

***Bricolage* and assemblage as proponents for a participatory art practice through multicultural dialogue in a South African suburb**

By

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Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the MASTER OF ARTS degree in

FINE ARTS (CREATIVE PRACTICE)

in the

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

31 March 2023

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ABSTRACT

The interlocutor assemblage

In this practice-led Fine Art research project, I examine how sculptural assemblages created as a form of *bricolage* and presented in my suburb, Sunnyside, as a multicultural, cosmopolitan, postcolonial space, can initiate a dialogical exchange between artist and curious viewers. This study argues that a *bricolage* and assemblage of art objects placed in a site-specific and site-responsive home studio can encourage multicultural audience engagement. The art objects are made from repurposed material through the method of *bricolage* and provide opportunities for viewer spectatorship and response from the residents of Sunnyside. The form of my art objects is closely bound to their context, both materially and culturally, to provide an accessible point of entry for viewers. Viewers may be familiar with the materials, which are informally sourced from my neighbourhood, contextually binding the artworks to their environment.

Bricolage is relevant to my work because it is democratic in its visual availability to viewers who may not necessarily be familiar with contemporary visual art. My creative practice is informed and sustained by the values of provisional solutions and tinkering that *bricolage* suggests and the appropriation of materials and techniques that are representative of their surroundings in Sunnyside. Assemblage and *bricolage* as primary methods of creation become the basis for a rhizomatic thinking structure, which is strongly organic and intuitive. Through this creative practice, I argue that the tactility and materiality of my assemblages invite spectator participation, as the ambiguity of the material imagery can evoke a quality of psychological absorption.

Insert key terms:

Sunnyside – is a highly populated, old, ungated, middle-class suburb in Pretoria where the research is situated.

Interlocutor – a person with whom one converses and who could act as a mediator.

Bricolage – a construction made from a diverse range of repurposed materials.

Assemblage – the combination of disparate materials and objects acquired by the artist.

Provisional solutions – arranged temporally.

Tinkering – attempts to construct or repair.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Dr Nicola Grobler for her commitment and supervision and for the time she gave to this practice-led dissertation.

The salient critique of my appointed readers offered me an alternative point of view that was vital to achieving a scholarly manuscript. I also wish to acknowledge the various pedestrian spectators who mentored me and brought me *bricolage* material and treasured articles for my assemblages.

The opportunity to pursue a master's in fine art at the University of Pretoria has been a memorable experience.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this practice-led Fine Art research project, I examine how sculptural assemblages created as a form of *bricolage* and presented in my suburb, Sunnyside – a multicultural, cosmopolitan, postcolonial space – initiated a rethinking of the space where the artist and curious viewers intersected. These *bricolage* artworks integrated mundane materials from the surrounds of Sunnyside that may have been familiar to the local inhabitants.

The term *bricolage* is understood as a process whereby any person can construct, add on, repair, or solve technical mechanical problems by tinkering with whatever materials are at hand or available (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 17; Deleuze and Guattari 2004:494). It is an activity as old as bartering and was an economical and entrepreneurial practice that has pervaded all functions of daily living since early human civilisation. It became commonplace in Europe after the Second World War, when people were still recovering from extreme deprivation and a culture of exchange for the sake of survival gathered momentum. *Bricolage* is derived from the French verb *bricoler* and suggests making do, puttering about like a jack-of-all-trades. Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, was the first published initiator of this methodology, and contends that, when applied to the plastic arts¹, *bricolage* starts when a material is added onto a structure or armature with creative intent (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 26). The overall intention of this project was therefore not primarily to communicate with the viewer through the tactility and associative meanings of materials, but to develop a spontaneous, unorthodox viewer relationship through the *bricolage* construction process that was visible to pedestrians through my palisade fence. The transparency of the frontage of my home garden studio allowed for unexpected, unsolicited scrutiny from pedestrians and encouraged an unusual relationship between the artist, art object and pedestrian. For Lévi-Strauss (1966: 27), the artist is the liaison – the interlocutor between the art object and the viewer.

The process of *bricolage* encourages the use of discarded, damaged or threadbare material in an innovative and entrepreneurial context through repairing, fixing, or tinkering. This methodology

¹ The plastic arts are art objects that are three-dimensional, and fully in the round such as sculpture or ceramics where the process requires adding material onto a core or armature and where form is expressed by manipulating the initially soft, pliable (plastic) material (Kleiner 2005:2).

stands in contrast to a pioneering approach, in which new material is used to make a new object. According to Ole Johan Andersen (2011: 2), *bricolage* brushes aside historical and institutional values and the norms and routines of established processes, instead recapitalising known materials with a history of pre-use and utilising construction techniques that have associative meanings. In Andersen's (2011: 3) estimation, *bricolage* is based on bottom-up mobilisation, which is critical for generating creativity.

My creative practice was informed and sustained by the values of provisional solutions and tinkering that *bricolage* suggests, and the appropriation of materials and techniques that were representative of their local surroundings. The health restrictions and resultant lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic catalysed significant changes in my approach to materiality, form and presentation in my art practice and led me to consider viewer engagement as an aspect of my work, applying myself to their prompts and questions. As a result of relocating my art practice from the art school sculpture studio to my outdoor home studio in Sunnyside, the production of my art objects became visible to passers-by from the street and led me to reconsider the importance of site specificity and site responsiveness in my practice. These circumstances radically affected my choice of material and methodology, moving away from welding new metal and towards the *bricolage* process of reusing discarded materials and found objects. Many of my materials were supplied by the informal waste reclaimers who passed my home on their way to depots in Marabastad and Pretoria West. As my formal studio space and the gallery context disintegrated in the COVID-19 pandemic, my outdoor studio doubled as a site-specific exhibition space where pedestrians, residents and informal traders could respond to my work in progress. My street offered an unorthodox viewing public and a wider – and arguably more inclusive – gaze, one often anonymous and transient as pedestrians passed my house frontage.

The realisation that the exhibition space can be flexible and positioned in an informal setting led me to question the limitations of the formal gallery space. Despite the white cube's status as official gallery space being challenged and reimaged in the early 1960s, many contemporary curators remain so attached to the spatial model of the singular, fixed bricks-and-mortar venue that they overlook the potential of site-specificity. Miwon Kwon (2002: 2), curator and scholar in architectural history at the University of California (Los Angeles), asserts that site-specificity can present a social dilemma, as it has been adopted by mainstream commercial institutions since its conception as a new genre and has been diluted by overuse in its assimilation into industry. Kwon (2002: 2) suggests that commercial and public events management in the last 30 years have

weakened and redirected site-specificity. Kwon (2002: 4) suggests that the commodification² of site-specificity may discourage diverse, marginalised audiences from both viewing and making or presenting art. Such perceived barriers are the result of erroneous perceptions by the public that they are not welcome or that they may not understand the work being presented (Kwon 2002: 4). This study follows the notion that site-specific artworks can have a nomadic relation to institutionalised exhibition venues (Kwon 2002: 4) where the viewership is from transient, anonymous, and fleeting passers-by who do not have a fixed abode and are constantly on the move.

My consideration of materiality and use of *bricolage* in a specific environmental and cultural context responds to the limitations of the decontextualised, institutionalised exhibition space. The placement of my objects in full view of passers-by and my use of familiar *bricolage* materials are compatible with a multicultural, cosmopolitan, postcolonial space. The artwork was materially and culturally bound to its context, though this was not the initial focus of the study. Using easily recognisable, tactile materials and forms that are not overly prescriptive and finalised can invite the viewer to engage and form linkages with the works. This study recognises that viewers will have different personal responses to a work, in part dependent on the memories the materials and forms evoke in their imagination. This study proposes a contextualised practice in which the materials reference personal histories, uses and specific places in a viewer. While the artworks led their own progression, they also developed a symbiotic relationship with the community. When *bricolage* material is assimilated into assemblage, these complex workings can support a participatory art practice.

Assemblage is a model of engagement with the world, explained by William Seitz in 1961 as “the fitting together of parts and pieces”. Seitz (in Dezeuze 2014:31) proposes that an art assemblage should contain no less than two different materials that have been discarded or purloined but remain identifiable. Assemblages are characterised by ambiguity, multiplicity, becoming, the mid-ground, instability, and freedom, as discussed in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s (2021:587-589) rhizomatic theory. According to rhizomatic thinking, a horizontal, spreading thinking process can be likened to a plant root system that grows superficially and horizontally underground, sending out shoots without a central tap root. This is the prime philosophy in practices of *bricolage* and assemblage. Assemblage is an open-ended process and applies what Deleuze and Guattari

² Kwon’s concern about “commodification” is about the artist’s and art works’ suitability to a site in terms of institutional or market position (2002: 2).

(2021:585-587) refer to as non-linear, simultaneously individual, and collective, thinking. According to Dezeuze (2010: 49), the method and medium of assemblage operate outside the Western binary model of causal, linear thinking. Non-linear reasoning presents a challenge to Cartesian dualistic thought, which assumes a universe of binary opposites, for example truth and untruth, back and front. The rhizomatic process of constructing an assemblage requires intuitive thinking and is not as concerned with the aesthetic appearance of the physical object as it is with the multiple registers of meaning triggered by the materiality of the assemblage and its means of construction. The materiality of *bricolage*, assemblage and installations bypass linguistic barriers and can trigger the imagination and memory in radically different ways for different viewers.

Sunnyside is a unique model for immersed creativity and innovation due to its informality, lack of social inhibition and disregard for the establishment. These elements are abundantly visible in informal sidewalk businesses and hastily constructed dwellings on public walkways. It appears to be populated by a diverse citizenry, some with no specific vested interest in the area or living from hand to mouth; some are illegal immigrants fleeing severe circumstances in their countries of origin (United Nations High Commissioner for refugees, displaced and stateless people in southern Africa photo exhibition 2022). I met many Ethiopian nationals who are in Sunnyside after leaving civil war and famine in their country. In conversation, I also learned that many of the pedestrians are young professionals using cheap accommodation to easily access their place of work.



Figure 1: *Gated Skin*, 2020. Crocheted plastic and hazard tape, 270 x 170 cm. Installation at the entrance to the artist's home, Sunnyside, Pretoria. An example from my fourth-year exhibition, *Skin Series*.



Figures 2 and 3: Street frontage of the artist's home, showing the pavement and gate area and the front veranda, Pretoria, 2022.

Sunnyside stretches from Mandela Drive in the east, adjacent to Pretoria central, to Loftus Versfeld, its population density decreasing toward Clydesdale. Both the University of South Africa and the Tshwane University of Technology have faculty buildings in Sunnyside. Although said to have been originally populated by Sotho and Ndebele people, Sunnyside was part of an Afrikaner stronghold for 160 years (Huffman 2010). Afrikaner artists and writers such as Alexis Preller, Eugene Marais, Jan F. Cilliers and C. Louis Leipoldt lived here early in their careers (Mawadza 2008: 6). Urban decay, crime and group polarisation-initiated change, but not as severe as in post-election Hillbrow in Johannesburg (Mawadza 2008: 6). The Living Standards Measure (LSM)³ breakdown in Sunnyside is between LSM6 and LSM8, but the last published national census took place in 2011 (Statistics South Africa 2011). As unregistered subletting and illegal occupation by immigrants is commonplace, only approximate numbers can be given for foreigners in Sunnyside (Mawadza 2008: 6). The official population in the last major census in 2011 was 40,000, of which 88.4% was Black African, 8.5% White and the rest Coloured and Asian (Statistics South Africa 2011).

³ The Living Standards Measure or LSM is a marketing and segmentation research tool used in South Africa to classify standard of living and disposable income. This classification is similar to social economic class, but more refined noting certain basic household amenities and salary scales (National Institute for Health 1988).



Figure 4: Street map illustrating the position of my home at 115 Melville Street. (Google Maps)

The route down De Kock Street (instead of Jorissen Street) and up Melville Street (Figure 4) is a shortcut to the affluent east of Pretoria and passes my home studio; this route is the focus area of my study because it is less formal and does not obstruct the traffic. It is also a section of Sunnyside that is not policed as the main traffic routes and presents less chance for illegal migrants to be scrutinised.

As this practice-led research is situated in a South African suburb, I was interested in the observations of African philosophical researchers, mentioned to me by the passer-by who stopped to talk. Current and past African poets, cultural theorist and political philosopher Leopold Senghor, first president of Senegal (1960–80), and more recently, Achille Mbembe's *On Postcolony* (2001) and his investigation into the diasporic, Afro-cosmopolitan culture of decolonisation and the artistic practices to emerge within social theory of the late twentieth century were debated. This interest led me to the theories of Kwame Anthony Appiah, who led the Gold Coast to independence in 1957. I also examined the collectivist, communal societies of Africa. Edouard Glissant's (2012) "relational poetics" suggests that the writer alone can tap the unconscious of the people to apprehend their rhizomatic multiple culture, reconstruct an identity and form an emerging culture. These writers investigate the collective model as a feature of a communitarian lifestyle, implying that the art-making process is often communal and is seldom carried out by a single individual, as processes are often combined with dance and music in rituals

and ceremonies with a bricolage materiality. According to Sue Williamson (1989: 80, 124-125), South African artists Malcolm Payne and Kevin Brand both find that ancient and contemporary African art making have a history of *bricolage* and assemblage alongside media such as clay and wood carving.

For example, the Peace Park⁴ installations (Figure 7) and Jackson Hlungwane's religious installation shrine, *Altar of Christ* (Figure 8), were communally constructed. The sourcing of materials in these artworks and the communal support for the artist inspired my own practice. I was also inspired by Hlungwane's transformation of the relationship an artwork can have with its materials and the subsequent response by viewers.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three research questions explored the possibilities for a multicultural response to my *bricolage* assemblages in my suburb. This study argues that the practice of *bricolage* and assemblage in a site-specific and site-responsive approach can encourage multicultural engagement. I argue that the art objects made through the method of *bricolage* provide opportunities for viewer spectatorship and response by fostering commentary and viewer engagement. The form of my art objects was materially and culturally bound to their context and provided an accessible point of entry for viewers.

Bricolage was democratic in its visual availability to viewers who may not have been familiar with contemporary visual art. As the materials I used were informally sourced from within my neighbourhood, viewers might be familiar with them, thus contextually binding the artworks to their environment. *Bricolage* freed me from linguistically anchored communication of a semiotically coded lexicon of signs and symbols, resulting in works that may be more accessible to a broad, multilingual viewing public. I believe that tacit knowledge can be acquired without language, which is important in the context of Africa's wide linguistic diversity. The tactile materiality and ambiguity of my imagery evoked a quality of psychological absorption (Iliya Kabakov in Bishop 2005: 14-15) and invited spectator participation. The materiality of *bricolage*, assemblage and installation bypassed linguistic barriers and stimulated individual imagination and memory, regardless of culture, class, race, educational status, or discipline. These instances

⁴ The Peace Park installations should be viewed within the context of non-confrontational political resistance in the mid-1980s when apartheid was at its most brutal (Sack 1989: 191).

of imaginative memory and connection were often undocumented, anonymous, and private as the pedestrians passed by.

This practice-led research reflects on the potential for ongoing informal discourse between artist and public, as in Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbou*, Helen Martin's *Owl House* and Jackson Hlungwane's *New Jerusalem*. At my home studio, my sculptures were visible to passers-by, whose comments and questions about my works-in-progress directed my work to some extent. Their comments led me to refine or reconsider combinations of materials to evoke memories and associations. These viewers were of multiple nationalities, primarily from the African continent, as Sunnyside is a multicultural suburb. However, the demographic included the well-travelled, sophisticated diplomatic visitor en route to the Alliance Française, as well as the large and vibrant parish of the Seventh Adventists' and scholars and teachers from the four government schools in the area and from the University of Pretoria.

In conjunction with the non-linear rhizomatic thinking embedded in *bricolage* and assemblage practices, I examine Grant Kester's (1995, 2000, 2011) theories of discursive or dialogical⁵ art practice and littoral art⁶. The art object as signifier is non-figurative and is not a closed, modernist, Greenbergian (1989: 137) model. A carrier of aesthetic significance that does not acknowledge the presence of the viewer can challenge the perception that an artwork was authored beforehand and subsequently presented as fully resolved to an audience excluded from the process of its formation (Kester 2011: 3). Nicola Grobler (2020:93) contends that an artwork bound too closely to the intention of the artist can become inductive when it disregards the viewer's own subjective interpretative skills. I propose that a practice of *bricolage* and assemblage can form the mediating object or social sculpture that Jacques Rancière (1992: 278) sees as constituted by involved participation from various viewers.

Through my creative practice, I consider art as a social, participatory practice and aim to show how local art methodologies, such as Hlungwane's religious shrines and the Peace Parks in South Africa in the 1980s, are interwoven into my own practice. Dele Jegede (2009: 245) writes that African art objects run the risk of being romanticised when placed *ex situ*, as they are

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin used "dialogical art" to explain the democratic process of extended verbal exchange and questioning in which points of view are offered and ideas are shared as a platform to the meaning of a situation (in Harris 1995: 110).

⁶ Bruce Barber (1998: 1-3) coined the term "littoral art" to describe art that occurs outside the institutions of the art world that stimulate dialogue and elevate the standards of conversation between different communities and disciplines whose paths would not normally converge.

deculturalised and without context. I work against the deculturalisation of art objects by emphasising contextual materials and processes of making in situ. My practice-led, socially engaged art explores how my art objects were made and moved from my home studio to other public venues in my suburb, and how the casual observations of passers-by helped me create meaning and make sense of the work.

My investigation of non-linear thinking methods and doing processes gave me more clarity on the direction of my own practice. *Red Hazard* (Figure 5) and *Black Oblivion* (Figure 6) demonstrate *bricolage* and assemblage and are examples of my rambling, intuitive method.

The research questions therefore are:

1. How can the artistic practice of *bricolage*, as an unruly, rhizomatic creative process, assist the artist to develop a participatory studio practice in a post-colonial contemporary African setting and encourage multicultural dialogue?
2. How might the material quality and modes of making of assemblage convey meaning to a diverse audience with a contemporary African focus?
3. How might a situated and visible creative practice encourage multicultural dialogue within a specific neighbourhood?

These research questions explore the range of creative processes available to the artist, as well as materiality and meaning in a diverse viewer context, and dialogue with viewers.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of this study are to suggest an alternative and inclusive method of making and presenting a body of work to a broader audience. The contemporary art making practice of *bricolage* and the rhizomatic creative process of constructing art objects as an assemblage or installation can result in what Kester (2011: 3) suggests is not all about aesthetic appreciation, that is delivered to the audience in one finalised statement authored by the artist. Instead, the artwork can elicit different responses in the viewers that the artist did not plan for. I use *bricolage* to explore and negotiate the complexities of discursive inter-relationships in residents and pedestrians in a local suburb such as Sunnyside.

I constructed and placed my art objects in my garden, where they were viewable from the street and were appreciated and interpreted by a diverse audience. This encouraged discourse, inclusion, and participation. This study is valuable because it identifies and encourages an

alternative and inclusive studio practice through socially engaged, participatory and site-responsive assemblage and *bricolage*.



Figure 5: *Red Hazard* (in progress), 2021. Mixed media, hazard tape, shredded cardboard and found objects. Size: variable.



Figure 6: *Black Oblivion* (in progress), 2022. Mixed media, plumbing piping and black garbage bag plastic. Size: variable.

1.4 THEORETICAL APPROACH

My theoretical approach was domiciled firmly in a local, African city and embraces a qualitative approach that is communally based. This practice-led, qualitative research was situated within a Fine Art framework in a postcolonial, contemporary African setting. A *bricolage* methodology informed the construction of the art objects, whose materiality was representative of their surrounds as a multicultural, cosmopolitan post-colonial space. Jegede (2015: 245) claims that assemblage is a major African-art material methodology and remains relevant in post-colonial Africa, as it acknowledges social interaction, participation, and ritual.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative, practice-led Fine Art study that upholds and supports *bricolage* as a creative practice. The applied practice-led art making process was unruly, self-propelled, rhizomatic and

horizontal (Sullivan 2010: xxiv) and followed a path of “one thing after the other” (Judd 2020 :137) or of “one to another, to another...” (Massumi 1992: 1). My practise did not require intense pre-planning or a grand idea, and the objects of its production were made without a specific outcome in mind, thereby inviting intuitive participation from a diverse audience. My assemblages offered opportunities for visual decoding that were purely tactile and emotive and the triggering of visual memory that the reconstituted, *bricolage* material could bring about. As such, I needed to clarify the researcher’s dual role. Sullivan (2010: xxiii) describes how the artist-theorist is the artist practitioner and becomes both the researcher and the researched – in my case because pedestrians spontaneously scrutinised and offered comment to the artist. This methodology is indicative of a postmodern, post-structural, non-hierarchical structure in which the artist and viewer are equally observed.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

My argument is situated in a contemporary local, African art platform from where I examine my art objects in the context of *bricolage*, materiality and what was evoked in the individual viewer. I examine both local and Western art historians’ and art critics’ writings on *bricolage*, assemblage, and installations as forms of socially inclusive practice.

Deleuze and Guattari (2021: 551-581) use the materiality of weaving as a metaphor to explain their complex, rhizomatic, stratifying thinking process. I refer to the smooth, and the striated process in *A thousand plateaus*, which was one of the pivotal metaphors for my work. I consulted the writings of Gillian Rose (2012: xviii), Lucy Lippard (1973) and Barbara Bolt (2000:8) for their observations on materiality in relation to audience participation. The materiality of the *bricolage* object solicits personalised interpretation. According to Joseph Beuys (in Bishop 2005:105), this audience interpretation is an evolutionary and collaborative process, as all who engage with an object *become* the object. Considering Beuys’ claim (in Bishop 2005:105) that art is a free space that exists outside ideology, I investigate his democratic, social sculpture. Beuys had an enduring influence on subsequent artists and on the German government’s education policies that are in place today.

I briefly examine Kester’s (2011) research on littoral practice in Europe and America, which critiqued Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg, and Michael Fried’s opposition to acknowledging the presence of the viewer and their notion that an art object should be made to completion, excluding viewer gaze as participation before presentation. I also found that the lack

of full “completion” drew passing pedestrians to reflect and ruminate about the object. I consulted Bishop (2005, 2012) and Kester (1995, 2000, 2011) on socially engaged art practice, as well as Graeme Sullivan’s (2006 & 2010) practice-based street works. Bishop (2005: 6-11) describes an installation as a type of art experience into which the viewer physically enters. This is often described as theatrical, immersive, or experiential – a singular totality that addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in a space that presupposes an embodied viewer. The viewer’s sense of touch, smell and sound are just as heightened as their sense of vision, because these senses are evoked by memory.

I was intrigued by Kabakov’s (in Bishop 2005: 16) explanation of an installation as a quality of psychological absorption that can prompt conscious and unconscious imaginative association in the beholder. I found this more compatible with viewers’ responses to my practice, as they viewed the objects from the street and did not physically enter the objects’ space. Kabakov, observed that an installation is a non-commodifiable object (in Bishop 2005: 6-11), similar to a fresco in Renaissance Italy. It is an immaterial model of the world that falls outside of commodification as a result of its permanent, fixed placement and the difficulty in packaging and selling it.

In South Africa, *bricolage* was used to express resistance, such as in the Peace Parks that spontaneously sprung up in numerous African townships at the height of apartheid in the 1980s (Sack, 1989: 191, in Nettleton & Hammond -Tooke, 1989, Williamson, 1989: 88-89). These temporary assemblages were constructed on public pavements and walkways, visible to pedestrians and drivers. Whitely (2014) argues that *bricolage* and assemblage have been viewed in the western context as contrived, disruptive, and transgressive. Deleuze and Guattari’s (2021:76) warning about making resistance a commodity is relevant, as the political aspect of the Peace Parks was not of primary interest to me. As the process engaged people with a social purpose, I was interested in the provisional spontaneity and use of material at hand in the Peace Parks.

To explain how the situatedness and site-responsiveness of my *bricolage* assemblages respond to the specific nature of a multicultural local community, I consider Wendy and Phillipa Coleman’s (1994: 97-99) theories on the uniqueness of African social organisations. The Peace Parks and Hlungwane’s religious shrines are examples of a community working together with a strong purpose and exemplify Senghor’s (1964: 59) reference to the metaphysical philosophy of communalism, where forces are not antithetical, and objects exist to complement one another.

Senghor saw the community as symbiotic rather than parasitic, and wanted the collective spirits of communalism, humanism, and egalitarianism to thrive (Sogolo 1999: 202). Richard Sklar (1988: 1-21) examines the writings of Leopold Senghor and Julius Nyerere and considers Kwame Nkrumah's (Kwame 1991) contribution to radical socialism. He also examines Amilcar Cabral's revolutionary realism, the racial capitalism of anti-apartheid black consciousness and the radical chauvinism of the African National Congress (Sklar 1988: 5). I consulted the poetic writings and African communalism of sisters Paulette and Jeanne Nardal, who introduced the Harlem Renaissance and its ideas to the Martinican poets Aimé Césaire (1997) and Etienne Léro, Leon Damas of French Guiana, and Senghor. The Nadal sisters drew on the surrealist literary style, exploring the diasporic home-going being who belongs without imposing Marxist, atheist, and anti-capitalist ideals.

Achille Mbembe (2019) and Olu Oguibe (1999) single out globalisation and the African diaspora as key challenges that inform contemporary African creative agency. Mbembe (2019) examines the notion of Afro-politicism, which is based on the nomadic movement of the African diaspora and has resulted in a cultural hybrid of African descent – a virtual clan who do not belong to a single geography. This was of significance to me, as my art objects led me to meet many displaced people, immigrants and migrants who exposed me to non-Western philosophical concepts. Kevin Bales' (2000) study refers to the sub-altern or “disposable people” who are featured as stateless and without fixed nationality who go from opportunity to opportunity. This also led me to examine more prosperous stateless African populations in relation to the social philosophies of communalism and collectivism in Africa, such as the Cosmo-Afro-politan society through authors Taiye Selasi (2005), and Dabiri (2013). These philosophies reflect an element of experimentation and possibility integral to the rhizomatic and nomadic thought typical of Deleuze and Guattari (2021:293) with no distinct beginning or end and no defined, singular destination. This study also alerted me to the fact that migration and mobility in the conventional, traditional sense where legitimate, formal visa or immigrational applications had been replaced within a conceptual and sociological category that prevents or prohibits a specific conflictual geography and position because of perforated or ill-defined borders. In doing so I realised that the virtual as in identity and nationality has enormously positive implications for displacement and social movements on the African continent.

Deleuze and Guattari wrote, edited, and rewrote in an anti-identity thinking mode, imagining that the individual no longer reigned supreme (Dosse 2010). They worked in a model that presumed a community of being, thinking and reacting to the world, and attempted to dissolve and extinguish the subject of self through this notion of de-individualising. Deleuze and Guattari's theories are very compatible with those of Senhor, Cesaire, Dumas and Nyerere, who frowned on individualism in their poetry, prose, and political philosophies. This stream of thinking is still being examined in the writings of contemporary authors, as in Mbembe's views on necro politics (2021, 2019 and 2013) and Francis Nyamnjoh's (2006, 2017, 2018) studies on belonging, citizenship, and xenophobia. The African diaspora boasts many high-profile contemporary artists, including Ethiopian-born Julie Mehretu, Ghanaian sculptor El Anatsui, Nigerian Wole Soyinka, and Kudzanai Chiurai, exiled from Zimbabwe for producing inflammatory images of Robert Mugabe. My interlocutor *bricolage* assemblage sculptures had the potential to relate to any person regardless of linguistic, national, or educational level, as they did not have a fixed, pre-determined cultural meaning. Francois Dosse claims that this lack of identity embraces Deleuze and Guattari's belief that individualism is a deception summoned to obscure "the nature of reality" (in Dosse 2010).



Figure 7: *Crossroads People's Park*, 1985. Oukasi Township. (Mende 1985).



Figure 8: Jackson Hlungwane, *Altar of Christ*, 1993. Wood and stone. Size: variable. Photograph: Lee Van Wyk. Source: Visual Arts, 12.2013:172.



Figure 9: Carol Preston, *Black Oblivion*, 2022. Home garden studio.

I selected three contemporary African artworks that inspired my work and support my arguments. Each work presents general evidence of the materiality, *bricolage*, assemblage, installation, site-specificity, site responsiveness and audience engagement that informed this study. I investigated the religious shrines (Figure 8) constructed by Hlungwane and his parish, the Peace Parks (Figure 7, 16 and 17) erected by anonymous individuals. I also briefly discuss the assemblage (Figure 8, 14 and 15) that Mkhize displayed outside the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg, as his works integrate multiple modes (such as puppetry, performance, and himself). Beuys also used himself as an actor and protagonist in his own work.

1.7 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter Two provides a theoretical framework for a site-specific, participatory studio practice informed by considerations of materiality, assemblage, and *bricolage*. Contextual information about Sunnyside's diverse and volatile demographic makeup as a multicultural suburb inform my argument on site-specificity and site-responsivity.

Chapter Three presents the workings of my artistic practice of *bricolage* and rhizomatic creative thinking and argues that these processes helped me develop a participatory studio practice. I explain the complex, non-commercial collection of materials that was very specific to the local viewer. Contributions from residents and pedestrians are noted and reflected upon. I argue that

a rhizomatic process can challenge linear methodologies and allow for a different form of art practice.

Chapter Four considers how meaning was conveyed in my body of work through a multi-faceted approach to making. This chapter discusses the materials and methods utilised in my practice, such as crochet, knotting and found objects, to stimulate subjective responses from viewers. I discuss formal aspects such as negative space and how I limited my materials and colour to prevent a visual overload.

In conclusion, Chapter Five summarises the chapters and contributions made by the study, outlines the limitations of the study, and makes suggestions for further research.

1.8 ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

During this study, pedestrians and residents asked questions or commented on my work. I noted these comments in a diary but did not indicate the speaker's name or physical characteristics to preserve the spontaneity of our engagement. These comments are anecdotally referred to throughout this mini-dissertation, and I reflect on the potential effects of these remarks on my creative processes. Some viewers and commentators participated on a more regular basis, and I asked these participants to fill out a consent form (attached as an addendum). I noted down their comments in a separate diary, but the speakers appear as anonymous in the text. This group included residents and pedestrians and vulnerable people such as informal waste reclaimers.

CHAPTER 2: SCRUTINY FROM A LOCAL LANDSCAPE

This chapter provides a broad qualitative theoretical framework in postcolonial contemporary Africa. I explore notions of a site-specific, participatory studio practice informed by *bricolage* materials that attracted responses from anonymous, multicultural, and diverse spectators. This scrutiny took place from outside the studio space. Contextual information about my suburb's diverse and disruptively innovative demographic makeup as a multicultural suburb inform my argument on site-specificity and site-responsivity. The relocation of my practice and presentation demanded a review of concepts like territorialisation (Deleuze 2021: 36), as subaltern⁷ people, international diplomatic visitors, parishioners, various academics, students of French and scholars passed my house.

2.1 SUNNYSIDE, AN UNGATED SUBURB

The demographic of Sunnyside, the South African suburb where I live, was representative of the spectatorship for my practice and dominated my audience. In addition to its formal and informal residents, it often has an international presence comprised of delegates from various diplomatic residences visiting the Alliance Française, congregants of the well-attended Seventh Day Adventists next to the Alliance, and scholars, students, and lecturers from four government schools and the University of Pretoria and Tshwane University of Technology campuses.

Sunnyside's formal demographics are freely available and consist of mainly of black civil servants and students. Unregistered sub-letting, and illegal occupancy by migrants in inner Sunnyside make the informal demographics harder to quantify (Mawadza 2008: 6). This undocumented population is sometimes referred to as the subaltern, a term from post-colonial studies and critical theory that identifies a colonial population that were and still are socially, politically, and geographically excluded (Stokes & Guha 1997). Sunnyside is adjacent to the Department of Home Affairs in the Pretoria central area, where many foreigners gather to become legal citizens. Because South Africa does not have official migrants' camps, such hubs materialise spontaneously and organically near areas regularly frequented by foreign nationals. Sunnyside is an ungated suburb, open to anyone, day, or night, but many of its residents are classified as undocumented, illegal migrants considered a burden on the suburb's infrastructure and often feel harassed by officialdom.

⁷ This term implies a person or mass of people who are marginalised or overlooked. It includes undocumented migrants who cannot access basic human or legal rights (Merriam- Webster 1999).

Observation of central Sunnyside shows that many residents do not adhere to municipal by-laws, as businesses are set up on pavements, and the dumping of unwanted material and waste is difficult to manage and remains untended. Many of the original houses were demolished in the 1960s and apartment buildings were erected, increasing the population density. Central Sunnyside has the highest percentage of residential units among the suburbs of the inner city and lies between Reitz and Park Streets, Walton Jameson and Kirkness Streets and Nelson Mandela Boulevard and Kotze and Jeppe Streets (Schenk 2008: 2). During the apartheid era, this suburb and neighbouring Arcadia were white, middle-class neighbourhoods, but they are now populated by the new Black middle-class, who are employed by government or are school or university students (Statistics South Africa 2011).

Anecdotal information, conversations with pedestrians and speculation about the informal groupings in Sunnyside made me aware of new formations that occurred as a result of the suburb's uninhibited and unmonitored character. This led me to consider Deleuze and Guattari's (2021:552) striated realities and the emergent properties that Manuel DeLanda (2006: 7-9) proposes, where diverse communities with new groupings can evolve. DeLanda is known for studies of urban areas that self-organise and adapt to change and new dynamics. If these subterranean hybrid communities can set aside their differences and pool their resources and strengths, they can survive.

However, Deleuze and Guattari (2021: 244) notes that natural history under western codification is concerned primarily with the sum and value of difference, not with the evolution of affiliation. This may explain why, after the British annexed the area in 1900, migrants of various nationalities began to settle and thrive, to the point that the migrants became legitimate, prosperous citizens. Henri Bergson (in Deleuze and Guattari 2021:277-8) describes this phenomenon as a peopling that cannot be ordered into an institutional model. Bergson's theories on multiplicity refer to situations similar to the phenomenon of 'block of becoming' which suggests that these informal demographics or observations cannot be drawn from the restrictions of an official data capturing system. This level of the rhizomatic, surface, unpredictable 'flight spread' that occurs in a diverse temporality, although unruly, can evolve into a robust, creative new culture, similar to 1940s

Sophiatown⁸ in Johannesburg, where African (54,000), Coloured (3000), Indian (1,500), and Chinese (686) people owned property.

Mbembe (2019: 104) observes that one of the most common aspects of such a diverse collection of people is 'othering' – a negative construct of assumptions about a certain group and a phenomenon referred to as groupthink (Janis 1972: 510).⁹ Groupthink encourages an 'us and them' world view under which effective decision-making breaks down and a form of collective rationalisation takes place so that innocent people can be seen as evil or criminal or be ascribed other negative perceptions. For instance, most refugees are assumed to be unskilled migrant labourers with little English, but Mackenzie (1997: 34-40) asserts that many refugees and asylum seekers are urbanised, multilingual and well-educated, with some form of higher education or skill. Giliomee (2001:190-198) writes that this sophistication is perceived as a threat to employment by undereducated Black South Africans, who were marginalised by the inferior Bantu Education policies of the apartheid era and are cognisant of their own (lack of) skills and resent the articulate and specialised activities of such foreigners (Giliomee 2001: 195). Xenophobia and employment insecurity in South Africa cause considerable tension and have led to a sinister culture of secrecy and fear amongst some local residents (Giliomee 2001:195).

Francis Nyamnjoh (2006, 2018) writes about citizenship and xenophobia in contemporary South Africa and how human movement pushes the limits of citizenship to new formations. As a result of Sunnyside's volatility and organic instability, it cannot be seen from a formal, well-regulated national viewpoint. An informal, subterranean, and unruly spreading, similar to a labyrinth, should be considered as a legitimate construct for social cohesion. Leopold Senghor promoted a sense of brotherhood and collaboration among people of African descent around the philosophy of communalism in a collectivist society (Jackson and Rosberg 1991: 265). Sunnyside's subterranean peopling thrives on the African communitarian model (*ujamaa*), which was a strong feature of the pre-colonial African lifestyle described by Jackson & Rosberg (1991: 265). Under the philosophy of familyhood (*ujamaa*), a person becomes a person through the people of a community (Nyerere 1968). Nyerere used this philosophy as the basis of his autarkic¹⁰ social and economic development policies for Tanzania after Tanganyika gained independence from Britain

⁸ Sophiatown (Softown or Koffi) was a black cultural hub destroyed under apartheid. Before the enactment of the Native Land Act, 1913, coloured South Africans had freehold rights and buying rights. (Goodhew 2005)

⁹ Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon proposed by Irving Janis, in which members of a similar background make biased decisions to insulate themselves from the opinions of outside groups, resulting in an irrational or dysfunctional decision-making outcome (in Baron & Byrne 1994: 508).

¹⁰ Autarkic refers to economic independence and self-sufficiency (Nyerere 1967).

in 1961. Nyerere perceived African socialism as embedded in African communitarianism, a feature of the African lifestyle severely affected by colonisation. According to Crawford Young (1982: 3, and Lal 2018), Nyerere was inspired by the Chinese experience of collectivisation under Mao Tse-tung to re-establish this philosophy of African socialist behaviour and practices. And while Senghor's philosophical beliefs fully endorsed a communalist and collectivist society, Senghor, unlike Nyerere, felt that African independence should be gradual so that the African state could be nurtured gradually. The Nardal sisters are considered to have laid the theoretical and philosophical groundwork of the Negritude movement and are considered the drivers of the literary aspect of the black consciousness movement. They were inspired by the 1920s Harlem Renaissance in New York and established a salon in Paris to promote Afro-anglophone and francophone interests (Church: 2022).

Conversations with the pedestrian spectators of my art practice inspired me to dig deeper into the identity and philosophy of the people of Africa. Ungated Sunnyside offered a constant ebb and flow of viewers, the largely unquantifiable, emerging social movement of residents and visitors from across the African continent and the globe, in both official and unofficial capacities.

2.2 A SITE-SPECIFIC, PARTICIPATORY STUDIO ART PRACTICE

My entire art practice has been site-specific owing to the participatory nature of the assemblages' visual accessibility to pedestrians passing my house. The *bricolage* assemblages were not created behind closed doors or incubated for a conventional bricks-and-mortar art gallery.

Bart Cassiman (1993: 5) states that the location of an exhibition is a container of the collective memory of that location's people. Site-specific participation allows the artist to draw the viewer into the artwork by the fact that the artwork is domiciled in or often close to its place of creation. Bringing the public into the production process allows the art object to be viewed in context and encourages different associations and meanings to form. Jegede (2009: 245) notes there is a danger of African artworks being romanticised when placed *ex situ*, as they are viewed out of context and an audience may have difficulty interpreting them. According to a spokesperson for the Tate Gallery (2020), the mainstream art fraternity holds the work of self-trained artists in little regard as a mirror of the time an artist lived in.



Figure 10: Unknown pedestrian observing the art objects in my home garden studio. 2022



Figure 11: The Alliance Française premises on the corner of River and De Kock Streets, Sunnyside, Pretoria. 2022

Artists working outside the canon or beyond the mainstream market who focus on non-Western narratives include artists with disabilities or mental illness (Millington 2003) and others who do not fit comfortably into mainstream society, such as the homeless, ethnic minorities and migrants of subaltern status.



Figure 12: Judith Scott, *Untitled*, 2003. Size: unknown. Medium: mixed scraps of fabric and fibres. (Source: Rothery 1974 [sa].)

Judith Scott (1943–2005) was born with severe Down syndrome and deafness from scarlet fever and spent 35 years in a state institution. She started producing sculptural forms by spinning layers of cloth and fibres over an armature and had her first mainstream exhibition in 1999.

The lack of conventional in studio process may have been true of artwork created outside the orthodox academic studio. The artist Marty Smith is an example of an outsider artist. When Smith, who worked as a gardener, retired, she placed her work in her small garden and received encouragement and acceptance from local residents. She had an inner compulsion to paint and display her work and did not approach an official gallery.



Figure 13: Marty T. Smith, 2000. Installation of paintings. Source: Bacon, R. 2017.

Redmond Bacon (2017) describes Smith's work as "a highly public form of spiritual autobiography". Her installation (Figure 13) would lose much of its beauty and relevance if it were packed up and reconstructed in a mainstream gallery. Smith's installation is an example of what Bishop (2005: 102) refers to as an artwork that has become political because it has been projected onto a collective or community by its situatedness, transforming the individual viewer experience to a collective or communal event. This suggests Beuys's concept of the 'social sculpture', where thought, speech and discussion are regarded as core artistic materials, and the assemblage or installation becomes an entire production in which the viewers' status is ambiguous and intermingled with the artist. Beuys deliberately drew the audience closer and provoked them to articulate their opinions in public engagement. However, Benjamin Buchloh (in Bishop 2005:105)

cautions that Beuys's democratisation of the art act as a blurring of boundaries, between the audience and the artist, the viewer, and the creator. Thomas Hirschhorn (in Bishop 2005: 105) commends Beuys' model for artistic engagement, which has influenced a generation of contemporary postmodern art practitioners who recognise the value of multiple narratives and a flattened hierarchy. Such practitioners include Marina Abramović, Ai Wei Wei, Olafur Eliasson, Christoph Schlingensiefel and Matthew Barney, who use their practice to engage in discursive interplay with current issues, using multiple mediums to enhance the narrative. In 2005, Abramović re-enacted Beuys's performance work, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, reiterating her reverence for Beuys's performance installations.

Deleuze and Guattari's (2021:293) interest in the dynamics of multiple subjects in complex, diverse interactions led them to consider the place of multiple political and cultural engagements and events in Western belief systems since the 1960s in alternative materialist terms. Deuze (2008: 34) claims that the counterculture in the West was a response to the continued breakdown of social empathy and peace and the slaughter of young men in the wars in Vietnam (1955–1975) and Algeria (1954–1962) and the French protests in May 1968. These became a strong reason to take a stand against political mismanagement (Deuze 2008: 34), and many non-mainstream artists who claimed their democratic right to protest or lobby through art. John Lennon and Yoko Ono used their high-profile status and marriage in a performance piece in a New York shop window to draw attention to the slaughter in the Vietnam War and although they were not outsider artists performance art was an emerging field. In this way the non-traditional artist in the form of performance art elicited a much broader audience to viewership of their art statements by blurring traditional boundaries of rock music, art protest statement and street spectatorship.

After the carnage of the Second World War, artists used multiple means to express their disapproval in public displays of social disobedience. According to Nato Thompson (in Deuze 2008: 34), the abstraction of modern art was replaced by the more solid forms of *bricolage*, assemblage, installation art and street interventions and public protest happenings. In the 1960s, both the art object and its production began to emerge from the reclusive confines of the studio and orthodox western gallery space to invite spectator participation with the artist (Deuze 2008: 34). The change of material, format and place of presentation resulted in a much wider, inclusive, and immersive culture of spectatorship in the expanding field of new media and mixed media, which questioned the pre-1960s tradition and emphasised social inclusion and postmodern

expansiveness with protests concerning compulsive consumerism and the spectacle obsessive society.

Bishop (2005: 10) writes that art installations presuppose different levels of immersive experience. Kabakov (in Bishop 2005: 14–15) clarifies participation as a physical immersion but also as a psychological absorption, where the viewing subject can also enter the work in a gallery context and contemplates the art statement emotionally. Bishop (2005:5) points out that this viewer experience is inaccessible and impossible to categorise, because the encounter is emotionally embedded in the viewer's mind in the form of private associations and memories. For Bill Viola (1995: 175), it is most important that artworks exist in the mind of the viewer, regardless of where they are. As these memories remain in the dominion of the viewer's mind, the viewer can choose to share the experience publicly or not.

Witnessing the artwork-making process in situ gives the viewer context and an intrinsic relationship with the artist. The removal of the artistic process can minimise participation from the viewer and can create a disconnect that is difficult to proceed from. The lack of psychological absorption with the art object bypasses the potential empathy and dialogue between viewer and artist, rendering the art object a mere retail commodity. In witnessing the artist at work the viewer, although a spectator nullifies what Guy Debord (1967:39) refers to as the capitalist spectacle. This in itself is a contradiction when using *bricolage* because repurposed material is a macabre, anti-capitalist act as pointed out to me by a passer-by. The act of looking, assimilating, and interpreting is an act of participation and acceptance that can foster inclusion, especially when the audience vocalise their experience.

2.3 SOCIAL PRACTICE AND MATERIAL CULTURE

The *bricolage* materiality evident in my art objects is directly bound to the local urban landscape and forms the basis of the social cues that initiate the art-making process. Spectators might have noticed certain materials as they went about their daily business and then found those same materials incorporated into a sculpture nearby. Many viewers said they had never encountered sculpture before and asked about its purpose.

Dezeuze (2008:31) proposes that critical elements of *bricolage* and assemblage are recognisability and transformation in the eye of the viewer, and the tactility and texture of similar

materials is constantly visible in Sunnyside as people go about their daily lives. The viewers who saw my objects did not all have a Western understanding of the world and its objects. Having my art objects seen by a diverse demographic allowed for a broad interpretation, and not necessarily through Western categorisations. The discarded possessions of evicted tenants litter Sunnyside walkways and are materially and culturally bound to the local context but is unlikely on the pavements of wealthier suburbs such as Waterkloof or Brooklyn or in Pretoria's gated suburbs. Laura Marks (2002: xix) observes that materiality draws viewers away from symbolic decoding to a shared physical existence and a more universal absorption of an artwork.

When William Seitz invited potential exhibitors to submit works for *The Art of Assemblage* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1961, he called for sculpture constructed with *bricolage* materials (Dezeuze 2008: 32). This exhibition was a major initiator of a renewed interest in materiality in western art and a continuation of the move away from Modernism. Dezeuze (2008: 31) This initiated a new dialogue in art, breaking from preceding art movements in which the norm was to buy new, unblemished materials from a commercial outlet for a set, non-negotiable price. Helen Franc (in Dezeuze 2008: 34) observed in a letter to Seitz that his *bricolage*-based exhibition focused more on the acts of *making* and of *process* than on a final, finished product, and she emphasised this dialogue as a new approach to performance and audience engagement.

Kaprow (1961: 9) hailed the repurposing of rejected material as the arrival of the “new concrete”, or *bricolage* materiality, and as a turn away from abstract imagery and subject matter towards reconnection with the viewer. This new dialogue embraced Lévi-Strauss's notion of *bricolage* as a “science of the concrete” (Dezeuze 2008: 31) and described an alternative way of working with the material world, in which material speaks not only *with* things but also *through* things in the form of a tangible statement. This presaged the Deleuzian rhizomorphic theoretical approach. Kaprow (1961, 1993: 9) was convinced that Lévi-Straus's theories on *bricolage* and the ‘new concrete’ alluded to the socio-political anti-commodification embodied in assemblage and installation.

This move to tangible materiality was not sudden. To Kaprow (1961: 6), the consequential progression of the “new concrete” was *bricolage*, collage and montage, assemblage, installation, and the birth of performance in the form of happenings. Montage was a step towards using *bricolage* materiality in two-dimensional artworks. In 1912, Marcel Duchamp placed his ready-

mades of unworked utilitarian objects in a gallery context as art (Dezeuze 2010:33), giving the objects complete autonomy and sovereignty. In his Combine series of the 1950s and 1960s, Robert Rauschenberg attached objects, including a pillow and a bird, to his paintings. Jane Bennett, who considers herself a “New Materialist, posits an object is alive because of its own efficacy, without implying any kind of interpretation from the viewer (2010: 38). Bennett (2010: vii–38) resurrects Dadaist beliefs and challenges the view that material is passive, inactive, inert, and lifeless but are alive through complex interrelationships, flow, and properties (including serious life-threatening issues when dealing with toxic waste disposal). Bennett’s theories concerning New Materialism are sympathetic to Duchamp’s ready-mades, but she relies less on the social incongruity of the gallery space.

Petra Lange-Berndt (2015: 13) reminds us that material has always been taken for granted in the visual arts as merely being part of texture. Krauss (1999: 7) admits that Greenberg’s notion that materials are autonomous and essential, with distinct properties, is merely a means to modernist abstraction and visuality and not a genuine interest in material for materiality’s sake. In Sunnyside, the familiar tactility of the material in the art object initiates spectator curiosity.

2.4 PROTEST WITH BRICOLAGE, ASSEMBLAGE, INSTALLATION AND PERFORMANCE

Social sculpture’s involvement in the political events of North America and Europe from the late 1950s changed the artist’s relationship with the public from passive acceptance to active involvement and critique of aspects of a citizen’s life. Spectator participation in the public arena became prevalent and sometimes even violent with public opposition to the innocent lives lost in the Paris student protests in 1968 and the slaughter in Vietnam. As intervention, social sculpture was used to raise public awareness to take responsibility for their own welfare.

Cultural critic Robert Hughes (1993: 28) claims that social participation requires the rethinking of the artist’s role in communities, as an artwork may be action-orientated, inclusive and dynamic through the combination of mainstream art methodologies and indigenous practices common to a local community or culture. (Which include craft, commercial design, typography, mixed media, new media, film, video, painting and sculpture). This eclectic use of material and subject matter draws attention to the creative activities of the “non-artist” and growing subaltern community that includes the disenfranchised, homeless, migrants and people of humble means who seek refuge in unorthodox, untraditional, creative methods. And so, the blurring of the boundaries advocated

by Beuys has become a reality. Many US Vietnam veterans returned home to unemployment and post-traumatic stress. Visual theorists were exploring post-structural, postmodern theories as an alternative to the hierarchal, authoritarian, singular voice of the politician.

In his assemblage theory, DeLanda (2009:67) presents an alternative point of view to materiality in general and an interpretation of Deleuze's materiality. DeLanda (2009: 67) does not see grandiose structures, systems, or mechanisms at work in assemblage, installation, and happenings. Instead, he posits that innumerable events comprising the material effects of both nature and culture must be considered when producing an assemblage; they do not need to be seen as compatible or harmonious. In his street art practice, Sullivan (2010: 23) finds that the use of *bricolage* material is open-ended on two accounts: firstly, because it is taken out of the gallery context; and secondly, because it is viewed by a diverse but anonymous public audience. The pedestrian's encounter with street art has a different, informal, institutionalised point of view than an encounter in a gallery. Sullivan uses material sourced from the street and returns it to the street in a new form. He believes that teaching and making art are social processes that encourage an understanding of the liquid nature of art practice (Sullivan 2010: xxvi). While the life of an artwork may be short or an encounter with it brief, it can have a wide social impact (Sullivan 2010: xxvi). South African Peace Parks, for example, are a clear example of short-lived but powerfully expressive assemblages outside the art mainstream.

Installation art is social sculpture that has a strong, clear, communicative, community purpose. Beuys used this medium to connect with the spectator both in situ and ex situ after the Second World War, taking the process to the spectator through narratives and using himself at centre stage (Leam-Hayes 2019: 58). The social sculptural communication model that Beuys presents with his installations, performance pieces and explanations was a strong motivator of my own thought process. Beuys presented his socio-political ideas by visually incorporating the spectator with the material tactility of his assemblages and installations to reflect on concepts of humanism, sociology and according to Laem Hayes (2019: 56), Beuys was known for his extended definition of art in which the ideas of social sculpture¹¹ could reshape society and politics, and he frequently held open debates on a wide range of political, environmental, social and cultural issues.

¹¹ Social sculpture entered Beuys's discourse in the 1970s and refers to the idea that life is an artwork that is made collectively by society, with every human act having the potential to be a creative one (Bishop 2005).

Like Beuys, South African artist Fanlo “Chicken man” Mkhize combined several art modes and operated outside the boundaries of the official art system. His practice extended beyond the making of assemblage objects into the realm of performance, setting up his *bricolage* objects in front of the art museum in Pietermaritzburg and engaging its viewing public. Stacey Vorster (in Brenner et al 2015: 41) writes that Mkhize adopted various costumes and took on multiple roles, appearing for a time in a hat and tie and an outfit of uncured skins decorated with buttons. He often accompanied his works with music, and some of his assemblages took the form of spectator-based puppet shows.



Figure 14: Fanlo Mkhize, *Porcupine*, date unknown.
Media: porcupine quills, wire, hide, bitumen, drawing pins.
Size: 71 x 66 x 76cm. Standard Bank art collection catalogue 2015.



Figure 15: Fanlo Mkhize, *Untitled assemblage*, circa 1985. Size: variable. Standard Bank art collection catalogue 2015.

Vorster (2015:43) suggests that Mkhize’s artistic persona is constructed through layers of myth and mediation. Mkhize was more commonly known by his nickname “Chicken man”, a name suggesting the combined spirit of fowl and man. He never denied his therianthropic¹² conception of being and, like Beuys, included animals in his repertoire. Due to his lack of resources and his position on the margins of South African art society, Mkhize used repurposed craft materials and materials found in garbage bins and slaughterhouses to construct his objects. Beuys and Mkhize both integrate several genres and do not put forward one simple narrative.

¹²Therianthropy refers to the belief by the shaman of the San Bushman that during a religious trance dance a transformation from human to animal or a human-animal hybrid takes place. Coleman & Coleman (2011:83-92)

Hlungwane, Mkhize and the Peace Parks artists made work at a time when apartheid laws marginalised black people. Hlungwane’s world view was strongly pantheistic and animistic, and his wanderings in the bushveld gave him intimate knowledge of the land, vegetation, and trees, which served him well in his wood carvings, assemblages, and installations (Liebhammer 2013: 6). He could enter or exit the making process and his personal narrative at any point with ease which was forever in motion because his thinking was non-linear, an embodiment of Deleuze and Guattari’s (2021:5 & 6) nomadic, rhizomorphic thinking. Pantheistic¹³ thinking provides great insight into Hlungwane’s assemblages, and his singularity of purpose drew me to his public/private engagement of spiritual ritual, the non-static, meandering rhizomorphic, configuration, and theophanic¹⁴ conception of being.

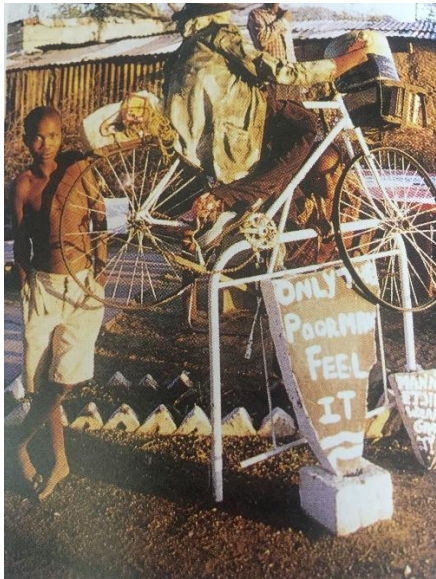


Figure 16: *Only the poor feel it*, 1985. Oukasi township, Brits. Photograph by Gideon Mendel. Sack, 1989)



Figure 17: *The Garden of Peace*, 1985. Alexandra Township, Johannesburg. Photograph by Gill Vlieg. Sack, 1989)

Steven Sack (1989: 191–210) writes that the Peace Parks that spontaneously sprung up in the South African townships had a political resistance agenda and were created by non-artist members of the public in townships. These “non-artists” hurriedly constructed *bricolage*

¹³ Pantheism refers to the belief in many gods. (Coleman & Coleman 2011:98)

¹⁴ Animism refers to the religious belief that everything that exists is inhabited by its own spirit. (Coleman & Coleman 2011:98)

assemblages and installations overnight to be viewed by members of the public on national roads and traffic intersections the next day. The makers were anonymous, unofficial, and not part of the art establishment. The artworks were considered subversive and openly anti-apartheid, and the statements they made could be seen as guerrilla tactics or even as acts of treason (Sack 1989: 200). If identified, the artists faced a real possibility of arrest, interrogation and even death in detainee centres. The Peace Parks were positioned in public walkways in townships like Oukasie, Brits, Alexandra, Johannesburg and Mamelodi. In some cases, the lifespan of these artworks was only a few hours, as they were destroyed by the apartheid security forces within hours of daylight. Their impact as participatory *bricolage* assemblages, however, was as powerful as the far-removed rural spiritual shrines and complexes that Hlungwane and his congregation constructed and maintained for three decades.

Spectator participation in an assemblage is a group phenomenon driven by shared, unsaid values. It can occur between people known and unknown to each other who share a common concern, but it requires leadership, a cue or motivation. Because the spectatorship is so specialised and situated, it is referred to as audiencing by Laura Marks (2002: viii) explains that materials do not operate symbolically but seek to prompt the viewer into associated responses and personal associations to overcome language's inability to describe and contain somatic experiences.

2.5 A NOMADIC PUBLIC AND PRIVATE THINKING

The thinking in social sculptural practice is rambling and nomadic, utilising elements private mental activity and public scrutiny from a street or park that Deleuze and Guattari (2021: 5) speak about. the wider, public audience sets up an alternative thinking methodology. The artists discussed in this chapter used found materials and were motivated by situational challenges beyond personal vision.

Deleuze and Guattari (in Sutton & Martin-Jones 2008: xi) claim that nomadic thought does not reside in a controlled, methodical interiority but moves freely in a state of exteriority. It does not rest on a singular sense of self but thrives on difference and is entrepreneurial and exploitive. Deleuze and Guattari (2021: 6-7) proposes that nomadic thought replaces singular, hierarchical thinking with an elastic, all-pervasive, horizontality, with nomadic thought thriving in an open-ended environment. Its mode of distribution is to arrange oneself in an open space (street) rather

than a closed space (gallery). Deleuze and Guattari (2021:6-7) describes nomadic, rhizomatic thinking as a philosophy that can take many forms. At the same time, however, it can be understood as an attitude that is expansive and open ended, similar to a rhizome plant root system that forms nodules in its root system.

Several intense situations occur simultaneously when this malleable and meandering thinking process is used to elucidate what occurs in an individual scrutinising an art object in a public, non-gallery space. The public space can be unruly, disruptive, noisy, and even dangerous, while the private mental space of the viewer is riddled with the unique variables that constitute a complex, singular human being. Leora Farber (2010: 162) reminds us that the content of the viewer's mind can never be accessed or even guessed at, and that all viewership is essentially one-on-one. The individual regards the object, and from there a unique, private personal cognitive process takes place. Sunnyside's predominantly non-Western demographic presented an ideal, largely ocular centric, thinking process. John Berger (1972: 7) proposes that "seeing comes before words" and that the linguistic act is secondary to what the memory constructs.

The Peace Parks were a collective political statement that cannot be dismissed as subversive non-art or Dadaist anti-art, or as organised anti-social, nihilist statements. The Dadaists responded to the violence and carnage of World War I after the fact, whereas the Peace Parks were a spontaneous expression of outrage with a single-minded absence of self, a multi-authored response to the Nationalist government's censoring and surveillance. The temporality, immediacy and make-shift *bricolage* materiality of such artworks inspired me through their participatory and transitory nature and the situational spectatorship they attracted.

In this chapter, I noted the varying demographics that my practice was exposed to by being freely visible to passers-by. While my work was presented in my South African suburb, I situated it in a broader African world view exposed to multiple international philosophical viewpoints. I considered how *bricolage* and assemblage developed in the Western context. I explained the social process driven by culturally based materiality in personal and political contexts and how this is instantly recognised and interpreted by a very specific, local spectator.

CHAPTER 3: THE WORKINGS OF A BRICOLAGE CREATIVE PRACTICE

In this chapter I present the workings of my art practice of *bricolage* and rhizomatic creative thinking and argue that these practice-led processes helped me develop a participatory studio practice. I explain what materials I used, how I sourced them, and how I placed them. Contributions from residents and pedestrians are also noted and reflected upon in terms of the artist/viewer relationship, the nature of *bricolage* and assemblage, and how they relate to one another. I argue that a rhizomatic process can change linear methodologies and allow for a different kind of art practice that is inclusive and participatory and firmly situated in a postcolonial African setting.

3.1 MATERIAL IN MY PATH: THE FIRST SORT

The material I used for my *bricolage* art objects was found in plain sight as I navigated the walkways of Sunnyside. The selection and collection of materials and objects such as sponge, inner duvet foam and plastic sheets were acts of cultural affiliation specific to my local urban landscape and the suburb's unique circumstances. Prior to being discarded, the materials were regarded as valuable and useful.

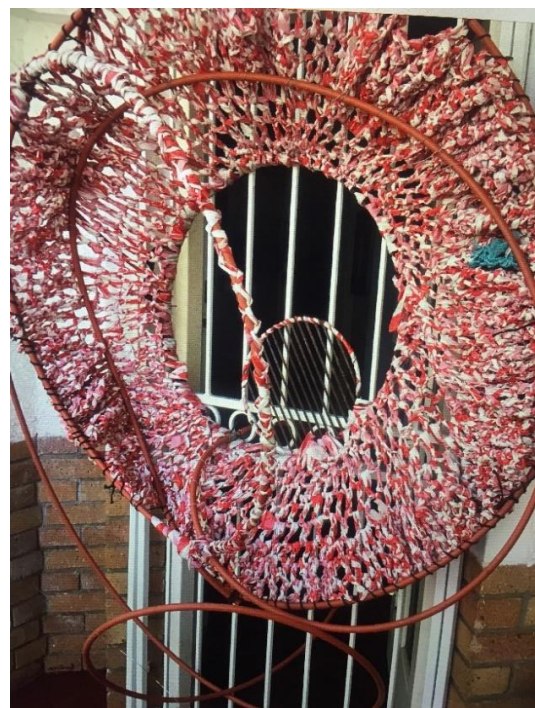
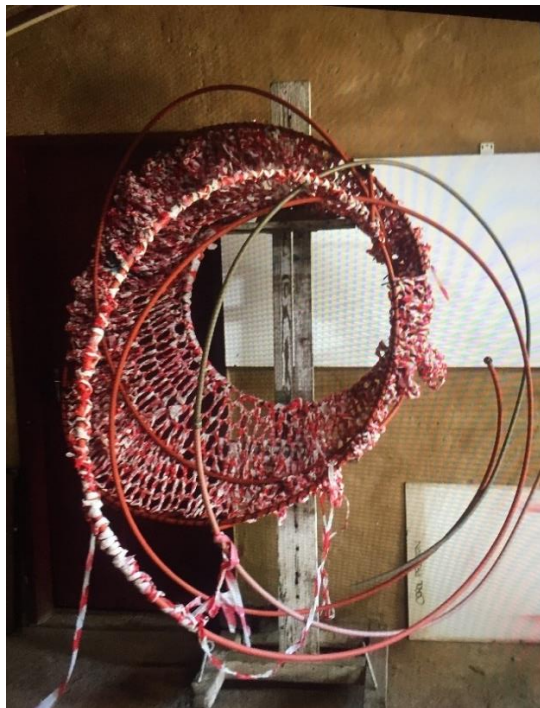
My mindset changed from pioneering to entrepreneurial owing to the restrictive circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. A pioneering mindset implies a forward-thinking approach with new, unused material for the construction of a new object with a specific use and purpose in mind, most often in the environment of industry or business (Andersen 2011: 2). I had purchased a variety of materials before the health restrictions were enacted, but by the time the restrictions were being gradually lifted, my practice had already taken a strong turn to *bricolage*. In fact, this *bricolage* sometimes recapitalised material used to wrap or protect new materials destined for the manufacture of a new object for the retail market.

My choice and collection of *bricolage* materials narrowed my focus to visual aspects such as texture, incidental marking, and negative and positive space. Though I deliberately refrained from intensive preplanning or rethinking, the materials were very carefully chosen for their relevance to the local cultural landscape or surrounding areas, and I stored them in my storeroom at my home studio until an appropriate idea materialised in my mind. I refer to this act of collection and selection as the “first sort”. This act of collecting, finding, and receiving materials was a vital part of my process, not only for the acquisition of the materials, but also for the communal interaction

with local people. This first sort related to the act of rescuing discarded, rejected, or abandoned material that I felt could be revitalised.

Public areas such as vacant plots and pavements attract illegal dumping and the day-to-day detritus of human habitation. Municipal waste collection of one black bag per household occurs once a week. Apartments in inner Sunnyside are overcrowded and have a high turnover. To avoid storage costs or accusations of theft, landlords move the possessions of these absent or evicted tenants to the pavement. To me, these materials had a poignant sense of loss and abandonment, like a recently deceased person's most closely held articles that gave them bodily comfort when they were alive. They also prompted me to wonder whether the area had been vacated by choice or if a tragedy had occurred. Sunnyside is populated by many desperate and vulnerable people seeking refuge, and many kinds of predators who prey on these exposed individuals.

I repurposed humble utilitarian materials such as unbleached mutton cloth (used by mechanics to clear oil marks); warped pieces of wood damaged by rain or in storage; twisted, rolled metal rods; and rolled plastic plumbing tubing, among other materials. These materials suggested secret information and mysterious evidence about a situation unknown to me. Strips of plastic and discarded road construction materials such as hazard tape also became signature indicators in my work.



Figures 18 & 19: *Red Hazard* in progress, 2021. Red hazard tape and plumbing tubing. Size: variable

Hazard tape usually encloses an emergency scene of violence, crime, and trauma. But the intensity of the diagonal red and white stripes also represents an opportunity to construct an object that is visually demanding and emotionally loaded, evoking subjective memories from the subconscious. The diagonal pattern attracts attention, advises caution, and warns of possible danger. It also prompts a subconscious question about what misfortune might have occurred, as hazard tape is a universal indicator of a situation after the fact. I crocheted *Red Hazard* (Figures 5, 18, 19, 26 and 27) out of red hazard tape and hung slightly above eye level around the Pretoria Art Museum in Park Street, where an observer told me that the title, hazard tape and woven shapes reminded him of living with his parents on the south coast as a little boy, where the tape was used to indicate the baited fish traps used to lure fish in the shallow sea water. This anonymous man's comments about trapping desperate fish looking for food helped direct my practice to an analysis of the subjective perceptions that abstract objects can conjure up in the mind of the observer.

Some materials are used so regularly by artists that the art-viewing public associate them with that artist. Beuys, for example, often used honey, fat, felt, blankets and semi-wild alive or dead animals (Bishop 2005: 108). Certain shapes or materials also seem to dominate certain artists' practice at specific timelines or in specific countries or with a particular group of people. These materials become visual signifiers or archetypes. I experimented with material such as black car tyre rubber, but associations with its violent symbolism from the apartheid era and the burning smell of the rubber as I grinded it into strips created such a negative association for passers-by that I abandoned the material. South African artist Nicolas Hlobo often successfully incorporates black rubber and car tyres into his works, as black tyre rubber and the industrial odour of its burning have become a national archetype of resistance in South Africa.

I used several objects as plinths upon which to place my finished *bricolage* assemblages (Figures 20 and 21).



Figures 20 & 21: Structures and areas used as plinths and platforms, 2020 onwards. Sizes: variable.

These objects acted as unconventional but effective holders or stabilisers. I also placed semi-complete art objects in areas of my home garden for contemplation in a kind of subliminal mental soaking process, where the yet-unformulated object rests until it is ready to be finalised into a visually pertinent statement. Sometimes a half-finished art object, like *Water Way* (Figures 22 and 23), was visible from the street and a chance remark by a pedestrian offered a solution.

I also acquired materials for the first sort by bartering and purchasing discarded materials from the waste sorters, who are most prevalent on the day municipal garbage collection takes place. While Tuesday is collection day for my street, there is a constant traffic of waste sorters all week, because Melville Street forms part of a backway to the depot in Marabastad and the Pretoria West industrial area. The waste sorters communicate with a series of whistles, shouts, and hand signals that only they know the meanings of. Their very quick, informal conversations (because the waste sorters are often in a hurry) made me realise they have an intricate culture and decorum. Each waste sorter specialised in a particular material, such as metal, wood, plastic or paper and cardboard, and each had her/his own designated area of trade. They were in constant contact with one another about the availability and location of a particular material on the pavements and dumping sites. If I found myself in need of a certain material or technical skill, they would send the appropriate person to my gate in no time at all. The unorthodox processes of sourcing and accumulating materials and the technical advice and help I received were a result of the web of local communities. Respect for each other's area of expertise, territory and type of material was strictly adhered to and I seldom observed conflict between members of this community.

3.2 CHOICE OF MATERIAL, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: THE SECOND SORT

Originally, the specific choice of *bricolage* material for each artwork and placements in and around my garden and home studio came about purely for the practical purpose of surveying the incomplete work to ascertain what direction it should go in. I refer to this as the "second sort", a broad, informal process of adding, attaching, and removing *bricolage* material to or from each art object. This second sort resulted in unexpected and unsolicited scrutiny by residents and anonymous passers-by, who generally passed at the same time of day, usually twice a day. They witnessed my process of making and the progress or difficulties I encountered, and this eventually prompted them to participate. Their participation was initially tentative, but when I asked for their opinions and opened my work for debate, they became more forthcoming.



Figures 22 & 23: *Water Way*, 2023. Thinking and making process for the garden fountain. Size: variable

A conversation would usually take place regardless of the array of languages. Many French-speaking pedestrians were from the francophone states in Africa and conversed in French and their own cultural language, but not in English and as I don't speak French communication was sometimes a mixture of hand signs, body language, gestures and broken sentences. My materials prompted passers-by to share the signified responses evoked in their memories. Kester (2001: 3) notes that the viewer's desire to communicate their response to the art object to the artist is important, as it breaks down the barrier that often exists between strangers. The tendency to objectify an unknown person due to differences subsides when a non-confrontational, informal talking point is established. For me, *bricolage* situated my art practice as a process-led, practice-led, community-orientated research methodology that naturally led to the construction of assemblage as my method of creation. This was a strongly organic and intuitive process in which I delved into my collection of stored materials to tinker into being an art object made up of repurposed materials.



Figures 24 & 25: Material in storage, 2022. Mutton cloth, covered discs, plastic tape and sheets of blue plastic. Sizes: variable.

This open, polysemic viewership unexpectedly presented me with alternative criteria of assessment different from the conventional white-cube gallery perspective. The usual linear material methodologies of a closed statement were bypassed in favour of an interpretation of an artwork in the context of Sunnyside's multi-cultural demographic. Over the palisade fence, I debated the relationship between the individual and culture, the idea of aesthetics, placement, current and historical situations with passing residents and pedestrians. Art appreciation was considered in the local context, but also as a point of interest to wider Pretoria, as many international citizens passed my house on their way to Alliance Française in nearby River Street.

Umberto Eco (1962: 33) reminds us that the openness of an artwork is characterised by ambiguity of meaning and plurality of interpretation from the anonymous, undefinable spectator. Kester (2011: 3) explains the over-completed art statement or object as limited, because it does not consider the viewer's participation in participating the completion. Seitz's (in Dezeuze 2008:56) curatorial choice of art objects for *The Art of Assemblage* avoided artworks in which the material was so overworked and so 'beaten to death' that the character of the material was almost obliterated. According to Dezeuze (2008: 56), Lévi Strauss realised that the incidental – the presence of the probable or the potential for several interpretations – is available to the spectator when confronted with a *bricolage* object, encourages the viewer to participate. This non-lingual approach defies hierarchy and encourages multiple subjective interpretations.

The second sort of material occurred on the partially constructed *bricolage* art objects, in their process of becoming and materialising. I had several art pieces in progress simultaneously,

moving them around the garden to interpret their personalities and establish where they would be most comfortable. I dragged them, hung them, and draped them over my make-do plinths. Some materials stood around for some time, drawing attention to their incompleteness and asking where they fit in the assemblage. *Water Way* (Figures 26 & 27) lay stagnant on my front veranda for some months before pedestrians began to ask about it. I moved it around on the circular veranda and grass plinth, until a pedestrian suggested weaving the nearby hosepipe in between the chairs, keeping the hosepipe connected to the tap. I saw this both a performance and a fountain.



Figure 26 and 27: Repurposed Bentwood chairs in process of being moved to different venues, 2023. Sizes: variable.



Figures 28 and 29: Discarded material in South Campus studio, 2022. Sizes: variable.



Figures 30, 31 & 32: Examples of the material collected and rearranged from time to time.

During this process, more and more pedestrians stopped to peer through the palisade fence. They questioned, debated, and offered advice, and I, in turn enquired about their situations. I gradually became aware of the challenges that migrants in Sunnyside faced, as some expressed their concern with losing their cultural identity amidst the busy South African culture. I became sensitised to the challenges faced by Africans residing near me, who were negotiating their own identities within South African culture.

The second sort resulted in intense interest from pedestrian spectators, who started to trust me and to share their own difficulties and challenges in the suburb. According to Kester (2011: 3), a multi-cultural interpretation of the same object presents a conflict between individual interpretation and universality.¹⁵ The bias of universality was a subject of concern for many of the migrants who spoke to me, and I must admit that I had never encountered or even thought about such a predicament before. Pedestrians explained their encounters with conflict and minor issues that were not life-threatening but were uncomfortable. I ruminated with them and shared some of my areas of discomfort as well, which resulted in the viewers offering *me* advice. The pedestrian spectatorship that my assemblages drew unexpectedly became my mentors, expressing concern for my well-being in our regular exchanges.

3.3 AN UNRULY, RHIZOMATIC, POST-COLONIAL CREATIVE PRACTICE

The collection and selection of materials, the creative process and deciding where to start and what to eliminate or combine were a major part of my art object. The unsolicited but welcome participation of the viewer made the process more unruly and often complicated my decision-

¹⁵ In this context, universality is the preconceived belief that a certain notion or worldview is shared by all. (Baron & Byrne 1994:260).

making. Bishop (2005: 102) suggests that a culturally based participatory process has political intent, because participants play a role in the content, and a transitive relationship is implied between “activated spectatorship and active engagement” in the wider social and political arena. This unregulated rhizomatic spectatorship encourages an experimental practice, as pre-planning and regulation become impossible when considering many diverse opinions. The only way I could productively engage with the participants’ interventions was to note them down in a separate book and return to them in a quiet moment when I felt stuck. My making process was not steady or even, and at times my production appeared slow or dormant, while there were also periods of intense activity. I was very surprised by the feverish speed at which residents and pedestrians contributed suggestions and material during my days of inactivity. Most materials were donated by interested people who wished me success for my project, many of whom did not know where their next meal was coming from or had very precarious accommodation situations. They made themselves available to me and my practice and generously gave their time and intellectual capital. This was not simply an opportunistic relationship of supply and demand and obtaining the highest price for an item never seemed paramount.

This generosity to a person clearly more prosperous and comfortable than themselves was a mystery to me that I attributed to a practical application of Senghor’s philosophical theories of collective communalism. This multi-cultural spectatorship catalysed a more communal practice, in which the acquisition of *bricolage* materials was a collective project and talking point amongst the viewers. The artworks often went in directions that were macabre, amusing and even ridiculous in their materiality and form and puzzled many residents. But when they had guests for Sunday lunch, I noticed that they would take them on a brief tour of the neighbourhood, often debating the merits of my sculptures. This public interest often gave my practice momentum and because the works were visible from the street, I could not indulge in periods of procrastination or inactivity without gentle prodding from the passers-by.

3.4 A PARTICIPATORY STUDIO PRACTICE IN A LOCAL SETTING

My studio practice did not have the conventional limitations of a traditional bricks-and-mortar gallery space and developed a process of material collection and communal participation situated within and visible to an anonymous local spectatorship. The encounter followed a diverse, alternative relationship and an engagement with me as the artist.

Integrating multiple art objects into an assemblage in full view of the pedestrian spectator demanded a certain amount of flexibility and an open, opportunistic mindset, as the pedestrians offered me unorthodox materials and suggestions. The practice of *bricolage*, rhizomorphic thinking and the mentorship of enthusiastic pedestrians helped me develop a participatory studio practice free of conventional sculptural limitations. The intertextuality of my contact with numerous subaltern people in and around my suburb, as well as the more prosperous and established viewers, facilitated a constant stream of *bricolage* material, advice, critique and even protection that upheld and enhanced the materiality and presentation of the art objects. This pushed me beyond the boundaries of my own conceptual thinking and challenged my reluctance to embrace certain possibilities. Scrutiny from the pedestrian spectators facilitated my material collecting process and the initial construction of the assemblages and made me aware of the various and multiple meanings these materials conveyed.

Post-coloniality is an important issue in liberated colonies and presents new challenges. The intellectual space of post-coloniality includes the mapping of subaltern people to speak for themselves – in their own voices – and thereby produce culture, discourse, philosophy, language, society, and economy that address the situations that people at the base level of society face daily (Chaturvedi 2000: 3). The unexpected sight of an artist working intently on her *bricolage* art objects resulted in a completely different audience/artist relationship and a loosening of traditional hierarchical roles and relationships. What started through the palisade fence as a gesture of greeting, a verbal hello, developed into tentative questions and full conversations. Debating and brainstorming solutions spread as viewers interacted with their peers. Some walked by my house out of curiosity even when they did not necessarily need to use that route. The assemblages in my garden studio intrigued members of the community with varying levels of academic status and unconventional contributions.

On some occasions the practice became unruly and difficult to manage, especially when the textual component of the research became demanding. I took many wrong turns and had to consider many new possibilities. Von Hantleman (in Grobler 2020: 202) writes that “artworks generate responses situationally in particular spatial and discursive contexts as well as relationally (in relation to the viewer and public)”. Audiences began to experience and respond to embedded principles, concerns, and discursive contexts through the artwork process, to the point that they assumed a seemingly empathetic stance to me. This mentoring evolved my research into a relational art practice in which the discursive content centred around the praxis of problem-solving

while accommodating the fluidity of the exchange of tools, repurposed materials, and intellectual capital.

3.5 THE FACILITATION OF MULTI-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

My art objects unexpectedly became larger in their production, perhaps because of the perception of freedom and unlimited space offered in moving out the studio door and into the exterior garden. The lack of inhibition and the confidence in ownership of my home studio space allowed the form of the artwork to meander nomadically and even situate itself for a period without imposing on other student artists. Experimenting with placement all around the garden, on fences, grape vines and walls expanded my vision and was enhanced by the native elements in my garden. *Nest Wave* (Figures 30 & 31), a diamond-shaped wire basket on a found DSTV satellite dish, hung comfortably on a diamond-wired gate. I moved the work around numerous locations and heights until I felt a sense of situated connectivity.



Figures 34 & 35: *Nest Wave*, 2022. Found dish, discarded basket and transparent plastic. Size: 80 x 60

I was moving *Nest Wave* around even as I was busy making other art objects. It was important to me that the work not be at the same height as a functional satellite dish. This work was easily visible, and the combination of signifiers was clearly recognisable to viewers, whose signified responses were varied. Several spectators found it amusing and made suggestions about what to place in the basket, which was perceived as an open statement, especially as its bottom section was not finished off. Many viewers were intrigued by my eventual placement of two wrapped avocados in the basket, as people often do to encourage the ripening of the fruit.



Figure 36: Various stages of casting and placing the bronze gourd in preparation for the final assemblage. Sizes: vary.



Figure 37: A view of the *Interlocutor Assemblage* showing placement of the *Nest Wave*, 2023. University of Pretoria's sculpture courtyard. Size: variable. Photograph: Rupert de Beer.

Chapter three explains the processes of the first and second sort of my collection of materials to achieve order in what I found to be a chaotic situation. Many participants provided me with material but also contributed to the conceptualising of the art objects. I hesitated to throw anything away and even kept the used filters after servicing my car for possible use as embroidery and smocking. I examined my neighbour's garbage bins and considered Styrofoam supports and packaging of expensive electrical sound equipment found on their pavements as elements of

form. I combined expensive material like bronze with shattered bulletproof glass and dry Koki pens and their saturated day-glow colours.

The fact that most of the pedestrian spectators were anonymous and transient made the participants even more mysterious and interesting to me. While I never felt a sense of hierarchy, I could be perceived to be in a position of dominance as the home owner (Sarkar 2014: 253), and my interactions with pedestrian spectators offered multiple nuances and ambiguities of power envisaged by Michael Foucault and Jacques Derrida; although I was aware of these possibilities, they never surfaced.

CHAPTER 4: BRICOLAGE AND ASSEMBLAGE IN THE HOME GARDEN STUDIO

In this chapter I consider how meaning is conveyed in my present body of work through a multi-faceted approach to making that involves *bricolage*, assemblage, material considerations and a process that relies on the incidental and provisional. This chapter discusses my materials and methods of working, such as crochet, knotting, weaving and the combination of found objects to stimulate subjective responses from viewers. I discuss formal considerations of negative space and self-imposed limits on my materials and use of colour to prevent visual overload. Through this chapter, I argue that these objects communicate perceptually with the spectator. This chapter addresses research questions two and three, in which it is proposed that material quality and modes of making assemblage can convey meaning to a diverse audience with a strong contemporary focus.

4.1 THE MATERIALS, METHODS, MAKING AND THINKING

My methods of material collection, making which is the crafting, weaving, tying, or crocheting to form the object and construction, (the putting together of these different forms in a meaningful way on an armature and hung or placed on a plinth) as well as the theorising in the research were simultaneously discursive and experiential. I worked on several art objects synchronously, both in my mind and physically, with objects in various stages of failure, incompleteness or of being complemented by research and spectator participation. I found that the process of discursive thinking fit the rhizomatic, non-linear manner of placing and removing *bricolage* material on a found object. Divergent thinking offered a fluid way of looking at the materials available to me to explore placement until the art object emerged. This process also involved the experiential act of

alternating embodied, sensorial, emotive, and affective acts of doing and reflection, punctuated with periods of activity and inactivity, observation of the art object to judge progress. Pedestrians saw me during these still periods staring at an object in my garden studio and approached me with polite enquiries that led to a discussion, and I could explain what, if anything, was worrying me about the object would result in innovative suggestions from the public.

My process of doing was an empirical, pragmatic act of a naturalistic approach that viewed the knowledge gained from the doing process to be the next step, which was often the active application of advice from a spectator or an attempt from me to explain what I was doing. This attempt at explaining to an objective person demanded that I apply rational thought to my intuitive creative process. I welcomed the challenge of such explanations because they demanded deliberation and self-reflection and made my practice participatory, allowing me to indulge in a nomadic type of thought that organically encompassed the different opportunities and ideas offered. My home storeroom contained numerous gathered objects and materials. Some lay dormant, while I found others so interesting that I took them out and put them in view immediately. An object could offer an interesting sense of balance or tension, or even have a mysterious presence. Very little preparatory sketching or planning was ever necessary. I left objects in my line of sight or in and around the garden until they suggested their own formation.

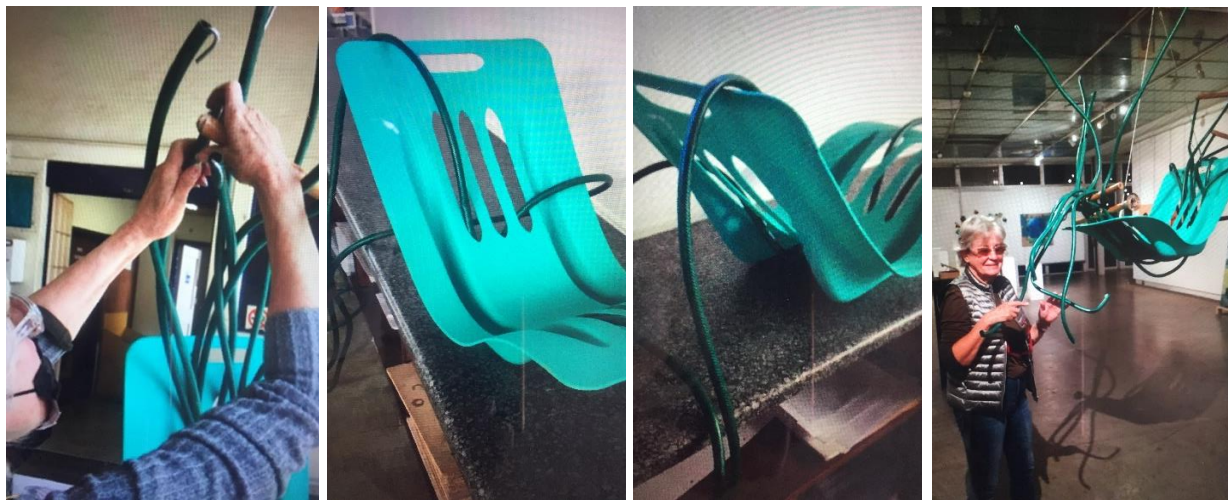
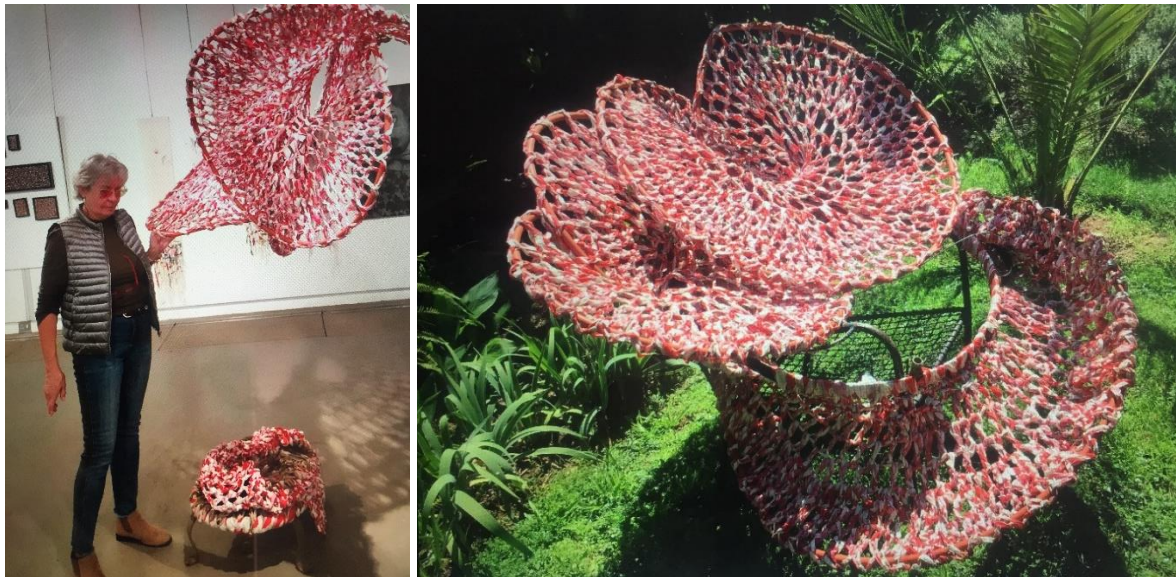


Figure 38: *The Swing* (methods and processes), 2021. Size: variable.

When constructing *The Swing* (Figure 33), I placed the green plastic chair on the counter at the back of the classroom of a school where I was employed to teach art as a locum for a term. As I went about my teaching duties, I placed other articles that I felt related to the swing onto the

counter with the chair, including green hosepipe and same size varnished wooden broomsticks. The materiality of these articles seeped into my mind gradually and organically. Eventually, in a spare teaching period, I started to weave the hosepipe into and through the gaps in the plastic chair. Students witnessed my making process and were amused by the gardener's alarm that I might include his hosepipe. As the sculpture took shape, I needed more tools and a clamp, so I moved it to the University of Pretoria's sculpture studio to complete it. The finished object hung in the communal section of the sculpture room until it was delivered to the Pretoria Art Museum, where it was selected with *Red Hazard* (Figures 5, 18, 19, 39, 40,) into the top hundred of the Sasol New Signatures Art Competition.



Figures 39 and 40: *Red Hazard*, 2021. Size: variable. (PAM Gallery and on an old garden chair in my garden studio).

Because not all materials impact every individual in the same way, the various materials of *The Swing* (Figure 41) had the effect of harnessing the unpredictable. Marks (2002: x) counters symbolism by emphasising that materiality demands we turn our backs on symbolic understanding and engage affect, where the viewer has no need of cultural interpretation but is enveloped by the surface area of experience. Through *bricolage* I encountered materials like fabric, plastic, and rubber under circumstances I was not familiar with. An observer at the Pretoria Art Museum who saw *the Swing* insisted that he found the artwork very erotic! Only after explaining his association of, it to Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *Swing* did I understand his thought process.



Figure 41: *Swing*, 2021. Mixed media, plastic sun lounger, hose pipe and broom sticks. Size: variable.



Figure 42: *Black dome*, 2022. Mixed media, braai bowl, shredded cardboard, strips of garbage plastic. Size: variable.



I improvised tools and considered any instrument at hand to work the material. I crocheted with hazard tape and strips of plastic of various softness using a 20 mm crochet hook. For the *Interlocutor Assemblage* body of work, I included a starting point or base in the form of a found object, which ranged across a rusted metal 100 cm circular container, a black braai bowl, a green plastic lounging chair, hose pipe, pieces of varnished broom sticks and a rejected satellite dish. The artworks shown in Figures 41 and 42 combined found materials with no relation to each other, but in both artworks, I weaved and crocheted the repurposed materials of plastic garbage bags and shredded cardboard to create texture and tactility that could evoke curiosity in viewers.



Figure 43: *Bark Scroll*, 2023. Tree bark, animal skin, metal frame, car seat belt. Size: 35 x 40 x 8 cm. Photograph: Rupert de Beer.

I found the bark scroll used in Figure 43 on one of my daily walks before the pandemic. It remained on my studio shelf until 2023, when I constructed a narrative in which it was the container of the interlocutor art practice, and I held it together with animal skin.

I used old baskets, upholstered seats in mutton cloth, shredded packing cardboard, hessian string, plastic washing line, plumbing tubing and old electrical cords in various states of disrepair or deterioration, and more. These offered an alternative to traditional purchased materials. I combined mainstream industrial methodologies like welding and bronze casting with craft practices such as the weaving and crocheting of hazard tape and discarded plastic. The materials' history, previous use and commercial status worked with the combination of contradictory objects. I reconstituted the materials with a primary focus on texture, materiality, and cultural significance to the local community. I exploited tactile intensity and disregarded traditionally harmonious combinations, using the muted colours of bronze with the garish colours of plastic or found objects, or a discarded satellite dish with an empty hanging basket. Materials were not casually or loosely juxtaposed but were carefully and deliberately woven, knotted, crocheted, and stitched to suggest or create new relationships. I paid careful attention not to destroy the indeterminateness, chance, and mobility that Dezeuze (2008: 31) refers to. I almost obsessively repeated the weaving and crocheting of the materials in or on found objects in several art works, perhaps an unconscious attempt to instil order and control on the seeming chaos and detritus I witnessed around me daily.



Figure 44: *Black Oblivion*, 2022. Plastic and plumbing tubing. Size: variable.

The spiralling aspect of *Black Oblivion* (Figures 6,9,40, 44–50) changes depending on its placement. This artwork reflects my interest in tango dancing, which helps me stabilise the vertigo caused after the sensors in the cochlea in my right ear were dislodged. The lead dancer improvises steps, indicating the choice of configurations and movements around the dance floor with his foot and body movement in a synchronised harmony to music.

With my use of *bricolage* the materiality of my objects is not secondary to the form or used to enhance and uphold the form because the concept differs between individuals and function. Moniker Wagner (2015: 8) states in relation to *bricolage*, material is the primary information carrier. *Bricolage* materials carry a history, so the choice of material used in my work needed to be relevant to the culture of the viewer.



Figures 45–50: *Black Oblivion*, 2022. Red plumbing tubing, strips of black garbage bag. Size: variable. Installation view in home garden studio and South Campus studio.

The materials changed according to venue, and once back in my cramped studio on South Campus the tone of my art objects changed. Figures 28 and 29 suggest art objects that are wild and difficult to contain, wanting to break out of the stifling confines of the small room. The large circular spring literally rolled off the table, and I made attempts to contain it with sisal string and strips of black plastic. Eventually I placed the parts on the floor to stop them from rolling around. I inserted the striated plank to stabilise the objects.

I found Deleuze and Guattari's (2021:5) rhizomatic thinking model of never-ending and becoming preferable to that of a closed, static form that is less inviting to the fast-moving spectator. The open-ended, rambling, tactile form does not represent anything recognisable, and this and a lack of context make it unlikely that a pedestrian could overlook an art object such as *Black Oblivion* (Figure 45 and 50) as they speed to their destination. According to Maas (in Jordaan 1990: 348) this allows the viewer to impose their own context. *Black Oblivion* hints at an affiliation with *Black Dome* (Figure 52), *Red Hazard* (Figures 39 and 40) and *The Swing* (Figure 41) through their shared use of plastic, weaving and crocheting with the same size crochet hook and the same stitch size that create transparency and negative shapes.



Figures 51 & 52: *Black Dome*, 2023. Left: In the sculpture courtyard. Right: Presented for a master's critique in 2022. Size: variable.

Every time *Black Oblivion* (Figures 45 to 50) was moved, the configuration of the unruly, tightly bound spiral of red plumbing tubing changed. Strips of black plastic garbage bags were crocheted onto the tubing as in *Red Hazard* (Figures 39 and 40). The materials in *Black Dome* (Figure 51 & 52) included shredded cardboard, which started to deteriorate in the university's sculpture courtyard; during a wild thunderstorm, the weight of the dome caused the shredded wet cardboard to collapse and fall to the ground. The sculpture nevertheless seemed very at home among the white mould marks on the courtyard's brickwork.

In their social participation sculptures and installations, Beuys and Kaprow put aside preoccupations with modernist aesthetics by creating open works that did not conform to the modern formalist principles of the traditional gallery space. They distanced themselves from the notion that art should be a representational practice that can be translated from linguistic grammar or formalistic templates for codification (Bolt 2010: 3). Bolt (2010: 4) expresses concern about the operating logic (procedure) of practice rather than focusing on the finished product. The unruliness of a *bricolage* assemblage practice is difficult to quantify and impossible to force into one finalised interpretation demanded by modernism. Bolt (2010: 5) notes this difficulty by pointing out how this gap is evident in Greenbergian formalism and the Bauhausian principle of art as a process to decide whether an image works because of its excessive finalisation which results in an internalisation, excluding the viewer, but if we can apprehend what is involved by including process in an artwork this can be avoided. Visual practice is not information, but a process with a particular practical and mental logic and explanation, and Bolt notes that there is not yet a unified theory of visual practice (Bryson in Bolt 2010).

My Interlocutor Assemblage Series (the title chosen for the present body of art objects) were juxtaposed with craft techniques like crochet, sewing, weaving and carpet knotting. Crochet stitches are basic chain stitch, single, double, and triple, with single, double, and triple spacing to create negative shapes and transparency in the form. Pattern pamphlets can be purchased at haberdashery shops from knowledgeable attendants who advise on stitch designs and sell exquisite silk and wool threads, but I chose not to work with such an orderly, stylised emphasis on design.

In the *Skin Series* (Figure 1) I learned that the crocheting process is laborious and time-consuming, but I continued with this method in the *Interlocutor Assemblage* because the looseness or tightness of the stitches resulted in transparency, bringing the background in as part of the artwork. While the work was monotonous, a lapse in concentration could result in a dropped stitch, causing an entire section to unravel. At first, I considered such moments to be disastrous, but then I saw them as opportunities to add and stitch in objects, creating unexpected textures that added to the tactility of the work, (e.g., *Black Oblivion*, Figures 6,9,44,45 to 50). Although some of the objects appear very organic, all the objects are constructed on a clear vertical and diagonal grid of warp and weft by turning the crocheting around and going back and forth or slightly gathering or rushing small areas. My choice and placement of ‘thread’ was intuitive, but variety was deliberately restricted. Different levels of depth and texture were achieved by slitting the plastic into various thicknesses to create open and closed areas. In *Red Hazard* (Figures 39 and 40) and *Black Oblivion* (Figures 46 to 50), transparency was further emphasised by attaching garden mesh between the larger open spaces of the dropped stitches. This created a grid to which I sometimes applied a carpet knot, giving completely different textures to each side. The art object had to be viewable from all sides, as it was not meant to hang against a wall like a tapestry. My combination of materials was deliberately contradictory, varying from natural, untreated materials like hessian, mutton cloth and sisal to a rusted 6 mm steel rod and cheap plastic as in (*Sketch in Metal and Mutton Cloth* (Figure 53).



Figure 53: *Sketch in Metal and Mutton Cloth*, 2022. 6 mm metal rod discarded chair seats covered with mutton cloth. Size: variable, depending on placement.



Figures 54–56: *Unsettling Transformation*, 2023. Wooden plank, metal spiral, mutton cloth, disc. Size: approximately 3 m x 1 m. Photographs: Rupert de Beer

4.2 MEANING-MAKING PROCESSES OF A DIVERSE AUDIENCE

The pedestrians passing my home garden studio, as well as spectators at later venues, commented, offered guidance, asked questions, and even brought found objects, materials, and tools to assist my art practice in 2021 and 2022. Understanding the complexity of meaning within one's own culture is difficult, but considering a polysemic, diverse audience like that of Sunnyside has as much to do with the maker as of what a diverse audience brings with an even greater variety of interpretation to the work regardless of its maker's intentions or attitudes. This inclusive ambiguous, unfixed, open stance was necessary so that individuals could construct a narrative from the work on their own terms because the audience witnessed or took part in the process from time to time and was as involved with the growth of the object. The long plinth in *Unsettling Transformation* (Figures 54–56) was a piece of wood striated with white paint, with spiralling metal wire woven around it. This 3.5 m wood plank was carried from a building site to my studio by a local pedestrian, who supplied me with numerous objects for my objects. The plank was vital in unifying and stabilising my physically and visually unruly metal *bricolage*, where the connotation of the work was so ambiguous that a consolidating element was necessary. The bricolage material and placement of the metal rods and ball of black garbage bag thread invite spectator intervention.

Unsettling Transformation was a progression from *Sketch in Metal and Mutton Cloth* (Figure 45), which was exhibited in a group show at the Pretoria Arts Association. I called it a “sketch” because I was still visually debating preliminary matters about the spiral and its tight, intense energy. To my surprise the “sketch” was sold, and I had to emotionally let go of it, so I completed *Unsettling Transformation* instead. *The Wave* (Figures 49–57) is made from plastic, sponge, and duvet stuffing in neutral creams, transparent or white, loosely combined as if floating in the wind and glittering in the rain. It was unanimously and spontaneously named by a group standing at the kiosk near the Student Gallery, where the work was installed for a student crit. The passers-by referred to the object as *The Wave* so often that the name stuck, despite it hanging inland on the side of a building far from the sea.

Memory is embedded in each object in the *Interlocutor Assemblage* body of work because the materials are simultaneously familiar but ambiguous, as they are not clearly recognisable or representative of an objective reality – triggering the pedestrian spectator's subjectivity to decode the object.



Figures 57–63. *The Wave* (in progress), 2021. Aluminium fencing with plastic, brown paper, duvet foam. Size 5 m x 2.5 m.

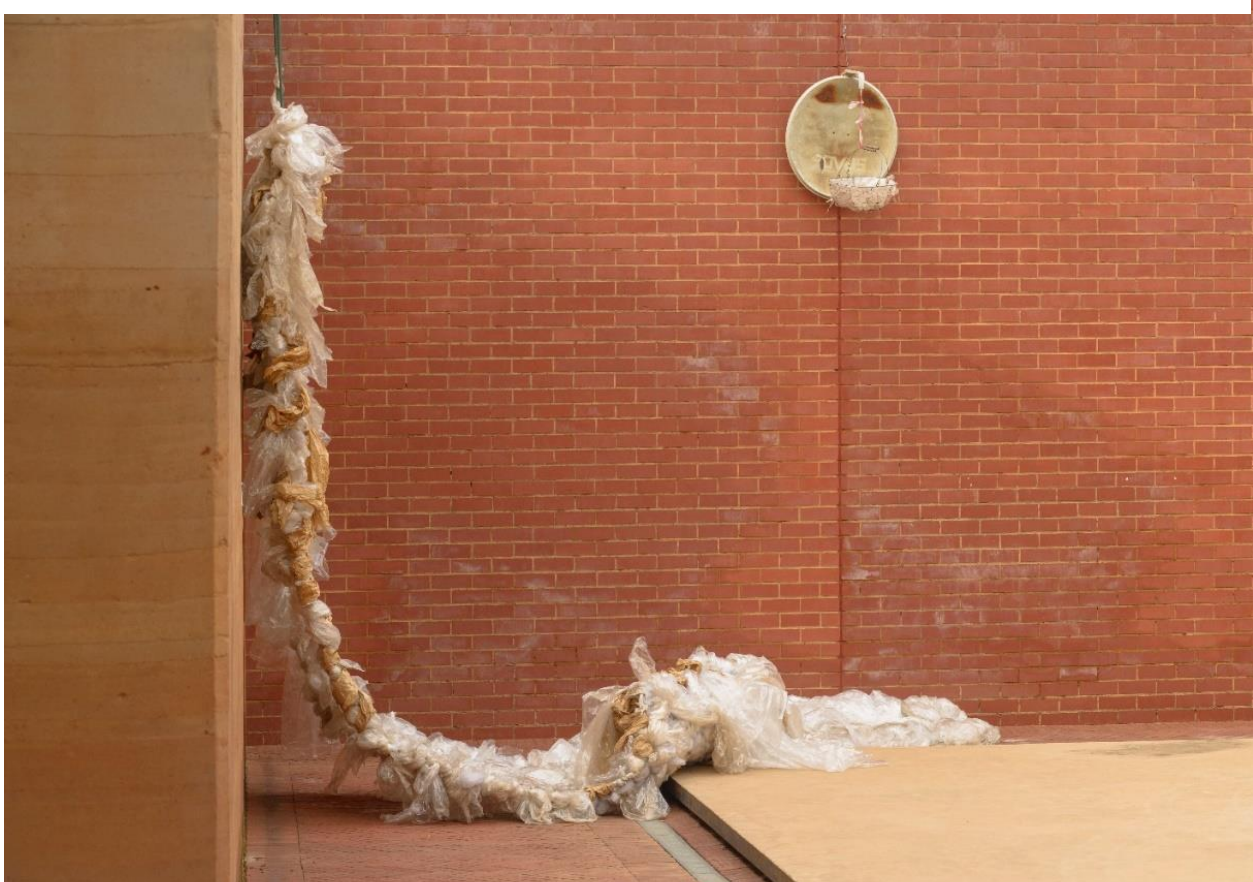


Figure 64: *The Wave*, 2023. Sculpture courtyard, University of Pretoria. Size: 8x2.5m. Photograph: Rupert de Beer.



Figure 65: *The Wave*, 2023. Sculpture courtyard, University of Pretoria. Size:8 x 2.5m. Photograph:

The art object provokes the viewer to draw on their own collective experience to decode it subjectively and emotionally. Viewers' individual and collective experiences of the work make them part of a *bricolage* assemblage through their psychological absorption when responding to the tactility of materials. This sensual experience of looking takes place publicly, but the decoding takes place in the privacy of the viewer's mind. The *Interlocutor Assemblage* was integral to spectator participation because each work's materiality was grounded in the exploitation of a found object's basic form (e.g., a metal circle, a broken stand, a rubber loop) through a *bricolage*-based craft application like crocheting, threading, weaving, or knotting. This is similar to Scott (Figure 12), who starts most of her art objects on a structure or armature.

In decoding an image, the individual interrogates it on their own terms. This process of interrogation allows us to un-anchor and recode the image within our own unique socio-cultural

context. By presenting an undifferentiated and ambiguous culturally relevant materiality (with an emphasis on the *material*), I sought to avoid prescribing a response to the *bricolage* object. According to Lange-Berndt (2015: 12), *bricolage* material in a sculpture suggests that a substance will be further processed, and this material is thus subject to change and wider range of interpretations depending on the different spectator's emotional response.

The materials used in the *Interlocutor Assemblage* were deliberately limited in texture and colour to ensure the viewer would not be so overwhelmed by the art object that they dismissed it entirely. However, this is also dependent on the pedestrian's emotional state, which is in turn affected by the current political and economic turmoil of the African context. This instability is manifest in Sunnyside's undocumented refugee population – some of whom take a back road past my home garden studio. The multicultural spectatorship offered by local pedestrians and residents and the placement of my *bricolage* artworks in local galleries, public areas, parks, convention centres, shopping centres and sculpture parks exposed the works to an inclusive public and private interaction in a borderless landscape of interpretation, which in many cases remained unknown to the artist. The works are documented in situ in my catalogue, and it is my intention to distribute and display the works in public spaces and conventional gallery settings that are accessible to a wider audience, because I believe that art should be inclusive and available to everybody. The site-specificity of the *Interlocutor Assemblages* created in my home garden studio expanded the reach of my art objects to include the responsiveness of the pedestrian spectator, who might not have encountered such an assemblage of *bricolage* in their daily activities before.

4.3 EXPANDING MY PARTICIPATORY BRICOLAGE ART PRACTICE

The process of creating works with materials culturally relevant to my suburb partially returned to the University of Pretoria South Campus studios, with critiques and counselling sessions from lecturers and fellow master's students in the student gallery. This interaction added to the spectatorship, because the student gallery is directly opposite a coffee kiosk frequented by students and staff from other University of Pretoria faculties. The head professor of Architecture conducted a lecture amongst the art objects on display in the sculpture courtyard for her first-year students. The art objects also had exposure in art competitions and other local gallery events in Pretoria over the last two years of this project. As this is a practice-led research project, these incidents formed part of the participatory nature of my *bricolage* art.

Because the spectatorship in Sunnyside was so diverse, the wide variety of languages and dialects inhibited linguistic communication, and a linear, linguistic model was not suitable for analysing participatory assemblages. A visual communication model offering an empathetic, non-linguistic encounter that the spectator could easily participate in seemed more conducive to the discursive fellowship that my participatory sculptural assemblage required. Viewing my *bricolage* art object as the interlocutor that initiates and facilitates a visual process was more likely to draw a response from a multicultural spectatorship than a conversation.

Viewers did not visit the art objects *ex situ* in a gallery to be contemplated in silence. In fact, the viewers' process of scrutiny may have been quick, a cursory glance from a distance over a very short period. This is more like traffic speeding past a billboard in a public street – more fleetingly perceptual than laboriously mental, and often too fast to accommodate an artist's statement. The available meaning was in the tactility of the material, which encouraged emotion and memory but offered no singular interpretation. The encoding process was anchorless and democratic, and decoding occurred in the privacy of the viewers' subconscious to surface emotion and memory. As the interlocutor in this participatory practice, the *bricolage* material conveyed meaning to a diverse audience with a strong contemporary African focus, even when relocated from my home studio.

4.4 DIALOGUE WITH A MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

The final presentation of the *bricolage* art objects presented challenges in the form of unexpected anomalies, disorder, irregular access to studio space, limited access to tools and materials, involuntary migration, switches of direction, adaptation to unruly spectator demographics, community health restrictions and crime. The different locations of the works' placement contribute to the meaning of the work to a person of any educational level or language. A single *bricolage* art object is constantly repurposed, made, tinkered with, rejected, reinvented, and discarded. The reordering, recodifying, and redefining of the object, informed by the crafting, crocheting, weaving, smocking, and knotting into negative and positive space, spoke to the private landscape of the viewer. The becoming into being of each object was encouraged by open-endedness, ambiguity and plurality that was appropriate for a multicultural community such as Sunnyside and its surrounds.

The subjective perceptual activity of viewing took place in private – the individual’s thoughts – and public – my street and beyond. The viewer pedestrian must negotiate and interpret numerous stimuli, ranging from mildly pleasant to severely traumatic. Intra-individual perception systems perform an important selective function, consciously retaining iconic sensory memory for a very short time before archiving it in the subconscious (Jordaan 1990: 348). Sensory memories as elusive as a fragrance can be suddenly evoked in a seemingly unrelated context when an object, person or situation knowingly or unknowingly acts as a stimulant for the viewer. The sensory information contained in this stimulus (in this case the art object as interlocutor) is meaningful to the individual viewer’s archived, subconscious memory and causes an emotional response. The individual is flooded with memory – images, fragrances, sounds of occasions and people associated with the stimulus. The art object – or in this case, the *tactility* of its material, the stimulus – activates the viewer’s subconscious memory and transfers it to the conscious.

This process was able to take place because of the benign, empathetic relationship established by the participatory nature of my assemblage in and around my home garden studio. The *bricolage* art objects became the interlocutors between the artist and the pedestrian spectator, encouraging dialogue in and around Sunnyside and other formal exhibition venues. The multicultural spectator – be they Sunnyside resident or visitor, South African citizen or from the wider African diaspora – requires a non-linear, inclusive communication model that is elastic, socially engaged, and participatory to engage with and include any person on any level of articulation.

4.5 THE INTERLOCUTOR ASSEMBLAGE

The contemporary quality of the *bricolage* materials in my assemblages and how I made and presented them drew the attention of pedestrian spectators. I wanted the works to be as compelling and arresting as possible to establish themselves as interlocutors. This body of work, the *Interlocutor Assemblage*, is comprised of several *bricolage* art objects gathered in an assemblage in the sculpture courtyard of the University of Pretoria. The *Interlocutor Assemblage* is a continuation of my previous body of work, *The Skin Series*, which utilised the material residue left behind in a form of transference or metamorphosis in the host object.

The objects of the *Interlocutor Assemblage* also show evidence of transition, left behind by an unknown host to take on an independent life and manifest themselves as autonomous material

objects. Instead of creating a body of work alone in a cloistered studio, to be presented in a conventional art gallery, I worked in and around my garden in full view of the public, resulting in a very different audience-artist relationship. Rose (2012: 260) states that the audience process produces spectatorship, and spectators develop complex and elaborate ways of interpreting the effects of art. Depending on the type of materials used, *bricolage* artworks can engage a viewer emotionally and socially Kester (2000: 1) advocates for this in his lecture on critical frameworks for littoral art).



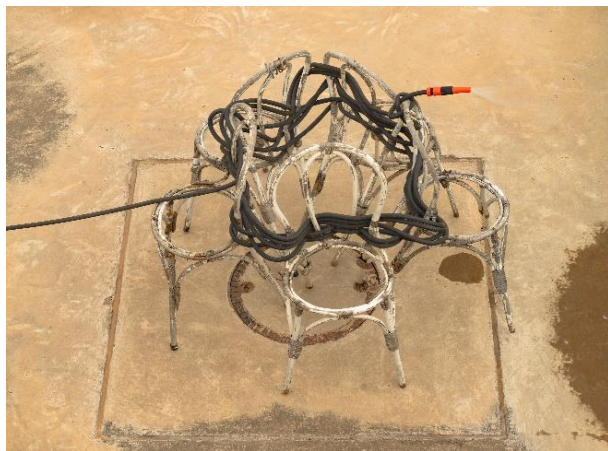
Figure 66: A glimpse through my palisade fence, with *Black Oblivion* in view, 2023. Size: variable.

The spectatorship of passing pedestrians created a new dynamic, a shift from distanced strangers to curious spectators. Sullivan (2010: xii) describes how the researcher can inadvertently become part of the research, and Vinciane Despret (in Grobler 2020: 76) writes that it is necessary to step out of the arena of research and into the world so that we can form bonds. Such processes require subjective involvement and trust in personal intuition through shared experiences and learning from different world views. Dezeuze (2010:83) claims that spectator participation requires an

object to offer the possibility of an open work in order to be inclusive of all viewership. Multicultural discourse requires thinking and creative methodologies that seek to enhance both an objective and subjective stance to achieve inclusive, respectful communication that facilitates the passing of oral traditions from generation to generation in a reverent adherence to group identities.



Figures 67–70: *Water Way*, 2023. Discarded bentwood chairs and hose pipe. Size: radius of 1.5 m x 85cm



Figures 71–73: *Water Way*, 2023. Final placement in sculpture courtyard, University of Pretoria. Size: radius of 1.5 m x 85cm. Photographs: Rupert de Beer.

My absorption in the construction of each *bricolage* object in my home garden studio and the comments from passing pedestrians diverted my attention from my work to ask about their personal background and heritage. The spectators, although anonymous, shared anecdotal information about their ancestry, heritage, and country of origin, and in turn enquired about my background. This gradually led to conversations about why I was using certain materials and how I decided to combine them in a limited colour palette.

I limited my use of colour to neutrals or to one saturated colour in combination with black and white to prevent information overload and distracting the viewer from the tactility of the *bricolage* material. Although removed from the place of their making, the works retained the context of the Sunnyside landscape through their material implications and still offered what Umberto Eco (in Deuze 2010: 49) refers to as “ambiguity of meaning” and “plurality of interpretation”. The individual viewer’s interpretation sparked the interlocutor process when pedestrians made time to stop and communicate, from hand gestures and waves to articulate theorising by parking attendants or refuse collectors. The position of interlocutor implies mediation between two distinctly different parties to establish a respectful communication or dialogue. It suggests formality but also empathy, as neither I nor the pedestrians actively solicited each other’s attention.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this practice-led research, I examined how sculptural assemblages created as a form of bricolage unexpectedly initiated a participatory exchange between myself and curious viewers in my suburb. This discursive relationship evolved out of necessity when I had difficulty obtaining material and equipment for my previous body of work during the health restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The artworks, from the *Skin Series* and the artworks from the current (*Interlocutor Assemblage*) body of work, specifically integrated discarded material from my local surrounds, translating into a cultural significance that the pedestrian spectator was able to decode in their private capacity, applying the tacit, implicit knowledge available only to citizens familiar with the local area.

5.1 A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In Chapter One I presented the background, the research problem, three research questions, research methodology, aims, literature review and ethical considerations of the study, while Chapter Two explored the notions of site-specific, participatory studio practice informed by considerations of materiality, assemblage, and *bricolage*. Contextual information about Sunnyside's diverse demographic as a multicultural suburb supported my argument on site-specificity and site-responsiveness. Empathetic responses from the anonymous spectators who often helped and monitored me in a communal spirit motivated me to consider some of the collective, communal political philosophies that have arisen since the decolonisation of Africa from the 1960s. In addition to issues of xenophobia, I also learned more about issues of universalism and essentialism that migrant people grapple with. These encounters made me more aware and alert to the various cultural challenges that African foreigners face when they find themselves in the southern part of Africa. I would not have had this valuable encounter without these face-to-face experiences with an alternative viewing public in my local suburb.

Chapter Three explained my collection of materials very specific to local viewers, who on occasion guided my process by contributing found objects and materials. This ground-level discursive process brought me into contact with the multicultural community passing my assemblages, who sometimes initiated conversations. I linked the act of collecting and storing with the rhizomatic process that challenges linear methodologies and supports a different form of practice. My process of collection was so rambling and chaotic that I had to create a system of a first sort and a second sort. The collections of objects started to materialise as art works during the second

sort. I noted the unorthodox and often uncontrived critique shared with me by the pedestrian spectators and unconventional viewers who offered a fresh, less scholarly interpretation mainly in Chapter Three, but also in Chapter Four. In Chapter Four I discussed the materials used in my *bricolage* and assemblage, and how these materials prompted a new process of making and construction. I also discussed formal and technical considerations, such as negative space, transparency and limiting colour to prevent visual overload and how my making methodology took on a unique form to accommodate the unusual circumstances of the health restrictions. Photographs of the main body of finalised work from of the *Interlocutor Assemblage* that were displayed in the sculpture courtyard of the University of Pretoria is placed in Chapter Four.

5.2 AN ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR AN ALTERNATIVE AUDIENCE

This study prompted me to consider an alternative communication model to explain the contact that materialised between me and the multicultural pedestrians on my street. I considered a *bricolage* visual statement to be a possible initiator or interlocutor, one that utilised reconstituted, discarded material that encourage the pedestrian spectator to spontaneously communicate with me without apprehension.

The transient, anonymous nature of the pedestrian spectator could have been seen as a limitation for the study, but a more static, formal viewing platform such as a conventional gallery would have narrowed exposure to the artworks and significantly changed the viewing demographic from a passive, traditional, exclusive viewer and a mostly distant artist in a conventional gallery to an active response and engagement with myself feverishly working on the *bricolage* objects in full view of the public . Some of the pedestrian spectators were undocumented migrants in the habit of being elusive for their own safety, as well as sophisticated members of the diplomatic community and other pedestrians of various nationalities and disciplines. Because conversations were so hurried, most of the viewers' identities remained anonymous or subject specialities were unknown.

The migrant sometimes became the main pedestrian spectator and, using the same route at the same times of the day, became a committed, but nomadic audience who had volatile, transitory daily habits and movements. This nomadic audience, because of their regular observations, mentored me as the creator of the *bricolage* objects because they were unobtrusively, but enthusiastically monitoring the progress of each *bricolage* sculpture in the assemblage.

5.3 PEDESTRIAN SPECTATOR MENTORSHIP

Throughout my communication with the pedestrian spectatorship and informal waste collectors who passed my house, I became aware of a reversal in the hierarchy of our relationship status, and I began to rethink and question traditional western dominance and power structures. Many of my artistic problems were outside my frame of competence with tools, technical ability, and access to repurposed materials, and I also often used my spectators and informal suppliers' facilities as a sounding board as well as suppliers.

Many pedestrians developed a tacit sense of what objects and material would be of use to me and encouraged me to consider a wider range of materials by bringing me articles that I would not have normally considered. The passers-by who gave me material would often pass by at a later stage of the process to enquire how I was progressing with their found articles. This would spur me on to be productive and show them what I had created as well as sharpen my eye for innovative use of common-place material. I welcomed the viewers' advice and comments and was delighted by their offerings of materials as gifts that they sensed might be useful.

Most of my suppliers insisted that the materials they brought, their technical advice and actual physical help were gifts, with no financial transaction required. This surprised me because many of them did not know where their evening meal was coming from or have the travel fares to their humble shacks. Many people had become aware of my activities, not only from seeing me at work in my home garden studio but also from word of mouth. However, some of the migrants mentioned that before encountering my practice they did not know what a sculpture was and what the purpose of sculpture is. They indicated that they had found our debates comforting and enlightening.

My art practice was marketed by the pedestrian through the verbal grapevine as the pedestrian spectator took ownership and perceived themselves as part of the process and discussed my progress with their family and friends. This mentorship was far reaching and beyond the traditional art community's methods of instruction and advertising.

5.4 PERCEPTION OF OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

The response of the pedestrian community to the tactility of the *bricolage* materiality involves the emotional retrieval of memories of each individual pedestrian. The *bricolage*'s material ability to

evoke these memories did not demand the command of any language, script, or specific visual culture.

This lack of linguistic coding in the tactile materiality of the *bricolage* objects eradicated linguistic communicational barriers, and the lack of specific cultural signs and symbols resulted in the viewer reading the tactile materiality on their own emotional terms. The *bricolage* material freed me from linguistically anchored communication of a semiotically coded lexicon of signs and symbols, resulting in sculptural works that may be more accessible to a broad, multilingual viewing public. I believe that tacit knowledge can be acquired without language, which is important in the context of Africa's wide linguistic diversity. The huge variety of languages spoken on the African continent can be an obstacle for communication. According to Mary Nooter (1993:2) Africa has over 2000 official languages, not counting dialects of each language, plus endless symbolic systems, countless oral myths, and narratives on numerous levels of script, making linguistic communication extremely difficult. *Bricolage* is the deliberate apprehension of the message by the materials and the diversion of it to another meaning along with the new materials to create a completely new meaning in the sculpture. The set of subverted non semiotics evident in the sculptures in my assemblage re-orders, re-codifies and re-defines the message that the art object conveys, making interpretation open ended and available to any spectator. The tactile materiality and ambiguity of my imagery evoked a quality of psychological absorption (Kabakov in Bishop 2005: 14-15) and presented opportunities for spectator participation. The fact that the *bricolage* sculptures were also not visually fixed into completion with realistic and finalised representations of something recognisable (such as a particular animal or object) resulted in the sight of the art object subconsciously prodding the spectator to participate with their private completion. This completion takes place with viewer accessing situations from their own memory resulting the creation of their own meaning. This alternative method of engagement with the viewer by presenting a body of work to a broader audience which bypassed a closed, modernist, Greenbergian (1989:137) model resulted in a successful engagement between me and the public.

Contact with the multicultural communities who passed my house led me to a wider view of African philosophy beyond the South African point of view and situated my world view in a much more global and inclusive humanitarian landscape. I realised that the migration movements in Africa with increasingly mobile populations trying to escape the volatility of economic and political inequality, zones of military and humanitarian conflict, and rising environmental havoc of climate change must incorporate a broader, non-traditional view of what constitutes identity and

nationality. A clear, physical geographic boundary or national, ethnic identity in Africa is not always feasible.

5.5 THE BALANCE OF A RESEARCHER BEING SELF-RESEARCHED.

For me to conduct this practice-led research is to engage with both primary and secondary information, as well as simultaneously processing information which was in a state of becoming because of the additional situations constantly taking place. The making of my artworks and my simultaneous engagement with the spectators and the researching and recording of the dissertation demanded a split in my mental focus, an alertness to recognise the unexpected but valuable input from all quarters, and an ability to evaluate opportunity quickly. At the same time, I felt enthusiastic and grateful to be in step with a wide range of spectators, because they were upholding and keeping my practice buoyant and current.

Sullivan (2010: xxiii) writes of the dilemma that the artist-theorist as artist-practitioner who becomes both the researcher and the researched faces. Kaprow (1961:150) notes that practice-led research is not a summary after the fact and that the simultaneous doing, experiencing, and writing can be exhilarating, but difficult to fully engage with. My practice-led research was created and written as I made the art objects and assemblages. These objects were informed by interests and perceptions that were observant, specialised and biased from both the artist and the spectator who spontaneously scrutinised each other and me and offered comment and encouragement. I felt that this method is indicative of a postmodern, post structural, non-hierarchical, flat structure which placed both myself and my viewer on an equal footing without dominance from one party.

The aim and objective to this study was to suggest an alternative and inclusive method of presenting a body of work to a broader audience and to develop a participatory studio practice in a post-colonial contemporary African setting. The intention was to encourage multicultural dialogue by conveying meaning to a diverse audience with a contemporary African focus. The creative practice was situated in my home, garden studio, visible to passing citizens through the palisade fence at any time of day and gradually a strong, multicultural dialogue within my neighbourhood began to emerge. I did not set out to conduct a relational art practice, but the situational circumstances of my home, garden studio, the choice of materials that related strongly to the local environment, and the empathetic scrutiny and monitoring of my practice by pedestrian spectators all directed me firmly towards an inclusive social process which has presented me with numerous possibilities for further study.

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ADDENDUM

INFORMED CONSENT

If you would like to comment on the artwork that is presented in my garden, please read the following information to gain insight of what the artist is conveying.

TITLE OF STUDY

***Bricolage* and assemblage as proponents for a participatory art practice through multicultural dialogue in a South African suburb**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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Supervisor: Dr Nicola Grobler

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to create an assemblage of art objects out of *bricolage* material found in the surrounds of my home and suburb, Sunnyside, a multicultural, cosmopolitan, postcolonial space. From time to time these art objects have been visible from my home studio and residents and pedestrians have stopped to comment on what the bricolage material and form conveys to them.

PROCEDURES

As you are a commentator who have participated on a more regular basis, I am asking you to fill out a consent form (attached as an addendum). I will note down your comments, which will appear anonymously in my mini dissertation.

BENEFITS, RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This document informs you of the scope of this study. There are no risks to you, as you participate voluntarily and anonymously, at times that suit you. The benefit to my study is that your comments can be used as feedback to guide the development of the work, to an extent.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Participant data will be kept confidential. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality, including the following:

- You will not be identified by name in my written study.
- Keeping notes, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet. (Please note that research will be stored for 15 years and might be used for further research.)

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

DATA STORAGE

I, the Principal Investigator, Carol Preston, will be storing all the research data and documents referring to the above-mentioned study at the following address: University of Pretoria School of the Arts, Visual Arts, Visual Arts Building, Hatfield Campus, 0028. I understand that the storage of the abovementioned data and documents must be maintained for a minimum of ten years from the commencement of this trail/study. The data will be stored until 2032.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I am above the age of 18. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

RIGHTS OF ACCESS TO THE RESEARCHER:

For more information on the project, you may contact the principal investigator during work hours
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