act of drawing and mark-making. The mark speaks for itself; it is its own conveyer of meaning, a sign of human activity that exceeds — even as it embodies — the very notion of human self-expression as a culturally specific practice. It is for this reason that my focus will be on certain phenomenological aspects of mark-making as opposed to interrogations into neuroscientific relations concerning human cognition or possible causations of mark-making or narrowly defined, culturally specific associations with mark-making.

1.4 Methodology

This study is practice-based, due to a personal investigation into my own questions regarding my practice as an artist who makes marks. Candy (2006:1) writes that "Practice-based Research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice". My initial reason for this practice-based research was to gain broader insight into my own artistic practice as a painter. The daily solitary nature of drawing and painting also contributed to a yearning to engage with an academic institution where I could synthesise my own thoughts and understandings surrounding my practice with that of a larger philosophical debate regarding mark-making and to explore with more intensity the use of mark-making in the works of other artists.

Concerning my own practice, my research and pondering on mark-making have influenced the actual creation of the artworks made for my exhibition, in the sense that I was more attentive to the value of mark-making. This also gave me time to reflect on how I experience mark-making, which in turn, became a contributing factor in the writing of this dissertation. Though I must emphasise, that the body of work presented for my exhibition, is still a natural progression of my daily practice, as opposed to a deliberate venture into mark-making as a theme. Through years of experience as a practising artist, I have come to understand, art and mark-making largely as a personal enquiry into an internal or external world as opposed to a venture that largely serves as a form of presentation.

My research is qualitative in that it is a creative exploration to gain a theoretical and practical understanding of the phenomenon referred to as 'mark-making'. It seeks to form valid hypotheses by asking relevant questions regarding the practice, history, origin, and theories regarding mark-making – questions such as

- Why do we as humans make marks?
- Why is it significant that we gain knowledge of ourselves and our histories by studying marks, its application and the history thereof?
- "What is the evolutionary path from our remoter ancestors, who somehow lacked artful minds, to the existence of cognitively modern human beings, who cannot fail to be artful?" (Turner 2006:xv).

My study will reflect on certain eras and histories of art and mark-making, by referring to writings such as those on Palaeolithic art by Leroi Gourhan (1982) and focusing on artworks made by David Koloane in both an apartheid and post-apartheid era. Despite this, my study is art-critical as opposed to art-historical, due to the fact that regardless of a historical timeline and setting, my research still focusses on a phenomenon that is largely open to investigation and, in some ways, always contemporary. In this way, I see my research as a philosophical and analytical investigation into how mark-making, which, by being foundational to art-making, is also foundational to the human species.

1.5 Literature review

This critical investigation will be conducted by analysing philosophical writings by Berger (1972/1980), Biko (1996), Deleuze (2005), Greenberg (1971), Elkins (1999), Shiff (1987),

and Williamson (1989), among others. The study will use these literature surveys for aims 1-3 as mentioned in 1.2 in order to create a theoretical framework with which to analyse the selected work. In other words, this study will make use of artifactual analysis. The analysis will employ methods such as comparison, evaluation, and interpretation.

Although the writers previously mentioned share – to a certain degree – a common thread in terms of their observations into and philosophies of art and mark-making, it is important for me to distinguish between them, seeing as they are individuals, each with their own unique views. I am deeply inspired by these passionate and personal accounts of an act (mark-making) that, as a practicing artist, I find mindless and arbitrary from time to time. I find that the viewer (in this case, also the writer) plays a part in the phenomenological aspect of mark-making in that they are able to contribute to the process through observation, analysis, and ultimately conveying a form of meaning by expressing themselves through conversing and writing.

As a painter, I spend a lot of time wondering what it is that I am actually doing. Painting consists not only of an act that we might call ‘painting’ but, also one that leads to the creation of an object (called a ‘painting’) which arbitrarily becomes a practical if often decorative object to be hung on a wall. This creation is not only characterised by a painted surface, but is also understood as something derived from various forms of mark-making, observation, internalisation, self-expression and communication. In his book, *The truth in painting*, Jacques Derrida (1987:2) investigates this ambiguous phenomenon by analysing, deconstructing, and challenging various accepted notions of the act of painting and the painting as an object.

Gilles Deleuze’s (2005) investigation into the work of Francis Bacon, entitled *The Sense of Logic*, not only serves as a deep appreciation of Bacon’s work but also as a vast analysis of everything from Bacon’s use of medium, surface, and materiality to subject matter and intent. This book serves as a testament to the value of expression through mark-making, and ultimately to the writer and viewer’s necessary ability to gather meaning from art and mark-making. This book, as with the book by Derrida, is not included in my general discussion but forms part of my initial background research and has given me greater insight, and analytical abilities into my subconscious reasoning regarding certain decision-making in my practice as an artist

In his book, *What Painting Is*, Elkins (1999) focusses on the painter and the act of painting by investigating everything from the early mixing of pigments and mediums through to an analysis of the painter's conscious and subconscious state while he is busy painting. This book functions as more than just mere observation, due to Elkins being a retired painter with first-hand knowledge of this endeavour. I can relate to Elkins' findings as I am a painter who, upon reading his text, has found that my own processes are relatable to those of his and most other painters, even though they come across as being idiosyncratic.

I turn now to the artist whose work I will be investigating in addition to my own: David Koloane. It is clear that Steve Biko had a huge influence on David Koloane. This is evident upon reading Biko's (2017) [1978] book, *I Write What I Like*, and various articles written by Koloane himself; they shared mutual sentiments with regards to the so-called 'Bantustan' situation under Apartheid, as well as the confinement and regulation of black people within South African society. I will investigate these overlapping views by looking at these writings of Biko and Koloane in order to show the struggle for freedom that not only Koloane and other black artists faced, but also the struggle of black people in general during apartheid whose bodies, lives and indeed very existence were closely regulated, controlled and narrowly defined by the racist policies, practices and ideas thereof. With regards to David Koloane, I will also look to Sue Williamson's (1989) *Resistance Art in South Africa*. This book gives a historical account as to how Resistance Art in South Africa originated and also information on the artists involved. I have also looked quite extensively at Vanessa Anderson's (1999) master's thesis titled, *The use of abstraction by Bill Ainslie and David Koloane*. This thesis consists of a variety of interviews held by Anderson with the likes of David Koloane, Ricky Burnett, Thami Jali, and Bill Ainslie's wife, Fieke Ainslie, to name a few. Through some of these interviews, especially the ones with Koloane, Anderson addresses the contentious issues regarding art education for black people in apartheid-era South Africa, as well as issues regarding abstract art under black people in South Africa.

Additionally, there is a wide variety of publications by John Berger that I will look to throughout this study. These include *Ways of Seeing* (Berger 2008) and *About Looking* (1980). Berger has written prolifically on the subject at hand, and I find that his contribution not only shows a deep passion for the arts, but is so inspired that it feels like art itself. To tie in with Berger's writings, I have found Schiff's *Art and Life: A Metaphoric Relationship* (1978) of great importance regarding mark-making's ability to evoke emotions.

In addition to the writers just mentioned, I will refer to the work of many others. These include various publications dealing with the origins of mark-making by writers such as Ellen Dissanayake (1996), Mark Turner (2006), and André Leroi-Gourhan (1982). Important, also, is a variety of articles by the twentieth-century art critic, Clement Greenberg (1961/1971). I will refer to these articles to discuss my own art education, and how his sentiments were relatable to my own — very much subjective — practice as a young artist.

1.6 A preliminary outline of chapters

Chapter 1 provides a basic overview of the mini dissertation, including its main concerns, goals, the literature review, applicable methodologies and so forth.

Chapter 2 provides a general background to the study by focusing on the subject of mark-making in broad. This includes a brief introduction to the origins of mark-making. However the chapter will predominantly focus on what mark-making constitutes in terms of two-dimensional art, and how it can be seen as foundational to art-making in a formal, material sense. This chapter will also elaborate on mark-making by focusing on its expressive qualities, emotive abilities, and interpretive possibilities.

Chapter 3 covers the work of David Koloane and, through doing so, will additionally focus on notions surrounding personal and creative freedom. This chapter will also include a historical background of South Africa in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. I will discuss how Koloane not only fought against his own subjugation as a black man in apartheid-era South Africa, but also how he had to fight for his own right as an artist, to make marks as he pleased

Chapter 4 will offer a background of my life and work. In this chapter, I will discuss the meaning and use of mark-making in my work. This chapter will contain an element of introspection and will largely be of a personal nature in that it will focus on my own mark-making. I will discuss how mark-making has contributed to my life experience from my early childhood up until my current position as an artist.

I will conclude by synthesising the primary ideas in the previous chapters to show how mark-making is not only foundational to the process of making art but also originates from

an inherent primordial human impulse with which we express ourselves. I will refer to the life and work of David Koloane and myself, Dylan Graham, to discuss mark-making as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon.

CHAPTER TWO: MARK-MAKING

2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2

In this chapter, I will discuss the artistic phenomenon referred to as 'mark-making' as a foundational artistic process in creative practice. I will begin by giving a brief historical background to mark-making through touching on our known prehistoric origins of mark-making. I will do this by referring to the works of Amber Pariona (2017), Brian Boyd (2009), and Stephen Alvarez (2015), and later in the chapter again, by looking at the writings of André Leroi-Gourhan (1982), Ellen Dissanayke (1996), and John Berger (2015). I will then make mention of a variety of art mediums and their uses in mark-making and two-dimensional art practice. I will do this to provide context for what I mean by mark-making. What should be clear in this study is that I will focus on mark-making in two-dimensional art practice only. In other words, this study will focus on mark-making in painting and drawing, and will not include the use of mark-making in three-dimensional art practices such as sculpture.

I will then move on to discuss how our early tactile investigations as infants, along with a variety of other factors, contribute to the action of mark-making. I will explore the process of mark-making not only as a foundational process to art-making, but also as originating from a basic human impulse to express our emotions, our inner world, and to give external form to our understanding thereof artistically.

2.2 Origins of mark-making

At present historians assume that human mark-making dates back to the upper Palaeolithic period which took place between 10,000 and 50,000 years ago (Pariona 2017:par 1). These marks are predominantly characterised by stencilled handprints and drawings of animals. Some of the earliest drawings are found in caves in Altamira, Spain, a cave in Pech-Merle, France and those which are believed to be the oldest of the findings in Chauvet Cave, France. As Boyd (2009:22) writes, "The 1994 discovery of the drawings in France's Chauvet Cave pushed back the earliest date for cave art from about 17,000 years ago to 32,000 years ago...". Below is an image of a portion of the *Horse Panel* found in the Chauvet Cave. French prehistorian, Jean Clottes, a leading figure in the study of the Chauvet Cave, believes that "... the images were intended to be experienced much the way we view movies, theatre, or even religious ceremonies today..." (Alvarez 2015). Even though some possibilities and probabilities exist that these dates and places might change,

due to new evidence or the likelihood thereof, I am compelled to mention them briefly, as it gives some context to the discussion that will follow in the next subsections.



Figure 1: Stephen Alvarez, 2015, Portion of the *Horse Panel* in Chauvet Cave, National Geographic

2.3 Defining mark-making in relation to artistic expression

I will first define what I mean by mark-making from a formal and material perspective. In terms of two-dimensional art-making, mark-making can be seen as the act of making a mark on a surface such as paper, wood, or canvas with a medium such as charcoal, graphite, paint, or by using one's hand or relevant utensils such as pens, pencils, or brushes. Different kinds of marks can be made by using these tools differently to create lines (e.g. thick or thin, flowing or staccato), to create patterns such as dots or circles, to create solid colours through repeated layers, to generate contrasts between light and dark, and textures (both visually and through impasto, for example). In a single drawing, the sharp tip of a pencil can be used to make a long thin flowing line, whereas a thick blunt piece of charcoal can be used to make a series of thick loose marks. Made together, these marks create a visual field that could be abstract or emulate objects in the real world such as trees and flowers. In painting, a brush or a series of brushes can be used to make

marks through the repeated application of paint to create colourful textures, flat expanses of colour or even thick three-dimensional layers of paint referred to as 'impasto'. Moreover, many of the tools that we use today to create marks on flat surfaces remain fundamentally similar to those used in prehistoric times. Leroi-Gourhan (1982:13) writes that:

The instruments of colour application could have been the finger of the artist himself, a stick used as a spatula, or a stick with one end mashed or crushed as the Australian aborigines still do. Real brushes of horsehair or other hair, glued or bound at one end, could have constituted true paintbrushes or stencil brushes.

Due to technological advancements in recent decades, our repertoire of mark-makers has certainly grown to include a wide variety of machines and computers, for example. It can be said that such advancements eliminate the use of a hand to make a mark, but essentially, a finger is needed to operate a piece of machinery such as a video camera, and/or to combine a set of visual signals to generate an image. This is obviously a complex argument as the hand is then no longer directly involved in making marks on the surface of, for example, a photographic printout or a blank piece of paper. However, the argument is not necessarily about technology and its advances in relation to mark-making, but rather about mark-making as being foundational to any more complex forms of aesthetic creation, digital or otherwise. For the purposes of this study, it is argued that mark-making is foundational in both a formal and biological sense. For instance, we have hands; we have opposable thumbs; we make marks on and with materials regardless of whether or not these materials are technological and virtual or manual in a more straightforward sense. The fact remains that from infancy, we use our hands to grab at things, to explore the world around us, and to make sense of it. By doing so, we involve ourselves in the world in a tactile sense, and when we first try to express our inner worlds, we do so through the physical act of mark-making. Matthews (1999:21) writes that:

Joel, 6 months of age, regurgitates some milk onto a purple carpet in front of him within his visual field. He looks at this and reaches into this white target, which is contrasted against the purple ground, and then scratches at its edges with his fingernails. He looks very carefully at the actions of his fingers as they disturb and transform the edges of the patch of milk.

Apart from our optical awareness, it is clear that from a very early age, our inquisitiveness and our engagement with our surroundings involve certain tactile investigations. Willem Boshoff's *The Blind Alphabet* (1995-ongoing) (Fig 2, 1995, Page. 12) re-evaluates the notion of 'viewing' art by reversing the roles of the blind and the seeing through the

emphasis on tactile experiences. According to Boshoff (2019), his work “...re-establishes the integrity of touch as a socially viable catalyst for interactive discourse”. For Boshoff touch and, by extension, using our hands remains a central aspect of art-making and its interpretation. Boshoff does this by showing us as sighted viewers that we have forgotten the complexity of touch, its capacity to enliven our imaginations, and indeed along with it a whole lexicon of complex terms that communicate our sense of three-dimensional form. Moreover, as Boshoff makes clear in *The Blind Alphabet*, we as viewers and indeed as humans are literally intellectually and culturally poorer for it.



Figure 2: *Blind Alphabet* (1995 - ongoing) Oliewenhuis Art Gallery, Bloemfontein. Photo Credit: Willem Boshoff, <https://www.willemboshoff.com/product-page/1996-exhibitions-5>

What is fascinating about Joel's early childhood inquiry into his surroundings, Boshoff's musings on touch, and pre-historical cave drawings and paintings (with a specific

emphasis on handprints), is how our enquiry into our external world by use of our hands has permeated through history since the dawn of our mark-making endeavour. It is so specific to our own species, and still to this day captivates us emotionally and serves as inspiration to our imaginative selves. In turn this entertains the idea of how our tactile experience as human beings can engage with our other senses to make images of, for instance, the world around and within us.

Regarding cave handprints, The Bradshaw Foundation, which focuses on the study of early mankind, asks the question “Was this the signature of the artist, confirming both his or her work as well as his or her self-awareness?” They go on to argue that :

Given that the images exist around the world, and cover a great time span, clearly there must be a variety of meanings. For all of the hypotheses, hand painting and the 'hand' motif could have represented any number of rituals, but without knowledgeable informants from a particular culture, hypotheses they must remain. (Bradshaw Foundation, no date, par: 3 [no pagination])



Figure 3: Handprint found in Chauvet cave, © DRAC Rhône-Alpes / Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Smithsonian Magazine

The fact that we do not, or cannot, have any exact clarity on the use and meaning of some of our very first ventures into mark-making has some bearing on this dissertation, as it

justifies to an extent the notion that mark-making originated as a transcultural human phenomenon that happened in a variety of areas across the globe without clear purpose or intent. Regardless of what these paintings imply or could have meant, their existence points to the fact that lived experiences by our own ancestors drove them to externalise their feelings through the tactile material form that is mark-making. This heritage of mark-making exists well beyond the confines of the modern-day cultural phenomenon that we refer to as 'art'. Dissanayake (1982:146) writes that:

The modern concept of "art", for example originated among people of a small geographical area and has had its present connotations for only about two centuries. No wonder it is often awkwardly applied to objects and activities from other human societies and from earlier times.

Apart from Dissanayake's viable notion regarding the modern concept of 'art' versus the origins of mark-making by early human societies, it is difficult for us to get an exact understanding as to how this phenomenon was understood, experienced, and incorporated in societies of fifty thousand years ago. Any evidence that we have of these undertakings could probably only lead us to some informed speculation, but speculation nonetheless. Regardless, the possibility that as a species we could have had, to some degree, some debating and pondering over our mark-making endeavour is feasible. Here I think it could be argued that despite the relative crudeness of some of these early ventures into mark-making, numerous other examples clearly show traces of the fine kind of craftsmanship that we today would readily associate with training and development of some sort. How much of this is innate to our capacity to make marks on surfaces and how much of it is the result of a form of heritage by way of some form of training is impossible to discern. But what is clear, is that even the earliest artists were capable of making marks with a high degree of sophistication, most possibly the result of our acute (visual) perception. Berger (2015:2) writes about the Chauvet cave paintings:

What makes their age astounding is the sensitivity of perception they reveal. The thrust of an animal's neck or the set of its mouth or the energy of its haunches were observed and recreated with a nervousness and control comparable to what we find in the works of a Fra Lippo Lippi, a Velasquez, or a Brancusi. Apparently art did not begin clumsily. The eyes and hands of the first painters and engravers were as fine as any that came later. There was a grace from the start.

Throughout this artistic research project, I will argue that mark-making is foundational in the sense that it is formal and, as such, forms part of our childhood development, our subsequent art education, and leaves its tactile memory within us, even as we may end up

creating and participating in a great variety of other forms of art. But more narrowly, for most visual artists, drawing as a primary form of mark-making remains a vital tool in terms of their self-expression. As Berger (1953: par 1) states: “It is the actual act of drawing that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind’s eye and put it together again...”. This act of drawing generates a myriad of possibilities for all kinds of artists, which range from painting underdrawings to quick pre-sketches and visual aids for sculptural and conceptual artworks and then, of course, to artworks where drawing is the medium on its own (as is the case with the artworks of South African artist Diane Victor, to name but one example).

This study focusses only on the two-dimensional act of mark-making, meaning I will predominantly focus on mark-making in painting and drawing. Most importantly, for the purposes of this dissertation, beyond the merely representational function of the artwork, mark-making adds a significant secondary layer of interpretive possibility. It allows us as humans to respond in an affective, intuitive and even bodily manner. For example, beyond what the figurative content of the image may be, marks make us feel certain things, even allowing us to momentarily identify with the artist’s hand by virtue of our innate capacity to have an empathetic response. Shiff (1978:111) writes that the artistic mark seems “...alive both because it presents the life or experience of the artist and because it may induce an empathetic response in the viewer which causes him to sense the living force that lies within the work itself.”

It is through this act of empathising that we experience things beyond our immediate sensations. In this way our tactile, visual and mental memories actually work together to enliven the otherwise static surface of a canvas, for example. In turn, I would argue that this form of empathetic identification with marks leads us to affect, emotion, and transcendence of historical and cultural bounds that may be implicit in the use of specific subject matter in an artwork. Regardless of one’s race, ethnicity or nationality, we are bound by tactile experiences and can collectively identify with them as thinking and feeling humans. In this sense, it can be argued that mark-making can function as a tool that can facilitate not only the artist’s but also the viewer’s yearning for individual freedom. In the next chapter, I will qualify this statement by discussing and analysing the work of the artist David Koloane, showing how an intrinsic need for freedom of expression correlates with, and is to a greater extent synonymous with, a need for personal freedom.

CHAPTER THREE: DAVID KOLOANE: A NEED FOR PERSONAL AND CREATIVE FREEDOM

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will be discussing and analysing the use of mark-making in selected works by the South African artist David Koloane (1938-2019). I will first discuss Koloane's childhood education under the tyranny of apartheid. I will do this by looking at the writings of Vanessa Anderson (1999), Rebusoajoang (1979), and Steve Biko (2017). I will then discuss how Koloane's struggle for personal freedom through creative self-expression made him one of the most notable figures in late twentieth-century South African art. More specifically, I will also show how a persistent need to create freely manifested itself in his art through the use of expressive mark-making. His usage of marks as part of the making of nearly abstract drawings and paintings ultimately enabled him to produce works of art that transcended his pigeonholing as a black artist first under apartheid and later as part of the fraught workings of post-apartheid South Africa. In this way Koloane maintained this position both towards - and as part of the - making of his artworks until the end of his life. It is worthwhile noting that the end of apartheid did simply not translate into the end of the pigeonholing of black artists and their work, especially by the largely white-dominated art world of South Africa. Importantly, I will show how Koloane's exposure to art contributed to his refusal to accept any prescriptive conditions set by the political criteria of apartheid (including the confines of such prescriptive categories as 'township art' and later of 'transitional art' for art produced by black South Africans). Here I will briefly delve into the definitions of both 'transitional art' and 'township art', showing how both definitions were in fact premised upon reductive – even racist – notions of ethnicity. I will do this by looking at the writings of Aneta Pawłowska (2011), and David Koloane (1999). I will also discuss a work titled *Rhythm* (2016) by Koloane in the context of the discussion of both township and transitional art.

I will also discuss how the death of Steve Biko, along with events such as the Soweto uprising in 1976, which was characterised by the deaths of many protesting school students, would further embolden a critique against the tyranny of apartheid and would incentivise South African artists to protest using their art as a form of resistance. I will do this by looking at the writings of Sue Williamson (1989), John Pepper (2009) and Koloane (1995) himself. In this section, I will also discuss how Biko's death had a long-lasting effect

on Koloane, which eventually led to a series of works titled *The Journey*. This work is a portrayal of Biko's arrest, his interrogation, and his death. My discussion will be guided by the writings of Eliza Garnsey (2019).

Beyond the scope of resistance art, Koloane's artwork attests to an intrinsic need to create freely, to play, and to indulge our innate need to create marks and externalise our inner world, no matter how turbulent it may be. I would therefore like to discuss a series of paintings called *The Scavengers* (1993), which Koloane produced just before the end of apartheid when "South Africa's first democratic constitution was enacted in December 1993 after a four-year process of negotiation. The inaugural election followed in April 1994...". (Sommer 1996:53). Although these artworks by Koloane have overtly political narratives, and delving deeply into the political is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will nevertheless touch on these narratives as I have chosen the artworks for the sheer expressive nature of their beautiful, excessive, and obsessive marks. Today regardless of the representative content and historical context of the work, these artworks continue to make me feel and experience something well beyond their content. This I would argue is because the very notion of freedom remains materially interwoven within - and as part of - the artwork itself by way of Koloane's usage of marks.

3.2 The mis-education of David Koloane

The South African artist, David Koloane (1938-2019), was born in Alexandra in Johannesburg, ten years prior to the official advent of apartheid (1948). However the segregationist policies that would become the hallmark of twentieth-century South African politics were already well-established by the 1913 Land Act. Walker (2014:655) mentions that through the 1913 Land Act "...the country was divided into two irredeemably unequal zones: a fertile, productive heartland comprising 87 per cent of the land reserved for whites, and a marginal unproductive periphery, made up of the 13 per cent of land reserved for blacks". Apartheid would later exacerbate segregation by lawfully enforcing separatist policies, through a smokescreen ideology of 'self-governance' and 'separate development' for white and black South Africans. According to the United Nations (in Friedman 1972:1), apartheid can be described in the following way:

It is the contorted face of racial containment thinly disguised with the transparent masks of 'parallel progress' and 'separate development.' Racial containment is a less familiar term than the more widely utilized phrases of racial discrimination, racial segregation, racial domination. It

incorporates their meanings but extends semantically and symbolically beyond them. In the Republic all peoples are being surrounded by walls of containment. They are assigned and confined under varying degrees of coercion to containers according to their 'race.'

Apartheid would also divide black South Africans into their respective tribal allegiances and force them into specific territories set out by the Bantu Citizenship Act of 1970. These territories were referred to as 'Bantustans'. Biko (2017:90) states that "...20% of the population are in control of 87% of the land while 80% 'control' only 13%". He goes on to say that "... the areas where bantustans are located are the least developed in the country, often very unsuitable either for agricultural or pastoral work" (Biko 2017:90). Some years before the establishment of the Bantu Citizen Act, the Bantu Education Act (established in 1953) would relegate black youths to an education system of inferior quality. Rebusoajoang (1979:229) writes that:

The commonest and most widely accepted goal of Bantu education is contained in a statement to the South African Senate by H.F. Verwoerd...: "There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze".

This statement by Verwoerd is highly problematic because it not only promotes colonialism and turns a blind eye to its atrocities by bluntly implying that there is no place for black people in their own land, but it also whitewashes various other even more craven forms of subjugation of black people by patronising them and insisting on what is best for them. The school system to which he refers largely owes its inception to Christian missionary societies established by European colonial settlers. Jansen (1990:195-196) writes that "The early 1800s saw the era of mission education in which Christian missionary societies introduced a European form of education to the schools". This form of education comprising its own religious aspirations would ironically also eventually serve as a counter-action against the government's apathy towards youths in black communities. In this way before the beginning of Bantu Education, Koloane, like many others, found himself in a mission school. Koloane (as quoted in Anderson 1999:127) says that: "The government over the years had neglected the responsibility of education within the black community, so different mission societies took up the challenge of education. It was also to their advantage because they could now convert the communities into their different religions". Thus even when black youths were educated they remained subject to Eurocentric colonial ideals and policies.

In St Michaels, his primary school, Koloane would start drawing with friends. According to Koloane (Anderson 1999:94), there was a particular friend who Koloane admired because “...he could just produce any figure in any position. So in this sense I worshipped him and he showed me how to draw a full length figure”. Koloane continues:

At the time, to me it was entertainment; it wasn't something that could be a profession. There were so many Apartheid restrictions at the time that I had never seen a newspaper article of a black artist or knew of any black artist where I grew up. I don't remember meeting an artist, so for me it was something only whites were allowed to do as a profession (Anderson 1999:94-95).

It was at St Peter's where Koloane would receive his first art class. Koloane would spend most of his school years in a mission school and it was only in Standard 8 (now called Grade 10) that he would go to a state school when most mission schools closed down due to the Bantu Education Act. It was in Orlando, in a Bantu school, where Koloane would meet the artist, Louis Maqhubela. Louis Maqhubela introduced Koloane to the Polly Street Art Centre. Under Cecil Skotnes the Polly Street Art Centre offered art classes and guidance to black students. Sack (2019: para 14) explains that: “David spent time on the periphery of the Polly Street scene, but his association with it was not as rewarding for him as it was for the sculptors and woodblock engravers who worked there”. Through Maqhubela, Koloane would meet artist and activist Bill Ainslie, from whom Koloane would receive an art education at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, founded by Ainslie and his wife, Fieke, in 1971 (Sassen n.d). According to Fieke Ainslie, the Art Foundation was started because: “Black artists had no place to work, no money and also young aspiring artists had no place to go for training...” (Anderson 1999:30). Although, at the time when Koloane was there, he was the only black student among students such as William Kentridge and Ricky Burnett. Koloane says that “... I was not supposed to be there because of the Group Areas Act, so when somebody suspicious came around I would pretend I was working in the garden” (Anderson 1999:99).

Koloane spoke very fondly of Bill Ainslie. He mentions that Bill Ainslie “...really brought me out of my shell because I am personally very shy and I met somebody who encouraged me, my ideas and to do things in a way I had never been encouraged to do before” (Anderson 1999:124). Koloane explains that Ainslie “...actually encouraged students because he dealt with them within their working context and not outside it like ‘no that's all wrong, that's never done’” (Anderson 1999:125). Not only did Ainslie have a

significant influence on Koloane's life by encouraging and building Koloane's confidence as an artist, but he was also integral in introducing Koloane to broader national and international participation as an artist.

It was years later, through Ainslie, that Koloane – who was at the time teaching at the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) – would meet with British sculptor, Anthony Caro, who was on a visit to South Africa. The Federated Union of Black Artists:

“...was cofounded in 1978 by artists, writers and musicians in Johannesburg as a learning centre and to support black artists regarding ownership and distribution of their works to benefit economically from their art. FUBA helped to boost the careers of black artists within the restrictions of apartheid” (Moloi 2018: para 2).

According to Koloane, Ainslie told Caro “...that it seem[ed] he was only going to white institutions and that he didn't know what was happening with black artists in this country. Caro said that he would appreciate it if he could meet them [black artists]. So Bill brought him to FUBA and he was appalled by the lack of facilities he found there” (Anderson 1999:100). This lack of facilities was largely due to apartheid's restrictions, which left black communities with very few resources to operate an art school. These restrictions also prohibited black youths from entering formal educational institutions to further their training as artists. Caro would eventually also help Koloane to obtain a study grant from the British Council “...to further his studies in England where he completed a diploma in teaching at the Birmingham Polytechnic. In 1985 he was awarded a diploma in Museum Studies at the University of London” (Friends of JAG 2019: par 1).

Koloane's time in England led to numerous experiences which included working on assignments at the Tate Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, and the British Museum in London (Anderson 1999:102). It also allowed him to attend the Triangle workshops in New York. These workshops inspired Koloane to start the Thupelo workshops in South Africa alongside Ainslie (Anderson 1999:104-106). South African artist, Thami Jali, who attended these workshops, said that “...most of the workshops had an abstract emphasis. It worked out like that not because it was enforced, but because the environment encouraged such a form of expression. Many black artists had been working on small scale works because of no space in their living environment” (Anderson 1999:93). These workshops would however be criticised by white academics who “...were outraged that black artists should paint in an abstract expressionistic manner, and the work produced was negated and

criticised amidst accusations of American imperialism” (Martins 1996:5). Later however there was an acute realisation that we all operate in a postmodern world in which, according to Martins (1996:5),

[T]he concepts of pluralist toleration and plurality of cultures became popular. It allows for an open-endedness and pluralistic approach which means, for example, that art originating in rural and other peripheral contexts can be shown alongside art which is influenced by the western ‘mainstream’. This is the case, as long as it suits academics, curators, residual modernists and the art market; if it does not, selective pluralism is applied.

As we can see, this tumultuous history of Koloane’s education points to his perseverance, not only as an artist but also as an educator who exerted himself and refused to be confined by any authoritative restrictions. This perseverance would eventually lead to the launch of The Bag Factory Artist Studios, of which Koloane was a founding member, was established in 1991 in anticipation of freedom, where black and white artists would be equal partners. (The space was co-founded with British Arts patron and philanthropist Robert Loder) The Bag Factory “was housed in an old manufacturing warehouse situated between white and black neighbourhoods in Johannesburg, making possible a racial mix that apartheid laws would have otherwise prevented” (Cotter 2019: para 14). I will return to my discussion on The Bag Factory Artist studios later on in this chapter.

3.3 Transitional art and the question of black ethnicity in art

During apartheid, the term ‘township art’ was used to avert the derogatory implication of art that was created solely by black people. Robbroeck (2016: 03) explains that this term “...was used loosely and without distinction – not so much as a label of a kind of art (which requires definition and specificity), but as a deceptively neutral euphemism for the more contentious term ‘Black Art’”. Koloane (2003:120) also contends that “[t]he work of practitioners based in urban settlements has been indiscriminately referred to as ‘township art’ as a means of differentiating the artist’s work from mainstream art produced by white practitioners”. In effect this means that black artists artworks would not be treated with the same kind of reverence and respect than that as their white counterparts, becoming ethnic or cultural objects situated somewhere within a Neo-anthropological framework provided by this category. In short black artists did not produce ‘Art’, instead they produced art that belonged to a sub-category somehow related to the very fact of their cultural, racial and ethnic differences from the white mainstream.

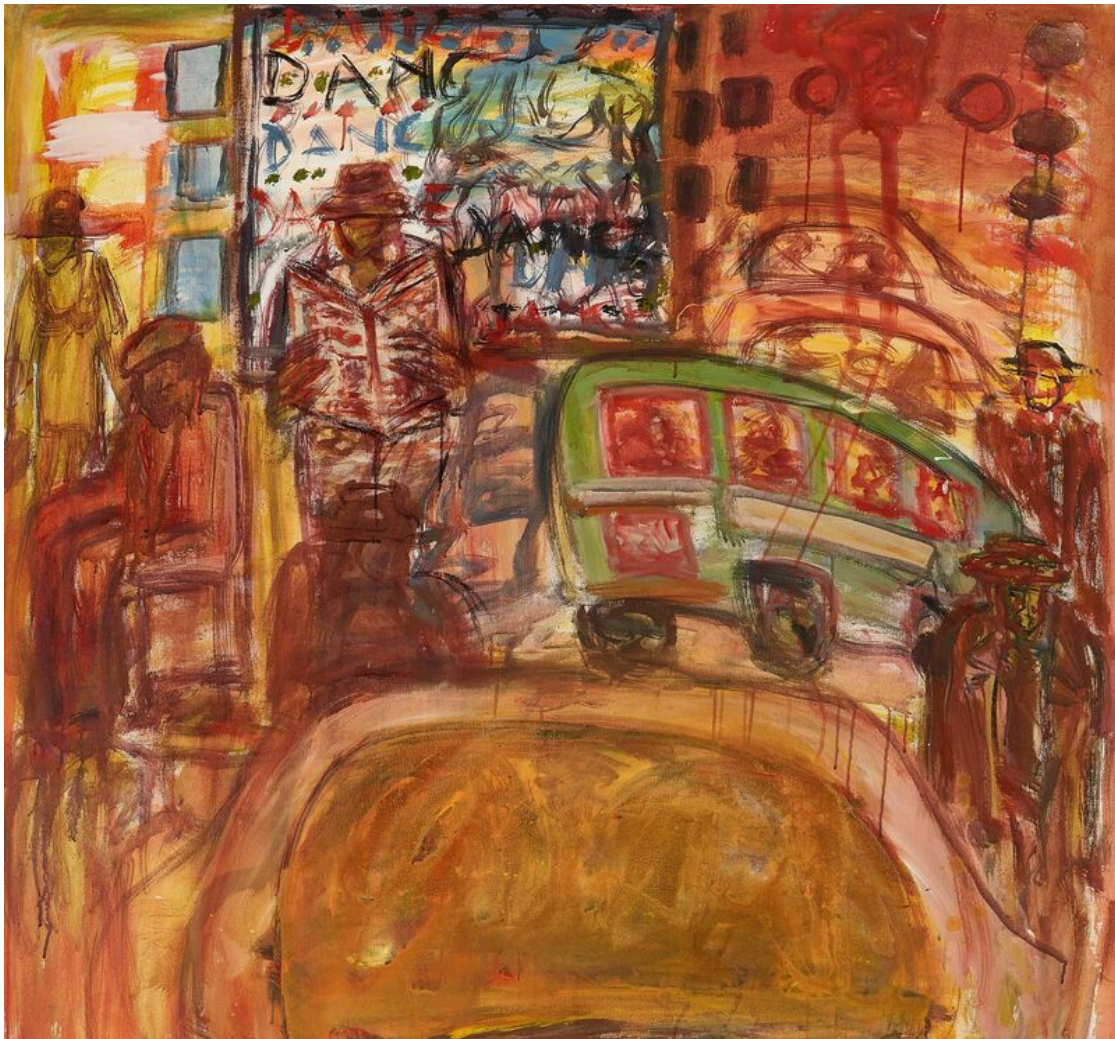


Figure 4: David Koloane, 2016, *Rhythm (2016)*, Goodman Gallery, Artsy

'Township art', which is generally typified by picturesque images of townships and rural living under apartheid, would essentially be characterised by a romanticisation of an "African lifestyle, barely touched by the rampant technologies of the west, retaining a spontaneously 'African' feel – or at least what the consumer would consider to be one", as Powell (1995:261) puts it. In this sense 'Township art' was unspoilt by the excesses and decays of western art and civilisation reflecting the broader colonial view of Sub-Saharan Africa. In the process this category also neatly ignored the reality of the space, its particular histories and the cultures of the numerous peoples who populated it well before colonisation. More specifically, because black artists including the so-called 'Township artists' such as Sam Nhlengethwa and Helen Sebidi were not allowed to be educated like their western, white counterparts, there remained a deeply inequitable chasm within the artworld at large, which had a lasting impact on specifically the work of black artists. Additionally, Koloane (2003:120) reflects that " ...it is not difficult to realise that visual

artists in South Africa operate at different levels because of their educational levels, creative potential and opportunities”. As such many black artists could not avoid the moniker of being a ‘Township artist’, given that this was nearly only the means through which they could gain access to the artworld itself - including its resources and opportunities. Koloane would not succumb to such patronizing views about his work ever, preferring instead to use his work as a means to express his personal yearning for freedom. This is as true of the works Koloane produced early on in his life as it is of his later works, with his style and subject matter and artistic approach remaining consistent throughout.

When we look at *Rhythm* (Fig. 4, 2016, Page 26) by Koloane, we are confronted with an image that exemplifies urban living. We see a busy street with people, cars, and buildings practically on top of one another. There is a banner in the background that is repeatedly telling us to dance. To the right, in contrast with this banner, there are also what seem to be red traffic lights signalling to stop. What is it that should stop? The dancing? The freedom? The expression? Koloane, in conversation with Ivor Powell, says that apartheid was:

“a politics of space more than anything. If you look at the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts they are all about space, and much of the apartheid legislation was denying people the right to move. It’s all about space...Claiming art is also reclaiming space” (Koloane 1999:261).

The mark-making in this work appears to have happened quite rapidly. It is as if, through rapid aggressive expression, where the whole body is actively involved in the process of mark-making, Koloane is showing us that he has a right to move as he likes, and in that way, he is reclaiming his space. Certainly Koloane is reclaiming a physical space around him within the studio through the aggressive unflinching movement of his physical mark-making. But more than that, in my view this becomes a synonym for a reclaiming of the urban space of Johannesburg depicted in the work. Lalu (2019: para 3) writes, “...Koloane set out to discover the crisp edges of life at a time when apartheid was transforming the urban subject into machine-men and machine-women”. It is this unwavering commitment to his own life and freedom that, apart from his exploration of human rights, political injustice, and day-to-day township life in his artistic practice, also establishes Koloane as an expressionistic artist whose work is deeply imbued with the use of rapid obsessive marks leaning towards abstraction. These obsessive marks yearn to obliterate his surroundings; and show complete indifference towards his oppressors, the inter-workings

of their power and its effects upon black bodies. It is this sense of mark-making's expressive abilities to allow for the artist to give form to their emotions that goes beyond representation, beyond what we see and towards what we can only feel. Again, we as viewers empathise with Koloane's marks, we momentarily imagine his body freely scraping scratching and moving as it makes these marks on the canvas. In that moment of visual identification we too may share in the sheer joy of the freedom of his movement. Koloane says that abstraction gave him "[a] greater sense of freedom" (Anderson 1999:161). He elaborates that he "... had moved away from the figurative, no longer restrained by retaining a certain degree of representation. I started playing with my intuitive responses and in a sense the fluidity of the acrylic medium..." (Anderson 1999:161).

What is startling is how this 'sense of freedom', this natural progression of one's own impulses, this inclination to create freely – to make a mark on a piece of paper in any way you choose, could also fall prey to someone else's prescriptions; prescriptions that would even dictate how one should make a mark according to one's race. Through Western European powers and the legacy left by apartheid and colonialism, freedom of expression for black artists would be curtailed "...by those who consider themselves authorities on future developments to describe the township art that may eventually prove distinctive or characteristic of a free society" (Koloane 1999:332). These authorities that Koloane refers to, comprising largely and ironically of a white liberal contingent, were responsible for driving a sentiment to rectify atrocities of a recent past by cultivating an overarching label over black artists referred to as 'transitional art'.

According to Pawłowska (no date:183), the term "transitional art" was originally used by anthropologist Nelson Graburn in the mid-1970s to differentiate between the so-called

...fine and high art of the Western civilization, and such primordial people as native Africans, Aborigines, Eskimos, Indians, etc. The various phenomena which Graburn included in this new class of artistic actions were often described as 'tourist art', 'souvenir art', or even 'airport art', all having somewhat pejorative meaning and a kind of negative and lower-quality connotation.

This underpins a notion of Africa being a mere tourist attraction for Europeans, and exacerbates the consequences and the still-present grip of colonialism on Africa by positioning African artists as makers of curios for a European market. What is also of concern is the notion that African art functions outside of the parameters set out by 'High Western art'. The 'Transitional art' label "...was indiscriminately applied to any work

produced specifically by Black artists” (Koloane 1999:332) and would relegate black artists to function under the auspice of a so-called ‘ethnic’ moniker. Koloane (1999:332) writes that

It is curious how readily the ‘ethnic’ concept, as promoted by the government, has conveniently become an appropriate aesthetic classification. A parallel can be drawn between the somewhat hollow ring of the legitimization of the Bantustan policy and the false echo of an ‘African’ mythology in ‘ethnic’ expression conjured by the local art fundi. The irony is that it is only black artists who constitute the indigenous population – who are insistently reminded at every possible occasion about their own identity, and how they should be conscious of it, by specialists who are descendants of settlers.

One can only imagine that these kinds of authoritative prescribing sentiments by these so-called specialists, along with the fact of living under extremely unjust and oppressive circumstances, could ultimately – through the artist’s internalisation of his situation – serve as a form of artistic inspiration and become a contributing factor to his creative and artistic process. But, as I have suggested before, it is the way in which Koloane’s struggle for freedom manifests in his work through a growing focus on abstraction and mark-making. It is as if the representational elements in his work ultimately only serve as a springboard or a starting point for an artwork, and gradually give way to the more expressive and emotive qualities of his marks. When looking at his work one senses an almost indifferent mark. It is formally indifferent, in the sense that it doesn’t adhere to any austere or accepted drawing techniques set forth by formal training. It goes where it wants to. But they are *obsessive* indifferent marks, yearning to obliterate his surroundings, and a way to show complete indifference and resistance towards his oppressors.

3.4 Resistance! The Soweto uprisings, The death of Steve Biko, and the rise of resistance art

In her book, *Resistance Art in South Africa*, South African artist Sue Williamson (1989:9) writes that, “[d]ependant on sales through art galleries to a white market, black artists tended to produce carefully non-confrontational work – scenes of a jostling township life or traditional rural vistas”. This would, however, change, as is evident with the Soweto uprising of 1976, which started when protesting black school children would meet with severe police brutality, resulting in many deaths. Williamson (1989:8) refers to this tragic incident as “jagged fault line” that cuts through recent South African history. Williamson

(1989:8) explains that, “[i]n the space of a few months, things in South Africa had been changed forever. The flames melted the oppressive ice which had frozen South Africans, black and white, into apathy for so long.” The following year, Steve Biko, who served as an inspiration to these school children, and who was also the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, would be murdered in Police custody. Peffer (2009:56) writes that:

On August 18, 1977, Steve Biko, the Black Consciousness leader who had inspired the “Class of ’76” was arrested in the Eastern Cape. He was taken to Port Elizabeth, brutally beaten in police custody, and left naked and handcuffed in a cell. During interrogation Biko received a severe blow to the head, causing brain damage and eventual loss of consciousness.

Steve Biko’s death sent shockwaves around the globe. His murder, which was initially deemed accidental, pushed South Africa’s already-volatile political climate to a greater boiling point. According to Koloane (1995:145), “The Biko event, more than any other occurrence, touched every human chord when explicit details of the incident were revealed at the inquest. It provoked international outrage”. Koloane (1995:146) expands on this, stating that “[a] creative upsurge developed around the event as different artists in the visual, literary and performing spheres produced a variety of work”. Is it possible that Steve Biko’s death was so poignantly felt specifically by artists because of his undeniable eloquence in expressing himself freely, and that he in some way paid the ultimate price for essentially voicing himself, for merely speaking the truth and ultimately for writing what he liked? Koloane, also greatly influenced by Steve Biko, and also – like Biko – adamant and vocal with regards to, not only his personal freedom but also the freedom to express himself without restraint, would later curate the South African component of an exhibition held at Whitechapel Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

Titled *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, this exhibition consisted of seven smaller exhibitions from various African countries and focused on exposing African art to a greater international audience. Under Koloane’s co-curation the work of South African artists would thematically have a strong focus on apartheid and, more specifically, the death of Steve Biko. The exhibition included the work of Ezrom Legae, Paul Stopforth, Alfred Thoba, and a work (1990, Fig 5, Page 27) by Sam Nhlengethwa portraying the death of Steve Biko. In Nhlengethwa's work titled *The death of Steve Biko*, we are confronted by an image of Biko’s dead body in a cold and monochromatic holding cell. Through the use of

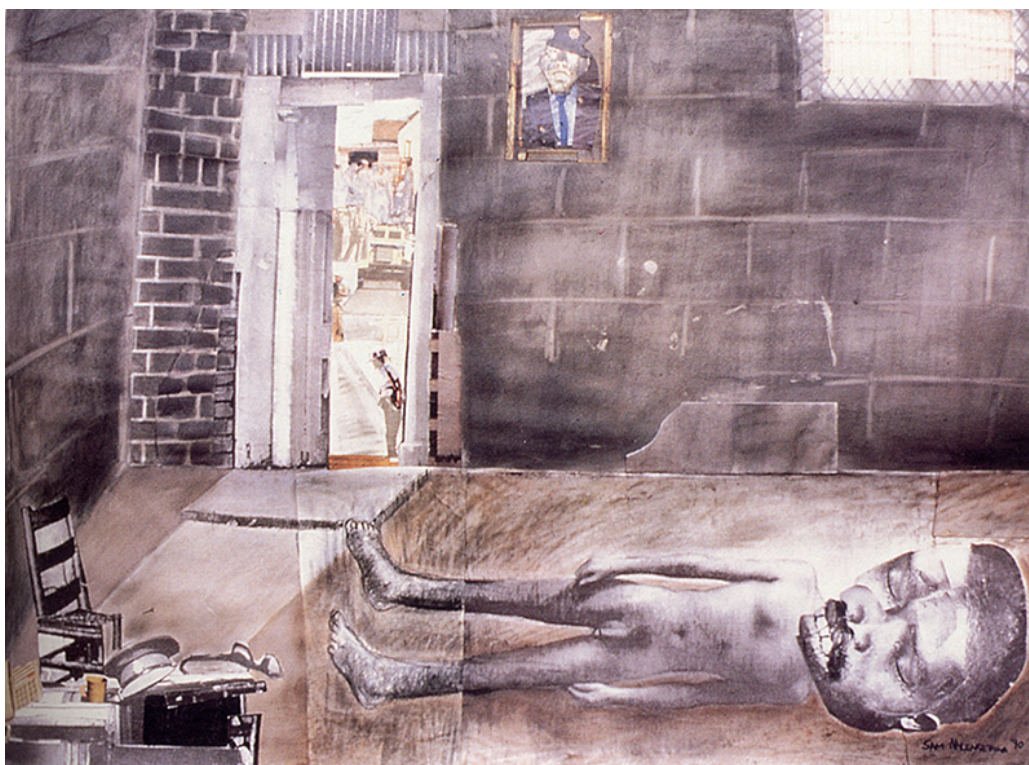


Figure 5: Sam Nhlengethwa (1990) *It left him cold - the death of Steve Biko* Collage, pencil and charcoal on paper, 69 x 93 cm 2019 9The Art Momentum)

drawing and painting on photographs, Nhlengethwa constructs a multi-perspective collage that is quite harrowing in its surrealness, especially with the use of what seems to be an oversized image of a murdered Biko's face. Oliphant says that “The multiple perspectives are more than the mere formalities of the cut, paste, draw and paint techniques of his assemblage. They are the inscriptions of torture and dismemberment” (Oliphant 1999:258).

Koloane would also have an exhibition of his own work on Steve Biko. This series of works titled ‘*The Journey* (1993, Fig. 6, Page 28) was a depiction of the final hours of Biko’s life. In this work, we can see the long-lasting effect that Biko’s death in custody had on Koloane. In contrast to Sam Nhlengethwa's collage, Koloane's ‘*The Journey*’ is a colourful series of nineteen works in acrylic and oil pastel on paper. The series starts with his arrest and leads up to the eventual killing and autopsy of Biko. Biko's journey becomes Koloane’s journey; he follows Biko and internalises these events through the use of documentation and his imagination. He places himself in Biko's position. He follows Biko from his arrest to his death, to his autopsy, as though it were his own. Through this imaginary re-enactment, Koloane commits himself to experience countless emotions, and through an expression



Figure 6: David Koloane, 1993, *The Journey 17*, 1993 (The Mail and Guardian)

of grief, anger, violence and mourning, conveys himself through mark-making to tell Biko's story, to breathe life into him, to wish him alive as it were. Through the use of bold colours and erratic unflinching aggressive marks, Koloane ultimately internalises Biko's horrendous journey finding hope therein through his art. The images of Biko's body are haunting. We are drawn into Koloane's imagination to follow with our eyes his use of line that jumps rapidly from left to right and back again, and to be repeatedly confronted with his emotions through the layering of colours. Garnsey (2019:607) writes:

The sequential images portray the torture of a black body at the hands of white bodies. The repeated figure of Biko is Christ-like, each frame becoming a station of the cross, progressing through the final days of life. This sense of martyrdom was increased by the artwork being hung in a low-lit area of the Pavilion. The imagery in *The Journey* is abstracted by the densely coloured layers of oil pastel. This style increases the tension; the artwork becomes more disturbing the more it is looked at.

Of course Koloane's *The Journey* becomes more than just his own expression and internal dealings with the subject of Biko's murder. *The Journey* becomes our journey as well. Koloane invites us to witness this tragedy with him and more than that, it serves as a

testament to our country's woeful heritage. But there is also something else that takes place. Apart from the fact that Koloane is giving us an imaginary representation of Biko's death, we are also witnessing an artist's emotional expression through the use of mark-making. We are witnessing our capacity to express ourselves, through a mark. We are witnessing our ability to convey our emotions of grief, or joy, and as a viewer, to have the ability to empathise with the artist – to be touched and to be moved beyond the here and now. Through Biko's death many other artists such as David Koloane would find the courage to continue to strive for freedom.

3.5 Freedom and mark-making: Post-apartheid South Africa

The Bag Factory artist studios were co-founded in 1991 by Koloane, Laura Burnett, and British Arts patron and philanthropist, Robert Loder. (Cotter 2019: par 14), during a period of political negotiations that would end apartheid in South Africa. It was, in this sense, launched in anticipation of the inevitable democratic freedom of all South African citizens. According to Cotter (2019: par 14), "It was housed in an old manufacturing warehouse situated between white and black neighbourhoods in Johannesburg, making possible a racial mix that apartheid laws would have otherwise prevented. It was one of the first visual-art studio programs in Africa." The first time that black and white artists could be equal partners would be at The Bag Factory. This would be the first time in South Africa's history that black artists would have the power to own, administrate and manage an art space according to their needs and requirements and not merely function as participants and /or pupils. The space provided workshop areas, artist studios and a gallery where artists and curators could host exhibitions. By way of a visiting artists programme (established as part of the Triangle Arts Trust ¹) the Bag Factory would also make space for artists from all over the world to come work and live in South Africa as part of a residency programme. The centre still operates today as a space where artists of all races may freely create and make whatever works suit them best ranging from painting, performance, sculpture to new media arts. Notable alumni today include William Kentridge, Sam Nhlengethwa, Pat Mautloa, Penny Siopis, Helen Sebidi and many others.

¹The Triangle Arts Trust, now known as The Triangle Network was founded by artist Sir Anthony Caro and collector and philanthropist Robert Loder "...to make work informed by new ideas, materials and media, and influenced by each other's practice and the context of the workshop". (Antoniolli & Kindersley, 2017:par 1)

Black artists would no longer be relegated to a peripheral position in the greater artistic community. This makes me think of the very specific imagery of dogs that Koloane use quite extensively in his works such as the *Mgodoyi* series, and the *Street dogs* series.

Throughout these selected works of Koloane, we see stray dogs performing a variety of actions such as , roaming about, fighting, lying and scavenging for food. It is as if these dogs are pushed out of society and discarded. Accordingly they have become a wild pack with rules and laws unto themselves. These street dogs are now dangerous to the very (human) society within which they live. I consider these works metaphorically in relation to the dehumanising struggle that Koloane, and all black people in general, had to endure under apartheid. Koloane (in Anderson, 1999:120) says that

If you go to any township, you will always find stray dogs. They are a characteristic of the township in that they are a community unto themselves and that they have a territorial monopoly over certain areas, and also the fact that they don't belong to anybody and their lives are just that. I mean they stand to be abused by the next person who walks by, who can just kick them for no reason at all or run them over with a car the next minute on the street.



Figure 7: David Koloane, 1993, *Scavengers III*, Goodman Gallery, Artsy

There is one work in particular that I would like to focus on titled *The Scavengers III* (1993, Fig. 7, Page 30), which also forms part of a series called *The Scavengers*. This work can

at first sight be understood as a work that is purely abstract in its formal execution. It is only upon closer inspection that one notices – especially towards the left of the work – imagery of dogs, and also what seems to be a car. In its essence, it is a highly expressive work, produced through the use of obsessive mark-making and layering. This is indeed the hallmark of Koloane's technique. I would argue that the visual significance of Koloane's expressive mark-making dominates any possible suggestions of political or historical context in the work. The mark is the primary subject matter in other words. These possible representational elements and their narratives dissolve into Koloane's fierce and aggressive use of mark-making on the material surface. The mark becomes an expression of his own freedom and a revolt against the forces that curtail this freedom. The mark is violent in itself – a violent response against being curtailed, dehumanized, discarded and forgotten; a violent need to be free.

This need to express oneself freely is synonymous with the act of art-making. Especially in the case of expressive mark-making. Mark-making in its essence is not something that adheres to rules. German post-impressionist/expressionist painter Emil Nolde (1867-1953)? says of his own work that:

“I was no longer satisfied with the way I drew and painted during the last few years, imitating nature and creating form all done preferably with the first stroke, the first brushful of paint. I rubbed and scratched the paper until I tore holes in it, trying to reach something else, something more profound, to grasp the very essence of things. The techniques of Impressionism suggested to me only a means, but no satisfactory end. Conscientious and exact imitation of nature does not create a work of art”.

In *Saxophonists* (2010, Fig. 8, Page 32) we can also see how Koloane scratches the paper as Nolde did. We can see that Koloane is literally scratching through the surface as though it is a border that needs to be obliterated. This freedom to make a mark in any way that we like, is not something for someone else to decide. It is something inherent in us as a species regardless of our race or any political doctrine. It is unfortunate how the Thupelo workshops were received by American critics. Fieke Ainslie talks about Bill Ainslie's anger regarding this matter. According to her Bill said that “...one doesn't make any artist do what you want, but every artist must come into contact with all sorts of things, and besides, African art has always been abstracted. That's where it comes from” (Anderson 1999:50). In this regard Bowles (2001:39) also notes that “...whiteness provides the models by which the Western subject judges culture. As a norm, whiteness passes unremarked,



Figure 8: David Koloane, 2010, *Saxophonists*, Standard Bank Gallery, Medium

perpetuating the canonical conventions and traditions that sustain its privilege...” He goes on to say that “...Whiteness has acquired the power to determine the effect -and the limits- of that discourse. If whiteness is to be denaturalized, and its hegemony undermined, artists and art historians must take responsibility for the racial desires concealed within the history of art as it has traditionally been written”(ibid)

The following chapter will have more of an introspective and personal nature, as I will be discussing meaning, materiality, and the use of mark-making in my own work. As with the start of this Chapter’s discussion on Koloane’s education, I will begin by giving a background to my own education. On the surface, there is nothing in my orthodox education and even in my life as a white South African that should identify with David Koloane’s work. However I can see the work and, I can appreciate the marks because I can see them for what they are beyond the subject matter they depict. I too am infuriated by the sheer force of their significance, as a human and as an artist who shares a deep need to be free from all forces that would seek to govern the need to express ourselves. Apart from mark-making, It is also through this study that I have come to serious revelations and empathy, for the life and work of David Koloane and many others who had to suffer the indignity of being judged, pigeonholed and discriminated against solely because of their race. In this way, Koloane’s work has allowed me to reconsider my own life and work too.

CHAPTER FOUR: DYLAN GRAHAM: PROCESSES, MATERIALITY, AND MEANING IN MARK-MAKING

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to discuss how mark-making forms a vital aspect of my work. Through an overview of my early childhood, my school education, my student years, through to my current occupation as an artist, I will discuss how mark-making is foundational to my work. I will specifically look at the following three artworks: *Worlds Apart* (2017), *No* (2019), and *Malleus Maleficarum* (2022), by paying attention to the relation between subject matter and mark-making. I have chosen these works specifically to explore and categorise a variety of possible meanings and processes inherent in the very material and formal manner through which I create artworks. In *Worlds Apart*, I will discuss my mark-making methods and techniques, especially the 'handprint motif' which is also often present in examples of Palaeolithic art. In the self-portrait titled *No*, I will discuss how aimlessness and frustration with the act of painting and the painting itself inevitably also lead to certain eventualities and conclusions. This motif now regularly features in my artworks, signalling at once a connection with the very history of mark-making while often functioning like the ghostly trace of an otherwise invisible body. In the final work that I will be discussing, titled *Malleus Maleficarum*, I will focus on a variety of issues which will include discussions ranging from certain practical elements such as working with colour and reworking older works, to issues that involve the human condition, our rights as human beings, and especially (in this case) the rights of women. Additionally, I will also be looking at some of my private notebook sketches and doodles in order to give context to how I formulate certain ideas through drawing and observation. While the writing in this chapter is autobiographical, I will be referring to the writings of Elkins (1999), Shiff (1978), and Greenberg (1961; 1971) in order to supply definitions.

I have been a practicing artist for the last twenty-five years, and I predominantly work in oil paint and drawing. I experience the act of painting as a material, tactile process through which I externalise my own feelings, thoughts, and experiences onto two-dimensional surfaces such as canvas or paper. I use marks – both painterly and otherwise (hand prints, drawing, and so on) – in conjunction with subject matter such as portraits and household items including books, plants or plant pots, and even brooms. Although my work seems predominantly representational and figurative at first, abstract and philosophical ideas surrounding the application of marks have always been central to my art-making. I will

argue that the nature of art and mark-making functions very much like a soliloquy, or perhaps a dialogue between the artist and the surface. If this is so, it is because I spend long hours alone working in the studio. It is not simply that it is a private matter that has no relevance to the viewer or the public. Rather, I feel driven to make sense of the world this way, to struggle with marks, the pencil, the paint, the canvas and the forms that emerge through this slow process. Due to this monologic-like nature of mark-making, I would thus argue that marks function as a tool that is underpinned by the inherent need to give form to the world as we experience it, both internally and by way of external forces.

I will argue that despite the fact that my own context and culture are different to that of other artists, in this case, the context and culture of David Koloane, I still deeply resonate with their use of mark-making and the more formal and material aspects of their work, regardless of their subject matter. Personally, I find that marks can communicate more than just the specificity of their context, also cutting to a deeper question about our collective need to express ourselves creatively and freely as humans. Marks are beautiful and meaningful in their very materiality and their formal aspects. Here I will ask and seek to answer the following questions regarding the affective quality of marks: Is it their capacity to make us experience emotions first and foremost that leads to their broader significance? Is it perhaps the optical quality of mark-making as texture that generates empathy on the part of the viewer, reminding us of certain physical bodily experiences, for example? Is it the sheer expressive force of mark-making as a means to internalise human emotion onto an external canvas that binds all of us – artists and viewers – into a collective whole when it comes to our seeming universal capacity to respond to them?

4.2 The mis-education of Dylan Graham

I was born in Pretoria on the 16th of September 1977, a mere four days after the death of Steve Biko. Of course, these two days have no direct correlation, but today, I look at my history as a white Afrikaans artist born under apartheid with serious reservations. For one thing, I can now look back at my early school years and education and understand the significance of the colonial, political environment in which I grew up. I was an unknowing child, growing up in a country in the throes of serious political upheaval, and it is in retrospect that I understand my privileged background and more specifically the education I received, firstly as a child, and then later as a tertiary student. For example, to my utter shame I never knew that Steve Biko died on 12th September 1977 until I embarked on this study! Of course, one may argue that it is not my history and not my place as a white male

South African to know these details. But I would say that it is exactly because I am the product of a biased apartheid education that I must know it, embrace it and consider its close relationship to my life as a human and an artist living and working in South Africa today.

I grew up in a middle-class, albeit secular and slightly bohemian, white, Afrikaans household. I have been drawing and painting since I can remember. My parents encouraged this, seeing that they both studied art and my father, a restaurant owner, also painted in his spare time. I started my schooling at Oost-Eind primary school in Sunnyside, Pretoria in 1984. It was an Afrikaans school, and like many Afrikaans schools, it followed a staunch Christian doctrine. We were warned about everything from drugs and pop music to child abduction by the enemies of our nation, our culture and indeed our way of life – from Satanists to communists. According to Frankfurter (2003:108), “Rumors and alleged memories of Satanic cult activity swept through the US and UK during the 1980s and 1990s, confounding scholars of religion, as well as jurists and psychologists, with their combination of tantalizing ritual scenes and dubious forensic evidence”. These rumours soon reached South African shores and spread like wildfire too: as children we all spoke about rituals and our church leaders and teachers made a point of warning us against any such activities. In terms of communism, we were warned as children, that ‘The Communists’ were going to confiscate our bibles and force us to denounce God. These were strange times and, in hindsight, I feel these are most certainly very strange things to tell children without verifying the facts. In reality, according to St. Jorre (1977:53-54), the South African politicians of those years identified

...the country's principal enemy as the forces of international communism. Historically, the authorities have actually been preoccupied more with the “black threat” (in Afrikaans, the *swart gevaar*) in the towns and in the countryside than with the “Red menace” of the remote, almost mythical commissar. But in combating the first, they have invariably blamed the second, claiming to see the hand of Moscow behind every act of opposition carried out by the black man.

I think the fear of these teachers was intensified due to the school being nestled in the centre of a populous urban area. It felt to me at the time as though the school was somehow involved in an ongoing battle with the realities of a world that lay just outside its borders. Of course, Sunnyside was quite possibly one of the most culturally diverse areas in Pretoria at the time – a stark contrast to the all-white Afrikaans constituency of the

school. Sunnyside was also filled with restaurants, movie theatres, nightclubs and a variety of dubious businesses that seemed to mysteriously come to life only at night. I was a naïve child and all too young to understand that most of these teachers, along with many other Afrikaans-speaking people, were still clinging to what might have been the dissolving vestiges of Afrikaner nationalism and its once-supposed glorious past and future. According to South African History Online (Grundlingh 2019: par 21):

A marked feature of the way in which Afrikaner nationalism was constructed was the emphasis placed on history. The past was that of the Great Trek, the Day of the Covenant, the Anglo-Boer War, the concentration camps during that war, and other events of importance to the Afrikaners. These events were cast in near-religious terms, with Afrikaners as God's chosen people, destined to bring civilization and Christianity to the southern tip of Africa.

The year before I went to school, there was a car bomb attack very nearby, which in retrospect, I think would certainly also have contributed to a prevailing sense of trepidation at school. According to SAHO (2016: par 1), the Church Street bombing (1983) targeting Air Force headquarters was one of "South Africa's deadliest terror attacks" attributed to Umkhonto we Sizwe, which was the armed wing of the African National Congress. Furthermore,

[i] The bombing resulted in the death of 19 people as well as over one hundred injuries. [ii] The bombing took the lives of 17 men and 2 women, of which 9 were White and 7 were Black. [iii] The bomb proved successful in its objective to cause the most harm as its detonation time was 16h30 in the afternoon, [iv] a peak rush-hour for the area. MK forces participated in a range of various systematic bombings [v] across South Africa during the years following the 1938 Church Street bombing. The African National Congress claimed responsibility for the bombing under the leadership of Oliver Tambo (SAHO, 2016: par 1).

As an unknowing child from around six years old, apartheid politics was generally not a topic of discussion. At the time though, I wondered about certain things. For example, I often wondered why black people had their own transportation system. Why did black people work for white people and never the other way around? Why did black people take orders from white people? Why were black people poorer than us? The school, the church and our elders also constantly made me aware and fearful of a future that included compulsory military conscription after school. South African Military conscription came about under the Defence Amendment Bill, which was passed in 1967 (SAHO, 2020: par 1).

To elaborate,

Conscription was instituted in South Africa in the form of 9 months of service for all white males between the ages of 17 and 65 years old. Conscripts became members of the South African Defence Force (SADF), or the South African Police (SAP). They were used to enforce the government's stance against liberation movements, anti-apartheid activists and the 'communist threat' (SAHO 2020: par 1).

I was too young to understand the reasoning behind such laws. Practices such as reciting the 'Onse Vader' (the Afrikaans version of 'The Lord's Prayer') every Monday morning, the routine of daily prayer, corporal punishment and the raising of the (old) South African flag seemed to shape my entire education as a child. That said, I was also constantly reprimanded for being insubordinate. I was considered insubordinate for merely voicing my own opinion when these seemingly normal daily experiences were so strange to me. In retrospect, I think my time at school was the very antithesis of my life at home.

My mother, being a free-spirited atheist, instilled in me a sense of free will. It was always important to her that I made up my own mind. I gather, through discussions we had, that this could be as a result of her revolt against her own Christian upbringing as a child. This upbringing historically stemmed from a certain Calvinist Christian doctrine. According to Moir (2013), Calvinism is "A Protestant Christian theological system constructed by religious reformer John Calvin (Jean Cauvin, 1509-64)". He goes on to describe this 'theological system' as something that "...presents a comprehensive view of how human life should be properly ordered, personally, socially, ecclesially and politically, according to the sovereign will of God." Du Toit (1985:209) adds that: "...seventeenth-century Calvinism" which the Afrikaner founding fathers derived from their countries of origin, became fixed in the isolated frontier conditions of *trekboer* society and survived for generations in the form of a kind of "primitive Calvinism." This Christian Calvinistic approach to life was perhaps something I became aware of when I spoke to friends or other school children, but religion was just not something that either of my parents considered important enough to discuss with me in any detail.

My father's passionate nature inspired me greatly. He was a chef in his own restaurant, an artist, a lover of music. He drove a red convertible sports car. To my mind, he did exactly as he pleased. He took me to cinemas and museums regularly. We often went to the Pretoria Art Museum together. I remember seeing works by Jacobus Pierneef, Judith

Mason, and John Meyer. I have mentioned before, that as a restaurateur, my father painted in his spare time. I think the case is really that he is, in essence, a painter, who earned his living by running a restaurant which was also something he was passionate about. This left an indelible mark on my young mind: one could do as one pleased, enjoy life and not suffer needlessly. A number of rude awakenings lay in store for me, but I still think people have the right to be free to be happy, to discover meaning for themselves and to express themselves however they feel best encapsulates their search for and discovery of meaning in life, as long as they do not harm others.

There were practically no art classes in my primary school. I remember that it was a subject that they would have one year and then for some reason, not the next year. Thinking back, it did not really bother me that much, seeing as I spent most of my time drawing anyway. Throughout this time, I met friends who also had a keen interest in drawing. We would draw everything we saw on television and in movie theatres – everything that we were warned about. I remember drawing cityscapes – New York or something that resembled it; places that we kept seeing on television and in films. These urban scenes were filled with superheroes both real and imagined all jumping and flying around. To me, drawing was an escape, a means through which I could create my own reality. It was an escape to a place where people could do as they pleased. Naturally, these drawings were always of a world outside the rigid confines of my school.

After primary school, I went to Pro Arte High School, a school for the arts. This was a school where, at a very young age, you could focus on your specific avenue of artistic expression such as art, ballet, drama, or music. It was a small school with a limited student intake. Pro Arte was different to the other high schools in the sense that it acknowledged its students as individuals and focused on cultivating, through artistic practice and the learning thereof, a broader view of the world that we live in, as opposed to the general Afrikaans Christian school, which I felt was focused on indoctrinating young people to become – simply-put – ‘good Christian Afrikaners’. In hindsight, I am fully aware that the ideals of this art school, with specific regard to its artistic subjects, were essentially based on the premise of Western European culture. Although I found great joy in making art extensively on a daily basis, especially in painting class under the tuition of Dr Diek Grobler, I was an extremely disorganised child. I had a problem with following the given art projects and would literally just do as I pleased. I think what might have been a

contributing factor to this behaviour was the fact that in primary school, art was an escape; it was my own personal expression, whereas at Pro Arte, it was an official subject with clear rules. Of course, I thought I had much better things to do than to follow these rules. After my first year at Pro Arte, I changed subjects from Art to Ballet. I made very impulsive decisions during high school that I can ascribe to simply being a teenager. It was also at this time that South Africa had its first democratic election in 1994. Szeftel (1994:457) writes that “[t]he first democratic elections in the country’s history successfully completed the transition from the racist apartheid state to one based on universal human rights and common political citizenship”.

My art education continued when I left school and went to university. At that stage, I was very eager to study art at university as I wished to become a professional artist. I studied art from 1996 to 2000 at Pretoria Technikon, now known as Tshwane University of Technology. My main focus was on painting and drawing. On a practical level, we focused extensively on formal and more conventional European methods and techniques in painting and drawing. In the case of drawing, this included studying the use of perspective and foreshortening, figure drawing, anatomy of the human figure, and expressive mark-making. In painting, especially in my first year, we dealt with a variety of aspects, from colour theory and composition to application methods such as scumbling, glazing, and dry brush. Apart from learning all these methods and techniques through the constant making of art, the way in which we were instructed encouraged us and was geared to benefit individualistic approaches to self-expression, exploration, and discovery. The theory syllabus was entrenched in the greater canon of European/western art, which incorporated everything from the Renaissance to Modernist western art and Post-modernist discourses. Evidently, it was decidedly Eurocentric in approach. Burney (2012:143) writes that “Eurocentrism represents an inherent belief in the pre-eminence of European culture, knowledge, and values.” Thinking back, I recall theory modules on African tribal trance dancing, but essentially, the reality was that I was a South African art student being educated in European concerns regarding art, art theory, and its particular modes of expression such as sculpture, painting, and installation. I specifically remember one of the few black students (an established sculptor) being critiqued for making traditional African wooden sculptures in this so-called contemporary art institution. I do not think that it is necessary to criticise this specific lecturer or institution, or any other art institution now, but rather to call for awareness and consideration that our understanding of art was and still is largely dominated by western, Eurocentric art criticism and practices. The slow but

persistent integration of black students into formal education institutions calls for a more inclusive debate around art, and especially in the case of South Africa, an African country. This debate ought to be Afrocentric, or at the very least not dominated by overtly European ideals. I think it is worth mentioning that I never once had a black art teacher or lecturer. Hoskins (1992:247) says that “Afrocentrism presents and deals with an authentic and specific culture and history – a cultural history that did not begin in Father Europe but a human/world history that began in Mother Africa”. Today it makes sense to me on so many levels to focus on my own context, here in South Africa, in Africa, as being more important to my art than that of Europe or anywhere else.

It is important for me to add that at the time of my undergraduate university education, I was less concerned and also less aware of these issues, and that my recent revelations do not in any way seek to merely discredit an immeasurable and invaluable experience and highlight in my life. Most of my lecturers were exceptionally passionate and very committed to their teaching and their students, and I have very fond memories of this time. I remember, as a second year student, painting a self-portrait. I was planning on adding something on the distant horizon of the painting – something that would give this self-portrait ‘meaning’. I discussed it with my painting lecturer Kevin Roberts (1965 - 2009). His response was simple: ‘Why add meaning?’ He explained to me that by insisting on certain representational imagery to convey or to force some kind of narrative, I might inadvertently take meaning away and that the process or action of painting this self-portrait, or this thing, already carried some form of meaning. This continues to stick with me. Even though I always enjoyed the process, the realisation that my observations, my enquiries, and my expressions carried weight, and that I wasn't under any obligation to see my art as a vehicle to explain myself or what I do, lifted mountains from my shoulders. The formalist critic, Clement Greenberg who, according to Witcombe (2000: para 23), “...saw Modernism as having achieved a self-referential autonomy...” and “...governed not by human impulse so much as by the mysterious internal laws of stylistic development” states that:

It is granted that a recognizable image will add conceptual meaning to a picture, but the fusion of conceptual with aesthetic meaning does not affect quality. That a picture gives things to identify, as well as a complex of shapes and colors to behold, does not mean necessarily that it gives us more as art. More and less in art do not depend on how many varieties of significance are present, but on the intensity and depth of such significances, be they few or many, as are present. And we cannot tell, before the event – before the experience of it – whether the

addition or subtraction of conceptual meaning, or of any other given factor, will increase or diminish the aesthetic meaning of a work of art.

In this way painting became the means through which to liberate and express myself from the sheer weight of predetermined meanings, structures and experiences. To enquire and to understand my surroundings, I wanted to tell my own story through the making of the artwork. Inadvertently, I started making art because I wanted to be free, but what I realise in hindsight is that I have always been, and I am still, being held down and largely influenced by western European doctrine. Today I am acutely aware of the fact that certain narratives and idealisations of outcomes and end products always play a part in my work. Regardless of the presence or absence of recognisable imagery, idealised outcomes and quality of work are domineering factors not only in my work, but in the greater oeuvre of European art and art criticism. Greenberg elaborates, stating that

Art is a matter strictly of experience, a lot of principles, and what counts first and last in art is quality; all other things are secondary. No one has yet been able to demonstrate that the representational as such either adds or takes away from the merit of a picture or statue. The presence or absence of a recognisable image has no more to do with value in painting or sculpture than the presence or absence of libretto has to do with value in music. Taken by itself, no single one of its parts or aspects decides the quality of the work of art as a whole. In painting and sculpture this holds just as true for the aspect of representation as it does for those of scale, colour, paint quality, design, etc., etc.

Greenberg (1971:174) also says that “Art is, art gets experienced, for its own sake, which is what Modernism recognised in identifying aesthetic value as an ultimate value. But this doesn't mean that art or the aesthetic is a *supreme* value or end of life”. However, in a sense, art did become a ‘supreme’ value to me. I was labouring over my work to the point of burnout. Everything was quantifiable by laying my brush or pencil on a surface. It was how I communicated, asked questions, and expressed myself. I would argue that it is still like this at times, but I have learned how to deal with it and also to be able to view the process more objectively and with more patience – to not only see it as Greenberg mentions, the ‘end of life’, but also to simply enjoy it. Art is a human phenomenon that we can benefit from as opposed to a constant self-absorbing exercise that often also leads to self-deprecation, self-idealisation or some clear truth, whether in art or in life. Art is never beholden to some truth that we can easily discern, share or give form. We share it as human beings. That said, I do have to stress that what I have just said sounds like a wonderful idea, but it is not always possible. Painting for me remains a solitary pursuit.

Elkins (1999:147) says that "...[p]ainting is born in a smelly studio, where the painter works in isolation, for hours and even years on end". He goes on to say that "...the act of painting is a kind of insanity. It may seem unfashionable to say so, because postmodern doctrine has given up on the old notion that artists are melancholic geniuses prone to manic depression and beyond the reach of ordinary common sense" (Elkins, 1999:147).

Regardless of an artwork's so-called 'quality' or subjective deductions by viewers or myself, I have found that having the ability to express myself through the making of art is essential to my contentment, even if it is in isolation; it is where I find refuge. At the heart of this making of art lies the act of mark-making. I have committed myself to a highly subjective form of art-making in which I sometimes destroy laboured imagery just because I feel like it. It is in this sense that I also arrive at very subjective deductions and conclusions. Although these conclusions that I arrive at make sense to me, they become exceptionally complex and, in some cases, virtually impossible to explain by means of verbal or written language. The explanation is simply found in the results of the painting, for example, in the surprise of a variety of colours working beautifully together. Shiff (1978:111) says that

Visual artists commonly maintain that they cannot explain the meaning of their own art in words; this is not so much a claim that the visual experience cannot be translated into a verbal mode but that verbalization is usually not poetry, and words with their fixed dictionary definitions belong to the public domain, while the visual image must always retain its private mystery. This visual image, the argument goes, was born in the intensity of individual experience and it directs its speech confidentially to each individual who encounters it. The painter or sculptor often admonishes the critic to 'let the work speak for itself'.

Painting can be quite self-absorbing and at times also quite isolating. Towards the end of my studies, I was quite overwhelmed. I felt weighed down by my absorption and the making of paintings and art in general. I was tired of art criticism, philosophy, and the art world. I had a nagging urge to travel. I wanted to go abroad. I wanted to escape the confines of 'Dylan the artist'. I went to London to experience something completely unrelated. A working holiday visa allowed me to do all kinds of menial work in order for me to earn money to travel to the rest of Europe. I wanted to disengage from the greater art discourse that I had been dealing with as an art student. At the same time though I wanted to see the art I had been learning about all these years. I had an urge to start right at the bottom. I wanted to work and labour as part of a greater world and to understand my place

therein with more clarity. Certainly, I also wanted to escape the idea of myself as being a poor floundering artist!

In London, I ended up doing a variety of jobs to survive. These jobs, which ranged from cleaning toilets to packing warehouses and working as a labourer on construction sites, kept me busy and understandably there was no time to make art. I had gone from the comfort of being an art student lost in his own world, to someone who laboured long hours in mindless work for minimal wages. I enjoyed this new life. Nothing extraordinary was expected of me. I was free in a different way. I did miss making art though. I found my outlet through my notebooks. These notebooks served a diary-like purpose in that I just scribbled any marks or visual observations in them. This mark-making became therapeutic in the sense that I understood its simplicity and it was a way for me to make sense of my numerous daily experiences. Also, it was mine; the notebook and its contents had nothing to do with a greater art context and art world. It was through these private scribbles and observations that I came to certain realisations – things that I had forgotten along the way. This includes the realisation that I had been so busy exploring and exposing myself as an art student, that I had taken for granted the very nature and capacity of mark-making. I also forgot the intrinsic value of mark-making as a human impulse, as opposed to an easily assumed and overlooked action for the greater benefit of an art world of exhibitions, originality and so forth. I understood the notebooks as a platform that no one would necessarily see. The notebooks didn't serve anybody except myself. I could do as I pleased; I could make marks regardless of their artistic/formal trappings. Dexter (2006:06) explains that:

“Drawing has a primal and elemental character: it enjoys a mythic status as the earliest and most immediate form of image making. The idea and execution of drawing has remained unchanged for thousands of years – as such it is an activity that connects us directly in an unbroken line with the first human who ever sketched in dirt or scratched on the wall of a cave”.

It is through this insight that I now understand that even the most complex and laboured works that I produce are for nothing if not the very simplistic act of mark-making.

In the section that follows, I discuss some of my artworks. I will start with a notebook drawing before I get to the paintings in order to explain some basic differences between the two avenues of creation. My reasoning behind this is largely to explain how drawing's directness is more closely linked to the impulse of mark-making when we compare it to the

more laborious undertakings associated with layered painting, for example. Dexter (2006:06) elaborates:

The Primal qualities of drawing are also conjured through the simplicity and purity of the blank sheet of paper, while the act of drawing itself betokens honesty and transparency – all the marks and tracks, whether deliberate or not, are there for all to see in perpetuity. Any erasures or attempts to change the line mid-flow are obvious – drawing is a form that wears its mistakes and errors on its sleeve. Oil painting, by contrast, is an art of accretion and concealment. It is possible to paint an entirely different painting on top of another. Drawing is improvisatory and always in motion, in the sense that it can proceed ad infinitum without closure or completion, continually part of a process that is never-ending.

On the following page, we see a variety of quick little sketches. In the upper left corner is a drawing that is suggestive of a torso. To the right of this image, in the upper middle of the page, there is a portrait. Below this portrait we see two feet; one with a high heel shoe on and the other bare. Below these images, on the lower half of the page, the drawing grows denser with mark-making. There are a number of easily discernible images in this area, such as a peering eye and a chair, but compared to the upper part of the drawing, the images seem to overlap and to intertwine with one another to form a denser conglomerate of imagery. These drawings generally start with some observations of random things around me. From time to time, they start in an abstract manner where I just make random marks. What I specifically remember about this one is that it was done in a figure-drawing session, although the foot with the high heel shoe was drawn from my imagination. In the case of these drawings, I like to go wherever my mind goes. I very rarely write on my drawings, but I don't stop the urge when it comes, as can be seen in the lower right-hand corner, which contains the words "against my will". There is a Bob Dylan song titled 'Not dark yet' that contains those lyrics. I can imagine that it was probably playing while I was making this drawing. In a sense, these random arbitrary marks originate from various influences and observations. I synthesise these ambiguous influences onto a surface in an automatic way. I like to think of these drawings as a documentation of the specific time they were created – documents of observations intertwined with whatever it is that I am feeling at the moment of their creation.



Figure 9: Dylan Graham, Notebook Page, Ink on paper, 2022, Photo Credit: Dylan Graham

4.4 'Malleus Maleficarum'

When I start a painting, I rarely have a clear idea of what I am doing. From time to time, I might have a general idea of what image the work might have to eventually become, such as in the case of still-lives or works based on an actual model (a figure). But generally, I start my paintings much like I do my notebook sketches: in an impulsive way with no



Figure 10: Dylan Graham, *Malleus Maleficarum*, Oil on linen, 2022, Photo Credit: Dylan Graham

specific intent other than expressing myself. I simply begin with a mark, and then another, until slowly but surely, enough of a visual presence on the canvas begins to form to suggest the beginnings of an actual image. This is exactly how the artwork *Malleus Maleficarum* (2022, Fig.10, Page 46) shown below began.

This artwork features a female figure standing in a surreal imaginary landscape – one that is filled with a variety of marks and hands. These marks were made by various means, from actual handprints, to brushes, scratchings with a palette knife or a stick found in my studio, to stencilling with masking tape. The pink flesh tints of the figure are contrasted with the blues and teals of the background. It is as though the figure is merging with, or emerging from, the blue background. There are two handprints on either side of the figure's head. Towards the lower end, the painting sinks into a deep ominous red. Here too it seems as though the figure is either emerging from or submerging into the reddish colour.

The eyes of the female figure are depicted as if closed or resting. Her arms and hands seem to be held in various positions simultaneously: at her side, one hand holding the other by the wrist, another in a semi-raised position as if disappearing into the background. She is holding a figure that appears to be a baby or, rather, a somewhat misshapen doll of some kind. The infant/doll appears to be sleeping or resting. There is also an eye peering through the fingers of the handprint to the left. There is a hand touching the figure. It appears as though this hand is also reaching towards the hand holding the baby. What does it mean or seem to mean if taking only the figurative, visual content of the work into consideration?

What I like about working on new surfaces such as an empty canvas or page is that you can start with anything that comes to mind, from an arbitrary colour down to a very considered colour or mark. You can use anything, from quick expressive marks, to a slow application of washes and glazes. There are no rules. This is also generally how I begin any painting, regardless of what I have in mind. That said, I try with every painting to break my habits and not simply reiterate a formula. It is only when the painting starts to reveal itself as something very specific that I systematically start to venture into laborious undertakings, and even then, I try to harness, through mark-making, some kind of impulsive attitude towards the work and its visual subject matter. Today I feel that an image can easily become convoluted with aims and idealisations of perfection (this must look like a figure, a cloth, or a hand, for example). Although I must also add, more so with painting than drawing, that apart from the expressive qualities of mark-making, there is also something joyous in the fact that the work eventually allows for decision-making, such as in what to conceal, what to reveal, and what colour to use.



Figure 11: Claude Graham, Untitled abandoned painting, Oil on linen, 2019, Photo Credit: Clade Graham

Malleus Maleficarum, on the other hand, was painted over an existing painting that my father painted and discarded (Fig. 11, Page 48). When I started working on this painting, it was important for me to keep some of the elements left behind in my father's work. The hand was a key fixture that I settled on. I decided to change the work from a landscape format to a portrait format. At the time, numerous things affected me. I had just come back from New York where I was exposed to extreme amounts of art. Also, my friend and then supervisor Ingrid Stevens (1952 - 2019) had just gone in for major heart surgery. I think on some level my concern for her well-being along with the experience of New York triggered a couple of emotions that I expressed on this specific canvas that my father gave to me. The female figure in the painting became the female in essence, and to a large degree, the painting is centred around the notion of suffering and to an extent, female body politics. The portrait is a clumsy attempt to embody her suffering by way of an artwork. The title, *Malleus Maleficarum*, is also the title of a well-known treatise "...dealing with the problem of what to do with witches. Written in 1486 by a Dominican inquisitor, Heinrich Institoris..." (Maxwell-Stuart, 2016). Ben-Yehuda (1980:01) writes: "From the early decades



Figure 12: Untitled abandoned Painting and *Malleus Maleficarum*

of the 14th century until 1650, continental Europeans executed 200,000 and 500,000 witches, 85% or more of whom were women". He goes on to pose the following question: "Why were women singled out as the main victims?" (Ben-Yehuda, 1980:02) He answers: "Women had an inferior status to begin with, and their lack of power and organization

(Lewis 1971) rendered them ready targets for widespread persecution".(Ben-Yehuda 1980:25)

According to Adams (2010:134) "Medieval thinkers explored the question of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the context of a family of doctrines regarding Adam's fall and its consequences". She goes on to say that "...After the fall, soul-body disorder and psycho-spiritual disarray in the primal parents means that sexual intercourse is always accompanied by lust or concupiscence". (2010:135)

This idea of the persecution of women versus the virginal sanctification of women played a big part in the initial phases of the painting, for example, at some stage the figure was standing in a fire with her hands tied up, while she was also donning a halo. I have since concealed much of my imagery and of the existing imagery left behind from my father's work. This concealment was not necessarily due to my dissatisfaction but rather as a flux of progress through the painting. The process of concealment also contributes to the life-cycle of painting. It is about my process with the creative cycle of the painting as opposed to the notion of working towards completion. The idea that I started this painting on my father's abandoned painting is also of interest. As I have said before, it was important to keep some of the elements of his work, rather than treat it as a new blank canvas. I am his son after all; we share a history. Now it is our canvas. But it is also the story of another adult who helped shape my artistic career and indeed my life.

4.5 'No'

The self-portrait *No* (2019, Fig.13, Page 51) is painted on a wooden panel. Once again, it is painted over an existing painting, but this time it is one that I began and then discarded as I was unhappy with its progress. Originally, I started by randomly applying paint in any way and form. I painted straight from the tube without any regard for ideas of 'good' painting (where one should always mix one's own colours). I squeezed the paint from the tube onto the surface and I worked in an automatic way where I allowed for anything to happen. This approach can sometimes be frustrating in the sense that I end up wondering what the point of doing it is if I obviously do not know what I am doing (which is often). The portrait only came later. I used this surface to apply to it whatever came to mind. This includes some semi-legible, arbitrary words or symbols at the bottom of the painting. There



Figure 13: Dylan Graham, *No*, Oil on wood, 2019, Photo Credit: Dylan Graham

is a cube to the left and, to the right, something that resembles a 'Y'. Below this is a slogan that might read as 'I O NO', hence the title of the painting. The fact that the word 'NO' is in blue, in comparison to the other white symbols, is completely arbitrary. There is also a black circular shape inside the middle letter 'O'. Once again, this is completely arbitrary. At this stage, there was still no plan to make a self-portrait of the work. This was just a surface to do random scribbles on; a surface for playing and for self-expression. I think the reason for painting the portrait came down, quite simply, to some form of indecision.

This all might come across as me being slightly nonchalant about my work and processes, but this should not in any way be construed as a disregard or downplaying of possible meanings and reasons for using certain elements in my work. On the contrary, the reality is that I get so frustrated at times when I am in the mood to paint, but don't know what to paint, that I resort to random scribbles or self-portraiture – anything that comes quickly and satisfies my need for self-expression. This then exemplifies to certain degrees my reasoning behind self-portraiture. The self-portrait, then, doesn't become an enquiry into myself, but rather the painting itself, or even paint itself. My frustrations with the painting, and by that argument, my frustrations with the fact that I do not know what to paint or how, might eventually lead me to finding joy in wasting expensive paint. Painting is strange and tricky stuff – I actually don't know what I'm doing most of the time, but I always feel compelled to do it. Echoing my sentiment, Elkins (1999:114) writes that:

Although historians tend to see Rembrandt's method as an attempt at naturalism, it goes much further than portrait conventions have ever gone, then or since. Consider what is happening in the paint, aside from the fact that it is supposed to be skin. Paint is a viscous substance, already kin to sweat and fat, and here it represents itself: skin as paint or paint as skin, either way. It's a self-portrait of the painter, but it is also a self-portrait of paint.

It is in this attempt towards naturalism, or the attempt at comprehending myself as an external entity in a mirror, that I delve even deeper into the actual substances that I am working with: the pushing around of pigments on a surface; dabbing my fingers in the paint; bursting open congealed blobs of paint; pouring oil into the messy mixture. It is this tactile experience that transcends representation and leads to a greater understanding of my own human composition as no more important than the pigments that I'm pushing about.

4.6 'Worlds Apart'

In *Worlds Apart* (2017, Fig.14, Page 53), we see a female figure emerging from a dark, atmospheric, amorphous space. There are handprints on either side of her face, and a nondescript white area in the lower-left corner of the painting. The dark area that engulfs the figure appears to be layered in such a way that it resembles an open space – one that is simultaneously filled with a mass of visual clutter (a clutter of marks). The figure is highlighted in such a way that one can almost imagine a bright light shining on her. In this



Figure 14: Dylan Graham, *Worlds Apart*, Oil on linen, 2017, Photo Credit: Alet Pretorius

specific photograph of the work, she appears to be looking at the handprint to the left of her.

The surface of the painting was created through various means of applying oil paint to a canvas. These applications, especially in the early phases of a painting, involve rapid and impulsive mark-making and are made by anything that comes to mind, such as the use of

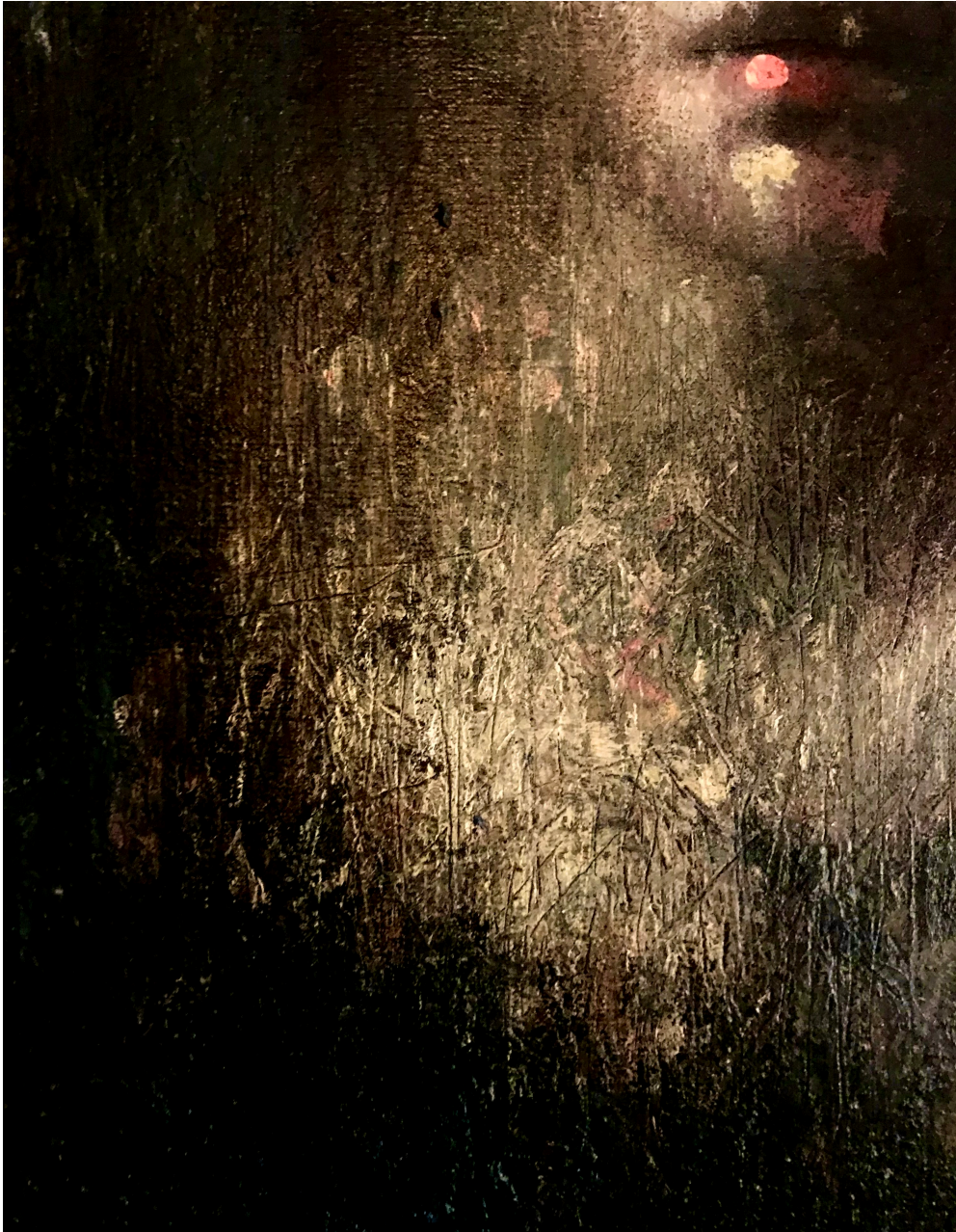


Figure 15: Dylan Graham, Detail of *Worlds Apart*, Oil on linen, 2017, Photo Credit: Dylan Graham

brushes and palette knives, handprints and painting by hand, and – in this case – actual beatings of the surface with cloths and rags. In Figure 15 we can see some aggressive palette knife scratching in the painting surface too. The pink highlight on the lip was created by dabbing my finger in the paint and then onto the surface of the painting.

It is through this impulsive mark-making that ideas form and the surface takes on a life of its own. It is this life of the painting that excites me. There are inexplicable and completely unplanned things that appear on the surface of the work, and they also trigger certain understandings within me. This spontaneous approach is generally steered by, and

intertwined with, subconscious decision-making and subconscious sublimation, which can allow for the surface to surprise and excite me – as Elkins (1999:132) states:

“That’s the goal of academic painting: pure control, nothing unexpected. Sublimation is rapid, fiery, and decisive, and therefore it is also divine. That which was solid rock is now a swirling fume, or an invisible spirit. Sublimation is unexpected transformation, a sudden impulsive change.”

This sublimation comes down to strange sensations and understandings of my practice in that I always feel that the work is never finished. It is never complete. I often think that I should work harder. It is almost as though I forget that I am working – almost as if time just passes, and things just happen. It is through this process of subconscious decision-making that I also stumbled upon the use of the hand print motif. This was the first time that I quite deliberately used the handprint in my work. A sudden urge to engage with my process on a whole new level. To go beyond the representative painting of the female figure. These handprints create a sense of two different worlds: That of the figure in the painting’s interior, and that of the artist banging on the surface as though he is trying to get in. The scratching (Fig 15, Page:58) that I have mentioned also alludes to the idea of piercing the canvas and breaking through the representational limits of the canvas.

CONCLUSION

In this research project, I set out to discuss the relationship between the artistic human phenomenon referred to as mark-making, meaning, and freedom by investigating the work of David Koloane and myself, Dylan Graham. In essence, this project originated from my own question, as to why I make marks. This has led me to look more closely into the use of mark-making, in the works of other painters such as David Koloane who I admire for his spontaneity and his disregard for realistic and austere painting techniques.

This investigation and personal interest in the use of mark-making by artists whose works differ visually, vastly from my own, has brought me to the conclusion that mark-making functions as a primordial, transcultural and transhistorical phenomenon that we share in, as artists, and as viewers of art. A phenomenon that we have been engaging in since our existence as a species.

By discussing various mark application methods and the use of the different mediums involved, I have not only shown how mark-making is foundational to the process of visual art-making, in the sense that one needs to make a mark in order to make art, but also how these tools are practically the same as the tools used in prehistoric times. By referring to the writings of Ellen Dissanayake (1982) and John Berger (2015) I have come to understand, that even though mark-making exists prehistorically beyond the scope of the modern-day cultural phenomenon that we refer to as 'art', the earliest artists were in some cases already capable of making-marks with a high degree of sophistication. This notion has led me to rediscover and reinforce the importance of self-expression through the use of mark-making as a phenomenon that transcends even the conditions and trappings of a current 'art' world.

These prehistoric marks found in caves, which also include handprints, are indicative of a tactile investigation. I have come to the realisation, through the writings of John Mathews (1999), that this impulse that empowers us as a species to make marks, originates from our early childhood explorations into an external world. It is through these tactile investigations that we engage with the world around us. With his artwork, *Blind Alphabet* (1995), Willem Boshoff reminds us that our capacity to touch and feel with our hands is a contributing factor to our assimilation of the world around us. In this sense, our

tactile and visual abilities allow us to engage with the artist's use of marks. It allows us, through our intuition and imagination to identify with the artist, himself.

It is this intuition that leads me to identify with the work of David Koloane. By looking at these artworks I have found that his highly expressive use of aggressive and obsessive marks, allowed him to obliterate his initial representational undertakings, to the point where they have become near abstract works. The visual capacity of his marks inspired me to investigate his life even further. Apart from the fact that the artworks I have discussed, such as *Rhythm* (2016), *The Journey* (1993), *The Saxophonists* (2010), and *The Scavengers III* (1993), have, to a certain degree biographical elements to them, Koloane has shown me that the need to express myself, in any way that I like, through expressive mark-making outweighs my own biased aspirations and idealisations that are generally associated with the greater canon of Western European painting.

My findings in researching the life and work of David Koloane have surpassed any expectations that I might have had. Apart from the fact that I am visually transfixed by Koloane's use of marks which has led me to denote a variety of aforementioned attributes to Koloane's use of marks, for example, unflinching, aggressive, obsessive, and even violent, I have come to understand that Koloane's fight for personal freedom has transpired into artworks that are free from the stern confines that so many artists battle with. It is also through this study that I have come to serious revelations and empathy, for the life and work of David Koloane and many others who had to suffer the indignity of being judged, humiliated and discriminated against solely because of their race. In this way, Koloane's work has allowed me to reconsider my own life and work too.

Through deep introspection and, quite possibly the first time in my life that I have analysed my own life and history to such a degree, I have come to the understanding that self-expression and, in this case, mark-making, transcends and functions beyond any confines set about by a recent 'art' world. Beyond the fact that mark-making is a transcultural and transhistorical human phenomenon that allows us to engage with one another through visual and sensory cues, mark-making is inherent in self-expression. It allows us to tell our stories. It allows us to express ourselves freely.

This analysis has also led me to grasp and understand that mark-making has been central to my existence in a variety of forms. As a child, it allowed me to investigate and deal with my environment through my imagination. As an art student, it afforded me the opportunity to engage with a general and factual history of the art world, as such. My studies also accentuated the importance of individual exploration and self-expression. But, in essence, this form of expression, which ranges from mindless scribbles made randomly, for instance, during telephone conversations, up to, previously discussed elaborate laborious time-consuming paintings such as *Malleus Maleficarum* (2022), *No* (2019), *Worlds Apart* (2017) and any other mark-making ventures in between, has always been central to my personal quest for freedom.

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