Tula Tula by Penny Siopis
Re-membering the South African nanny-child relationship

By Irene Bronner

"One of the ironies of the [apartheid] system is the role of the black nanny"[1]

Since the 1980s, Penny Siopis's work has been seminal in South Africa in its engagement with issues of gender, race relations, representation, sexuality, memory, and belonging. She is foremost a painter but works extensively in film/video, photography, and installation, compelled by form, formlessness, and contingency. Her deployment of figures from classical and contemporary mythologies, metaphysical archetypes, as well as characters and emotions in extremis create identifiable tropes through which the artist explores inter-subjective relationships.

Tula Tula (1994; Fig. 1) is a mixed-media portrait that draws its source from a photograph of the artist's young brother seated on the lap of his black 'nanny'[2] in the early 1960s, evidence of a complex surrogacy relationship between black 'nannies' and white children that was photographed as uncontroversially quotidian in apartheid-era South Africa. The photographic negative has been photocopied and enlarged, inverting color laden with racialized power associations. The black woman's face and the background have been worked over in paint. An ornate gilded picture frame is stuck on top of and within the unframed pasteboard work, dominating the lower half of the work; inside it are coarse scouring pads and a word fragment translating as "terrorism." The first of three works that originally formed the Tula Tula series, I refer to this work as *Tula Tula*, although it is sometimes called *Tula Tula I* in the literature. The second two works were never exhibited and have long since been destroyed in a flood in the artist's studio, without having ever been documented.[3]

Born in 1953 in the small town of Vryburg in the Northern Cape Province, Penny Siopis's Greek parents were immigrants to South Africa, and her memories of the family bakery influenced her first acclaimed, feminist Cake Series in the early 1980s. *Plum Cream* (1982; Fig. 2), for instance, is characteristic of this series with its thickly layered paint sculpting nonliteral yet sexually suggestive forms. The work may be variously interpreted as a parody of womanist imagery that celebrated an essentialized vision of feminine body parts, a parody of the purist, modernist display of art objects on white plinths, and a valorizing of historically marginalized forms of predominantly female creativity, such as baking. Siopis's use of paint as a 'sculptural' medium was also provocative at the time, as it blurred demarcations between artistic mediums.

From the mid-1980s through the 1990s, Siopis consistently references various black female figures with the intention of disrupting colonial and apartheid narratives about gender, race, and representation. In one of her iconic history painting series, *Dora and the other Woman* (1989; Fig. 3),[4] Siopis continues her interest in the retelling of female stories, taking particular cogniscence of how their narratives have so often been written for, and over, them themselves. In this work, Siopis stages herself in a self-reflexively theatrical fashion as 'Dora,' the eponymous young woman in Freud's case study, apparently traded between two men in their own power game, who had by the 1980s become a feminist watchword for female exploitation. The other main character depicted in the work, or rather depicted through Siopis's reproduced European images of her, is Sara Baartman, the Khoekhoe woman exhibited at European fairs and prurient scientific gatherings as so-called evidence of her 'lesser race'.

In the early 2000s, two other well-known series, Pinky Pinky and Shame, may be seen to extend Siopis's already established interest in trauma and female subjectivity through a psychoanalytical framework of subject formation.[5] In these two series, she explores the imprint of gender-based violence and childhood sexual trauma in ways that express both the smothering quotidian quality of such experiences as well as their timeless horror. Pinky Pinky is a contemporary urban myth told by children in South African schools of an indeterminate, alternately ghoulish or impish creature that lurks in public places, particularly in girls' bathrooms. Siopis images these tales as fears around puberty in a society deeply traumatised by gender inequality and violence. In *Who is Pinky Pinky?* (2002; Fig. 4), the creature has humanized plastic eyes and hands folded like tomb effigies embedded in impasto pink paint, while its stomach writhes with plastic baby figurines, which either maggot-like consume it, or that the creature has itself consumed.

In the Shame series (2002–05), Siopis manipulates various spilt liquids into amorphous forms which co-exist alongside the saccharine banalities of crafting stamp-kit greetings, which, in this context, are rendered deeply menacing and repressive. In one of the untitled works (Fig. 5), two shapes appear ambiguously interlocked, one seemingly engulfing the other. Together they partially obscure a blurred stamp, a type of brand, reading "To the Best Father in the Whole World." Siopis displayed the Shame Series, together with interventions of other kinds, at her exhibition in the Freud Museum in London in 2006.[6] Her thirty-year oeuvre has consistently grappled with the ways in which subjectivity has been narrated and the sociopolitical context in which subjects are formed. She continues to display a profound respect for the workings of the subconscious, challenging her own processes of art-making to image the deep internal wells in which things are hidden, and also found.

Having received an MFA from Rhodes University in 1976 (as well as an honorary doctorate in 2017), Siopis lectured in painting for many years at ~~Wits~~ the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and currently holds an Honorary Professorship at the Michaelis School of Art at the University of Cape Town. She has received awards and has held residencies around the world and a significant body of scholarship has explored her work.[7]

In other collaged works of the 1990s, three of which are discussed here, the artist paints over photocopies, keeping fragments and traces that are as much in conflict with the paint that enfolds them as they are a part of the whole work. Working over existing documents as photocopies, incorporated into paint workings, allows for the mediations and disjunctions of received narratives that may be said to be the basis of conscious memory work. My focus here is on three elements of *Tula Tula*: the reworked photocopy, the use of connective color, and the picture frame within the unframed work. I expand upon how it is specifically in the artist's method, in the light and color reversals, and the affective, layering, repeated touches of paint, that Siopis's contribution to the dissolution of the fetishization of this trope may be enacted.

There are a number of contemporary artists in South Africa who have examined domestic worker tropes, how these tropes perpetuate unequal racial and gendered relations, how they impact black women, and how they may be transformed and deployed to subvert and complicate power relations.[8] In the early 1990s, however, the years where South Africa knowingly headed toward profound sociopolitical changes with the advent of democracy, it was most notably Penny Siopis who was creating works that explored the subjectivities of black and white South Africans who meet in this relationship between employers, their families, women employed as domestic workers, and their (usually absent) families. While artists such as Mary Sibande and Zanele Muholi have become known in the last ten years for their works that draw on domestic worker tropes, they have not (as yet) engaged directly with the nanny-child relationship. Siopis's works influenced by this particular relationship, as discussed here, remain, I argue, the most nuanced on the theme, even today.

Siopis herself offers the most extended critical engagement with *Tula Tula*, specifically with how the work seeks to image the nanny-child relationship through psychoanalytic theories of loss in subject development.[9] Annie Coombes's analysis of *Tula Tula* and Siopis's other domestic service-themed work, *Maids* (1993; Fig. 6), focuses on how Siopis uses psychoanalytic theories of subject development to motivate that the social relations formed within the context of domestic labor are central to understanding South Africa's apartheid past and its legacies of intersecting race, gender, and class inequalities that have continued structurally to inform the country.[10] I take the opportunity here, however, to discuss not only connections in theme and medium with her other work of the period, with comparisons not drawn by other writers, but I also emphasize *Tula Tula* as a linchpin between Siopis's earlier and later work. In *Tula Tula*, Siopis's feminist concerns with issues of representation and historical situatedness meet the assertive materiality of her paint. This meeting may, I propose, be interpreted through Bracha Ettinger's theorization of a matrixial womb membrane, in order to reflect critically on the nanny-child relationship.

The role that domestic workers play in the reproduction of labor power is overtly that of physical maintenance, through the performance of their duties in the employer's home, but arguably more significantly, the role that domestic workers fulfill is to maintain an ideological order based upon a racialized sociopolitical hierarchy.[11] Especially during the years of apartheid prior to democracy in 1994, white South African children and the black women employed in their parents' homes were socialized into an asymmetrical experience of interracial contact. In white family photographic albums, from one of which the source photograph for *Tula Tula* was drawn, photographs of nannies with their white charges function as an ambiguous counterpoint to other family groupings. It was likely that evidence of racial intermingling would be represented exclusively by the inclusion of women employed as domestic workers and nannies.

The particular loss when the nanny loses the child's affection is expressed by many writers commenting on South African cultural mores. Ernest Cole, South Africa's first black freelance photographer, observes how "the lessons they learn at home" perpetuate the "awful heritage of racism" for white children, who learn that it is socially acceptable for them to treat domestic workers in the dehumanizing manner that their parents model.[12] The central role that a black female domestic worker in South Africa often plays in the nurturing of white children, Siopis's own experiences of mothering a young son, and her memories of having had a nanny who cared for her and her brother in her own childhood, stimulated her interest in this issue.[13] This kind of critical attention in South African creative practice and scholarship of the 1990s was often inspired by the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (T.R.C.) and the wider rippling cultural effects that it exerted on the national psyche.[14] Marianne Hirsch saw art practitioners' reflection on and the telling of stories of those years in South Africa as "a means to account for the power structures animating forgetting, oblivion, and erasure and thus to engage in acts of repair and redress."[15] Siopis was therefore not alone in those years in feeling that the end of apartheid signalled a time of greater, not lessened, social responsibility and personal reflection.[16]

In *Tula Tula*, the young boy's individuation from two mother figures, the import of one (the black nanny) disregarded by his nation's narrative and perhaps within his community and family as well, is what Siopis works with in articulating emergent masculine subjectivity. *Tula tula*, the isiZulu lullaby from which Siopis's work takes its title, may be translated as 'Be quiet' or 'Be still': it may be interpreted as a soothing of, a smothering of, or a requiem for the white male child, or of/for the black woman. In this metaphoric scenario, the nanny tells (sings) of her own future silencing by the emergent personality that she is at this moment nurturing. As Siopis puts it, she loses her voice and her authority as the child grows into his place in his society, despite (or because of) the emotional and physical dependency he has in infancy on the surrogate mother.[17] The song becomes a warding off, even disavowal, of the loss that she may suspect that she (and the child, to a less economically impactful extent) will likely suffer. The visual counterpart to the silencing suggested by the song is arguably of the child's hand, placed over the woman's, which may present both as the boy's affectionate dependence and as a forceful foreshadowing of the power that his society will tacitly or overtly allow the man to wield, physically and symbolically. Siopis's rendering of the two subjects' gendered gazes is also central.

In the artist's source photograph, the boy is looking out at the photographer and viewer, and the black woman is looking down at him. As Siopis explains: "Because it is a photographic negative, she's in fact white, if you like, colourwise, and he's black, but his eyes are white. I've tried to invert value-laden colour. His eyes are in some ways absent or blank because in the original photograph they would have been black."[18] By blinding or 'blanking' the eyes of the white boy, and the racialized apartheid ideology that he is to be read as representing in this moment, Siopis offers a space to consider how vision is a psychoanalytic, politically situated process of subjectivity. She emphasizes how, as the infant's autoerotic body yields to a speaking subject, vision is at the behest of ideologically structured language rather than using language to explore the infant's own subjective formation.[19]

In this inverted image, Siopis does not 'reinstate' the nanny's gaze, however, as arguably this may be visually akin to 'speaking for' her, thereby disallowing both the difficulties of her situation and the agency she may have exercised within that sphere. It would be disrespectful and ahistorical to reductively invert the power hierarchy by retrospectively 'bestowing on' the nanny apparent agency in the scopic and ideological realm. Rather, it is in the white painting marks that Siopis feels that she works through her personal understanding of the nuances of this kind of situated, surrogate maternal relationship.[20] Using white oil pigments to paint into the blank white spaces of the photographic negative is a subtle intervention in the existing document, one that results in an overall surface that, arguably, is more to be touched than to be looked at (Fig. 7). This painting is a gestural meditation that occurs in a separatist society that seeks an expression of acknowledgement for the experiences of 'others' who are not 'akin to' the artist herself, an acknowledgement that nonetheless does not participate in this scopic separatism. The artist's use of colors not black or white in this work is confined to the depth of field, which is suffused with the blood reds and placental purples that recur in Siopis's oeuvre. (Works already discussed here that deploy libidinal colors in this way are *Plum Cream* [Fig. 2], *Dora and the Other Woman* [Fig. 3], and *Untitled* from the Shame series [Fig. 5]). Her working into the image is therefore a conscious and sensitive consideration of how the ideologies of racialized skin were maintained by circulating on the surface, while soaking deeply into perceptions of self and other.

Siopis's interest in psychoanalytical accounts of subjectivity is matched by her (feminist) reservations about their reliance on the scopic and the visual image. In this, her stylistic choices share similarities with European and US feminist art of the 1970s that deployed a "negative aesthetics," which involves, as Pollock describes, "a radical distanciation from any aspect of the spectacle and visual pleasure, a distrust of the visual image, of the iconicity especially of women."[21] In *Tula Tula*, working 'outside' of this 'frame' is done by "(be)labour[ing] the painting process itself into a kind of identificatory gesture of extreme intimacy, making tiny white paint marks in the spaces left blank through the photocopying process."[22] By drawing attention to the scriptal slippage of labor/belabor, Siopis positions the artist's gestural labor as contemplative. The tactility of the painting process builds up a "strong point of identification" with the female subject that is intended not to be specular or mimetic.[23] Her intention is not to perpetuate inadvertently the hypervisibility of black female bodies. Within the ersatz-Victorian frame are Brillo pads, or coarse scouring pads, such as are used in domestic cleaning. Being hard on the hands, they exemplify the physical labor performed by domestic workers. As a different form of labor to the artist's gestural labor, and a different surface to the traditionally smooth mimesis of oil paint, Siopis represents the domestic worker's labor metonymically rather than metaphorically, arguably to permit such experience its own voice.

In *Tula Tula*, Siopis uses a photocopied photographic negative from her personal archive, but other of her history painting series (1985–95), also layer photocopied images from a wide variety of sources in the public domain. *Terra Incognita* (1991; Fig. 8) is an example of how Siopis developed a subversive copy-and-paint approach to the 'grand narratives' in the genre of academic history painting. The background is built up from images of colonial powers exploiting the African continent, mining, mapping, and waging wars of attrition: the main source is repeated fragments of colonial artist Thomas Baines's painting of the Battle of Blauwkrantz of February 1838. The seemingly tattooed crawling female figure personifies not a classical nude allegory of European dominion, nor a 'noble savage' stereotype, but rather the anger, despair, but also the critical subversion of William Blake's critique of Nebuchadnezzar and Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan.[24] In both *Terra Incognita* and *Tula Tula*, using existing images means retaining the referent as well as the iconographic image. The co-existence of different marks over time allows for a clear material disruption.

Experiencing how the iconographic elements of the sourced photographic negative interact with the formlessness of her paint is central to Siopis's workings. The artist interprets the color red as connective and cataclysmic: "hot" colors "reflect the fragility of the body and the emotional states that we connect very directly to the body."[25] These hot colors express her own desire to assert "Eros …life and energy in the face of counter-pressure to balance, or return to, stasis or inertia."[26] More recently, she has similarly contrasted "the eternal wrestling between life-giving and life-denying forces."[27] Saturating the visual field with red, enveloping *Tula Tula*'s so-called blank background spaces or depth of field with this color, holds space through affect-laden paint. This deliberate painting as an aspect of connection may be considered in the context of subjectivity formation, as in the matrixial womb membrane Ettinger theorizes.

Cultural theories of the gaze and the field of vision situate the subject within the highly scopic imaginary that is dominated by an Oedipal, Foucaultian, mastering gaze.[28] Ettinger joins Freud's passage on the uncanny aesthetic effect of womb phantasies (*Mutterleibsphantasien*) with Lacan's re-theorizing of the gaze in his 1964 seminar. Here he repositions the gaze as a phallic *objet a*, as "a non-optical psychic inscription of a trace of what came to be felt to be lost as the subject emerges through its successive severances from archaic unity with the m/Other."[29] Ettinger's proposal is for a matrixial gaze, theorized further as a matrixial *objet a*, that is "not the psychic inscription of what is forever lost whose scar forms the incitement to desire, but as a borderlinking mechanism that is never totally lost as it is not phantasized in retrospect as being had or being submerged in."[30] This is significant because the gaze proposed is not essentializing, nor utopian, nor based upon the creation and opposition of differences, but rather on the relationships that exist between even ambivalently connected individuating subjectivities. I suggest that what Siopis calls the Eros of her affect-laden, somatic, frequently-used red paint may be deployed as the "screen" or "transferential, unconscious field" that spreads itself out between the shared thing and lost object. This field becomes "the transport for affects generated in this libidinized textile of connectivity and dissemination."[31]

Ettinger's "transferential, unconscious field" is symbolized as unconscious, uterine, connective memories. Siopis's smothering, enfolding, connective red in *Tula Tula* symbolically becomes, in this context, a sense of another kind of looking. By placing the memory object (the source photograph) within the body/womb (the painterly process), it is, I argue, being depicted as fertilized and co-created in the artist's past and present memories. When perception is an embodied thing, when the gaze is anchored in the body's eyes, it becomes an "intra-psychic remnant of the body." By obliterating both characters' gazes and conscious subjectivities, even as she references and acknowledges them, by retaining reference rather than literal depiction or iconography, I propose that Siopis develops what Pollock has called her work, namely, "a painting practice rooted in historical trauma."[32] This connective color field that allows the semi-digested glut of images is also apparent in *The Baby and the Bathwater* (1992; Fig. 9).[33]

Here Siopis creates an eight-meter long collage of photocopied images of enslaved women threatened with rape, humiliation, and the loss of their infants, as well as photographic images of Siopis and her son Alexander (born in 1988). These images are embedded in paint and overlaid with fragments of Alexander's first attempts at speech, rendered in hard, wrought-iron, cursive forms. These allude to how language, as a medium of communication and purveyor of identity, imparts lessons on the value-laden differentiation between 'self' and 'other.' In photographic negatives and positives, each image coated in wax, Siopis's hands are spread in atavistic protection, affection and/or maternal suffocation over or on the body of her young son (Fig. 10). This creates a dialogue with her brother's hand in *Tula Tula*, which is placed over that of his nanny. *The Baby and the Bathwater* is also, like *Tula Tula*, a fragment of a phrase that takes childhood as its vehicle for metaphor and also refers to silencing and caution ('Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater'). While in *Tula Tula*, Siopis explores implications for the subjectivities of both the black nanny and the white boy, precipitated by their interaction, in *The Baby and the Bathwater*, she seeks out profoundly different experiences of motherhood, experiences that may serve as points of identification if they remain respected as rooted in their own particularities. As a white, middle-class woman in possession of authorial or artistic authority, Siopis does not associate herself in a reductive essentialism with the positions or histories of enslaved women. *The Baby and the Bathwater* amounts also to a consideration of how, but for an accident of history, Siopis's son might have grown into a slave master (or an apartheid-era 'baas') and how she, as his mother, might have nurtured that socialization.

As in *Tula Tula*, Siopis whitens out or works up the blank spaces in the scaled-up images of *The Baby and the Bathwater*, where the white blank spaces are filled with white processed sugar. Sugar as a mark across history of colonial slave labor, production, and commodification has left traces in the apartheid-era institution of domestic labor, as represented by *Tula Tula*'s Brillo pads. In *The Baby and the Bathwater*, the gritty unresolve of the graininess of the sugar can be seen to contrast with the affective connective feather strokes that Siopis describes for *Tula Tula*. The incorporation of sugar creates the material foundation for Siopis's contention that the traumas suffered particularly by enslaved women and children are a crucial aspect of acknowledging the experiences of slavery. Not intending to fetishize or to ghoulishly isolate such experiences, Siopis nonetheless draws attention to South Africa's own slave-owning history (in the Cape Colony, 1658–1834) even though many of the images sourced are of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Tula Tula's haptic engagement with the placental paint that transforms the work's background has continued in Siopis's enduring experimentation with painting materials as affective carriers. Since about 2007, for instance, Siopis has been spilling and manipulating glue and ink, and through these mediums contingency in form and formlessness. Glue is a viscous substance, and that determines how liquid ink flows and where it is absorbed on the surface. *At the Root* (2011; Fig. 11)[34] is from her exhibition *Who's Afraid of the Crowd?,* which explores the tensions between the multitude and the individual.[35] The pictorial source for the work was an image of a lynching in the United States; lines of words of the poem "Strange Fruit"[36] appear on a horizon of formless red towards which bird-forms plummet through acid color. The thread from her earlier work is evident in how Siopis describes her conceptual compulsion: "the formlessness I am after seems less about abstraction than materiality. Iconography is important but always in dynamic relation to materiality, of which colour is key."[37]

The gilded frame inside the unframed pasteboard work in *Tula Tula* (Fig. 12) may be considered as the wound of severance in the racialized nanny-child relationship. It is thus explicitly outside this frame, even as she incorporates its homunculus presence, that Siopis seems to attempt the rapprochement of connective color between self and other, and the holding together, without conflating differences, in gender, race, class, privilege, memory, and experience. The frame is like a tombstone, a fetish, commemorating disavowed knowledge. Siopis examines the remains for the way of life they have come now to commemorate. "Commemoration," Pollock writes, is the ambiguity central to Freud's later theory of fetishism, in that commemoration "attempts to disavow unbearable knowledge while simultaneously placing at its traumatic site a memorial marker, the fetish."[38] The frame in *Tula Tula* and its contents may be posited as an externalization of the fetish, freeing the artist and the viewer to engage affectively with individuals' childhood memories and collective socio-historical memories. There is no conventional frame on the pasteboard edges of the work; the frame is within, around the fetish.

The '*terrorisme'* to which the word fragment within the gilded frame refers is the literal concretizing of this wound: Siopis references the stainless steel and concrete sculpture erected in the strongly Afrikaner nationalist capital city of Pretoria in the politically turbulent 1980s that commemorated the implicitly white victims of black liberatory violence or 'terrorism.' This monument acts as an example of the Freudian frozen fetish. Siopis's metonym may be seen as a reclamation and release of that fetish. Referring not to a datable public event, *Tula Tula* opens up a quotidian moment in the long process of socialization and identity formation that solidified South African race relations. As a mnemonic device, this *aide de memoire* is of the will to change and of the external markers of a more rooted psychological history that does not change so expediently.

Siopis's Forgotten Families series (1996) brings attention, through recreated portraits, to the black African families, such as those of domestic workers, for whom the consequences of apartheid's social engineering projects continued to influence life after 1994. The works in this series are the artist's interpretation of a recognizable kind of hand-colored portrait that was common for petit bourgeois, urban, black Africans, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, the era in which the photograph of Siopis's brother and his nanny was taken. These portraits montaged the aesthetics of the studio portrait with the ubiquitous headshot photograph used in the apartheid reference books for all 'non-white' citizens. The family members in the photograph likely would not have been able to come together to the studio to sit for a portrait, because of how apartheid policies of migrant labor and racial segregation drove the separation and disintegration of black family life. Headshots of individual family members would therefore be collaged onto bodies deemed appropriately festive and formal; these would be then arranged together in a family group in the photographer's darkroom. John Peffer has written on how this portrait aesthetic "revaloriz[es] bureaucratic uses of photography by the apartheid state into celebratory heirlooms and markers of community status."[39]

In *Forgotten Families I* (1996; Fig. 13), the desire for a unified and stable family triad, despite overwhelming oppositional forces, is respected even as the harsh blocked colors and the faint photocopied faces emphasize its constructed realities. Siopis again uses photocopies, here directly of photographs, a technique that becomes an expression of witnessing, in that she is facsimilizing, not creating, lives other than her own. This family is imagined, *not* invented. The invention is the maps of Africa and the vision of territory and resources—but not the stories of contemporary human inhabitants they present—which collage the background of this family. Taken from collectible cereal boxes of the 1990s, these images would be absorbed at domestic (predominantly white, suburban) breakfast tables, a different domesticity to, and one that elides that experienced by, the black family members portrayed. That this work was selected as part of the South African Post Office's Constitutional Court artwork stamp series, issued on June 5, 2009, expresses how central and painful the subject remains in the national consciousness. Migrant labor has been definitive in structuring the experiences of African community life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It would not be a leap to suggest that this kind of 'imagined' family that is seen in the assembled portrait may be representative of how the black woman in *Tula Tula* experiences her own family life.

In the mixed-media portrait *Tula Tula*, Siopis seeks expression for the complexities of the traumatic wounding and repression that occurred during the years of apartheid, as seen through the 'nanny' trope and through the relationship between black women and the white children for whom they care. In working with less conscious or examined memories, the artist invites the viewer to consider, as Fish does, "the institutionalized nature of domestic work as the mostly deeply embedded and complex endurance of apartheid's legacy."[40]

Transforming her source photograph allows Siopis to examine the nuances and find a means of mourning the losses in the South African nanny-child relationship. Siopis's empathic and respectful rapprochement between these different characters involves exploring her personal memories of her own childhood nanny and her retrospective consideration of how socialized gender roles impact the subjectivity of white children, particularly boys, and the black women who cared for them. Siopis feels that representing, mourning, and integrating these losses may be done by painting the photocopied photographic negative and by exploring how the iconographic interacts with process-driven affects of paint and painting. The materiality and color of paint create empathic identifications that are not representational. In seeking to articulate ways in which lived experiences complicate psychological and social identities, and in engaging vulnerably with traumatic issues that have multiple perspectives, only some of which the artist herself has experience, these works by Penny Siopis continue to warrant examination.

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Notes

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1. Ernest Cole, *House of Bondage* (New York: Random House, 1967), 73.
2. A 'nanny' is a South African term for a black domestic worker whose primary duties involve the care of predominantly white infants or young children. Arguably more used during the 20th century, perhaps reflecting the practice of employing someone dedicated solely to childcare, the term is also associated with apartheid-era racial hierarchies, as is the term 'maid,' or, indeed, 'girl.' While the titles 'helper,' 'housekeeper' or 'domestic worker' are more commonly used in 21st century suburbia, such an employee may well have significant childcare responsibilities; she may, for instance, maintain the employer's home in the morning before collecting the child/ren from nursery or junior school at midday and looking after them until the parent/s return home. The term 'nanny' remains in use by both black and white South Africans, however, particularly when reflecting on intergenerational memories of having been cared for by a black female employee, or having a family or community member who cared for white children. In such cases, the term also conjures up the complexities of this particular care relationship. I use the term 'nanny' here to focus on this relationship between employee and child, and to remain truthful to the mid- to late-20th century period to which Siopis's work refers.
3. Penny Siopis, email correspondence with the author, April 24, 2014. The work was first exhibited on Siopis's solo show *Private Views*, Johannesburg, 1994.
4. Siopis produced a number of paintings and installations from 1985–95 that explored the pathologizing of feminine 'hysteria' and, in other works, issues arising from the story of Sarah Baartman. Siopis is one of many South African artmakers who have responded creatively to what has been recorded about the woman known as Sarah

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Baartman. See, for instance, the works in Senzeni Marasala's 2010 exhibition, *Beyond Booty: Covering Sarah Baartman and other tales.*

5. See, for instance, Sarah Nuttall, "The Shock of Beauty: Penny Siopis' Pinky Pinky and Shame Series." in *Penny Siopis* ed. Kathryn Smith (Johannesburg: Goodman Gallery Editions, 2005), 134–59.

6. For further reading, see Penny Siopis "Shame in the House of Freud," in *On Making: Integrating approaches to practice-led research in art and design*, ed. Leora Farber (Johannesburg: Univ. of Johannesburg), 23–246.

7. Recent solo exhibitions include Cape Town (2014, 2018), Brussels (2016), Mauritius (2016), Johannesburg (2015), Durban (2009) and London (2005). She has participated in many international exhibitions and biennales; notable group exhibitions from the past ten years in the USA include *The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp,* Prospect.4, New Orleans (2017), *Public Intimacy: Art and Other Ordinary Acts in South Africa,* Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2014) and *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons and Ideologies of the African Body*, Hood Museum, Hanover, NH; Davis Museum, Wellesley, MA, and the San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego (2008).

8. For instance, Angela Buckland, Steven Cohen, Claudette Schreuders, and Zubeida Vallie.

9. Penny Siopis, "Domestic Affairs," in *de arte* 55 (1997): 58–69; Penny Siopis, "Dissecting Detail," in eds. Brenda Atkinson & Candice Breitz, *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art* (Johannesburg: Chalkhill, 1999): 245–66. A number of in-depth interviews with Siopis allow her to elucidate her working methods and conceptual concerns: see Achille Mbembe, "The Place of Imagination: A Conversation with Penny Siopis," in Smith, *Penny Siopis*, 118–33; Sarah Nuttall, "On a Knife Edge: Penny Siopis in conversation with Sarah Nuttall," in *Journal of Contemporary African Art* 25 (2009): 96–105; Sarah Nuttall & Penny Siopis, "An Unrecoverable Strangeness: Some Reflections on Selfhood and Otherness in South African art," in *Critical Arts* 24, no. 3 (2010): 457–66.

10. Annie E. Coombes & Penny Siopis, "Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity in Art Practice in Post-apartheid South Africa: Annie E. Coombes and Penny Siopis in conversation" in *Feminist Review* 55 no. 1 (1997): 110–29, 117; Annie E. Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa: History after Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits Univ. Press & Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003).

11. Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers under Apartheid* (London: Women's Press, rev. ed. 1989), 8. For a sociological and historical account of domestic workers and the domestic labor (or service) sector in South Africa, during the apartheid and democratic eras, see also, for instance:; Cherryl Walker, ed., *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Claremont, SA: David Philip, 1991); Jennifer Fish, *Domestic Democracy: At Home in South Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Shireen Ally, *From Servants to Workers: South African Domestic Workers and the Democratic State* (Scottsville, SA: UKZN Press, 2010).

12. Cole. *House of Bondage,* 73.

13. Coombes & Siopis, "Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity," 117.

14. The T.R.C. was a court-like proceeding of three committees set up by the Government of National Unity in 1996 that heard testimonies of witnesses, survivors, and perpetrators of human rights abuses instigated in service of (anti-)apartheid ideologies, that sought to be a space of individual and national healing, and that processed applications seeking exemption from prosecution for politically motivated acts. Archbishop (now Emeritus) Tutu, the commission's chairperson, as well as others, has critically debated the purpose, merits, limitations, and successes of the T.R.C. proceedings. See Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

15. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Colombia Univ. Press, 2012), 16.

16. Sue Williamson & Ashraf Jamal, *South Africa: The Future Present* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996), 130.

17. Ibid, 115. 'Nothando' recounts to Jennifer Fish how she was valued for her trust and capability by her employers for her care of their young child, but her presence was considered inappropriate at the young man's 21st birthday celebration: "[…] now you are nothing in that party. There is something very sad, it hurts you." Jennifer Fish, *Domestic Democracy,* 88. 'Victoria' describes her life as a 'nanny': Now you must care for their child, you must give the love you suppose to give to your child, you must give it to them. Like myself, I am very fond of this child, sometimes I feel like taking my things and go, but then it comes to this child, then I decide not to go, because we are very close the two of us (Jennifer Fish, *Domestic Democracy,* 88, sic).

18. Coombes & Siopis "Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity," 117.

19. Ibid, 117.

20. Ibid, 113–14.

21. Griselda Pollock, "Gleaning in History, or coming after/behind the reapers," in ed. Griselda Pollock, *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London: Routledge, 1996): 266–88, 285.

22. Coombes & Siopis, "Gender, 'Race', Ethnicity," 117.

23. Ibid, 117.

24. Dirk van den Berg, "Painting history: *Terra Incognita* as anti-Leviathan emblem," in *Acta Academica* 37, no. 1 (2005): 56–98. *Terra Incognita* was first exhibited on the Cape Town Triennial, South African National Gallery, Cape Town, 1991.

25. Mbembe, "The Place of Imagination," 128.

26. Ibid, 128.

27. Kim Miller & Penny Siopis, "'Fire, water, forests, swarms': Penny Siopis discusses 'Who's Afraid of the

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Crowd?’ with Kim Miller,” in Penny Siopis, *Who’s Afraid of the Crowd?* [catalogue] (Woodstock, Cape Town & Braamfontein: Stevenson, 2011): 47–51, 50.

28. Griselda Pollock, “Thinking the Feminine: Aesthetic Practice as introduction to Bracha Ettinger and the concepts of matrix and metramorphosis,” in *Theory Culture Society* 21, no. 1~~5~~ (2004), 32.

29. Ibid, 50. “*Objet a*” in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, stands for *objet autre*, and is the object of desire that can never be obtained.

30. Ibid, 50.

31. Ibid, 50–51.

32. Ibid, 12. Similarities between Siopis’s *Tula Tula* (1994) and Ettinger’s Eurydice series (1992–ongoing) led me to consider Siopis’s work in a conceptual framework influenced by Ettinger, particularly to Siopis’s libidinous color as a “borderlinking mechanism,” a visual expression of Ettinger’s proposed outro-phallic subjectivization. Pollock had already discussed in her essay how Siopis’s feminist project, which integrates socio-historical situatedness with the modernist understanding of the emotive potentials of paint and painting, may be interpreted in relation to Ettinger’s process of “metramorphosis.” Pollock, “Painting, Difference and Desire in History,” 60.

33. See Elizabeth Rankin, *Penelope Siopis: The Baby and the Bathwater: Motif, medium and meaning in the work of Penny Siopis* [catalogue] (Johannesburg: Penny Siopis, 1992); ed. Terry Kurgan, *Bringing up Baby: Artists Survey the Reproductive Body* (Cape Town: Bringing up Baby Project, 1998). Siopis first exhibited this work in-progress at the Albany, Grahamstown, 1992.

34. *At the Root* was first exhibited at Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town, 2011.

35. Miller & Siopis, “‘Fire, water, forests, swarms,’” 49.

36. “Strange Fruit,” by Abel Meeropol in the 1930s, protested lynchings of African Americans, and has been sung by, amongst others, Nina Simone, becoming a widely recognizable rallying cry against racism.

37. Miller & Siopis, “‘Fire, water, forests, swarms,’” 48.

38. Griselda Pollock, “The Image in psychoanalysis and the archaeological metaphor,” in ed. Griselda Pollock, *Psychoanalysis and the Image: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Malden, MA, US; Oxford, UK; and Victoria, AU: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 10.

39. John Peffer, “Vernacular Recollections and Popular Photography in South Africa,” in eds. Christopher Morton and Darren Newbury, *The African Photographic Archive: Research and Curatorial Strategies* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2015): 115–31, 128.

40. Fish, *Domestic Democracy*, 7.