

**Women Artists in Botswana in the late
Twentieth Century.**

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London

PhD

Volume One

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Signed declaration

I hereby declare that all the work presented in this thesis is my own:

Jo Lewis

*in memory of my father and Yan
with love and thanks*

remembering too Mannie Brown and Stephen Williams

Acknowledgments

This thesis is about working, contemporary artists and my biggest thanks goes to all of the artists I have spoken to over the years, about their work and inspirations. From my first glimpse into the arts of Botswana during a trip there in 1994, I was excited and inspired to investigate further. Women artists working in apparent rural isolation and with little recognition caused me to enquire about their commitment to their art, their reasons, values, aesthetics and inspirations.

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Abstract

Women have always played a large part in the visual arts throughout Africa. In Botswana at the present time this is illustrated most immediately by the woven baskets, seen everywhere, in galleries, shops and at roadside stalls, that have come to represent the country and its arts and crafts; and with the odd exception they are all made by women in the most rural areas. However, women in Botswana currently practice other arts, including house decoration and pottery, although, for a variety of reasons, these are less immediately obvious.

In contrast to these practices, representing traditions inherited from the past, there are others of relatively recent inception. Since the 1980s Botswana has seen the emergence of a small number of women 'Fine' artists, some of whom are Botswana nationals while others are expatriates settled in the country. In contrast to arts made for immediate local use, or sold in roadside stalls, the work of these artists is exhibited in the few art galleries that now exist. During the same period, art education has also been gradually introduced into the school and university system in Botswana. Art galleries both private and public are another recent development, beginning with the National Museums and Monuments Art Gallery, which opened in 1978, and which began to facilitate local exhibitions of Botswana art, while also encouraging exhibitions of this material in other countries.

In addition to local tradition and an emerging Fine Art practice, art education, museums and galleries, a series of workshops has also been developed. Some of these were set up by expatriates on a more-or-less permanent basis with the aim of training women in various art forms, while others are temporary and artist-led, giving selected groups of artists the chance to meet, work and exchange ideas.

I begin this thesis, therefore, with a survey of all the arts inherited from the past, and currently practised by women in Botswana, and then, in a series of chapters I look at each of the developments, including art education, museums and galleries, and workshops; and their histories, their aims, and their achievements with particular regard to the overall development of the arts in Botswana. This thesis thereby provides a comprehensive study of all the arts practised by women in Botswana through the last thirty years.

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Maps of Botswana



Map showing the main towns of Botswana.



Map showing the countries bordering Botswana.

Introduction

From 1983-1986 I studied Fine Art at Coventry polytechnic, I then went on to complete an MA in sculpture at Birmingham. One of the main concerns for my work during my time at college was the historical position of women in society. I was inspired by contemporary women artists in Britain and I drew on, and was influenced by, the women artists' movements in Britain and America of the 1970's and 80's. I felt that the strength of the theories and works by women such as Griselda Pollock, Rozsika Parker and Linda Nochlin and artists like Judy Chicago in America, Mary Kelly in Britain and Frida Kahlo in Mexico had opened new paths for women allowing them to become more experimental, political and involved in future art movements. Women artists worked together to promote their arts and to get themselves heard and seen in contemporary art galleries, publications and debates; organisations such as the *Women Artists' Slide Library* and the *Women's Art Magazine* emerged allowing easier access for research and debate into historical and contemporary women artists.

From 1988- 1991 I worked in Africa driving for an overland company. During this time I was unable to continue my own art practice, instead I spent time looking at the indigenous arts that we came across during our trips. The predominant art of southern Africa at that time, in terms of being recognised internationally, was the art of the Republic of South Africa. The political situation there meant that art, used as part of the struggle against apartheid, was being documented; and banners and murals used in demonstrations were often televised around the world. Publications such as *Images of Defiance* and *Resistance Art in South Africa* brought the art of the Republic of South Africa to Europe and America. However the arts from the surrounding African countries were relatively unknown.

Botswana is a landlocked country bordered by South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Fig1). It is 582,000 square kilometres of which two thirds is the Kalahari Desert. In the northwest area is the Okavango Delta, and to the east there is scrubland and rocky hills allowing for some farming and cattle. This environment means that the majority of the population live to the east of the country as well as in the south around the capital Gaborone. The population of Botswana is small, however, a mere 1,500,000, most of whom are known as Batswana (plural) or Motswana (singular)¹; their language is Setswana. There are many other ethnic groups living in Botswana amongst which the ones featured in this thesis are Herero in the northwest and San (elsewhere known as San or Bushmen or Khwe)² in the remoter parts of the Kalahari. See appendix 1(i) for full details of Botswana's population.

Prior to independence in 1966 Botswana was the British protectorate of Bechuanaland. Seretse Khama became president when Botswana achieved independence as a republic on 30th September 1966. Ketumile Joni Masire became acting president after the death of Seretse Khama in 1980 until 1998. Former Vice President Festus Mogae then took over.

Botswana is one of the wealthiest countries on the continent due to its diamond and copper mines. However, the AIDS epidemic is devastating the country with, in 2001, the highest reported rate of HIV infection in the world. Since 2002 it has launched ambitious campaigns to rid the country of new HIV by 2016, the 50th anniversary of the country's independence.

Mostly the arts we saw were made for tourists, but I was aware that a lot of it had originated from an art form that may have been practised for many years. I began my own collection of tourist art that was sold on the side of the roads, from wooden aeroplanes to multi-coloured clay guinea fowl. Generally the makers sold the art themselves and so I quickly became aware of the gender divisions in their making. For instance wood carving in places like Malawi was always done by men but the pottery and baskets made in Zimbabwe and Botswana were made by women. In Botswana it seemed that most of these arts were made by women.

It was when I came across the various art projects in Botswana that I decided to document and photograph some of the work. I was excited by the art that was coming out of projects, which seemed to exist in the middle of the desert (the Kuru painters) or in small villages with seemingly little potential in terms of interest or market (the Oodi weavers). I was also interested in why and how these women functioned as artists, and whether they even saw themselves or were seen by others as artists.

I subsequently made two research trips to Botswana. The first, in 1995, was to make a complete survey of all the arts that women currently practiced. I collected information on all of the projects that women were involved in, I met and interviewed individual women artists and I began to determine the contemporary status and development of the indigenous arts. In 1996 I travelled more widely through the country to meet women artists working on indigenous art in rural areas. I also followed up on the projects I had previously contacted which included flying out to Kuru to interview the artists and project workers there. I was also able to visit the Thapong International Artists' workshop in progress where I encountered a very diverse group of international artists working alongside the most experienced Botswana artists. These trips confirmed that there was indeed a history of women working in the visual arts in Botswana, and that, as well as these arts continuing to be made, there were new forms being introduced, adopted and developed by a variety of Botswanan artists both in remote rural areas as well as around the cities.

However, I also realised that many people in Botswana were unaware of the extent of their country's visual arts both the indigenous heritage and the contemporary developments. Women working in rural areas on their arts rarely saw themselves as 'artists', and they did not see their work as 'culture'. Was it because they were women that they did not value their work? Or was there a more widespread conviction that indigenous rural 'crafts' were not to be included in either 'art' or 'culture'?

Some of these ideas and issues had been debated in Botswana at the 1987 conference on culture hosted by the Botswana Society³. The opening speech was made by the Hon. D. Kwelagobe, Minister of Agriculture, who identified the objectives of the conference as follows:

We may not have one definition of culture, and we may find it difficult to spell out a cultural policy, but at the end of this symposium we should know which of our traditions we want to preserve or adapt. We should know how to use our media and our people as vehicles of culture. If we have no written policy at least we should have a direction and a common purpose: to be one nation and one people composed of varying rich and mature parts. (Hon. D. Kwelagobe, Botswana, 1987)

There was only one paper, *The Status of Women in Society* by Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, given at the conference that covered the topic of women and the arts, and its author was a man! Nevertheless, his paper was important as, for the first time, it put women as artists on the agenda. He raised the issue of freedom of expression and creativity for women and reported that women were not, at that time, free to express their creativity due to traditions that subordinated women to men socially, culturally and economically.

Women's subordinate role can be traced to the cultural background of our society. It is the society which determines the division of labour in terms of sex and gender, a conspiracy of cultural-norm mystification has helped to reinforce the subordinate status of women and to make it appear biologically and genetically determined. (Nengwekhulu, 1987)

By which he means that women's position is seen as 'natural and inevitable' and that girls are "culturally indoctrinated" into believing they are less intelligent, less competent etc. (Nengwekhulu, 1987). I kept these ideas in mind when I was interviewing women working at the projects, and soon found that they had not thought of their baskets and textiles as having any cultural value; and these ideas were not confined to Botswana. A report in the Namibian magazine *Kalabash* about women basket makers noted a woman's disbelief when told that her basket was to be displayed in gallery:

Is my basket culture? Isn't it just a basket? And I have won a prize for it! (Un-named woman, *Kalabash*, 1992)

Her basket seemed to have more value to her now that was seen as a part of a Namibian culture: her culture, indeed. Her basket had been elevated by a white person (the gallery curator) and its new status, for her, gave her pride in her work.

The 1987 conference concluded that:

It was felt that women have their own attitudes towards their group's culture not necessarily the same as those of men and that this is a possible study for researchers. (Nteta, 1988:145)

It is against this background that I recorded and analysed the status, variety and development of the arts that women practised in Botswana.

In my first chapter I look at the indigenous arts of Botswana and identifying the visual art forms that women in Botswana have practiced historically. Each has its own history within the country. I consider them in turn identifying its history and development to the present day: pottery, baskets, house decoration, bead and dress. The major focus of this part of my research was how these art forms were practised and received in contemporary society and how, over the years, the status of both the objects and their makers has changed. When pottery and baskets are no longer needed for their practical usefulness, notwithstanding their decorative qualities, they are sold to tourists. They are presented in the museum as historical objects and in the tourist shops as curios. I look at how these changes have affected their manufacture, their makers, and their value in contemporary Botswana

The next chapter is concerned with the development of projects, sometimes specifically for women artists, set up by expatriate artists. New art forms that seemed to have no previous history in Botswana were introduced. These projects fell into two categories, firstly those set up for groups of women; and secondly the one project, not for a single sex but for a single ethnic group, the so-called 'San' (the present day survivors of the hunter-gatherer peoples known also as 'Basarwa' or 'Bushman') I examine the reasons given for choosing these groups by the project workers, how they were set up, what the aims were, and how these ideas were developed with the members of the project. I chart the development of the projects over a number of years and consider their success in terms of achieving their goals, and of creating a project for the target group, which could then be run without them.

In Chapter 3 I present the very small group of individual women artists of Botswana, those whose practice falls into the category of Fine Art. Most of them are expatriate, and most, whether expatriate or Botswana national, live either in or close to Gaborone. They fall into four categories: Botswana who studied art abroad, Botswana who are self taught in Botswana, expatriates who have trained in art, and self taught expatriates. I consider the women in each

category, their biographical details, their work and their status as artists in Botswana. I look at how they see their work in relation to other artists in Botswana, such as the women who decorate their homes, weave baskets etc.

Chapter 4 examines the extent of art education in Botswana. As a subject at school art is a recent development. I look at how it was introduced and the subsequent development of an art education course at the University of Botswana. I also assess the art education programme run by the National Museums, Monuments and Art Gallery in Gaborone.

The next chapter examines all of the Triangle artists' workshops in Botswana and how they have played a crucial part in the development of the arts. The 'Triangle' (International Artists' Workshops) was established by Sir Anthony Caro and Robert Loder with the aim of enabling artists to get together from around the world to work together and share their ideas. These workshops have spread to Africa and around the world. There have been several in southern Africa, each identified by its individual name: Thupelo in South Africa, Pachipamwe in Zimbabwe and, beginning in 1989 Thapong in Botswana. I look at the impact of these workshops on the artists of Botswana, how they were initiated, and how successful they have been. I follow this development through ten years. Following the success of Thapong, two other workshops were established to deal with issues that had arisen during the first few years. Firstly Thlale was set up for the younger less experienced artists to encourage development to a standard which would enable them to participate fully in Thapong. Secondly the lack of women artists and the different requirements that women working in the art projects needed in terms of art training and development, led to another workshop, Motako. I consider how Thlale and Motako have worked in relation to Thapong.

Finally I look at exhibitions of Botswana art, in Botswana and abroad, especially beyond Africa, and the differences between art as part of everyday life and art created for the gallery. This research has continued over a period of ten years and, by keeping up to date with developments, I have recorded slow but gradual changes and developments for women in the arts both in terms of practical support such as the workshops and projects, and culturally in terms of how the various art forms are perceived around the country.

Chapter 1

A history of women's art in Botswana.

Introduction

When I first visited Botswana I expected to see baskets for sale by the side of the road, in shops and hotels. I knew that this art extended from Zimbabwe, which I had just travelled through, to Botswana, but knew of no other art forms practiced in the country. This is the case for most people. When people think of the arts of Botswana, if they can think of anything at all, it will be the basketry. Baskets are a visual art form that we presume have a long history in Botswana and one that, as there continues to be a market for them, is still practiced. Tourists visiting, or passing through the country, buy and collect them. They fit the market well as they are suitably suggestive of Africa, not too expensive, and light in weight therefore easy to post or carry. They are also guaranteed to look ornamental wherever they are placed in their new homes. However, there are also other art forms that have a long history of being practiced in Botswana and which are all also carried out, with few exceptions, by women. These include pottery, house decoration, dressmaking and beadwork. The art produced is not as visible in contemporary Botswana and is not as saleable (the pots are too heavy and fragile to transport and a painting on the side of a house cannot be bought⁴) nevertheless, their part in the visual culture of Botswana cannot be denied despite the lack of interest and paucity of documentation on them. The fact that these art forms, practiced almost exclusively by women, have been going for many years and are still, to a greater or lesser extent, carried out today has led me to treat them as separate from the art forms that are relatively new to artists in Botswana such as painting on canvas

There is very little written or researched about baskets, pottery and house decoration of Botswana. I investigate whether this lack of awareness and the difference in the treatment of the diverse art forms in the contemporary art world is as a result of either: a) a general lack of interest in culture in Botswana, b) because the art forms themselves are essentially utilitarian and therefore undeserving of serious research, c) a result of the makers being women, or d) combination of any of the above. These art forms also serve to illustrate the debate, discussed in the introduction on culture, of art/craft and high/low art in Botswana.

Firstly I look at the changes in the form, design and usages of baskets, pottery and house decoration over the years and at the impact on them of manufacturing, tourism and museum and art collections. I then consider the status of these art forms in Botswana today.

A quote from Dr. Olu Oguibe, written as an introduction to the exhibition in 1993 *8 African Women Artists*, pinpoints some of the main debates that will arise and sets the scene for this chapter⁵:

If Europe denies its great women artists, the story of art in Africa is undeniably one of great women artists. Across the continent from the forest cultures of the Guinea coast to the Nomadic cultures of the Masai highlands art as creation, is essentially as much a female space as it is male. Indeed, in some cultures aspects of art are the preserve of the female, and so without the discriminatory dichotomisation between high and low art, between craft and art, which is why such distinctions do not exist in most African languages. What is most interesting is that this distinction set in, and cannot be denied to exist afterwards, with the advent of western civilisation, western education, and the art of the academy. (Oguibe, 1993)

Oguibe states that “the story of art in Africa is undeniably one of great women artists”, a sweeping statement maybe, but one that nevertheless should encourage us to begin to redress the balance of a very male centered art history and highlights the theme at the very centre of my research.

I develop some of the concerns raised in his catalogue introduction as I consider each indigenous art form. Issues such as the importance of recognising the imported Eurocentrist view of art history that operates in places like Botswana; a view which often excludes women’s art as ‘low’, ‘useful’, or ‘craft’, terms that have been developed in Europe but which may not have been used in Africa until the advent of the Fine Art academy system. These are points that I consider when examining the following:

- a. Baskets
- b. Pottery
- c. House decoration
- d. Arts of other groups in Botswana: Herero dress and San beadwork

Baskets

Basket weaving is so widespread in Botswana that it is hard to imagine the country without it. Since the early 1980’s several articles were written about Botswana baskets in art and tourist magazines, which stirred up intellectual interest in its development and status in Botswana. In 1990 Elizabeth Terry⁶ began extensive research into the contemporary situation of basket making and resources in Botswana. However, apart from this, there is very little published literature or research about the history of basket-making in southern Africa and I therefore rely on information from a variety of historical sources.⁷

In terms of the history of baskets in the region all we can say with any certainty is that basketry has considerable antiquity, with a range of techniques so widespread and commonplace that this indicates nothing of their history, and ongoing adaptability. As for the more recent developments for basket making in Botswana, 1969 is mentioned in several places as the time when more interest was taken in baskets as a commodity, and simultaneously, production increased. Michael Main's article explains this when he writes about the second Hambukushu⁸ immigration into the Okavango district from the war torn country of Angola in 1969.

These people brought with them a traditional Hambukushu skill that had not hitherto been commercially exploited in Ngamiland. The skill was basket weaving. Okavango residents had always woven baskets but the fresh input from the new arrivals reasserted the strong traditional and cultural components of this craft. (Main, 1987.)

A market soon developed in Etsha⁹ where baskets were traded (Figure 1.1). Before long other local people began to bring their baskets to the market, and this increased interest, led to a revival in basket making skills throughout the region.

Uses

Baskets had a variety of uses such as sifting, winnowing and drying grains. In fact, as Dora Lambrecht points out, they are used in every part of the food production cycle: planting, harvesting, transport, storage, food processing, brewing and drinking beer and serving foods (Lambrecht, 1976: 179), (Figures 1.2 and 1.3) (see appendix 1(ii) for more information on uses). There were several reasons why baskets were chosen over other containers such as pots. One practical factor is the lack of clay soils; areas in Botswana where baskets are predominant are the Kalahari and the North East district, which are very dry regions where little clay for making pots could be found. Another feature is that, as unbreakable and transportable containers, they were useful for both settled and transitory people.

The basket makers

The research carried out by both Elizabeth Terry and Louis Taussig shows that, in Botswana, it is mainly women who make the baskets.¹⁰ It is usually done in addition to another form of income or subsistence farming, although it can also be a woman's only source of cash income.

The majority of basket makers in southern Africa fall into at least one of the following categories: low income, living in rural or very remote areas, female, and often female head of household, subsistent agriculturist, and owning few or no cattle. (Terry and Cunningham, 1997:3)

It is the women from the Hambukushu and Yei¹¹ groups in the North/West regions of Botswana who are the predominant basket makers, although there is some basket making scattered throughout other regions.

Whether farmers, cattle herders or fishermen, all Ngamiland people use baskets in their occupations and all of them make baskets as of necessity, with the possible exception of the Herero (who buy baskets when they need them) and the Bushmen (who prefer leather pouches and ostrich eggshells as containers). (Lambrecht, 1968: 29)

There is no formal training for basket making. The skills are passed down from mother to daughter (see appendix 1(iii) for how a basket is made and Figure 1.4). It can take anything from between two to four years to become a proficient and skilled maker. From there it will then take between four to six years of practice to learn the repertoire of stitches for the designs and to finally weave a well made, usable and saleable basket. Louis Taussig states that the women with thirty to forty years experience will weave baskets of the highest quality.

Basket designs and decoration

Designs/patterns on the baskets are many and varied. Although the colours generally employed by the makers in Botswana (natural palm colour, browns, mauves) give a uniform feeling to a large group of baskets, on closer examination it is clear that the combinations of patterns and colours are extremely diverse (Figures 1.5 – 1.10).

No one has researched a comprehensive list of designs currently in use. There are a great many of them and similar designs can have different names depending on who has made them, giving even more variety. Many of the patterns and designs used are also found in Zimbabwe, as seen in Margaret Locke's¹² research *The Dove's Footprints*; however, there is no equivalent study of them in Botswana. Botswanacraft¹³ do have a list of basket designs and names which they present as being conclusive, but it is not so (Figure 1.11). It also does not take into account any regional or familial variations.

Any article on Botswana baskets will mention certain very common designs and their names, often also with a story as to how that design was developed. Yet it is difficult to ascertain to what extent these names were invented as the design emerged, or, whether they were invented as a marketing device. Terry and Cunningham (1997: 20) imply that many of these names originated only in the 1970's through discussions between the makers and their

marketing officers. Terry substantiates this by remarking that no museum collection of Botswana baskets has records of any names.

Examples from the Botswanacraft catalogue (1999) show how a design is often given a title with a story to tell. For example, the triangle pattern called *Swallows Flying* illustrates the saying that swallows fly before the rains and is therefore a sign of good fortune. The *Tears of the Giraffe* design is one of small dots radiating from the centre of the basket. Someone is quoted as saying of a giraffe, as it was about to be killed on a hunt:

We saw it cry and were impressed by its sorrow. Later we made baskets with giraffe tears to commemorate its death. (Unidentified women in Botswanacraft catalogue)

Curved lines radiating out of the centre is called *Ribs of the Giraffe* and another story is told to explain the origin of this pattern:

Many years ago when I was a child, women followed men on a hunt. After the kill we would flay the giraffe of its meat [so] only the ribs remained. My grandmother made a basket of the rib design to remember the great giraffe hunt. (Yoffe, 1978:42)

Other very descriptive names used are: *Forehead of the Zebra*, *Knees of the Tortoise*, *Shield*, *Forehead of the Kudu*, *Running Ostrich*, *Urine Trail of the Bull*, *Back of the Python*, *Roof of the Rondavel*, *Palm Leaf*. Clearly these are fanciful names, originating from the imagination and storytelling, which is exactly what the majority of tourists look for in their souvenir. These names and stories increase sales and inspire the marketing, as can be seen in the Botswanacraft catalogue and the exhibitions of baskets that I look at later. On the other hand, there is no reason why the women would not have named the patterns¹⁴ for their own reference, interest and enjoyment.

Taussig (1997) states that these designs are not limited to baskets and that they are also employed by the San¹⁵ in their beaded jewellery and pouches. As we will see later, there is a familiarity of patterns used in the arts throughout Botswana. The zigzag pattern is commonly used as are a variety of other schematic forms and shapes. One explanation could be that, as the women throughout Botswana and regions of southern Africa lead similar lives with comparable surroundings, when they draw on their environment, landscape, wildlife and plant life for inspiration, there naturally develops a similarity in patterns and designs. I will discuss this in detail, in relation to all of the arts discussed in this chapter, later on. However, there is also a certain amount of diversity; Dora Lambrecht explains some of the influences that have led to the baskets of today:

If we take into account all the traditions related to basketry which the Ngamiland people have inherited, if we couple these with new techniques acquired by tribal interaction, and add the weavers own improvements of ornament and function, we will understand why basketry as a necessity, craft and art is so varied in Ngamiland. (Lambrecht, 1968:30)

See appendix 1(iv) for more information on historical influences.

Contemporary development and marketing of baskets

A lot of original uses for baskets have been made defunct by the importing of plastic buckets and other such containers, which are as light and portable as baskets but cheaper to buy. So, where the practical usage for baskets has, in many cases disappeared, new functions and reasons for making them have developed which has allowed the continuation of basketry in Botswana. Firstly, the growing tourist and expatriate market has bought about an increase in the sale of baskets and a much needed cash income. Secondly, as a newly promoted art form, it can offer status to skilled basket makers whose work is chosen to be exhibited in the National Gallery, thus transforming baskets from utilitarian pieces into works of art. Three main buyers of baskets can be identified:

1. Non-makers of baskets some of whom want to trade pots for baskets ie: Herero.
2. Tourists and expatriates.
3. Botswanacraft, a commercial marketing company.

In Botswana the commercial buying of baskets started in early 1970's in the Ngamiland district. This was mainly through Botswanacraft¹⁶, which is active in travelling around the country to meet the producers who otherwise, without transport, would be unable to sell their work.

Botswanacraft Marketing Company Ltd. actively encourages the continued production of traditional crafts and the development of new contemporary items... In addition the company provides experts to help producers continually improve the quality of their products, while maintaining their indigenous charm (Botswanacraft brochure 1999).

Terry was one such expert employed by Botswanacraft as a 'craft advisor' for baskets. It was her job to communicate to the producers what was required from the buyers, in terms of standards in neatness and quality of the baskets and materials used (interview with Terry, London: 1998). These were obviously all values that the new market, in other words the tourists and expatriates, had bought with them. Whereas previously, baskets had been made solely for a woman's own use or for sale to someone who wanted it for a purpose such as

storage, now their primary use was for display by people not part of the basket maker's community.

More elaborate and contemporary designs are being developed for the market and the naming of these new designs, as discussed earlier, is now common. New colours in ink and imported dyes have also been introduced although these are still relatively limited in use. Many baskets are also sold directly to the tourist or to small shops in tourist areas like Maun, Nata, and Chobe. Here, the direction of the basket's development is not directed by a company like Botswanacraft but by the success of the artists' individual sales. At this point we begin to see the effects of marketing demands on something that previously, had been made mainly for personal use or exchange. Although evidence gathered by Terry, shows that some baskets have always had patterns and decoration, in some areas of Botswana and with some types of baskets, designs and patterning are a relatively new development. It is as a direct result of the changes in use of the baskets that the variations in decoration and style have come about. One Yei weaver from Gamore, Botswana explained that:

a long time ago there used to be no designs on our baskets, but these days our culture has developed and our designs are being used all over the country. (Botswanacraft brochure 1999)

Terry also writes about the adaptation of basket functions to suit western homes. For example, the winnowing basket has become flatter to be used as a tray or table mat, large grain storage baskets have become laundry baskets and carrying baskets have become fruit bowls. Now, these popular designs and shapes which, as the Botswanacraft brochure explains, have an "indigenous charm" are the ones asked for again and again by buyers; and it can safely be assumed that women now leave the unpopular designs and concentrate on repeating the best sellers.

In any case, each individual basket is unique. Even though styles of baskets and certain patterns can be listed and classified no two baskets are ever the same, the choice of style with design and the individual weavers' methods makes each basket distinctive:

the weaving alone is like the signature of the artist and already distinguishes one basket from another. (Terry and Cunningham, 1997)

In spite of the constraints of the market demands, women do have a certain freedom to develop designs and combinations of designs and styles thereby asserting their individuality.

The patterns are known by specific names, but the representation created involves each craftsman's own idea and imagination. It would be possible to put together collections of baskets using all the known patterns and no collections would look identical. It is the high quality of construction

coupled with the ability to abstract creatively which has produced much interest in Botswana baskets. None of these patterns is pictorial representation. Their execution represents a highly developed sense of abstraction. (Taussig, 1997)

Some Batswana groups are more interested in developing new ideas and designs for their baskets than others, so, where for some women the work is purely a way of enhancing one's income, for others it is obviously more than that. Terry establishes that only a few Mbukushu¹⁷ weavers from Etsha claim to make up their own designs whereas 30% of Yei weavers from Gomare make up their own designs.

possibly indicating the importance to the Yei of individual expression in design as compared to the Mbukushu. (Terry and Cunningham, 1997:19)

Dora Lambrecht had, in any case, already found that:

Basketry has given individuals from different groups a means to express their artistic inclinations. ... The Tswana of Ngamiland are usually considered as a mobile group. Accordingly, their art is concentrated on familiar and personal objects, among them transportable and unbreakable baskets. (Lambrecht, 1968, 29)

Influence of the income on lives of the basket makers

The importance of the possibility of earning a cash income for women, especially for those living in the remotest of areas, cannot be underestimated. For women to earn any sort of income from basket making was a relatively new experience and there is a new found sense of freedom and choice from the women who have talked about it:

We are self employed and we send our children to school from what we get from the baskets. In the old days we used to be like slaves for other people... fetching water and doing other small jobs... now we can make baskets, sell them and be independent. (unidentified informants quoted by Terry and Cunningham, 1997:5-6)

Exhibiting baskets and the National Museum and Monuments Art Gallery

The National Museum of Monuments and Art Gallery (NMMAG) in Gaborone has always taken the baskets of its country seriously. Since it opened in 1967 it has collected baskets of the highest quality, both historical and contemporary, for the National archives. The museum has always had a policy of travelling around the country, both to take its collections and education to people living in the remotest areas, and to buy, collect and document art and music from the people. As distances are large and travel is difficult for individuals in the most isolated areas, this is a crucial service in order to provide a genuine example of the country's arts. Therefore once a year, new baskets are bought into the gallery collection and are then

exhibited, with each maker identified, as part of both the permanent and changing displays of baskets in the museum.

An important development, in terms of the visibility of baskets in Botswana, is the annual basket competition that was initiated by Botswanacraft in 1976 and continues to this day. Organisers of the show travel around the country during the year collecting examples of baskets for the competition. The *Baskets of Botswana* exhibition is then held at the NMMAG, where the baskets are judged by a changing panel of people involved in the arts: teachers, artists and curators; and prizes are awarded. All of the baskets are for sale afterwards. Although the basket makers cannot very often attend this event they are told of any awards that they may have received and get any money from the sales of their baskets.

Since the 1980's the NMMAG has taken over the running of the annual basket exhibition and it continues to be one of the art gallery's most popular shows, in terms of numbers of people coming through the doors. Local Batswana have a keen interest in the work, through recognising it as representing their country and its history, and also from maybe knowing one of the makers.

After seeing baskets for sale throughout the country in shops, hotels and on the roadside, the gallery exhibition makes the viewer look at the work afresh. Hung on a white wall, in a calm and often quiet space the basket is devoid of utility, the audience can therefore concentrate on its form, pattern and skill and can maybe begin to assess them as works of art. The annual basket competition locates them, temporarily at least, within the gallery/art set up where they are therefore looked upon by the visiting public as art. On the other hand, the huge historical collection of baskets is housed in the museum side of the NMMAG where they are stored and displayed as artefacts (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). This attention to the contemporary basket, however temporary or fleeting, is something that has not happened for any the other arts such as pottery or house decoration.

Baskets from Botswana have also been exhibited abroad. In 1999 Rebecca Hossack exhibited them in her London galleries and at the South Bank Centre alongside the Kuru artists' exhibition there. (Figure 6.14) Once again, baskets hung as paintings in a gallery space, make people look closer at the work and give it a weight that it would otherwise not have had.

African baskets have been imported into Britain for several years for sale in shops such as *Out of Africa* in London's Covent Garden (since closed). In 2000 they were presented in a new light as 'urban' and 'contemporary' in a Sunday magazine, highlighting the difference between the reality of the baskets' origins and the baskets' destination British home:

British baskets are rustic, willowy, nostalgic affairs. African baskets are more urban and contemporary with intricate patterns and bold covers. (The Guardian Weekend, 8/1/2000)

Ironic words when the origins of the Botswana basket could not be more rural and divorced from any form of “contemporary urban culture”.

Conclusion

Botswana baskets have undergone huge changes over the last thirty years. Where the art form could have died out instead it has adapted and developed to suit the new demands, usages and markets. The efforts of the National Museum have kept the art alive for the general public although the recent development of other art forms (such as painting on canvas and sculpture) in Botswana has often led to it being labelled as a ‘craft’ as opposed to ‘art’. This labelling/terminology has meant that the art of basketry is not seen as part of the contemporary art movement, it is seen as rural and separate. The baskets are exhibited separately and, as yet, have no place in the school art curriculum.

In order for baskets to continue to develop their new functions need to be explored. The baskets and their makers need to be treated as contemporary equals to the other arts and artists that are exhibiting in Botswana now.

Pottery

Although less prominent in Botswana than baskets, pottery is an art form with a history. Pots are still made and traded throughout the country although little detailed information is available. Women have always been the main makers of pots (see appendix 1(v) for history and more information on who makes pots), however, in 1996 there were said to be fewer women than ever before making pots in Botswana.

Twenty to thirty years ago there were a good number of women making clay pots at Morwa village in the Kgatleng. Mina Kwapa learnt to do so by watching them at work and then copying them. She is now only one of three women in Morwa (pop. 1,353) who are still doing so. (Grant, nd: 93)

The main reason for this can be traced to the fact that there are more manufactured goods such as plastic wares and metal cooking utensils available for use. The functions the pots were used for are now being done by shop bought items, which last longer as they do not break so easily and, in many cases, are lighter and more convenient to use. But also, the job of collecting clay,

working with your hands and finding a market is a very difficult one. “None of them [the potters in Morwa] are passing on their skill as she says people are not interested and are afraid of work.” (Grant, nd: 94). Women are becoming more reluctant to do work that is seen as linked to a rural and poor lifestyle, (this is a point that is relevant to all of the arts that I am discussing here and which I develop later in detail in the section on house decoration). So gradually the skills are becoming more and more scarce and, for the potters themselves, this has led to a loss of income.

Contemporary developments

Two developments started in the late 1980s, have encouraged the continuation of pottery in Botswana. Firstly, a small group of women started a pottery project just outside Gaborone in the Pelotsetla area. The project was initiated by Nkagisang Ellis, the daughter of one of this area’s best known potters. The women came together to work making pots to sell to passing tourists as well as to markets further a field in Lobatse and Kanye. It is not a great financial success for the women but they can earn a small cash income and, working together means that they do not all have to be there at the same time to sell the work. The women working at this project all have a pottery background as they learnt from their mothers or grandmothers how to make pots (see appendix 1(vi) for details of the indigenous methods of pot making and their uses). (Figures 1.12 – 1.16)

The second development is the pottery factories of Pelegano and Thamaga where the women are recruited to work and do not necessarily have a pottery background. Pelegano is a commercial set up in the village of Gabane just south of Gaborone and Thamaga is to the north of Gaborone. The pottery made at both factories has been altered to fit the western home (Figures 1.17 and 1.18). Instead of the large pots historically made for storage and transporting food and drink, Pelegano and Thamaga make pots as vases, mugs, display plates and ashtrays. Also, rather than the roughly made unpainted clay figures and animals that children used to make themselves to play with, Pelegano makes small carefully crafted animal figures, fired and painted with bright patterns (Figure 1.19). The contrast between the functions and forms of what was made indigenously with clay and the new art forms now manufactured at Pelegano and Thamaga is great. This has a lot to do with the set up: although the women still hand-build the pots (as opposed to using a wheel), they now use workbenches and stools instead of sitting on the ground. Clay is bought to the factory (from Lobatse clay works) rather than mined individually. They use shop bought enamel paint to provide a guaranteed longer lasting colour and not locally mined dyes; and of course they use kilns as opposed to fires in pits. The work

is nevertheless marketed as 'traditional'. The patterning used is similar to some of the indigenous pottery and house decoration found in Botswana, yet intensified by the use of the permanent enamel paints. The fact that the products here are repeated to a formula and that their functions have changed to suit a foreign market, shows that the work produced here is clearly all part of the manufacturing plan, and not inspired creativity by the workforce.

Pelegano has its own shop at the factory where it sells to tourists. Also, Botswanacraft buys from both Pelegano and Thamaga for its shop in Gaborone and for export (although not in the same quantity as the baskets as the fragility of the product does not make it as accessible to the tourist market).

Influence of an income on potters

These two factories provide a crucial income to women living in rural areas by tapping into a carefully manufactured tourist market for indigenous look alike products. For the women working at Pelegano and Thamaga, the income is their primary aim for working. They do not necessarily have any history of working with clay, or any empathy with the practice particularly as pottery is not practiced throughout the country and was always a more specialised art form, previously carried out only by certain families. They are simply happy to have an income that they can earn close to home. Otherwise, throughout Botswana, the money earned by potters is minimal, although as tourism increases some potters, such as those at Pelotsetla, do now manage to sell at the side of the road as well as through Botswanacraft.

Pottery and the National Museums, Monuments and Art Gallery

The museum has a collection of pots from around Botswana (Figures 1.20-1.21) but it is not as comprehensive as their basket collection, and it is without any comparable detailed information. The pots are housed in the museum side of the NMMAG and there is no reference to contemporary pottery. Pelegano and Thamaga do not exhibit their work in the gallery and, despite selling the work as 'traditional' they do not promote it as art or their women workers as artists.

Pottery was included in *Botswana Live!*, the NMMAG's touring exhibition in 1993. However, individual potters were not identified, and the pots were placed in an entirely historical context implying that pottery no longer played a part in the arts of Botswana.

Conclusion

Despite some interest from Botswana Nationals and expatriates, pottery has a very low profile in the country. Although pottery from Pelegano and Thamaga is being promoted as 'indigenous' and is getting marketing attention from Botswanacraft, the individual women potters working in their villages have little recognition. Stalls on the side of the roads will sell a few pots, but their simple colours and patterns cannot compete on the tourist market with the commercially made, highly coloured and fully glazed pottery made at Pelegano and Thamaga. This is an example of an indigenous practice slowly dying out because of a lack of demand. Firstly, because plastic containers have replaced the heavier pots of everyday use and secondly, because tourist sales are dominated by pots from Pelegano and Thamaga, where forms and patterning have been imitated on a commercial scale and adapted to suit the western home in function, style and finish.

House Decoration

A comprehensive study of the Tswana home was carried out by Anita and Viera Larsson in 1984 and the Grants also provide some documentation in their book of 1995. Typical rural Batswana buildings are made mostly from mud with some timber framing and a thatch roof. Women will do most of the work in the building of the home although men will usually build the frame for the roof. The house will then need regular maintenance in order for it to last against problems such as termites and the weathering effect of the rain on the mud walls; again the women usually will carry this out (Larsson and Larsson, 1984). The houses and outbuildings such as store areas are built close to one another and one low wall will link several of these together. Where houses stand alone they will also have an outside area enclosed by a low wall at the front of the house. This low walled area is known as a *lelwapa* or *lelapa* (plural: *lolwapa* or *malapa*), meaning the outside space but also translated as: family, home and household (Grant, 1984, 14) indicating the importance of this space in the Batswanan homestead.

The physical *lelapa* is an essential architectural feature because it binds together the component buildings comprising the traditional home. (Grant and Grant, 1984:14)

Or, as the Larssons put it:

The heart of the dwelling unit is a courtyard enclosed by low walls. This place is named *lolwapa* in Setswana. The importance of this courtyard is emphasised by the Tswana concept of the word. *Lolwapa* means mostly inner courtyard, either the construction of walls and a floor, or the "room". However, the whole yard or home of a household is also referred to as the *lolwapa*. (Larsson and Larsson, 1984:55)

Travelling through Botswana one will see occasional examples of house and wall decoration. More often than not it will just be the *lolwapa* that are decorated, or the house will have been simply painted in bright colours: the top half of the building in one colour and another colour for the bottom half (Figures 1.22-1.28). Occasionally, you will see a fully decorated patterned house and wall. However, in 1995 Sandy and Elinah Grant published their book *Decorated Homes in Botswana* and through this we do know that, until very recently, house decoration was much more widespread through the country than it was at the time of my research. Moulded and/or painted mural decoration is common throughout Africa and well documented (see Courtney-Clarke, 1990 and Schneider, 1989); however, the situation of contemporary house decoration in Botswana is much less well known. (See appendix 1(vii) for details of available documentation).

History

In Botswana wall painting was documented by European travellers as early as 1820.¹⁸

Sinosee's house was nearly finished.... the wall was painted yellow and ornamented with figures of shields, elephants and camel¹⁹ - leopards etc., It was also adorned with a neat cornice or border painted of red colour.... In the centre of the house was a circular room...and its walls were decorated with delightful representations of elephants and giraffes. (Rev. John Campbell in Grant and Grant, 1995:43)

There was no further published documentary evidence of house decoration until George Stow in 1905. He published illustrated designs made by the Bakwena²⁰ people then living in South Africa, who would have used these designs on their homes in Botswana in the early 1900's. Issac Schapera²¹ 1937 is the next source of documentation and, as his work filled in some of the gaps in their research, the Grants used a lot of his photographs to illustrate their book. In 1970, James Walton²² carried out a study of the art of house decoration throughout southern Africa in which he comments that the Sotho-Tswana peoples may well have been the first to develop mural art. In 1992 Alec Campbell²³ wrote about the demise of the art form even though, as Grant (interview with Grant, 1995) points out, there still has never been any systematic study of the art form and how widespread it had ever been in Botswana; so it was impossible to speak accurately of a decline. The fact that house decoration is documented in the 1820's tells us nothing of the antiquity of this art, however; and even though subsequent documentation is fragmentary at least we have some idea of its existence for nearly two hundred years.

The artists

As for baskets and pottery, women are the artists who decorate the homes. There are no 'master painters' employed by other families to do the work; painting and decoration is very much the choice of each individual household and is carried out by women on their own homes. As the evidence shows, not all women will paint their houses and it is more common in some areas than others. As women pass their skills from mother to daughter, it is generally the families with women who decorate who will continue to do so. (see appendix 1(viii) for full details of methods and materials employed in house decoration)

Women interviewed would give as their main reason for decorating their homes the fact that "they like to make their home look good". They take great pride in keeping their homes neat and, because so much of their time is spent outside in the *lolwapa*, this means the courtyard area is always being tidied and swept; but also for many this means decorating their house and *lolwapa* with paint (Figures 1.29-1.35). Some women will always want their homes decorated and will need to repaint at least once a year. Others will decorate for special occasions: to decorate at Christmas time shows the village that you care about a special time in the year and is a time when one will see the most homes painted in the villages at any one time. To decorate for wedding shows respect to the couple and adds importance to the ceremony. Decoration at other times is purely for personal satisfaction.

The women interviewed mentioned nothing about their art being an assertion of identity.²⁴ They would often say that they painted their homes because it was "a part of their culture"²⁵ although they would not elaborate on what exactly they thought of as 'their culture' or what the painting might signify within this. However, a woman's wish to take part in a village custom such as a wedding or festival by painting her house, would indicate a strong form of identification with her community through her art.

Current situation in regard to house painting

On speaking to several women during April 1995 who had painted walls, it became evident that house decoration is, in fact, a dying art form. Most of the women artists I interviewed, painters, potters, basket makers, had mothers or grandmothers who decorated their homes and who they had watched paint as a child. However, only a few of the older women now decorated their homes for special occasions. These women all had daughters to whom they could have passed on the knowledge of house painting, but they said that their daughters are

not interested. It is too labour intensive with hours spent digging the clay and transporting it back to the house. Days are then spent mixing the clays and the colours and painting. The work gives you very rough hands and after all that, it washes off with the first rains. Sandy Grant, during his research, experimented with painting a wall in the traditional way using the white clay he had mined himself. He found the work hard going and the materials difficult to manage with his inexperience (Figure 1.36). This gave him and insight into why the younger women see the advantages of shop bought acrylic paint. It lasts longer and is easy to apply. However, few use it, proving that it is not just the labour of collecting and preparing the paints that puts the younger women off decorating (Figures 1.37 and 1.38).

Walls of the modern home are now covered with a cement finish and painted with acrylic paint. They are very rarely decorated (I only came across one during my research in Mochudi), and when they are the painters are men.

The advent of cement has caused a decline in house decoration and commercial paint is seen as a man's job. Paint is male. (Interview with Sandy Grant, 1995)

The reason why women will not work with acrylic shop bought paint is unclear; but it must have something to do with the fact that women always sourced the materials they needed from the land around them whereas men would often need to trade or visit a store for some of their building materials, nails, wood etc. Thus, as the technology of house building changed, men became identified with the different resources needed.

Village houses are now increasingly seen as a way of living in the past, and this too promotes the decline of mural painting. As people move to the cities and into concrete and cement-block houses, they perceive the village homes as a measure of poverty and backwardness²⁶. The modern house is made of modern materials and has a small patch of land around it, which is kept swept and ordered. This homestead, house and yard, is kept controlled, separate and apart from nature. It signifies the owner's rise from poverty, the village and rural life to a lifestyle where nature, rural-ness and hopefully poverty, are kept at a distance²⁷ in a way that the old style rural *lolwapa* was unable to do.

However, these changes are not without problems:

Housing for low income groups in towns provided through government measures are based on colonial ideals, rather than those of the Tswana people. It is evident that links are missing between the traditional dwelling in rural areas and the modern one in towns. The lack of links is probably the reason behind the dissatisfaction of people in some types of low cost housing. (Larsson and Larsson, 1984:10)

In many young women's eyes, house decoration is seen as something their mothers used to do back in the village from which they have 'escaped', and with which they no longer want to associate themselves. Younger women are dissatisfied and no longer proud enough of their village homes to want to live in them, on the other hand, neither are they comfortable enough in their new city homes to want to celebrate them through their painting.

House decoration and the NMMAG and galleries

In 1996 the museum built a house in its grounds and commissioned a group of women to decorate it. It is significant that the museum wanted to recognise the art form and bring it to the public's attention however, the house was placed in the historical part of the museum and is therefore seen by the visiting schools and tourists as a relic of the past rather than as an art of the present (Figures 1.39 – 1.42). On the other hand, paintings, which use elements of house decoration in them, are hanging in the art gallery. Ann Gollifer and Neo Matome (see chapter 3 and figures 3.58-3.62 and 3.3-3.4)) both make direct reference to the patterns and images used in the Batswana house painting in their work and in 1986, Tjako Mpulubusi (the then director of the NMMAG), held an exhibition of paintings based entirely on house decoration. It seems ironic that a man was able to come along, take the basic elements, colour, patterns, shapes, of house and basket decoration and transform them from what was previously seen as a 'craft' into what is now considered an 'art' as it hangs in an exhibition in Gaborone's art gallery. A review by Judy Seidman in the local paper shows that some of the issues discussed in this chapter were recognised in this work:

Many people have pointed out that isolating the visual aesthetic and hanging it on the wall as "art", is a modern trend. "Art" has become alienated. It is no longer a part of everything we make but added later. A modern house is built, the walls completed and painted white; only then is the artistic object is tacked on...by contrast, the traditional African builder makes the walls of the house she lives in, according to her capability and her sense of beauty, and includes the design in the cow-dung finish. The basket weaver weaves the pattern as she constructs the basket... (Seidman, 1986)²⁸

As in the case of pottery, few Batswana feel strongly enough about the loss of this part of their culture to try to find a way to preserve it. The museum has, nevertheless, recorded its existence and allocated it a place in the history of Botswana. However, whilst the art of house decoration is dying, albeit very slowly, it is the westerners/ expatriates who are trying to keep it alive. The Larssons and the Grants²⁹ have extensively documented, photographed and published the art of house decoration, and Elizabeth Gron at the museum attempted to find a way to make the clays and paints more durable so that the artwork could be preserved. Their

concern could be motivated by nostalgia for the loss of local indigenous art forms, although coming from Europe they would also be aware of the damage done to, and loss of, local traditions in the name of progress; especially in the west in the 1950's and 60's.

The key to ensuring the survival and development of an almost extinct tradition is for people to realise it has a value for and within the 'modern world'. Unfortunately, as people move into city homes built of cement, this has yet to happen. Moreover, the large social gatherings that were formerly a reason for decorating the house in the village, happen less frequently. If women could find some way of turning their abilities into a saleable commodity, they could see the value of their art in a modern and urban context.³⁰

The Grants have produced several postcards of Botswana wall decoration, which are sold throughout the country. The book and postcards are aimed at the expatriate, tourist and foreign market but, through their visibility in the shops in Gaborone and elsewhere, will also be seen by Botswana. The publicity given to the Grant's photographs and publication could yet mean the beginning of a revival of local interest in this art. One woman, (unidentified) interviewed in Mochudi in 1995 about her wall painting, spoke of the pride engendered by tourists coming to take photographs of it (Figures 1.43 and 1.44). Admittedly this has proved to be an isolated example, yet it does suggest that a revival is possible. Grant also suggested that there could be an annual painting competition as a means of raising awareness and interest in this art.

Another way of developing local interest in house decoration would be to encourage the women to paint on canvas, a format that could be sold to visitors to hang on their walls at home. The obvious danger here of course is that, having learnt that certain designs sell better than others, the process of commoditisation would reduce the art to a formulaic craft (as seen with the pottery at Pelegano), devoid of local purpose or interest.

A third possibility is to bring the artists into public areas to paint the walls of community centres and other public buildings. The art would reach a wide audience, giving the women public approval and visibility. To be paid to paint as she does at home, but on a public building could encourage a painter to develop her work freely. This is something that has been discussed by the arts education officer at the museum, but has not as yet been put into action. However, it has to be noted here that there are two buildings in Gaborone (the Botswanacraft shop Figure 1.45 and the Boipuso Conference Centre), which have been decorated, using acrylic paint and by workmen, in a style more reminiscent of Ndebele house decoration. In his book, Sandy Grant warns of ignoring Botswana's own vernacular art forms for those more widely promoted ones, often mistaken as being indigenous to southern Africa rather than the small Ndebele region from which they really originate:

....even more pronounced has been the recent lavish Ndebele style decoration of the Peace Corps hostel in Gaborone. These developments pose a particular danger that the imported, foreign design will overwhelm the local designs and colours which are today crying out for wider recognition. (Grant, 1995:79)

Fourthly, there is still a failure to bring this local art practice into the educational system. If house decoration were included in the art syllabus at school as well as Van Gogh and Rembrandt, it would give it an importance that could help to make the pupils value their own art history.

Conclusion

The original motivation for house decoration was pride; pride in the home, the village and the culture, alongside the desire to celebrate visually weddings, births or village events. With the move into the towns and into cement homes all this has largely disappeared. The question of how, if at all, the decline in this art can be reversed, has yet to be seriously considered in Botswana.

Dresses and Beads

Botswanacraft also promotes what they call 'Bushmen Crafts' and 'Herero Crafts'. The 'Bushmen Crafts' include raw-hide products such as bags, dancing skirts, loin aprons and hunting sets, usually made by the men; and necklaces of beads made from ostrich eggshells also used for decorating clothes, usually made by the women. 'Herero Crafts' include jugs and containers made from wood and cow skin and also dolls dressed in the clothes of the contemporary Herero, the colourful, long dresses and hats that the women wear.

Many tourists and even many Batswana will never have seen women in Herero dress or San wearing beads. Now, thanks to Botswanacraft, otherwise little known practices are now commonly seen in the tourist shops. Although a souvenir shop in Gaborone and daily life in remote rural areas are completely different contexts, Botswanacraft does at least draw attention to the fact that these are women's art forms, which still exist in parts of Botswana.

Herero Dress

Travelling through North West Botswana I would often see Herero women going about their daily activities dressed in very large, brightly coloured and multi-layered dresses. The

development of this distinctive Herero dress is hardly documented. There are a few articles in magazines and papers of southern Africa but they all have more or less the same information, which is brief and hardly researched. This is surprising considering, through the sheer colourfulness and size of the dresses and headdresses, the huge visual impact that the clothes have on the communities, and their history of the assimilation of a visual culture.

The Herero lived in the region that became South West Africa. In 1884, when the area became a German colony, in return for protection within their region against the 'Hottentots'³¹, the Herero ceded land to the Germans. This led to the loss of their cattle and previous way of life. Following the Battle of Waterberg in 1904³² many Herero escaped across the Kalahari to Bechuanaland³³ where they settled. Today Herero peoples still live in north west Botswana, mainly in the areas of Ngamiland from Maun to Toromoja, though many also still live in Namibia.

In 1840 the first missionaries arrived to the German colony. Emma Hahn, the wife of the German missionary Carl Hugo Hahn was the first white woman to live amongst the Herero. She wrote:

Sheep skins are their only clothing, but they, with their ornaments are arranged with a degree of taste not to be expected from so rude a nation... they wear skins to cover the whole of the lower part of the person, otherwise they are quite in a state of nudity excepting a singular cap made also from skin... from the top of which rise three ornaments of stiff leather....The heathens, male and female, go quite naked...at least a single covering is necessary, a smock for males and a gown or loose garment for females. We have already sent many chests full but what are they among so many, therefore the assistance must become stronger. (Hahn quoted in Guedes and Otto, 1985:13)

She straightaway sent requests home for clothes and cloth, and initiated dress-making classes. By 1850 she had 50 pupils in her class. The dress style was based on her own dresses: a closely fitted bodice, straight narrow sleeves and a long full skirt. Herero women were unsure about the dresses at first, especially as the high tight fitting neck made them feel as though they were choking. Nevertheless they were accepted, and before long it was the role of every missionary wife to set up sewing classes. Emma Hahn is quoted as saying:

A Herero who has a Namaqua wife...begged me to cut a gown for her and fix it for her, which I did, gladly doing anything for them to encourage them to habits of civilisation. (Hahn quoted in Guedes and Otto, 1985:14)

The new dress quickly became popular and by 1923 most Herero women were reported to be wearing them (Figure 1.46) (see appendix 1(ix) for full details of the dress). Eventually the Victorian style dress, sometimes called a Mother Hubbard, was always expected to be worn by all Herero women above marriageable age. However, this became increasingly difficult as the

prices of the material and accessories increased beyond available income (R200-R300 in 1987). Nevertheless, every woman will possess at least one, which is worn for special occasions and at other times she will wear a simple dress without decoration or petticoat.

Most women today will also own a 'National' dress. This is based on the same design but the cloth will be one of three colours chosen depending on the woman's affiliation with a particular section of the Herero: red is worn by the followers of the political leader, Samuel Maharero³⁴ called the *otjira tjotjiserandu*; white is worn by the Zeruaua people³⁵, called the *otjira tjotjizemba* and green is worn by the Mbanderu people, called the *otjira tjotjingirine*. They are all worn with plain black jackets. Many women will make their own dresses, however, there are also women who are dress makers and particularly skilled at sewing the whole outfit. "Every woman is supposed to know her family style and the design is passed from mother to daughter."(Seisa, nd: 11)

Despite some changes since 1900, the basic design has remained the same. The point of interest here is that the Herero accepted a totally new concept of clothing, adopted the design as their own, and began to develop and adapt it to suit themselves and their tastes. As a group of people, with very few possessions and fleeing war, the Herero were desperate to find a safe and secure home. The missionaries helped them to secure a livelihood for themselves and in return many Herero also converted to the religion that they offered.

(Following the German-Herero war in 1904....) in a desperate search for a new tribal identity they turned *en masse* to Christianity and other facets of western life, which included the adoption of Victorian dress by the women and German uniforms by the men. (Guedes and Otto, 1985:14)

This is an excellent example of the formation of an identity in a changing modern world, by the acceptance and adaptation of initially alien forms. Now the dresses are spoken of as theirs, and the distinctive design is now seen, within Botswana, as Herero dress as described in the National Museums' magazine *Zebra's Voice*:

The Herero women, especially those of Ngamiland, which is from Maun to Toromoja, are amongst the few ethnic groups which are still proudly holding on to their traditional skills, in the form of designing their dresses. Their dressing styles are very fancy and can be said to be a combination of artistic and skilful designs. Fortunately, these are still being passed on, although at a diminishing rate to the younger generations. (Seisa, :11)

It is ironic to note that what the NMMAG refers to as 'traditional' is little more than 100 years old, a new tradition that replaced the previous practice of wearing skins and beads.

However, despite the increasing costs of keeping up the use of the dress, Penniston and Harpending write in 1993 of the preponderance of women in colourful Mother Hubbards:

the Herero are self consciously ethnic and there is today almost no marriage with members of other groups. Adult women wear distinctive Victorian dresses that stand out in the same way that Amish or Mennonites are visible in rural areas of the north eastern United States or that orthodox Jews are visible in New York City..... During dances the women bob and weave so that the points of their bonnets simulate the horns of the herd... all these aspects of daily life seem scarcely related to fundamental subsistence activities like producing food or getting firewood and water. If we were to interpret the “meaning” of all this we would say that they are doing their best to be colourful cattle.’ (Penniston and Harpending, 1993: 17 and 35)

The assertion of an identity by assimilation of European dress has allowed women the means, through their headgear that permits the imitation of cattle in dance, of reiterating one of the most basic and important elements of the Herero economy.

Today among the Herero the Victorian dress has the important function of reinforcing solidarity and respect for traditions and respect for traditions and of maintaining identity. Despite the fact that younger women often prefer to wear factory made clothes, the Victorian dress is still far from declining in popularity and continues to be made with great enthusiasm and originality. (Guedes and Otto, 1985:16)

For tourists, Herero dress is fascinating and photogenic: women sitting outside their homes on the edge of the hot Kalahari desert wearing a Victorian style dress made of colourful cloth and with elaborate head dress (Figure 1.47). Tourist interest inspired women to make and decorate cloth dolls in Herero fashion, using scrap pieces of cloth left over from their own dresses (Figure 1.48). No one can now remember whose idea it was to make these dolls, but they do bring some cash into the Herero economy. The dolls are also now marketed by Botswanacraft, in their shops in Gaborone and abroad:

Both the dignity and sense of humour of the Herero is translated into a wonderful collector’s item - the Herero doll.... Like the patchwork dresses worn by the women, these dolls are all sewn by hand by the Herero living in the northern rural regions of Botswana..... As less and less dresses are worn by the younger generation, the tradition will be preserved in the Herero doll, thus, making it possible for the traditional design to outlive the dress itself. (Botswanacraft catalogue.)

Beads

The essential San material art forms are items made from raw hide and beadwork. The preparation of the animal skins: skinning, drying and stitching is carried out by the men. The things they make include loin aprons for clothing, hunting sets for carrying arrows, bags and dancing skirts. It is then the women’s task to decorate them with beads. The beads are mainly ostrich eggshell beads but, since the 1980’s, they have also traded for coloured glass beads which they have incorporated into the work.

The ostrich is an important source of meat for the San; the contents of the eggs are also eaten and the shell is then used either as a water carrier or as the raw material for beadwork. As water carriers the eggs are ideal: they are light to carry and they keep the water cool. They were occasionally decorated although this might not have been as common as it may appear in museum collections of decorated shells, and with the tourist shops in Botswana selling them in great numbers.

It is the women who own the shells as they are responsible for the storage of food and water, although both men and women would have decorated them. Only a few shells would have been decorated by any one person, although a woman could have up to ten shells either plain or decorated, at any one time (Figure 1.49).

Eggshells are only occasionally decorated with incised designs. When done, this is for a purpose of beauty rather than identification. Each married woman would have 5 -10 shells. (Lee, 1979:122)

A lot of the shells I examined had mainly designs rather than animal or people. A /Gwi man made a giraffe when asked to make an animal. The lizard was decorated quite often with dots or lines. There do not appear to be any specific compositions, the decorations being rather isolated. They use a knife as a tool for making the decorations and then rub black ash or charcoal onto the lines to bring out the decoration. There are no obvious similarities between the rock painting and engravings and eggshell decorations. Only the giraffe was similar to the rock engraved one in the Beit Bridge area and one from the lower Mumas Ravine, Brandberg. (Nteta, 1975:17)

The eggshell beads are made mainly by the women. It is a very slow process carried out with great care. The only detailed account of the art yet published is by Per Jenson detailed in appendix 1(x) (Figure 1.50 and 1.51). Botswanacraft markets them as following way:

..[beads] play an important part in the Bushmen material culture. They create exquisite necklaces, bracelets, and headbands. They adorn their leather products with beads...beads are knotted together with hair from the wildebeest to make bracelets. (Botswanacraft catalogue)

As with Herero dolls, the San necklaces, bracelets and strings of beads are good tourist souvenirs. Whether purchased from a dusty room in Ghanzi on the edge of the Kalahari, or in an upmarket hotel souvenir shop in Gaborone they convey a sense of 'real Africa' (Figures 1.52 – 1.54). I write in more detail about the San way of life in the chapter on the Kuru project. However, the fact that their way of life is disappearing has led to increased research and tourist interest, a result of which, in 1995, the Botswana government placed an embargo on research permits (tourists are free to visit) for the area. As a consequence, the San have become something of an enigma in Botswana, which has only led to a growth of interest in and increased sales of any arts that they produce.

The Bushmen have become commercially minded; a good thing too in a world which exploits the naïve and innocent as much as the sophisticated and sly... it appears that the Bushmen do not as a rule decorate the eggshells nowadays, although they may have done so some times on a small scale. Today they will decorate them when asked to do so by an outsider or if they think they can get more money for it. Like any work of art, it is only done by a few people who have had long practice at the job. (Nteta, 1975: 17)

So, what was once made purely for personal adornment has now become an important source of cash income for a society, ever increasingly dependent on cash. The following was written about the !Kung (one of the San group) in 1984:

Craft marketing is an important development for !Kung. For many years the !Kung produced eggshell bead necklaces for the tourist trade, purchased by European travellers for nothing. Botswanacraft developed and paid two thirds of the market price to the maker. This caused an influx of cash in the Dobe area of \$300-\$500 a month. (Lee, 1984:144)

and again in 1993:

!Kung San works and successor organisations purchases increasing volumes of Dobe area crafts. After their marketing schemes income increased to \$2000-\$3000 a month. (Lee, 1993:148)

As for most of the other indigenous arts made in Botswana, the company Botswanacraft has taken over most of the sales, providing promotion of the products in shops throughout the southern Africa region and abroad. The company states that it ensures a fair return to the makers; however, as we shall discover in chapter 2 when we turn to the San painters of the Kuru project there is some doubt over the claim of benevolent patronage.

Conclusion to chapter 1

Despite the status of baskets at the NMMAG's Art Gallery there remains a clear conceptual divide between basket makers as artists and the artists painting on canvas. Their histories and social circumstances are still so different that they cannot see themselves as having any common ground as one group of artists. This is highlighted by the fact that basket makers, (or any of the other 'craft makers') are not invited to the International Artists' Workshops³⁶ which again emphasises the division between art and craft, (a relatively new concept in Botswana) and which is perpetuated by the workshops and their initiators, Antony Caro and Robert Loder, detailed in Chapter 5.

The arts of basketry, mural painting and pottery continue to be regarded as art forms without development or experiment, taught by mother to daughter. The recent attention given by the NMMAG to basketry suggests this perception is inaccurate. Nevertheless, these arts

remain isolated in terms of both local practice (they remain separate groups) and international attention, and are still seen by many as mere 'craft'.

Apart from the baskets, which are promoted by the NMMAG as well as by Botswanacraft, the other arts discussed in this chapter are not well known outside the small area in which they are produced. A woman who paints her house is only known of in her village, as are the women who make pots, dresses or beads. A practice handed down from mother to daughter is inherently, unlikely to become known much beyond its locality.

As people in Botswana move from the rural areas to the city, (except for the San who experience an enforced restriction of movement) they are finding themselves increasingly removed from the motivation and resources necessary to the arts associated with the rural environment. If basketry, pottery and beadwork survive it is because information about 'western' taste is fed back to local women through Botswanacraft and the tourist industry. This leads to a particular kind of commodification, as, for example, the winnowing basket becoming an ornament to be hung on the wall like a painting. Unglazed water jugs that are now glazed to make vases, or are placed as a piece of sculpture on a shelf. The Herero dress becomes a saleable doll. This transformation of utilitarian objects into 'art' is explored at length by Steiner:

...the essential point remains constant: ie. that the disavowal of use value is a prerequisite for admitting what has the potential of being utilitarian into the realm of aesthetics.

One may conclude from this discussion that in the West, at least, use and beauty are not threads in a single fabric of meaning but are viewed, more commonly, as separate elements of value competing toward radically different ends. (Steiner, 1994:161)

However, the fact that the Batswana have not yet learned to separate the craft from its rural place of origin and primary function, is maybe why those involved in the contemporary arts in Botswana have little time for these rural artists. This clearly illustrates the divide that persists in Botswana between art and craft, and between 'high' and 'low art'.³⁷

In contrast, mural painting is difficult to commodify. A painted wall cannot be bought and women painters have so far gained nothing from the books and postcards of their work. The promotion of basketry through the annual NMMAG competition, and its attendant sales, has been suggested (interview with Grant 1995) as a model for encouraging the development for mural painting, but this has yet to happen.³⁸ Similarly, the use of these artists on public buildings has also yet to happen.

In 1994 Stephen Williams³⁹ and Neo Matome⁴⁰ researched the possibility of starting a workshop specifically for women 'craft workers'. This resulted in a series of women's

workshops called Motako, which I discuss in chapter 5. Women from the various projects described in chapter 4, such as Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng, were invited to take part in Motako where there was some tuition, exchange of ideas, methods and materials allowing for experimentation and development of work. However, independent makers of indigenous art forms such as the basket makers and house painters were, once again, not included.

Yet, none of the arts described in this chapter feature in the Botswana education system or in any history of Botswana arts, which further reinforces a popular view equating them with rural backwardness. Whether any of this will change remains to be seen, but the question is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Chapter 2

Workshops and projects for women.

Introduction

In this chapter I examine the five projects and workshops that have been initiated and run by expatriate art teachers in Botswana, between 1977 and 1999. They fall into two categories: those set up specifically for women or where the applicants/ respondents were all women: Oodi, Ithuteng, Ikgabiseng and Mokolodi projects; and the fifth project set up for not a single sex but a single ethnic group, the San, called Kuru. Both categories of projects have the same aim: to help people earn an income through their art. I look into who the original project workers were and why they chose their particular target groups. I then explore how the projects were set up, what the aims and ideologies of the expatriates were, and if and how members of the project then adopted these ideas. I chart the development of the projects over a number of years and analyse how successful the project workers were in terms of achieving their goals, and of creating a sustainable project for their target group. Equally, I look at how the artists working in the projects, responded to and developed the ideas put before them, and to what extent they took on board the project themselves.

Lentswe la Oodi

Lentswe la Oodi producers' cooperative society was the first of all the projects in Botswana. It was set up for inhabitants of the Oodi and Mochudi districts of Botswana. However, as it had mainly women applicants for the jobs, it is now seen by both the participants and onlookers as a 'women's project'. Unlike the other projects, the Oodi weavers' cooperative has been written about. In 1977, Dennis Lewycky, a communications consultant from Ottawa, Canada, was hired by CUSO (Canadian University Services Overseas), one of the original donors, to evaluate the project. The findings of the research was *Tapestry, Report from Oodi weavers* a lengthy and thorough overview of the project from 1972 to 1977. In 1997 Dennis Lewycky initiated a return to the project to, in his own words:

write about the people and the project again with a global and more mature understanding of development issues. (Lewycky, 1999: xv)

Funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the results were published in 1999 in his book *Equal Shares*, where he writes about the project from a social and economic point of view, measuring the success of the project in terms of community economic development (CED):

Here [in the book] I assess the project in terms of the women artists and the art produced using some of the above material and the results of my visits to the factory and interviews with the women. (Lewycky, 1999)

History

Lentswe la Oodi meaning 'the rock of Oodi' is a weaving factory based in the village of Oodi, fifteen miles north of Gaborone (see map). Oodi is a small rural community which, at the time of the project's inception, had 800 inhabitants. It was initiated in 1977 by the Swedish couple, Ulla and Peder Gowenius. Ulla Gowenius was formally trained as a textile designer and was a skilled and trained weaver; Peder Gowenius had a formal art education and was an artist and art teacher. They first came to Africa in 1961. In 1962 they were sent to Rorke's Drift in South Africa by the 'Swedish Committee for the advancement of African Arts' to launch an art and craft centre. The initial idea for this came from the Swedish artist Berta Hansson and Helge Fossius, the future bishop of Zululand who wanted the project to be based on the Swedish Mission's land at Rorke's Drift, under the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Gowenies successfully established the centre at Rorke's Drift, which offered a wide range of arts programs including printmaking, weaving, pottery, domestic science and textile printing, and continued to work there until 1968. Elizabeth Rankin discusses the role of Rorke's Drift and its importance in the history of black art in southern Africa:

Throughout the country painters, sculptors, printmakers, weavers, textile designers and ceramists in the black community, acknowledge their roots in the centre.... amongst all these artists, the name of Rorke's Drift is generally spoken of with great respect, sometimes bordering on reverence. (Rankin, 1977: 46)

From 1968 - 1970 the couple started and ran a new arts project called *Thabana Li' mele* in Lesotho, along the same lines. However, by 1972 Ulla Gowenius had returned to work at Rorke's Drift and Peder Gowenius was working in Botswana as a consultant for Botswanacraft, a commercial craft shop, buying and selling locally as well as exporting indigenous crafts (as recorded in chapter 1). Peder Gowenius was working on a book, which he wanted to finish whilst still living in Botswana; however, his visa was running out. As a way of trying to get his resident's permit renewed, in order that he could complete the book before

being forced to leave, he decided to put in a proposal for a project knowing that it would take months to process, during which time he would be allowed to stay.

When I wrote the project I was only interested in getting my resident's permit renewed long enough to finish writing a book I was working on.... after the *Rorke's Drift* and *Thabana Li' mele* factories I was getting somewhat tired of weaving and wanted to do something else. (Lewicky, 1977)

He proposed an arts project to the Botswana government based on the couple's previous experience in southern Africa, and the personal skills that they were able to offer, ie: his skills as an art teacher and Ulla Gowenius's skills in textiles and weaving. The proposal was for a weaving project, to be situated in a rural area, and to be run as a cooperative. The Goweniuses aimed to set the project up and then, as it became operational and fully functioning as a cooperative, they would be able to withdraw. They did not intend to remain as managers of the factory.

In the proposal there were several stated aims based on ideas about employment, social structures and village development (well documented in Dennis Lewycky's published assessments of the Oodi project). Initially, the main objectives were to train and give employment to up to 50 people in a village factory; this would then, through increased local wealth, create more jobs, better agricultural production and thereby a better standard of living throughout the village. The factory was to be run as a co-operative, with a section of the profits returning to a village development fund; it was further hoped that the factory would help to create a commitment towards village advancement and the maintenance of the community. There were also educational aims for the factory, which would arise most immediately from the need to learn essential skills for the running of a business such as literacy, maths and bookkeeping.

Once the factory was up and running and people were earning enough from the work to believe that the co-operative could support them, it was hoped that other ideas would be developed. Firstly, that Oodi would provide a model that could be used in the future to develop other projects around Botswana:

The main aim of this project was not to just make one village 'happy', but to create a model for development and spread this into as many villages as possible who request it. I had no doubts that, if the community in the first village understood the far reaching benefits of the project and as the word spread, we would have no difficulty in finding suitable teachers, suitable capital accumulating ideas and the capital required to answer requests from other interested villages. (Lewycky, 1977, 36)

Secondly, as the project progressed, Peder Gowenius hoped that, in his own words: "the workers would become aware of their own potential" and begin to "question their situation of

people living in a rural yet rapidly changing community". He stated that although he "did not want to change traditional Botswana society", he did hope "to break down barriers", and allow a dialogue amongst people about how their society might "change and adapt to the needs and requirements of a changing world" (Lewycky, 1977, 36). These statements and ideas raise many questions, not least because of the contradictions such as "not wanting to change society" and "the changing world"; I come back to these later on.

Although Peder Gowenius was not attached to a political party he did hold very strong political and social beliefs, and the fact that the project was designed to be a co-operative, was an obvious attempt to bring some of his ideas into practice. Due to his reputation as a political character he had trouble getting the proposal accepted, although at the time that was just what he wanted, as it meant plenty of time to work on his book. The development officer for the Kgatlang district, John Speed, wrote:

Apart from the ordinary bureaucratic problems of the government, there was undoubted concern at Peder's past history... a high ranking officer specifically asked me whether I thought Peder would prove a political embarrassment. He seemed generally unsure of himself but it was obvious that this was a major question in the minds of the Gaborone bureaucrats. (Lewycky, 1977, 46)

Real evidence of Peder Gowenius' political past is scant, although his cross-cultural work in the apartheid South Africa of the seventies, and his views on racism and education that came out of that work, would have preceded him to Botswana. Whilst not necessarily views that would upset bureaucrats in Botswana, his political outspokenness would have made them wary of him. Another reason why the government considered the proposal at length before giving its approval was the track record of projects and brigades⁴¹ so far in Botswana. In a letter to Peder Gowenius, the then Director of Economic Affairs of Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Mr. P. Landell-Mills stated:

As you are aware, there have been a number of schemes in the field of handicraft/brigades, which have been initiated by a small group of dedicated, expatriates but which have for one reason or another collapsed leaving the government to pick up the pieces. (Lewycky, 1977, 45)

At first, Peder Gowenius' ulterior motive for submitting the project proposal was to enable him to stay in the country, and the campaigning for the go-ahead on the project was left to supporters such as the then development officer with the Botswana Christian Council and member of the Kgatlang district Development Committee: Sandy Grant, who in turn enlisted the support of Chief Lenchwe II of the Bakgatla⁴² and John Speed. However, as time went on, Peder Gowenius became more attached to the project himself and keen to see it set up successfully.

Peder Gowenius and Sandy Grant sent out the project proposal to local District Councils. The Kgatleng District Council was the first to respond and show support, but few of the other councils showed any interest. Whilst waiting for government approval, meetings were held during March and April 1973 with the Kgatleng District Council and potential funding bodies to discuss the work.

Oodi was chosen as the site for the factory for a number of reasons: most importantly it had sufficient access to water needed for the washing and dyeing of the wool, but also it had a large enough catchment area in which to find workers. Oodi was also near enough to Gaborone for trading and marketing their products. Recruitment for potential workers covered neighbouring villages such as Modipane and Matebele, partly to get a larger number of applicants for the work, but also to maintain relations with the nearby villages so as to prevent any form of jealousy. In June 1973, Peder Gowenius decided to consult the residents of the three villages to seek their approval before going ahead; they held a meeting in Oodi and explained the projects:

The response was encouraging but not one of great excitement, for we didn't oversell the project deliberately in order not to raise expectations. (Lewycky, 1977, 52)

Having established enough support from the residents for the venture, they secured a location for the building in Oodi.

The project was started as a public company with ownership in the hands of the donors. Funding initially came from sponsors in Botswana and Canada: the Botswana Christian Council (BCC), the Botswana Development Corporation (BDC) and the Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO)⁴³. The aim was that, once the factory was up and working, the weavers would be able to establish ownership as a co-operative. The criteria of the funding bodies would put a certain emphasis on some of the aims: the BDC were primarily interested in employment and insisted that the project employ 50-60 people (initially they wanted it to look at 1000-2000 people but Peder Gowenius persuaded them that that would not be viable). CUSO's criteria were more about the training and longer term developments/spin-offs:

That the project would supply inputs which would allow the people of the villages to develop their villages themselves in the future. Replicability of the weaving factory is not essential to the project, rather it is the replicability of the concepts of high quality technical and management training, disciplined business procedures, low-level expatriate input, worker ownership, village development tax (levy) and the spin-off projects that is essential... our relation to the project should be such as to prompt these objectives. (Lewycky, 1977, 43)

Early in 1973 the construction of the building started and by December the first weavers were being recruited. At this point, Ulla Gowenius joined her husband from Rorke's Drift to help him establish the new project. The Goweniuses, as initiators of the co-operative, recruited the weavers; application forms were available to anyone interested. Although it was not a project directed specifically at women, 90% of the forms returned were from women. In Botswana there is a large percentage of female heads of household, this is due partly to the fact that men have to leave the village for work abroad (and in many cases do not send money home or ever return), and also to the very high divorce rate. These women, often with children and family to support, would survive by subsistence farming and would have had very few chances of earning cash income, thus the Oodi project was seen as a good opportunity. Men, however, would be more likely to already be in employment or involved in cattle farming.

Work in the mines and industries of South Africa has for a long time been one of the established lifelines for poor families. Almost one third of the male labour force is absent from Botswana at any one time.... It means that for many families women have, for a large part of the year, the sole responsibility of fending for the household on a day-to-day basis. Traditionally men were expected to do the ploughing but now this task along with other agricultural tasks is carried out mainly by women. (Bryam, 1980: 211)

Another reason was the fact that it was a job that involved textiles which men in Botswana associated with sewing cloths, knitting and crocheting and were quick to conceptualise it as 'women's work'. As Mr. Morapedi Moeng, an Oodi District Councillor (1973) stated:

...in Setswana we have women's jobs and men's jobs. It could be possible that others think that those things at the factory are for women; knitting is a women's job in Botswana. There are other jobs that women are not interested to do, not because they can't but because it is a man's job. Yes there are men who know how to knit but it is just only a few who do that. Men know that to work in Gaborone or Pikwe is better than to take up women's work. (Lewycky, 1977, 75)

Women had fewer choices about work as, owing to family commitments, they were unable to travel as widely as the men and were therefore more willing to try something new, however strange an idea it might seem. Thus circumstances led the women to be more open to new ideas and prepared to experiment. So it was that originally, in 1977, women made up the majority of the workforce at the project, and all of the management committee. This was still the case in 2002.

In choosing candidates, a range of criteria was employed. They were selected partly on their need for work, such as single-headed households, or women with a large number of children to provide for; but also on the basis of reflecting the make-up of the catchment area they were working within. Other considerations as stated by Peder Gowenius were:

We also tried to get at least half the workers with a little better education, so that they could provide some type of leadership to the others. We thought they should be able to understand what we were teaching better, and than could tell others. There was also the need for translation. We have found in Botswana that actually the older people, in their forties say, are better prepared to learn. It seems the present school system in Botswana prepares the younger women for urban jobs and living and they, therefore, are not as good learners in the factory... if the person was a little cheeky, then they were likely to question or challenge and therefore we selected them. Others who might be more quiet or withdrawn we preferred not to take, because it would be harder to involve them in the larger village development goals of the project. (Lewycky, 1977, 55)

Successful applicants then began a training course for six weeks in spinning and weaving, taught by Ulla Gowenius. In all, eight groups of twelve were trained, a total of 96 people; after which they were tested in the skills they had learnt. Seventy five percent of those tested passed, meaning that they had achieved a standard of work that the Goweniuses were happy with and they were then taken on as apprentices for a full year. After the year, those who then continued to show an interest and ability could stay on as weavers in full employment. Courses were provided such as literacy, arithmetic and bookkeeping and the majority of the workers were trained in all aspects of the business, with the intention of enabling the project to develop into a fully functioning co-operative.

The main aim of the Goweniuses was that the project should eventually be self-supporting and so, in order to begin to shift the emphasis away from themselves as managers, it was decided to set up a management committee (MC) for the factory. There were five management positions. Following a short course given to all the factory workers there was a test from which thirteen women were selected and trained in committee duties. On a rotational basis, five would be on the committee at any one time the others continuing with their other work weaving and spinning. The intention was that, through rotating the members, the women would be in touch with all aspects of the factory and it would also prevent any form of hierarchy. By 1977 there were 52 people working in the project (90% women). Out of these workers there were usually 4 spinners, 4 dyers, 9 spread/runners weavers, 16 tapestry weavers, 2 carpet weavers and 4 finishing off.

The workshop area has not changed since the beginning of the project and is a large airy space with 20 upright looms around the edges and 16 floor looms running down the centre of the room (Figure 2.1). The spinners work in a smaller room off to one side of the building (Figure 2.2) and the dyeing takes place outside. There is a small veranda where some of the women will move their looms in order to be able to work outside (Figures 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5). Each tapestry is made from the hand spun and dyed wool which is imported from either Namibia, South Africa or even at times as far away as England. The dyes and other chemicals

come from Germany. The sizes of each tapestry vary from a half a metre square to six metres square and, depending on the complexity of the design and its size, it can take a weaver up to two months to complete a piece of work. The tapestries are woven on the upright looms (Figures 2.6-2.9) whereas the bedspreads, carpets and wall hangings are woven on the floor looms. More on the designs and work itself later.

The work began to sell straight away through the shop at the factory. In 1977, it was recorded that the factory received on average 450 visitors a month. Sales exceeded their predictions and continued to be in line with production, so there was little need for selling outside of the village shop. By 1977, 80% of all sales had been made through the shop to expatriates or tourists; the remaining 20% has been through individual sales to South Africa or abroad. Nevertheless, it was recognised that a much larger market could be forged through companies like Botswanacraft and by making a greater effort to sell abroad. I examine the marketing of the tapestries and other woven products later on.

The blankets and tapestries provided wages and profits. The profits from the sales were split, with one quarter going to a village development fund to start other improvements such as the Consumers Co-operative Society in the village, and the rest going towards repaying the loan for the factory. By 1977, already a third of the factory was owned by the workers who had been able to buy equal shares with their wages and within three years they were to own it completely.

Project objectives

The objectives varied from the immediate economic aim of providing work and an income for a percentage of the village, to the wider aims of the co-operative which would benefit the community as a whole and, on a larger scale, provide a model for other projects elsewhere in Botswana. As stated in the project proposal, the aims were:

To train and give employment to about 50 people in a small weaving factory, who in turn by their work and capital accumulation would give employment to at least another 150 people at this factory and in various smaller production units accumulating enough capital to improve and increase the agricultural production of the village, which in turn would give the village and its people a general broad development and an increased standard of living, and that the experience and the knowledge received through this first village could be developed into a training programme through which the benefits received could spread to many others. (Lewycky, 1977, 36)

Other objectives, which Peder Gowenius stressed as important, were: 1) to provide a basic and practical education for the workers at the project, including literacy, numeracy, accounting

and business studies; and on a larger scale: 2) he hoped to provide a political and sociological forum for village education through producing an educational product: a tapestry with a story:

We wanted the benefits of this project to be educational as well as economical. The two types of benefits are clearly related of course, but initially we expected people to request and work toward the economical benefits because these answered their most obvious needs, but later on when they became aware of their own potential, they would start to raise questions like; what is good of value in our traditional society or what should we keep and what do we have to change to develop our nation? (Lewycky, 1977:38)

Finally Peder Gowenius stated the more questionable aim of hoping to:

Help people rediscover their culture in the face of a changing country and world... The weavers have started to rediscover their own culture, the only force capable of preserving their identity. (Lewycky, 1977, 38)

I analyse all of these objectives as I look at the development of the project.

Economics

The fact that the project was successful in paying wages and repaying the loan on the factory means that there were economic benefits for those involved. *This is Our Life* is a catalogue produced in 1977 when a collection of the Oodi tapestries was taken on an exhibition to Sweden. At the end of the catalogue some of the weavers, all women, gave brief biographies: Naomi Semele, Seka Semele, Dipugo Masilo, Fredah Mosala, Kereng Nkwe, Mantle Ndaba, and Mmaphala Koboyatshwene. They were all aged between 20 and 40 years old and all had children. They wrote of their previous employment such as working on other people's fields and domestic work in South Africa. Clearly, by comparison, their current employment at Oodi was an achievement and improvement in lifestyles for all of them. Again, at the end of Dennis Lewycky's report there are several interviews with people from the villages and with some of the workers. Although many of the statements are repetitive or contradictory, once more the general feel from the interviews is that the project did financially benefit those working there. A statement by Ndana Mhlanga summarises the general comments made:

The only improvements in our lives are by giving us work. We then get paid. This helps because if you have done a good bedspread its value is increased and your money too. If it's not beautiful its money value is low. But the best thing is to work. If you are not working there is nothing that can be good for you. You cannot do anything for yourself. (Lewycky, 1977, 144)

However, the economic benefits also gave rise to jealousies and discontentment amongst some of the villagers, and also between the three villages. A number of people felt that the factory did not offer enough work and that it benefited just the few who were lucky enough to get a job there. Ndana Mhlanga said:

In the village there are still criticisms to the effect that we are working and they are not working. They want to work too, but if they see there are no openings for them they will obviously resent this because it is not proper for people to eat alone. (Lewycky, 1977, 143)

And Mmantshaba Molwantwa stated:

At the beginning of the factory, people did not believe it would give jobs, but now they are crying. They didn't even want to take application forms, but they think that we look down upon them. We don't greet them they say; there is no peace in the village because of this industry that is why we now ask the government to make us another industry. (Lewycky, 1977:189)

Traditionally there would have been very little financial inequality in a village. The increased wealth caused an economic imbalance that people were not used to. Rightly, it was hoped that another factory would create more wealth and opportunity for all. This has yet to happen.

Education

Peder and Ulla Gowenius stressed their desire of not wanting to influence the decisions made by the co-op workers. They were keen to set up a system, which, eventually, would not need them. Nevertheless, despite not wanting to impose ideas onto the Batswana or to alter their ways of life, the introduction of new concepts such as: 1) the workplace as a community within the community of the village (giving rise to comments such as Ndana Mhlanga's above about "not eating alone"), 2) the art of weaving and 3) art as communication, could not help but influence and change people's ideas. The aim was to set up a situation where the people would be in full control of the factory and the decision-making process, and would therefore eventually be independent of expatriate influence and control. However, the fact that the situation was set up by expatriates with a European socialist philosophy, soon posed certain difficulties and problems, as I will show later.

The practical sides to the training given which, it was hoped, would give sufficient understanding and grounding to allow the Goweniuses to withdraw, included:

- basic skill training dying, spinning, weaving and the making of looms.

- training in business skills such as bookkeeping, ordering of materials and marketing of goods.
- training in the understanding of a co-operative, worker management and ownership, through which self-reliance should grow. Eventually, this should then spread to outside the co-operative itself and into the villages:

The workers have started to question aspects of their situation such as the relations between employer and employee, the migrant labour system, the role of men in society and many questionable aspects of South Africa, which many so-called educated people may not even have considered. (Lewycky, 1977, 200)

- the teaching of image making for the tapestry weavers.

.. a major purpose in showing tapestries is to educate. By seeing major problems exposed through art objects and objects made by Batswana, we hope to stimulate some further awareness of the issues and problems of southern Africa (Lewycky, 1977:190)

The Goweniuses acknowledged that the hierarchies in Botswana were still very much based around the expatriate community and dominated by South Africa. Any education needed to address the many consequences of this, such as the lack of motivation around the training of women and their exclusion from formal education, which had resulted in an innate lack of self-confidence and self-belief. The Goweniuses educational values were based on socialist principles and training was given in order to promote self-confidence and empowerment in the community. Their strategies were worked out in response to the conditions they found in Botswana. The intentions were to involve as much of the community as possible and to work towards a co-operative which would give the people a voice in how their community is run and in turn develop self-assurance and self reliance.

There are a few who realise that education must do more than merely prepare people for jobs. Some of the experts in the group started to ask themselves education for whom and for what? Why should we teach people how to read when all there is to read is 'After Action Satisfaction from Lexington'? Education must be the foundation of any and all development but in my opinion, 'education' was and is being flagrantly misused. Education is misused when it leads to the favouring of a minority, excluding the majority and thus creating a class structure. Thus in the past ten years I have tried to ask the question 'How do we make oppressed people aware of their situation, of their own strength, creating an interest in their future and commitment to the concepts of self reliance, freedom and independence?' (Gowenius, 1977: introduction)

Martin Byram explains Peder Gowenius' ideas on education as being close to those expounded by Paulo Freire and Silva (development and education professors in Southern America) and quotes from each of them: "The object is to enable man to recover his identity as the chief agent of his own destiny. Education thus becomes the practice of freedom."(Silva,

1973: 41 in Bryam: 1980, 218) "...recipients, [but] as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shape their lives, and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it." (Freire, 1972, in Bryam, 1980: 218)

Nevertheless, despite all the good and sympathetic intentions, it has to be acknowledged that these theories were imported into Botswana from a very different social environment. They were ideals and values, which were being interpreted for the Batswana by Europeans. No Batswana educationalist had thought these theories relevant or brought them into discussion or use in Botswana. The danger here was that the then newly formed theories on 'education for development' and 'self-help', whose values appear genuinely very firmly rooted in the people it aimed to help, was in itself still influencing and importing values that were alien to the community within which it was working; as will be quite clearly shown in the example of the Oodi project. This is in contrast to other parts of Africa and in particular South Africa where, at that time, communities were establishing their own educational programmes and art projects as a way of educating themselves, specifically during apartheid when education was denied to the black population.⁴⁴

The social values of a co-operative, such as working for a common aim rather than individual gain can be learnt. However, without fundamental grounding, in other words, without the idea having stemmed from circumstances that have led the participants to want to work in this way, as in South Africa (or in the west where people without individual access to financial backing or all the necessary skills needed for a project, will band together to form a co-operative), then the ideas are bound to remain superficial and will still be seen by the population as something 'other', something foreign to their own culture. Certainly ideas can be adopted and appear to work but, as the Oodi project shows, they cannot be sustained by the people without an anchor/ administrator, someone for whom these theories mean something and who will interpret and adapt the ideas for the particular situation. This person is most often found in the form of an expatriate/western.

The Goweniuses were keen not to remain that 'anchor'. However, despite the training and talks that the Goweniuses gave to impart knowledge of the importance of each individual's contribution to the project, the recruited trainees, not always clear of the overall visions of the Goweniuses, just wanted to do what they were told in order to receive a wage. The Goweniuses were working against the history of southern Africa, where, just seven years after Botswana's independence most Batswana men still travelled to apartheid South Africa for work in the mines⁴⁵ and it was still very much perceived as normal for white men to provide the work for the Batswana⁴⁶. Thus the workers arrived ready to be told what to do and not

always prepared to discuss ideas or make decisions. This lack of connection that the people had with the factory is illustrated by the fact that, despite lectures explaining the function of a co-operative, the members did not understand or could not believe that they were the owners of the factory. The workers were interviewed in 1977:

About 10 per cent of the workers stated flatly that they did not know who was the owner of the factory, while another 22 per cent wrongly stated that Peder and Ulla were the owners (after numerous "lectures" by Peder, this probably indicates caution rather than ignorance) of the remainder who said the workers owned the factory, many expressed doubts as to the validity of the ownership or what it in fact meant to be the owners of the factory. (Lewycky, 1999, 72)

Although the Goweniuses intended to try to break down this barrier of employer/employee it is questionable how far they managed it and therefore it needs to be taken into account when considering their positions as teachers during the first couple of years at the project. There are, of course, other factors involved in the complex relationship between expatriate and Batswana worker/managers and the State, which Gowenius recognises in *Equal Shares* and which I examine later on, along with imported ideas and dominant cultures in the context of education.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that the Goweniuses believed that they were initiating developments rather than managing them, that they were providing the tools for development and allowing the workers to use them as they wished. However, as will be seen throughout this chapter, the discrepancies between the Goweniuses statements, and those of the weavers, workers and villagers, indicate that that was not always the case.

Village reaction

Dennis Lewycky recorded that the villagers could see the wider benefits that the factory had bought them such as:

- better availability of water. "What I am happy about is this factory and that it bought water. we were fighting for water. It would not have come without this factory in the village" Diane Meswele. (Lewycky: 1977, 71)
- a co-operative shop selling goods cheaper than anywhere else "another thing that was born by the factory is the cooperative consumers shop. The word of advice came from this very man (Gowenius), even though we didn't know what to become of it, but we are still thankful. It was not built long ago; there is still time in which we'll see what it shall do." Mochele Semele (Lewycky: 1977, 136)

- a bridge between Oodi and Gaborone.

Those not living directly in Oodi complained that the project was all focused on Oodi as the largest number of workers lived there and the factory was based there. A worker from Matebele, Moji Phelefu states:

There are quite some improvements from the factory, but the main improvements are to be seen in Oodi. Here in Matebele there are no marked improvements we have made, because in Oodi today we have built a bridge, which enables them to cross over to Gaborone when the river is full. Here today when the rains have fallen we have nowhere to cross. There is no bridge.

I think the manager did not take the task of seeing how many people from Modipane and Matebele and Oodi are in the factory.... if there were eight or ten children from Modipane in the factory it would be better. The owner of the factory may not see this but it is a problem. (Lewycky, 1977, 109)

An important point to note from these quotes is the emphasis that the interviewees put on Peder Gowenius being in charge. No one talks about the factory or the problems as though they were involved or felt able to do anything about their grievances. These are the first in a series of statements that demonstrate that the Gowenies, had not, as yet, achieved the aim of making the village or the workers feel a part of the co-operative. Despite many consultations, village meetings and educational talks, the people would not take on board the possibility of being in control of a part of their lives, such as their possible future employment. They still saw this as someone else's job. They were not able, after a lifetime of being employed in the towns by white people, of having their banking and education headed by white people, to see the Gowenies as any different. Despite their efforts to delegate and involve the community, the Gowenies were still seen as the people who had access to the recourses of the state and political elite, who had the idea of the Oodi weaving project and who were going to carry it out and employ people to work for them. In Botswana, the white people are from a variety of backgrounds, from residents and South Africans to expatriates from Sweden, the UK and other European countries. Those who are white, regardless of where they are from, are always the more privileged and the better educated. This is the background that the Gowenies, the villagers and the weavers are working against and it is not one that was likely to fade after a few meetings.

Art teaching

Although research was carried out into which area of Botswana might be suitable for the project, there is no documentation of research into which art form might be suited to the aim of the project and prospective workers. Weaving was chosen because of the particular skills and experience the Gowenies had to offer and not because of any perceived interest in or demand

for the art form. However, the Goweniuses also saw it as useful because it suited the criteria of the project: it was a visual medium suitable for display and exhibition. A tapestry could be hung in either public or private spaces, it was a vehicle that could be used to express and explore a number of ideas and was therefore appropriate for education; and, from their experience in their projects in South Africa, the Goweniuses also knew that it could be a commercially viable item, that both domestic and international markets could be found for tapestries.

In *This is our life*, Peder Gowenius states, “there is no local tradition for picture-making” and in *Equal shares* he says “Now in Botswana one can generally say that it (culture) has expressed itself in words, in language and song partially. But it has never come out visually”. These statements show Peder Gowenius’s limited and mistaken view of the history of arts in Botswana. Some of the earliest recorded rock paintings are at Tsolido Hills (70,000 – 100,000 years old). See appendix 2(i), a site north-west of Gaborone. Also, as documented earlier, basketry, house decoration, pottery etc. have all been practiced throughout Botswana, alongside other less widespread art forms such as ostrich eggshell decorating, jewellery making and clothes and hair decoration. This dismissal of indigenous art forms, because they do not fit into the understood European tradition of ‘picture making’, indicates a very limited view of the visual arts; it is with this ideological background that Peder Gowenius begins his training at Oodi.

The teaching of the technical skills required for all the stages of weaving, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, are carefully documented in the report by Dennis Lewycky. However, throughout the information available to me, I cannot find any reference to a structured teaching of art or picture/image-making at the project despite the fact that Peder Gowenius was a trained art teacher. As far as image is concerned, Dennis Lewycky just mentions the fact that the designs started off being very simple and that gradually they developed and became more involved. So the question is, how were the themes and designs for the tapestries arrived at and by whom?

The catalogue *This is Our Life* (Gowenius, 1977) contains forty tapestries, which is a good sample of the images and body of work created at Oodi between 1975 and 1977. The catalogue shows every piece of work titled and credited to the artist/weaver and each tapestry is accompanied by a story or explanation given by the individual weaver. Occasionally there are two names by each tapestry, implying joint works. Each tapestry depicts something very specific. Some scenes show daily life such as *The cattle post*, *The village*; others are political: *Today the Rhodesians attack us* (Figure 2.10) and *We must strike* (Figure 2.12). Historical

tapestries include: *One day 300 children crossed our border* (Figure 2.11) and *Independence* (Figure 2.21) and tapestries about women's position: *At home we women have to work but the men just drink* (Figure 2.13) and *There is little we can offer our daughters* (Figure 2.14). Many of the tapestries have English words woven into them. They are not signed although the artists are credited in the catalogue.

The layout of the imagery bears a strong resemblance to story telling and strip cartoons. Often there are several sections or the piece is divided into layers each of which will depict a scene, as in *The Stupid Boer II* (Figure 2.15). If you follow the scenes, a narrative unfolds:

This is the story about two brothers. One was a “nice boy” doing what he was told, but the other one was a “cheeky one”. One day the cheeky one managed to convince the good one that they should steal oranges from the farmer. But of course the good one was caught and tied to a tree while the bad one managed to find shelter with a women. In the night he stole her clothes and, dressed like a women, he lay down under a tree close to the farmer’s cattle kraal. The Boer who’s always afraid that some “bloody kaffir” may steal his cattle, came round and saw what he thought was just another “bloody drunk kaffir women”. So he did not bother but went to bed. Then that cheeky kaffir dressed like a woman stole all his cattle. This story tells you that to be a “good kaffir” is a waste. (Dipugo Masilo and Sekgoropana in *This is Our Life*.)

Another example is *This is how we lost our freedom* (Figure 2.17) is a weave divided into four equal parts and is read from the bottom upwards. The story starts with white missionaries coming to the village and preaching a new God. Next we see white traders exchanging useless items for valuable goats and cows with the villagers. In the third section, we see the Batswana carrying the Union Jack flag and a white man through the village, this symbolises the country becoming a protectorate of the United Kingdom. The last part shows a confused Batswana confronted by several white men offering money, presumably aid money. The question we are left with is, is this pure generosity or do they want something in return?

As these two examples show the tapestries in the exhibition and catalogue *This is our Life* are, as the titles imply, more than stories or images, they all comment very strongly on aspects of Botswana life or history. The titles and words woven into the works point the viewer towards the meaning behind the image. In the catalogue, statements from the artists further explain the tapestries. They appear to be very honest and direct observations and comments on Batswana society. Several of the weaves have direct messages and resemble educational or propaganda posters; for example: *People must go to the Kgotla* (Figure 2.16), urging people to take part in the village meetings and to take responsibility for their lives; and, *We have also built a drift over our river* (Figure 2.18), promoting the new bridge brought about by the Oodi project and built by the community.

The subject matters alone indicate that women must weave the majority of the tapestries, with titles such as: *At home we women do all the work but the men just drink* and *There is little we can offer our daughters*. Even those not so clearly titled are often hinting at women's situation in society for example in *The lands* (Figure 2.19) women are shown sowing the seeds, harvesting and cooking, then when it comes to meal time the men have arrived!

Other such tapestry projects that I have seen around southern Africa, for example workshops in Luderitz and Swakopmund in Namibia and another weaving project in Botswana at Francistown⁴⁷, weave mainly landscapes or abstract patterns and none have touched on the possibilities of storytelling or figurative narratives in their work. The fact that the work at Oodi was so different and specific in its direction implies special criteria at the project.

In *This is our life*, Peder Gowenius states that they were only involved in teaching techniques and not designs to the artists, and that the images were created and developed by the women on their own, much in the same way as stories are told. However, this leap that Peder Gowenius makes from women living where “there is no local tradition for picture making” to women producing a large figurative imagery leads me to a very different conclusion. Knowing that one of the aims of the Goweniuses in this project was to promote discussion about Botswana and to get the weavers to question their situation, it needs to be acknowledged that the Goweniuses did in fact guide the artists towards this style and way of working. The Goweniuses were keen for the factory to involve the whole village and one way in which the tapestries produced could “benefit the other villagers” (which was also one of the criteria of the funding bodies) would be if they had a message or made a statement which would inspire discussion for example a comment on daily life or a historic event such as *Independence* (Figure 2.21). The tapestries could then be exhibited and used outside the co-operative to stimulate comments and discussion on contemporary affairs in the village. Considering one of the objectives of the project was to develop independence for the weavers it is important to establish to what extent the weavers were given a free rein to depict whatever they chose in their own manner or, how much control/ guidance the Goweniuses as art teachers exerted over the images portrayed.

Teaching or not

During my field trip to Oodi in April 1995 and November 1996, I spent some time interviewing Joan Hoff, an American Peace Corps worker sent to Oodi in 1995 to help the project. She stated that she did not ‘teach’ the weavers anything. Alongside her statements I

found that, when I interviewed the weavers about their work at the project, phrases that were repeatedly used included “we were never taught anything” and “we had no training”. This was a marked contrast with the women I interviewed who were involved in the indigenous art forms such as pottery and house decoration; they had no problem in identifying their influences by saying: “my mother/aunt/sister taught me” (as written about in chapter 1). The women weavers, denying any form of teaching at Oodi, were not being critical of the project for not providing what they considered to be teaching, nor did they seem to be saying it as a point of pride.

The question that arises here is what is meant by the words ‘teaching’ and ‘taught’. An analysis of the term ‘teaching’, as used by the different parties in relation to art, is essential in order to be able to compare their intentions with the actual experience. Definitions of the term vary considerably depending on the experience. My own experience of art teaching in the U.K. was a matter of being given a space, material and a forum for discussion, experimentation and exchange of ideas, set against the background of a knowledge of my own culture and art history. I was already functioning within an art world that I understood, where the aesthetic criteria I was brought up with were those that were required at Art College. I was working from a common ground shared with the other art students, tutors and gallery curators. It is from this basis that I examine other interpretations of the term. As the project workers also went through art school in the west, they will have experienced similar tuition and will relate back to that. Herein lies the difference between what art teaching means to students and tutors in Europe and to the artists at projects in Botswana. The artists who have ‘not been taught’ will get their ideas of what ‘being taught’ is from their experience of teaching their daughter to decorate a house, which they do in the context of their own visual history and known aesthetic. They cannot associate that kind of teaching with the much more structured and essentially foreign experience at the project.

The evidence is that, for over twenty years it has been felt necessary by the expatriates working at Oodi to say “the artists were not taught” and that “the project only provided the materials, skill tuition and encouragement”. The managers, from the Goweniuses through to Joan Hoff twenty years later, have always stated that they were there only as the medium through which they hoped the artists would be able to create objects/images to sell in order to make a living. The phrase “we were not taught anything” was also such a regular refrain and denial from the artists that it implies that, either: 1) the women did not relate to the work done by the Goweniuses as teaching or, 2) the question is asked on such a regular basis that the

artists were bored with answering it or, 3) that they had maybe not really considered it and/or 4) that I was being given an answer that, it was thought, I wanted or was expecting.

Peder Gowenius explained how he was frustrated by the question of art teaching and saw the fact it was continually posed as an inference that people did not believe that the artists could produce art works by themselves and, although he went on to explain that the women did have their own ideas for the tapestries, in the same paragraph he also confirmed that he taught and guided them in their work (Full interview on this subject in Lewycky, 1999, 79). The fact that the weavers have been introduced to new materials and have developed an image-making technique and a critical judgment of their own work, along with being brought together as a group, means that they have learnt, even if they have not been overtly taught, certain skills and aesthetic criteria. However, as we shall see later on, from the data gathered, it would seem to be a closely directed teaching programme that worked to teach a set of criteria and certain aesthetic which may have in fact negated individual creativity and stifled decision making. For instance in 1995, Joan Hoff, having stated that she did not teach the weavers, then contradicted herself as she explained how she “guides them in choosing colours” as “sometimes they choose all the wrong colours” They do not necessarily need a realistic colour but one whose colours do not “clash with our western sensibilities” (Hoff interviewed, 1995, Oodi).

I believe that a lot of the emphasis on the ‘untrained’ artist is, firstly, a way of emphasising to the women workers as well as to the public, (and also initially as authentication for the Goweniuses,) the fact that the Oodi project is run and owned by the women weavers and that they are, on paper anyway, in control of the whole process; secondly, it is a marketing strategy. It is well known that tourists and buyers in general are more interested and curious about art from ‘untrained’ artists. It gives the work a marketing edge, thus any art teaching input by the project workers is downplayed. I go on to develop this later in the section on marketing.

Teaching in relation to the artists and village development

The teaching at the workshop began with skills training: how to make and set up a loom, how to spin and dye the wool and finally how to weave. This was followed up by management training and bookkeeping courses. Later on, there was also training on the history of weaving and fabric design both in Europe and Africa.

Gowenius for one year ran a study program, during working hours, to give all the workers a political and economic orientation to the weaving craft. This included discussions on the history of textiles, the relationships between raw materials and the processes leading to a final product, and the evolution of clothing from skins to modern synthetics. All this was related to industrialisation, and

the competition between mass production and hand-made materials. The workers were given a sense of history of the textile industry (and alongside it a history of southern Africa) a context in which they could place their own production unit and see its significance in terms of modern day textile industry. (Bryam, 1980, 241)

However, there is no indication that they held classes on the history of art in Botswana or even southern Africa as they did on the history of weaving and textiles, leaving a gap in the education. Consequently, the women artists were never given the opportunity to relate their work to other Botswana art forms, (more on the issues and problems around art education in Botswana in chapter 6).

In order to extend “education and self development” to the village and to allow everyone to benefit from the factory, the project’s aim was to use the tapestries as a focus for dialogue and discussion amongst the weavers and villagers. Because of this, the Goweniuses had to take control and guide the images to the end that they had in mind, as the subject matter had to fit in with the overall aims of the project.

The Goweniuses bought up events and images, drawn from life in Botswana, as possible subject matter. The women would then discuss these, the design would be agreed on and then, to begin with at least, Peder Gowenius would do the initial drawing for it.

In the beginning Gowenius took major responsibility for the drawings; however, over time as the weavers confidence and artistic skills grew they began to produce the drawings themselves and to take control over the whole creative process. (Bryam, 1980)

Two weavers would then take the design and transform it into a tapestry. Once the tapestry was finished it took on the role of ‘a lesson’ and was shown to groups in the factory and later in the village, to provoke debate and dialogue on the community’s problems and National issues. This process was successful in that the villagers were interested in the tapestries and themes depicted and they did generate discussion. The gatherings also aimed to break down any barriers between those working at the factory and the rest of the community.

Although the women had a clear idea of what was meant by ‘training’ in terms of skills, they were vague when questioned about how they began to learn and develop their picture-making and creative weaving abilities and what exactly they were taught by Peder Gowenius. Answers such as “it just comes from my mind” (interviews in Oodi, April 1995) were common. The women were learning a completely new craft, one that had been imported to the village by a western art teacher; therefore it cannot be denied that there must have been a teaching and learning process. The issue here is to identify what the women were taught in order to achieve the critical and aesthetic judgments that they use today.

Masire Morake explained that she “was not shown other pictures to copy” that they were just told to depict something local to them ie: a family or village scene. They were however, “told when something was wrong or right” (interview, 1995: Oodi). Here, Morake was undergoing a learning process, she did not instinctively know what the criteria for the tapestries were (as they had not been taught), and so she felt that she had to do what she was told in order for it to be ‘right’. The notion of ‘right’ here can only be related back to the Goweniuses’ social and marketing aims for the works. Similar themes continue through the other women’s responses: Seka Moremi says she was taught how to set up and use a loom correctly and that the only other art training they were given is that they were told to work from stories. She didn’t indicate any other teaching and stated, “if you set up the loom correctly and it is neat then it is easy. You see the shapes that you want and you can do it” (Moremi interviewed, 1995: Oodi), She says that ideas for her pictures come from around her. Kamogelo states that she was taught to set up a loom and to weave but was never taught how to make a picture. They were just told to visualise what they wanted to depict. When asked her where she gets her ideas from she said that “we were helped by the women who set it [the project] up and by the time she left we knew what to do” (Kamogelo interviewed, 1995: Oodi). Selebaleng Ndaba was trained for two months, was taught how to use the loom and then how “to do the background and how to add things” (Ndaba interviewed, 1995: Oodi).

No time was built in for teaching an image- making process. Initially women were left to learn through watching Peder Gowenius when he did the designs. Because of the aims of the project there are notions of right or wrong that come into play here where they would not in any western art school. There is a desired end product and so, ideas of what is an accepted image are developed with this in mind. Images are deemed correct or not in relation to what the product is needed for: in the beginning, for village development, and later on, for sale to the tourist and expatriate market. The weavers learnt through a process of hit or miss, through their work either being accepted or corrected.

The more one sees of Oodi tapestries the more they seem much of a muchness. The forms are set on a flat plane with no attempt at distance; and there is little evidence of individual difference one weaver from another. That this is so indicates either that the women were never free to develop the imagery as they wished (otherwise there might have been a variety of styles and subject matters) or, that the women, working within an unfamiliar field, never gained the confidence to experiment and so felt the need to comply, copy and learn the required aesthetic. Seka Moremi illustrates the separation between herself and the type of product she makes and the imagery she uses when she says that she would like to have a tapestry at home but cannot

afford it; and that, if she could, she would depict her own family and would sign her work (interview, 1995: Oodi).

Another interesting fact is that the workers and the Goweniuses would collectively judge the tapestries. This is mentioned in Martin Byram's article, yet no information was given on the criteria that were used in the judgment. It is not clear whether it was the design, the neatness or the educational value that were the important factors in deciding a 'good piece of work'. The attempt here was to encourage everyone to contribute to the decision-making process and to allow a communal assessment of which works were acceptable. There must, nevertheless, be doubt as to how much people were prepared to voice their own opinions on a practice they had never used before. Without a discussion on the necessary criteria for a 'good tapestry' there would be no consistent basis on which the weavers could judge the work. The Goweniuses' previous knowledge, and therefore dominance in the field would have, unconsciously, to some extent disallowed other voices or opinions.

The work of untrained women artists, using the format of storytelling which is seen as 'traditional' and African, fits neatly into the 'primitive' and 'exotic' market of African art. No consideration was given to what the women might have wanted to produce, such as the use of perspective or abstract patterns as practiced on house decoration. The relationships of authority within the project were such that the women would not question the directions given by their white superiors. One of the comments in *This is our Life* by Fredah Mosala about her tapestry, called *Yes we women have to do all the work* (Figure 2.20), demonstrates this:

It is wrong that the woman in the middle is naked. Rra Masiza (local name given to Peder Gowenius) told me to weave her that way. He said that otherwise people would not understand that, besides all the other duties, she also has to be at the service of the men. This we believe you could have understood even if she had been covered by a blanket... (Mosala in Gowenius, 1977)

Here, against her own and others opinions she was persuaded not to cover the woman's body with a blanket. This sort of interference in one woman's work calls into question the main aim of the project, which was to encourage an acknowledgment and promotion of contemporary culture. If it were against the women's desire to portray a naked woman, for a variety of cultural reasons, then it would have been more relevant and realistic to allow the woman to weave what she wanted.

It would seem from these observations that there were definite priorities within the aims of the project. It was primarily a project for the village to: promote discussion and debate around issues of social organization, co-operative work and ownership of the means of production, right through to the questioning of current affairs; almost as a by-product of that, it was about

passing on skills and allowing creativity. Essentially, the project was about community, not individuality; it is in fact a good example of the theory that Janet Wolff explores in *The Social Production of Art*, where she concludes that all art work draws on both the individual and the collective:

Even where artistic production is a more 'individual' activity, as in painting or writing a novel, the collective nature of this activity consists in the indirect involvement of numerous other people, both preceding the identified 'act' of production (teachers, innovators in the style, patrons, and so on), and mediating between production and reception (critics, dealers, publishers). More generally the individuality of the artist and the conditions for his or her specific piece of work, are entirely dependant on the existence on the structures and institutions of artistic practice, which facilitate that work. (Wolff, 1981:119)

One assessment of the Goweniuses' system is that, through the process of developing a co-operative and community business, rather than succeeding in their intentions of themselves being the tools that were necessary for community development, it was they who used the weavers as the means of fulfilling of their ideas. The training offered was solely for the achievement of their aims and the foundation of the project was laid with an unevenness of authority. They were the initiators who held all the knowledge, as opposed to the trainees, who had to begin working completely in the dark without any local frame of reference. The Goweniuses considered it more important for themselves to fully understand the process that they were about to use in the implementation of their ideas rather than allowing the development of something that they may not have been completely familiar with and thus in control of. The women were not encouraged to 'think' visually for themselves. This is something that has not changed in the eighteen years that it has been running.

The markets

The dictates of this potential market were western as the majority of sales were to tourists or expatriates, and were therefore based on westerners' ideas of African/Batswana art and craft. In other words, the work needed to be something that westerners would identify as 'other', something different to their own culture. For the tourist market, the tapestries needed to be something that would remind them of Botswana, something they could show 'back home' which would capture their memories and ideas about Botswana. For the 'more serious' expatriate collector or possibly gallery curators abroad, the work would need to live up to their expectations about 'African Art' and be instantly recognizable as different and from Africa, about which we all have our own preconceptions and ideas. Peder Gowenius does not mention this and it is not talked about in the context of the weavers until Olaug Morse, an expatriate

working at the project in 1994 (more on her in the section 'To the present day'), writes a report to USAID⁴⁸:

The tapestry weavers are all artists. Their tapestries are all unique - never two alike. This art is called primitive art and is in demand in Europe and USA where it commands very high prices. (Olaug Morse, 1994, letter to USAID, Gaborone).

This is a market which has invented for itself an 'African aesthetic' with which it works and informs its clients. The work needs to be seen as 'primitive' and carried out by 'untrained artists' in order for it to be authentic. This explains the project's emphasis on the weavers not being taught: the 'untrained artists'. This is a category that has been continually and often wrongly used to describe artists and, in 1989, it was used to describe artists in the 'Magiciens de la Terre' exhibition in Paris. This exhibition was based on a curatorial preference for the 'self-taught', a category which, upon close examination, appeared to apply to almost none of the artists in that show, all but one of whom had been through the apprenticeship system.

In contrast to the marketing of the work in Botswana, there is the other dimension of when the work is moved away and is seen abroad and out of its usual context. In 1977, a major exhibition of the tapestries created at Oodi, went on tour to Denmark and Sweden. A colour catalogue was produced and, all of a sudden, the tapestries were involved in a different world with an international audience with its own expectations. No longer were the works there to promote village discussion and confidence-building exercises, they were on display as representing Botswana through the eyes of 'rural African women'. The catalogue explained the aims of the project as put forward by Peder Gowenius. However, several statements in the catalogue need careful examination as they point to yet another dimension in the way in which the tapestries and their artists are portrayed and perceived:

Through this book we hope to preserve the weavers' simple message.... Here are some people who want to express themselves. Through their tapestries they are speaking to us about the history of their country and the thoughts and conditions of life, which are part of their everyday existence and ours... There is no local tradition for making pictures but, even so, only the technique is taught. Everybody is her own designer and the tapestries are created just like you would tell a story. (Gowenius, 1977)

In these sentences, Peder Gowenius has turned the emphasis of the project to suit the exhibition, the market and western expectations. Although I have to acknowledge that a history of the aims and day-to-day processes could not be included in such a small catalogue (and may not be at all relevant anyway), it is important to analyse how such statements were chosen and the categories that it then threw the tapestries into in the eyes of the west. Peder Gowenius

lifted ideas from the project and placed them in a different context in the catalogue, in such a way so as to comply with the wishes of the funding bodies and the exhibition organizers and visitors. His initial reasons for the project, of trying to promote his own social ideas through the medium of a community co-operative and village education, using debate and discussion, and the problems he faced, has been left out. The problem of gaining trust and interest from the community in order to carry out a social experiment, and the way in which he dealt with it by offering work and an income to women who had previously had no hope of earning, is not relevant for the western market. Here instead he concentrates on the anthropological and cultural references. A careful analysis of the above quote will show the assumptions and generalisations that structure the message passed onto the western audience:

'the weaver's simple message': Here he denies any interference by himself in the subjects chosen for the tapestries and the fact that it was he who would initiate the debates and discussions, which would lead to the subject matter chosen. The idea of a 'simple message' indulges the western notion of the 'primitive'. The subjects of many of the tapestries are in fact far from 'simple': many highlight huge problems for the people of Botswana. For example *This is how we lost our freedom*, an image showing colonialism and the advent of missionaries, or the contemporary situation of *There are so many whites in our country today* and *This is among other things what migrant labour means to us the women*, about the problems of a society where the men have to migrate for work, are far from straightforward messages. The tapestries are images portraying some of the complex problems of modern society in southern Africa. The statement is either implying that, as the art is simple its message is uncomplicated or that he has reduced it to a simple message in order to be able to offer the western consumer an undemanding assimilable experience of Botswana.

'they (the workers) are speaking to us about the country'. It is debatable as to what extent it is the workers/ weavers speaking. As written about earlier, it is known that the Goweniuses would initiate discussions and direct them in ways that they believed would benefit the community, also we know that Peder Gowenius initially did the drawings. In this way he informed the weavers (even though he may not have thought he was consciously teaching) of a style and form of constructing an image. The denial of his involvement fits in with the western ideal of an isolated and uninfluenced people and is an example of Mudimbe's notion that the west can only see African art as a selection of self-contained entities which are not influenced or challenged by other external influences whether within or beyond Africa. (Mudimbe, 1988)

'there is no tradition for making pictures'. It is interesting here to remember that the Oodi project was mainly made up of women and in particular the tapestry weavers were women.

Although mentioned before, this statement reiterates what I believe to be a very serious issue, that Peder Gowenius completely overlooks the whole of Botswana women's creative history. Basketry, pottery and house decoration, as written about in chapter 1 are all art forms which women have been involved in in Botswana for a varying amount of Botswana's history and involve skills and an image-making process. Not to be forgotten, further back in history as previously mentioned, there are the cave paintings of Botswana in Tsolido hills, which no one would argue, was not a picture-making process. (Although not painted by the ancestors of Bantu-speaking Batswanan these pictures are nevertheless a part of their country's culture). Little has been written about this visual history, nevertheless, evidence of these art forms were still very much part of Botswana culture when Peder Gowenius was working there, and he should have been aware of them. In one statement he denied a whole creative history and brought his own preconception of what is or is not art to Botswana. Another point being that the denial of any artistic history gave more credence to the achievements of the project than if the country's rich history of a visual culture had been examined and taken into account.

The irony here is that, in contrast, at that time, the late 1970's early 1980's, back in Britain and the USA, women artists were just beginning to reclaim such art forms (weaving, embroidery and textiles) for themselves after they had been for so long dismissed as 'women's work' and therefore not valued as art. Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1979)⁴⁹ is a classic example where the artist used embroidery and china painting in her modern installation. Much work followed and the exhibition *Subversive Stitch*⁵⁰ in 1984 brought together a large number of women artists reclaiming traditional women's skills as art. Critics such as Janet Wolff, Germaine Greer and Rozsika Parker wrote much about the development of these ideas in *New Feminist Art Criticism* (Katy Deepwell [ed], 1995)

'only the technique is taught'. In spite of Peder Gowenius' liberal ideas on education, he used the word teaching here in its narrowest sense in that they did not formally 'teach' the weavers picture making and, in so doing, he denied the many ways in which the weavers were, in fact taught. This statement is only made in order for the tapestries to comply, once again, with the audience's desires and expectations. The implication is that, if only the techniques were taught, then the artists were expressing themselves without interference from the west and that therefore it is 'genuine African art', with all the naive and primitive qualities (lack of perspective, unrealistic colours) expected.

What were not mentioned in the catalogue were the economic aims of the women who work at the project. It was their poverty that bought them to the Oodi project, not their desire to weave. To what extent the women would continue to weave and 'express themselves'

through their work without the possibility of an income is not examined, and is in any case unclear.

All this may or may not seem unnecessarily critical of the Goweniuses, and their reasons for the touring exhibition. However, it is important to pinpoint the different levels on which a project like this is justified. The sympathetic aims of the Goweniuses along with their aims of community development and their intention of minimal interference is compromised when bringing the resulting works to the west. They felt the need to return to the language and formula used when looking at African work from Europe and to comply to the expectations of the viewers, both for reasons of funding for the project as a whole, most of which came from the countries Denmark and Sweden, and in order to try to generate sales amongst the public.

The Goweniuses left in 1978

At the end of their time at Oodi, the Goweniuses recognised the dilemma of wanting to see something succeed but at the same time realising that true success can only be if the workers have gained enough self-confidence, independence and self reliance necessary to carry the project themselves. Peder Gowenius explains why they needed to leave:

If for example I stay here and run this factory until I die, it will continue if I am not challenged from the top or the bottom. People would have work, they would get a wage.... but there would not be any of what we refer to as development, except the employment factor. If that's what the country wants then maybe I should stay on...but then you can forget about things like confidence, self-reliance, and independence.

Perhaps the time is not ready for these things, I just don't know. I do know that if I stayed the workers would not set down roots. The people would come and go, and they would not be seriously interested in the work other than the money that they get. They would not be part of the work. They would turn their money into drunkenness and they would not be interested in changing their village or helping others to improve. (Lewycky, 1998, 85)

As planned, the Goweniuses did leave the project and Botswana in 1978 despite the lack of confidence amongst workers that they would manage without them. Dennis Lewycky picks up on this during his interviews with the workers in 1977:

Recurring regularly in interviews with the workers was the fear of what would happen to the factory when the Goweniuses left. Over half of the workers expressed fears that there would be either fighting between workers or absolute confusion...part of the fear they expressed was due to a lack of confidence in themselves, as many of the workers said they did not have the general capacity to operate "such a large industry". There was also a lack of trust among the workers and an apparent resistance to cooperate, which the workers noted as reasons for their concerns. A third explanation was that they lacked the management skills to run the factory. (Lewycky, 1998, 74)

These fears were held by the majority of the workers, despite specific and continuous training in co-operative management, throughout the four years that the Goweniuses were there.

Nevertheless, Martin Bryam writes a positive conclusion in his article about the project and the Goweniuses aims:

1. The overriding aim of the project was to build self-confidence and social awareness of the people involved. All the major social and economic organisational features of the factory reflected this aim.
2. Workers ownership was ensured by allowing only those who work in the factory to own the shares. Workers control on a daily basis realised through a process of collective management, with major decisions being made by the workers.
4. The production process was such that the workers were able to develop their technical skills and develop a sense of pride in their work.
3. Economic parity was maintained amongst the workers by a wage system that would allow everyone to earn approximately the same each month,
5. The factory was not an isolated entity from the rest of the village: through the development fund and through its own educational work (through the weavings and drama performances⁵¹) it kept its links with the village and supported other development activity.
6. Central to the whole project was the political and social education of the workers. Through a Freirian-type⁵² concretisation process the workers were encouraged to examine the social and economic forces affecting their lives - including those of the factory. This education was directly linked to production. (Bryam, 1980)

However, as he prepared to leave, Peder Gowenius was not as positive and had begun to question the apparent success of the project and to recognise some of the problems of imposing a foreign concept that I discussed earlier in this chapter:

This I suppose comes down to the realisation that this project is completely wrong. It is still trying to impose certain values and criteria on the Batswana, even if these try to develop confidence and self-reliance so that the people can create the type of society they want. It is well intentioned but I think it is no better than some aspects of colonialism. You can't even use the most legitimate of arguments that we must do something rather than do nothing. We still perpetuate a system that is. I don't know of any African country where the expatriates have such a high profile, and I think this definitely should be limited. (Lewycky, 1998, 97)

He expands at length on the problems of Botswana's history and expatriate dominance in Dennis Lewycky's *Equal Shares*.

To the present day

Since 1978, there has been a continued fluctuation between successful periods, where there has been an expatriate working and managing the project, to times when no work is being produced at all and the project is about to close. There has been continual support for the project from various people and organisations who have attempted to help the weavers. The most consistent of these has been the support from the Department of Co-operative Development of the Botswana Ministry of Agriculture. Since 1981, when the project was

registered as a co-operative, the department has always been available to help the women as and when requested, with accounts, auditing, and finding volunteers.

In the early years the Goweniuses returned twice to assist the project. In 1983 Ulla Gowenius returned for three months to upgrade the tapestries, encouraging neatness and more care in the final look of the tapestry; and in 1983 Peder Gowenius returned for a brief visit. After this, the project continued successfully and in 1986 an exhibition of tapestries toured Sweden, Denmark and Canada, returning again to Canada in 1987. From 1973 to 1986, there was continued support from CUSO who contributed financial, marketing and legal advice. It was after this that the workers stated the project had a serious collapse. In 1994, a Swedish woman, Olaug Wetten Morse was working at the project and wrote a letter to USAID in Gaborone (she is unclear as to why she chose this particular funding body), asking for assistance for the weavers:

Dear Sir,

In the six years that I have lived in Botswana, I have seen the Oodi Weavery in the height of its glory, with prolific sales and exhibitions in Europe and now plunging to its depth in bankruptcy.

I have worked alongside the weavers for the past year and believe that I understand them. Now that we shall leave Botswana I can only hope that their unique form of tapestry art form can be sustained.

Botswana has very little indigenous handicrafts and it would be a catastrophe for this art form to be lost to the world forever. I have prepared this report to try to prevent this from happening.

After reviewing my report, you will realise that Oodi Weavery will close its doors unless it has assistance, as well as creative strong management.

If you believe your organisation can assist, you can contact me further until August 1994. (Olaug Morse, 1994, letter to USAID (United States aid group)).⁵³

According to Sandy Grant, Olaug Morse was at the end of a long line of expatriate managers, not all of them credited or remembered by name at the project, who had followed on from the Goweniuses. As she could see no way in which the project would continue to function without 'strong management', she wrote to USAID for help. In 1994, answering her wishes, Joan Hoff arrived from the Peace Corps service and took over the management and Setsuko Takazawa, a Japanese Overseas Co-operation volunteer, came to the factory as a design and quality advisor. So, once again, expatriates managed the project. Joan Hoff left in 1996 and Setsuko Takazawa was replaced in 1997; so, in conclusion, the project has in fact continued to be assisted by expatriates up until the present day. Tebbogo Tlhagwane is the current manageress of the project and she continues to be supported by USAID.

When I spoke to the weavers, they all mentioned how pleased they were when Joan Hoff arrived; at the time they had been working for nothing and were about to run out of wool. Aware that she would be leaving soon, they spoke of how they were going to miss her and may

not be able to manage once she had gone. Not one weaver expressed any confidence in her own ability to run the workshop. Joan Hoff thought that the solution would be to find a younger Motswana woman trained in business to run the project. Kamogelo disagreed with this when she stated to me that if a Motswana had run the project, then it would not have succeeded. These feelings demonstrate how the women have not been trained to see themselves as initiators or leaders.⁵⁴ Another aspect that Joan Hoff mentioned was that no woman wants to put herself forward as manager as that would single her out as a target for jealousies and possible witchcraft, which continues to be a concern for many of the older women. Repeatedly we see that, despite their own proven abilities the women are reluctant to take control. Martin Bryam explains it thus:

This dependent relationship on South Africa also operates at another ideological level. Black people are conditioned by the media and their own experience in southern Africa to believe that they must be subservient to the Whites. This has created a sense of apathy in the blacks: a feeling that they are unable to do anything and that they are subject to the more dominant forces of society. In Botswana this has been reinforced by the presence of a civil service that has a large number of expatriates. The internalization of the ideology of the oppressor, i.e., that whites can organize things, is what Freire calls the 'culture of silence'. (Bryam, 1980, 211)

Thus we see that, despite the Goweniuses' management training which included marketing, buying and selling and which should, in theory, have allowed the project to be self-governing, the social historical background against which they were working was so ingrained that the project has not yet been able to manage successfully without an expatriate manager. The lack of self-promotion amongst the women and, as a result, little motivation to connect with their market, leads to the conclusion that there will, for some time yet, continue to be a need for an elite or middle class cultural broker to access the expatriate and tourist markets.

The women's attitude towards their international exhibitions highlights the gulf between them, their product and their market. Sandy Grant, a supporter of the project (his belief in the potential of the project and the tapestries is highlighted when in 1996 he offered to buy out the cooperative. After much consultation the owner/workers turned the offer down.), discusses this when he speaks of his disappointment with the project's progress and agrees that, without a white manager the project flounders and that the weavers have no pride in their work. He cannot understand why, with touring exhibitions of their work and people visiting and buying their work, the women are not fiercely proud of what they do. Similarly, when I visited Oodi in 1995 and 1996 and questioned the women about how they felt about their tapestries I found that, although they were certainly pleased with their art, there was no sense of excitement or pride which is what one would expect from any artist whose work was being exhibited in

galleries at home and abroad. This simply highlights the difference in perception and understanding of the institution of 'the gallery' between people accustomed to the 'art world' and the women at Oodi. The women have never travelled abroad with their work and they have no experience of display or sales beyond Oodi itself. A building where artwork is displayed is something unfamiliar to them thus, the fact that their work is hanging in a gallery means nothing.

Yet Peder Gowenius continued to believe that, through his training, the women would develop their own ideas and aesthetic:

The weaver quickly learns the technique then after a while there comes a time in every weavers development where she starts to become critical of herself or the work... all people carry a tradition, carry a culture of their own and there are just no people without this tradition. Sometimes this culture has expressed itself in dancing or music or words and sometimes pictures. Now in Botswana one can generally say that it has expressed itself in words, in the language and song. But it has never come out visually. Now if you give the medium to express this tradition, you will only help express that culture more, it is bound to happen that you will express that tradition. You carry out a tradition in a way it has never been put before, but it still comes from the people so it is part of their culture. Using a new medium is part of their historical development in expressing their culture. (Lewycky, 1977, 234)

I believe the Oodi weavers' reputation still rides on the legacy of the time when the Goweniuses were there and when the designs, which developed and changed frequently, were pertinent to the time and sold well in southern Africa and abroad. Yet today, although each tapestry is unique, all too often they demonstrate the use of a repeated formula. There are no more political statements or community debates within the work. Now the work is based on 'the village' and 'life in the village' with little variation, without the Goweniuses' influence the work has changed. The Goweniuses hoped that the women would continue to 'express their culture'; what the tapestries show is that either the women are expressing their lives and that the repeated and unchanging scenes do in fact show the slow pace of Botswana rural life or, they are unable to develop more complex ideas and scenes visually through a lack of confidence and taught skill (Figures 2.22-2.24). They continue to talk about depicting strikes and community affairs, which they haven't actually done since 1978. They are unaware of the stagnation of the work as, although they see the Goweniuses as the past they still see work they did twenty years ago as part of their current portfolio.

Conclusion to the Oodi project

From examining the different understandings of the conception of training, the levels of intervention by western tutors and how the project and art work was portrayed to the west, it is clear that the weavers were drawn into an area that they would never properly understand or be able to control. However sympathetic the aims of the Goweniuses and their stated attempts to 'interfere as little as possible' and to allow debate and discussion from the floor, they did nevertheless, impose alien criteria and aims upon the weavers. There were also the political, economic and social constraints of the project's aims. Despite the emphasis on self-reliance and co-operative structures these were imported ideas and all too alien for the women to understand.

The project's denial of any interference or art teaching also meant that the training was only half-hearted, the weavers were not given the benefits that they could have had through developing an appropriate art education, and there was a lack of recognition of local cultural heritage as a visual and aesthetic resource⁵⁵. They also did not have the freedom or encouragement to develop, experiment and discuss the artwork without the criteria of social responsibility or sales. Although Peder Gowenius acknowledged the problems that would occur if the work were being made just to sell, he did not see his criteria, the social responsibility, as having similar constraints:

If, however, the weavers are forced to 'conform to commercial demands' or to weave for only requests the creative element will die and along with it the cultural identity and self-confidence. The weavings may continue to be technically proficient, but they will no longer represent the weavers' own understanding and concerns about their situation. (Lewycky, 1977, 235)

Early in 1996, Neo Matome and Stephen Williams, as part of their research into the need for a Regional Art School⁵⁶, looked into women's art projects and their training. They were critical of the training that was given twenty years ago at Oodi and the lack of development of the work since then. Their results led them to believe that women artists in projects such as Oodi would benefit from a series of training courses and as a result Motako, a woman's workshop (developed in chapter 5), was started in 1996.

However, despite criticisms, it has to be acknowledged that Oodi weavers' co-operative is still going today, twenty-eight years on. In all those years it has provided many women with a job as well as a skill and co-operative experience. The way the project failed in its objectives was in its social goals for self-reliance and self-belief amongst the workers and the village.

In terms of the development of their art, I conclude that the weavers lost out firstly, by being controlled by the aims of the Goweniuses and the project, which did not allow the workers any tangible links between their art at the project and their own history of visual art

and contemporary indigenous arts. Secondly, due to the Goweniuses policy of non-intervention, they lost out through not being allowed the benefits of a structured taught art education. Instead, they had to find a path for themselves between the two theoretical positions and the two alien aesthetics: that of the Goweniuses' social aims and that of the western market, and attempt to produce what was asked for in order to make a living.

Ikgabiseng and Ithuteng and Mokolodi

In contrast to Oodi, there is nothing at all written about the following three projects: Ithuteng, Ikgabiseng and Mokolodi. All three were set up by expatriates, for Batswana women. I will detail the background and content of the projects and then go on to look at why they were set up for women by women and how successful they were in their aims.

One woman, Tamar Mason, links Ikgabiseng and Ithuteng as she set up both projects within a year of each other in the same village. Tamar Mason was born in South Africa but left in 1989 because of the political situation there. Working as a regional craft worker she filled a job vacancy at the Phutadikobo museum in Mochudi, a large town just north of Gaborone, and moved to live in Oodi just a few kilometres away. Phutadikobo is a well-established museum of local history, on the hills above Mochudi. The building itself is of interest as it was the first ever purpose built school in Botswana. Alongside the museum a printmaking workshop was set up, both to provide souvenirs for the museum and also to carry out printmaking on a commercial scale, producing articles such as t-shirts and badges for companies.

Tamar Mason worked there for a few months but explains that she decided to leave, as she did not get on with Sandy Grant, one of its directors. He is an expatriate who had lived and worked in the community of Mochudi and Oodi for many years and was a respected and established figure at the museum; Tamar Mason was new to the country and environment and had many new ideas of her own. She did not go into detail about their disagreements; however, she did say that Sandy Grant had very rigid ideas about what should be produced in the workshop, whereas she wanted to be more experimental. The clash was one of background, character and aims and neither would compromise. Once she left Phutadikobo they had nothing more to do with each other.

She had previously been making jewellery herself and had the idea to set up a project making jewellery somewhere near Mochudi. In 1989 she made a successful funding application to the Department of Commerce and Industry. She found suitable premises in a

small set of business units in Pilane, two kilometres from Mochudi and on the main road from Gaborone to Francistown.

She called the project Ikgabiseng, meaning 'by ourselves'. Her idea was to shape and paint pieces of ostrich eggshell to make earrings, necklaces and broaches, as the shell was easily obtainable from a local ostrich farm in Serowe. She recruited women by asking local people she had met through the museum and gradually the word spread that there was work at Pilane. No one can remember how many people were recruited at first, but they think it was about ten women. The numbers since then have fluctuated. When I visited in April 1995 there were just 5 women and in November 1996, 4 (Figure 2.25). Tamar Mason spent 3 months training the women in the technical skills needed for jewellery making, design and management. The project was to be run as a cooperative with all of the women being responsible for the running of the business, such as bookkeeping, stock management and sales, as well as for making the jewellery. Tamar Mason was the sole trainer for all of these skills.

The broken shells were bought from the farm in Serowe. From these, the women carved shapes appropriate for earrings or broaches. With ink and pen they then drew either images or patterns on the smooth surface, and some were later coloured with paints (Figures 2.26- 2.29). They started to sell the work in Gaborone, through shops and at the market, it sold well from the start and the women were happy with their success.

Tamar Mason's idea was that she would set up the project and then leave; she did not see a role for herself in Ikgabiseng and in fact, intended the women to be totally independent as a co-operative. So, once the project was established, Tamar Mason left Botswana and spent a year travelling in the USA and New Mexico where she saw local crafts made with tinplate. Inspired by this work she thought a similar project could be set up in Botswana. The material is cheap, mainly recycled, and the work itself had what she called, an "African sense of design" (Tamar Mason, interviewed 1996: Johannesburg) a statement that I examine later. On her return to Botswana she tried out some of the ideas with tinplate and taught herself, through trial and error, the skills necessary for the project. Once again she approached the Department of Commerce and Industry for funding and was successful in securing funding for a new project. As she had previously secured a workspace in Pilane she returned there to start Ithuteng, meaning 'learning' in 1991. Ikgabiseng had continued to work successfully for the year Tamar Mason had been away and so she began to set up the next project along similar lines using the same principles of training and of forming a co-operative.

Living in Mochudi she knew many people in the community and, as for Ikgabiseng, she sent out the message, by word of mouth, that she was looking for women to work in this

project. It was, however, not as welcome as she expected and there was not a huge response. Although when jobs were offered they did not have a problem filling the positions, she was surprised at how few women came forward considering the unemployment in Mochudi. She could not give any explanation for this. However, it is most likely that the handful of younger women who were interested in this kind of work had already been recruited in Ikgabiseng and that other women were wary of the new enterprise. Initially they may have had difficulty in grasping the concept behind the project and would have an understandable suspicion of the white South African setting up a workspace for them. The alien-ness of the work is shown in the villager's lack of response and indicates a reluctance to be involved.

Motsaphi Radipholo is a woman I met in 1990 when I was travelling through Botswana. I liked the work they did at Ithuteng and we remained in contact through occasional letters until we met again in 1995 and 1996. She spoke to me about how difficult it was for them to start with at the project:

People used to call us *masesures*, a derogatory term meaning Zimbabweans who have come to set up businesses here in Botswana. (Motsapi Radipholo, interviewed 1995: Ithuteng)

This of course is an indication of the prejudice in Botswana against incoming people who are being accused of taking away the livelihoods of local people. Although this form of prejudice is not immediately apparent in Botswana, it very definitely exists with racism towards other minority groups such as the San peoples being much more obvious. The problem is highlighted again in the CORDE (Co-Operation for Research, Development and Education⁵⁷) catalogue 1995-1997: "...people used to make fun of the members collecting used tin around the village." The women survived the taunts and are now respected and, according to the workers, even envied for their jobs.

In looking for women who might be inclined towards artistic work Tamar Mason asked them what other things they did by hand and selected them by means of interviews and drawing tests. From the fifteen or twenty who came forward, she selected just eight. The women then went through training with Tamar Mason in the techniques of working with tinplate and jewellery making, design and business running skills. There was also a second stage of design training that the best few would go forward to. This was to instil a sense of competition - "I wanted the women to compete and didn't want them to think that they had a nice easy number!" (Tamar Mason, interviewed 1996: Johannesburg). The work they produced ranged from jewellery to household objects such as candlestick holders to framed pictures. All

made from tinfoil with decorative patterns and images hammered into the tin with a variety of tools (Figures 2.30 - 2.40).

After the six or seven weeks training Tamar Mason asked them how they wanted to run the business. She explained the different options of having a management and workers, a small partnership or a co-operative. The women all chose to operate as a co-operative and so she then helped them to be established as such. They developed outlets in Botswana, as Ikgabiseng had, in the market, shops and museum of Gaborone.

The women at both the projects are reluctant to talk about their work. I have been writing to one of the women, Motsaphi Radipholo for a number of years, and have visited the project three times. When I visited in 1995 I spoke to both Motsaphi Radipholo and Cinah Tlali. Cinah Tlali is a young woman who had just left school when she joined Ithuteng. She also lives in Mochudi and in 1996 I interviewed her again as well as talking to the group as a whole. The language barrier is obviously a problem nevertheless, even with a translator, any questions about the work were answered with one or two words. It was the same at Ikgabiseng where I spoke to Ruth Mmotlana, Seori Mogorosi, Lesego Sefako, Segakweng Madisa and Elda Kgetsi; although friendly, they had little to say to inform me of their interest in their work. Either the women are suspicious of my questioning or they really have little to say about the work they do. The implication is that they do not or cannot engage with the work at a conceptual level other than as something that provides an income. The information and conversations will be used later on in this chapter.

Tamar Mason left after a year feeling that the women were now in control of the business. She believes that the success of both projects is largely to do with the fact that the products are very marketable and that the materials used are cheap and locally available. She says that she knew what would sell well and geared her designs towards that market. More on this later.

The third project, Mokolodi, is a different venture altogether. Robyn Sheldon, an artist from southern Africa, set it up in 1986 as a purely commercial business. It was based out in the Mokolodi estate area on the outskirts of Gaborone, thus the name. Originally there were just three employees and they made jewellery from beads and pottery. By 1990 the workforce had expanded to ten and they were now also printing fabric. Robyn Sheldon's idea was to print cloth with original designs and make clothes out of them. Plain cloth was bought in, dyed different background colours and then printed using carved potato halves.

In 1993, Mokolodi moved to premises in Gaborone West where they had a print workshop and a shop attached. Robyn Sheldon then sold the business to Toff Hill and Kitty Dixon, two

British expatriates and they continued with the workshop and shop in Gaborone West but also expanded with a shop next to the city art gallery. In 1994 their staff grew to fifteen and they opened another outlet in Gaborone centre at Kagiso mall.

Mokolodi was started as a privately owned commercial business in 1986 and still remains so today. (The reason that this enterprise is included here is that Mokolodi frequently displays their printmaking on cloth, as works of art at the Gaborone art gallery. More on this later.) The owners are the marketing and managing directors and the women come to work in the morning and get on with what ever they are told to do by Toff Hill or Kitty Dixon, which will inevitably be what the shops and markets demand. The women will be asked to produce lengths of cloth with either a certain theme or colour. The nature of the technique means that no pattern or design can be exactly replicated and in the workshop itself there seems to be the freedom to experiment. Women are cutting potatoes with their own designs, which they will then use to print onto cloth that they have previously dyed using the colours of their choice (Figures 2.41-2.43).

They also make wall hangings, which are printed in the same way as the material for the cloths, but then it will often have beads and other items sewn on to the surface. This is the work that is displayed in group art shows at the city gallery (Figures 2.44 -2.47). The work will be given a title and the artist's name is given as the collective 'Mokolodi' as opposed to individual names.

The managers are proud of the work and stress that it is all unique and that it is "a real art form, using traditional designs" (Mokolodi press release 1998). (This notion of 'traditional designs' was dismissed by the Motswana women in the shop, more on this later.) They are excited about their success and talk about further expansion:

The items made by our craft ladies are so attractive and well received, that we can only grow and improve. We have plans already underway to establish a new, larger workshop and Craft Centre in a rural setting, while keeping a shop open in Gaborone. This will mean an increase in staff to meet the growing demand and to export the products. More jobs and income to the families and villages affected by our growth is an obvious benefit to all. We are able to carry out in-house training of new staff and will also make use of management training. (Toff Hill, Kitty Dixon owners of Mokolodi project, 1996)

Why for women

The question of why all of the above projects have been for women needs to be answered. Oodi became a project for women the reasons for which I discussed earlier. Yet Ithuteng,

Ikgabiseng and Mokolodi only recruited women. Unemployment has been very high in Botswana especially amongst women who are often heads of household and single parents. Female unemployment and poverty have been the main reasons given by the project instigators for recruiting women. As women are often the only providers for families in the villages, helping women was also seen as the best way of helping the whole village; this would also have been an important factor in Tamar Mason's application for funding for her two projects. As explained for Oodi, the men in Botswana have always been much more mobile and able to travel for work than the women, often leaving families forever and not sending home the promised money. Women with children were stuck in their home village unable to travel for work yet needing an income. The role of grandmothers and great grandmothers in the village is still such that a woman could rely on her family to look after her children if she did get work, which meant that any source of income was often keenly taken.

There is no reference during the training at any of the projects to Botswana's visual arts, and so we can assume that the fact that women had a history of being involved in the arts had no relevance to the project initiators' choice of women for the project. Accordingly, if they had considered the history of women's involvement in the visual arts as an important factor when considering the projects, then maybe the art forms chosen used would have been more related to existing indigenous art forms; whereas in fact, the art forms chosen for the projects were imported from other continents such as Europe and America.

The social and art history that the expatriates brought with them prescribed that, in European tradition, it was the women who were the homemakers and who were also seen as the 'craft' makers. (European history of 'craft'⁵⁸ is long and complex; however, it is important to understand the category that seems to be being imported here.) So it followed, consciously or not, that it would be appropriate to recruit women into projects involving decorative arts such as tapestries, jewellery and tinwork. It has to be noted that, by contrast, at Kuru (which I look at next), where the participants paint on canvas and are producing 'art' rather than 'craft', it is a mixed project with often more men than women working. From this we can see that where the work in projects is purely decorative men do not seem to be involved. We also know that this is the case in the history of Botswana visual culture. However, it is also there because of the project initiators' own preconceptions. In western history 'crafts' and 'decorative arts' are much the same thing, with a lesser status than 'Fine Art'; and these categories have been imported into Botswana along with many other ready-made categories, such as 'women's work' and 'commercial art', which accompany the work that the women produce. The project initiators thus have not acknowledged the wealth of visual arts that Botswana women had been

involved in historically as it was seen as craft and this in turn denied the women the possibilities of any links between their current work in the project the women's art indigenous to Botswana.

An important note here is that, at that time, the classifications imported in to Botswana by the Goweniuses were being challenged by feminist writers and art critics such as Griselda Pollock and Rozika Parker in *Old Mistresses* and Janet Wolff in *Social Production of Art*. These art historians wanted to 'reclaim' the previously ignored art works by women and write them into the history of art. Also, established artists such as Judy Chicago began to use mediums such as ceramics and embroidery in their work (most prominently Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*), as a recognition of the historical and social value of women's crafts. The 'reclaiming of crafts' into the visual arts circle continues into the present, for example with the exhibition *The Subversive Stitch* at the Serpentine art gallery in London in 1999. The art/craft problem may or may not have been relevant in local language terms, but it is something that the expatriate managers should have been aware of.

The Goweniuses, Tamar Mason and Robyn Sheldon all want the work their projects produce be it tapestries, tinwork or textiles, to be seen as art. They have worked towards having the work exhibited as art in Gaborone art gallery and pointedly describe the women as 'artists' and the work as 'indigenous' or containing references to 'indigenous' art in their literature and brochures. However, at the same time, they all fail to acknowledge, either through their teaching or training at the projects, the existing indigenous crafts done by the women of Botswana. Essentially the projects were aimed at women for economic reasons, to help women earn a cash income in order to benefit the family and thus the community as a whole, and were thus not originally motivated by artistic intentions.

Teaching or not

In the section on Oodi I examined the teaching role of the Goweniuses: what they chose to include and leave out of the training programme, as well as their denial of some of the teaching that actually was going on because of the market's emphasis on the 'self-taught' as signifying greater authenticity. It is interesting to see how the other projects have dealt with this issue. Tamar Mason acknowledges the basic skills training that she gave, in that she taught the women how to cut, shape and decorate the sheets of tin. As for the contents of the work, in the training she tried to get the women to input and to relate to the project's products. She wanted Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng to have a distinct identity; she did not want them to produce "airport

art, images of people jumping up and down beating drums, other people's vision of Africa" (Tamar Mason, interviewed 1996, Johannesburg). She wanted the art to come from them and asked them to draw from their experience of what women's work is: washing clothes, cooking, farming etc. This has been successful as the work itself shows: the tinwork pictures depict women and children at work or at home and the decoration and patterning on both the tin and jewellery is clearly related to some of the painting seen in house decoration, in particular the patterning called *lekgapho* used to decorate the low wall surrounding Batswana homes. This shows some instinctive use of a taught (as in 'taught' from mother to daughter as researched in the chapter 1) Batswana aesthetic which, as explained throughout this chapter, was denied at Oodi.

Tamar Mason geared the products to a market that she understood and hoped that, through the training, the women would then be able to initiate designs themselves. Initially the women thought the training and items were odd and some items such as napkin rings and mobiles were totally alien to them, but when things started to sell they began to understand what was wanted from them.

When women were questioned in my interviews about what other things they do by hand most women answered sewing and crocheting. Tamar Mason said that if she asked them about house decoration a few would say that their grandmothers used to do it but none would count that amongst their own skills now:

Unfortunately, well... most have had some schooling which has led to them being embarrassed with their own traditions. (Tamar Mason, interviewed 1996, Johannesburg)

This idea of tradition (i.e.: mud houses and house decoration) being associated with rural-ness and backwardness, was looked at in depth in the first chapter however, it is worth making a note again here, that this lack of overt reference to their visual history has and will continue to affect the development of contemporary Batswana images. The women artists are obviously using this inherited aesthetic but it is not being acknowledged: firstly because of the above stigma and secondly, because of the decision of the project workers not to 'teach'. Tamar Mason did not try to counteract the negative feelings around house decoration and, although she was more open and honest than the Goweniuses about what she did teach, her training fell short of giving the women as much as possible to go on. Because she refrained from giving the women historical and contemporary Batswana/ southern African art references it meant that, in many ways, women were left working in a void.

At Mokolodi the training was more minimal. Robyn Sheldon taught the women how to dye cloth and how to carve patterns into potatoes for printing with. On visiting the workshop I saw magazine images from papers such as the National Geographic, pinned to the wall and around on the tables. These were the women's main source of inspiration for the patterns and images. They would copy patterns in fashion pages or animals from wildlife photographs. Despite the comment in their publicity that the images used are 'traditional' there was no teaching or discussion with the women of what this is or might be. It is clear here that, with minimal training, Robyn Sheldon was happy to let the women develop their own designs and to label them as 'traditional' precisely because the women were not taught. The equation assumed here is one of 'no teaching' equalling 'authentic' and therefore 'traditional'⁵⁹.

Our designs and colours are meant to reflect occurrences in nature such as sunsets, clouds and rainbows and shades of the bush. Our staff are artists and have natural handcraft skills to bring you your original, individual, handmade ethnic Botswana products. (Publicity hand out from Mokolodi 1996.)

My conclusion is that, as for Oodi, all of the above projects cannot have failed to teach or train their artists in some way, whether it was teaching them techniques, showing them pictures from magazines or telling them to draw from their own lives. However, in order to try to market 'authenticity' any form of training was denied allowing only for influence through the expatriates' dominant position. The whole history of women in the arts in Botswana is not explored⁶⁰ and where the overt use of an indigenous medium and design could have inspired and given the women confidence as artists, it was denied. The reason for this becomes apparent in the next section.

Exploiting 'traditional' designs and marketing

The above discussion relates directly to how the products are perceived in the market place. The work is marketed as 'traditional' and as being made by 'untrained artists' despite evidence to the contrary. Tamar Mason states that the reason for Ithuteng's success is her understanding of the available market. This is certainly true. Tamar Mason, Peder Gowenius and Robyn Sheldon all knew that work thought of as 'traditional', and as being made by artists who have not had contact with any western form of art training, will be seen as 'ethnic' and 'primitive' (see earlier discussion of Mudimbe:1988); as a result these will sell well within the western and expatriate markets.

However, Tamar Mason's "African sense of design" and Robyn Sheldon's "unique pieces of artwork" (statements on back of cards sold at Mokolodi centre) are ideas of their own making. Through understanding another common 'vision' of African art they have created their own Africanesque aesthetic for the women to follow. Although they wanted women to express themselves through depicting their daily lives in the subject matter of the work they guided them to do it in a certain way in order to match the pre-conceived notion of what African art's style should be: a 'primitive' style with 'naïve' qualities. The fact that the methods chosen for the work at Ithuteng were Tamar Mason's is apparent from the comments that the workers at Ithuteng made about their work. This highlights the disjunction: she imagined that she was encouraging African design but in fact her workers were simply trying to please her. When I interviewed a group of the women in April 1996 they told me that:

White people like funny things, funny art, so we do these things. They like things made by hand... White artists draw funny things so we copy them in our designs as we know they like them. (Motsapi Radipholo and Cinah Tlali, interviewed 1996: Mochudi, Botswana)

Clearly it is an aesthetic that the women didn't understand but which they have learnt. At first they didn't realise what to do but, as the work sold, this was proof enough to them that that was the way to work, and gradually they learnt this foreign aesthetic. Some of the women say that they like the work and now have some of it in their own homes.

Ithuteng has the biggest market amongst Batswana nationals of all the projects and Tamar Mason maintains that the aesthetic used was in fact one shared by other Batswana - that it was not done just for the whites. She believes that the tinwork has a "kitsch element that goes with the modern velvet suites" found in many city homes. (Tamar Mason, interviewed December 1996: Johannesburg.) However, the above research shows that it was not a shared aesthetic at all and the fact that the work does now sell to the local population and to the workers themselves means that the work is now appreciated. Whether this is because of the 'kitsch element' (another foreign concept/aesthetic), as Tamar Mason believes, or whether it is another case of all things western being seen as the way forward in Botswana, is hard to tell.

When visiting Botswana in 1996 I asked the women working in the shop selling Mokolodi work whether they thought that the designs were 'traditional' as stated on the labels, they laughed and said no they were not. The idea that these images could be thought of as traditionally Batswanan was obviously amusing to them, which goes against the vision portrayed by the Mokolodi statement:

Mokolodi craft cards are each a unique piece of original artwork created by women in rural Botswana, Africa. The cloth prints are produced by the “carved” potato stamp method. The women design and execute the patterns and colour schemes to reflect their individual feelings. (Mokolodi card)

I conclude that for all three projects it is not the ‘traditional’ designs that are being exploited but the term ‘traditional’ itself. Well known to attract western, expatriate and tourist buyers it is used without any understanding of or reference to the very real indigenous arts of Botswana.

Success and intervention

It is worth investigating how much these three projects actually enabled the women to run their own businesses and how much the initiators of the project continued to control and make decisions for them. I consider whether where control has been handed on, as in Oodi, they continue to rely on expatriate managers.

Mokolodi has always been a private project and, as far as the Batswana women who worked there were concerned, there was never any pretence at it being set up for them. Toff and Kiddy Dixon own the business and they employ the workers as artists. The women were not shown the business side of the venture and are not involved in any of the decision-making. On the back of the cards sold at Mokolodi they state:

By purchasing these cards from Mokolodi craft centre you have enabled many Batswana women to generate income for their families and improve their standard of living. (Mokolodi gift card)

The “income” that the women “have generated” is their wages and they are not or ever have been involved in the running of the project and the business set up did not alter when it changed hands.

Tamar Mason left both Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng after a year, as was always her plan. She felt that she had enabled the women to be in control of all aspects of the project and that, as cooperatives, they should now be able to run successfully without a manager. She says that she still maintains an interest and goes back regularly to visit. Since she left, an organisation called CORDE (Co-Operation for Research, Development and Education) a fully Batswana group funded by Botswana, was set up as an umbrella group to help the various projects in Botswana with marketing and training. Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng both became members and have benefited from their advice. The projects are visited twice a month by a business advisor to see how things are going and whether there are problems or needs. Some of the women at

both projects have been on courses run by CORDE; these courses have been on practical topics such as bookkeeping and marketing rather than creative or art based.

In 1992 the women at Ithuteng, obviously feeling in control and optimistic about the project, spoke of expanding and developing their business:

to avoid obvious inconveniences we want to have our own car, says Miss Mutshegwe, the groups treasurer. We want to have a plot and some capital in order to build our own factory...we also want to set up our own nursery in about three years from now. (*Kutlwana* magazine, Gaborone, Botswana, April 1992)

However, in 1994, Tamar Mason was asked back to Mochudi by CORDE to look at the progress of both Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng, her role now being one of freelance consultant and fully independent from any organisation. Her report from this return to Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng is that the market was getting tired of the old designs and products, and that in the meantime both sides, herself and the women workers, had had new ideas. They then worked together on designs inspired by mythical figures and stories from childhood; these new ideas gave the project and the women a new impetus. The question of course is that, if the women had had ideas for new designs etc. themselves, why was Tamar Mason needed at all. The fact is that since Tamar left, although the projects continued to run themselves, the style, techniques and products changed little. When I visited in 1998 a number of women had left the projects but very few new women had been recruited. So, in conclusion, although Tamar Mason did furnish the women with the skills they needed to run the business (how to work as a cooperative and how to make and sell the work), what would seem to be a basic lack of interest and understanding of the product itself meant that the women were not able to develop ideas in the design and content of the work. Thus the project stagnated.

Since then, when comparing the two projects Ikgabiseng and Ithuteng, the jewellery of Ikgabiseng has developed more than the tinwork. Their expansion into silver work and a wider variety of patterns on the pieces indicates that the women related more to the wearing of jewellery and could therefore feel more confident about experimenting. Tin artwork and ornaments were still things that the women would not very often have for themselves and therefore they found it difficult, as mentioned earlier, to explore confidently this foreign concept and aesthetic without expatriate support. Once again, despite the economic success of the project, the alienation of the women artists from their own artistic and cultural background and the lack of art training has left the development of the artists and their art forms stagnant.

Summary of Ithuteng, Ikgabiseng and Mokolodi

Compared to Oodi, the projects Ithuteng, Ikgabiseng and Mokolodi are still very young. Mokolodi, a private venture, is the most consistent in terms of producing new work and ideas. The owners have a complete understanding of their markets both in terms of producing small saleable items suitable for tourists and larger pieces of art for the gallery. The owners, in control, guide the women artists towards producing the work that they want.

Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng are successful in that they are still running years after Tamar Mason left them and are providing the women with a cash income. However, it is clear that, without occasional external input either from CORDE or Tamar Mason, the work becomes repetitive and the women unmotivated. This is an inevitable result of the importing of ideas and practices that the women cannot fundamentally relate, to and the unavoidable gulf between the women artists and the aesthetics and motivations of their chosen markets.

The Kuru art project

At first we believed the things that we were told. Things will be better for you and your children, they said. They told us that we should send our children to the schools, so that they could care for us, once they were also civilised, like those who had gone to school and could read and write.

We waited for that day. We could not always understand, but we believed that things would get better. The things that our old people taught us could not help us anymore.

Now some of our children have gone through the schools. They come home, and they do not find work. They can no longer do the things that our old people taught us, because they do not know the veld or the animals. For a long time we were angry, and we still are. We have lost everything. Our land as well as our beliefs. Now we see that we will have to do something ourselves. Maybe if we could start our own school, where our children can learn our old values, our language, and maybe to work with their hands as well as their heads, we will again stand up.

Kuru is for us. We have to do it ourselves, that is what the word means. Other people will help us, but one day our children will do the things themselves, as we had done it ourselves very long ago. (Joseph Kaase, 1996, one of the original members of the Kuru Development Trust)

The Kuru art project is part of the Kuru Development Trust, situated at D'Kar in the region of Ghanzi in the North of the Kalahari dessert, Botswana (See map and Figures 2.48 and 2.49). This area of Botswana was originally used by the San for hunting and gathering but, during the last century, as farmers have encroached into the desert area the land has gradually become farm land/private property and used for cattle. As a result the San have been forced off the land they have always lived off and confined to increasingly smaller areas, making their hunter-gatherer lifestyle impossible. This situation is not unique to Botswana; San throughout southern Africa are having their lifestyles destroyed by farmers' land acquisition and developments by governments. Several organisations have stepped in with differing solutions

for the San peoples' problems, the most prominent being Survival, however, the missionaries and churches were the first.

In 1964 Henry Luck (a man of wealth and property) from Namibia visited Ghanzi. Concerned by the developments he saw there and the San's disenfranchised position he decided to buy the farm D'Kar and give it to the Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia so it could start some missionary work there. During the 1970's the church was built in D'Kar along with a number of homes for the missionaries. Eventually the church officially 'allocated'/ returned this land to the San. The initial aim of the church was to give spiritual guidance to the San who were finding it more and more difficult to maintain their way of life. Dislocation led to the San feeling isolated and out of touch with their society. Small-scale projects giving Christian education to groups of San were set up by the missionaries, with the aim of converting the San to their religion and of filling the gap left by the disintegration of their way of life.

Bram and Willemien Le Roux, missionaries from South Africa (Dutch Reformed Church), came to D'Kar in 1982. It was whilst working as missionaries that they decided they needed to make an impact on the lives of the San in a practical way as well as in the spiritual sense. They wanted to help them to cope with the developments happening around them and the erosion of their original way of life; to ease them into the modernization and monetary system of the rest of Botswana and at the same time help them to retain elements of their own culture and pride in themselves. By 1986 schools had been set up around the area and several projects, aimed at generating an income for them, were established. They formed the Trust, Kuru Development Trust (KDT) in 1986, which meant that the San took over the management of the board and the trust became a self-development group "a hope organ" (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: D'Kar, Botswana.) employing Bram and Willemien Le Roux and others as teachers and advisors.

Now the Kuru Trust is, in theory, independent from the church, although they work closely together they are no longer a missionary project. However, the majority of workers in D'Kar are both attached to the church and to the projects and thus the links between the two are still very strong. For instance, a group of missionaries worked in D'Kar translating the bible into Nharo, one of the San languages, and during this time they also offered their services to the project as translators or by giving language lessons. This is the same throughout D'Kar; the missionaries' skills are used where needed in the projects. The overwhelming missionary and Christian presence at and around the project cannot be underestimated, the values and answers given to questions that arise in the running of all the KDT projects are very much influenced

by the Christianity instilled at the start of the project and which continues to be imported by the Christian workers.

Many of the San have converted to Christianity. Several Black African churches tried to recruit the San in order to increase their congregation and, according to Willemien Le Roux have used and abused them and their money by collecting what little money they had in the name of church work (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: D'Kar, Botswana.). Dissatisfied, they were however, still receptive to new forms of worship Willemien Le Roux believes that they found it easy to understand the Christian religion as their indigenous belief was also that a God had made them and put them on the planet; it was only when things became difficult that God abandoned them and left them to struggle. Because they have had so much taken away from them and have felt their lives hopeless they were happy to find another God to take up their cause. The trust oversees all of the projects, which are as diverse as a cochineal farm, bread making, and schools and craft shops.

History

As the KDT had already established projects that enabled the San spiritually and economically they now thought that something was needed to “strengthen its [the community’s] cultural identity” (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: D'Kar, Botswana.) In December 1989 members of the KDT, both San and expatriates, took a trip to the Tsolido Hills thought to have been inhabited for 100,000 years (see appendix 2(i)):

An inspiring group tour to the Tsolido hills in Northern Botswana was organised in late 1989. The aim of the tour was to see the rock paintings there, which are reputedly the work of earlier San people. Out of this tour the idea of starting a cultural project emerged and the art workshop began with a textile-painting workshop for women. (Press release on the Kuru project 1992.)

After much fundraising they secured the resources necessary to start the art-based project and Catharina Scheepers-Meyer, a regional craft project worker was recruited to initiate the project in July 1990. Funding came from HIVOS (Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamewerking) from the Netherlands and DanChurch of Denmark (Danish church donor agency). Their first project was for women and was a textile-painting workshop. They began very basically with painting with acrylics on cloth. Pieces of white cotton and primary colour paints were given to the new recruits and they were left to experiment with the materials. The first two works produced were sent to the National art gallery (NMMAG), in Gaborone, who bought the pieces for their permanent collection.

They decided to expand the project and recruited more potential artists, this time both men and women, from the local area. Willemien Le Roux explains how artists were recruited through a process of selection: she helped to pick out people whom she thought may be creative by the way they dressed, decorated items or made things. Examples she gave were Qwaa who “dresses in a distinctive way” and Ainee who knitted decorative woollen hats. This criterion for selection was not developed by the group it was simply the only way Willemien Le Roux could think of to select people for the project without any formal skills test or examination. She was looking for people with a visual interest and looked to their lives for forms that expressed this. She obviously believed that the skill and interest shown in a person’s use of decoration could be transferred from something such as a knitted hat to painting on canvas (more on this transfer of aesthetic later). The consequences of such a selection process is that, it was Willemien Le Roux’s choice of what she considered to be an ‘aesthetic sense’ amongst the San and, although she could not avoid that, this needs to be acknowledged. The process of moulding the work to the anticipated audience had, consciously or not, begun as Willemien Le Roux’s tastes matched those of potential buyers of the work.

In order for the artists to develop techniques as well as to offer the prospective market more choice, the work expanded with artists beginning to paint with acrylics on board and then oils on canvas. The centre rapidly expanded with a gallery, a training centre, a recourse centre and a museum of cultural history. Finally in 1998 they built a printmaking studio, funded by the KDT for screen-printing, engravings and monoprints. (Figures 2.50 -2.51). Pieter Brown, the third art co-ordinator, taught the printmaking techniques. The artists quickly developed a body of work and exhibited for the first time in Windhoek, Namibia and Gaborone in 1990. Since then they have continued to exhibit regularly and internationally.

Teaching

There have been three art project co-coordinators: Catherine Schepers-Meyer, Tamar Mason (of Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng), followed by Pieter Brown an artist and art teacher from South Africa. They work under the KDT umbrella.

The approach to the art centre has not been to present art lessons at all but rather to provide facilities, materials and encouragement to individuals who are invited to play and experiment and thus to teach themselves a personal way of handling the new materials. (Kuru Press release, 1992.)

There is no explanation as to why they did not want to present art lessons and the official line put out by the artists and workers is that there is no formal art training. Even though they may

believe this to be true, this answer, given by both the artists and the art workers in response to any question on art training, is a programmed one. So keen are they to promote the 'no-training' stance as a way of proving that the art is genuinely 'primitive' and 'untouched' by the west (and therefore 'authentic') that they deny the obvious and undeniable influences such as the use of previously unknown materials (acrylic, oil, canvas etc.), the newly introduced tools for painting and printmaking plus the new experiences of their settled way of life from which they now experience racism, poverty and lack of land rights. The argument about training was discussed in detail in the section on the Oodi co-operative and the situation is very similar here. There are two main reasons why the 'we have not been trained' position is so strong. Firstly the workers/missionaries do not want to 'interfere' with the San's culture. Secondly, as with Oodi, the foreign market is understood well enough to know that untrained naïve artists are more popular and marketable as a particular genre.

Willemien and Bram Le Roux have a genuine wish to be facilitators and to exert as little influence as possible on the lives of the San and the importance of this was passed onto all of the workers at Kuru. They believe that the huge scale devastation of the San's usual way of life caused irreversible damage and they hope to provide a forum for the San to express their culture with the minimum of interference. The cultural centre that was set up alongside the art project may be a more genuine success in this respect than the art project. It houses San cultural artefacts and has dance and music evenings. Although set and performed in an alien environment the people are at least continuing to perform in the way that they have always done and that, despite the external changes and displacement that they have had to suffer, dance and music can continue to be very much part of their life.

The art project is different in that a totally new art form has been introduced. There is no direct continuity between rock art and any surviving San group today. More specifically, there is no evidence to prove that the painters of Tsolido rock art were the ancestors of the San of today in the Kuru project. It is known from the recent past that the San comprise many different languages and social groupings and it is impossible to know just what the relationship is between the prehistoric artists and the surviving San. Only two things are probable: one, until their engagement with Europe all San were hunter-gatherers; and two, some San groups were responsible for rock art while other groups were not. Moreover, although there are some common elements, including shamanism, San is not a unified culture. Despite continuing a variety of visual art forms in their culture, the San today were as unfamiliar with painting on rock surfaces as they were with painting two-dimensional images on textile or canvas. It has

not been a natural progression of an existing art form and, despite the links with a remote cultural past, it is still undeniably an imported format.

The artists were left to paint/draw whatever they wanted. The only formal teaching that they were ever given came later when they were taught the technical aspects of etching and printmaking. They were not shown any other works of art to inspire or guide them; in fact, the project workers were so keen to allow the artists to express themselves and their lives without any possible outside influence, that the workers who were artists themselves, would not even do their own work (painting and etching), in front of them.

This situation is, as we will see, both unrealistic and untenable. It is also patronising, in assuming that the San would copy, or would want to copy, the work of the expatriate artists. This denial of influence, as with Oodi, leaves the artists' in a situation where the actual circumstances of their art, are not being confronted. As will be seen later on, their position, manufactured by the Kuru art project, is an artificial one that cannot be maintained.

Tamar Mason was only at the project for one year, she followed on from Catharina Scheepers-Meyer as art project co-coordinator. Her approach was quite different to that of Pieter Brown who followed her and who has spent over four years at Kuru. She was not a member of the church and felt quite badly treated by fellow project workers as a result. She spent a year there and still believes it was one of the best things she had done even though, after a year, she was glad to leave. Socially it was very difficult for her. Being single in such an isolated situation when everyone else there had families or were linked to the church made it a lonely place to be. On the project itself though she says: "It was a wonderful place to go into. There were some great artists working there at the time."(Tamar Mason, interviewed December 1996: Johannesburg)

She was not as worried as Pieter Brown about interfering or influencing the artists. As an experienced craft worker who had already set up other projects in a wide range of mediums she knew that her position was unavoidably one of influence. Instead she saw that the important step was to initiate and enable, not control. She encouraged experimentation and set up regular critical assessment sessions. "This was not about interference but about getting them to initiate and talk and act amongst themselves" (Tamar Mason, interviewed December 1996: Johannesburg). They were designed to get artists to talk, to give each other advice and to discuss what they were trying to show in their work. She made a conscious effort to get more women involved as artists in order that the art project would reflect the San community. Artists began to use canvas for painting, to do printmaking (in 1998, taught by Pieter Brown) and some started to sew beads into their work.

Tamar Mason is very critical of how Pieter Brown ran the project. The critical assessment sessions and any form of experimentation stopped. In his fear of influence and acculturation he dared not continue the encouragement of experimentation or initiate anything new, which she believes led to a stagnation of the work and boredom amongst the artists. She also accuses him of being slack in checking things such as how tools are left at the end of a printmaking sessions or not properly finishing editions of prints. Tamar Mason obviously wanted to run things 'professionally'. As has been seen in her dealings with the setting up of Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng, she has no qualms about the nature of her work. She is there to help set up/run a professional business be it tin work or painting on canvas which aims to sell work in order to give the artists an income. As well as understanding the needs of the artists to communicate amongst themselves and with others she also knows that the work needs to stand on its own if it is going to find an ongoing market, in which case experimentation and external influences will eventually be essential. Another factor that she believed lead to apathy amongst the artists is that he no longer scheduled exhibitions or organised sales of work properly so firstly, they were not getting the exposure they deserved and secondly, the work was not selling as well as it should. His job was support worker for the artists to do the work they could not because of either a language barrier or because of their illiteracy and innumeracy, such as ordering materials and organising exhibitions; this is work that he should not have had any problems in doing. She was hoping that Pieter Brown would be replaced soon, but acknowledges that it is difficult to get people to take the post. The pay is poor and, as she found out, the life can be isolating.

I believe that the situation of teaching at Kuru is very similar to that at Oodi, even though it is twenty years on: expatriate personnel initiated the project, supplied the materials and provided the trip to Tsolido Hills. The difference is that Oodi was set up during apartheid and was seen as much more controversial at the time because the Goweniuses were white but interested in promoting black self-reliance, whereas Kuru was a post-apartheid development. The population as a whole were becoming more racially aware and expatriates were even more cautious about their imposition on the local people. Yet the market has not changed. The project workers know that the market they are aiming for favours the exotic and untrained artist. As a result the artists get neither the benefit of being left completely to their own ideas (even if this were possible in this regard) or of proper training, which would allow them access to African and world art. The ensuing over protection of the artists is discussed later on in this chapter.

The artists

The artists group at Kuru changes as new people arrive and others leave⁶¹. Unfortunately, and this is something that Tamar Mason is concerned about, many of the artists are elderly and three have died recently, Qwaa, Ankie and Qmao, leaving the project without some of its most prolific and well-known artists. All of the artists have a name given at birth as well as a nickname either given by their families or by the Kuru trust. This is an easier name for English speakers to pronounce and it is with this nickname that most of them will sign their paintings. There have been five prominent female artists at Kuru.

Dada (Coex'ae Qgam) is one of the best known of the artists and was one of the first to join the project in 1990 (Figures 2.52–2.57). She was born in 1934 in Ghanzi. In the beginning she was recruited as a translator for the project as she was fluent in five languages. Eventually, frustrated with trying to get the artists to understand what was being explained to them she began to demonstrate the techniques. From then on she continued to paint on her own terms and became a very productive artist.

Originally, her first contact with art was with her employer in Namibia who taught her needlework and embroidery which she would continue to do when the materials were available. Her first paintings at Kuru were on unstretched cotton and the National art gallery in Gaborone (NMMAG) bought her first ever painting for their collection. Her work, figurative and schematic, is also narrative; she can tell a story from each piece of work although the stories can vary each time they are told. From painting on cotton she moved onto painting with acrylics on stretched canvas and then oils on wood. Although she continues to paint she is also a keen printmaker developing ideas from paintings into linocuts.

As an outward going person, keen to exchange ideas, despite language barriers, she has been a very active participant at many International Artists Workshops in southern Africa and in 1994 she was chosen as one of the five African artists to show work in the international exhibition *Women of the Nineties*. Despite her success and monetary gain she still lives under sackcloth in the bush.

Ankie (Nxadom Qhomatca) was born in 1930's in D'Kar. Ankie was already a craft producer when she joined the project in 1990; she was very skilled at intricate beadwork something which her mother, a master of the craft, had taught her. Ankie bought this craft with her and integrated it into her painting. Her work took inspiration from the patterns and colours used in

her beadwork and she would often sew beads onto her canvases. Her work is an interesting example of how two historically different art forms can be combined (Figures 2.58 – 2.61). She worked mainly on large canvases painting bold abstract designs but also sometimes slipping in figurative elements such as a bird, a loincloth or plant. In 1994 Ankie died from tuberculosis.

Cgoise (Cg'ose Ntcox'o) was born in the 1950's in the Ghanzi district. She remembers her mother making eggshell beads and necklaces. She joined the art project in 1992. Her works are mainly figurative, to do with her people and the foods they used to eat and in particular the tasks and lives of women in the veld (Figures 2.62 –2.67).

Through her art Cg'ose would like to remember the beauty of life in the Kalahari and as most of the Kuru artists, she portrays almost nothing of the hardships, pain and difficult circumstances in which they live. (Kuru artists' website)

Nxabe (Ncg'abe Tase) was born in the early 60's. She joined the project in 1992 with her friend Cg'ose; their work was very similar in style for a while but then her work became more abstract, reflecting the traditional bead designs (Figure 2.68- 2.74).

Like all Kuru artists she likes to apply the paint in smooth flat planes, which sometimes gives a decorative quality to her work, counteracted by a spontaneous, almost childlike depiction of objects that portray her love for nature and her culture. (Kuru website)

Coxae/ Ennie (Coex'ae Bob) was born in the 1940's and was one of seven children. She had eight children herself. She joined the project in 1994. Her work is mainly about people, family life and women in particular. Although figurative her detailing of clothes and jewellery is often geometric (Figure 2.75).

The things she remembers most vividly from her childhood are the trips she made with her grandparents to the veld to collect veldfood and to hunt. Like most other Kuru artists, she also has a need to convey some of these memories in her art in order to keep them alive. (Kuru website)

When I visited in 1996 there were also seven male artists:

Qwaa (Xg'oa Mangana) The eldest of all the artists Qwaa was one of the first to join the project. Willemien Le Roux describes how she was fascinated by the leather work he did, carving integrate designs into the saddles and shoes he made. He was also an elegant dresser with his own unique sense of style. Like Dada his paintings tell stories, mainly figurative work with patterning (Figures 2.76 –2.78). Qwaa died in 1997.

Thamae S. (Thama Setshogo) was born in the late 1960's he too joined the project in its early days in 1990. Sadly this very young artist died in 2004. His subject matter was primarily animals and he enjoyed working in a variety of medium, painting, etching and woodcarving (Figures 2.79 –2.82). The large collection of his work is still being sold to generate an income for his surviving wife and seven children.

Qhaqhoo (Xgaoc'o X'are) was born in the early 1970's. He joined the project in 1991. He enjoys playing the dongo (finger piano) and woodcarving. These interests have helped him in his artwork, which is mainly figurative with a particular interest in plants and animals (Figures 2.83 –2.84).

T. Kaashe (Thama Kase) was born in 1971 he joined the project in 1992. Again he depicts mainly animals but often ones that are part real and part fantasy (Figure 2.85). He works in printmaking, etching and monographs.

His large swirling compositions and unusual colour combinations were met with great enthusiasm by art lovers. He combines known animals with ones he has conjured up and as a result, they are amusing and charming... "Why should I not make people laugh? Anyhow I think people love the fun in my art." (Kuru website)

S. Sobe (Sobe Sobe) was born 1973 he is one of the youngest members of Kuru. He joined in 1993 after three years of school. He worked mainly in lino depicting animals both real and from San mythology (Figures 2.86 – 2.89). Unfortunately Sobe died in August 2000.

Q. Moses /Olebogeng (Qaetcao Moses) was born in 1973; he joined the project 1994. Born to Batswana parents he was raised within a San community who gave him his Nharo name. He has always enjoyed making objects from wire such as toys and replica trucks. He is mainly a printmaker and interestingly, does not depict trucks which he was so interested with in his wirework, but animals (Figures 2.90 –2.93).

Qmao (Qgoma Ncokg'o) grew up on several farms in the Ghanzi district and has great knowledge of the birds and animals of the Kalahari. He is also fascinated with the way his ancestors lived and draws them in much of his work, many of them being half animal, half human (Figures 2.94 –2.96). Qmao died in 1995.

The Work

The variety of the work produced at Kuru is huge nevertheless there are unifying themes and an aesthetic that holds the work together. The style is one of flat surfaces with the subject matter, be it animals, people or plants, making up a patterned and often decorative image. The subject matter is drawn from their lives past and present. Clothes, beadwork, plants, birds and animals are common subjects and it is interesting to note that, even though they are living in an increasingly changing world, there are no trucks, aeroplanes or images of commercialism in their work. This is in contrast to the Ndebele women (Schneider: 1989) who started to paint images from the developing world around them. Popular designs for them included razor blades and aeroplanes things that are just as likely to be a part of the San's lives as the Ndebeles'. Although the Ndebele women's work was stimulated by the apartheid government to encourage tourism, the designs and development of designs were very much their own. Whereas at the Kuru project, the San's lack of reference in their work to new existing images in their lives is either because they are trying to root their work firmly within the San culture and are not interested in modern objects or, because the market or the project workers encourage the same tried and tested popular images. The first is unlikely as the artists always have a fascination for cameras, watches, lighters and items from a modern world. It is much more probable that the project workers would not encourage such themes or reference to a modern world because the specific 'demands' of the market. Also, interestingly, the work never depicts sadness, death or loss nor does it refer to their way of life as being hard or difficult. I could not find out whether this was due to the 'market demands' or to a genuine optimism and pleasure in painting.

The colours used are bright and seemingly unrelated to the brown landscape around them. Animals and plants can be multi-coloured. The artists are not copying nature, rather interpreting it, adding a story or a myth or a dream to the composition. Often it is an overall pattern that seems to be the over-riding theme for a painting. There is a clear enjoyment in decorative and colourful pattern making. Other paintings are more focused on a narrative. People and animals are arranged in a way to tell the story of a hunt or the gathering of food. Beadwork is often shown allowing the artist the freedom to experiment with colours and patterning whilst incorporating a part of their lives. The lithographs and linocuts give the artists a different way of working, limited to a smaller scale they therefore tend to work with more detail. The themes remain the same but the colours are restricted which give a more controlled and considered edge to the work. The fact that they can do several editions of one work obviously makes printmaking appealing in terms of sales.

Protection

The role of the Kuru Development Trust is to facilitate for the needs and requests of the San, however, their self made position as keepers of and protectors of the San at the project is an ambiguous one. As for the Goweniuses at Oodi the Kuru project workers, Willemien and Braam Le Roux, see themselves as the tools with which the San can work. They are aware of the already damaging external situations and pressures that are being forced on the San as well as the influences they bring themselves. Here they try to tread the fine line between facilitator and influencer; however, their position of provider and facilitator leaves no doubt that they are in a position of power, which cannot be avoided or denied.

The San in Botswana are subjects of racial abuse, have been forced off land that they have travelled through and hunted on for thousands of years and are left to live on small areas of unproductive land. This has led to them being seen as an 'endangered species' and has resulted in a great deal of interest and support from around the world from sociologists, anthropologists and researchers. Groups such as the Kalahari Support group and Survival have been formed, they believe in facilitating self help groups for the San throughout southern Africa (both have supported the Kuru project):

The group is convinced of the value of local initiatives and self help development. It wants to support initiatives respecting the cultural, ecological, social and economic potential of people living in the Kalahari, especially San peoples who have been living there for thousands of years as hunter-gatherers and who are passing through a complicated acculturation process. Fully recognising the responsibility of respective governments and the work of concerned NGO's the KSG seeks to cooperate with all parties in the interest of human and ecologically sound development. (Kalahari Support group, Amsterdam, 1991)

Survival International is a worldwide movement to support tribal peoples. It stands for their right to decide their own future and helps them protect their lands, environment and way of life. (Survival, London, 1996)

The result of this interest has been a great many research projects on the San throughout southern Africa; research both into their lost lifestyles and their current situations. Because of this sudden influx of researchers the Botswana government has tightened up on research permits for the Kalahari and, from 1995, it was almost impossible to gain a research permit that included anything to do with the San. The reason they give is that the San are being over researched and continually disturbed by interviewers and researchers. The government is right to offer some protection; however, their sudden concern after their previous neglect is suspicious. It is more likely that the government themselves are tired of the interest in the San

and are afraid that research will expose their treatment of them and the racism against the San that is prevalent throughout Botswana. The San should be allowed to speak for themselves, as full members of Botswana society they should be allowed to decide who to speak to or not. This false situation that the San are being held in can only cause problems. From the moment when their lifestyle was taken away from them there was to be no going back; the San's way of life changed drastically and rapidly, forever. Any attempt to lessen the impact, hold off the changes or to turn back is not possible. This leaves the KDT in the difficult position of being a buffer between the San and their way of life, and the rest of Botswana.

It was the invitation in 1991 to the artists by Stephen Williams, then the Director of the NMMAG, to take part in the Thapong international artists workshop (see chapter 5) that began to highlight the problems surrounding the 'protection' of the San. Following a visit to Kuru, Stephen Williams realised the importance of these artists to the arts of Botswana and wanted them to take part in the annual gathering of artists, believing that their influence would benefit the artistic community as a whole, as well as offering the Kuru artists a chance to meet contemporary non-San artists. Willemien Le Roux says that they were very worried about the idea at first. "There is a lot of back up at the project and so we were scared about the idea of their trips abroad/outside of the project". (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: London.) She talks about the high percentage of recovering alcoholics amongst the artists and of the worry that, outside of the project environment, they would return to drinking and would not know how to behave in the modern city of Gaborone. However, Stephen Williams stated that he thought that the artists had something to contribute to the arts scene in Botswana, and that they had a role to play. This the KDT understood and thus they began to realise the significance that the Kuru artists had within Botswana and the development of Botswana arts. Dada was the first of the artists to go to Thapong. Willemien Le Roux describes her as "a very special person" who was fully able to cope with the situation. She is a confident woman who is able to communicate her feelings well and who is confident in her own work. Artists who met Dada at Thapong speak about the impact she had on the workshop and several, such as Ann Gollifer, have spoken to me about how her work influenced them. Since then one or two artists from Kuru have taken part in Thapong every year. However, more recently, due to a number of situations where the artists have not been treated as Willemien Le Roux and Pieter Brown would like, the relationship between Thapong and the KDT has deteriorated and now they are reluctant to send the artists. Willemien Le Roux says that since Stephen Williams left the museum (1994) the handling of the artists at Thapong has been very poor; she gave an example of where the artists were left at the airport with no one to pick them up, and where

they have had other travel arrangements messed up. But her main concern is about the influence that other artists have on the Kuru artists.

We think they are being influenced. Their own artistic skills, gone [used] over years, are burnt out a bit. So they look to see what other artists are doing and copy it. It doesn't work. They don't understand about art on a wide scope yet and they can't judge their own work. (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: Ghanzi, Botswana.)

Pieter Brown, the art worker at Kuru also spoke of unwanted influence from Thapong. He told me about the artist Thamae Kaashe who, on seeing other artists using shading as a way of depicting form, tried to do so himself. Pieter Brown thought it didn't work and believed that this was a negative influence. An artist himself, Pieter Brown will not paint with or show his work to the Kuru artists for fear of influencing them. This attitude is clearly very paternalistic and does not take into consideration the artists' own intelligence in regard to their art. The project workers' concerns that the Kuru artists' work will change with external influence is worrying. Unless you live in a vacuum nothing can remain pure and uninfluenced for long. To tell an artist not to look at other art or to take note of other artists' work is imposing an unrealistic and untenable situation. As the San life-style changes so will the art, otherwise it will be left in a neo-primitivist nostalgia and will become just another kind of tourist art.

Another concern is that Willemien Le Roux says that the artists are "burnt out" as a result of trying to keep up with the market demands. This fear of losing the niche in the market that they have captured and the income it brings in, means that the artists churn out time and time again copies of their own work. This lack of development can also only have a negative influence on the artwork and has been noted by other artists such as Neo Matome and Veryan Edwards who have followed the Kuru artists' work and believe that the work is in danger of becoming unoriginal.

Willemien Le Roux talks about the artists in such a way that she implies that, without the support structure of the KDT, the artists would be lost and incapable of looking after themselves. There is an important question here about the balance between KDT protection and help for the San, and KDT control and effective ownership of the artists.

People are vulnerable - you cannot paternalise on the other hand you cannot say, well they are artists here they are...we are responsible for them. Contact with outsiders has been very hard in many ways. They will grow into the outside world but they need to grow in their own confidence first. They need to go slower, to catch us slowly. Dada still lives under a sack in the bush but also now she travels internationally. It's almost impossible to think that she could make that leap emotionally. (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: Ghanzi, Botswana.)

It is true that, the changes to their way of life that the artists have undergone in their lifetimes are huge and the KDT are trying to soften the blow by providing some sort of protection. This is seen particularly when it comes to the issues of alcohol and money. As with the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, when their ways of life were completely destroyed many became alcoholics. Part of KDT's work has been to 'dry out' alcoholic San. This they have done with some success. However, they are very concerned that, in contact again with unfamiliar surroundings, and without project workers to watch over them, they may return to drinking. Willemien Le Roux was particularly concerned about the private views of their exhibition openings. People who have been at these openings told me of the way in which KDT project workers kept artists away from alcohol, to the extent of taking glasses out of their hands. This, the onlookers found embarrassing: the artists are fully grown adults. Unless the project workers can trust and allow the members of their project out of their sight their work has not yet succeeded.

Cash is another difficult issue, as the San have no history of using cash.

The money they earn has dragged them down, been a destructive force. They can't understand it or deal with it. They get jealous. They are not numerate and so don't see the difference between 600 or 6000 pula. We have had workshops for weeks on how to deal with this. (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: Ghanzi, Botswana.)

When artwork began to sell the money was given directly to the artist. This cash held very different social values for the artists and they would often distribute it amongst family and friends. However, this was not thought of as correct by the KDT thus highlighting the existing difference between economies: on the one hand the redistribution of resources that is the custom of the hunter-gatherer communities and on the other the promotion of individual wealth of the capitalist world. The KDT wanted to instil the importance of the cash income to the individual. It was a difficult situation, the sale of paintings often brought in an income for the artist far greater than that of the project workers. The workers would tell the artists that they now had a good income but then once the artists had rapidly given away or spent their money they would then complain to the KDT that "you tell us we are rich but now we have no money". So, in an attempt to help the artists control their money, the KDT tried keeping the cash from the sale of the pictures and then giving them a weekly allowance from that.

For the artists, the fact that materials, time, labour and paintings have a cash value is a new concept and it is one that will take time to adjust to. To tell them that they should not distribute the money that they earn amongst their families and friends and that they should keep it for

themselves, to plan for the future, is not necessarily the right way to help them to adopt the new system.

It is a cultural thing to share money out but when the money has gone they are down and out again where they started which means they are not making any personal progress in their lives. After five years of getting more money than I or any of the other workers get at the project they have nothing. (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: Ghanzi, Botswana.)

What we in the west strive for with a cash economy and our consumer society is very different to anything experienced by the San, and this seems to be what the KDT is unable to acknowledge. It is not to be expected that the San would want to aspire to the things, the 'personal progress', that we do ie: the acquisition of material goods. They are from a society with few material possessions; and this 'personal progress', that Willemien Le Roux speaks of is a concept as foreign to them as the cash itself.

They are such open people, they are so easily exploited. (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996: Ghanzi, Botswana.)

An example of this that she gives that highlights the disparity between the two cultures' perceptions of value is that, during a Thapong workshop, Thamae Kaashe swapped a painting for a music tape; an obviously unequal exchange in monetary terms yet nevertheless one that the artist was happy with. In his eyes he had not been exploited.

A cash economy is unavoidable. The San now need cash to feed themselves and so need to understand it, but how they choose to use it is something else. The imposition of one particular view on how the cash system should be used is an imposition that affects other areas of their lives. For instance, by controlling the artists' income, the KDT workers are also preventing and destroying ideas of equality and wealth distribution that the San have always held. Instead they are almost promoting a culture of individual wealth, which is ironic considering the missionary/Christian roots of the project. Money will eventually lead to changes in how the San's society is run, however, the direction in which they chose to take it should not be dictated by the KDT. Here, the great dilemma for the KDT is that on the one hand they offer a genuine support system for a people whose way of life has been destroyed and who are struggling to adjust to new existence by offering shelter, food and protection; while on the other hand, the over-protective and unrealistic maintenance of an 'influence free zone' around the art and artists, and the KDT's total control on how their future society should be run through the present control of their money, is paternalistic and essentially unsustainable.

A case hit the newspapers in Britain on the 21st June 1998 which illustrates the situation at Kuru: it was reported that British Airways had bought a painting from a Kuru artist. Cg'ose Ntcox'o had sold her painting *Hyenas and trees* to BA for 12000 pula (£1907). She bought seven cows with the money, built a shack in the bush and gave the rest of the money away. However, once she discovered what her work was to be reproduced onto the sides of BA airplanes she felt cheated and believed that she should have been given more money.

I may be illiterate but I am not stupid. I know what my artwork is worth.... I just saw this person who said he was from London. He gave me a piece of paper and told me to make a cross. (Cg'ose Ntcox'o in the Guardian newspaper 21/6/1998)

The Botswana newspaper the Botswana Guardian agreed with her and took up her case: "There is no doubt she has been robbed," says the journalist Benison Makele. David Hillman from a London based design group Pentagram explained that it was not unusual for unknown artists to be ripped off: "I'm not surprised; the terrible thing about this business is it is a lot to do with who you are."

On the other hand BA and the KDT believe she was well treated. A BA spokesman from South Africa said: "She got a fair deal" and stated that they had no intention of giving her any more money. The KDT, who also received £1900 for the work, said: "The artist is illiterate. She is happy. She has no need for more money." (Rein Dekker 1998). He explained that the artists live in a pre-cash society and had no understanding of the value of money, a statement that shows little knowledge of the San's contemporary way of life, which includes buying food and clothes from shops using cash.

This episode highlights the lack of progress that has happened at Kuru around the issues involved in introducing a cash economy since 1996 and my interview with Willemien Le Roux. The problems of introducing cash to the San, through the set up of KDT, had still not been resolved. Firstly, the artists continued to spend all their earnings in one go or give the money away to relatives, as is their custom; and the KDT had not managed to instil, as they had hoped, a need to accumulate personal wealth. Secondly, as the KDT were still involved in the management of the artists, they also profited from this deal which obviously put them in a compromised position. Finally, any attempt to 'protect' the artists had failed if a large corporation such as British Airways could come into D'Kar and get an artist to sign away copyright to a piece of her work without her fully understanding what she was doing. Dekker's statement that the artist is illiterate and has no need for money is insulting as well as misinformed.

Whilst I believe that the apparent overprotection of the San in general and the Kuru artists in particular is a stifling and untenable situation it has to be acknowledged that, due to increased commercialisation in Botswana, (which has led to San land being taken from them and used for cattle and cultivation), the forced integration of the San into Batswana life is all but inevitable. Whatever the attempts are to manage this transition it will remain a complex and difficult issue.

Art as anthropology

When the San artists from Kuru were taken to see the rock art at Tsolido Hill in 1989 they felt it was very important for them. For the first time they got an insight into their distant history and a broader picture of their people. As an isolated nomadic group they had been unaware of how many different hunter-gatherer groups there were and their discovery of other living groups of San in southern Africa made them realise that they were part of a large strong force of people, which gave them a new self-confidence. As mentioned there are a number of organisations and San support groups in southern Africa, which link the KDT with other self-support groups; through these the artists have become aware of the emergence of a new collective of San identities within the nation state and of other institutional projects (one of which organised a trip for the artists to see the rock paintings in Namibia in June 1996 with Tamar Mason).

This trip sparked a long-running and complicated debate about the links between the rock art and the Kuru artists' and one that has continued to the present day. Willemien Le Roux states that they never intended for the artists' work to be linked to the cave paintings yet:

Although the artists had not seen any rock art before they started to paint the similarities cannot be denied. (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996, London.)

It is a debate fuelled by the dictates of the artists' market, which I will look at next yet also it has been argued by romantic Afrocentric philosophers that:

Oppression and exploitation may dislocate and disorient but they can never destroy the archaic, ancient, deep structure of the myth and symbols of aesthetic reality... (Asante, 1987:59)

His argument would be that the San artists could tune into a 'San aesthetic' even though they were at the time totally unaware of the history of art in their culture. This is an improbable proposition acceptance of which is largely a matter of faith. However, the San have always had some form of visual art, such as the patterns made from beads used for decorating clothing and

utensils and painting and etching on ostrich eggshells. Willemien Le Roux, (despite) not wanting to detract from the marketing potential of the 'inherent aesthetic', acknowledges this and believes that their art and aesthetic never really died. "For them it was a very easy thing to start painting." (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1996, London.) As mentioned before, when she was choosing the artists, she picked people she had noticed whom she thought showed an artistic nature in the way they dressed, believing that not everyone has the potential to be an artist. She had seen Ainee's crochet work, Qwaa's saddle making and decoration skills and had invited them to join the art project. These skills demonstrate the capacity to make something to please the eye, but whether this has been passed down through the generations, through the differing mediums of beadwork, leatherwork and etching on ostrich eggshells, is impossible to tell.

Marketing

Sales of the artwork are vital to the running of the Kuru project. A certain amount of the work is sold from their workshop in Ghanzi as people do travel there specifically to visit the project and buy the work. However, its location, on the far edge of the Kalahari, means that they cannot count on passing trade. Thus, the KDT secured for the artists exhibitions in Botswana and abroad; these have been very successful and have been essential in terms of selling the work. I look more closely at how the work is exhibited in the chapter on galleries but here I want to briefly point out the issues surrounding the marketing of the Kuru work. The marketing of the work in all of these exhibitions reflects the interest around the San as a people. As for the Australian aboriginal work exhibited in the late eighties, the art of the San is seen as a 'discovery'. Buyers, collectors and curators like to have something new and unique, they also like to have something that represents a history and which is seen as 'authentic'. The way the work has been exhibited reflects these particular interests. Firstly, the link between the Kuru artists and the rock art is one that is hard to resist both for curators wanting to inspire their audience and for marketing boards wishing to increase sales. To suggest that these artists are continuing where their ancestors left off gives history and depth to the contemporary work. This is reflected in the 1993 exhibition in Rotterdam at the Museum Voor Volkenkunde *Africa in the picture*, where they had on display original pieces of rock art alongside the work of the Kuru artists. The comparisons were interesting: similarities could be seen such as in the subject matter of animals and plants and in the use of line. However, there was no serious research or information to back up this link. Without looking at the development of the people or their

visual arts between the time of the rock art and the present day the curators were indulging the popular notion that there could be an inherent aesthetic of the San stretching across many thousands of years. This was promoted again in 1993 at the *Botswana Live!* exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute in London (more on this in chapter 6) where some of the Kuru work was selected for the group show. In the catalogue the curators Alec Campbell and Elizabeth Gron state:

The descendants of these early artists no longer paint on rocks, nor have they done so for many generations. Now some paint on paper and canvas using water and oil colours instead of haemalite. Their paintings at Kuru Art Centre are different, yet they exude the same mystery as those of their forefathers and are just as exciting as anything remaining on the rocks today. (Campbell and Gron, 1993)

Again in 1994 there was an exhibition at the Barbican concourse gallery. The press release, written by Rebecca Hossack read:

African art is enjoying a revival of interest and the art of the Bushmen, like that of the Australian aboriginal, has its origins deep in pre history. Likewise it has received fresh impetus in recent years. The motifs of the Bushmen's paintings and linocuts are borrowed from the cave paintings of their ancestors but are reborn with a new vitality and wonder. With its combination of ancient power and unselfconscious immediacy, the Bushmen's work is one of the most exciting developments in contemporary art. (Rebecca Hossack, press release, 1994)

Rebecca Hossack, a contemporary gallery owner in London, promoted the Kuru art as she did the Aboriginal art, through an emphasis on the 'Bushman' the 'primitive' and the 'exotic'. As a result work sold well and prices steadily increased in line with the popularity of the work. The artists, both Aboriginal and Kuru, pleased with their income did not question how they were being portrayed.

Secondly, that there is a difference between the subject matter of the work produced by women and by men, although is not borne out by evidence, is something that is stated repeatedly by both project workers and promoters. This stereotyping of the work states that it is the women who paint the veld plants and food they would have gathered and men paint the animals they used to hunt. Looking at the work now, this is clearly not the case even if it was at one stage. All of the women have at some time painted animals and people and the men do paint plants; as the work becomes more geometrical, patterned and abstract it is difficult even to make that distinction. It is only because of the attempt to market the link between the contemporary artists and their hunter-gatherer ancestors that this distinction is made, and the artists and the project workers seem to promote these ideas in order to satisfy the interests of visitors to Kuru who wish to buy something and the national and international markets. In

order to increase sales, curators promote both of these ideas even though they are not yet backed up by any serious research.

Summary of the Kuru project

The precarious situation of the San people in Botswana, their need to find a place for themselves between the destruction of their old way of life and the encroaching modernisation, is echoed in the Kuru art project. A fanciful link with the painters of rock art is promoted, and, as with other projects discussed in this chapter, the idea of the artist as self taught, untutored is promoted as a means of encouraging sales. However, while the centre and the artists are dependant upon sales, there is the irony that the artists themselves have yet to learn about money.

Conclusion to Chapter 2

All of the above projects have been inspired, initiated and managed by expatriates, their aims being to help local people earn an income for themselves by selling the work whilst at the same time developing a self confidence and an identity through using art. Their intentions have been to start the projects with minimum influence and then to withdraw, leaving the artists to manage the running of the project and development of their own work. The success of the withdrawal has been mixed: Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng being the most self-sufficient after Tamar Mason left whereas Kuru is still at the stage of being completely managed. Oodi is a good example over the longest period of time, nearly thirty years, of success of an idea and product and yet failure in the aims of self-sufficiency, self-confidence and independence for the workers. However, it is clear that when the influence of the initiators of the projects is acknowledged, the more secure the artists have been in their own ability. Conversely, the more the artists are protected from the outside world, the more their art stagnates into mere repetition of stock themes. The lack of constructive teaching of the history of art, whether within or beyond Botswana leaves the artists working in a void, unable to link their work to anything they are familiar with. The women of Botswana have a rich heritage of involvement in the visual arts but there has been no attempt to develop their usefulness as a resource by any of the projects. The women at Oodi would surely have benefited from being encouraged to draw upon their previous practices of house decoration and basket weaving. This is where Kuru has been successful to some extent; the artists do at least know something of their art

history and their work also reflects their arts such as beadwork and images on ostrich eggshells.

Kuru shows how, as the artists get to understand their own work and their own art history, they need to fit themselves into the larger context of arts and artists both in Botswana and internationally. To see works from other cultures allows for stimulation and exchange of ideas, which leads to a developing body of work. To protect artists from this influence holds them in an unreal and eventually unsustainable situation.

Modernisation and commercialism means that, the ways of life of the people of Botswana have been forced to change and, as in the case of the San, drastically. The marketing of the work by expatriates reflects the interest of the Europeans in 'disappearing cultures' in such a way that the fear of losing the market they have, combined with a embargo on external influence and lack of context or history of art can lock the artists and their art into one mode of working.

The importance of the projects to the artists cannot be denied, without them many would never had discovered the enjoyment of painting or weaving nor would we have had the opportunity to see this original work. However, now, several years after their establishment, it is time for them to have the courage to move along allowing the artists the knowledge they need and the freedom to develop their work.

Chapter 3

Women painters in Botswana.

Introduction

Following on from looking at developments for women in art projects, I turn my attention to individual women artists. Despite the history of women's involvement in the visual arts throughout the history of Botswana, there are currently very few women painters or sculptors in the 'Fine Art'⁶² sense. Indeed Fine Art is a relatively new phenomenon in Botswana. All but a handful of the NMMAG's collection of paintings are by expatriates who were living in the country before Independence in 1966 and whose work now constitutes the museum's history of Fine Art in Botswana. The paintings are typically colonial: landscapes, wild life and model villages seen from a distance. As such they depict very much an outsiders' view of the country. In the period from 1972, when the NMMAG opened, until the emergence of Botswana artists in the 1980's, this collection was the only reference people had to this kind of art. The small group of currently practicing artists living in Botswana, including the women discussed here, are at the beginning of the history of Fine Art in independent Botswana.

In year 2000 there were only nine women artists in Botswana of which five were successful in earning a degree of income from their work; I am able therefore to cover all of them in this chapter. I give biographical details and description of the work of the five most prominent and experienced artists: Neo Matome, Dada, Monica Mosarwa, Veryan Edwards and Ann Gollifer. I compare how they see themselves and are seen within the art scene in Botswana and make a brief mention of other women who, more recently, have become involved in the arts: Sara Glendinning, Doreen Gomang, Lorraine Molefe and Neo Modisi.

The minimal development of art education in Botswana, as explored in the following chapter, has meant that any children who enjoyed art at school will have little chance to continue to practice art later in life. The lack of role models, in people who are artists, whether they make a living from it or not, means that being an artist is not seen as a viable option. Of the few who do choose to continue their art practice, only 20% are women.

Each of the five women artists practicing today in Botswana with a degree of success has a unique history: Neo Matome, Botswana, art education in the UK; Veryan Edwards, born in Hong Kong, art education in South Africa; Monica Mosarwa, Botswana, educated in Botswana, no further art education; Ann Gollifer, a British citizen born in Guyana, art

education Scotland; Dada, San, living in the Kalahari and working at Kuru, no formal art education. The two expatriate artists have lived the majority of their lives in Botswana and all of the artists are major influences on the small art scene of the country. Three ethnicities are represented in this group, white European, Motswana and San; and although the artists regard themselves as equals, many Motswana will know the work of Ann Gollifer, an expatriate, (as some of her work is printed as greeting cards sold in many shops around the country) but not that of Neo Matome.

Neo Matome

Personal history and education

Neo Matome's situation is currently unique as the only Batswanan woman who paints as full time as possible whilst earning a living within art related jobs (Figure 3.1). She has been described as "one of Botswana's best known modern artists" (Oguibe, 1993).

Born in Johannesburg, at a young age she moved to Botswana with her family. She completed 'O' and 'A' level examinations at school and applied for a scholarship to study abroad. At first she wanted to study psychology, but the fact that she would have to do one year's voluntary work in Zambia put her off. The following year she applied for a scholarship to study Graphic design at Coventry Polytechnic, which she was granted. So, from 1986-1989 she moved to the UK where Neo Matome received her formal introduction to, and education in, the arts. It was because of the lack of art colleges in the southern African region that she was forced to travel abroad for her art education. Neo Matome thus formulated her ideas on art as an expatriate in the UK.

Her choice to study abroad was encouraged by her mother, and her main problem then was the difficulty in choosing a course and a college with only the prospectus to go on. With no Fine Art education in Botswana's schools, and therefore no understanding of what it was, she chose a course that made sense to her:

At that point I was not switched onto or interested in Fine Art, I didn't understand the point whereas I understood the point of Graphics: communicating a specific point to an audience. (Matome, Bulawayo: 1995)

Neo Matome spent three years learning how to communicate, through graphics, to a western audience. She was new to the subject which is often geared towards selling through design and advertising; this was at first confusing to her:

At first I found it difficult, as my cultural perceptions were different from British cultural perceptions. So, as graphics was mass communication, sometimes I would come up with an idea that I thought was relevant but no one else saw it that way. But after three years I began to understand their point of view. (Matome, Bulawayo: 1995)

As she explains, firstly she had to learn the cultural tools in order to be able to participate in and communicate to, the British public. Images and concepts of what is appealing, of what one might aspire to, are not universal. They are specific to particular social and historical circumstances. Because of this, in order to work in a different place from where she was brought up, she had to learn about a different set of priorities and aspirations. This came about for Neo Matome, through living in the country and assimilating its customs.

Neo Matome's situation here, of a Batswanan abroad grappling with the western tools of communication, mirrors the situation in Botswana where foreign workers, setting up community projects such as the Oodi project (see chapter 2), imported a certain set of tools previously unknown to the workers.⁶³ At first she did not understand what the people of Coventry found appealing. Yet, over time, she assimilated the knowledge necessary to work within these values and expectations, just as the women at Oodi accessed the aesthetics of their foreign market.

The difference between Neo Matome and the Oodi workers was that she was the active agent; she instigated her move abroad and into further education. Her background was such that she was able to choose to go to university, having already accessed the education environment. She was in control of her learning process through having choices, whereas the women at Oodi were not actively looking to access the aesthetic values of the west. In their case, the Goweniuses arrived with their ready-made aims and planned to teach the necessary tools. As we found, what the Oodi women actually learned was a formulaic approach to colour combination and image making, and when the Goweniuses left the tapestries did not develop or change in any way. The formula that had been learnt was simply repeated. This suggests that the Goweniuses failed to teach them to be active agents within a new system of communication⁶⁴. By contrast, Neo Matome states that after three years of education in Britain she began to "understand their point of view", meaning that she could create to fit the formula necessary to communicate with her audience.

On her return to Botswana Neo Matome, with her new graphics skills, got a job at the National Museum and Art Gallery in Gaborone to help mount shows and design catalogues. It was here, she said, that she gained an introduction to the concept of Fine Art:

I started at the museum in August 1989 and stayed for three years. This is how I got to know more about Fine Art. I got to know what its objective was and what its value was. Also I got to know about the workshops, the first Thapong in 1989. I didn't actually participate but I went along to see what was happening. (Matome, Bulawayo: 1995)

Contact with the regular *Artist in Botswana*⁶⁵ shows, the selection of art exhibitions, and the movement of people organising the Thapong⁶⁶ workshops, helped formulate her ideas about Fine Art. Her main influences during this time were people who had a close connection with the museum: Stephen Williams⁶⁷, the then Director was a painter who had trained in the UK; Alec Campbell, the museum's former director and a prominent research worker at the museum; Philip Segola, an artist also educated in the UK and one of the regular art judges; Veryan Edwards (as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) an expatriate, a painter and the main organizer for Thapong. It is from these people that Neo Matome says she began to understand painting. When she states, "I got to know what its objective was and what its value was" she is referring to the objectives and values, held by a group of artists and curators all educated abroad, which she then adopted.

She began to paint (1989) in her own time and quickly developed a confidence in handling paint on canvas. In contrast to the market-led constraints of her previous graphics work, Neo Matome chose to develop her ideas using abstraction. She obviously enjoyed her new art. She began to participate in the Thapong workshops that previously she had just helped to organize, and her work rapidly grew in strength and confidence. Her first public exhibition was a Thapong show. From there she went on to exhibit annually in the Thapong shows as well as the *Artists in Botswana* exhibitions. In 1993 she was selected to take part in the *8 African Women Artists* international touring exhibition after which she participated in several international artists' workshops abroad including one in Canada in 1998.

Her work (Figures 3.1 –3.12)

She continues to be extremely committed to her work and will always make time to spend painting, believing that this is the only way to develop. However, it is only because she is in a privileged position that she is able to do that. She does not have a family to support and is able to get enough research and design work to keep her in a certain amount of comfort, paints and canvas; something that must be rare amongst independent artists in Botswana (i.e. artists who are not part of a co-op or group like the Kuru group).

In 1993 Neo Matome moved to Zimbabwe where she lived with Stephen Williams. She worked occasionally in the art gallery in Bulawayo⁶⁸ and for the rest of the time painted at

their home, in a garage, which she used as a studio. It is here that her own work and personal style developed.

Her work, though abstract⁶⁹, has figurative elements and is drawn from her surroundings and everyday life.

My paintings are abstract with an element of collage. They are influenced by social and political issues in my environment. My objective is to convey a message through the use of colour, form and symbols. My main aim is to try and show the transformations occurring in the South African environment. (Matome, 1994: Thapong catalogue)

Her canvases are large and she works by using layers of thin colours, at times transparent and at others opaque, blocking out the painting that went before. There is a sense of history in her paintings revealed by the layers of colour and an etching technique where she will scrape patterns into the thicker areas of paint using a variety of blunt knives or sticks. This is very reminiscent of the patterns and methods used in house decoration in particular the *lekgapho* where women will use their fingers to scrape patterns out of the mud or paint decorating their houses (Figures 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5). Neo Matome acknowledges this influence. At other times she will paint over large sections of her work, only leaving a few windows where we can see sections of the painting underneath giving a sense of movement and impermanence (Figures 3.3 and 3.11).

She describes the motivation behind her work in an interview with Veryan Edwards:

Different things have motivated me at different points of my life. As a child it was the sheer pleasure of being immersed in something that I enjoyed which gave me an indescribable sense of freedom. Later on, in my 20's, my focus was on personal issues and experimentation with media and texture. Now in my 30's I am more interested in exploring social themes and concepts such as issues of identity, beliefs and the environment. (Neo Matome interviewed by Veryan Edwards⁷⁰)

Following Stephen William's death in 1996 Neo Matome moved back to Botswana. She continued to paint from home and also worked at the University of Botswana in their Department of Graphics. Wanting to develop her own theoretical and practical knowledge she continuously tried for sponsorship and scholarships to study for an MA in Fine Art abroad. In 2002 she was finally granted a scholarship by the Kellogg Foundation to study for an MA. In July 2003 she began her MFA in Computer Graphics Design at the Rochester institute of technology in the USA (Rochester, New York). She was of course very happy to get the scholarship but was keen to point out that it had taken her six years to find and fund a place on a course due to the lack of resources in the whole of southern Africa for the arts.

Looking back on her own introduction to painting Neo Matome now feels that there needs to be greater input by Botswana into the development of their own art history and art theory.

Rather than only looking to the west for an analysis and history of painting, Botswana needs to write its own art history and place it in the context of art in Africa, and more attention needs to be given to the development of local and indigenous ways of working.

It is important here to analyse Neo Matome's attitude to the different arts in Botswana. Although she is not in a position of institutional power nevertheless, she has worked at the museum and art gallery, is on the Thapong committee and on the research board for the SADC⁷¹ art school. All of these institutions are at the forefront of the visual arts in Botswana and are where artists and patrons look to for direction and an understanding of what art is in Botswana. Particularly, it is through artists shown at the NMMAG that the public gains an understanding of their visual culture.

Despite Neo Matome voicing a support for the crafts in Botswana other comments point to a clear separation in her mind of the visual arts and to a hierarchy within the different art forms. She believes that Botswana does not have an identifiable culture unlike that of Nigeria, which is immediately identifiable:

There hasn't really been a strong cultural base in terms of the arts unlike in West Africa where it is entrenched, it is part of life, and there isn't that same sort of quality of culture. Wherever you go the Nigerians the Ghanaians have their traditional attire, which is immediately identifiable. But with Botswana this is lacking. Obviously there is culture but not to the same degree. When people talk about culture they tend to talk about things like traditional dancing; they don't even talk about painting. (Matome, Bulawayo: 1995)

Here, Neo Matome expresses a very narrow view of art/culture. On the one hand she acknowledges that the Nigerians' dress is part of their visual culture, yet she does not mention any of the various indigenous arts such as house decoration or basketry that have been practiced in Botswana, both in the past and present, and that are essentially unique and culturally defining. Her dismissive attitude to the traditional visual practices in Botswana is disturbing as these are the arts that form the art history that she believes needs to be written. If these arts were not to be considered then Botswana would have very little in the way of art history:

The fact that the women are responsible for the house, children and fields leaves little time for your creativity; probably the most creative they get is making pots, baskets or house decoration. They maybe sewing or crocheting, that's as far as they get. (Matome, Bulawayo: 1995)

Neo Matome does not see any artistic value or relevance in pottery, basketry or mural painting. She acknowledges the problems women have in being responsible for the home and children but does not give them credit for the work that they do actually choose to produce. It is a

contradiction that she sees the Nigerian cloth making and design as being part of a “strong cultural base” but does not see Botswana house decoration or basket making in the same light⁷². It is ironic that she should have absorbed the narrowing of the term of ‘art’ typical of so-called art worlds in Europe especially when, assessed on its own terms, African material expands these boundaries.

The label ‘craft’ given to women’s art practice in Botswana has led to their dismissal by people like Neo Matome and to a denial of their role in the history of the arts. Whatever label is attached to basketry, house decoration or pottery it is undeniably a very important part of the Botswana visual culture, which cannot be rejected as ‘women’s work for the home’ and as unimportant in the formulation of a Botswana art history and practice. The danger here is that, as in the west, important and relevant women’s work will be dismissed and women themselves will not be encouraged to give value to their art forms and visual aesthetics. A quote from Sylvia Plath illustrates this:

Once when I visited Buddy I found Mrs. Willard braiding a rug out of strips of wool from Mr. Willard's old suits. She'd spent a week on that rug, and I admired the tweedy browns and greens and blues patterning the braid, but after Mrs. Willard was through, instead of hanging the rug on the wall the way I would have done, she put it down in place of the kitchen mat, and in a few days it was soiled and dull and indistinguishable from any mat you could buy for under a dollar in the Five and Ten. (Plath, 1985:46)

Through learning about Fine Art from the west, even indirectly as Neo Matome has done via Graphics and the NMMAG, the ‘art/craft’ categories were taken for granted; and through her work at the NMMAG and within the Botswana art community, she continues to transfer these values to the artists, patrons and public that she works with. It is from this appropriation of categories that new values, ideas, theories and debates are introduced to an emerging and developing art movement. This relationship between western art traditions and emerging artists in Africa is not a negative one. Artists travelling to the west for art education can appropriate whatever art theories or practices they feel may be useful in their own work and development of their own art history. Foreign patrons are interested in the emergence of new styles of work and the development of painting and sculpture in Africa and support artists through funding, buying work or offering opportunities.⁷³ However, the use of terms such as ‘art’ and ‘craft’ needs to be examined and not simply appropriated, especially when they are used to define certain art forms in society, often labelling the crafts and their makers as having a lesser status.

Neo Matome works a lot with artists’ workshops such at Thapong and Motako (see chapter 5), and her view here is that artists need to be “continually experimenting” and should not just simply repeat a formula. (This view betrays a lack of art-historical knowledge as we have seen

artists such as Brancussi and Monet among many others who do use repetition in their work.) She sees this as a big problem with the artists at the Kuru and Oodi projects:

I have spoken to Thamae about it at the last workshop. He had started to paint a painting that someone had asked for similar to one he did last year. I told him that is not the way to do it, that he, as the artist, should dictate what he does. Producing the same thing over and over is not my idea of art, I feel it diminished it; you get stuck in a rut painting the same thing because it makes money. (Matome, Bulawayo: 1995)

Again this is very much a western notion: that art should be unique. Un-copied, the artwork keeps its value on the market, copied its value is reduced and is no longer appealing to the buyers. However, the relationship between replications and innovation within an art tradition is a subtle one⁷⁴. Certainly there is truth in the fact that a repeated formula will eventually frustrate the artists and deaden their work, as we have seen at the Oodi project where the women were simply repeating learnt formulas and not developing independent and individual ways of working. On the other hand artists should have the freedom to develop particular styles of working and to experiment with repetition and commercialism, as Andy Warhol⁷⁵ did in the 1960's.

Neo Matome spoke at length about the lack of an African and, more specifically, a Batswanan art history. This lack of a local history and theory of the arts, she believes, is the reason for the failure of the development of any kind of Fine Art culture so far.

There isn't a strong body of work that portrays the country. That is why I think it is important to have some theoretical knowledge of how things operate, how materials work, what affects you can achieve, why movements happened. So they have something to build on to support their work. I think that's what's lacking, people don't have a theoretical knowledge. (Matome, interview, 1995)

The contradiction here is between Neo Matome's voiced interest in the need for a local history and theory of art practices, and her lack of acknowledgement of the historical and contemporary indigenous arts of Botswana. She is in fact specifically talking about the manifestation of the development of Fine Art, as opposed to visual culture in general, and is in particular talking about her own position as a painter. The need for a theory to back up the concept of art may be felt more acutely by Neo Matome because of the lack of understanding the general public have about Fine Art, especially abstract painting. Baskets and pots, house decoration, music and dancing do not need to be justified by theory as, in the first instance they have a practical usage (water carrying, entertainment, celebration etc.) and secondly, they have 'always been there' and are therefore protected by the culture of local tradition. Abstract

painting is seen as 'western' and is not understood by the majority of the population, which is why she feels a need for some kind of intellectual justification in support of her work.

Critical knowledge and understanding of art needs to be developed by practicing artists and among the general public if things are to change. Neo Matome gives the example of her family who, at first, were not interested in her work but who are now becoming more appreciative; again this brings us back to the debate about access for the public to the dominant or elite culture. Through having a member of their family producing abstract paintings or, in other words, paintings that were not immediately identifiable, Neo Matome's family have taken time to look longer and with a more open mind at the work. They have been surrounded by it for some time and have thus become familiar with it and lost any previous fear of it; because of this awareness they are able to appreciate her work. This is shown through their support for her as a painter and in buying her work.

As in Britain, in Botswana there are the elite groups of practitioners, curators and buyers who have access to the understanding of abstract/modern art. Neo Matome considers whether it is possible to avoid this and how to achieve access to her work for the general public. She talks about two levels of domination, that of the west over Africa and of an educated elite over the general public.

For me the issue of our own art history is really important. We need to develop and write it from our own perspective⁷⁶. All the time the conferences on African art are in the west and the main speakers are from the west. Now things are changing...until now the speakers were always from the west and you end up having your past dictated to you as to how it was. (Matome, interview, 1995)

On a more practical level Neo Matome cites the Oodi project as an example of how this dominance hinders and prevents 'access to the necessary tools' for the development of a modern Botswana art. She points out quite clearly that in her opinion it is through the lack of training in their own culture's history and also in picture making, that the women have become stuck. The irony here being that the instigators of the Oodi project were well aware of the dominance of the west and by contrast, propounded socialist values in order to try to bring equality to the project. Yet, as we saw, despite this, the women never really gained access to the theories necessary to succeed on their own. On the other hand, Neo Matome who does acknowledge the importance of learning about Botswana visual history and art theory, has also denied that the arts that women have been involved in in the past are of importance, so we are unaware of the history of which arts she is referring to:

Good ventures like the Oodi weavers and Ithuteng have started up; they have a lot of potential but as they don't have the background knowledge of art that is their stumbling block. In the end you'll find

those things won't sell as they have been overdone⁷⁷ and they'll need new ideas but they won't know how to go about it, without training in painting or the arts. (Matome, interview, 1995)

She had sympathy with Nengwekhulu's statement at the Botswana conference on culture that women are "too oppressed socially and financially to be creative" (Nengwekhulu, 1987). However, she does point out that things are changing and that more women are gaining access to differing areas of society:

With more women going onto further education they are starting to develop their own identities and careers and making their own decisions, so things will change with time. (Matome, interview, 1995)

These statements demonstrate that Neo Matome has her own ideas about what culture is and how it should be accessed i.e. through training and education.

When people talk about culture they tend to talk about things like traditional dancing, they don't even talk about painting. They need to be educated in that sense. (Matome, interview, 1995).

Neo Matome's denial of the importance of the existing women's visual arts in Botswana, as well as being a product of western art education, is also a reaction in response to the hostility she has had to her own work. As we will see next, as a non-figurative artist, she has had to stand up for her work and argue that there is a place for African abstract work and that it is something an African woman can do. This is in direct contrast to the art that is 'expected' of African women, the applied crafts for the home, thus contributing to her antipathy towards these arts.

From my conversations with Neo Matome it seems that her hardest task has been to define a space for herself in southern African society and within the art world. She is currently very much alone as a Botswanan woman painting on canvas in a non-figurative mode. She was often accused of being overly influenced by Stephen Williams, a white abstract painter and her partner, until he died in 1996. This was a burden to her as she felt she had to constantly assert herself as an independent painter so as not to be seen as the black women being guided and dominated by the experienced white man. As it said in the *Botswana Live!* catalogue of 1993, when she was already established as a painter in Botswana, Neo Matome...

... holds a degree in graphic design from Coventry polytechnic, UK. She worked at the National Museum and Art Gallery as Assistant Curator of Art where Stephen Williams, former director of Mzilikazi Art and Craft centre, Zimbabwe, and recent curator of Art at the National Museum, Botswana influenced her work. She has participated in Thapong Artists Workshop. (*Botswana Live!* Catalogue)

Acknowledging influences is important; yet this entire biography says more about Stephen Williams than about Neo Matome.

She is also seen by other artists and art critics in Botswana as part of 'the Thapong group' who, as I explain in chapter 5, are thought by some (artists, patrons and art critics in Botswana) to be pushing artists into an abstract way of working. The criticism of African artists for using abstraction in their paintings comes from two directions. First there are those patrons who prefer figurative representation. Secondly, there are the purveyors of art for the tourist and expatriate markets, where non-figurative abstraction does not conform to the stereotypes of 'ethnic', 'primitive' or 'African' art. The Thapong workshop does have a majority of artists working in an abstract mode, and this only seems to reaffirm the critical opinion that it is a school run by expatriates that pushes a western way of working. No one minds Veryan Edwards or Stephen Williams painting abstract art yet when Neo Matome, Monica Mosarwa or any of the Kuru painters do then it is put down to expatriate influence and pressure. The artists are denied the use of their own judgments and their own perceptions of the need to experiment. Even when Neo Matome goes on to exhibit these works it is implied that she is simply falling in to a particular style. Olu Oguibe's short statement about her in the *8 African Women Artists* show deserves careful examination:

Is it possible for the Black artist in southern Africa to share the apoliticism of his or her white contemporary, to extrapolate on the innocence of colour? Or do we see unavoidably, something of the agitations and disjunctions of that region in each artist's work, no matter how much colour is laid on? Matome's works deserve to be admired for their impressive use of colour and application of pigment, even if these smack of a necromantic expressionist revivalism, and a group stylism, which strongly questions the role of neo-ethnographic philanthropists in the art of southern Africa... (Oguibe, 1993)

Here, Olu Oguibe implies that white artists in southern Africa are apolitical, and that Neo Matome is trying to follow that same path. In both instances this is clearly not the case. During the years of apartheid in the region it was impossible for any white artists to be apolitical, see Bill Ainslie, Penny Siopis, and others. Veryan Edwards is a good example of that in Botswana: an abstract artist whose position in South Africa became so unbearable that she had to leave and move to Botswana. "Agitations and disjunctions" can be seen in many of Veryan Edward's works of that time. Similarly Neo Matome is not trying to be apolitical. The titles of her work are direct clues to the politics behind many of her pieces. Certainly, Neo Matome has been influenced by artists at Thapong⁷⁸ and other international artists, some of whose work is abstract. This is something that she sees as normal and which she acknowledges. However, she is obviously frustrated by the categorisation that this seems to provide and the pressures felt by

external forces in the way that her work should develop:

I have a problem with the way the west sees African art and artists. They really stereotype that work and so if you work in an abstract way they say oh you are copying from the west, it is a western influence. I don't see why I can't use whatever I want, it's what you put into it which is most important, there is a feeling that because you are from Africa you should work in a figurative mode, why should I? ... They are looking for that quaint thing of African art; it is a marketable item like naive art... (Matome, interview, 1995)

Conclusion to Neo Matome

Caught between being seen as a forceful proponent of abstract art and an easily influenced Batswanan woman, Neo Matome continues to follow her own path, creating work that is distinctively related to the region she is working in and, to her own personal situation, and which responds to the questions and dilemmas facing African painters. Her reputation as the foremost Motswana painter is full of problems and contradictions. She is able nevertheless to maintain her strength of purpose in her art work and to continue to produce work that people find both challenging and enjoyable.

Dada –Coinx'ai Qgam

Personal history and education

Coinx'ai Qgam is Dada's full name. She is a member of the Kuru art project in the Kalahari, which is written about in detail in chapter 2. However, I also want to include Dada here as, amongst all the San women artists at Kuru, Dada is the longest standing and most productive as well as being the most internationally known. She has often travelled away from the project to paint, throughout Botswana, as well as abroad at artists' workshops. Her work is now often exhibited and she is now known as an artist internationally and independently from Kuru.

Born in 1934 in Ghanzi, a district of the Kalahari dessert in central Botswana, she is a San and was bought up in a time of rapid change for her people's way of life. Ghanzi is now comparatively, a very large town (5000 pop.), with a lot of through traffic, both in terms of farming and tourism. She attended primary school for just three months and later started to work as a child minder and domestic help.

Her grandmother, who did not like the name she was given at birth, which meant, "those who curse should think about it", gave her the name of Dada. Dada is simply the first words that children speak.

As a result of the nomadic life she once lived and of the many influences in the region that she now lives in (with British and German missionaries and Afrikaans and Batswana farmers), she is fluent in five languages, among them Afrikaans and four indigenous languages. For this reason she easily got the job as translator for the Kuru project in July 1990. Initially she was not interested in the artwork they were producing, but, when she became frustrated with trying to explain to the recruited artists what they were supposed to be doing, she began to do the work herself by way of explanation. She then became interested in the artwork and increasingly began painting and printmaking for herself.

Her first introduction to textiles was when she was a domestic help in Namibia where her employer taught her needlework and embroidery. Her first work at the Kuru project was what they call 'table cloths', plain cloths painted directly onto and hung without a frame. She exhibited her first cloth at the National Gallery in Gaborone in 1990 and it was bought for the permanent collection (Figures 3.13 -3.15).

Her work (Figures 3.13 – 3.25)

From her first painting on cloth in 1990 Dada's work has evolved, become more confident complex and individual. Her subject matter has always been based on the plant life around her with occasionally human figures, birds and insects included (Figure 3.16 – 3.25).

Patterning and a certain symmetry are important to her. She will pick up on the natural patterning of a plant or insect and use it as the basis for her painting. Either one plant will take up the whole canvas or its shape will be repeated over and over filling the canvas. All her canvases are colourful bringing to life the colours of the Kalahari, which would often go unseen or unnoticed by the traveller passing through the dessert, who would only see the colours of the bare sand and occasional scrub. Her paintings often show us the variety of plants that are important to the San way of life.

Other works are more complex and although they may be based on a plant form they are in fact narrative. She will explain the story behind a picture; often it is something happening, someone or an animal on a journey, finding a home. These stories are not always apparent on viewing the picture and the titles give nothing away. Dada obviously enjoys developing the story around the work as she paints. However, each time she relates the story to the viewer, the narrative can change. This freedom to develop stories is an inherent part of her culture that she passes on to the viewers of her work as we are left to imagine and develop our own stories around and through her work.

As soon as printmaking was introduced at Kuru (in 1998) Dada became involved. It suited her work very well and she has since used printmaking a lot. It allowed her work to become more detailed and descriptive. Several editions of one print could also mean more income as prints were always more marketable.

In 1991, Dada visited London with other members of the Kuru trust and I was able to interview her with the help of Willemien Le Roux (the Kuru project co-coordinator) as translator, about her influences. She explained that the art forms that are important to her, as they are to most San, are singing and dancing.

The dancing and music has been a part of my tradition for so many generations it is natural to me. It is not something I set out to do specifically. The painting and artwork is a recent discovery and I feel that it is with the help of God who helps me portray these images. I cannot draw a comparison between that and my music and dancing. (Dada, London, 1991)

She sees her music and dancing as inherent to her culture and quite distinct from painting which is an imported art form and one that was until recently, completely foreign to her, as was the other concept introduced at the Kuru project, Christianity⁷⁹. Yet, she believes that there is a link between the work happening at the Kuru project and the rock art she has seen.

I saw the rock paintings for the first time after our last exhibition, which was after three years of painting for me. I saw the rock art showed some animals as those we paint. I believe there must be a link because there are the same figures. I was very moved by the fact they were doing the same pictures as us. (Dada, London, 1991)

In the chapter on Kuru, I looked in detail at the aims, influences and contradictions around the project and its artists. Here, I consider her position within the arts in Botswana. She has participated in the Thapong international artists workshops for four years in a row. Willemien Le Roux explains that Dada has never been afraid of travelling and, as a very gregarious and independent member of the project, they were never concerned about her travelling to or participating in the workshops. Despite language barriers, through her personality and attitude to painting, Dada has had a large influence on the Thapong workshops, and Ann Gollifer in particular talks about Dada's influence on her work. She has participated in international workshops all over Africa. Dada was also one of the Kuru artists who travelled to London for the opening of the Rebecca Hossack San art show in 1991 (see chapter 6) and in the same year she was given an 'International Women Artists' award from America.

Conclusion to Dada

Dada's development from a translator to an internationally known artist is obviously the result of her proven affinity for painting, her confidence in developing her work and style, and her ability to transfer her imagination on to a two dimensional plane.

She has been at the centre of the Kuru group since it started and has influenced many younger artists; she has also given women a significant role model which has meant that as many women as men have joined the project.

Her work has clearly developed and changed since her first cloth painting in 1990 and, although she has developed a style and theme to her work, it nevertheless always seems fresh and has not stagnated. This is partly to do with the narrative ideas behind the work, but also to do with the changes in materials and methods that she has been keen to try and has developed in her own way: cloth painting, painting on canvas, acrylic paint and a variety of printmaking techniques.

Due to her confidence in travelling, and in meeting people that she cannot always communicate with verbally, she has become one of the most well known Kuru painters.

Monica Mosarwa

Personal history and education

Monica Mosarwa is a Motswana artist and is currently a school art teacher. She started drawing at home, where her mother encouraged her. From 1993 she took art at her school, Swaeneng Hill, for two years where she obtained her art O-Level. At the age of 18 her interest in art led her to visit a small local museum at Serowe where the artist Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse, an established Motswana artist who has participated in many shows at the NMMAG and *Botswana Live!*,⁸⁰ was working. She felt inspired by his work and his position as a young Motswana artist working in a museum. She saw that he was being recognised as a serious artist through his status there with, a studio space and regular exhibitions. (Mosarwa, Gaborone: 1995) He provided her with the role model that she needed and encouraged her to take her own work seriously. She continues to mention Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse, whose work is generally figurative, as an influence throughout my interview with her.

She decided that she wanted to be an artist and art teacher. Her parents, a nurse and an electrician were disappointed, having hoped that she would choose a more lucrative profession such as law. She took her art exam at school with figure drawing and collage and was the only girl at school taking art as a subject. However, she had an encouraging female expatriate teacher, Elena Springer, who encouraged her by showing her her own work and books on other artists. Although Monica Mosarwa remembers many images of art from the west, especially Van Gogh (an obvious favourite in Botswana schools), Elena Springer also showed her pupils works from South Africa and Zimbabwe, which began to give her a broader view of the arts.

She then applied to Molepolole teacher training school where she studied from 1995-1996, gaining her Diploma in Secondary Education. After which she was to be dispatched to any school in the area, which needed an art teacher. She hoped to teach older children in secondary school.

She has participated in several *Artists in Botswana*⁸¹ shows at the NMMAG, and other exhibitions, which include: *Three Batswana Artists*, at the Molepolole museum⁸² in 1994, and a one-person exhibition, again at Molepolole museum later in 1994. Often feeling isolated she is always keen to meet other artists and to make connections with anything that might help her in her work, in particular, following her experiences at Thapong, she is keen to participate in other International Workshops.

Her work (Figures 3.26 – 3.35)

Her own work throughout her time at teacher training college was mainly watercolour landscapes (figures 3.26 –3.31); however, as from 1994 she began to expand into more abstract work. This change of direction was very obvious: from small realistic watercolour landscapes she changed to large acrylic abstract work. As I will explain, this is a change that happened during her time at Thapong and is very significant for her work

In 1994 she participated in Tlali which is the junior, less experienced Botswana Artists' Workshop (see chapter 5) and from there, in November of the same year, she was invited to take part in Thapong. She was excited to be invited and was keen to get as much as possible out of the workshop. However, she was also nervous and worried that she would feel isolated as the only Motswana woman at the workshop. She consequently discovered over the following years that, unless Neo Matome was at the workshops, she would be the only female representative of her country surrounded by expatriates, guest artists from abroad and Motswana men.

It was during her time there that she said she was encouraged to try abstract art. In the chapter on Thapong, I go into detail about the complaints made about the emphasis on abstract art; here I just want to look at Monica Mosarwa's experience. Apart from being one of only two Motswana women, the other thing that made her feel out of place was the fact that she was doing landscape work. During the group discussions, when the artists walk around to look at and talk about each other's work, fellow artists encouraged her to use her time at the workshop to explore her work and to try to use paint in a different way (Figures 3.32 and 3.33). Looking around her, she saw people working in an abstract way and so, without resource to any theoretical or historical background to abstraction, she began to experiment. It was a concept that was totally alien to her but which she believed, and was told, would stretch her. She noticed that most other figurative artists also tried working in an abstract and non-figurative way.

The encouragement that she felt for working in an abstract way was found during the artists' tours. Where previously she had had very few comments on her landscape work, now there was a lot of constructive criticism and debate about her new developing work. She enjoyed the experience and has ever since continued to develop her new way of working alongside her landscapes (Figures 3.34 and 3.35). She does not see the emphasis on abstraction at Thapong as a problem as she feels that she has benefited greatly from being pushed to experiment and explore new formats. It is worth pointing out here that, in South Africa where 'art' was not for black people, the ability to experiment (Koloane via Ainslie⁸³) was both liberating and an act of resistance. Certainly being able financially, time-wise and space-wise to experiment with their work would be a liberating feeling for all artists at workshops.

Monica Mosarwa's Fine Art education has very much been based on ideas attained from looking at western art history. However, she does also have indigenous Motswana skills that she has learnt from her mother and grandmother and which she continues to practice: house decoration (though infrequently and for special occasions only) and dancing. She acknowledges that these, in particular her dancing, influence her art work. Because of her familiarity with other art forms she believes her current Fine Art work is similar in many ways to indigenous art forms and in particular basket makers: "in the way I use colour and arrange my things, it is creative". (Mosarwa, Gaborone: 1995) As someone who does practice several art forms, she can see the cross over and influences, she understands, through her personal contacts and practice of differing art forms, their relevance to each other. Unlike Neo Matome, she sees the two creative processes as similar and of equal in importance and believes that the

annual *Artists in Botswana* show should show both arts and crafts⁸⁴. Not only because she does not see such a big distinction between the work but also because:

People in Botswana find it difficult to see anything in painting whereas they are interested in crafts more. Art and craft should be mixed together; people would come to see baskets and may start to appreciate painting. (Mosarwa, Gaborone: 1995)

She recognises that the average Motswana is very interested in baskets (the annual basket competition draws the highest attendance at the museum), this is a National art form and they will travel to see an exhibition. Putting other contemporary art forms in the same show will introduce that art to people who would not otherwise experience it. She is talking about familiarising people with something new and which they may currently see as 'foreign'. This is a refreshing and significant statement, which truly recognises the importance of the indigenous art forms, which are her inheritance, alongside contemporary developments; as opposed to bringing in boundaries, and categories from elsewhere which may not be relevant in Botswana.

She also believes that the *Artists in Botswana* show should not be a selected show⁸⁵, but that anyone who enters should be shown, in that way everyone is encouraged. She realises that there will be a huge discrepancy between the poor and very good work but that the prizes awarded will credit those whose work stands out. More will be said on this show later on in chapter 6, however, it is worth pointing out that a large proportion of the work displayed is expatriate work; Monica Mosarwa obviously knows this and thinks that it is time to redress the balance and that non-selection would be a way of doing this.

She does not understand her female friends, students at Molepolole teaching college, who have been invited to Thapong but who will not go. She says that, despite winning prizes at the *Artists in Botswana* show and being invited to workshops, they still believe that art is for men and that they would be wasting their time with it.

She has sold work and has a few Motswana buyers some of whom ask her to do commissions, often giving her specific instructions as to what they want in the painting and in what style. She is happy to do these, as she needs all the income she can get in order to buy materials. She has also sold to expatriates from her exhibitions at the NMMAG and sold one of her first abstract paintings *Struggle* to Robert Loder, one of the founders of the International Artists Workshops. She realises that in general Botswana do not think that art is something worth spending money on:

Batswana will visit a show but will not buy because they do not appreciate what art is, whereas the English people do buy it. (Mosarwa, Gaborone: 1995)

Conclusion to Monica Mosarwa

She continues to work in both abstract and figurative ways. As a young artist she is keen to explore and push her work through exhibiting and participating in workshops whenever she can. However, realistically, she knows that she will have to teach in order to have an income to live on. She cites local artists as influences, most importantly Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse but also Velias Ndaba who is someone who combines figurative and abstract elements in his most recent work. She is obviously encouraged by the moderate success of such people and is only disappointed by the lack of women in her chosen career. However, in this she sees her role as someone who, in her turn, will be providing the role model for the next generation of women artists in Botswana.

Veryan Edwards

Personal history and education

Veryan Edwards was born in Hong Kong 1949 of British parents. She began her schooling in Hong Kong then, in 1964 she moved with her parents to South Africa. She always enjoyed drawing and painting although she states that her only art education was the “western art training” (Edwards, Gaborone: 1996) given at primary and secondary schools. She qualifies this statement later on when she explains that, despite living in Hong Kong and South Africa, she was only ever taught a western history of art and shown examples of art from the west. The teaching was very much based on the European tradition of landscape art⁸⁶.

She did not know what she wanted to do when she left school in South Africa and began to work in a bank. She never considered becoming an artist or even developing her art publicly, although she did continue to paint for her own pleasure. Veryan Edwards decided to go to Rhodes University, Grahamstown to study psychology and, as an extra subject, she chose art. However, when the art tutors saw her work they suggested that she could in fact study for the BA- level Diploma in art. This qualification gave her sufficient confidence as a painter and allowed her to believe that she could become a fulltime artist.

She moved to Johannesburg and enrolled on an MA Fine Art course, part-time over two years. In order to earn a living she decided to try to teach although, without experience, she found it difficult to get a job so she set up her own private classes in drawing, painting and pottery. She also worked at a resource centre in a Johannesburg suburb, which ran a wide range of arts classes for children living in the townships. Eventually, she was made manager of the centre but resigned a while later on political grounds. She began to teach in schools in Johannesburg but did not enjoy it, so she just continued with it long enough to finish her MA and then she left.

It was during the seventies and the height of apartheid in South Africa, and Veryan Edwards found that she had two ideas that she could not reconcile with her status as a teacher: firstly, she was a white teacher teaching black children in a suburb and secondly, what use is art⁸⁷ when violence is a daily occurrence in the lives of these children. The gulf imposed by apartheid between black and white South Africans meant that her position as a white teacher was problematic: when black people were struggling to gain control of their lives, learning from a white teacher seemed inappropriate. Instead, it was time for students to learn from the artists who had suffered and struggled under apartheid: Art was being promoted as a way in which people could reclaim the power of their own culture. However, at that time and with such a huge increase in violence, Veryan Edwards felt this was futile. She has since changed her mind, believing that art can, and has, made a difference to peoples' lives, and that the art that did eventually come out of South Africa proves this. Sue Williamson's book *Resistance art in South Africa*, 1989, shows the range of political art that was made by both black and white artists, from paintings and murals to peace parks and posters. *Images of Defiance* (Poster book collective 1991) shows the more direct use to which people put their printmaking training to. The art training was, in fact, not futile.

In 1980 her husband got a job in Botswana and so they both moved. However, there were no teaching opportunities in Botswana as art was not on any curriculum until 1983 (see chapter 4). She could have started her own private art classes again but decided instead to take the opportunity to make a go of being a full time artist. Although not rich, they were comfortable enough to allow her to paint full time, with the aim of eventually selling work to contribute to the household bills.

Her work (Figures 3.36 – 3.48)

Her art education was based on drawing from the landscape and this is very much what she still does. She travels frequently especially to the Okavango Delta in Botswana where she does on site sketches. She finds that images and ideas thought of there would, after a period of germination, appear much later when she is somewhere completely different. For instance images from Namibia appear in her work whilst she is in Cape Town, images from Cape Town in New York and images from New York in Botswana. Evidence of her widespread travel reveals her privileged position as someone who has the education and knowledge of how to apply for positions and opportunities abroad, as well as being able to occasionally fund such trips herself.

The works, however, are not about landscapes. The landscape is the vehicle that she uses to express her current ideas influenced by the experience of the place, the people she is with, the discussions and ideas that are around and what she might be reading at the time. A statement from an exhibition of her work held in London in September 1996 says:

Metaphysical concerns and personal experiences form the basis for ideas, which are transformed into drawings/sketches in a search for a visual metaphor.⁸⁸ These form the structure and the intellectual aspect of the work. The process of painting with its formal concerns and necessities, together with the resonance of colour, works to release the intuition and the unconscious aspect. (Edwards, 1996)

She will often have a working title for the painting but is careful not to be too dogmatic about it. She believes that if you start with a set idea for a piece of work or with the aim of trying to get a message across it is too rigid and can kill the work. She prefers to allow a dialogue between herself and the work in order to allow the painting to develop a life of its own. This is important as it allows for “something extra to happen...it can be a surprise and it is that that keeps the work alive”. (Edwards, London: 1996)

She considers that the final title chosen for the piece of work is important at the moment of viewing for the audience, but also that the work should be able to speak for itself, that the images, colours and movements will mean something to the viewer.

She sees her work as an object of contemplation, to be with for some time and that, despite the title it is open ended. The viewer will come to the painting with their own ideas and experiences and will impose these onto the work. She finds this exciting, as the work is new every time it is looked at. The artist is, at that point, excluded from the piece all together and the work becomes a dialogue between the viewer and the canvas. She hopes that when

someone buys the work, the changing state of the viewer means that they would find something new in the work every time they look at it.

My aim is to go beyond the self. The final paintings are open ended in that the viewer brings to the work his or her own intuition, state of mind and concerns. His or her interpretation completes the process...that is my dream! (Edwards, 1996)

Her religion, Buddhism, is very important to her. The small number of Buddhists in Africa means that she practices essentially by herself, which is something that does appeal to her. A lot of the time she enjoys reading about spirituality, by which she means “a life force” (Edwards, London, 1996) and not a religious doctrine. She hopes to share this through her work, not just to the buyers but also to the exhibition viewers.

The majority of Veryan Edwards’ canvases are over one metre square. However, she has chosen to work smaller at times as the work is easier to sell, both because of price and space available to the buyer. She states that such considerations are a limitation on her work, yet believes that boundaries can also act as a framework for artists and are often more liberating than restrictive:

With smaller paintings, I can splash out on them as someone might conceivably buy one! (Edwards, Gaborone: 1996)

A limitation that is restrictive is one of storage. She has several canvases with which she has experimented by adding more canvas and sewing or sticking on other cloth over which she paints. She would like to expand this idea and develop it in such a way that her work becomes more three-dimensional, however, storage space restricts how many pieces she can keep.

She believes that her paintings are seen as bold and strong and yet considers that there is a certain “prettiness” about them and at one stage made a conscious decision to move away from the more decorative element in her work. She was concerned that maybe it had become a formula that was easy for her and needed to eliminate it in order to push her work forward. (A similar dilemma is discussed on the section in Ann Gollifer who became worried when things sold well, that they were too commercial/accessible and who made a conscious decision to change her style). From this it would seem that, for an artist, whether their work sells well or not, is not sufficient feedback. If the work does sell, well they are pleased for both the appreciation of the work and for the income. However, they then worry that their work is too ‘commercial’ that, because it is appealing to a large audience, it is work that does not challenge or warrant serious consideration. The lack of discussion and art criticism in Botswana means that artists have very little against which to judge, compare and contrast their

work. Unless they are lucky enough to have an exhibition their work is very isolated. This can obviously be the case around the world, however, in Europe, art communities are larger and artists do have a wide range of art publications, programmes discussion groups and exhibitions available to them. Without much external art criticism artists are forced to be more critical of their own work and rely much more on whether the work sells or not as a critical factor.

In 1989, Vervan Edwards started Thapong, the Botswana International Artists' Workshop that is linked to the other artists' workshops: Triangle, Shave etc... and which is written about in detail in the chapter 5. She knew the late Bill Ainslie, a prominent artist and art worker, from her time in South Africa; he had set up similar workshops and thought that one in Botswana would be a good idea. As Botswana is at the centre of the SADC region it could draw artists from the area without the political problems that were present in South Africa. She had to stop painting for a while in order to set up Thapong. Fundraising, as previously explained, took up the greatest amount of time, searching for local sponsors as well as finding a venue, equipment, transport and accommodation. However, it was her belief in the benefits for artists of such a project that made her so committed. The lack of any sort of art community in Botswana can, as mentioned earlier, lead to a feeling of isolation. Recognising this, Vervan Edwards was prepared to work towards an event which would bring artists together purely for reasons of their art, and which might begin to change the situation. Not a totally altruistic gesture as it was something that she herself very much needed. She anticipated that by bringing together artists from Botswana with such different work such as Ann Gollifer and Dada, alongside artists from outside the country that the workshop would inspire and allow for discussion and art criticism to develop. Also, by holding the workshop in Botswana, she hoped that it would highlight, internationally, the fact that there was a developing contemporary art group in the country. She wished that this recognition would then give confidence to the current artists and would also inspire younger artists to take their work seriously and to want to be part of the developing movement.

She has taken part in other workshops abroad and at home, such as the Emma Lake International Artists workshop in Canada and the Shave workshop in Somerset. She speaks of the events being greatly beneficial to herself and her work and that she realised that the workshops were not so much about the place itself but about the experience of being with different people. She arrived at Shave with her own ideas, which were then influenced by the experience as a whole.

The intensity of the workshop takes time to come out. When you're talking about the deeper areas of your psyche it takes a while to manifest itself. If changes happen at a workshop it is because they would have happened anyway. Transformation may occur but in many ways you have been working up to it. Stuff I did in New York was a transformation but one that I had been working towards for a while. Ideas thought of in New York were manifested at Shave. (Edwards, Gaborone: 1996)

She was surprised by people's reaction to her work. Where she thought she was using very 'English colours' they spoke of her work being very 'African'. This was the first time her work had been labelled as such and she questioned it. Her conclusion was that it was her use of colour, which gave people the idea of her work being African:

Because it is so sunny in Africa people wear more colourful clothes and so warm colours are seen to reflect a warm climate and visa versa with a cold climate. (Edwards, Gaborone: 1996)

Despite her work at Shave having been painted using mainly dark tones, they were warm and were therefore seen as 'African'. This labelling is problematic as it dictates expectations to artists and the viewers without any real foundation. However, here at the workshop it is the artists themselves who are applying the labels to each other, as Veryan Edwards does when she speaks of some of the artists at Shave: "the Black Africans come to the workshop and work within their own traditions"(Edwards, Gaborone: 1996) without qualifying what she means by the category: "their own traditions".

These stereotyping categories are used so frequently without much thought to what they really mean, however, the consequences are extensive. Terms such as those used here by the artists are then used in turn by viewers and patrons who then begin to categorise artists. Artists then find the labelling restrictive, as we have seen already both with Veryan Edwards and Neo Matome. When an artists' work is labelled as 'African', 'abstract' or 'naïve' the labelling makes the artist feel as though that is what is expected of them and, as a consequence, finds it difficult to break away from these expectations and to experiment. This is in fact well demonstrated with all the artists we have seen in projects especially Kuru and Oodi.

Veryan Edwards acknowledges the influence of her surroundings and that her work changed dramatically when she moved from South Africa to Botswana. Her work in Grahamstown School was very dark which, on reflection, she puts down to partly the dark studios, but also to the conditions in South Africa at the time (and the fact that "Rembrandt was my hero"). None of these factors applied in Botswana and she did a deliberate rethink of her work at that stage. The landscape was so different that it took her a long time to come to terms with it. She likes to cite her main painting influences and explains that her interest moved from Rembrandt to Matisse "and his use of flat colour", which she saw clearly reflected

the large areas of flat colour in the landscape of the Kalahari Desert that surrounded her after her move.

Veryan Edwards is obviously very much at home in Botswana, yet she does not appear to be fully integrated or attached to any particular community which would seem to be for two reasons: firstly, she is not active in the Gaborone expatriate art community which is made up of a long term Botswana residents as well as short stay contract workers. She believes that the group per se has done a lot to damage the arts in Botswana, in particular the stereotypical 'colonial' work that has been seen at the NMMAG and Gallery Ann; and, more recently, the wildlife or landscape watercolours: set scenes that are depicted repeatedly and of which some are little more than paint by numbers.

Secondly, her links with other artists seems to be solely on a professional basis, rather than one of an 'art scene' where artists might meet socially for an exchange of ideas. Although this is probably the case for all artists in Botswana, her position as instigator of Thapong and as an abstract artist has alienated her to a greater degree from some of the other artists. Her involvement with Thapong has been seen as domineering by some artists and she has been accused of controlling aspects of the workshop. This is a difficult accusation to assess as, obviously artists who are not chosen to participate in the workshop may take it personally, and those who would rather see Thapong being run in a different way will disagree with how Veryan Edwards works. But, as she is the one who puts in the time to fundraise and organise the workshop year after year, then it is run the way she believes is best⁸⁹. She has also been accused of only encouraging abstract work, a concept that is still relatively new and has yet to find its place in Botswana, which has alienated some figurative artists (this is explained in detail in the chapter on Thapong). She says that she would be happy for someone else to take over the running of Thapong but at the moment knows that if she does not organise it the workshop would not happen.

However, although Veryan Edwards does not mention this, both of these factors, the reluctance to be part of the social circuit of expatriates and being the Thapong organizer, indicate alienation and problems of rivalry. The fact that she was not chosen to be represented in the *Botswana Live!* exhibition in London in 1993 only highlights a rift between the curators and those involved with the exhibition, and herself. The curators were Alec Campbell, Elizabeth Gron and Ann Gollifer and, whilst other expatriate artists, who are nowhere near as prolific or prominent in Botswana, were represented, Veryan Edwards was left out. No one wished to comment on this, so the only conclusion left to be drawn is that, whereas two small abstract works by Neo Matome and Stephen Williams were chosen along with abstract work

by the Kuru artists, Veryan Edwards' work somehow did not fit into the image the curators wanted to give of art in Botswana.

She thinks that being female has meant she has less pride in her work and less confidence to push her work forward. She believes that women in general are less confident about their own feelings and thoughts and are not as sure about displaying them through their work. She acknowledges that to get exhibitions and to sell work artists have to promote themselves and that without a strong sense of self-belief it is a very difficult thing to do. She suggests that this may also be the case for the Oodi weavers. Their position, as Batswana women, means that it is twice as hard for them to develop enough confidence in themselves and their own work, in order to feel assertive enough, to promote themselves in a previously exclusively white and male domain.

One of the benefits of a small number of artists in the country is that it becomes easier to get exhibitions, although the venues are limited and, as Veryan Edwards states: "the highest you can go is the museum!" (Edwards, Gaborone: 1996) She has tried to get exhibitions abroad but has found it difficult.

...unless you have an ethnic ring to your name. If you are from D'Kar then you'll have more luck... My work is so western and not sufficiently different for them to feel interested. (Edwards, Gaborone: 1996)

She feels here that she is a victim of the categorising mentioned earlier. She is neither an artist living in the west, with access to contacts and galleries, nor is she 'African enough' or 'ethnic enough' to be of interest to galleries outside of Botswana and therefore she struggles to be exhibited abroad.

She states that she has never had a 'proper studio', a space that she could travel to, to paint away from the home. This highlights her eurocentric art training: a 'studio', a dedicated room for artists to work in, is a product of the western way of thinking about art practice. Throughout Africa, artists have practiced their work mainly outside and occasionally within the home or garage. Potters in Botswana sit on the floor in the courtyard, basket makers sit under a tree near their material source and painters will prop a canvas against the outside of their home, artists do not expect a purpose-built studio space.

Veryan Edwards explains that the lack of studio spaces is a particular problem in Botswana as, unlike Johannesburg or South Africa where there are old buildings that can be used temporarily as studios with cheap rent, Gaborone only has new buildings, which have high rents. She currently has a room at home that works well as her studio, although she is

currently, along with other artists, trying to get funding to set up an arts centre. This, they hope, will be a building for exhibitions and performance with studios attached in order to go some way to provide artists some space and privacy for their work⁹⁰.

Her new situation, as a full time artist, led to the problems of having to dictate to herself her times of work. She was no longer restricted to working around the hours of another job and for a while she found it difficult not to be angry with herself if she was late into the studio. She knows that she has a psychological need to paint every day, meaning that without it she feels adrift, anxious and irritable. She needs to paint for herself whether anyone sees the work or not. Yet she also acknowledges that her work is about communication and wanting to communicate with others and wonders whether her work should be made more with her audience in mind. Here, Veryan Edwards is deliberating, as many artists do, about how to justify her time and effort spent painting. The emphasis in society is that everyone should work to produce an income for themselves; therefore artists, particularly young artists or those whose work does not sell regularly, are continually having to justify to themselves, consciously or not, the concept of art for arts sake.

Conclusion to Veryan Edwards

Like Neo Matome, Veryan Edwards as an abstract artist and a woman painter in Botswana, feels that she has to be strong and stand up for her work. Although she says that she does not have a lot of confidence in her work, looking at her and her paintings one would certainly think that she has a lot of belief and pride in what she does. She is prolific and is constantly developing her painting methods and ideas, using all her opportunities such as travel, meeting other artists and exhibiting, to the full.

Ann Gollifer

Personal history and education

Ann Gollifer was born in the northwest district of Guyana in 1960. She was educated in the UK and graduated from History of Art at Edinburgh University in 1983. In 1985 she moved to Botswana where her parents were living. Although born to British parents in Guyana she is an established resident in Botswana and not a transient expatriate. Her commitment to her art, the exhibiting of it and its continued development means that, like Veryan Edwards, she is an important women artist in Botswana⁹¹.

Her first job in Botswana was at the National Museum and Art gallery where she was employed as a technical officer. This involved organising as well as hanging exhibitions, cataloguing and looking after the work. Although trained in history of art she was also a keen artist herself and continued to draw and paint throughout this time.

Her work on cataloguing the art collection was a major task, which had never been attempted before. Works, which had been either donated to, or purchased by the museum, had all been stacked in a shed with no regard to fragility of material or value either historical or monetary. As Ann Gollifer had been trained in art history and knew the value of a historical art collection, she was rightly horrified by the state of things. She began the work of sorting through the badly stored work trying to identify the artist and date. At the end of this process, she probably knew more about the evolution of the art scene in Botswana than anybody else.

At the same time she worked part time at the Phutadikobo museum in Mochudi as a display artist. In 1987 she was employed as art director for a commercial lithographic print workshop in Gaborone where she worked in the advertising department. Again, throughout this time she continued to do her own artwork, painting and designing.

Her work (Figures 3.49 – 3.65)

In 1990 she resigned from the printers in order to concentrate on her own work. She set up a business designing and printing cards, illustrating books and working on commissions, which have varied from card designs to murals. Her cards are watercolour illustrations of animals, plants and people and it is because of these cards that Ann Gollifer's work is very visible both to tourists and residents throughout Botswana (Figures 3.49 and 3.50). With her cards on sale in most shops, many people will recognise the work even if they do not know her name. She knows well the market that she is catering for: the expatriate or tourist, people who want to send something recognisable as African. She depicts Botswana houses with the traditional *lekgapho* design, baobab trees, African animals and birds with sunset backgrounds, clay pots etc. They are all painted in bright warm colours. They sell well and she brings out a new set every year. Her commissioned work is based on the popularity of these cards and includes work such as calendars for companies and posters.

She likes to think of her other work, the non-commercial paintings, as quite separate. She sees the cards and commissions as the work she needs to do for an income, and the paintings on canvas as her Fine Art work where she explores ideas for herself and it does not matter if it does not sell. This division in her work has caused her several problems. Firstly, she works on

both areas in the same studio and so has to be strict about her time. Secondly, she is concerned about work being 'too commercial'. At one stage she explained that her Fine Art work was selling so well that she was worried that it was too easy and accessible and so decided to change her style. This is a paradox: it indicates both that she does not have to worry too much about an income, otherwise she would be delighted to be selling well, also that she equates Fine Art (art that is to be hung in an art gallery as opposed to an image that is made into a postcard), as something that should not be immediately accessible, that it should somehow be more obscure, difficult and complex.

She has had many different styles and, looking through the work, one can see her working through ideas, frequently changing direction and searching for new ways to express herself. Until 1998 she had worked with acrylics and collage mainly on portraits and village-scapes (figures 3.51 –3.57). Her interest in this imagery then developed into abstraction: the people have disappeared and just the interest in the cloth and patterns remains, the houses have faded but the *lekgapho* (traditional wall decoration in Botswana), remains. The work concentrates on colour and pattern, repeated, broken up and written over (Figures 3.58 –3.65).

She has participated regularly in exhibitions at the National gallery. Alongside participating in group shows she had a two women exhibition at the gallery in 1997 and 1999 with a solo show in 2000.

Ann Gollifer is a great friend of Beth Terry's, a freelance craft worker who has worked throughout southern Africa with craftspeople 'upgrading' their work in order to maximise their sales (written about in chapter 1). During the mid eighties Beth Terry worked in Botswana with women making baskets, at the same time Ann Gollifer also became involved with this work, based at the museum in Gaborone and at Phutadikobo:

I am involved in exhibiting their work and helping to upgrade the quality of design in craft and work throughout Botswana. (Gollifer, CV: 1992)

The debate about upgrading local work is one that has been explored in the chapter on baskets. However, it is worth noting the problematic nature of this idea, as ideas about quality are partly subjective, and partly they come from local aesthetics as well as market demands. As in Oodi, when Joan Kloff talks about telling the women that they have the "colours all wrong", one wonders what 'quality' Ann Gollifer and Beth Terry are referring to and where their point of reference comes from in terms of what is good or bad work. Ann Gollifer does not discuss it, which implies that it is an issue that she has not taken on board and that the opinion of what 'quality' is is her own interpretation

Ann Gollifer supports the various workshops⁹² and courses that happen in Botswana. She has taken part in Thapong as well as other printmaking workshops organised under the same umbrella and has also taught at some of the women's and printmaking courses. She does, however, have criticisms of the way some of these are run. For example, the workshops are free to participants, which she disagrees with. She believes that people would respect and make more of a commitment to the workshops and classes if they have had to pay a fee, however, small an amount, to take part. This could certainly be true; however, it is also true that many who do currently take part in the various workshops would not if they had to pay. In Botswana art is still, very definitely, seen as a luxury and not a necessity for anyone; money spent on it could be frowned on by the family.

In addition, she is not fully supportive of Veryan Edwards' way of running Thapong and finds her too domineering. She believes that she has too much control, which she refuses to relinquish to other younger Batswana artists. Ann Gollifer also makes same accusation that we have heard before: that she pushes abstraction onto artists involved in her projects. Veryan Edwards of course denies this and, as explained earlier, and believes that if she did not do the work Thapong would not happen⁹³.

Ann Gollifer is very involved in all aspects of life in Botswana. She is fully integrated into the expatriate community as well as being involved with the Batswana artists. She makes a lot of effort to keep in touch with other artists and is keen to communicate and exchange ideas.

Ann Gollifer works hard at exhibiting her work; she exhibits regularly at the NMMAG and always takes part in the *Artists in Botswana* shows. She is always looking for new places to exhibit and would like to try exhibiting abroad.

Conclusion to Ann Gollifer

As a prominent and prolific artist in Botswana Ann Gollifer's work and ideas are widely influential: first locally, through her exhibitions of paintings and graphics work and her teaching at workshops. Secondly internationally, through her postcards bought and sent out by tourists and travellers.

Other artists

The following is a brief discussion of four women painters that I interviewed during my visit to Botswana: Sara Glendinning, Doreen Gomang, Lorraine Molefe, and Neo Modisi.

Sarah Glendinning

Sarah Glendinning has lived in Botswana since 1978. She has been painting for a few years and exhibits regularly at the *Artists in Botswana* exhibitions. She participated once in the Thapong workshop in 1994. Her biographic entry in the catalogue was:

No formal art training. Living in Botswana for 13 years. Housewife and mother. Exhibitions include: numerous annual *Artists in Botswana*, National Art Gallery. 'Having no formal art training; there is a tremendous amount to make up. A few water colour courses and drawing lessons from Zoran (artist from former Yugoslavia, staying in Botswana for a few months and teaching art for a living) have helped provide basis skills, books and art magazines provide information and inspiration. My work is illustrative and I am looking forward to exploring my creativity at Thapong'. (Glendinning, Gaborone: 1994)

I interviewed her in 1995 about her work, during which she categorised herself all the time in an almost dismissive way, as a "housewife artist" and as a beginner. She is self-taught through a number of 'how to paint books' but has also taken a number of watercolour courses run at Gallery Ann⁹⁴. In 1996 she was accepted onto a UNISA (university of South Africa) art correspondence course which, she hoped, was going to help stretch and develop her work as well as give her some art theory and history.

Her work is figurative: still *lives*, birds and landscapes. They are competent but tend to follow the 'how to paint' formula. The birds sell well and her husband encourages her to do these, although they are not in any way dependent on her selling her work as his income supports the house and family. She has a large room at home as a studio and, when the three children are at school, she has the time to work.

The 'housewife artist' title is a common one. Because of the number of expatriates living in Botswana, of which it is more common for the man to be at work and the woman to be at home, many of these women will fill their time painting. It is very rarely the reverse: I met no expatriate men who painted. Therefore, it is the one situation in the arts, where there are more women artists than men. The label 'housewife artist' will also denote the subject matter of the work, this tends to be still *lives* such as vases of flowers and landscapes, often British. This category is something that Ann Gollifer has tried to dissociate herself from but Sarah Glendinning says that she is not bothered by the title. The classification offers her a safety net, the boundaries and limitations of this type of work are known and little more is expected.

There are certain formulae that can be followed in order to achieve an 'acceptable painting' that will sell to other expatriates or, if appropriate (for example a Botswana landscape) to a tourist. Some of these 'housewife artists' will be competent and will exhibit at the NMMAG. However, due to the expatriates' advantage of money, transport and large homes, they will also have private exhibitions, either at their property or in a rented building. Although they do not set out to be such, these are quite exclusive affairs for the expatriate community as, the fact that you need transport to get to the venues and time in which to do so, makes them such. They are social events where the expatriate artists support each other and buy each other's work.

She was very proud to be invited to Thapong in 1994:

Being invited to Thapong is the pinnacle of artists' aspirations in Botswana...to be invited is like 'having made it! (Glendinning, Gaborone: 1996)

Despite being successful in her own way in the expatriate community, being asked to Thapong, as a National event meant a lot to her as it does to all artists in Botswana. Firstly, because it is an event that you are invited to (because of the small number of artists in Botswana, they are invited to take part by the Thapong committee unlike other International workshops where artists have to apply for places), so to be asked is to be noticed. Secondly, it is an unequalled opportunity to mix with other artists and be able to concentrate on your art for two weeks. Having lived in Botswana for over fifteen years she is thought of more as a resident than an expatriate, however, she is the only one of the group of women housewife/expatriate artists who has ever been invited to Thapong.

For these reasons, despite reservations about leaving her young children she went. She found it a tremendous challenge. She was very worried beforehand about being out of her depth but gradually settled in. Her work was challenged and criticised by other artists and she felt pressured to change and explore new ways of working which she did. However, since the workshop she has returned to the 'safe format' that she was used to and continues to enjoy her position as 'housewife artist'.

Doreen Gale Gomang (Figures 3.66 – 3.72)

When I travelled to Botswana in April 1995 Velias Ndaba introduced me to Doreen Gomang as someone who was interested in art, and who might be available to work as my interpreter. She was very keen to work with me during my field trip, seeing it as an opportunity to visit artists around the country, and was able to help me again on my second trip.

She took O- Level art at school and since she left she has continued painted at home, though space and materials are very limited. Although her parents were supportive of her work, they made it clear that she also needed to earn an income, she has had a number of jobs in hotels which never lasted for long and her only real ambition remains to be an artist.

In 1994 she contacted the museum where she met practicing artists, in particular Velias Ndaba and Steve Mogotsi. She became aware of art being taken seriously and that for some it could provide an income; it was here that she found her role models. At the museum Velias Ndaba noticed her enthusiasm and invited her to the Tlali workshops.⁹⁵ Tlali is a week long non-residential workshop for the less experienced artist. Doreen Gomang was keen to take part and explains that it was her first time to work alongside other artists and also her first opportunity to work fulltime, with commitment, on her paintings. Following on from Tlali, in 1996 she was invited to Thapong. She found the experience very daunting, but at the same time “challenging” (Gomang, Gaborone: 1996), as she was surrounded by international artists many of whom had been painting for years. As she had only previously met Velias Ndaba and Stephen Mogotsi (the then art director of the NMMAG), the workshops gave her the opportunity to meet other artists, to see how they worked and to hear discussions on all topics surrounding art in Africa and abroad.

Her work has a naïve realistic quality. She paints landscapes with either people or animals, often with a story or some sort of narrative that seems to be taking place (Figures 3.66 –3.68). During her time at Thapong she did attempt a couple of abstract pieces that, she believes, shows the level of freedom and experimentation encouraged at Thapong (Figures 3.69 –3.72). For others this may confirm the idea that artists at Thapong are pushed into abstraction. However, Doreen Gomang was very happy about the work she had produced and was pleased to have had the chance to try it out, even though she did not take her abstract work any further.

She continues to paint and draw, still exploring the different materials and methods of painting and trying to find her ‘voice’. She submits her work, wherever possible, for exhibition and remains active around the arts in Botswana.

Lorraine Molefe

Encouraged by her parents to draw, Lorraine Molefe took art at school and spent her time at home drawing. When she left school, not believing that she could pursue her art as a living, she went to work for the Ministry of Health. Whilst she was working she applied for, and was granted, a scholarship to study architecture at the Pratt University in New York, USA after

which she returned to Botswana and her former job. However, five years later she returned to the USA, this time to study art at the Virginia Commonwealth University. After this she once again she returned to the Ministry of Health in Botswana but, feeling frustrated by the restriction the job had on her art, she left with the idea of setting up her own company. She successfully did this in 1993 and now runs her own private graphic design company *Lolo Design*.

However, she has continued with her own Fine Art work throughout and has exhibited work at the NMMAG and in 1993 was included in the *Botswana Live!* exhibition. Although she lives in Gaborone, she is not involved with any of the other artists or any of the new developments for artists such as Thapong, preferring to concentrate on her commercial artwork and business. (Molefe, 1996)

Neo Modisi

Neo Modisi trained in America as an architect during the late eighties. On her return she worked in the housing department in Gaborone for a few years designing government housing, until 1996, when she moved on to work as an architect in Kenya. She was an enthusiastic interviewee who was keen to talk about her ideas on art and architecture gleaned from study abroad and practice at home in Botswana. Dedicated to her profession and the arts in general, she believes in the European idea that “architecture is the mother of all arts” (Modisi, Gaborone, 1995), that it is the ‘complete art form’ because it deals with shape, form, function, colour and space:

Architecture is the definition of space. (Modisi, Gaborone, 1995)

She believes that there is such a thing as a Batswanan architecture and stated that it is based on inter-familial relationships rather than what the building might look like. She maintains that her work, although

Stylistically not from a Batswanan tradition, it is what I would call modern, yet I think about space with the spatial planning of a Botswana home. Because I have been educated abroad does not mean that I get my ideas from abroad. (Modisi, Gaborone: 1995)

She is aware, however, through her education in America, of the different theories and concepts about architecture throughout the world. She is therefore, able to choose to use the appropriate ideas in the designs of the homes she works on in Botswana. As architecture and

social planning are relatively new to Botswana she has found that it is not a male dominated field and that she has not had any problems fitting in as a woman. However, her work in the housing department was restrictive in that it was about government housing and did not allow for personal expression. It is this that led to her leaving her job in 1996 and moving to Kenya to work for a private company.

She explained that, as an artist, she also finds working on commissions and private homes difficult, as she then has to follow what the customer wants; once again she feels constrained in her creativity. She sees this reflected to some extent in the visual arts in Botswana where the market for selling work is very limited and artists are tempted to paint what they know will sell. She also feels that many Botswana artists have to hold back in their work for fear of offending people. This, she believes, is because Botswana society is still much more based on kinship and community as opposed to the individualism that is pushed in the west.

She herself is an art patron, one of the very few private collectors in Botswana and probably the only Botswana woman. Her collection is small; however, she does call herself a collector and has, amongst others, several pieces by Neo Matome, Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse and the late Stephen Williams.

Conclusion to Chapter 3

There are a number of younger women who were very good art students but who are not serious about continuing their work beyond college. Monica Mosarwa spoke about her fellow female students at teacher training college and explained that she could not understand why they were not more enthusiastic about their art. In particular, there were two women whose work stood out in the 1995 *Artists in Botswana* exhibition: Mantho Baliki and Elizabeth Kgotlafela. They both exhibited metal sculptures of giant insects and both won prizes and sold their work (Figures 3.73 and 3.74). However, according to Monica Mosarwa they could not see the attraction of being an artist and said that it was really “something for men” (Moswarwa, Gaborone: 1995).

This perception of art ‘being for men’ is a recent phenomenon for, as explained earlier, the history of art in Botswana is one mainly of women. When Mantho Baliki and Elizabeth Kgotlafela speak of ‘art’ they are talking exclusively about art in galleries, art that is exhibited and looked at in designated spaces. For these younger women, the art that women practice in the villages, the pottery and house decoration, is seen as rural and related to backwardness and poverty and is something they do not want to associate with. From the examples given by

Monica Mosarwa, the only artists that the students are taught about at college, who make a living from their work and exhibit in galleries, are male and predominantly white. Thus the female students, being introduced to art forms that have a recent history in Botswana, do not see role models for themselves and therefore believe that art is not for them. The two Motswana women, Neo Matome and Monica Mosarwa who do exhibit and sell work are not enough to convince them otherwise.

Unlike in Europe during the seventies and eighties, when women artists formed groups to try to secure a place for themselves in the art scene and in art history, there are no women artists' groups or movements in Botswana, conscious or otherwise. Because of the very small number of women artists, they are all more divided by nationality, age and background than they are united by gender. The only obvious allegiances are the artists from the expatriate community on the one hand and the artists involved in Thapong on the other: the expatriate group being mainly women and the Thapong group being mainly Motswana men.

By comparison Namibia, as a result of the country's struggle for independence, does have a women's movement, which encourages all art forms and they have a bi-monthly magazine called *Sister Namibia*. It explains:

Through our writing we want to challenge structures, myths and stereotypes that are oppressive to women.⁹⁶

The members of the collective introduce themselves as "feminists and political and women's community activists" and that the aim of their work on the magazine is about "empowering women". Josephine Nathinghe states that:

Women should not allow that social customs, myths and attitudes cause barriers between them and the full realisation of their potential. (*Sister Namibia*)

The articles are mainly about legal and community issues, however, there is also always some art input: poetry, extracts from novels and articles about either traditional art forms that women are still developing today (house decoration and basketry), or reproductions of contemporary work by women. By comparison, in Botswana there is a monthly magazine called *Motswana Woman*, which is aimed much more at the woman in the home rather than the independent woman struggling with inequalities in her daily life⁹⁷ or interested in developing arts issues.

The difference between the two magazines highlights the fact that, in Namibia there has been a conscious women's movement: an active grouping of women that has grown out of a

perceived need. This is similar to the women's movements in Britain and America, which then led to the development of strong feminist/ women's art movements. In Botswana, there have been occasions where women's roles have been challenged, such as the Unity Dow case⁹⁸ and the speech made by Mr. Nengwekhulu⁹⁹ during the conference on Botswana culture, but the need for a grass roots level women's movement has not been felt. This is reflected in turn in the arts where women have not felt a need to be unified by their art or by their position as women in the arts. There are few opportunities for any artists and, for the fewer number of women artists, there is not the issue of competing against a male dominated field, but of simply surviving in the small art world that does exist.

I believe that these differences, which are reflected so well in the two magazines, stem from the two countries' very different political histories. Where Botswana did not have to fight for its independence from Britain, Namibia had a long battle for independence from South Africa. People were politicised during this time, especially women, who played a crucial role within the independence movement SWAPO. After independence, the gains made by women meant that expectations were higher for women's position in the home, at work and in society; women's arts and writing groups were a natural progression. Whereas, due to their society's history and development, women in Botswana have not, as yet, felt the need for a women's movement; therefore it is not surprising that a women's arts movement has not emerged.

The denial of the importance of the indigenous arts, that women have been involved in in Botswana for several centuries perhaps, millennia even, and the lack of any knowledge of or education around the history of women's art elsewhere, has caused women to feel that 'art' is not for them. The widespread dismissal or ignorance of the history of women's art in Botswana, together with the failure of artists like Neo Matome and Monica Mosarwa to find extensive public acceptance of their chosen careers, suggests that art in Botswana might benefit from a more vigorous women's movement (as in Namibia and South Africa). Whether this would ensure a more serious and wide-ranging appreciation of women's arts in Botswana remains to be seen.

Chapter 4

Art education.

Introduction

As demonstrated in the chapter on projects and workshops, the term 'art education' is in itself a problem.¹⁰⁰ Although it is a well used and generally unquestioned term in the west, the denial of any form of art education at the projects in Botswana proves that the terms art education, art teaching and art training, mean different things to different people and are often loaded with other connotations that people have subconsciously absorbed. For example, for individual artists in Botswana who have been educated abroad, 'art education' means accessing knowledge of international art movements, art history and theory, information which they would not have been able to get in Botswana. On the other hand, at the Kuru project, any form of art teaching was actively denied in order to engender an art that is thought to be 'authentic' and 'ethnic', a conscious result of the privileging of the 'auto-didact', the self-taught artist (visionary) promoted by the 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre*¹⁰¹ exhibition in Paris, and taken up especially by J.C. Pigozzi in *Africa Hoy* 1991. While Susan Vogel in the 1991 *Africa Explores* show also tended to privilege this work, she did provide ample coverage of the wider contexts of university-trained artists, mask carvers and so forth.

As the Kuru project showed, the idea was flawed because 'visionaries' are in fact mostly taught via an apprenticeship system and within the remit of commercial art and advertising. However, as we will see, most teaching entails a self-taught element, and the students who are in reality most free to make it up as they go along, as it were, are the students of art colleges, i.e. the tertiary-level institutions so berated by those around *Magiciens de la Terre* and Pigozzi. So, not only is there no real agreement as to what 'art education' is, there have been some profound prejudices expressed within the African art literature. The reality is that no art system exists without some kind of social basis for handing on working methods (and working ideas, or at any rate ideas about working methods and ideas). Here I look at the broad spectrum of 'art education', by which I mean the passing on of art knowledge, practice and theory, available in Botswana.

Indigenous arts

The history of the teaching of the indigenous visual arts in Botswana has always been based on an informal, parent-to-child basis. Botswana women learnt from their mothers how to decorate their homes or make baskets and they in turn would pass on the same skills to their daughters. It was expected and taken for granted that the daughters would thereby inherit these skills and, through helping and copying what their own mothers did, slight variances in methods and styles were kept within families and regions. Similarly, the San women handed down bead-making and shell-carving skills to their children just as the San men handed down the skills for the woodcarving of small statues and bows, and hunting skills. It was only in the early seventies and eighties that, as the people living in Botswana chose different lifestyles or, as in the San's case, were forced into different lifestyles, the skills used in creating these visual arts were no longer seen as important or as an integral part of life by the younger generation. As shown in my interviews in 1995 and 1996¹⁰², women no longer took an interest in what their mothers or grandmothers did in the village for reasons already discussed in chapter 1. These art forms had previously existed and survived through the expectation that women would take up these skills by watching their mothers. The subconscious nature of this kind of learning is shown by the fact that, when questioned, women very rarely said that they learnt designs from their mothers; the first thing they usually said was something like "it comes from my head" without acknowledging their mothers as their teachers. Yet these indigenous arts proved that an aesthetic had been handed down, whether consciously or not, by the women, by their habituation within a given visual culture.

This lack of acknowledgment of the history of the indigenous art teaching that has always happened in the villages, combined with the recent movement of women away from the villages and their rural way of life, has meant a falling off in the practice of all the art forms. This decline had largely gone unnoticed and had not caused concern until recently.

In 1991, Elizabeth Terry, a development worker in Botswana, was asked by CORDE (Cooperation for Research, Development and Education) to make a study into the need for more formal training for the development of indigenous arts (Terry, 1991). Their aim was to identify the needs of the applied arts sector and then to provide or initiate the training needed to give people jobs or an income from it. In other words, it was viewed that the way to promote

indigenous art practices and to save them from dying out was to ensure an income from the work for the producers. Women's motives for producing were rapidly changing. For example, baskets and pots that were no longer used in the home, having been replaced by more durable and lightweight goods, had instead become very saleable to tourists and expatriates.

As Botswana's tourism industry expands, so too will the opportunity and need to provide the increasing number of visitors with diverse and high-quality products that properly represent the cultural traditions of Botswana. (Terry, 1991:6)

The conclusion of Elizabeth Terry's report, which had interviewed both producers and consumers, indicated unsurprisingly that people wanted training, with the objective primarily to enable artists to achieve an income from their work. Suggestions included: the setting up of a non-government arts council to oversee and coordinate training programmes; to encourage the polytechnic to implement an arts course for graphic and commercial art; and for CORDE to create a subdivision responsible for training for craft producers. However, ten years later very little of the report had been implemented. There was, as yet, no arts council, although the university had, quite independently of the report, started an arts course for teachers (1994) and CORDE had run training courses for rural artists but only in an ad hoc way.

The decline in interest by women in their indigenous visual arts has meant a decline in 'hand me down' teaching and, as women move away from the family home, this is unlikely to be revived. Despite the earlier discussions and reports, it is only now that organisations are gradually coming to their own independent conclusions about the decline of the indigenous arts, and slowly recognising the need to take over the role of teaching them.

The role of the museum

The National Museum and Monuments and Art Gallery (NMMAG) has a crucial role to play in Botswana art education. The public sees the museum as the place for art and, if Botswana are going to look for a definition of the term 'art', they will look to the museum and art gallery to provide it through what they have on display. I shall write about the NMMAG in chapter 6, so here I simply highlight its educational role.

Built in the centre of Gaborone the NMMAG is physically accessible to all those living in the capital. It has a small educational department that recognised the fact that, due to the size of Botswana and the difficulty of travelling great distances around the country the museum is inaccessible to the majority of the population. For this reason, the museum developed a touring section, which sends out workers to rural areas. Different divisions will take projects to both

children and adults. For example, the archaeology department will take fossils and artefacts, and the art department will show slides and films. What the art division chooses to take and show to the public contributes largely to their definition of art. In 1996, the slides being shown were mainly of European or western artists, such as Van Gogh and Constable, which I believe, would only alienate people from the concept of art and reinforce the perception that art is not for them. It is only since 1996 that any reference to an indigenous art form or African art has been made on these trips, in the form of the Botswana basket, the making of which the museum has been keen to revive.

Although the museum has always collected baskets for the national collection, it was not until the early 1990's that they recognised that the basketry skill was rapidly disappearing and that, as part of the country's national heritage, the museum was responsible for preserving this skill. The museum states that it was its art division's tour of Botswana in 1994 that highlighted the problem, which proves again that the study conducted by Elizabeth Terry for CORDE in 1991 had not been properly looked at by the museum and gives an indication of why, ten years after the study, none of its recommendations had been implemented.

The museum raises its concerns in the *Zebra's Voice* (the museum's quarterly magazine):

...a concern raised by the Art Division (of the museum) after a tour of Botswana is that many traditional practices are dying because they are no longer being passed from older to younger generations. When asked why, many of the older people say "it is because our children go to school now". The art division felt that the best solution to dying traditions would be to introduce them into education. (Gron, 1994)

The response to the report was to run a series of workshops for teachers from all over Botswana. If the arts were not being handed down through the generations as stated, then the museum would attempt to introduce them into the school curriculum.

From August 15 until September 2 (1994) nearly all of the art teachers in Botswana were trained in the art of Botswana basket weaving at a series of workshops conducted by NMMAG and organised by the Secondary Department, Ministry of Education in an attempt to introduce traditional arts and crafts of Botswana into formal education. (Gron, 1994:19)

Teachers were enthusiastic about this scheme:

If I am to take what has been done here as a voice, this voice has gone a long way - I myself have over 300 students, and all of those 300 students are going to learn how to make a Botswana basket. And this will hopefully help solve the crisis, which is there, of perhaps Botswana basket-making dying out, and in turn help save the Botswana culture. (Unnamed teacher in Gron, 1994:19)

Thus the informal education has been taken over by the formal; where once the teaching was instinctive, now it is structured. How this will affect the work and its development remains

to be seen. The same interest has, however, not been attached to the other art forms such as pottery or house decoration. The fact that Botswana baskets have achieved recognition throughout the world and that they are very saleable items on the tourist market (due to their transportability and practical as well as decorative use) has given them greater priority than the other arts in the eyes of the museum and educationalists.

The NMMAG did, however, in 1995 commission the building of a hut in the grounds of the museum and had it decorated in the Batswana style by women from a nearby village. However, it has not decided to introduce the art form to school art education nor organised a house-decorating workshop. The fact that the hut stands in the museum grounds and is in no way linked to the contemporary art galleries, relegates it and the art of house decoration to Batswana history. The non-commercial aspect of the art has meant that, despite the promotion and research done by Sandy and Elinah Grant in 1995 (authors of *Decorated Homes*) and the commercialised precedents such as the Ndebele wall paintings in 1989 (see chapter 1), few people, practitioners or arts workers, yet see the potential in the art form or the importance of keeping up the skill.

The museum's role in educating people about art is crucial. What it chooses to display and how it is exhibited is reflected in what people perceive as art. The museum is discussed in detail in chapter 6 where I describe how the museum is split into two sections, as its title implies - the museum and monuments section and the art gallery section. It therefore follows that if the museum chooses to hang paintings and display baskets in the art gallery and yet place the pottery and beadwork in the museum part of the building then residents and tourists alike will, consciously or not, make a distinction between the two: one is art and contemporary, the other is artefact and only of historical interest. The result of this could have far-reaching consequences if the arts in the museum section are allowed to disappear.

However, although promotion and teaching through the museum is useful, it should be recognised that the art forms will only survive if one or more of the following conditions exists: a) that arts continue to have a local use, either practical or ornamental, b) that quality-controlled sales to tourists continue, c) the creation of a Botswana-centred art collector market.

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Art education in schools

Art was introduced as a subject at schools in Botswana in 1983. It was available both in Community Junior Secondary Schools (CJSS) and Senior Secondary Schools where the

Cambridge Art GCE exam is offered. In 1984 Molepolole College opened where art was offered as a subject for teacher trainers. In 1988, a report on *Art training and the public sector*, written by expatriates Laura Ives and Walter Grisdale, tutors at Molepolole College, was published in a Ministry of Education newsletter called *Art Mo Botswana*. The report recognised firstly, that the majority of art-related jobs were held by expatriates and secondly, the importance of indigenous art forms in the country. It advocated that such art forms ought to have a role within art education in Botswana because:

as local industry and the tourist trade grow, so will the demand for local craftwork, basketry, pottery, leatherwork, woodcarving and textile design. The goal of art education, it argued, was to meet a growing demand for skilled manpower in art-related jobs, avoiding the need to import expensive expertise. Art education would provide secondary school graduates with the skills and creative abilities to enter private-sector jobs in the new industrial environment. (Grisdale and Ives, 1988)

However, art teachers would have to wait another six years for the museum's initiative, which was quite independent from the Ives/Grisdale report and its findings, to teach basket-weaving skills (Gron, 1994:19) for use within the art curriculum at schools. The report also recognised the need to replace expatriate teachers with local Botswana teachers. The reasons given for this were to allow for an expanding demand for the arts, owing to more schools offering art, but also to relocate Botswana teaching and art within the perceptions and ideals that arise within Botswana contemporary culture. An example of this need for relocation can be illustrated by the work exhibited by school children in the *Artists in Botswana* exhibition in 1995, where there were a number of still lives depicting wicker baskets with French bread and wine, a image commonly found and used in French painting and art classes but one that does not draw on the experiences of school children in Botswana. In a situation where, looking at art as an image in a frame on a wall is such a new and rare (in a country with so few exhibition spaces) experience, I believe that this lack of connection between the object/s being drawn and the child's life does not help to draw the artist or the viewer into the work and instead could alienate both from any further interest in art.

Similarly, children are taught about artists from the west but very rarely about artists from Botswana or other parts of Africa, which has led to a lack of role models for students, who then are unable to see themselves as artists or to take art seriously. One initiative to counterbalance this was undertaken by Diane Buck in 1993 who published a series of articles in the *Zebra's Voice* on artists in Botswana. Each article included an interview with a Botswana artist and a "variety of different instructional resources for teachers based on the artists work" (letter from Diane L. Buck 1993). This was a very interesting contribution to the

development of ideas around art for children in the class room and shows Diane Buck's experience of teaching art around the world.

Laura Ives and Walter Gridale also spoke in their report about the importance of art in further education. They argued that:

while the Secondary Art Education programme is being developed, a plan to develop a school of fine and applied arts should be implemented to train and educate Batswana to meet the demand for skilled manpower. Students graduating from school who have studied art as a subject can then choose a career in either art education or fine and applied arts. (Gridale and Ives, 1988)

They go on to suggest that this could be developed at Molepolole or it could be linked to the university.

Molepolole College and Botswana University

Students who leave school in Botswana wanting to pursue their art can either go to Molepolole College for a teacher-training course, which also incorporates other possible art-related careers such as graphic design and illustration, or they have to enrol at the University for the teacher-training Degree and choose the art option there.

From 1988, the Molepolole College of Education offered art as a subject, the main function of which was to train Botswana nationals as art teachers. Up until then, art teachers had mainly been expatriates, (from a list held by the NMMAG in 1985, only 10% of art teachers were Botswana Nationals). It was recognised that Botswana would need to train their own art teachers if art was going to have a place in the school curriculum. It was acknowledged that it is important for the teacher to have an instinctive knowledge of local and national perceptions and values which the students will need to draw on in order to develop their own cultural and artistic language. The first of the Molepolole-trained art teachers entered the teaching force in 1989 and their enthusiasm gave added force to the argument for art in the school curriculum.

In 1989, the possibility of a pure art degree was discussed with Neo Matome, who was employed the following year to research the matter; however, nothing as yet has come of this. However, in 1994 Diane Buck, an American expatriate art teacher trainer, was hired to start up an art department within the universities teacher training department (it was still not seen as a subject to major in itself as an art degree could not lead to a recognised and defined job). She was very excited by her role as head of department and facilitator for a new subject at degree level. As the great majority of teachers in Botswana are women, so were Diane Buck's students. The aim of the course was to train students to teach art and was therefore not about training people to be artists or to work in any other art-related field. However, for a lot of the

students who had always had an interest in art, the course, with space and materials provided, offered them a chance to develop some of their own ideas about art, which they had not been able to do anywhere else.

Art education abroad

For anyone wanting to further their training in art practice rather than in art education the only option is to go abroad, which several of Botswana's artists have chosen to do. Some, such as Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse and Velias Ndaba, studied at the Mzilikazi art school in Zimbabwe; others travelled further a field, such as Neo Matome to the UK and Neo Modisi (see chapter 3) to the USA, to pursue degree courses. However, the problem with wanting to take a degree abroad is that, in order to get sponsorship from the Botswana government, you need to do a course that it sees as being beneficial to the country on your return, and a Fine Art course is not one of these.¹⁰⁴ Therefore students have to choose an art-related subject, which is usually graphic art, in order to get the sponsorship. This is what Neo Matome and Philip Segola chose to do in the UK. It was in particular in this area of study that, as Neo Matome and Neo Modisi describe in chapter 3, the students had the biggest learning curve as they had to “learn the formats of communication” (Neo Matome, interview 1989: Gaborone) that the graphics world in the west uses for its tools. The highly commercialised countries of the UK and USA have developed sophisticated graphics aimed at researched and specific social targets in order to sell products. The concepts used were particular and contained references to a culture that the overseas students were not familiar with and they had to be learnt afresh, which was not the case for their fellow students who had been brought up with them. On their return to Botswana, the methods used had to be adapted to suit an audience with different visual and cultural references. However, this experience gave them a confidence in their work and what they hoped was an ability to communicate visually to a wide audience.

The students abroad were also taught a history of art, which, according to Neo Matome, was “a western history of art” (Neo Matome, interview 1989: Gaborone) meaning that it traced the development of western art movements with the only reference to the arts outside Europe being where it related to a western artist - such as Picasso's use of African masks. However, this art history did allow them as painters, to see how their work may relate to other artists and movements in the world, giving them a broader perspective on the possibilities for their art. On the other hand, a history learnt from a western perspective, ie: from the majority of art history books and magazines published and written, did also instil in the students a notion of

categorisation and labelling that the west is so keen to do. Some categories are chosen by the artists themselves as a way of identifying with a support network such as ‘woman artist’ and/or ‘black artist’, however, others such as ‘African artist’, ‘outsider artist’ etc., are imposed. Artists are often put into categories that are ill-defined and restrictive and it was from this perspective and art education that artists like Neo Matome and Stephen Williams imported categories to the arts of Botswana. Categories such as ‘arts and crafts’, ‘high art and non-art’, used by the curators at the NMMAG, have been influential in the way the visual arts are now presented in Botswana. Similarly, Tjako Mpulabusi, the current director of the NMMAG who took his degrees in the USA, continues to uphold the art categories¹⁰⁵ at the museum established by his predecessor. The following experience illustrates the intensely restrictive nature of these categories: none of the artists educated abroad that I spoke to found that a western Fine Art education was a problem for them but what they did later struggle with was the labelling imposed on them by both African and Western viewers which led to expectations of how their work should look as an ‘African artist’. Neo Matome in particular, as seen in chapter 3, struggled to establish herself as a female African artist as her abstract work did not conform to the expected ‘African art’ category. However, I believe that the example of Magdalene Odundo, Professor of Ceramics at the University College for the Creative Arts at Farnham, Surrey¹⁰⁶ shows how the categories of art/craft, potter/sculptor, African/European can be broken down. She has been able through her art to develop an international reputation. It is this freedom from categorisation that needs to be encouraged in Botswana.

It is noticeable that the artists involved in contemporary practices and who have had a western art education, have an understanding of the movements that currently dominate the arts in the world in terms of publicity, monetary gain and collectability. As individuals, they believe that the training they received abroad was good training and a good experience. On their return to Botswana, finding criticism and lack of interest in their work did not deter the artists. In fact, quite the reverse happened as artists such as Neo Matome and others speak of “educating the Batswana” (Matome, interviewed 1989: Gaborone) to appreciate and understand the art that they make.

Regional Art School

In 1986, the then director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, the late Cyril Rogers, initiated the idea of creating a Regional School of Art and Design (RSAD), to serve the South African Development Community (SADC). He approached Dutch consulting organisation Prode B.V.

to provide a feasibility study for an art school with a Zimbabwean perspective, resulting in the report: *The Establishment of an Art and Design School in Zimbabwe*. However, this was not followed by any positive action. In 1992, the idea was resurrected again from Zimbabwe and funds were found¹⁰⁷ to employ Stephen Williams and Neo Matome to conduct extensive research into the need for a Regional Art School. They spent two years travelling through the region interviewing government departments, universities, museums, galleries and companies. Their conclusion was that there was a definite need for such a college and that, despite South Africa's many facilities for further art education, the whole region could and should not be totally reliant on them for art education.

The spirit of the report cautions against the dominance of any one culture by another, as is likely to occur should South Africa be looked upon as the font of all light and knowledge in the region. (Williams, 1995)

In 1994, Neo Matome and Stephen Williams' report *Visual Art in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) - The argument for a Regional School of Art and Design* was presented to the board of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe with the statement that:

The Regional School of Art and Design would help bring about a fresh perception and understanding of art in the region and create a visual language and theoretical base, which would articulate an indigenous view of African art history and practice. (Williams, 1995)

The question here is whether the school would actually articulate a complete "indigenous view of African art history and practice" as, in their report, Neo Matome and Stephen Williams talk about their interviews with educationalists, gallery owners and companies around the region but do not mention conducting interviews on the ground level with art practitioners. This contrasts with Elizabeth Terry's research in Botswana, where her interviews about the need for training were mainly conducted amongst the women art workers in the field (Terry, 1991). If the indigenous arts, which are currently being practised in the rural regions, are ignored in favour of the more contemporary practices whose practitioners are largely city-based, and literate and vocal, then a huge part of the artistic heritage of the region will be lost.

In 1995, Stephen Williams presented his paper to the *African Artists: schools, studio and society, Africa '95* conference in London. There he put the case for the regional school to an international audience. The paper recognises that things only move forward if a dedicated team of people support and pursue the case. He demonstrated this when he explained that Cyril Rogers, who initiated the idea, had prominence and influence in Zimbabwe; after he died, Fay Chung, the Minister of Education and Culture, continued to support the project. However, she

shortly left the country for a new post in America, which left no one with influence to push the project. Thus, despite overwhelming support amongst government officials and educationalist in SADC countries, nothing has happened.

In Third World countries, projects such as the Regional School of Art and Design are reliant upon the support of persons with influence for their survival and, without Chung and Rogers, the project gradually lost its momentum and begun drifting like a rudderless ship through the corridors of bureaucracy. (Williams, 1995)

Stephen Williams' attempts to get support, land and sponsorship for the project, made little progress; and then, in 1996, Stephen Williams was killed in a motor accident in Zimbabwe. The project has remained "rudderless" ever since. Nevertheless, his ideas, articulated at the London conference, remain important and artists such as Neo Matome hope that one day the college will be built.

The proposal to build a school of art and design for the SADC region is rooted in the assumption that culture has a pivotal and hitherto untapped role to play in the development of the region. The Regional School of Art and Design would produce artists, designers and teachers of art to meet the practical needs of the developing countries of the region. The school would also take as its mission the nurturing of the reproduction and enhancement of a contemporary living culture. Art stands as a beacon for the true potential of human endeavour and is in the forefront of human development. Art has an historical role and extends our perceptions concerning society and ourselves. It alters the way in which we see and experience the world but it can also help to feed bellies and pay school fees. (Williams, 1995)

The National Library

The city library offers a free reference and lending service to the public. The art section is large but horrendously out-dated. It is made up of a large section on 'crafts', probably aimed at expatriates, which includes dried flower arranging, macramé etc. There are a few books on artists but they are all western artists and a few 'how to paint' books generally of the 'paint by number' category. There are even a few colonial books on architecture describing "African native dwellings", which should really be in the museum archive rather than in the lending library. Despite the huge numbers of art books now published on African art, especially art from South Africa and even the few that are published on art in Botswana, not one was held at the library. Any one interested in the arts would get a very narrow view of art from its contents and neither historical nor contemporary knowledge whatsoever about art in Botswana. This lack of reference to the arts of Africa and Botswana in the city's national library should be a great concern to all art educationalists in the country.

Thapong Visual Arts Centre

Since its inception in 2001 the Thapong Visual Arts Centre in Gaborone (see chapter 5 for full details) has run a variety of workshops, courses and classes for artists and anyone is free to take part. The workshops run from one day to two weeks, and there are classes that are held on a weekly basis. The only restrictions are the small fee¹⁰⁸ and the great distances some would have to travel. Artist-led, the centre is an ideal place for art education for all. The artists instigate the classes they want, funding permitting, and are able to invite artists from abroad to teach or to share in workshop experiences allowing for a great exchange of ideas and information. August 2002 saw the first artist in residence Professor Herklaas Viljoen, artist and head of the Visual Arts Department at the University of Namibia

The art fairs bring in some of the women artists who work in the villages and allows them to display their work along side that of the painters and sculptors and gives them the chance to mix with other artists. Just as importantly it gives the 'Fine Artists' the chance to see and meet with rural women artists. Visitors to the centre are attracted by the crafts side of the fairs and, once there, will be exposed to a wide range of arts allowing people's perception of Batswanan art to widen.

If successful, and with continuing funding, the arts centre could prove to have a crucial role in the development of art education in Botswana.

Conclusion to chapter 4

From the above we can see that there has been a distinct lack of communication between artists and art workers in Botswana. Reports are written but few people seem to read them and, even when the conclusions are recognised as valid, no action is taken with the results. There needs to be closer cooperation amongst the different art sections of the community and their relevant government and institutional supports in order to develop potential and gain the most from each other. Owing to the currently small population of Botswana, this should be possible despite distances.

Amongst artists themselves, there are many different levels of art experiences, from the handed-down education of the basket makers to the experience of artists trained abroad at university. We can clearly see how the differences in the artists' introduction to their art, whether it is through teacher training at Molepolole or an art degree from the UK, gives them different degrees of confidence in their work. The woman who paints on her walls at home does not consider herself an artist and is not happy to talk about her work or ideas whereas

those who trained at college and who paint on canvas have no doubt that they are artists and are very articulate about their art. This is not unusual in other countries, however, because the number of practising artists in Botswana is so small, the differences are all the more noticeable. Yet all artists of whatever background, when brought together, influence and are influenced by each other. 'Untrained' or 'home-trained' artists are equally able to influence college-educated artists as is seen at many of the international artists' workshops and as described in the chapter on Thapong. This particular wide variety of art practices is distinctive to Botswana and, despite the huge distances - both physical and cultural - , is one that should be promoted as a resource for art education in order to encourage a rapidly evolving art scene.

As the Thapong arts centre has begun to demonstrate, if any further institutional art educational developments happen, it will be important to maintain all current art practices, paying special attention to the indigenous arts, in order to keep the full range of artistic heritage that is unique to Botswana.

Chapter 5

Triangle workshops in Botswana.

Introduction

Following on from artists and art education I now look at artist-led workshops. Originally initiated abroad these workshops were started in Botswana in 1990. Their aim was to provide forums for artists from around the world to get together to work, share ideas and experiences and hold debates relevant to their practice. From its beginning in America, workshops have spread to Britain, Africa, India, East Asia, the Caribbean and Australia. Artists in southern Africa also began to initiate workshops, South Africa: Thupelo; then Zimbabwe: Pachipamwe; and in 1989 the first workshop in Botswana called Thapong. I look at the impact of this workshop on the artists of Botswana, what its reception was, how it was carried out and its achievements. I follow its development over ten years including visiting Thapong in progress in 1996.

Two other workshops were established following the success of Thapong to deal with issues that had arisen during the first few years of the workshops in Botswana. Firstly, it was found that there was a lack of younger artists developing to a standard which would enable them to participate fully in Thapong. Secondly, there were very few women artists taking part and it was noticed that, women working in the art projects described in chapter 2, had very different requirements in terms of art training and development. I look at the research around, and subsequent development of, workshops around these issues.

History of the International Artists' Workshops

In 1982 the British sculptor Sir Anthony Caro, and Robert Loder, patron of the arts, initiated the first International Artists' Workshop. Held in the USA it was called Triangle, indicating the positions of the three countries that were to be involved: America, Canada and Great Britain. The proposal was that artists from these three countries would come together to work for a period of two weeks. The first workshop was successful and it has been held annually since then at Pine Plains, an isolated spot 100 miles north of New York.

The remote location was intentional as it was felt that it was important for the artist to avoid distractions from their work; for the same reason no partners or friends were allowed to

accompany or visit the artists. The idea was to give the participants a complete break from the demands and routines of everyday life and the chance to concentrate fully on their work.

... they could work together as equals and share their experiences in making art..., it was Caro's firmly held view that it was the intensity of the experience not the duration that was important for the artist. (Loder, 1995)

Between fifteen and twenty artists are selected to take part. "Participants were chosen to form a coherent group in which a high standard of motivated artists would learn from each other" (Loder, 1995). The artists chosen are relatively well established, possibly in mid career, who would get the most out of working in a new environment and from having the time and space to experiment and develop.

A dynamic developed in this situation that proved a powerful stimulus to creative activity. Studios were open; criticism of work between artists was encouraged and the presence of a critic helped focus and articulate the discussion. (Loder, 1995)

Since its establishment the organisation has always been artist-led. The idea was that, once the workshops had been initiated by Robert Loder and Anthony Caro, then a changing group of artists would work to ensure its continuation and growth.

All participants are encouraged to make art technicians and assistants included; even the coordinator responsible for fundraising, logistics and the collection of materials is, if possible, an artist. (Loder, 1995)

There is no constitution or any rules for the workshops. "It is a movement rather than an organisation." (Robert Loder, interviewed 1993: London) However, there are a few unwritten rules and principles that the workshops do adhere to in order to maintain the emphasis of the 'movement':

1. All workshops should last two weeks.
2. There should be no hierarchy within the workshop.
3. That all workshops are held in an isolated venue - in order to minimize distractions.
4. No partners or friends.
5. A loose understanding that at least half of the artists should be local to country of the workshop. This is in order to ensure that the workshop maintains its roots within its host country. It is important that each workshop keeps its individuality and that it should benefit the artists in whose country it is being held.

In 1984 two artists from South Africa, outside of the original group of Canada, America and the UK took part in the Triangle workshop in New York. These were two David Koloane, a painter, and the late Bill Ainslee also a painter and a driving force behind the non-racial art institutions, such as the Johannesburg Art Foundation. The idea of starting another workshop was spawned and, on their return to Johannesburg, the two artists started to work on the first of what was to be a series of workshops based on the Triangle format. The first of these was held in 1985 in Johannesburg and was called Thupelo. Two artists from the USA, Peter Bradley and Ken Moffat, took part in 1985 and 1986. However, because of the cultural boycott of South Africa at the time, no other artists from outside of South Africa took part in the workshop until the nineties. In the meantime, many South African artists took part in Triangle in the USA, including Dumisane Mabaso, Durant Sihlali, Sam Nhlengethwa and Tony Nkotisi.

In 1988 the artist Tapfuma Gusta and Pat Pierce brought the model of Triangle to Zimbabwe. They discussed the idea with the founders Anthony Caro and Robert Loder and received their support and backing. The first workshop in Zimbabwe was at the Murewa Culture House and was called Pachipamwe from the Shona meaning: 'here we are together again'. The first Pachipamwe mainly involved artists from Zimbabwe and became an interesting debating ground for the work of the Shona sculptors. For instance, one of the main Shona sculptors at the time, Joram Mariga, was keen to look at his work in a new environment, which is exactly what the workshop offered. He and other sculptors were concerned that their group of artists needed new sources of inspiration if their art was not to become repetitive and lifeless.

Debates were also held on issues surrounding the practice of art. For example at Pachipamwe, issues discussed by the artists and noted by Elsbeth Court included: "international abstract expressionism or African Modernism" and "creativity vs. originality" (Court, 1992). The mix of artists and nationalities allowed for ideas and issues, not previously considered by some, to be brought to their attention; and new perspectives on old ideas stimulated other artists who may have had more contact with artistic debates and theories.

In 1989 the second Pachipamwe was held at the Cyrene Mission near Bulawayo. This time many more participants came from other African countries (Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and Namibia) and, on their return, some started workshops in their home countries. Steve Mogotsi and Veryan Edwards from Botswana returned to start Thapong in 1989. Fatima Fernandes from Mozambique started Ujamaa in Maputo in 1991. Mbile was started in Zambia in 1993, and Thulipamwe in Namibia in 1994. 1995 saw the expansion of the workshops to West Africa with Tenq in Senegal. The workshops also continued to expand outside of Africa.

In 1991 Shave Farm was established in Somerset in the UK and in 1993 Laura Hamilton who had previously taken part in Ujamaa started Xayamaca in Jamaica. Subsequently Trinidad, Cuba, India, China, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and Australia have all had one or more workshops. In every case the workshops have been inspired and initiated by artists, one of the fundamental requisites of the Triangle movement. The artists have formed loose committees to carry out the necessary duties such as fundraising and organising the location, accommodation, material supplies and artists' travel arrangements.

As more workshops are formed around the world so artists have more opportunities to travel and meet other artists from further a field. However, Robert Loder considers the developments within Africa to be the most interesting, with hundreds of artists being given the opportunity to meet with other African artists in areas that are often very remote.

Possibly the most significant contribution has been to facilitate the meetings of artists from different countries in Africa itself. While over twenty artists have been to African workshops from the UK and about the same number from North America some hundreds of artists have exchanged visits from within Africa... these exchanges have a major impact in lessening the isolation of communities of artists in more remote places such as Botswana and Namibia and giving the artists the confidence to develop their own voice and ultimately raising the standard of art making in the countries concerned. (Loder, London, 1995)

Workshops which are not successful will stop happening quite quickly as the participants are also the organisers. This happened to Thupelo in Johannesburg in 1992; the artists involved had got as much as they wanted from the workshop and had moved on. The response to its closure was that other artists, in both Cape Town and Durban, decided to take over the running of the workshop and held Thupelo in Cape Town in 1994 and Durban in 1996¹⁰⁹.

Each workshop has to find its own funding, much of which will come from overseas agencies such as SIDA (Swedish Development Co-operation Office), although more and more local support and sponsorship is being found as the workshops become more established. This local business sponsorship can in itself encourage public acceptance of the event and help to bring it into the community arena.

While the development of the artist's creativity is a prime function of the workshops they do of course have a social significance. They band together artists in the belief that what is said through art should be independent of the market...the stimulus of working with artists of different cultures and different countries, particularly within Africa, has proved a source of inspiration and energy which has been communicated through a wide cross section of opinion in the country concerned. Through the work shown at open days and exhibitions which have attracted a diverse audience the public has been made aware of the potential of art to move and inspire. (Loder, London: 1995)

Thapong

History and Background:

As already mentioned, Steve Mogotsi and Veryan Edwards had taken part in Pachipamwe in 1989 and it was from their positive experience there that they thought a similar workshop could work and benefit other artists in Botswana. They formed a committee of interested artists, museum curators and teachers including Velias Ndaba an artist, Gersham Sanga an artist and museum curator and Tom Ketlogetswe an artist and teacher. The first International Artists' Workshop in Botswana was held in November 1989. It was named Thapong from the Setswana "makgatlhanela thapong" meaning "the coming together of people for a common purpose". It was a two-week workshop to be held annually at a location outside of Gaborone. The venue for the first three years was at Kanye, a town on the edge of the Kalahari. In 1992 it changed to the Kanamo Centre, alongside the banks of the river Mhalatswe River in Mahalapye, 90kms North of Gaborone.

The aims of Thapong ran along the same lines as the other workshops and were clearly set out in the introduction package for participating artists:

The essence of the workshops is to create an informal networking between artists: to bring together artists of different ages, backgrounds and conceptual ideas in the spirit of goodwill and creativity. (Edwards, Thapong introduction package)

Thapong provides the participants with studio space, materials, time and most importantly, support. Free from everyday problems that often hinder practicing artists, such as poverty, the family and lack of available time, the artists, regardless of their background, are able to work freely and from an equal basis (Figures 5.1 – 5.9). It is an intensive two weeks. The participants work and live together as a community and, in this supportive situation, artists often feel free to experiment and explore their art in ways that they may not in their usual working environment. The international mix of participants means that ideas are constantly being exchanged. Here, artists who often feel isolated in their work have the opportunity at these workshops to feel connected to a wider artistic community. This is particularly important for artists in Botswana who, due to the size of the country and its scattered population, often feel very cut off from other artists and events.

Because of a recognised need for a better relationship both politically and artistically amongst artists in southern Africa, a conscious emphasis was given, in the selection process for Thapong, to artists from the region. An example of this is that for 1992 the composition of

the workshop was 14 artists from Botswana, 4 artists from overseas and one artist from each of the following countries: Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia. Participants are selected, where possible, through consultation with members of the workshops in their home countries.

Within Botswana, the relatively small number of practicing artists makes the selection slightly different to other countries where the competition for a place on a workshop is high. The theory behind the selection for Thapong is laid out in the “proposal for funding” statement which states that, the artists selected will be mainly from Botswana in the belief that artists in other countries have more artistic opportunities in their home countries. Participation in Thapong is intended for:

- Artists from Botswana who have been practicing artists for a number of years and who have workshop and artistic experience to be passed onto other participants.
- Prize winners or the creators of other outstanding submissions at the annual *Artists in Botswana* exhibition, which is open to all artists in the country.
- Two places for the artists from the D’Kar community (the Kuru project) in consultation with the manager there.
- One or two places are by selection from an open invitation to all known artists in the country on their submission of slides and curriculum vitae, with an emphasis on Botswana artists where possible.
- Places are held open for one or more outstanding and suitable participants from the Tlhale workshop (see below for more details).
- Artists who have been invited or who have applied for a place from another African country or overseas. (1995 *Thapong International Artists Workshop*. Proposal document. Unpublished.)

The intent in so grouping the workshop is to ensure that, non-indigenous artists who are living in Botswana and who generally have had greater advantages in training and experience, do not dominate the workshop to the detriment of Botswana artists. Also, as mentioned before, a core group of the most experienced artists in Botswana will participate regularly in the workshop in order to maintain a continuity of aims and quality of debate and critical assessments.

It is beneficial to the quality of art in Botswana for there to be a core of artists who repeat the workshop experience for several years giving it deeper basis than an ephemeral one off event. (Edwards, 1995)

Nevertheless there were problems with and complaints about the selection for Thapong, which I will examine later on.

Sponsorship is vital to Thapong. In order for the workshop to be successful it needs to be able to provide accommodation, travel and materials for the artists as without this, very few would be able to fund the two weeks themselves. Since its beginning in 1989, Thapong has managed to build up a regular network of sponsors from local firms to international development agencies. However, it is not easy and funding needs to be reapplied for annually; applications to donors go off as soon as the last workshop is finished. According to Robert Loder, it is only because Veryan Edwards is very good at fundraising that Thapong has managed to keep going. Regular overseas sponsors include the Swedish development co-operation SIDA, the Norwegian Agency for development co-operation NORAD, the Rockefeller Foundation from the USA and the British Council. In 1996 it seemed likely that much of the aid that Botswana was used to getting from SIDA and NORAD for many projects would soon be cut back or stopped all together as Botswana was no longer seen as a needy country. Aware that overseas aid will not always be forthcoming Veryan Edwards also makes an effort to get some local sponsorship every year. Local companies who have sponsored Thapong include the Botswana companies of DHL, Shell Oil and Barclays bank. Kgalagadi Breweries and the Botswana Book Centre have also been occasional sponsors. The venues have also been offered as a donation to the workshop.

The end of each workshop is marked by an exhibition in Gaborone at the National Museum and Art Gallery (Figures 5.10 –5.14). Here, an assessment of the work carried out and produced over the intensive two weeks, is carried out by the group as a whole. A small colour catalogue is produced for the exhibition stating the aims of the workshops and listing participants.

The exhibition is something that each workshop has. However, although they are public exhibitions, it is important that they are not seen as the aim of the two weeks work which, it emphasises is, primarily for experimentation and therefore needs to be free of the criteria and pressures that working towards an exhibition imposes.

At the end of each workshop, the open day and sometimes the exhibition of work made, bears witness to the enormous amount of creative energy that can be unleashed by a successful workshop. The work is by definition work in progress and is exhibited as such. (Loder, 1995)

To coincide with the Thapong exhibition, the museum's organisers have developed a special programme for schoolteachers and museum educators. Through this outreach work, it is hoped that the artists' work in the exhibition, will be reached by the wider community through visits to the museum and discussions.

The fact that Thapong continued to grow ¹¹⁰and receive support through sponsorship proves its success both for the artists, the sponsors and the audience. Since the beginning in 1989 local and foreign sponsors have repeated their sponsorship annually. The exhibition in Gaborone at the end of the workshop is a large and recognised event for the artistic community in Botswana and both the private viewing and the two weeks of the exhibition are well attended. For the artists from Botswana such workshops enable them to make contact with other artists from throughout the region whilst at the same time being hosts and offering new experiences to artists from overseas.

The reasons why the workshop is important to individuals and art of the region is best described by Thapong participants who have been quoted in the exhibition catalogues:

“...the new truths and modes of expression discovered will pass on to greater society.” Stephen Williams, Botswana, 1989.

“In our small way we are helping to break down barriers...” Lionel Davis, South Africa, 1989.

“...a wonderful and dynamic experience. The mixing of diverse backgrounds, the mixing of artists from around Africa and the world, the intense working environment and the beauty of the Botswana countryside have, I believe, produced some truly memorable art.” Jake Abrams, Great Britain, 1989.

“Helping to create a new visual language among artists of the region.” Stephen Williams, 1990.

“The workshop was just fine and our aim was to create more new ideas” Victor Moremi, Botswana, 1990.

“An experience enriched by interacting and sharing ideas with other artists from southern Africa and elsewhere.” Neo Matome, Botswana, 1990.

Articles by Robert Loder, Veryan Edwards and Fatima Fernandes in the recently published exhibition catalogue *Transitions* (Brunei Gallery, SOAS, curated by Barbara Murray, 2005) confirm these thoughts and ideas.

Criticisms

Nevertheless, in spite of this success the Thapong workshop remains an extremely controversial subject amongst artists and project workers in Botswana. The problems arise not so much with the concept or the aims of the two-week workshop but with how these aims are carried out and what the consequences are for the participants. The main points of contention that are raised and debated every time Thapong is mentioned amongst artists, critics, patrons, interested parties and the museum are:

1. That it is for abstract artists only, and that if you go and you are not an abstract artist, then you will be forced into painting that way.
2. That the exposure of artists to other international, other regional and trained artists will destroy, or negatively influence the Batswana artists.
3. That it is an elite group of artists who go back to Thapong year after year.

That the workshop is dominated by 'abstraction' was something I heard time and time again. The problem first starts with what do people mean by 'abstract art'. I looked at certain definitions earlier when discussing the work of Neo Matome (chapter 3) and concluded that it is a problematic term yet one that is used frequently in this context without any clarification. Abstract art, in most people's minds, can vary from the purely abstract non-figurative canvas to an image that may simply be difficult to work out¹¹¹. In the Oxford dictionary 'abstract' is defined as: "concerned with pure form and pattern, free from representational qualities." The problem then becomes one of distinguishing between representation as 'looking like' rather than representation as 'standing for'. The former is necessarily figurative, whilst the later may or may not be. Which definition was intended by those who spoke of abstract art at Thapong was never made clear.

The actual evidence from the workshops, if we attempt to define abstract and figurative art, shows a pretty even split. In 1990 there were 9 figurative artists as against 10 abstract artists and in 1993 there were 6 abstract artists and 15 figurative artists. Thus concluding that Thapong was certainly not an abstract dominated event. Why it was seen as such, is evidently due to the confusion over the definition of the term abstract art. At the 1993 Thapong the work of Enock Ilunga (Zambia) and Rantefe Mothebe (Botswana) (Figure 5.15) was clearly figurative, they have painted landscapes in a realistic mode. Other artists used elements of the figure but distorted them in some way or placed them in an unusual setting; for example the sculptors Albino Zaqueu Lucas from Mozambique (Figure 5.16) and Moitshepi Madibela from Botswana have carved figures on which schematic realistic heads are placed on minimally carved bodies. Johannes Phokela from England painted figures in elaborate dresses and then has painted out the areas of flesh with white wash, *Leggings on Blue* and *Untitled* (Figures 5.18 and 5.19). All these are clearly figurative works yet they may be among the art works that some people would define as being abstract. Then there are the more obviously non-figurative works; in Velias Ndaba's *Hanging Out* we can just make out human shapes and Ankie's *Hiiisa* is a plant form made into a flat abstract pattern. Finally there are the artists who work

intentionally in a non-figurative way such as Veryan Edwards' *Kanamo 1* and Stephen Mogotsi's *Through the Bush* (Figure 5.17). These are all good examples of the multiple definitions of abstract art. Mokwaldedi Gontshwanetse's two paintings from Thapong: *People must work together*, 1990 (Figure 5.20) and *Bar Scene*, 1993 (figure 5.21) clearly show the variations one painter can make between figurative and non-figurative abstraction. This cross section of Thapong work shows a mixed and very varied artist selection and hardly one dominated by abstraction. The other reason that Thapong was seen to be an abstract event was that for a while the organizers were mainly non-figurative artists (Edwards, Williams, Mogotsi and Ndaba), from which people, despite evidence to the contrary, concluded that abstract art would be favoured.

The problem of defining abstract art in Botswana was discussed in an interview with Neo Matome who found that many people in Botswana see her work as western, probably because they equate abstract art with western art. This is a very narrow view based on a lack of knowledge of either African or world art history; and is something that has not yet been properly debated in Botswana. Neo Matome is described and would describe herself as an abstract artist, as would Veryan Edwards. Both of these artists have been educated abroad and, because of that, their art form is seen as imported by such critics as Sandy Grant, (author of *House Decoration in Botswana* and occasional art critic in the Botswana newspapers) and Alec Campbell (director of the Botswana Society). On the other hand the Kuru artists' work is not defined in such terms despite being highly schematic and the imagery being neither realistic nor naturalistic. As the term 'abstract suffers from a lack of clear definition so the critics of abstraction display their lack of understanding. They ignore Botswana's own historic predilection for schematic forms as provided by the techniques such as basketry, pottery and rock art. Because abstraction is regarded as European, so its appearance in Botswana is mistakenly interpreted as the product of cultural domination. This confusion is largely a matter of ignorance of the history of arts whether in Botswana, Africa or the world in general.

On reflection it is apparent that the artists who pushed their work away from figuration and who would call themselves abstract artists, Neo Matome, Veryan Edwards and the late Stephen Williams, all happen to be articulate people who have been abroad for their formal art education and it is their confidence which has been misinterpreted; it generated the fear that these well-informed artists, with their ideas of abstract art, will influence other less confident artists towards a practice they are not familiar with. However, it has to be remembered that the workshops are about testing new ground and that artists go in order to learn from and to be stimulated by other artists. The possibilities offered here to try out and use or reject new

methods of working, and to get feed back from fellow artists on any new direction they try to take, is an opportunity that most will want to exploit. There are several artists that I am aware of who have experimented during their two-week stay with abstraction. Examples include Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse who, in 1990, is photographed holding a realistic painting typical of his usual work with an insert of a more recent abstract painting painted at Thapong. In 1994 Monica Masarwa (see chapter 3) went to Thapong for the first time and consciously made the decision to try to leave her figurative way of working behind and to paint abstract art. She was very happy with the results and in fact sold one of the pieces to Robert Loder, but is currently working again with figures and landscapes. In 1996, Doreen Gomang (see chapter 3) a very young artist, experimented with an abstract way of working which she enjoyed but never returned to since Thapong. These three artists were happy to test new ground and to enjoy their time investigating painting at Thapong. Each one derived different conclusions from this but all were pleased to have had the chance and freedom to experiment.

Nevertheless, it is precisely these examples of young, relatively inexperienced Batswana artists, which those who criticise Thapong, would use to demonstrate how artists are forced into abstraction. It is worth examining why they think this way. Certainly the dramatic change in styles for Mosarwa, Gomang and Gontshwanetse and the way in which they abandoned their usual ways of working in the name of experimentation is surprising, and one can ask how much understanding or thought was behind the sudden discoveries of new ways of working. Undoubtedly, the move away from their usual practices, will in itself help artists find new ways of using colour, applying paint, use of textures and use of their materials, all of which are valid and very much worth the time. On the other hand, talking to the artists about this work reveals that there is often little more to the process than that. The motivation for turning to abstraction was not arrived at through a progression of ideas but was purely by chance and was seen as an opportunity to be taken, neither of which reasons will provide a sure enough backing for continued work in that direction which is why, after Thapong, many do not pursue this avenue. Despite this, the idea, as declared by Sandy Grant and Alec Campbell, that they should not be experimenting with abstraction because they are African artists, is frankly silly.

Several artists I spoke to (including Sara Glendinning and Doreen Gomang and Monica Mosarwa) stated that they had felt a pressure to work in an abstract way at Thapong. They were women who had been to Thapong for the first time and were not too sure what to expect. As the emphasis is really very strongly on experimentation and as it is an intense working situation, for those less confident of their own methods of work it may have seemed as though they were being pressured into changing their direction of work as opposed to simply

experimenting. The daily group critical sessions would have highlighted the difference between the confident art school educated artists (such as Neo Matome, Veryan Edwards and Steve Williams) who were also generally the abstract artists, and the less travelled self-taught artists. There may have been a pressure to conform. However:

It was a tenet of the Triangle philosophy that the workshop was designed not to enable artists to paint a show but to encourage them to break new ground, work in new materials and try out new concepts. (Loder, 1995)

The exposure of local artists to artists from elsewhere has led to a deepening commitment to good art whether in the realist or abstract modes. (Edwards, 1995)

It is precisely this bringing together of artists with different styles, concepts and methods of work that gives rise to the next criticism of Thapong. This is voiced mainly through the project workers at the Kuru art project but also through museum workers such as Alec Campbell. Some of these issues have been touched on in the chapter on Kuru when I was writing about the 'protection' of the artists by the Kuru development Trust. Here I will highlight some of the points again in relation to the debate surrounding the influences amongst artists at Thapong.

Several artists from Kuru have been to Thapong and the Thapong committee always makes a point of inviting a delegate from the project. So far, every year Kuru has been happy to send someone. However, when interviewed in April 1995, Willemien Le Roux and Pieter Brown (the then project leaders at Kuru) expressed concern about the workshop. On the personal level they were worried about how the artists coped with being in an alien situation with a huge language barrier; also the fact that there is still a big racial problem in Botswana, makes them fear for the artists when they are travelling to and from the workshop. A couple of incidents where, it seemed to them, the artist was treated badly, have left them unsure about the benefits of the personal side of the experience of the workshop. They gave the example of Thamae Setshogo who went to a workshop and came back with a music cassette tape; he explained how he had exchanged a painting for the tape with one of the artists. "They are so easily exploited because they are such open people." (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1995: D'Kar, Ghanzi) Yet Thamae Setshogo was happy and certainly did not feel as though he had lost out.

As well as being concerned with their seeming vulnerability on the personal level they are also concerned about the influence of other artists on their art. The following extract from an interview with Willemien Le Roux shows the dilemma as she sees it:

We didn't want to send them at first but then the museum and the Botswana society asked us and said that the art is so unique that the artists should contribute to the art in Botswana, that they had a role to play. So we thought well we can't keep them here protected from everybody else, we'll let

them go. But lately we think that it has not been very good, we think that they are getting influenced. Because their own artistic skills have gone over years now, they feel are burnt out a bit. They might think, I've been doing this for years, let me go and see what that guy is doing, let me see if I can copy that. I've seen it happen and it doesn't work. They don't understand enough about art on a wider scale. They can't judge their own work. That is why Pieter, who is an artist, doesn't think he should do his own work as he might influence. I think that they will grow into a situation of interacting with other art, there is no way they can be stopped, but first they need to grow in confidence with their own work. Then they can see who they are. They have had a huge leap in their situation to cope with. Dada for instance lives under a sack in the bush, she doesn't have a house but now she is off travelling to London and the Thapong workshops on her own. It's almost impossible to imagine the emotional leap. (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1995: D'Kar, Ghanzi)

Certainly their situation is unique; nevertheless, all the artists who travel to Thapong undergo a huge change in their working environment and all have to deal with language barriers. For instance Godfried Donkor from the UK explained how it took him a long time before he was able to cope with the heat and the mosquitoes on first arriving in Botswana and it was some time before he could work comfortably. Starting to work in this new environment, surrounded by strangers, artists with diverse backgrounds and cultures and different interpretations of the meaning of 'art' will be hard for any artist. On the other hand this is why they are doing it. To have that experience of sharing, interacting, learning and being totally immersed in art for two weeks. Experimentation and influence is how an artist's work grows and develops. The fact that Willemien Le Roux and Pieter Brown are afraid of this influence and development highlights two problems: the first is they are not crediting their artists with any strength or influential status. Although they do hope that in the future the artists will get to that individual position of strength:

We believe that gradually the Basarwa will assimilate into the Batswana culture, there is no way of stopping it, but one of our aims is to make sure that they will assimilate in a way that they will maintain a pride in their own culture, that they have their own identity. (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1995: D'Kar, Ghanzi)

But currently they only see that other artists could influence Dada or Thamae Setshogo, and cannot conceive that Thamae Setshogo or Dada could influence other artists. This is clearly not the case as for example, artist Ann Gollifer talked at length about how she watched Dada working and learnt from her new ways of working and of using and mixing colours. This eagerness to watch other artists at work is also held by the other artists who participate in Thapong, showing that it is not the artists themselves but the over protective and patronizing outside critics who worry about the influence of artists from abroad; the artists themselves welcome new ideas. Whilst other artists go to the workshop relishing the chance to experiment

and discover new influences, those from Kuru are being advised to pay no attention to how other people work.

The second problem, which may be at the crux of the question of whether to send artists to Thapong or not, is the marketability of the work. The work is currently selling well and I believe their concern is that, if the artist is influenced by western or trained artists, the work will change and the naive and untrained quality, the 'neo-primitive aesthetic' of the art will disappear. This could lead to a drop in sales and interest in the project. The Kuru managers are severely criticised for their hold on the artists by other artists in Botswana who want the Kuru artists at Thapong in order to have a true representation of the arts of Botswana at the workshop; also because they enjoy being exposed to very different art forms. Artists such as Neo Matome and Vervan Edwards along with the art buyer Neo Modisi believe that, unless the Kuru artists are challenged and exposed to other art forms they will remain in isolation and never develop or explore their ideas to the full. Also, the work will begin to stagnate and become repetitive. There has to be a time when the project must let go and allow the artists to change and experiment. Part of Willemien Le Roux's reasoning for being reticent about allowing them out of the project is that she believes that: "They don't understand enough about art on a wider scale. They can't judge their own work" (Willemien Le Roux, interviewed 1995: D'Kar, Ghanzi). Yet, what the evidence really shows is precisely the artists' need and desire to know about art on a wider scale; this can only really happen through exposure to other arts and society in which case, as for the other artists, the workshops are the best place for this to start.

This debate does not only concern the artists from the Kuru project. Other people who are not fully supportive of Thapong express these same concerns about the untrained Botswana artists such as Speedo Gaotlhalehwe, Rantefe Mothebe and Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse taking part in the workshop. They are all artists whose work is realistic with naive qualities and who are without any formal art training and therefore, in the eyes of certain art patrons, are seen to be vulnerable and easily influenced by the more confident art trained abstract artists. According to Neo Matome, a journalist (name unknown) started this debate off in the press in 1994 accusing Thapong of "corrupting the African-ness of the work". The debate continued for weeks in the press and gained many supporters. The problem here being that no real definition either of what 'African art' should be or what 'abstract art' meant, was given. All that was argued was that African art should not be abstract and was not achieved by grouping artists from all over the world together. The debate was based on the false assumption that African art was and is static and pure and completely ignores the continuous development and influences of African art over the centuries. This is of course a patronising attitude and does

not give any credit to the artists to have the ability to experiment and to make their own decisions about the direction of their work. Statements by the artists show that they certainly see the experience as two-way exchange and that they are happy in the way their work developed through the experience:

I am grateful to have participated in the workshop and feel I have benefited from the experience. I feel I have learnt something from the overseas artists and hope they too have learnt something about the manner or way in which Botswana artists work. (Speedo Gaotlhalehwe, *Thapong Catalogue*, Gaborone, 1995)

I am interested to participate in another workshop next year because it is good for me to co-operate, share and experiment. (Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse, *Thapong catalogue*, Gaborone, 1995)

This patronisation of artists is particularly worrying when dealing with Botswana women artists. As a minority they need to be seen and to be publicly credited with their work; both for their own self confidence but also to promote strong role models for other women in Botswana society. An example of the current situation is that of Neo Matome who, in spite of her education abroad, which is enough to elevate a male Botswana artist from 'the influenced' to the 'influencer', she is not seen as someone with the power to influence others. On the contrary, as a regular participant at the Thapong workshops, she is still seen as somebody who is heavily influenced by other abstract artists. Her relationship with the white abstract painter Stephen Williams compounded this as he was seen as her mentor. Even once she was established in her own right as one of Botswana's top painters she was rarely mentioned without a mention also of Stephen Williams. As a black female artist she was seen as the weaker and lesser educated of the two. Without fully knowing or acknowledging the histories of either painter, quotes in magazines, catalogues and reviews place Neo Matome as the influenced and Stephen Williams as the influencer. "She worked at the National Museum and Art Gallery as the Assistant Curator of Art where her work was influenced by that of Stephen Williams" (*Botswana Live!* exhibition catalogue, London, 1993). It was only after Stephen Williams' death in 1997 that she was finally seen more in her own right and her work was credited fully to her.

Another example of patronisation of female artists is Monica Masarwa who attended her first Thapong in 1994. She had problems with her expatriate tutor at Molepolole College when trying to get permission to attend her first workshop. In spite of his, and the other expatriate tutors' own influence (as her art teachers) on her college work he told her that he was unsure of the benefits of such a workshop and that he was concerned about the influence of other artists' work, and in particular the abstract work of people like Veryan Edwards. I heard him

talk to her and practically forbid her to go even though he had little real power to do so. He was obviously threatened by the idea of one of his pupils developing a style and identity away from his control and teaching.

As mentioned before, Alec Campbell and Sandy Grant, two vocal writers, would also disagree with exposing any Batswana artists, even experienced artists such as Velias Ndaba and Neo Matome to the work of other artists. However, regardless of the debate about whether artists should or should not be exposed to or influenced by other artists and art movements, history shows that it is impossible for anyone to exist in a vacuum. Despite efforts to 'protect' artists from outside influences, exchanges will take place and cross-cultural dialogue will take place. Certainly, in the case of the Kuru artists this is a slower process due to the geographical location of the artists; their physical isolation will 'protect' them for a while. However, by maintaining such an unnatural and sterile environment with a lack of changing stimulus, the influence that the workers have tried so hard to stop is in fact already happening. The project's own protection is in itself a major influence, one of creating a false situation and is in itself no less influential than if they were exposed to all the art movements in the country.

The third major criticism of Thapong, which this time came mainly from Botswana artists themselves, was the accusation of 'elitism', meaning that it is the same artists again and again returning to Thapong. There is undoubtedly a core of artists from Botswana who return several years in a row or who are regular participants. Velias Ndaba and Veryan Edwards will always be there, as coordinators they are there to ensure the smooth running of the two weeks and in any spare time they will also paint and also take part in the discussions. Other artists such as Thamae Setshogo, Gersham Sanga, Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse, Rantefe Mothebe and Neo Matome are all regular workshop attendees. Veryan Edwards and Velias Ndaba explained the reason for this, firstly in the selection details:

It is beneficial to the quality of art in Botswana for there to be a core of artists who repeat the workshop experience for several years, giving it a deeper basis than an ephemeral one-off event. Thus some Batswana artists who attended Thapong 1989 and who demonstrated their ability to work intensely and take partake of the overall spirit of the workshop, then attended the subsequent workshops and will be re-invited for 1995. The aim is to maintain a balance between continuity and a broadening outreach to new participants whose freshness contributes to the vitality of the workshop. (Edwards, 1995)

Secondly, Velias Ndaba stated that there are not that many Batswana artists with the level of competence needed (meaning artists who have been practicing art for several years and who are confident with their work) who are available for the workshop, thus it tends to be a small

core of the most experienced and prolific Botswana artists returning again and again to the workshop.

Nevertheless Thapong has achieved a certain status amongst Botswana artists as something to aim for. Sara Glendinning felt very privileged to be asked to take part and would not consider turning down such an opportunity as it was like “having a foot in the door” (Sara Glendinning, interviewed 1995: Gaborone). Thapong is obviously seen by many as the forefront of art in Botswana.

Women artists at Thapong

However, the issue of finding enough ‘good artists’ brings up another question about the structure of Thapong and possibly other international workshops. Velias Ndaba was very aware of the ratio of male/female artists at the workshops and tried to maintain a balance by searching out women artists. This could sometimes take up days of work trying to track down a woman who had ‘showed talent’ when she was last at college but who has not necessarily worked as an artist since, in order to make up the numbers. The difficulty in locating women artists raises the question, of why sculpture and painting are the only arts at the Thapong workshops. In the UK, Shave Farm workshop has seen artists use video, installation and land art as well as painting and sculpture. In which case why not explore more fully the visual culture of Botswana. Instead of hunting around for women who have painted on canvas, why not use women working on walls, or with pottery and basketry or tapestry and tinwork. Magdalene Odundo raised this question at the *African Artists: Symposium, Studio and Society (Africa '95, SOAS, London, 1995)* during the discussion on workshops with Robert Loder. His answer was to say that perhaps an alternative workshop would cater for the craft based art forms and that the International Artists’ Workshops cannot involve all art forms. The point here, however, is that in order to base the workshop firmly in the culture and country in which it is being held, it needs to incorporate more of its own visual history. At the same symposium, Prof. Solomon Irein Wangboje from Nigeria, gave the example of taking his students out into the community to learn from bronze casters and basket makers and Ptika Ntuli from South Africa spoke often about using different venues for art (moving away from the western notions of gallery space and exhibitions and towards incorporating elements of African art history with new ideas about painting etc.). Through bringing together the indigenous culture, materials and ideas, which currently exist (epitomized for instance by wall decoration in Botswana), with the new art formats such as painting on canvas and exhibiting in galleries, the workshop would

become fully representative of Botswana. It would firmly locate Thapong within a historical and developing Botswana visual culture rather than simply being held in Botswana the country. The point here is that it would be women who would be brought into the workshop arena through the arts of pottery, basketry and house decoration solving Velias Ndaba's problem of trying to find female participants.

Tlhale

One way that the Thapong committee tried to get more women and young artists involved was through another shorter workshop set up specifically for them. They recognised the need to encourage young artists to take their work seriously and to see it as something they could continue with independently, outside of college, and which would then help to broaden the base for participating artists in future years at Thapong. Veryan Edwards and Velias Ndaba were aware that the number of possible Botswana participants at Thapong was limited and that this had led to accusations of exclusivity; so, in order to have a more changing group of artists who would be at a level to appreciate and benefit from the workshop experience, they needed to actively support the less experienced Botswana artists. So, in 1991 the coordinators of Thapong initiated Tlhale. The participating artists were usually students from college whose work was seen at the annual *Artists in Botswana* show (see chapter 6) and were generally people who had no experience of practicing art outside of college or school. The workshop was started as an annual event and was initially run for five-days; this was soon thought to be too short a time for people to acclimatise to the situation and benefit from the experience and so, with increased funding secured in 1994, it was extended to two weeks, as for Thapong.

Tlhale is different from Thapong in that there are tutors to lead and direct the work; these are more experienced artists selected from other workshops in neighbouring countries. The tutors are invited to the workshops by Tlhale's coordinators Veryan Edwards and Velias Ndaba; they are chosen as artists who would be keen to teach/lead a workshop but also with the consideration that as tutors they would represent a variety of styles and techniques to the students. Exchange of ideas and communication with fellow artists is encouraged, however, in order not to intimidate the artists there is a structure to the course and day to day activities where the students are led through a series of ideas and methods rather than being left stranded with the notion of 'you are free to do what you want' which is the policy at Thapong.

The emphasis is more on teaching by a leader than simply sharing with each other. The leader is invited from one of the workshops in countries in the surrounding region. One or more artists from

this group (Tlhale) are invited to attend the main Thapong International Artists workshop. This broadens the base of Thapong and further stimulates the arts in Botswana. (Edwards, 1995)

The small number of practicing artists in Botswana does mean that the places at Tlhale are not always filled up with inexperienced artists and so, although the inexperienced artists do have priority, other Batswana artists who have already taken part in Thapong, are allowed to attend. This does mean that there is a good mixture of abilities on the course.

The emphasis of the teaching is sharing ideas, communication and discussion on art related topics. This is done through daily critical assessment sessions where the artists get together to visit one or two artists' workspaces to discuss their work. The discussion stimulates ideas around subject matter, methods and materials as well as art theories such as abstract art and an African art history. There is also an encouragement to explore new materials which is promoted by seeing and discussing how other artists work. However, as well as experimentation, artists are also encouraged to consolidate their own ways of working. Overall it is about developing a confidence in their art so that they feel happy to practice independently. It is also hoped that, should they take part in any of the international workshops, that they would feel confident in the intensity of the situation and not immediately intimidated by the more experienced artists.

Doreen Gomang is a good example of someone who has progressed through Tlhale. In 1996 she left school and, apart from drawing at home she no longer had any opportunity of developing her art. She couldn't afford materials at home nor did she have the space to work. Through contacting the museum she was invited onto Tlhale two years in a row, and the following year, 1998, she took part in Thapong. Although still very much the lesser experienced artist there, because of her time at Tlhale she was not completely intimidated. She started the workshops working in the way she had developed and become familiar with which was working with acrylics and painting still lives or realistic scenes. After a while at Thapong, encouraged by fellow artists and the critical sessions that were held, she ventured to experiment and to try out new ideas and new ways of working. Firstly, through regularly having to talk about her paintings to the other artists she began to develop the narrative side to her work that she had previously ignored. By listening to the other artists' interpretations of her work she became clearer in her own mind what she was really trying to convey and so she was then able to explore this more fully. Secondly, she chose to try painting in an abstract way; she was stabbing in the dark and had little understanding of what she was trying to achieve, however, she enjoyed the experience of 'playing with the paints' and not feeling precious about materials. At home, where she could afford very few paints she would not dare risk

'wasting' them on experimentation. Thus the provision of materials and time gave her a freedom to try things out, to play and enjoy the paints in a way she had never done before. She also achieved a lot from the sessions when the other artists talked about this new work that she had just produced, both questioning her motives and offering advice.

In 1996 I interviewed Velias Ndaba about the selection policy for both Thapong and Tlhale and questioned the small number of female participating artists. He was at the time actively searching for more women to take part in that year's Tlhale. He had a list of female students who had taken part in the previous *Artist in Botswana* exhibition and was trying to contact them. This is extremely difficult as many are not on the telephone or they live in very remote parts of the surrounding countryside. Of those he had contacted not many were interested, which is in complete contrast to the situation in Britain, where any space available on any art workshop is fiercely contended. For example, two women, Elizabeth Kgotlafela and Mantho Baliki, students at Molepolole teacher training college (see chapter 3) whose metal sculptures *Butterfly* and *Insect* (Figures 3.73 and 3.74), stood out at the Gaborone *Artists in Botswana* exhibition, were not keen to take their art any further. Monica Mosarwa explained that they did not think it worthwhile pursuing something that they could see no future in and which they thought was really for boys/men only. This attitude stems from the lack of role models for young Motswana would-be women artists and from art teaching at schools and college, which has not included the history of women in the arts in Botswana, Africa or abroad. Had the indigenous arts practiced by women in Botswana, and the variety of arts that women practice throughout Africa been included in the schools curriculum, I believe that the students would be more inclined to see art as part of their lives. This lack of confidence in the possibility of practicing art for pleasure outside of college or school is a problem, especially in areas where women do not want to be seen as being different. This fear was examined in the chapter on Oodi (see chapter 2) where women do not want to put themselves forward as managers or members of a committee for a fear of being thought of as strange and therefore vulnerable to being picked on simply for being different.

The incentives for women to take art seriously are limited and teaching is the only way they could make a living with art; although private and public patronage is on the increase in Botswana and the limited number of artists means that those who are lucky could be well supported. It is a problem that can only disappear gradually as more women like Neo Matome and Monica Mosarwa emerge and show a positive image to younger women interested in art.

Motako

Instead of just waiting for women artists to come along a move was made to address this issue both in terms of women in the workshops as well as women in the arts in Botswana in general, through the women's workshop Motako. As a result of the research that Neo Matome and Stephen Williams did into a regional art school (detailed in chapter 4), the fact that there was a lack of women artists in Botswana emerged, alongside the lack of training and experience that the few women currently involved in the arts in Botswana had received. Neo Matome spoke at length about this when I interviewed her. (Neo Matome, interviewed 1995: Gaborone) The research showed, in her opinion, that women in art projects were shown formulas to use and were not given an art training that would allow them to develop their work independently, without the help of outside advisors. This is something that I also picked up on in the women's projects that I visited, in particular the Oodi and Ithuteng projects. As I explained in chapter 2, the Goweniuses gave a certain amount of training in skill and design but then withdrew from teaching anything to do with developing ideas in art; it was training to meet an end requirement, that of producing 'educational' images for the tapestries, and not for developing independent, artistic ways of thinking. Similarly, at Ithuteng, although the training was for younger women, it was still geared so much towards achieving the certain end product that was prescribed, ie for tourists or 'white people', that it left little room for development or experimentation. Thus the women were working with a foreign aesthetic, which they did not fully understand and therefore could not develop by themselves.

Neo Matome recognised this lack of development in the work being produced and believed that a workshop for women would be a good way to help women learn how to develop their own work. She instigated the first women's workshop, which was held from July 22nd- 26th 1996, in Gaborone at the NMMAG. The aim of the workshop was to bring women together from projects around Botswana and give them the chance, through a structured teaching course, to learn ways of developing ideas independently, and to encourage a way of working that was not tied immediately to a given market. She used the information gathered during the original research for the RSAD School to plan the workshop. Women had actually requested more training, showing a remarkable lack of confidence in their own abilities, especially after such long periods of practicing their art form: up to fifteen years for some women at Oodi. Thus Neo Matome saw the workshop's aims clearly as being one of allowing women to explore ideas and mediums and to gain confidence in themselves as artists through this experience.

Neo Matome was due to teach the course herself, however, her partner, the painter Stephen Williams, was involved in a fatal accident and she was obviously unable to attend. The workshop did, however, continue under the guidance of Frances Combs¹¹², an expatriate artist who has often been involved in teaching the painting and printmaking workshops at the NMMAG. She also brought in the painter Monica Mosarwa to help teach the course and artist Reginald Bakwena as a life model.

Women were invited to take part from the various art projects in Botswana. Six women in all took part, they had been invited by letters to the projects followed up by a visit from Neo Matome trying to gather interest. They had hoped for a larger group but they had not had enough time to visit the various groups. I managed to trace three of the women who took part in the first Motako workshop; they were from the three projects Ithuteng, Ikgabiseng and Pelegano (see chapter 2). Their feedback to me and Frances Combs' written report is the only documentation about the workshop.

Frances Combs' report is very vague on who participated and what the intentions and the structure of the course was:

The course was loosely structured around observational drawing from still lifes and our life model Reggie. Technical aids and concepts were introduced eg: the use of a viewfinder, looking at positive and negative space, measuring by eye angles and proportion. One drawing from this prolonged session was selected by each participant of which an A1 photocopy was made. The photocopy was then used to produce abstracted designs [The idea here was that a photocopy would help the artists to see shapes and patterns in the drawing].

All work so far had been in black and white, so with a quick introduction to colour theory [basic theory of how to mix colours to make other colours] we set about stretching canvases to do some acrylic painting. Stretching canvases proved to be another educational experience.

We presented a slide show and encouraged participants to discuss other artists' use of colour, texture and consider the compositions. Finally we had a session called 'Drawing on your emotions' an exercise based on Betty Edwards' *Drawing from the right side of the brain*.

The exercise introduced the concept of lines telling tales about the creator's emotion. Remembering an emotion such as anger participants were asked to represent that feeling in the use of the pencil. (Combs, 1996)

For the women who took part in the workshop all of these theories were completely new concepts to them and it is questionable as to how relevant they are to women in Africa (as previously discussed in terms of imported aesthetics and western notions of what art is). Nevertheless, this was the framework around which Frances Combs chose to structure the course, they were ideas that she was probably taught at school in Britain and that are in the art books held in the Gaborone library. However, at this early stage of the women's exploration of their art the art theory was just a backdrop; the most important factor for them was to have the time, space, encouragement and some sort of structure within which to work in order to give

them confidence to explore ideas. The workshop was an experiment in trying to allow the women to freely develop ideas in their art without the pressure of marketability and to encourage them to explore new ideas, methods and formats. It was an ambitious programme for women who had never used paints or canvases before; yet it was successful and it did achieve its aim of stimulating discussion and work.

In November 1996 (four months after they had completed the workshop) I met with three of the women who had taken part in the workshop. The three were all very different people: Lesego Sefak (Figure 5.26) from the Ikgabiseng project was a young (19 years old) single woman without children. Cinah Tladi (Figure 5.22), from the Ithuteng project, was a middle-aged woman with three children and Monica Nkwe (Figure 5.25) was an older woman from Pelegano, who lived alone and whose children had left home. For all of these women, the work at the projects had been the only jobs they had ever had which gave them a cash income. In 1996, only Cinah Tladi from Ithuteng was still employed at the project, the other women from Ikgabiseng and Pelegano had since left their jobs: Lesego Sefak said she left as she was bored with the work and Monica Nkwe had been made redundant from Pelegano.

Although they had produced a lot of work on paper during the workshop, the only example they had each kept (and were able to show me) was a painting on canvas produced towards the end. It was clear, from looking at the three paintings that these women had been to the same workshop. Although drawn from different viewpoints and approaches, the still life they depicted was clearly the same: a plant, a pot and a wooden sculpture (Figures 5.23, 5.24 and 5.27). Nonetheless each artist had found her own way of representing it; the colours and shapes and textures varied in each and yet the lack of perspective and shading gave a formal unity to the three paintings. However, unlike the work made at their respective employment, which is made according to expected market-related criteria, at the workshop nothing had been prescribed and they had obviously been given the freedom and necessary tuition to develop their own styles.

The three women had all proudly kept the painting. Lesego Sefak and Cinah Tladi kept theirs at their workplaces. When I contacted Lesego Sefak she came into Ikgabiseng to show me the painting and explained that, although she wanted to keep the work she did not have a place for it at home. Cinah Tladi's painting was also displayed at her workplace, Ithuteng (Figure 5.22). Monica Nkwe was the only one who had her painting at home with her (Figure 5.25). Now living in Gabane, she kept the painting stored behind her bed (there was no wall space large enough to hang it) and it was one of just four or five items in her small house; it seemed so out of context to possess such a large painting in such a small bare house. For

Lesego Sefak and Cinah Tladi, the fact that they hadn't taken the work home even though they were obviously proud of the piece and were very pleased to show me the work, indicates that the painting and the workshop were seen very much as something 'other', something that they had enjoyed doing but which they did not really see as being a part of their lives. They did not have space at home for the work similarly, despite the encouragement of the workshop, they did not have the space or time in their lives to continue with any aspect of art making. Monica Nkwe had tried to assimilate the large painting into her home but there was not enough room to look at it. This highlights the discrepancy between the work produced at the workshops and the women's real lives. Because of this it was hard to see how someone like Monica Nkwe would begin to use what she had learnt at the workshop on her own.

None of these three women had painted anything since as, although they were all proud with their work, they saw the workshop very much as a one off chance and not the beginning of an ongoing process. As some of the women had explained in chapter 2, they saw being an artist as their job either at the pottery, tinworks or jewellers and not as something that they would do at home. Apart from the obvious cost factor of the materials, the medium itself is very foreign to their lives as is the idea of spending any time painting or drawing. The one off workshop was not enough time for them to identify with other women artists or to find role models or precedents for them to follow. As much as they enjoyed the facilities and the time to draw and paint (and, it would seem from the results, that they were really able to explore and develop their own art without a prescribed end result), the work still did not link in any way to their lives as women in Botswana or with their cultural and visual histories. Until it does I believe these women will not develop their art independently of either employment, projects or workshops.

Tamar Mason, who has worked more than anybody with women in projects in Botswana, believes that the workshops such as Thapong and Motako are of no use to these women. Speaking about how she thought one woman from Ithuteng would react to Thapong she says:

She is a girl from high school who, if given a choice, would buy a painting of a bowl of roses as a piece of art to hang in her house. Painting on canvas is alien to her. On the other hand there is a motive behind the art that she practices: it is for sale and has a function. Thapong would not be of any use to her. The Kuru artists however, are already working within an outsider art framework and are already painting on canvas, therefore they would get a lot from Thapong. (Tamar Mason, interviewed 1998: Johannesburg)

She has also said, on other women from the projects she has been involved with:

Still lives etc. and all that expressionist stuff is not worth anything to the women at Ithuteng and Ikgabiseng. The benefits they might get would be meeting other people, travelling around, and the social aspect. I don't think that the people running the workshop would have the market in mind in the training. Being an artist is alien to the women. (Tamar Mason, interviewed 1998: Johannesburg)

Despite believing that the women she has worked with are able to understand and take on board her ideas and the products, market and aesthetics that she has introduced to them, she does not feel that they are able to approach something like painting on canvas which is in reality just as alien to them. She says that the women would not benefit from doing anything that did not have a 'function' by which she means marketability; yet the reality is that the items that she has helped them produce do not actually have functions within the women's own lives. As we have seen, the artists do not use the pots, candleholders or jewellery themselves. On the other hand she believes that artists already working within what she terms an 'outsider framework', such as the Kuru artists, are able to benefit from the workshops. What Tamar Mason is actually talking about is the frameworks and identities that she and other project workers have imposed on their groups of workers at projects negating any need for the individual women's artistic expression or interests.

Once within a project such as Ithuteng the women are seen as a group and not as individual artists, which is something that Motako tries to reverse. By taking the women away from their work situation it allows them to think about what they are doing and what ideas or materials they might like to develop. On the other hand it can also identify that a woman may have no interest in developing her own ideas and is only happy working within a group situation and making things to order.

Motako is an ambitious workshop. Whereas the International Artists Workshops like Thapong attract a lot of attention and artists apply to attend every year, for Motako the organisers had to go out and get women interested, they had to explain the concept of the workshop to women and encourage them to attend. Unlike for the other workshops they could not be artist led as the women would not have had the confidence to work by themselves without any guidance. Neo Matome and Frances Combs had to guess what the women might need and what might inspire them; they tried to instil confidence in the women so that they would then feel free to make suggestions and talk about what they like to be doing. A very positive step for women artists in Botswana, Motako is something that at last draws on the inherent creativity of Botswana women and aims to set it in a developing and rapidly changing Botswana society.

Thapong Visual Arts Centre

When I interviewed Veryan Edwards in 1998 she spoke of an ambition, which was to set up an arts centre for Botswana. There already existed a very successful performing arts centre called *Maitisong* where performers: musicians, actors and dancers can meet and rehearse; what Veryan Edwards wanted to see was a similar centre for the visual arts. Since then the Thapong committee has taken the idea on board and has been working towards the establishment of a centre for visual artists. Firstly, they found premises in an old building called the Old Fort House in an area of Gaborone known as The Village. It needed a lot of work doing to it and, as any future plans for a successful arts centre would entail a great deal fundraising and organisation they established themselves as a Trust with a working committee and staff for the office. The Chair and acting head of the Visual arts centre is currently Veryan Edwards supported by other board members: Phillip Segola, Stephen Mogotsi, Monica Mosarwa, Ann Gollifer and Velias Ndaba. The treasurer is Terrence Cockburn and the full time member of staff running the office is Susan Monyatsi.

The mission statement around which the Thapong Visual Art Centre is founded affirms that:

Our aim is to promote unity and excellence among artists as individuals and groups through sharing skills to enable growth and development and creating awareness of the Visual arts locally and internationally through networking. (www.Thapong.org)

They have been able to start to use the site by setting up a number of large tents where artists now have studios and where workshops and open days have been held. Meanwhile fundraising to get the work done on the building continues. Having artists working at the centre and with regular events taking place it is a very viable project to which companies have been happy to donate funds as well as in kind. At the end of 2001 the centre thanked the following sponsors for their donations:

Work on the Old Fort House:

Thanks to some hard work by board member Ann Gollifer and her numerous connections in town, a group of local companies are giving donations in kind. We are very grateful to:

P. G Timbers has donated the flooring, *Plascon* has promised paint for the internal and external walls of the house and *BMB* have promised to donate ceiling board. (*Artefacts*, December 2001)

Other donors continue to sponsor events and workshops ¹¹³ and from 2001 the Thapong Visual Arts Centre has been able to host a wide variety of events making the centre publicly visible and a real base and focus point for artists in Botswana.

Since September 2001 they have held a number of fairs where the centre is open to the public; artists are given a tent each to exhibit their work with the view to sell and promote their

work. In March 2002 they held an Arts and Handicraft fair, this was the first time since the NMAG's arts and crafts shows (which were stopped in the early 1990's), that women who make baskets displayed their work alongside painters and sculptors. The intention is to hold these fairs twice a year.

New workshops have been held on a regular basis since the site was acquired. The facilities are basic but the space, tutors and artists are enthusiastic. In 2001 there was a design workshop and a pottery workshop, Pieter Brown from the Kuru Trust ran a printmaking workshop, and Velias Ndaba ran sculpture workshop. 2002 saw an expansion with workshops being held every month: a one week drawing course taught by Reginald Bakwena (an artist then studying at Durban Polytechnic), a two week pottery workshop taught by Dias Machate (originally a sculptor and ceramicist from Mozambique he is currently teaching at the university of Namibia), a silk screen course for women run by Charity Gasesepe as well as printing, design, and an advanced sculpture course. (Edwards, *Artefacts*, September 2002).

The already established Thapong workshops are now also based at the centre, the first in 2001. It was a scaled down non-residential event that nevertheless was situated in the heart of the developing visual arts scene in Botswana and was easily accessible to the public.

The International 2001 took place at the Thapong Visual Arts Centre, The Village, Gaborone. We called it an "Alternative Thapong" because we could not afford it to be fully residential which would have been ideal. But still, we made it a wonderful event. (Edwards, www.Thapong.org)

Twenty-three local, regional and international artists took part and it was sponsored by the Swiss Arts Council and the KMS Trust, Botswana.

The women's art workshops have been established here too (although no longer called Motako). In 2000 Semina Mpofo from Zimbabwe conducted the first women's workshop at the centre:

The aim of the Women's art workshop is to encourage women to have confidence in their creativity outside of societal roles and expectations and to help themselves as artists. (www.Thapong.org)

In 2001 Fatima Fernandez of Mozambique a well-known member of the International workshops network and the organizer of the workshops in Maputo since 1991, ran another successful course for women artists and art teachers.

The participants...were encouraged to use everyday materials to explore their creativity. Their choice of one object to be drawn and painted in various ways obliged them to get to know it so well that it became a vehicle for emotional expressiveness. Working with inexpensive materials allowed for less preciousness, for a flowering of free expression and for a sense of this being something they could take back home to do. (Edwards, *Artefacts*, June 2002)

It is intended that Tlhale should be held at the centre too but so far funding has been short. Although scheduled to happen in July/August it needs to be funded in order to supply materials and a tutor. The centre's publicity states:

It is not always possible to raise funds for this important workshop. Many donors have left Botswana since it is fiscally sound. However, those monies do not filter through to the artists! (www.Thapong.org)

It is not only Tlhale that has suffered from lack of funds. Occasionally other courses have had to be cancelled and in 2002 the Thapong was forced to cancel. With the ongoing work on setting up the arts centre funds were short as the majority of donations continue to go towards the renovation and building work.

However, the arts centre continues with a full programme of activities and ambitious projects including Saturday morning drawing classes (run by Phillip Segola the current Curator of the NMMAG), publicising opportunities for artists in terms of commissions and art fairs and an up to date website. They also now have their own magazine *Artefacts*, which lists events, exhibitions and opportunities as well as reviewing exhibitions and showcases artists. Artists are encouraged to become more involved in the centre by: becoming a member, renting a studio space, buying an artist's page on the website and supporting the workshops and art fairs.

Through the regular meeting of artists at the arts centre's events and the quarterly magazine *Artefacts*, issues concerning the arts of Botswana are beginning to be discussed publicly. For instance in the June 2002 issue a debate was raised, following a review of the recent arts fair by Wanje Wene in the Botswana Guardian newspaper, as to why the arts are supported mainly by 'foreigners' and that Botswana rarely buy art or crafts.

It would help if there were greater public awareness of the importance of art to society as a vehicle for the expression of its highest aspirations and current concerns, as depicted by its most sensitive individuals. The arts sector also has a role to play in the economy of the country by providing diversity of production: arts and crafts can be the means for the people concerned to earn a living and to bring money into the country through areas such as tourism. However, as Thapong board member Neo Matome says: 'the strengths and impact of culture and the arts is determined/influenced by the level at which the local community partake in it. For example the popularity of West African attire in Botswana. Why can't we have the same level of support for local crafts? Thapong is doing its best to support the development of the Visual Arts and to do this effectively we need support from Botswana.' (Edwards, *Artefacts*, Botswana, June 2002)

That there is now a forum for such issues to be raised means that artists and public are now able to become more active in voicing opinions about the direction of the arts in Botswana.

Conclusion to chapter 5

The workshops Thapong, Tlhale and Motako all had (and continue to have through the Thapong Visual Arts Centre workshops) incredibly valuable roles to play in the development of the arts in Botswana. As opposed to the expatriate-led projects, they are forums for Batswana artists run by mainly Batswana artists. Thapong allows for dialogue amongst artists within Botswana, Africa and internationally and Tlhale and Motako are proactive workshops inspired by the idea that, in order for Thapong to develop and expand, younger artists as well as women artists needed to be found and given the opportunity to take their work seriously. The support that the workshops have through local sponsors allows for the development of a broad spectrum of arts. Art criticism and a debate amongst artists in Botswana on subjects such as women and art and art education that previously had been dominated by expatriate craft/ art workers is beginning to develop.

The recent development of the arts centre by the Thapong committee has shown a natural development of the artist-led workshop group. This expansion came about naturally as the core group of artists became stronger and more dedicated to acknowledging an expanding arts community. It is because of its natural development, due to a need felt and demanded by the artists themselves, and the fact that it is not there for any other political or commercial reasons, that the centre and its work is firmly rooted in the community. This solid foundation is what will make it a successful and ongoing project.

Chapter 6

Exhibitions, art institutions and patronage of the arts.

Introduction

There has been lengthy discussion about exhibiting African art in the west through the past 20-30 years and especially since *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, Paris, 1989. This exhibition was the first to show the current art from all parts of the world. Unfortunately the African contribution was, as already noted, based upon a fictitious category of the 'self-taught' visionaries. Nevertheless, from then on ethnographic exhibitions were seen as looking back to a colonial past and as not representing the full range of African visual practice. In the UK this led to the Africa '95 festival in which, in a series of exhibitions the full range of past and current practices were displayed. Subsequently even the ethnographic department of the British Museum (recently re-named Africa, Oceania and the Americas) began to acquire African modernist material (ie: El Anatsui, John Muafangeyo, Sokari Douglas-Camp, Magdalene Odundo and others). After another ten years Africa 2005 was a celebration of current practices from all parts of the continent.

Whether west African masks have been taken from the masqueraders and displayed in glass cabinets, or Ndebele murals have been painted on canvas and then displayed in art galleries, these art works have been taken out of context, placed in a relatively sterile environment and judged without regard to their original usage, site or intention. The issue at the centre of both of these cases lies the fact that, as Godfried Donkor¹¹⁴ pointed out in the Seven Stories debate (*Seven Stories* exhibition/ *Africa '95*, Whitechapel, London: 1996) as work moves into a gallery space, whether at home or abroad, the artist will always lose control of his/her work and the curator or institution takes over. It is crucial to examine this process, as the exhibition is often the point of contact between the artist and their audience, the individual and the public, and the potential seller and the buyer. In this chapter I look at the gallery spaces in Botswana and how they are used, as well as examining how art from Botswana is exhibited in gallery spaces abroad. However, not all African art is seen in galleries and I look at the alternatives. In South Africa there have been several answers to this. In apartheid South Africa there was no possibility of official or institutional recognition for Black artists and many other methods of display were developed. I consider these in relation to Botswana.

There have not been many occasions for Botswana art to be exhibited abroad but, those that have happened provide a wide spectrum of different situations: from the Oodi weavers' exhibition in Sweden in 1979 to individual artists' shows in London. Firstly though I will look at the exhibition of art in Botswana of which little has been written.

Exhibiting art from Botswana in Botswana

In Botswana there are only two venues set up as art galleries both of which are in Gaborone. The National Museum Monuments and Art Gallery and Gallery Ann, two galleries with very different agendas. However, there are also hundreds of other sites of display for the visual arts: from the tourist shops to the compound walls. How art is perceived in Botswana can be analysed by looking at these very different venues:

- National Museums and Monuments and Art Gallery (NMMAG)
- Gallery Ann
- Open studios
- Exhibition spaces at projects
- Roadside stalls
- Exhibiting indigenous arts

National Museums and Monuments and Art Gallery

The National Museum was opened in 1972 and in 1978 the Art gallery, a relatively new concept in Botswana, was established within the same building (Figure 6.1). Apart from the art gallery the NMMAG has a very wide range of interests. In 1992 a pamphlet about the museum was published outlining how it sees its work in the nineties. The then director Tjako Mpulubusi introduces the departments as Archaeology, Ethnology (the ethnographic collection), Natural History and Education. (See appendix 6(i) for full details) Other divisions also briefly mentioned are: conservation, design and production, desktop publishing, registrar, information, library, and the museum shop. He writes the following about the art gallery:

The National art gallery's primary role is the promotion and preservation of arts and culture in Botswana. Its permanent collection comprises more than a thousand items and serves to record humankind's journey through time from the perspective of art utensils and technology. (Mpulubusi, National Museums Monuments and Art Gallery catalogue: 1992)

Selected objects and paintings from the permanent collection are on display in the Permanent collection Gallery. Here, examples of contemporary art and ancient artefacts from throughout Botswana are contrasted with the art of other African cultures. The viewer is able to make

comparisons of method, media, and stylistic variation between the art and artefacts from Botswana and the work of artists and craftspeople from other African cultures. Contemporary visual arts and crafts are featured in a programme of exhibitions staged in the art gallery. Paintings, graphics, sculpture, basket work and textiles by local artists are featured in exhibitions such as the annual 'Artists in Botswana', while younger artists participate in the 'National Children's Art and Craft exhibition.'

The national art gallery places an emphasis on increasing cultural interaction with other SADCC member states and a number of exhibitions from these southern African countries have been held over the years." (Mpulubusi, National Museums Monuments and Art Gallery catalogue: 1992)

In 1988 a purpose made extension was built to house the art gallery. It is a large and interesting space broken up with a ramp and stairs leading to a second floor and balcony. Entrance, as to the entire museum, is free. The exhibitions change regularly, monthly or bimonthly, and are organised by the director of the art gallery, Steve Mogotsi, the exhibitions organiser, Gersham Sanga and until more recently, the arts archivist, Elizabeth Gron.

However, things have not always run as smoothly as it may sound in the museum's pamphlet. There is very little actual documentation about the development of the museum and art gallery; there are no back catalogues of previous exhibitions, no list of artists who have exhibited there. Peoples' memories are the only source of information about the museum's previous employees and exhibitions. Most of the information about the work exhibited at the gallery was found through interviewing two expatriate arts workers who had worked with the museum. In 1985 Elizabeth Terry, an American crafts worker and Ann Gollifer, an artist and art historian, women with experience in the field of art preservation and cataloguing, were asked by the then director Alex Campbell to catalogue the museum's art collection. They were horrified by the state of the collection, everything: paintings, prints, sculpture as well as historical artefacts, were all piled into various rooms. Much of the work had been badly damaged by the way it had been carelessly dumped. Eventually, Ann Gollifer took on the job of cataloguing the collection as part of her brief as technical assistant, when she was employed for a short time by the museum. She did what she could with the collection to preserve and catalogue it at the end of which she probably knew more about the development of art in Botswana than anyone else. However, for such a large scale operation it was a job that should have been a full time well paid job and not one to be done on a semi-voluntary basis. More money was needed to build proper storage rooms and a proper reference library for the cataloguing. In 1992 an American art historian, Elizabeth Gron was appointed as art archivist.

Her job was to continue the work, to completely catalogue the art collection and to ensure proper storage of newly acquired works. This was still in the process of being completed when I visited in 1996. The cataloguing was being done slowly and had not even started to be put onto computer. I managed to find some works using the cataloguing system but it was not yet very efficient. However, the historical artefacts were beginning to be stored properly.

Another problem was that new works coming into the collection were not being labelled or classified, so, although the backlog was slowly being sorted out, new works seemed to be receiving the same treatment that had been given to the original collection. This I noticed in particular with the museum's collection of work from Thapong. Work was stacked without any order in a room at the museum and some was already suffering damage from neglect. In 1996 I had been asked if I would be interested in cataloguing the work. Again there was no money available for this very lengthy project and it seemed that contemporary art works were not seen as important as the historical work and therefore were not seen as priority for funding. I was unable to take the job and believe that the Thapong collection is still uncatalogued. However, this lack of interest in looking after the collection is one that needs to be addressed and money allocated in order to save work from the 80's and 90's for future generations.

This lack of care and documentation of the museum's work extends to the lack of a proper archive in which museum publications, records of exhibitions, articles etc. are stored. The museum library does hold a collection of the *Zebras Voice* which is the museum's quarterly publication detailing some of events that the museum has been involved in, and some information on the development of the museum can be gained from them. Other than that the only archival information I could find was the private scrapbooks belonging to Ann Gollifer. For her own interest she had collected newspaper articles and reviews of exhibitions at the gallery, which is a unique reference to the debates that surrounded some of the exhibitions. It is amazing that the gallery still does not see the importance of this and still does not even collect its own catalogues. As a relatively new institution it has yet to understand the importance of its own history as it gradually develops.

The art gallery – an imported concept

The questions that need to be asked about the city Art Gallery are to do with who uses it, what are the exhibition criteria and how this institution is relevant to the Batswana culture. It has to be acknowledged that the art gallery as such, an enclosed building with white walls and artificial lighting, staffed by directors and curators, is an institution of colonial era origin. While the immediate history of art galleries lies in the west. The museum or gallery, whether

commercial or public, fits in with the western notion of art being available to be displayed, categorized and collected in a particular kind of way, so that people see 'art' in a special and separate environment. The art gallery can instil a hierarchy amongst artists, collectors, and curators by the facts of who and what has or has not been shown...

Museums and galleries are traditionally male-dominated. In the past, the patrons, gallery owners, directors, funders and curators have been mostly men. They are the ones who have dictated the direction of the arts in the west through the institution of the gallery. It is important to recognise how much of the institution and its history has been imported to Botswana.

The leading position of the gallery and what it exhibits:

With its prominent position in the capital the art gallery is currently seen by people who are striving to become recognised artists, as the forefront of art in Botswana. It is where sculptors and painters on canvas go to display their work and where the public goes to see their country's art. It has developed this position of authority through its status amongst artists as a place where the tourists (mainly from Europe and America), who are the most likely buyers will visit. Those responsible for the shows are therefore governing, to a certain extent, visitors' views on art in Botswana. This, of course, happens everywhere, but in Botswana there is only the one public art gallery.

The art gallery is divided into two sections: firstly, a permanent exhibition of paintings from Botswana partly historical and partly contemporary (which I will explore later on); and, secondly, a large space for temporary exhibitions, where five different annual art exhibitions are held (curated by the current gallery director). They are: *Artists in Botswana*, the *National Craft Exhibition*, the *National Basket Exhibition*, the *National Children's Art Exhibition* and, more recently, the *Thapong Workshop Exhibition* (more on these later). The rest of the time the space is available to be booked by artists who are interested and who feel capable of either organising a group show or who can fill the gallery themselves. The NMMAG has no obvious selection or exhibition policy. The reason this happens is that there are so few artists in Botswana who are able or who want to exhibit in the gallery; this lack of competition allows more opportunities for those who do want to exhibit. Examples of artists who have had solo shows are Neo Matome, Veryan Edwards, Philip Segola and Velias Ndaba. Group shows have included most artists who paint on canvas or who make sculpture on a regular basis in Botswana and who would call themselves artists. These are the people who have either studied art abroad or, more recently, who have been to artists' workshops in Botswana and/or other

southern African countries. Through these channels they have not only learnt about developing their art but also about what to do with the work. They have become confident as artists and feel assured enough to want to exhibit their work; this in itself becomes the selection process of the NMMAG.

Occasionally group shows from other southern African countries are curated by the gallery and group shows organised in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa have toured to Botswana adding diversity to the exhibition programme.

The exclusivity of the gallery - creating boundaries for 'art'

The fact that there is a place where one goes to view 'art' does, to some extent, exclude all the other art forms that may not be presentable within the gallery context. If artists, the public, the media and school children see the gallery as the forefront of art in Botswana then only that which is exhibited in the gallery will be considered 'art' and therefore valued as such, both in terms of culture and marketability. By default the NMMAG gallery is defining 'what art is in Botswana' and it is doing so without enough consideration. An example of this is the numerous occasions when people state that there is no 'history of painting Botswana', which totally disclaims any form of house, pottery or textile painting. This non-inclusion and lack of emphasis on examples of arts that have happened historically in Botswana perpetuates the myth that painting is a recent phenomenon in Botswana

This does not only happen in Botswana. Chika Okeke mentions it in his essay 'The Quest: from Zaria to Nsukka':

... a group of young artists at the Nigerian College of arts... commenced a search for alternatives informed by their indigenous art tradition of painting whose existence was denied, much against the overwhelming evidence of the compound walls in Igbo and Yoruba land. (Okeke, 1995: 41)

A review by Judy Seidman (an expatriate artist who lived in Botswana for a number of years and who wrote many reviews for the national paper many of which were critical or highlighted areas that needed more discussion) of the re-opening of the permanent exhibition at the NMMAG in 1993, brings attention to the problem the NMMAG has of trying to accurately represent the arts of Botswana:

As you enter, you face the European-style colonial art, the travellers' sketches and the portraits of the Moffats (Figure 6.3). The 'traditional African art' is stuck off by itself, more an afterthought than part of the continuity of visual history. This may in part have been dictated by the gallery lay out; you move down the steps to the traditional art, out of the paintings and drawings. And admittedly 20 years ago such a display would not have been in the art gallery at all but in an ethnology museum, as 'primitive artefacts' rather than Fine Art. But we live twenty years past

independence now. Further, the traditional graphics need some attention. Take Basarwa cave paintings: are these not also the art of Botswana? Can they not be represented, if only by photos? The museum also holds a wide selection of elaborately engraved ostrich eggs, surely a form of graphics. Cannot some of these precede Mary Moffat? The art of Botswana is not, never has been, and must not become, a weak imitation of styles. (Seidman, 1993)

Today the collection of artefacts has not changed much although the way it is displayed has altered slightly. Carved eggshells and pots have been displayed alongside the colonial paintings; however, the area allocated to the display is so small that a contemporary painting by Rantefe Mothebe is almost next to a 200 year old pot from the Okavango region. The curators have obviously responded to the criticisms, however, they need to allocate a lot more space and expand the work on display in order to complete the picture. Photographs have not been included and so rock painting and house decoration are still absent from the history despite Judy Seidman's call for photographers to be represented:

Where is Mike Khan's urban Botswana, or Sandy Grant's village Botswana or the many excellent photographs taken by the department of information's Peter Tladi?" (Seidman, 1993)

As a new institution, the NMMAG has a huge responsibility to the country and its audience to present an accurate picture of the visual arts history of Botswana.

An example of the contentious issues surrounding the curating of the contemporary exhibitions is shown through the changing history of the *Artists in Botswana* show. This annual exhibition highlights the ongoing debate about the relationship between art and craft and between indigenous and international contemporary art. For many years the art gallery hosted an annual *Art and Craft* show and also an annual *Basket Exhibition* both very popular shows. However, when Stephen Williams took over the Directorship of the art gallery in 1988 he decided that the 'arts' and 'crafts' should not be displayed together. He created two annual shows: the *Crafts Show* and the *Artists in Botswana* show. An expatriate from Wales, he gained his art education in Britain and it is from this background that he derived his ideas of what constitutes 'art' and 'craft' and how they do or do not go together. He then imposed this distinction on the annual art exhibitions, thereby introducing the concept to Botswana. The problem here, of course, is that the separation of art (a word derived from the Latin name skill) from craft (derived from the Anglo-Saxon word for skill) is a piece of European history that has little or nothing to do with Botswana, at least until the late 20th century.

Elizabeth Gron, the arts archivist at the NMMAG between 1995-1997, is an American who disagreed with Stephen Williams' decision and believes he excluded a huge amount of potentially exhibitable material through this distinction. This situation highlights the problem

here, which is that the NMMAG's curators' and directors' own biases and preferences dictate 100% of the non-commercial gallery art viewing in Botswana. There is no gallery space that offers different views, thereby allowing a debate on this matter.

Stephen Williams, through his western education and position as an abstract painter, brought his understanding of the art gallery from Europe to Botswana, hoping that the NMMAG would provide high quality shows of the kind of art familiar in Europe. Elizabeth Gron on the other hand, a historian rather than an artist, did not see the distinction between art and craft as relevant to Botswana, and was interested in the wide variety of art forms that are practiced throughout the country. She wanted to see them all represented in the national contemporary gallery. This continues to be an ongoing debate in Botswana.

The staff of the museum work very hard to encourage the use of the art gallery by the public and to introduce the concept of the art gallery and museum to the rest of the country. They are very aware of the geographical distribution of the population and the fact that the NMMAG is not in fact easily accessible to the majority of the population because of the huge distances between the capital and the rest of the country. They do a lot of work with schools, which are within a reasonable distance of Gaborone, in particular inviting groups to see the contemporary art shows.

Since 1990 the annual exhibitions: *Artists in Botswana*, *National Children's Art Exhibition* and the *National Basket Exhibition* remain the most successful events, and draw in people who would not normally visit an art gallery. As more people take part in the shows each year, so more visitors are invited and encouraged to go by the artists themselves, to see their work; as a result more people become familiar with and less intimidated by the venue.

The continuing annual *Artists in Botswana* show is one half of the former *Art and Crafts Exhibition*. Anyone normally resident in Botswana is entitled to submit work. There are five categories: Painting, Drawing/Graphics, Sculpture/Ceramics, Photography, and Textiles/Fabrics. The work is selected from the entries by a panel/jury of three chosen by the gallery director. Often the judges are themselves artists in which case, although they can submit work, they cannot receive awards. Once the show is selected and hung awards of 'excellent' 'merit' and 'special mention' are given in each category. The standard of works shown at the exhibitions I have visited have varied enormously. Artists who have been painting for years and who regularly sell work are displayed alongside very young and inexperienced artists. Due to the large space that needs to be filled and the small number of artists in Botswana the competition for such a show is not high. On the one hand this offers a great opportunity to a greater number aspiring artists and so contributes to the familiarization

of the gallery in Botswana society; on the other it leads to a very mixed show and one in which the more experienced artists may no longer want to show. Sales of work more likely reflect support for the artist by family and friends rather than quality of work thereby not necessarily encouraging improvement of work or selection process. This problem was beginning to be acknowledged and dealt with in the 1995 show. In his introduction in the 1995 catalogue Philip Segola, an artist and one of the judges, wrote:

Artists in Botswana is a very difficult exhibition because there has always been the perception that the works that are selected by judges are necessarily by formally trained and accomplished artists, to the detriment of young aspiring artists who have never had any formal artistic exposure. We have to recognise that there is a significant role to play by formally trained artists, a majority of whom are not from Botswana but are resident here. The role that they play is for raising standards because they are exposed to various movements the world over. Many of these ideas, they use here. We believe Botswana artists can learn from them.

Invariably a conflict arises as to what the exhibition should be about. If we try to raise standards by taking only formally trained and accomplished artists, there is no room for some local artists. As much as there is a need to exhibit works in Botswana and for people to see what's happening in the arts, *Artists in Botswana* has an obligation to raise standards. This is why we decided to split the exhibition. The upstairs gallery contains promising works by artists and works we felt were not up to the standard of the lower gallery...the idea is that the work of promising artists will eventually be seen in the lower gallery. Although there were not a massive number of entries, the exhibition is a reasonable barometer of art in Botswana, and is a great improvement. (Segola, 1995)

The show itself was probably of a higher standard (measured in terms of the more experienced artists being the majority of the exhibitors) when it was the previous *Art and Craft Exhibition*. An increased number of submissions, of which the baskets and tapestries would have been of a very high quality, would and have led to the less accomplished works on canvas being rejected. It is clear that this cross-section of all of the arts of Botswana (from basketry to canvas) also then gave a truer measure of the arts in Botswana.

The *National Children's Art Exhibition* is an important way in which the museum is drawing in more people. Exhibits are submitted from schools from all over the country and are displayed for three weeks. The work again falls into the categories of: painting, graphics, sculpture, ceramics and textiles, but here they do not make a distinction between art and craft. In fact, the organisers say that they want to encourage more of the 'traditional arts'. However, they do also acknowledge that these indigenous arts are not often taught at schools and so there is little representation of them in the exhibitions. Gersham Sanga, the curator of art during 1996, deals with this issue when he writes his introduction to the catalogue:

On the calendar of the National gallery, there are two exhibitions that are more important than all the rest in terms of cultural preservation and one of them happens to be the *National Children's Exhibition*. One of the reasons is that it helps us discover new talent and it ought to be an

opportunity to encourage our younger generations to actively appreciate and participate in our own traditional crafts such as pottery, carving and basket making.

We appreciate the difficult circumstances under which some of the art work is made, especially in rural schools, but we believe that teachers and parents should take advantage of whatever raw materials that nature can offer. At the moment most children probably think that art stands for painting, drawing, illustration etc. and I know that parents will probably say that traditional crafts must be included in the syllabus. The answer is yes they should be taught in schools. (Sanga, 1996)

The exhibition organisers are also aware of the problems of the population living at great distances from Gaborone and the fact that some schools may be missing out because of this. Christopher Toye, a lecturer in art education at Molepolole College of education, and one of the judges wrote:

The exhibition, at such a wonderful venue, is a wonderful incentive for students, staff and for art education...perhaps there could be some service to further encourage entries from outlying districts. (Toye, 1996).

The Thapong exhibition has a slightly different emphasis. It is work by artists who have been previously selected to take part in the *International Workshop*, therefore the criteria for entry to Thapong is reflected in the work shown at the end of the two weeks. The work is by more experienced artists from the southern Africa region and abroad and thus displays a confidence which is not always present in the other group shows. It is an exciting show, one that groups together some of the most experienced artists in the region. The main popular criticisms of the exhibition are the same as those previously discussed in the chapter on workshops in particular in the Thapong and Kuru sections. The fact that some of the work is abstract will always invite questions such as "what is the meaning of this?" "can African art be abstract?" and "are our artists being led astray by mixing with artists from abroad?" However, the exhibition would seem to be a positive step towards airing these questions and allowing a public debate and discussion.

Outreach work

A lot of outreach work is done with the museum's vehicles, which travel the country to take historical, archaeological and art-based information around the whole of Botswana. This takes into account that it is impossible for a whole class from outlying areas such as Ghanzi, to travel to Gaborone, and that it is easier in fact to move sections of the museum.

The education division interprets the museum and its collection to the public. The division processes and simplifies the researched information from other divisions and by using artefacts as teaching aids, gives lectures or conducts guided tours for visitors. The mobile museum takes the museum to schools and villages in rural areas of Botswana.

The division is one of the largest in the National Museum and operates three Mobile Museum units. When the fourth unit starts operating the mobile museum hopes to visit every primary school in Botswana annually. (Mpulubusi, 1992).

What is actually selected to be taken on each trip is at times questioned. Liz Kemp, the art education officer during 1994-1996 was not sure of the validity of showing videos about Van Gogh in the art section of the travelling museum and questioned the reasoning behind children at school learning about European painters when they were still unaware of some of the arts of their own country. On the other hand, the travelling museum is probably the only chance many of them will get to see such images. On these trips the staff are also collecting information and material for the NMMAG; information or artefacts that they can bring back to the archives in Gaborone.

“Getting it from the horse’s” mouth has become their slogan. For this reason they undertake research trips to various ethnic groups obtaining first hand information and artefacts which they can then use during their mobile museum trips (Mpulubusi, 1992)

During 1995 three women were employed to build a ~~mud hut~~^{thatched house} and to decorate it in the courtyard of the museum. Its location in the museum’s grounds enabled those living in Gaborone and the tourists passing through the city to see something of this indigenous tradition. Its position in the museum imparted a certain status to the art of house building and decorating, and its cultural importance was thus acknowledged. Nevertheless and problematically, situated in the museum part of the NMMAG and labelled as ‘a traditional house’, it was referred to in a historical context. This lack of reference to the contemporary survival of house decoration seems to deny the continued existence of this art practice still evidenced by all the real decorated homes around the country. It is true that the art of house decoration is in decline, as examined in chapter 1. Nevertheless, if the NMMAG had presented it as a contemporary art form and displayed it within the context of other current arts, rather than treating it as a historical artefact, it could have helped change its perception amongst Batswana nationals and visitors to the country.

The NMMAG thus has a critical role to play in the development of the arts in Botswana. It needs to recognise the importance of this and to establish a structured programme which would allow all of the contemporary arts of Botswana to play a part in its development. Botswana’s unique art history needs to be examined more thoroughly and to be made available through displays and permanent exhibitions to artists and to the general public.

The art worlds of Botswana are expanding and evolving, and offer an exciting opportunities to the NMMAG. The National art gallery should be able to offer support for all of the artists in

Botswana, thereby becoming more innovative and Botswana-centered. This in turn could lead to new creative developments.

Gallery Ann

The only other permanent exhibition space in Botswana is Gallery Ann. Established in the eighties by Ann Done (a British expatriate) it is Botswana's only commercial art gallery, and it combines exhibiting and selling art with a frame making business. In a not very large space (a converted house) Ann Done fills the walls with work and has two assistants making frames for most of Gaborone's artists. The gallery is made up of several small rooms. Throughout the year she will have a mixed exhibition of work by several artists. In addition, several times a year for periods of just two weeks she will have a one- or two-person show in the main room. The selection process is simply that she displays what she likes. She will consider the works of any artist who approaches her about a one-person show. However, with only a very few exceptions, the majority of these artists are expatriate.

As a commercial art gallery, Ann's aim is to sell work and she knows her market well. The work sells mainly to tourists or expatriates who are looking for something to send or take home with them. Here, the work of many expatriates fit the criteria looked for by these buyers, this is that the work needs to reflect or represent Africa to them. Figurative work with an 'African theme' sells well such as landscapes, wild animals and traditional homes. On the other hand work by Neo Matome or Velias Ndaba does not as it is essentially non-figurative, and is too expensive. Veryan Edwards does not exhibit there at all as her work is also non-figurative and so does not fit the commercial demands of the gallery.

Because Ann has been established for so long (early 1980s) the gallery is a space where some artists will go to meet each other. However, it is only expatriate or visiting artists who spend time there and at times it has the appearance of a colonial club. Hanging out at Gallery Ann is certainly not something that any Botswana would consider doing, either because of cultural differences or because of feeling excluded from such a group. Artists and friends of Ann's will drink coffee (supplied by Ann) and chat amongst the paintings. Few Botswana visit the gallery unless they are escorting tourists. In the other smaller rooms Ann Done displays a wide variety of crafts: pottery, batiks and carvings from around southern Africa. This is her selected representation of African art, it is also work that will sell well especially to resident expatriates.

In 1995 she organised a group charity show (for AIDS awareness) at the Sheraton Hotel in Gaborone in which she had a very wide selection of art. People were invited to submit work and there was a huge response. This may be partly to do with the fact that it was a charity event but also because it was very widely publicized through schools and colleges. It was an incredibly mixed show with a variety of styles and methods, from oils on canvas to fabric work and with less experienced artists showing next to other well-known artists (Figure 6.6- 6.7). It was also a very successful show with a huge turn out at the private view and a large number of sales. This seemed like the closest I had come to seeing a representation of what was going on in the Botswana art scene. It also showed the dedication that Ann Done has to the exhibition of art in Botswana and that, despite the apparent narrow and commercial criteria for work displayed at her private Gallery Ann, outside of these constraints she can and does recognize a wide variety of the arts in Botswana.

Open Studios

Still exploring the concept of the art that needs to be exhibited in a gallery-type space, some artists show work through organising alternative locations ie: instead of either the National Gallery or Gallery Ann. Amongst the expatriate community there are many available private venues. Ann Gollifer has a space to work in at her family's farm, which she occasionally uses for exhibiting her work. Others also have spaces or studios that they open to the public for an evening or a weekend. Again this is a social event where everyone knows one another and the work sells well amongst friends. Whilst I was in Gaborone I was invited to several of these shows. The exhibition openings were predominantly white/ expatriate affairs.

Hotels are also used for exhibitions. Veryan Edwards had a one-woman show at the Sheraton Hotel in 1996 and Gallery Ann organised the previously mentioned group charity show there. These events are very well attended by all sections of the Botswana society. Being 'neutral territory' makes it easier for people to attend as opposed to visiting someone's home or studio.

Exhibitions at projects

Art projects such as Ithuteng, Oodi and Kuru all have spaces for exhibiting their work. People visiting the project are then able to see the work hanging up, framed and separated to some extent from the actual workplace; whilst at the same time they can often meet the artist and see

where the work has been made. To visit Oodi or Kuru is an experience, for anyone not from Botswana, which can add to the appreciation of a piece of work.

For the artists living in very rural areas, visitors are usually very welcome, both as a distraction but also as a link to the wider world. With this kind of captive audience sales are also very good.

Roadside stalls

Many women sell their work at the side of the road near to the setting in which it was made. Often the women are working alongside their stall. The women potters at Pelotsetla made pots whilst they waited for passers by. The basket makers at Etsha will also work, sitting on the ground, next to their stall. The stalls themselves are often set up in such a way to be a work of art in itself. The order of display, the piles of baskets whose patterns clash all show a certain aesthetic and pride in their work. It could be said that this is the 'natural setting' for this kind of work. Yet these arts can also stand up in other kinds of display space in Botswana and abroad, as we shall see.

Exhibiting indigenous arts

In Botswana, despite the prominence of gallery-based art in Gaborone, most of the visual arts are produced in rural areas. In consequence, there is very little reference to them or interaction with them in the contemporary gallery spaces. As we have just seen, the art gallery is still thought of, through its position in the capital, by artists and visitors, as the forefront (in terms of exposure to a wide art-buying and interested audience and in terms of discussion, debate and critical assessment) of art in Botswana. Its importance is unquestioned and a lot of time is spent in encouraging the use of both the museum and art gallery. However, as my survey of the arts that women are still practicing shows, more reference to and information about what is currently going on around the country, and a greater effort to exhibit the work in whatever setting that is thought appropriate, would give a broader and more comprehensive picture of the contemporary variety of Botswana's arts. This would also help to prevent the two tier system that seems to prevail whereby art shown in the gallery is 'contemporary art' and that shown in the museum section such as house decoration, carving and baskets are merely the 'historical craft' pieces.

How arts that are made in rural areas can be bought into a contemporary gallery space is not without its problems. The work is removed from its origin and placed in a very 'foreign' context; and this may work for some arts and not for others. Baskets and pots have been

displayed very successfully in the gallery space, especially abroad as we shall see later. Removed from the dusty roadside stall, the work is seen in a different light. The focus is turned to the individual basket and pattern rather than the mass of patterns seen at a stall and the detail and aesthetic of the individual piece of work can be appreciated. Both ways of viewing the work are valid and it is exciting that art objects, such as the baskets and pots, can translate so well from one setting to another offering a range of visual and conceptual experiences.

The translation for the arts of house decoration is more difficult. For the women decorating their homes, although they work alone they are doing it for the local community as much as for themselves and the act of creating is as much a part of the finished product as the painting itself is. The work is often a response to a village event (a wedding, a birth) or it is seasonal; it serves particular audiences and inevitably this will not be the audience of the art gallery or museum. The house built and decorated in the grounds of the museum serves as a historical record of this art form. Should the house decoration be replicated in the gallery space its intentions will have changed as will its audience. Both exhibits are valid but hold very different purposes.

Alternatives

Alternatives to the art gallery and other institutional settings for exhibiting and looking at work do already exist and have had some success historically in other parts of Africa. The *People's Parks* in South Africa (early 1980's) is one example examined by Steven Sack (Sack, 1989:191) where groups of people would get together to create a monument/space for their community, their own public art. Here he suggests that this has replaced in some way the wall decoration that could no longer be continued in the urban situation. Another example, again in South Africa, is the Polly Street Art Centre (started as early as 1948) which was an organisation set up for the needs of the community and was run by those involved, it was not an imported institution. An art scene developed around the people who used this centre which also provided an essential space for viewing art. This is written about in detail by David Koloane (Koloane, 1989:211).

Alternatives to art galleries is also a contemporary issue consciously explored by some artists: Pitika Ntuli (a south African artist and tutor), when he was teaching in London and before his return to South Africa, advocated a diversity of sites for art and encouraged his students to display their work around the city on buses, billboards, shop fronts. He is acknowledging a plurality of venues for art, venues where the artists may have more control

over the presentation, where the work is more relevant and where it will be seen by the target audience/community. This would begin to break down the boundaries of what is or is not art. In West Africa teachers have spoken of taking their students to see crafts people at work; this, alongside visits to galleries, must give the students a sense of the equal importance of the diverse art forms and skills. In Nigeria there was the conscious movement called *Natural Synthesis*, which advocated a mix of “modern sensibility and ‘traditional’ reality” (Okeke, 1995:52). As well as promoting this for the art work itself, the artists in the movement also explored this within the context of the exhibition space. “Rather than affect the stark absurdism of much western installation art, Onobrakpeya’s work approximates to the emotive subject-space symbolism of African religious shrines...” (Okeke, 1995:52)

These ideas broaden the options available to artists when they consider how to go about exhibiting and displaying their work to the public, and they will be relevant to artists in Botswana. The need to find alternatives to the big city gallery is all the more pressing because of the diversity of art making and the huge distances in a country like Botswana.

Art from Botswana exhibited abroad

Art from Botswana has not had much exposure abroad. In 1977 there was a major touring exhibition of tapestries by the Oodi weavers to Sweden and Denmark: *This is my life*. But it was only in the following decade that the questions about how art from Africa should be displayed were opened up by *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989). Since then there have been only four major shows of art from Botswana in London:

1. 1993, *Botswana Live!* at the Commonwealth Institute.
2. The exhibition of Kuru art *Mongongo*: at the Rebecca Hossack’s gallery in 1993, at the Barbican gallery in 1995 and in Rotterdam in 1994.
3. 1995 Neo Matome was part of an exhibition called *Five African Women Artists* also in London at the Savannah gallery.
4. Veryan Edwards’s 1996 Delfina Studios (London) residency and exhibition.

In the light of the many debates about the display of African art internationally it will be worth examining each of these exhibitions to see how the work was exhibited and how successful they were.

This is my life

This was the 1977 exhibition of Oodi tapestries, curated by Peder Gowenius, who founded the project. I have discussed this exhibition in some detail in chapter 2. However, I also want to include it here in the context of other exhibitions abroad of art from Botswana. *This is my life* was funded by SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) who were the main supporters of the Oodi project itself. The exhibition was hung in the National museum of Denmark and then toured to the National museum in Sweden during 1977. The foreword explains:

Here are some people who want to express themselves. Through their tapestries they are speaking to us about the history of their country and the thoughts and conditions of their life, which are part of their everyday existence, and ours. (Gowenius, 1977)

The work was presented to teach us something about a different way of life, a rural African way of life. The exhibition catalogue describes the project and its history and each artist had a space to write about themselves and how they came to the project. The stories are similar for most of the women writing about how the project has helped them through earning a wage, where before they had no work at all:

I stopped working when I became pregnant, and for some time I did nothing until I found a job at the weaving factory. I have four children and I still stay with my mother. I do not see much difference in my life. (Fredah Mosala in *This is my life*).

In 1974 I became a weaver. Life is better now. I have five children and I am busy building myself a better house. (Dipugo Masilo in *This is my life*).

These statements do not discuss the subject matter or aesthetic value of the work but rather the weavers' lives, giving a sociological implication to the exhibition. In the catalogue Peder Gowenius emphasised the educational value of the works both to the viewer and the weaver.

...through this educational process the weavers have started to rediscover their own culture, the only force capable of preserving their cultural identity. They have developed some of the confidence, self reliance and social awareness that is required to fulfil the long-term development advocated by their government, i.e. Unity, Development, Self Reliance and Democracy. (Gowenius, 1977)

The emphasis of this exhibition is reminiscent of a comment that Susan Vogel made on the exhibiting of African work abroad:

Because the creators of these objects were not making a claim for their status as artists or for their works as art, and since their products generally failed to correspond to the art made in Europe at the time, most objects were classified as ethnographic specimens and sent to anthropology museums. (Vogel, 1991:13)

Peder Gowenius seemed to be primarily interested in the sociological and education value of the project. Moreover he was misleading when he wrote: "there is no local tradition for making pictures, but, even so only the technique is taught." (Gowenius, 1977). It would take another sixteen years before a major exhibition of art from Botswana visited Europe and put this right. In the catalogue of *Botswana Live!* the history of making art in Botswana was acknowledged by the then president of the Botswana Society: F. Mogae¹¹⁵:

This is the first comprehensive collection of our art and craft work which we have exhibited outside our own country.

Art is not new to us; some of our ancestors were painting on the rocks in the north of the country more than 2000 years ago. Our people have always imbued the things they made with beauty, be they clay pots, copper jewellery, skin mats or wooden spoons, and our children have always made their own toys. (Mogae, 1993)

Botswana Live!

Held in 1993 at the Commonwealth Institute in London, this was the first ever touring exhibition of a collection of Botswana art (Figures 6.8-6.13). The show was curated by Alex Campbell, one of the founders of the NMMAG and former president of The Botswana Society. He also designed the catalogue along with Elizabeth Gron, the then arts archivist at the NMMAG. Yvonne Ayo was the exhibition organiser responsible for the show at the Institute. The exhibition was sponsored by many organisations including the Barclays Bank of Botswana, the Botswana Government, the British Council and British Airways.

The context of the exhibition was very much determined by its venue. The fact that the Commonwealth Institute, rather than a contemporary art gallery was chosen gave a particular emphasis to the show. The history of the Institute was one of an educational purpose where fragments of cultures, historical and contemporary, were on display to give the viewer an insight into the indigenous culture of the countries of the Commonwealth. Running alongside the *Botswana Live!* show was *Gifts to the Queen*, an exhibition marking the centenary of the institute a reminder of Britain's colonial past. In this setting then it was clear that *Botswana Live!* was not about promoting individual pieces of work or artists but rather to give an overview of the contemporary visual culture of a Commonwealth country. This emphasis on presenting a package about Botswana led to the walls being painted the blue of the Botswana flag; this was not the best colour wall on which to display paintings and prints as it was too dark and deadened a lot of the colours used in the paintings, especially those without frames.

Information about Botswana, such as land mass and population size, was at the start of the show and this was enough to set the scene. Also, however, dispersed around the show were

photographs of Botswana mounted on board. These were very distracting as they were often placed too close to either a painting or tapestry and didn't seem to bear any particular relevance to that piece of work. Dotted around the show they appeared irrelevant and lacked reason. As an attempt to attempt to give an insight into the country, they were already surpassed by the works of art themselves. The exhibition was meant to be educational telling us as much as possible about the country, with the result that there was an unhappy mixture of art and information. It is a shame that the curators were not confident enough to allow the work to stand on its own merits. *Still Life* by Oupa Seleke and *Botswana Railways* by Rantefe Mothebe were great insights into Botswana contemporary culture: the still life depicting cartons of Botswana products, washing powder, milk, beer and a gas stove and the railways showing the relatively new industrialisation of parts of a country made up mainly of desert. Works by the weavers and Keemi Mosinyi give an insight into contemporary way of life in rural Botswana, the Oodi weavers showing different village scenes from a woman's point of view, children going to school, women at home cleaning the yards, and Mosinyi painting scenes such as the *kgotla* meetings. The photographs could have been exhibited as works of art themselves; enlarged and framed they would have given their own insight into the country of Botswana rather than getting in the way of the other work. The show reflected the thoughts and theories of the two main organisers: Gron and Campbell. They were both in favour of mixing art and craft in one exhibition space (it was Gron who complained when Stephen Williams cancelled the annual art and craft show at the NMMAG); and so here we saw arts and crafts displayed alongside each other, offering a fuller representation of the arts of Botswana, a point made in the catalogue. Although this has been much debated in Europe, in Botswana and much of southern Africa it is an issue that was just then beginning to be dealt with.

Our ancestors shaped everything they needed for their daily lives. They recognised no distinction between art and craft, nor do we do so to this day. (Campbell and Gron, 1993).

However, despite these words the exhibition curators did in fact draw their own line of distinction between the makers of art and craft the painters and printmakers were all credited by name next to their works and in the catalogue, whereas the weavers, the textile workers and those involved in the craft side of the exhibition were not. They were written about in the catalogue as groups rather than as individual artists:

Mokolodi is an arts workshop run by Robyn Sheldon who specialises in teaching ceramic jewellery production, painting and printmaking. (Gron and Campbell, 1993:41)

Lentswe La Oodi Weavers was founded by Ulla and Peder Gowenius in 1973 to help provide income for people living in surrounding villages. The weavers specialise in tapestries using wools

specially dyed in the workshop. Their illustrations are drawn from folklore and country life. Their designs are woven directly into the tapestries without using preparatory sketches. (Gron and Campbell, 1993: 30)

This distinction was highlighted when two very similar wood carvings in the show and were reproduced opposite each other in the catalogue (p20-21): *Seated Bushmen* by Speedo Goatlhalelwe and *Old Man* by the Serowe Woodcarvers. This had to raise the question as to why the artist of the latter was not identified and what was the difference between these two woodcarvers; which was merely that one was part of a group of artists at a project, whereas the other worked alone.

If the individual maker is important in one work of art, why not all the others? Perhaps paintings and printmakers should not have been credited. By default this created the very distinction they said they were trying to avoid! This particularly concerns me, as so often those who are un-named are women. The makers of the tapestries and textile pieces could have been identified. There was one screen print that was signed, and still the artist was not named by a label or in the catalogue. Yvonne Ayo said she had no idea why some of the artists were named and others not and she had not questioned the fact. This emphasises how the distinction can be made without any real thought or consideration as to why. It would have been interesting to see whether a different venue would have given a different perspective to the exhibition. Would an art gallery rather than a museum have given more weight to the individual pieces of work and to the artists rather than the broader educational emphasis that dominated *Botswana Live!* at the Commonwealth Institute.

There were good examples of contemporary painting, works by the San artists from the Kuru project, as well as Botswana artists such as Philip Segola and Neo Matome and expatriate artists such as Ann Gollifer and Petra Rohr Rouendaal. They did, however, neglect to mention the Thapong workshop, which was at the time in its second year and already a major force in the development of contemporary art in Botswana. This omission highlighted another ongoing debate within the arts scene (which I have previously discussed) between those who discouraged all kinds of outside influences for artists and those who actively seek it. Alec Campbell, the main organiser behind *Botswana Live!* believes that art education is a problem for African artists and that it often “destroys” their creativity. He said that: “as artists become educated their work suffers” (Alec Campbell, interviewed 1996: Gaborone), whether by the educational system in Botswana or the art education that some artists such as Neo Matome and Philip Segola have had abroad, in either America or Britain. Neo Matome told me that Campbell tried to discourage her from going abroad to study art saying that it would be a

negative influence. He was very much one of those who believed that contemporary African art could not be abstract. On the other hand he was very supportive of the Kuru artists' because he thought (mistakenly) that their work was 'unspoiled' by education or external influence (despite the obvious evidence to the contrary as seen in chapter 2).

Philip Segola was at the opening to the *Botswana Live!* show and he holds a point of view opposite to Campbell's. As an artist he welcomes outside influences, he is always looking around and abroad for inspiration. He believes that an artist cannot work in isolation and that you cannot deny external and foreign inputs and said that "an artist will always eventually come back to himself" (Philip Segola, interviewed 1993: London) implying that, having absorbed all that is around him/her, the work that comes out of a painter will be of him, and therefore will represent the artist's time and situation. Despite Alec Campbell's personal views on art, the importance of Thapong cannot be ignored and, in a survey of the arts of Botswana, there should have been some reference to it. Even if the number of people involved in the arts in Botswana is small, the *Botswana Live!* exhibition highlighted, through what was included or excluded, and how it was displayed, several of the conflicts and debates and differing points of view that are still currently being developed.

Kuru art abroad

The art from the Kuru project has been exhibited abroad more than any other art from Botswana. The first exhibition outside of Botswana was held in South Africa at the Newtown gallery in Johannesburg in 1992; this was followed by an exhibition in London in May 1993 at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery and again at her second gallery in October 1993. The following year Hossack organised an exhibition at the Barbican Concourse art gallery. In 1994 a major exhibition of art from Kuru was on display at the Museum of Ethnology in Rotterdam, Holland. How the project managers have displayed the work to the viewers and visitors has been discussed to some extent in the chapter on projects. However, here I want to focus on how the work has been displayed by foreign curators within the context of exhibitions abroad.

Despite the varied venues the emphasis of all the Kuru shows has been an interest in the artists' sociological and anthropological backgrounds rather than purely in their work. This interest has come in some cases from the viewers and critics and in other instances from the curators. An example of the first situation is the first exhibition in South Africa at the Newtown gallery in Johannesburg, one of the main locations for the display of contemporary art in South Africa. This venue immediately gave the work the context of contemporary art rather than turning it into a work of anthropological interest. Nevertheless, despite being in a

gallery devoted to contemporary art the critics and reviewers could not stop themselves relating the work to cave paintings. Judy Seidman (one of the few art critics resident in Botswana) points out:

The response of the South African newspapers is (unsurprisingly) “anthropological” attempting to find stylistic similarities with the rock paintings the artists themselves have never seen. (Seidman, 1992:34)

The situation of the Kuru artists, when they are seen as a group show, needs some explanation. The fact that they all work in the same workshop, which has been set up for sociological reasons by overseas charities, cannot really be overlooked and Judy Seidman gives some space in her review to an explanation:

The works don't easily fall into our cultural preconceptions. They were painted by five people from the Cexai and Nharo, groups of San who have long lived east of Ghansi, towards and around Lake Ngami in Botswana. As a people they have been forced further into the encroaching Kalahari, deprived of their livelihood by land enclosures for cattle estates...The main ‘traditional’ arts of the Cexai today include wood-burning, carving, and beadwork - no paper, pencils or paints. The art they do practice depends heavily upon decorative patterning and symbols. (Seidman, 1992:34)

However, she moves away from the temptation to categorise the work as using ancient symbolism and recognises the modern world that these people live in and the contemporary influences that they have:

None of the artists has formal Western education. They have never had access to western art books. At the same time forget - *The Gods must be crazy* - they have seen commercial packaging with photographs, drawings advertising logos in their lives, even if rather less frequently than a resident of Johannesburg might.

One might find similar stylistic resemblances to some of Matisse's work. Unless we have some insight into the artists' motivations, we simply cannot attribute a similarity to an assumed cultural continuity. (Seidman, 1992:34)

This is the only article or discussion that I have read about the Kuru artists where there is reference to the contemporary world that they live in and that questions the links to the cave paintings and the assumed inherent aesthetic.

How the work was displayed in a similar setting in London, however, was completely different. Rebecca Hossack is an independent commercial art gallery. She had previously held several exhibitions of Aboriginal art work and her choice to display the art from Kuru gave her gallery a name for showing ‘ethnic’ and ‘primitive’ art.

She organised three Kuru exhibitions in all, two in her own gallery and one at the Barbican centre (which also included a collection of baskets from Botswana). Despite the contemporary setting of the gallery a definite sociological and anthropological slant was given to the shows.

She invited Survival International to be associated with and to publicise the event: "Survival international is a worldwide movement to support tribal peoples. It stands for their right to decide their own future and helps them protect their lands, environment and way of life" (Survival publicity material 1993) and the press release for the exhibition read:

African art is enjoying a revival of interest and the art of the Bushmen, like that of the Australian aboriginal, has its origins deep in pre-history. Likewise it has received fresh impetus in recent years. The motifs of the Bushmen's paintings and linocuts are borrowed from the cave paintings of their ancestors but they are reborn with a new vitality and wonder. With its combination of ancient power and unselfconscious immediacy, the Bushmen's work is one of the most exciting developments in contemporary art. (Press release for Barbican 1994)

Without any amount of research or evidence the work of peoples from two sides of the planet are being compared. Certainly similarities can be found between the Aboriginal and San especially in that they are two groups of people who have been exploited and abused for centuries. Only now are they beginning to reclaim some of their rights and status partly helped by groups such as Survival. However, the fact that their situations are similar does not necessarily make the work otherwise comparable, any more than the work of artists from Japan and America, both peoples living in an industrialised and built up world, would be. This emphasis on the "origins deep in pre-history" can be brought back to the fact that the 'ethnic', the 'primitive' sells work well. Writing about the San and Aboriginal as a threatened people makes the work exotic and endangered and therefore more saleable and valuable. This could be interpreted as a cynical exploitation, despite the humanitarian work of Survival International.

The labels for the paintings gave the artists names but also their ages, which I thought was strange. (When do we ever see a group show of contemporary art giving the artists' ages: Rachel Whiteread 35 yrs. old or Damien Hirst 37yrs. old?) It was only seen as important here as the show was as much about showcasing the 'Bushman' as it was about selling their work. In fact, it was through promoting the 'primitive people' from the Kalahari that it was hoped to sell the work.

A few of the artists were present at the exhibition opening. They seemed very bewildered by their new surroundings and the amount of attention they were getting. Speeches were given (by Rebecca Hossack and a representative from Survival) and then the artists were asked to dance and sing in what must have been an attempt to convey something of the San culture. Sitting in a gallery in central London amongst a lot of other white middle class art buyers watching the San 'perform' was very awkward and embarrassing. There was something very colonial about the situation. Much as though the artists seemed happy to do it one could not

shift the balance of power of the situation between them and us, us with the power to say “dance” and them really without the power to say “no”

The artists’ work was very well hung and made a great and varied exhibition. The work stood well on its own; and without the sociological background (such as knowing the artists’ ages) the show would still have been interesting and exciting. Whether the work would have sold as well as it did though is a different matter. At the end of the day the setting of the exhibitions organised by Hossack was a sales pitch and she was open about that:

The works were created with the view to being sold. They are even created with the view to being sold to the west...These factors by no means degrade the quality of the art however it is foolish to say that they do when we consider that all our own artists paint with a view to sell. (Press release for Rebecca Hossack 1994)

Rebecca Hossack was fully aware of the criticisms around her exhibitions and chose to respond with an article she released called: *Artistic Apartheid? -! Kung states its case.*

Entitled *! Kung: Art of the African Bushman*, the show has been the recipient of extremely mixed reactions. Most common is the reaction combining surprise (that African tribal painting and printmaking exists), and joy (that it is so vibrant and compelling). Less common, but very persistent, is the accusation that the show is patronising to Bushmen at best and exploitative at worst. By answering the issues that this accusation raises, this piece seeks to encourage the former positive view by making the position of the Rebecca Hossack Gallery clear. (Hossack, 1994)

The piece explains how the gallery was approached by Kuru to display their work and they did not want to refuse as “to refuse would be to announce that they must be relegated to the status of a people with no role in contemporary society” (Hossack, 1994). But the criticism is not that they exhibited the work but how it was exhibited. “We have not mounted any information on them because we would never do this for our Western artists. Alone the works show the potential to represent a whole new genre in African art.” (Hossack, 1994). This statement is not correct: firstly most exhibitions do have some background information about the artist and their work often in the form of a statement by the artist themselves and secondly, the first Rhg (Rebecca Hossack Gallery) show did mount information on the artists as their ages were displayed and at the Barbican exhibition there was a stall full of books, pamphlets, music and information about the ‘African Bushmen’.

The article also went on to contradict a previous Rhg statement “none of the Bushmen today can remember any of their ancestors creating the rock paintings or engravings which the tribe is so famed for. Their cultural tradition has died and the project aims to allow them to create a new one by providing materials but no prescription as to what they should depict.”(Hossack, 1994). As opposed to what they had previously stated: “the motifs of the

bushman's paintings and linocuts are borrowed from the cave paintings of their ancestors..." (Hossack, 1994).

The conclusion here is that there is one press release for the buying public, and one for the critic. The exhibition served to highlight the fact that African exoticism still existed and that it still sold work. The Kuru project was about providing people with an income and Hossack, through her clever marketing has enabled that to be a great success. The artists were very happy with the success of the shows and they have not been exploited commercially. However, what has been perpetuated, are a series of myths surrounding their artistic and aesthetic ancestors as a group from a remote past. No real examination of them and their work as individual artists functioning within contemporary society has been done, and so, despite Hossack's statement and intentions, the exhibition had a context very different to anything that would be expected for a western artist.

Another part of the Hossack show at the Barbican was a display of Botswana baskets (Figure 6.14). They were cleverly shown with the flatter-shaped baskets hung, as paintings, on the walls and a few free standing baskets on individual plinths. This was a very good example of how art taken from the roadside and exhibited in a gallery setting gives the work a different context and allows the viewer to appreciate each basket individually. However, the baskets were exhibited without any mention of the artists by name, yet again turning back to the anonymity of an old-fashioned anthropological account.

The exhibition of Kuru art in Rotterdam in 1994 was held at the Museum of Ethnology and was called *Sporen in het zand: Bushmen kunst uit Botswana, or in English: Return of the moon: Bushmen art from the Kalahari* (Figure 6.15). It was not an exhibition for selling work; it was strictly a museum show, there for the purposes of education. There was much written about the San's past and the emphasis of the show was to draw comparisons between the historical rock paintings of Namibia and the contemporary art from Kuru.

The museum presents, in a fascinating setting, contemporary paintings by Bushmen artists and a series of centuries old rock paintings by their distant ancestors. (*Afrika in Rotterdam, 1993-1994, publicity material from the Museum voor Volkenkunde*)

The exhibition was visually successful with huge canvases by artists from the Kuru project on the walls and large sections of rock painting and engravings brought from Namibia on the ground level (Figures 6.16 and 6.17). However, the evidence behind the connection of these two art forms was lacking. The leap of several thousand years implies that the San's way of life had changed little whereas, even without the abrupt and cruel intervention into their

lifestyle by land owners, as a people, their way of life and art forms had been continually changing over the years. They were not one day painting on rocks and the next on canvas. Over the years their cultural references, artistic and visual expressions have changed and developed. As Judy Seidman pointed out, the canvases we see today are the products of not only rock paintings now that the artists have to travel to see them, but also a whole host of new and continually developing imagery such as advertising hoardings, food packaging and new cloth/dress styles. This exhibition romanticises the work of the Kuru project by ignoring any contemporary western influences and concentrates on Africa as exotic and primitive.

None of the exhibitions of Kuru work has been completely satisfactory. The differing approaches seem to be good examples of how one body of work can be presented and manipulated to serve different ends. This does not necessarily mean that the artists have been exploited as they were aware of where their work is going and why. However, there has been very little regard to actual fact or research throughout the exhibitions. Much has been written about the work and the artists based on the exhibitions; with very little proper research or evidence this has built up myths and histories about the Kuru art helping to perpetuate ideas about the exotic and primitive. The research into the relationship between their paintings and other aspects of their cultural productions, and then, from there, opening up the possibilities of references back to the rock arts, has yet to be done.

Neo Matome

Neo Matome has exhibited regularly in Botswana and Zimbabwe. However, trying to get exhibitions abroad is very difficult for any African artist. Until her trip to Canada 1998, where her work was exhibited during a residency, her only exhibition abroad was in 1993 in London. The now defunct Savannah art gallery curated a show called *8 African Women Artists*. The women included were: Zuleika Bladsczyck-Radziwill, South Africa; Ndidi Dike, Nigeria; Helen Lieros, Greek/Zimbabwe; Neo Matome, Botswana; Metzger, Sierra Leone; Jocelyn Santos, Benin; Helen Sebidi, South Africa and Caroline Sebunya, British Ugandan.

The catalogue essay was written by Dr. Olu Oguibe. He discusses the role of the women's art movement in Europe in the seventies and eighties and the distinctions drawn between 'high', 'low' and 'non' art. He states that:

The absent great female artist is an upper class European phenomenon, the result of a rhetoric of exclusion and erasure which dichotomised art into the 'high' and the 'low' and the 'non art', and reserved the 'high' art with a capital A, for self-defined centre, consigning all that was produced outside the perimeters of its little walls into absence. In other words history is populated with great

women artists, only art history as told by Europe decidedly failed and continues to fail to notice. Unfortunately white feminism equally failed to notice. If Europe denies its great women artists, the story of art in Africa is undeniably one of great women artists. Across the continent from the forest cultures of the Guinea coast to the Nomadic cultures of the Masai highlands art, as creation, is essentially as much a female space as it is male. In some cultures aspects of art are the preserve of the female, and so without the discriminatory dichotomisation between high and low art, art and craft, which is why such distinctions do not exist in most African languages. (Oguibe, 1993)

However, despite these words, the reality is that exhibition spaces and their curators in Botswana (and throughout much of Africa) now operate with these distinctions imported from that very western art history. This exhibition of eight African women artists in London did not confront any of the dichotomies that Oguibe talks about as they were all women who painted on canvas and exhibited in galleries. There is no doubt that they produce art with a capital A. Had one of the artists been a potter, basket maker or weaver then the exhibition would have challenged the art history and art distinctions that he talks about. Nevertheless Oguibe's observations are true and maybe more relevant when looking at other group shows of African art.

Savannah was a commercial art gallery in London, run by the Ghanaian curator Leroy Coubabgy, and with the catalogue written by Oguibe, it meant that Neo Matome's work was displayed at face value without any reference to exoticism or primitivism. The work was analysed for its own strengths and weaknesses without the negative and out dated questioning of whether African artists should be painting abstract work or gaining influences from abroad. Her influences and ways of working are debated at face value without there being the hidden agenda of trying to maintain the African art references which often only exist in the European mind:

A participant in the Thapong art workshops in Botswana, her work has been considerably influenced by the workshop environment and the heavy European influences on these workshops. Colour and the possibilities of pigment are her main interests, not in the same philostorical sense as we find in Santos, but in the intellecist, high modernist manner which the workshops encourage. Her play on relief and the metaphor of rust and blemishes pushes her art unconsciously beyond a mere play with colour. What is evident is that the workshop paintings of such veterans such as David Koloane, which have come to influence the workshop genre in southern Africa, are compromises between the supposedly apolitical work of the white South African art and the politically agitated passions of Blacks, between the urge to scream and the compulsion to look away. (Oguibe, 1993)

Here it is that Neo Matome's work is reviewed for the work itself within its proper context with references to the very real people and events that make up her influences.

Veryan Edwards

In 1996 Veryan Edwards was invited to be an artist-in-residence at the Delfina artists' studios, London. The resulting work was exhibited in a show called *Thoughts in Space and Colour*. It was an exciting show of largely non-figurative paintings, which obviously drew on her background as a resident of Botswana but incorporated elements from her short stay in London.

The work is informed by seventeen years of experience of Botswana: the vastness of the Kalahari and the richness of the Okavango; the heat and rawness of the land and the warmth and directness of the people. The art of contemporary Bushmen artists such as Dada Coex'ae Qgam from D'Kar have influenced my work towards greater simplicity. Concerns in London have largely focused on relationships and the experience of loss through death and the questioning this always brings. Colour can be life affirming, a recognition of the play of existence. (Edwards, 1996)

Veryan Edwards' time in residence was an example of how artists from Africa can work abroad and their work can be looked at without the 'baggage' of the labels 'African artist' and 'abstract artist' and the debates that surround them. Here Veryan Edwards' work stood by itself in the contemporary western art gallery situation and was well received.

Patronage

Finally a word needs to be said on patronage of the arts in Botswana. For artists to survive they need to be able to sell work or be sponsored (through grants, scholarships or fellowships) to work. Neo Matome was a good example of how hard it is for artists in Botswana to get this kind of sponsorship. Most artists will survive by doing other paid work and painting in their spare time.

However, art does sell at exhibitions. At the *Artists in Botswana* show work (by young less experienced artists) is often affordable and is sold to friends, family and the general public. Larger work by more experienced artists is more expensive and only ever bought by expatriates or the few Batswana interested in collecting art. Neo Modisi (see chapter 3) was one of the few art buyers I met.

Artists can often also sell to businesses. For instance the Bank of Botswana has a large collection of art. Patronage by businesses is actively being encouraged now by the arts centre, which now promotes artists and their exhibitions to potential buyers and businesses.

Conclusion to chapter 6

Whether exhibited at home or abroad, displays of art by artists living and working in Botswana can still present questions and disputes (whether about 'art' versus 'craft', or about the commercial value of descriptions such as 'tribe', 'exotic', 'primitive') which in many other parts of the world have been resolved. There is also, still, a tendency to impose categories derived from elsewhere that have little or nothing to do with Botswana. Even well-meaning humanitarian projects can get sucked into all this. Meanwhile the lack of critical patronage in Botswana remains a problem, though Thapong has shown ways of dealing with this; hopefully this can be developed and expanded in the future to offer more opportunities for a wider group of artists.

Conclusion

This research began with my discovery, as a student, of the women's movement; and then, travelling in Botswana, I could not help but notice all the women involved in the visual arts and culture of the country. On the other hand, with the exception of the Grant's book on house decoration (1995) and the occasional article in a journal or magazine, I could not find anything written about women and the visual arts in Botswana. This thesis is, thus, the first to examine all the arts practiced by women in that country; and it shows (i) that the arts indigenous to Botswana have in fact been predominantly those of women, both at the present time and in the past, that none of the traditions inherited from the past were dead; (ii) that where art practices have been introduced via a series of projects and workshops it was mainly women that were recruited; and (iii) that in the emerging Fine Art practice in Botswana women have taken a leading role.

I found a wide variety of indigenous visual arts spread over the country, from the women around Gaborone still decorating their homes to small pockets of women making baskets in the Okavango regions, and the Herero women sewing in the dusty streets of the desert town Ghanzi. Contemporary with all these, I found developments for women in projects set up by overseas workers, as well as individual women artists largely working alone, some having received their art education outside Botswana. In this thesis I have documented and discussed all the arts that women were involved in during the period of my research, and I have considered the factors leading to their successes and failures.

During my research in Botswana I found that many of the indigenous arts were still practised, and that they were more widespread than it would at first seem when travelling through the country. For example, in more rural areas, houses are still painted according to the local decorative tradition, and hand-thrown pottery is still made for local use. Even though the frequency of mural painting and pottery making was less than it was in the past, they were not yet dead art forms. It was in the city that the galleries and museum, and the generality of city dwellers, treated these traditions as something belonging to the past, and thus no longer relevant to the culture of today. Painted mural decoration, in particular, was threatened by its association with what was perceived as the poverty and backwardness of village life. This took away the incentive for it to be passed on from mother to daughter, and, in any case as people moved to town or city there was even less incentive to adapting the mural tradition to the

forms and materials of urban life. In rejecting village life women also rejected the arts associated with it.

On the other hand, I also found, unsurprisingly perhaps, that those indigenous arts that women had been able to adapt to sale in a market were practiced more than those that could not be so adapted. Basketry, in particular, which offered tourists a product of optimum interest whilst still retaining some sense of its indigenous visual appeal, could be seen everywhere. Others forms, such as the Herero dolls, have been invented to serve the interests of tourists.

As my research progressed I found that the new developments brought about by missionaries and expatriates in Botswana often focussed on women as a group with the need for an income and with the time available to try something new. Yet these developments were invariably divorced from the indigenous art traditions that women had once practiced, and that despite the intentions of those setting up the projects the women involved in them did not develop their own aesthetic. They were taught how to use the new materials, and about the purposes of and markets for the things they made were; but this was not enough to enable them somehow to possess and then develop their own aesthetic. Their training took no notice of the visual and artistic heritage of women in Botswana and once passed from grandmother to mother to daughter. Without developing any association with the indigenous arts, the new projects struggled to survive, often tending in the absence of their expatriate founders to lapse into mere repetition of forms and designs with a capacity to sell well to expatriate visitors. The women were never really fully in charge of the direction of the work. They had not been encouraged to take control; and they did not progress from the status of project workers to that of artists of value to their community.

However, there was a small group of women, five of whom were full time artists and well known in the museum and gallery environment, with another four working occasionally. In no sense did they comprise a coherent 'movement' with some kind of common aesthetic or political purpose. Each of them had been educated within the school/university system and had the benefit of supportive families and sufficient financial resources to allow them some time to paint. Most importantly, they all have faith in their work as artists, and confidence in the possibilities for and the necessity of developing a contemporary Fine Art tradition in Botswana. Each worked independently of each other without any sense of a need to be mutually supportive in what elsewhere has been an otherwise male-dominated field. In Botswana, the development of Fine Art still remains in the hands of so small a number of artists that each is seen very much as an individual in regard to forms, media and aesthetics, and the politics of art-making. In spite of this confidence, there was little interest in the

indigenous traditions, either as representing an art history distinctive of Botswana, or as points of reference for their own work. The arts-crafts divide had been imported into Botswana as a result of Fine Art training elsewhere, and this still served to prevent artists taking notice of the indigenous forms. Nevertheless, in contrast to the development of arts projects by expatriates, this emerging group of contemporary fine artists had take the initiative to bring the artist-led Triangle workshop movement to Botswana, beginning with the inception of an annual Thapong International Artists workshop in 1989. This allowed artists often isolated in distant parts of Botswana to meet, talk and work together and also to meet artists from other countries within and beyond Africa. The success of Thapong encouraged its organisers to set up additional workshops: Tlhali for younger artists, and Motako for women artists; and eventually, in 2002, to these led to the inception of the Thapong Visual Arts Centre in Gaborone. The workshops and the centre have been crucial in forming an emerging arts scene in Botswana. Artists who would otherwise be very isolated now have a forum to come together. Questions such as 'the relevance of abstract art in Africa' and 'commercialism in the arts' have been debated at length, and, on a more practical level, artists have a chance to work in a studio environment with understanding and support from their contemporaries. That it has taken nearly thirteen years to develop the workshops and arts centre is due to the small number of artists and their relative isolation; but the crucial factor is that this development has been totally artist-led which will ensure that it has a far better chance of success than the expatriate projects. Nevertheless, Oodi and Ithuteng, despite the problems that I discovered, have allowed for some access to art making, especially for younger women who have lost their involvement with the indigenous arts.

Established institutions such as museums and libraries could play a larger part in the formation of people's ideas about art in Botswana than they do at present. The travelling museum has the capacity to spread information and ideas throughout the country, but the choices of material judged to be relevant remains in the hands of a small, elite and not very well-informed group of librarians, curators and historians. There is no overall national policy on art or art education.

On the other hand, the Thapong Visual Arts Centre that opened in 2002 now holds open days and fairs, which might have begun the process of bringing the diverse arts of Botswana arts together and encouraging all of them to flourish. Thereby one can hope that the privileging of Fine Art over the local inheritance of indigenous practices can be overcome.

Notes

¹ Tswana is a group term for peoples from southern Africa. Ba is the suffix to denote from Botswana thus Ba-tswana. Accordingly other tribes such as the Yei become known as Bayei, Tlokwa become known as Batlokwa etc.

² The terminology used for the hunter-gatherer people of the Kalahari and other southern African regions is problematic and I cannot develop the arguments here; I refer instead to Robert K. Hitchcock and Megan Bieseles article: "San, Khwe, Basarwa or Bushmen?: Terminology, Identity, and empowerment in Southern Africa" where the full history and implications of the different terminology is discussed in detail. As he shows there is as yet no consensus as to one correct term to identify these populations. For consistency I will use the term San throughout this thesis.

³ "The objects of the Botswana Society are the encouragement of interest in and research and scholarship on subjects in the fields of the Natural Sciences, the Humanities and the Arts, especially where such subjects relate to Botswana." Statement published in the society's annual journal *Botswana Notes and Records*.

⁴ There have nevertheless been some developments with Ndebele house decoration in the Republic of South Africa, (not a truly indigenous art form but a creation of apartheid), which nevertheless has included the artists developing their work on canvas and/or selling the rights to the paintings to allow them to be used on aeroplanes. More on this in the section on house decoration.

⁵ In the same catalogue Oguibe continues: "One of the few things that unite the artists presented here, beyond a shared continent, is their gender, and if there is anything else beyond these, it is their place in conventional art history, their usual consignment to the margins of the narration of art.

There is a sense in which the last point is only a reflection of the failures of art history itself- art history as narrated by a specific race and a specific section of the world - rather than a fact of history. One of the strong beacons of the feminist uprising in the early 1970's was art history, the exploration of women's role in art through the centuries. However, because feminism simply carried over the racist and Euro centrist shortcomings of white-male History, peculiarities of the upper class European art tradition were universalised and employed in the formulation of supposedly general theories on gender representation. Feminist art history bemoaned the absence of great women artists in history. The very pioneer of feminist art history, Linda Nochlin, theorised that history failed to produce great women artist essentially because it disallowed women the opportunities that men took for granted. The rise of human societies and the consignment of the female to roles, which either compromised full creative engagement or indeed denied it on her part, meant that much fewer women stepped into the hall of artistic fame.

The great failure of this theory, however, was not in its undeniable logic, for as long as it was recognised to be culture specific, but specifically in the failure to do the later. The absent great female artist is an upper class European phenomenon, the result of a rhetoric of exclusion and erasure which dichotomised art into the 'high' and 'low' and the 'non' art, and reserved the 'high', the art with a capital A, for a self defined centre, consigning all that was produced outside the perimeters of its little walls into absence. In other words history is populated with great women artists, only art history as told by Europe decidedly failed and continues to fail to notice. Unfortunately, white feminism equally failed to notice." (Oguibe, 1993)

⁶ An American researcher who ran a variety of projects and undertook research in Botswana. She later began, an as yet unfinished PhD, on the commercial production of baskets in Botswana.

⁷ National Museum of Monuments and Art Gallery, *Botswana Baskets*. Gaborone.

Lambrecht, Dora 1976 'Basketry in Ngamiland'. *Botswana Notes and Records*, 8.

Taussig, Louis 1997 *Resource guide to travel in Sub-Saharan Africa*. London: Hans Zell.

Terry, Elizabeth and Cunningham, Anthony 1997 *The impact of commercial Marketing on the Basketry of Southern Africa*. Unpublished.

Yoffe, Michael Lee 1978 'Botswana Basketry'. *African Arts*, 12 (1).

⁸ Andrea Bontrager writes: "Hambukushu, a Bantu tribe originally from the Middle Zambezi river, near Katima Mulilo, presently part of Namibia. In the 1700's many were forced to move into Angola due to Lozi expansion. In the mid-1800s a large group move south to what is now Botswana, due to dissatisfaction with their leaders. However the most recent migration was in the 1960's when 4000 fled the Angolan civil war and resettled in Etsha. The Hambukushu now live in three main areas: along the Kwando river in Zambia, in the lower Okavango region of Namibia and in Ngamiland, Botswana." 1996, 'Hambukushu', *Botswana Notes and Records*, Vol. 28, 97.

⁹ A town in the far north western corner of Botswana close to the Namibian and Angolan borders. See map of Botswana.

¹⁰ Men do occasionally make baskets, though generally they are elderly or disabled and have found that basket making is a way for them to contribute to the household's income.

¹¹ The Yei are the original inhabitants of the Okavango Delta. (They moved south from Zambia, as did the Hambukushu, in the eighteenth century to escape the Lozi oppression). Historically fishermen, they now live in large Tswana -type villages with cattle.

¹²The only study close to a comprehensive list of baskets is Marjorie Locke, 1994, *The Dove's Footprints*, a study of baskets in Zimbabwe.

¹³ Botswana Craft are a commercial company established in 1970 to promote and sell indigenous arts and crafts. More on them later.

¹⁴ Marjorie Locke, 1994 says Zimbabwean baskets have similar names and stories given by their makers.

¹⁵ San/Khwe/Basarwa/Bushmen all terms used to refer to peoples of hunting and gathering origin in southern Africa. See introduction for full explanation of term.

¹⁶ This company was established in 1970, as a Peace Corps project, to promote and sell a variety of crafts from Botswana. Since 1993 it has been privately owned by the Botswana Development Corporation and continues to buy directly from the producers and then resell to retail or export businesses.

¹⁷ Mbukushu meaning from the people Hambukushu.

¹⁸ To compare, historical documentation of wall decoration in the Republic of South Africa does not go back more than 100 years. Elizabeth Ann Schneider writes about the first reference to Ndebele wall decoration as being in the 1940's: "The first information we have referring to distinctive wall decoration comes from the general area around Hatebeestfontein where the Paramount chief once lived. In the late 1940's Pretoria architect A.L. Mering became quite intrigued with a small settlement of homesteads on white-owned farms displaying some eye-catching wall decorations that were so unusual that he began documenting them photographically each year". (Schneider, 1989:109)

¹⁹ Camels were used in the southern parts of the Kalahari.

²⁰ Bakwena, of the Kwena tribe in Botswana. See appendix 1.i for more information.

²¹ Issac Schapera was a professor of Botswana studies and author of *The Bantu speaking tribes of South Africa* amongst many others.

²² James Walton author of *African Village* in 1956 and *Bantu Mural Art* in 1970.

²³ Historian and the then director of the NMMAG.

²⁴ But Grant does bring up the question, for which there are no researched answers as yet, of whether the distinctive house decoration could have been actively used in the past as a way of reinforcing an identity under threat:

"Throughout much of the century, successive Bakgatla chiefs, in particular, made deliberate and sometimes spectacular public use of the tribal regiments to boost their personal authority and to underpin community identity and tribal nationalism. But because all aspects of nationalism derive from war it was, in general, the male forms of tradition, which the Bakgatla chiefs chose to exploit. Did Bakgatla women, and other women throughout the country, feel that their identity was also under threat? And did they use their traditional decoration as a conscious means of reinforcing it?" (Grant and Grant, 1995:74)

²⁵ Interviews with women from the villages of Gabane and Mochudi, 1995.

²⁶ An illustration of where these misguided notions of all things modern being progressive and all things old or 'traditional' being primitive can be found in a book in the Gaborone library which still houses a vast range of colonial and racist books: "The development of the human consciousness in terms of human habitations from the circular 'pouches' of the most primitive peoples (spatial expressions of the womb itself) to the contemporary urban rectangle, symbol of a disintegrated individualism a separation from the universe and man's origins." (Marc, 1977) Despite the fallacies of this statement it is precisely this European equation that has filtered into Botswana, through books in the arts section of the library, papers, magazines that links mud houses to primitive people, poverty, nature and living off the land, that has surely contributed to the shunning of the indigenous architecture by the contemporary Batswanan.

²⁷ This symbolism of the home is seen in western countries too wherein the old style of building is seen as a sign of living in the past. Ireland is a good example, it has a whole new architecture based on the modern bungalow (Fitzsimons, 1973 *Bungalow Bliss*) where a wall, seeming to keep nature at bay, in which the ground is kept as controlled and neat and tidy as possible, surrounds the field in which the home is built.

²⁸ Judy Seidman continues: "So we ask: is more alienation a direction the art of Botswana should take?... perhaps an alternative can be seen in the new Marang community school in Broadhurst, or in some west African buildings where traditional wall-painting has been adopted ... to the demands of modern architecture. Perhaps we could even strive to de-alienate our modern paintings, integrate them more into our functional lives." Seidman, 1986

²⁹ Elinah Grant (the co-author of *Decorated Homes in Botswana*) is one of the few Batswana active in trying to preserve the art of house decoration.

³⁰ The Ndebele, mentioned earlier, are a good example of the commodification of an art form. Originally the decoration of their homes was done by a small group of Ndzundza, (southern Ndebele people) who had been displaced and were working on a settled white farm as labourers. The house decoration was noted and photographed over the years 1946-1953, by the Pretoria architect A.L. Mering. Of course, the increased attention gave the women added incentive and their designs and decorations became ever more elaborate and colourful." "When the white farmer died in 1953, Mering suggested that the South African government move the settlement to a site about 50 kilometres northwest of Pretoria and use it as a tourist attraction... the government provided poles and thatch every

year as well as buses full of tourists, and the residents enthusiastically responded to this attention by decorating their walls with elaborate versions of their former simple wall decorations.”(Schneider, 1989:109) The apartheid government attempted to use this completely contrived situation to present an idealised ethnic homestead under apartheid. The women and their families in return had a relatively stable home and income. However, the falsity of the situation meant that it could not be sustained. As the realities of the apartheid system filtered into the settlement dissatisfaction grew, the painting grew stale and tourists, more aware now of the instability of South Africa and dangers of travelling there, stayed away. By 1986 the decorated Ndebele homesteads were no longer. Here we see how an art form that was developing on its own and was a form of cultural identity for the Ndzundza Ndebele, was taken over, controlled, used and thus destroyed by its commodification.

³¹ Hottentots: the pastoralist speakers of Khoisan languages. The colonial term 'Hottentot' is now generally seen as offensive and derogatory.

³² Battle of Waterberg: 1904 war between the nomadic Herero and the German colonialists.

³³ Bechuanaland, colonial name for Botswana.

³⁴ One of the several groups who make up the Herero people.

³⁵ One of the several groups who make up the Herero people.

³⁶ International Artists Workshops are explained and examined in chapter 2. The issue of craft makers not being invited to the workshops is developed in relation to a debate at the 'African Artists, Schools, Studio and Society' conference at SOAS in London September 1999.

³⁷ As we will see in chapter 5, the Artists' Workshops, run under the umbrella of Thapong, do not include these women artists in their events. Even though workshops have been run specifically for women artists (Motako), women working on indigenous arts (basketry, pottery) have not been invited, in the belief, maybe correctly, that they would gain little from such workshops. This exclusion obviously disallows any potential developments or exchange of ideas across disciplines.

³⁸ The development promoted by the curators of the 1989 Magiciens de la Terre show at the Pompidou centre in Paris, in which Ndebele murals have become paintings on canvas (Schneider, 1989) has not happened in Botswana.

³⁹ Artist, curator and former director of the NMMAG's art gallery.

⁴⁰ Artist.

⁴¹ Brigades are independent, community-based organisations engaged in local development by providing training and employment opportunities and offering services to the local community. The first brigade was founded in 1965 by the then principle of Serowe Swaneng Hill School, Patrick Van Rensburg. Despite some failures the brigades have generally been successful with 32 (one in each district) functioning well in 1999.

⁴² Bakglata, of the Kglata tribe. See appendix 1(i) for more details.

⁴³ Both Canada and Sweden had a history of giving development aid to Botswana. This continued from the seventies to the late nineties when both countries decided that Botswana, as a stable and relatively prosperous country, should be able to manage without overseas aid and grants and funding were gradually turned down. Thus, as we see later, projects, such as the Thapong workshops, have had to begin to rely more on local funding.

⁴⁴ See art projects such as the peoples' parks etc described by Steven Sack in Nettleton, 1989:191

⁴⁵ This situation had as much a significant and lasting effect on the women left behind as it did on the men at work.

⁴⁶ Gowenius expands on this in Lewycky's *Equal Shares*, 1999,83

⁴⁷ Not covered here because of the lack of information. The project was closed on both my research visits and no other information is available.

⁴⁸ USAID: United States Agency for International Development. www.usaid.gov.

⁴⁹ Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party Made 1974 -1979* Exhibition in the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA.

⁵⁰ *Subversive Stitch* Group exhibitions held at the Cornerhouse and Whitworth Galleries in Manchester, UK. 1988.

⁵¹ This link is not explored in his paper nor did I find any mention of the drama or links when interviewing members of the project.

⁵² Paulo Freire: Brazilian Secretary of Education, 1960's. Fellow of the centre for the study of Development and Social Change and visiting Professor at Harvard's Centre for Studies in education and Development (1970's)

⁵³ Letter seen in the files at the Oodi office during my field trip in 1995.

⁵⁴ Examined by Bourdieu in his accounts of dominant and oppressed people: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction, A social critique of the judgement of taste*, Harvard university press, 1987.

⁵⁵ Although as explained, they did give a history of textiles etc. there is never any reference to any kind of Batswana visual arts or cultural history tuition.

⁵⁶ See chapter four for full details of the proposed Regional Art School.

⁵⁷ Co-operation for Research, Development and Education (CORDE). A fully Batswana group funded by Botswana set up as an umbrella group to help the various projects in Botswana with marketing and training.

⁵⁸ The word 'art' is of Latin origin meaning 'skill'; 'craft' is of Anglo-Saxon origin also meaning 'skill'.

⁵⁹ Tradition, which means ‘handing on’, is as essential to art as it is to any other part of social life. But any attempt to designate or market work as ‘traditional’, or to condemn it as ‘not traditional’ is a misuse of the idea of tradition in preference to European and American stereotype.

⁶⁰ Later, in the chapter on Kuru, we see reference to rock art, the oldest art form in Botswana

⁶¹ Since the initial selection by Willemien Le Roux, artists now apply to join the Kuru arts project. They are seen by the current art worker (currently Pieter Brown) and if thought suitable they are allowed to ‘try out’ over a few weeks.

⁵⁸ Fine Art: this will have to be defined as those practices internationally recognised as ‘art’ in the major sites of education, display and patronage. In practice these are historically situated in Europe and the USA, but Latin America, India, China Japan and Australia have become included followed by Senegal and South Africa. These countries all have some kind of involvement in the internationalism provided by biennales. There are art worlds elsewhere in Africa but so far international recognition is minimal. The most comprehensive accounts are provided by *7 Stories* ed. Jane Havell and *Revue Noire*.

⁶³ Pierre Bourdieu explained the necessity of learning the appropriate cultural tools for communication when he writes about the representation and maintenance of class divisions. This can be applied equally to the differences of aesthetic value between different places.

⁶⁴ All art is communication in one sense or another and at Oodi it was taught as such due to the Goweniuses’ theory of art as education. See chapter 2 for more details.

⁶⁵ Annual exhibitions held by the National Museum of Monuments and Art Gallery in Gaborone are discussed in chapter 6.

⁶⁶ Thapong is one of the International Artists’ Workshops. See chapter 5.

⁶⁷ A naturalised Zimbabwean, originally from Wales, died tragically in an accident in 1996.

⁶⁸ One interesting project that she was involved in during her time in Zimbabwe and which I have written about in chapter 4, was to research the possibility of the development of a regional art school for the SADC countries. She and the late Stephen Williams were funded for two years to carry out the research.

⁶⁹ The term ‘abstract art’ or ‘abstraction’ is problematic in that it can mean two essentially different things: a) figurative but schematic as in Picasso and b) non-figurative (but not mere graphic design), as in Pollock. For example people like Ivan Hitchens painted schematic landscapes. Sometimes Kandinsky’s forms are in some way figurative. Manet goes the other way beginning with something recognizable but then almost loses it in a pattern of light. This is discussed again in relation to Thapong.

⁷⁰ Neo Matome interview with Veryan Edwards, 2003. www.artshost.org

⁷¹ Proposed regional art school discussed in chapter two.

⁷² At the time of Neo Matome’s education in Britain, there had been much interest in Nigerian textiles which had been well researched and given much publicity and the importance it deserved, none of which had happened to any of the art forms in Botswana.

⁷³ A good example here is Robert Loder, who set up studios in London, *Gasworks*, where African artists can work for extended periods.

⁷⁴ See Monet’s haystacks and Brancusi’s sculptures.

⁷⁵ Andy Warhol’s Campbell Soup (1962) Tomato Soup (1968) and Marilyn (1964-1967)

⁷⁶ All art histories are written from someone’s perspective. What Neo Matome means is that it should be an art history as seen from Botswana.

⁷⁷ Here she means it is a repeated format and set of images, produced so often that both the artists and the public are bored with it.

⁷⁸ Every year different artists from all over the world work together at Thapong – the aim of which is to provide discussion and influence, see chapter 7.

⁷⁹ See chapter 2 for more details.

⁸⁰ Exhibition at Commonwealth Institute, London, 1993.

⁸¹ Annual exhibition at NMMAG. See chapter 6.

⁸² A rural museum which displays local history and artefacts with a small space for contemporary exhibitions.

⁸³ David Koloane: South African painter, curator, educator. Bill Ainslie: painter, activist, educator.

⁸⁴ Until 1993 it was an art and craft show however, the late Stephen Williams the then director, decided to split the show and have two separate events.

⁸⁵ Currently selected by a panel including the NMMAG director, Ann Dunn owner of Gallery Ann and two artists. See chapter 6.

⁸⁶ See personal updated website page at www.thapong.org

⁸⁷ This was Veryan Edwards’ own view at the time despite the fact that South African artists were then using art as a ‘tool of the struggle’. She was unaware of the impact of art as a political weapon and changes her mind about this later as we will see.

⁸⁸ Meaning the landscape is used as a metaphor, to express her current thoughts, ideas, and experiences.

⁸⁹ There is a committee set up to run Thapong of which Veryan Edwards is the Chairperson.

⁹⁰ More on the studios in chapter 6.

⁹¹ Personal updated website page at www.thapong.org

⁹² See chapter 5 for full details.

⁹³ There is also more on this debate in chapter 5 in the section on Thapong.

⁹⁴ The only commercial art gallery in Gaborone see chapter 6.

⁹⁵ See chapter 5 on workshops.

⁹⁶ *Sister Namibia*, Vol.5, No5, "Sister Namibia is a news journal by, for and about women. It is published six times a year and is run by a collective consisting of three staff members and a number of voluntary workers. The project was initiated in 1989. Sister collective is committed to the elimination of sexism, racism and homophobia and other issues that oppress and divide us. Through our writing we want to challenge structures, myths and stereotypes that are oppressive to women. Any women who is interested to develop her writing skills, or who wants to be part of an independent, non-party affiliated and dynamic women's group is welcome to join the sister collective".

⁹⁷ Articles in one issue include: "Setting up home" and "Step by step to lovely legs". They do however also give some coverage to women who are still practicing the traditional arts or who are involved in creative work.

⁹⁸ Unity Dow was appointed Botswana's first female judge of the High Court in 1998 following her successful citizenship case that had previously been thought impossible to win. She is also a novelist with four books. These books often concern issues dealing with the struggle between Western and traditional values. Unity Dow was one of three judges who recently (2006) decided the now internationally acclaimed Kgalagadi (San, Bushmen or Basarwa) court decision. The case was about the San's right to return to their ancestral lands.

⁹⁹ As discussed in the introduction.

¹⁰⁰ The New Oxford Dictionary of English's definition of Education: noun: the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university: *a course of education*.

¹⁰¹ *Magiciens de la Terre*, exhibition 1989, Musee National d'Art Moderne, Paris. Featuring the work of a hundred artists from all over the world it claimed to be the first truly international, global survey of contemporary art.

¹⁰² Interviews with women about house decoration in the villages of Gabane, Oodi and the capital Gaborone during 1995 and 1996, detailed in the chapter 1 on house decoration.

¹⁰³ An example of this as a possibility is the Kenyan –born potter Magdalene Odundo who has, in 2001, some work in a auction of contemporary ceramics at Phillips of Bond street, the estimated prices of which are between £3000 and £5000. These are the sorts of prices that Japanese and European ceramic collectors will pay for contemporary work. The small art market in Botswana does not even consider the collection of any art forms other than painting or sculpture let alone at those sorts of prices and this contrast just serves to highlight the Botswana art market's struggle to be part of an international modernity.

¹⁰⁴ Seeing art practice as a significant enough subject for sponsorship abroad will not happen until it is seen as such by starting an art practice degree course at the university.

¹⁰⁵ Although he is at present dismantling colonial categorisation in the museum sector following the advances in the South African museums. More in chapter 6.

¹⁰⁶ Magdalene Odundo. Born in Kenya, moved to the UK to study Fine Art. She specialised in ceramics and has continued to work in the UK. She gained her MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art. She is currently Professor of Ceramics at the University College for the Creative Arts at Farnham, Surrey See www.magdaleneodundo.com

¹⁰⁷ Funded jointly by the European Community and the Zimbabwe government they requested a 'thorough qualitative and quantitative investigation within both the public and private sectors of SADC in relation to the demand for a visual art training facility.'

¹⁰⁸ Some workshops and classes are sponsored so that an inability to pay the fees would not stop someone from taking part.

¹⁰⁹ Thupelo has continued to run in Cape Town, the most recent workshop being December 2007.

¹¹⁰ Thapong International Artists workshops ceased in 2001 when the Thapong Arts Centre was established.

Workshops and residencies are now carried out at the centre.

¹¹¹ In general usage the term abstract can mean: 1) non-figurative, 2) schematic but figurative, 3) the supposed artistic process of abstraction.

¹¹² Frances Combs, British expatriate artist who has lived in Botswana since 1995. She is a prolific painter who works from home. She holds regular exhibitions in Gaborone and amongst the expatriate community. She occasionally teaches at workshops.

¹¹³ Other sponsors include: For the workshop: HIVOS/ Swiss arts Council/ KMA Trust/ Ministry of education/ BP (Botswana) Ltd. / Corona Society. For services to the old house: Botswana technology centre (Ken Stucke, Architect/ ADA/ AGA/ Dominic Mkamanga (architect). For the renovations: Majaha-Jartby Family/ HIVOS/ BCAST/ Debswana

¹¹⁴ A U.K. artist living in South London.

¹¹⁵ His Honour F. Mogae, then the Vice President of Botswana and, since 1998, President of Botswana, and President of The Botswana Society.

Women Artists in Botswana in the late Twentieth Century.

Jo Lewis

School of Oriental and African studies

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PhD

Volume Two

Signed declaration

I hereby declare that all the work presented in this thesis is my own:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Lewis', written in a cursive style.

Jo Lewis

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List of Illustrations

Every effort has been made to provide as complete a set of data about each picture as possible alongside the illustration. Where data is missing it is unavailable.

Unless stated otherwise all the photographs were taken by myself during my field trips in 1995 and 1996.

If ownership of the piece of art is not mentioned then it remains the property of the artist.

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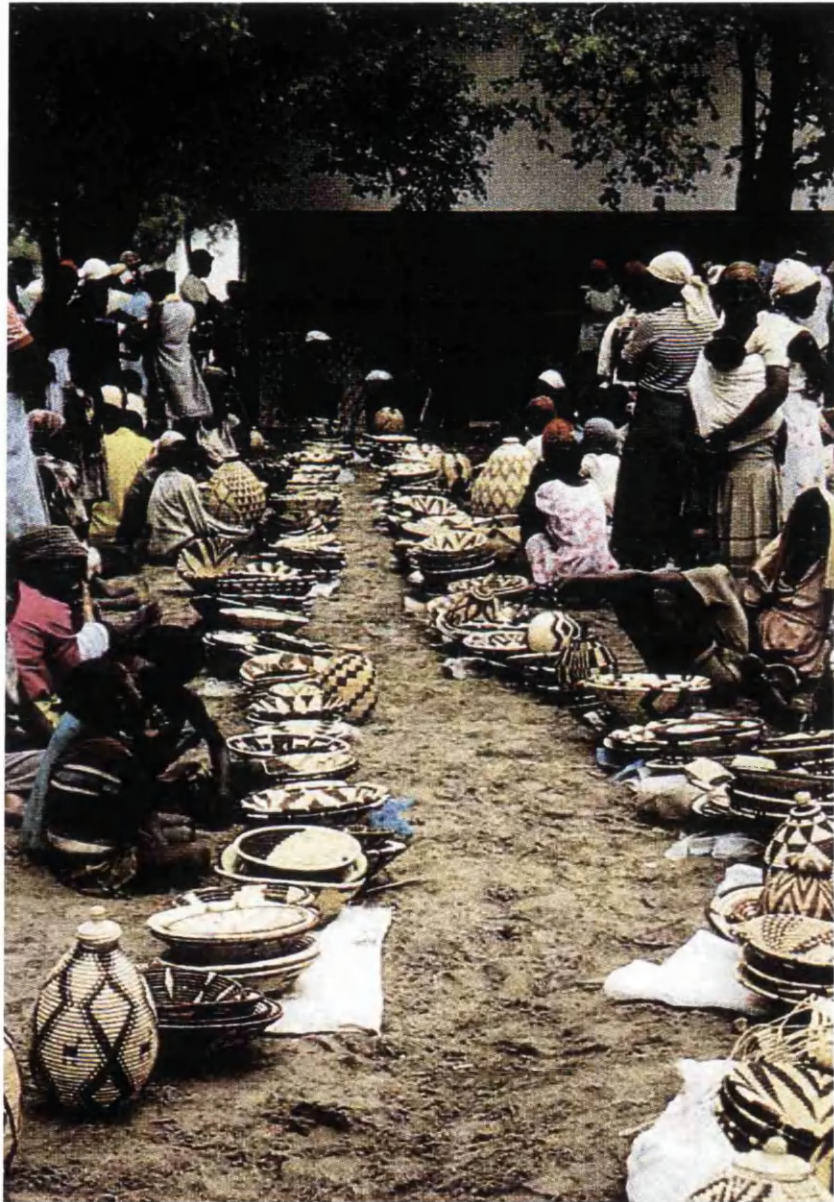
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Chapter 1

A history of women's art in Botswana.



*Figure 1.1 Roadside stalls selling baskets.
Etsha, Ngamiland area. Photograph by Botswanacraft, 1994.*



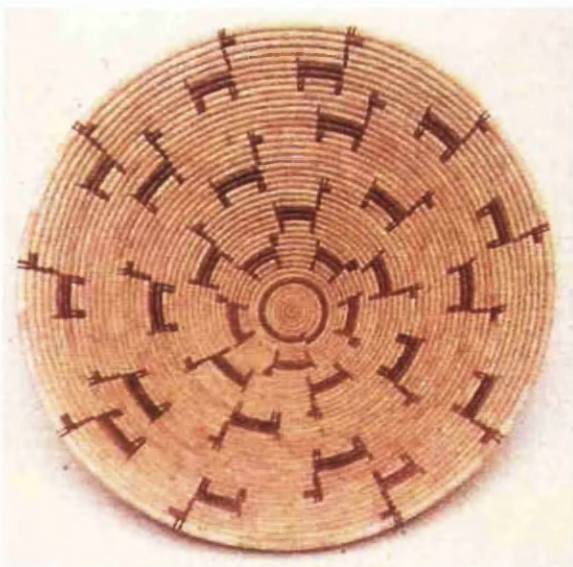
Figures 1.2 and 1.3 Large storage baskets originally used for food storage. Displayed in the historical section of the National Museum, Gaborone.



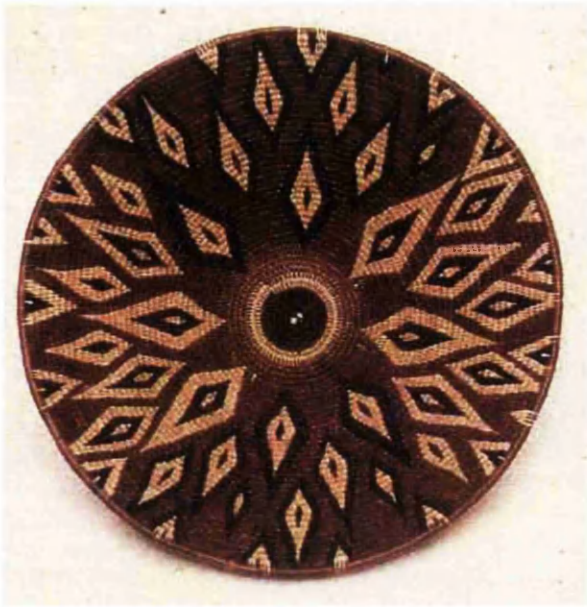
Figure 1.4 Dying the palm fibre ready for making baskets. Photograph by Botswanacraft, 1994.



*Figures 1.5 Running Ostrich and 1.6. Knees of the Tortoise.
Baskets on display at the Barbican, London. 1994
Approx size: 100cm x 40cm.*



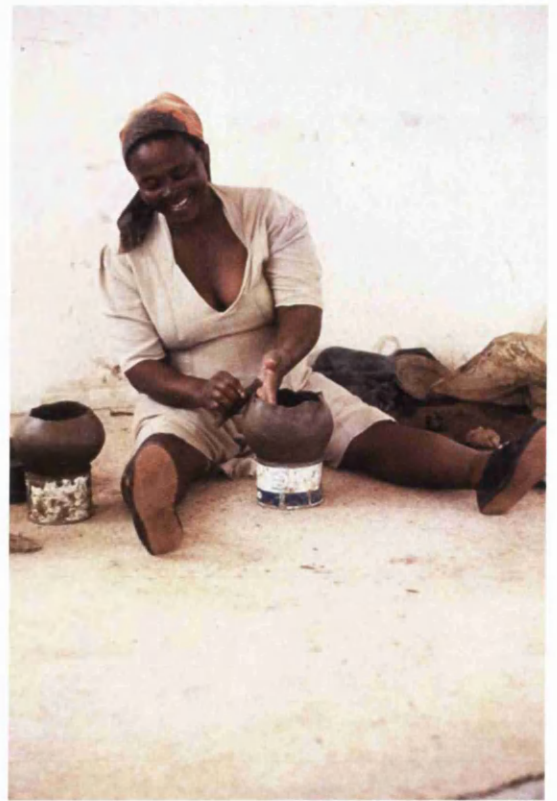
*Figure 1.7 and 1.8 Baskets promoted by Botswanacraft.
40cm Diameter and 70 x 40cm.
Photograph by Botswanacraft, 1994.*



Figures 1.9 *Knees of the Tortoise* and 1.10 *Forehead of the Zebra*
Baskets promoted by Botswanacraft. 40cm Diameter.
Photograph by Botswanacraft, 1994.



Figure 1.11 Botswanacraft's range of basket designs and names.
Graphics by Botswanacraft, 1994.



Figures 1.12 and 1.13 A Dinkonyane potter at work: grinding the stone and smoothing the surface of her pot. Pelotsetla area, 1996.



Figure 1.14 The Dinkonyane pottery studio in Pelotsetla. 1996.



Figures 1.15 and 1.16 Dinkonyane pottery displayed for sale at their roadside stall. Clay and paint. Various sizes. 1996.



Figure 1.17 Pelegano potter. 1996.



Figure 1.18 Typical Pelegano design. Clay and paint. 13x6x20cm. 1996.

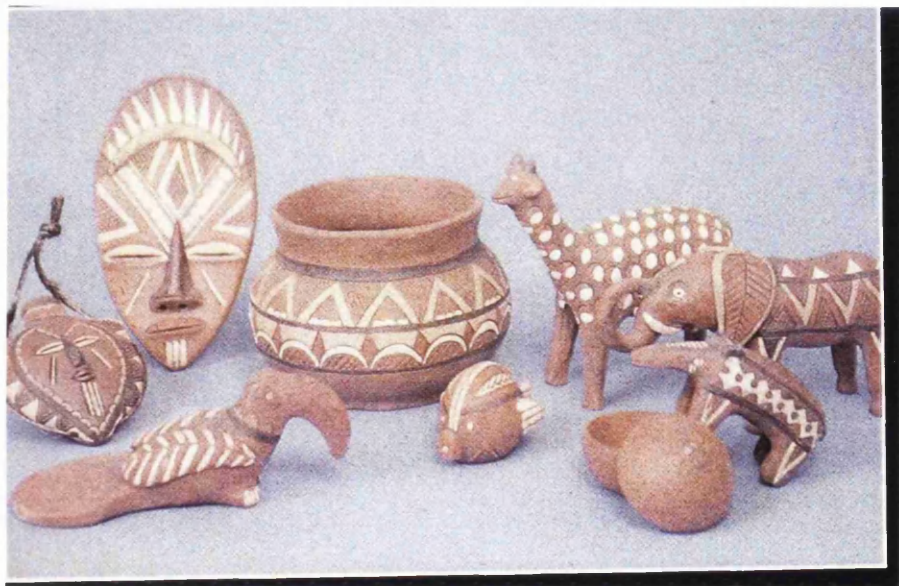


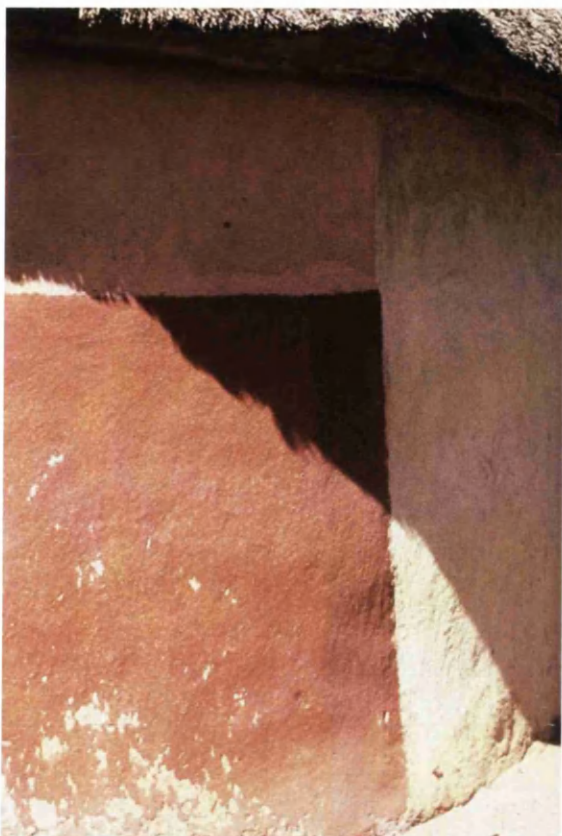
Figure 1.19 Pelegano clay animals and pots made for the tourist market. Photograph by Botswanacraft, 1994.



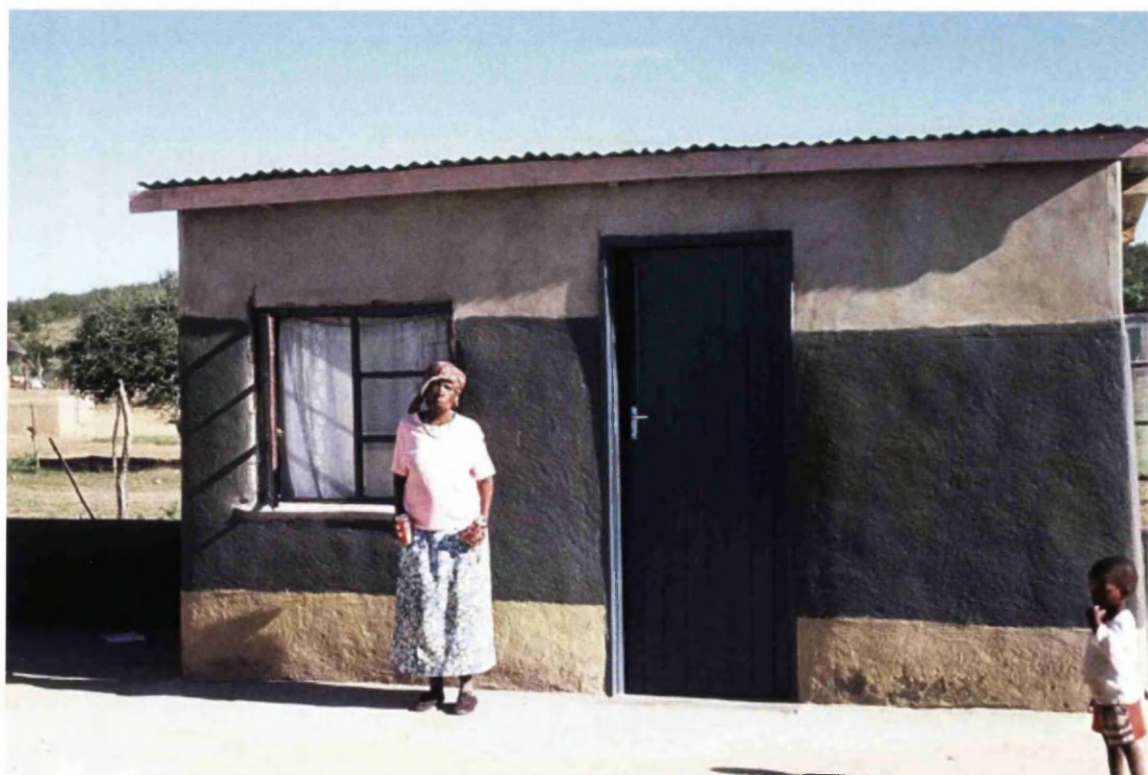
Figures 1.20 and 1.21 Clay pots displayed at the National Museum (NMMAG), Gaborone. Photograph 1996.



Figure 1.22 Simple house decoration. Clay and locally sourced colours. 1996.



*Figures 1.23 and 1.24 Contrasting paints used for geometrical patterning.
Mrs. Tikologo Masisi, Oodi 1996.*



*Figure 1.25 House decoration: a woman's pride in her home.
Keromang Sebifelo, Oodi 1996.*



*Figure 1.26 and 1.27 House decoration and lolwapa detail.
Mmapula Mashabe. Mochudi, 1996.*



*Figure 1.28 Lillian Ntang Tsele proudly showing off her decorated home.
Mochudi, 1996.*



Figures 1.29, 1.30 and 1.31 Repeated symbols used at the corners and entrances to the lolwapa. Oodi, 1996.



*Figures 1.32, 1.33, 1.34 and 1.35 More intricate patterning and detail on the lolwapa.
Oodi, 1996.1*



*Figure 1.36 Sandy Grant experimenting with paints on his own lolwapa.
Oodi, 1996.*



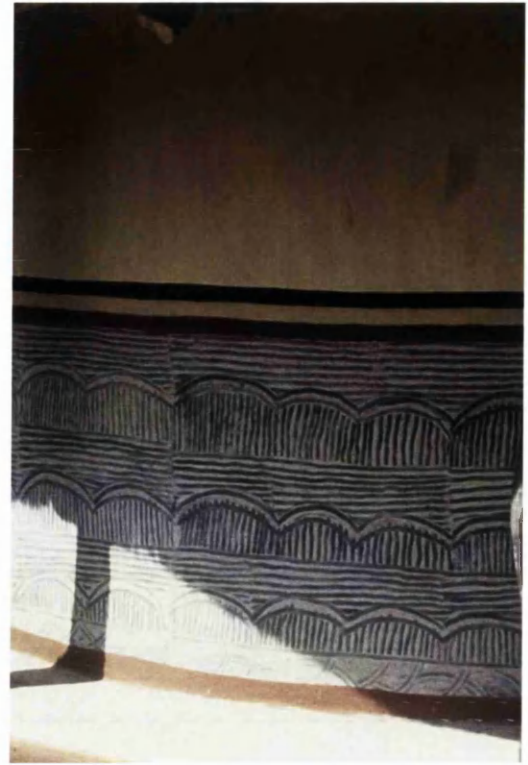
*Figures 1.37 and 1.38 Displaying the shop bought paint and the locally mined stone
which is ground to give a colour. Oodi, 1996.*



Figure 1.39 Women working on the museum house. NMMAG, Gaborone, 1996.



Figure 1.40. Detail of the finished house. NMMAG, Gaborone, 1996.



Figures 1.41 and 1.42 The finished museum house. Careful decoration of the house wall and detail on the lelwapa. NMMAG, Gaborone, 1996.



Figures 1.43 and 1.44 Much excitement as women see their house decoration reproduced in the Grant's book. Gabane, 1996.



Figure 1.45 Modern use of the patterning found on Botswana baskets and wall decoration: shop bought house paint used to decorate the Botswanacraft shop. Gaborone, 1996.

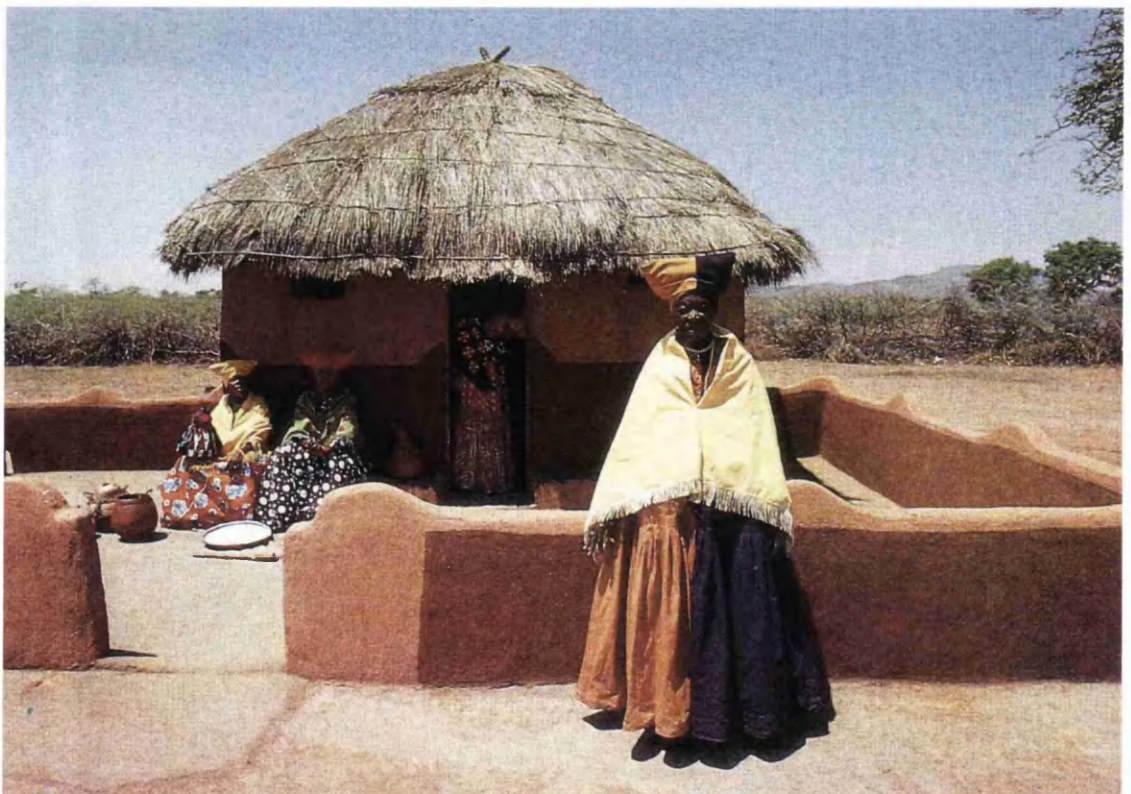


Figure 1.46 Herero women outside their home. Photograph by Botswanacraft, 1994.

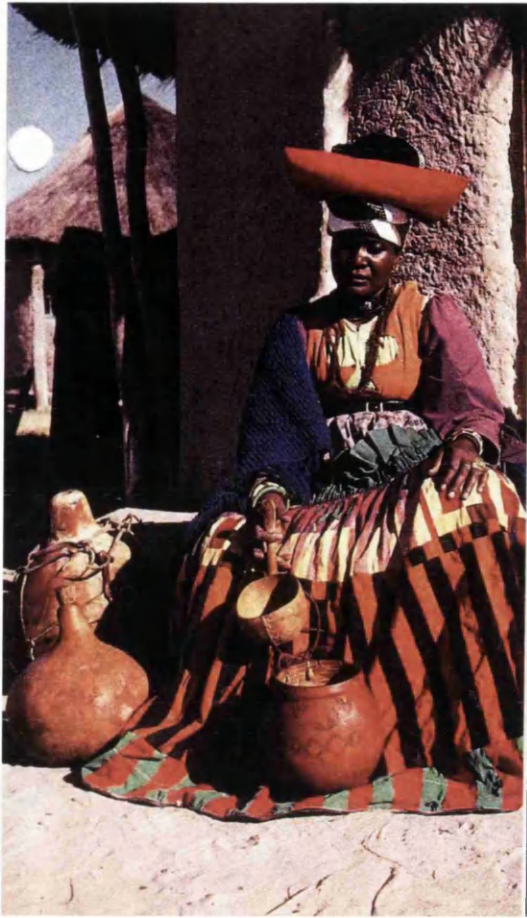


Figure 1.47 Herero dress. Figure 1.48 Doll in Herero dress made for the tourist market. Photographs by Botswanacraft, 1994.

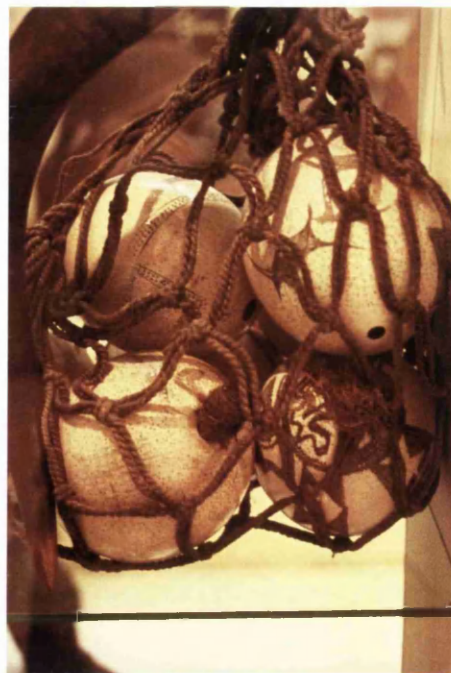


Figure 1.49 Decorated ostrich eggshells in the NMMAG collection, Gaborone. Photograph, 1996.



Figure 1.50 The delicate task of bead making. Photograph by Botswanaecraft, 1994.

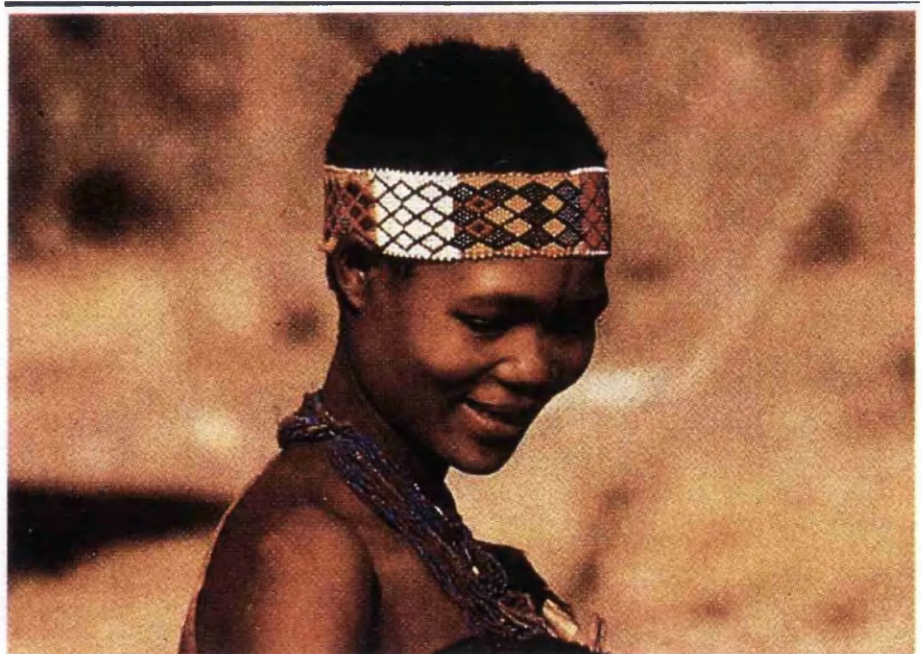


Figure 1.51 San use of beads. Photograph by Botswanaecraft, 1994.



*Figures 1.52- 1.54 Ostrich eggshell beads made into necklaces and bracelets for sale.
Photographs by Botswanacraft, 1994.*

Chapter 2

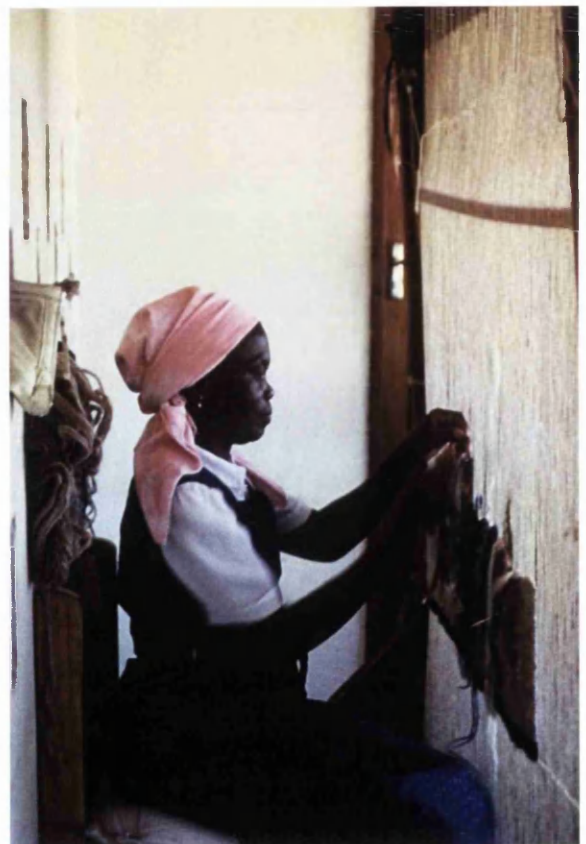
Workshops and projects for women.



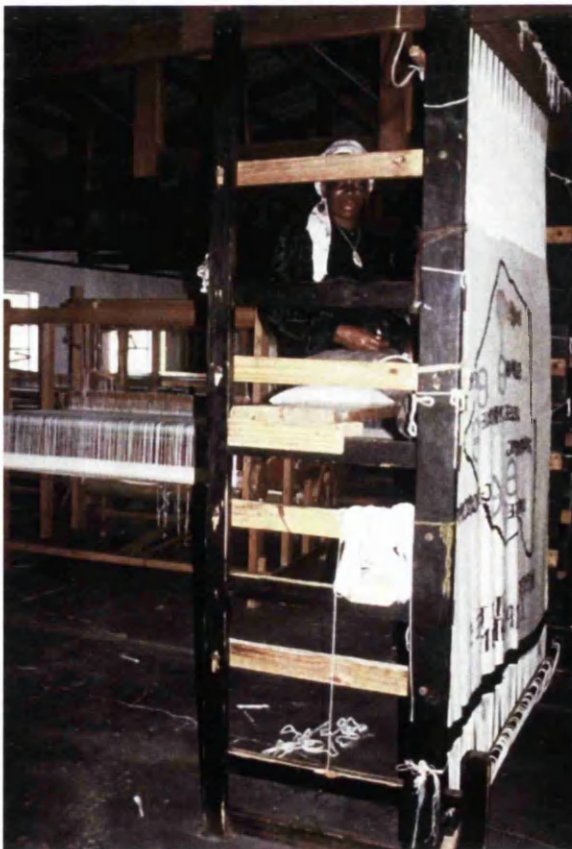
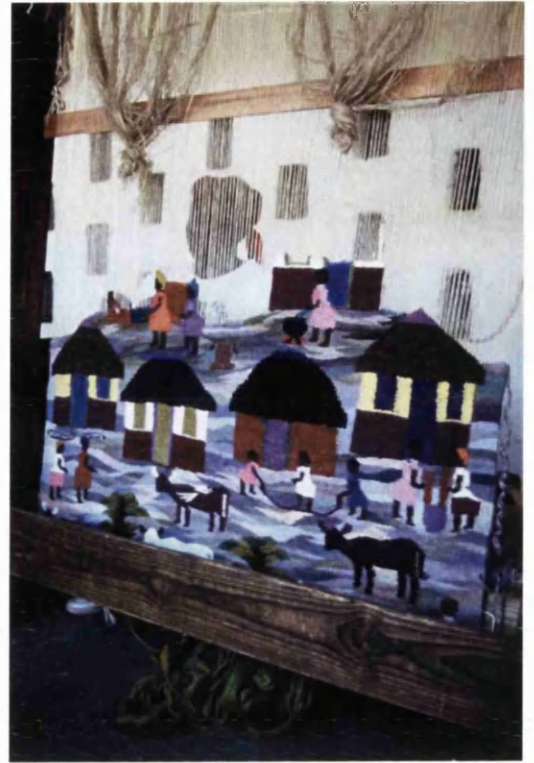
Figure 2.1 The large workshop at Oodi. 1996.



Figure 2.2 The spinning room at Oodi. 1996.



Figures 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 Weavers working outside on the veranda at Oodi. 1996.



Figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9 Looms set up around the workshop. 1996.

The following photographs of tapestries were all taken from the 'This is Our Life' exhibition catalogue, 1977. No dimensions of tapestries were given.



*Figure 2.10 Today the Rhodesians attack us by Kereng Nkwe and Mantle Ndaba.
Figure 2.11 One Day 300 school children crossed our border by Seka Semele.*

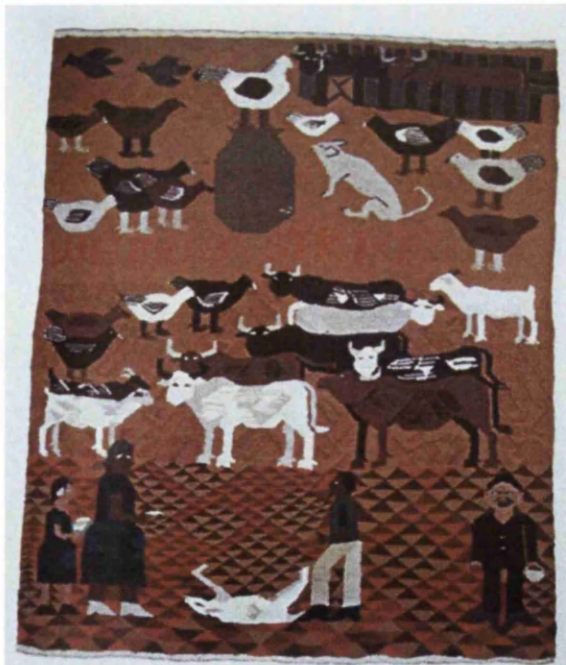
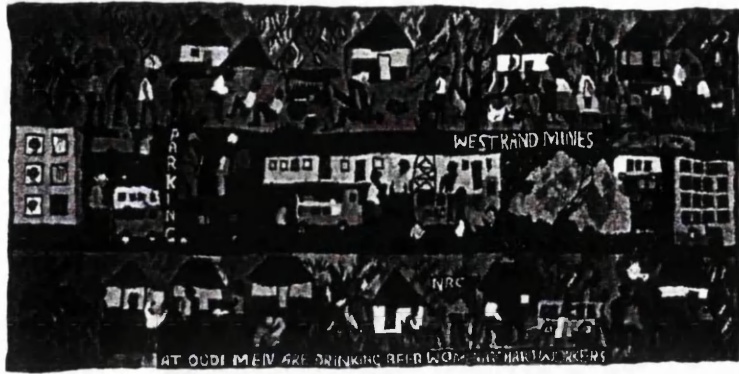


Figure 2.12 We must strike by Dipugo Masilo and Sekgoropana Balole.



*Figure 2.13 At home we women have to work but the men just drink by Naomi Semele.
Figure 2.14 There is little we can offer our daughters by Fredah Mosala.*



*Figure 2.15 The Stupid Boer II by Dipugo Masilo and Sekgoropana Balole.
Figure 2.16 People must go to the Kgotla by Betty Moloji and Lebogang Sekolo.*

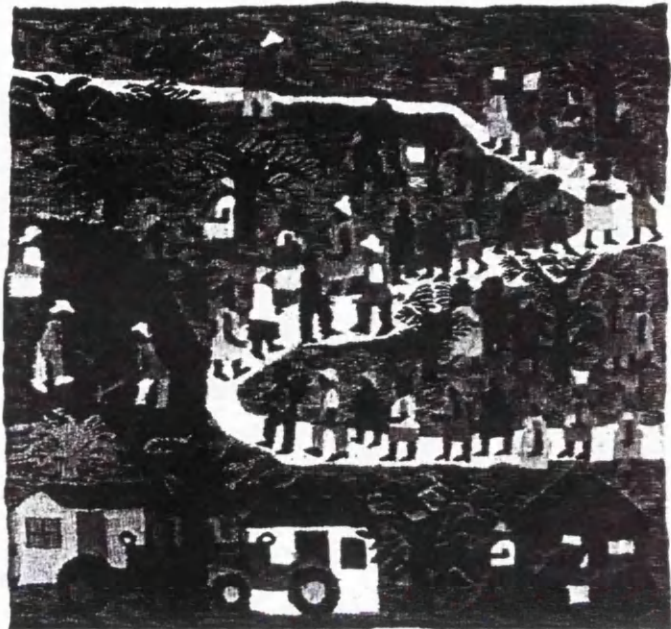
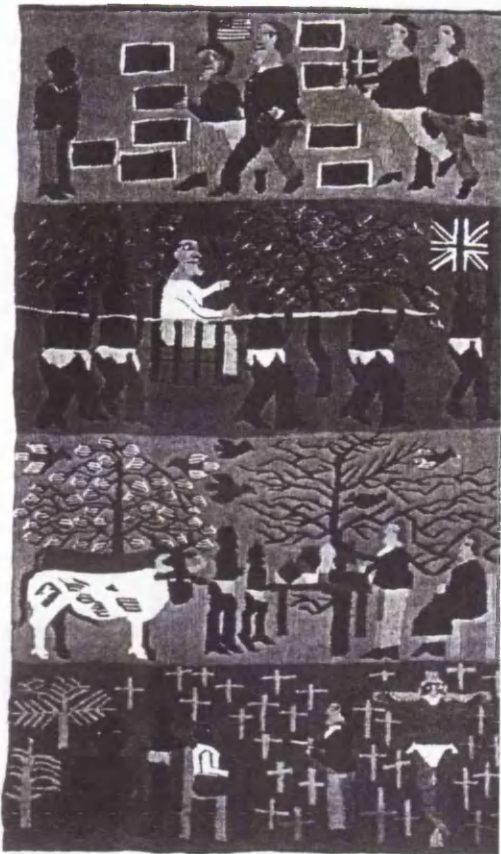


Figure 2.17 *This is how we lost our Freedom* by Dipugo Masilo and Sekgoropana Balole.
 Figure 2.18 *We have also built a drift over our river* by Mmaphala Koboyatshwene and Mosire Morake.

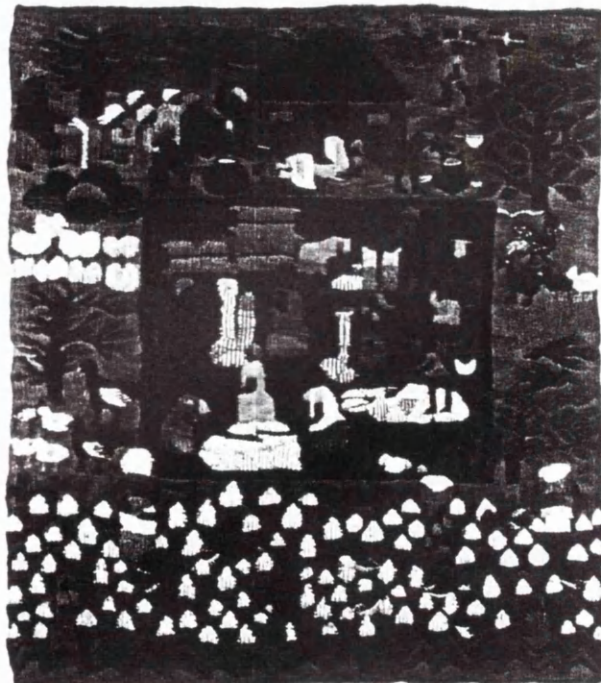


Figure 2.19 *The Lands* by Mmaphala Koboyatshwene and Mosire Morake.

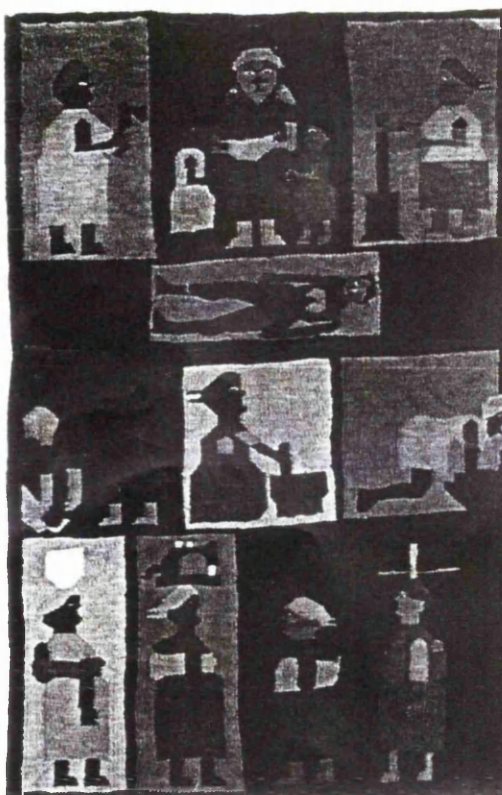
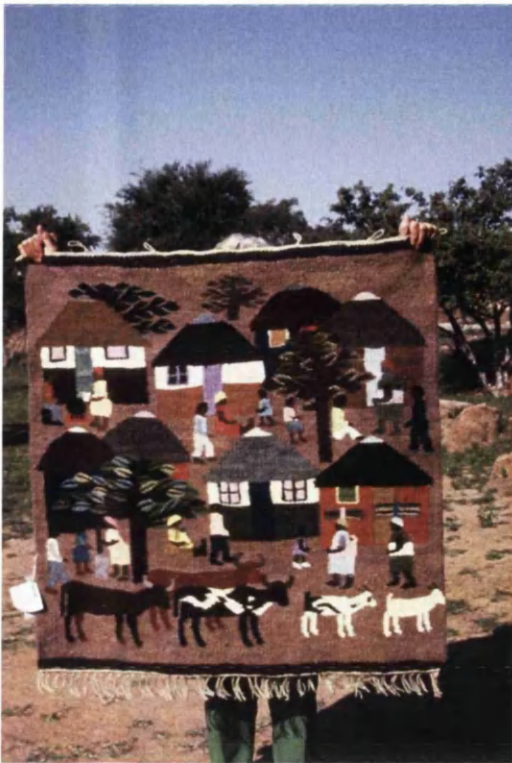


Figure 2.20 Yes we women have to do all the work by Fredah Mosala.



*2.21 Independence Celebratory group tapestry by the Oodi weavers, 1976.
Photographed myself in 1996.*



Figures 2.22, 2.23 and 2.24 Untitled tapestries at Oodi made during 1996. The individual weavers are unknown. All approx. 50 x 60cm. Oodi, 1996.



Figure 2.25 Ikgabiseng workshop, Mochudi. 1996.



Figure 2.26 Fragments of ostrich eggshell. Ikgabiseng, 1996.



Figure 2.27 Painted eggshells for broaches or earrings. Ikgabiseng, 1996.



Figure 2.28 Hand painted designs on ostrich eggshells. Acrylic paints and varnish. Ikgabiseng, 1996.



Figure 2.29 Lizards on a brooch. Acrylic paint and varnish. Approx 5x3cm. Ikgabiseng, 1996.

All Ithuteng works are displayed and sold as such and the individual maker's name is not given.



Figure 2.30 Ithuteng workshop. Mochudi, 1996.

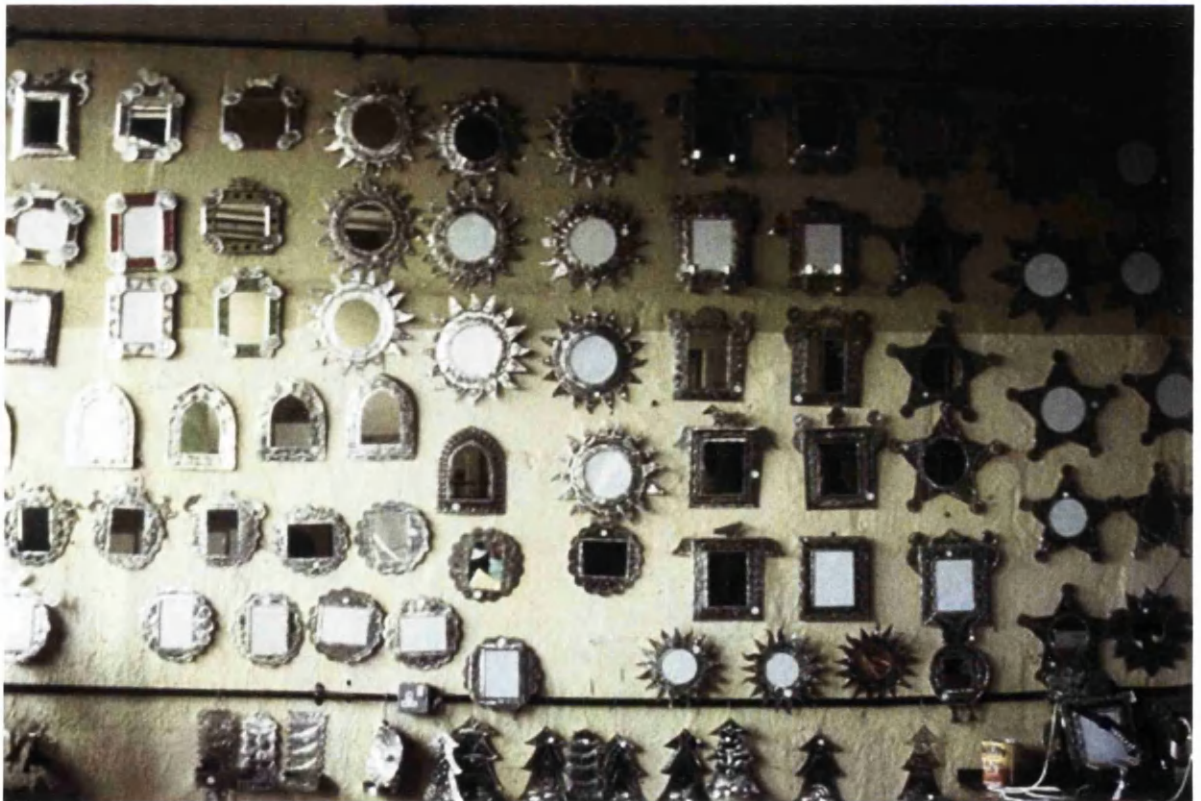


Figure 2.31 Display of works at Ithuteng. Mochudi, 1996.



Figures 2.32 and 2.33 Work benches at Ithuteng with handwritten co-operative rules. 1996.



Figure 2.34 Animal shapes for use in mobiles or picture frames. Tin and wire. Approx sizes 12x8cm. 1996.



Figure 2.35 Detail of tin pattering using a hammer and nail. 1996.



Figure 2.36 Village and local images used to decorate the work. Tin and solder. 24x5x15cm. 1996.



Figure 2.37 Picture frame holding a photograph of my own work at Coventry Cathedral, 1988, which I had previously sent to Motsapi Radipholo. 1996.

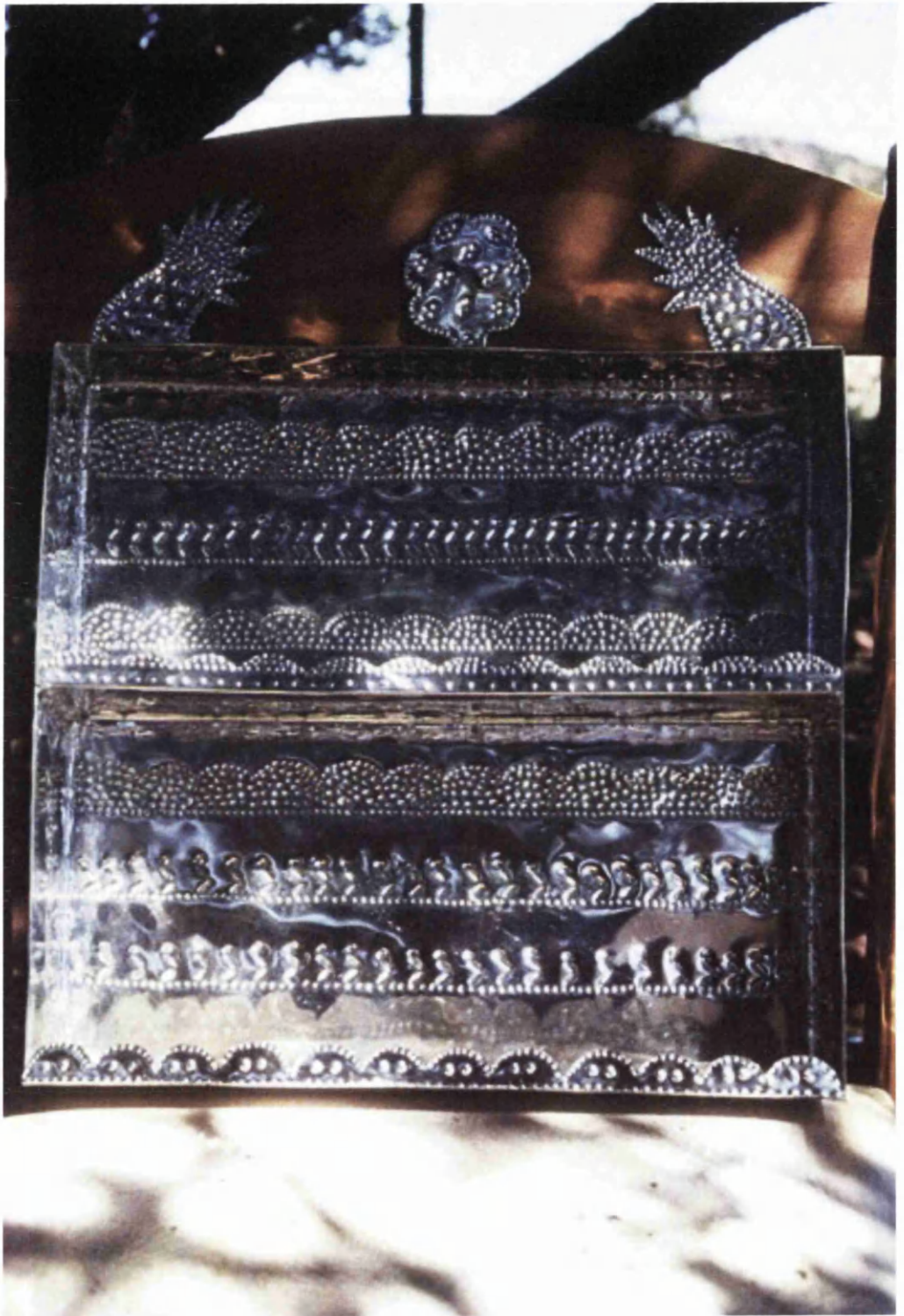


Figure 2.38 Decorated tin ornament. 30x25x5cm. Mochudi, 1996.



Figure 2.39 Workshop display. 1996.



Figure 2.40 Tin mobile. Tin and wire. 1996.

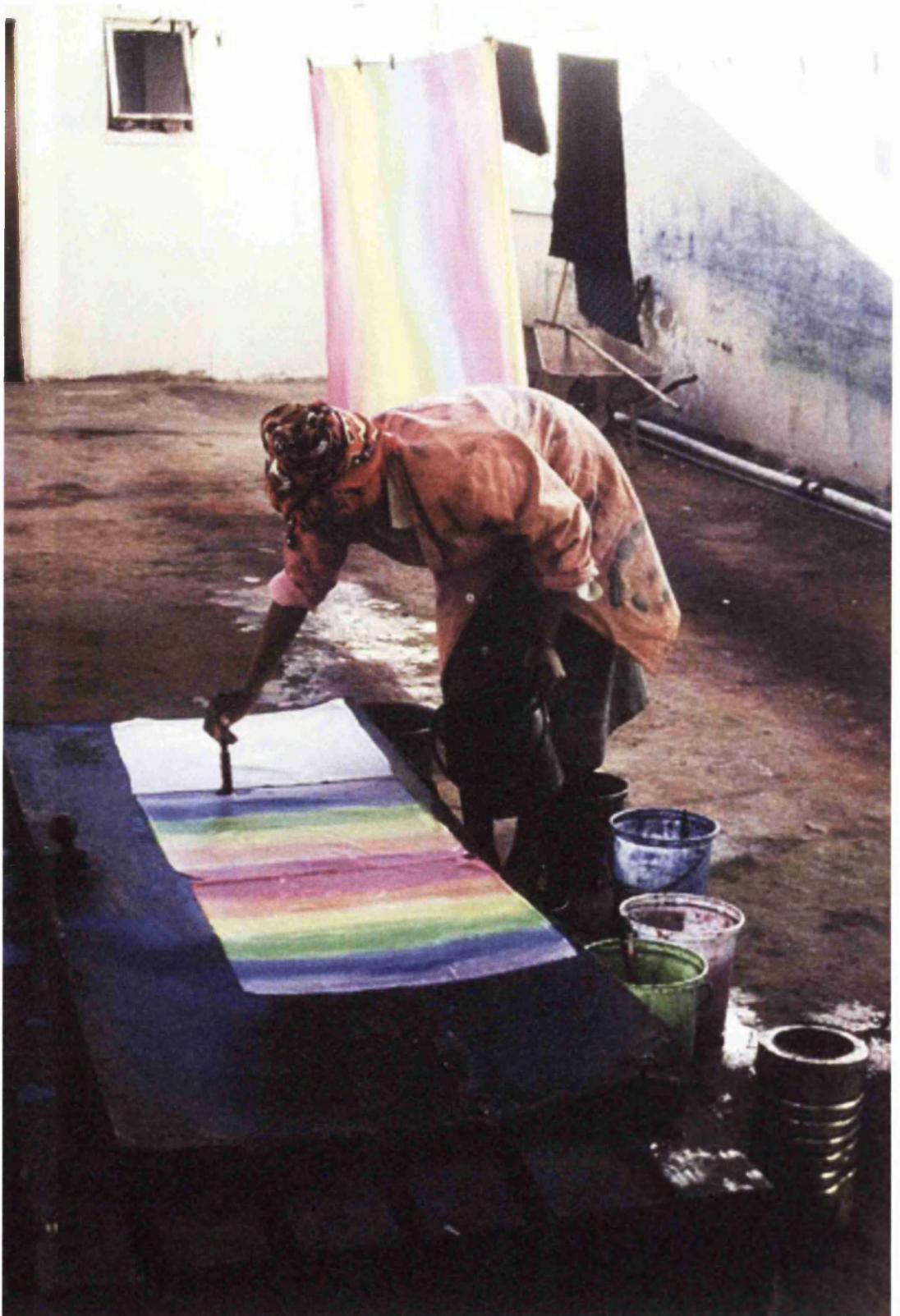


Figure 2.41 Painting cloth at Mokolodi. 1996.



Figure 2.42 Mokolodi workshop. 1996.



Figure 2.43 Carving a potato for printing with. 1996.



*Figures 244, 2.45 and 2.46 details of finished cloths.
Painted backgrounds with potato print patterns using manufactured dyes and
textile paint on cotton cloth. Mokolodi, 1996.*



*2.47 Finished Mokolodi product hanging in the art gallery.
50x60cm. 1996.*



Figure 2.48 The Kuru art project buildings. 1996.

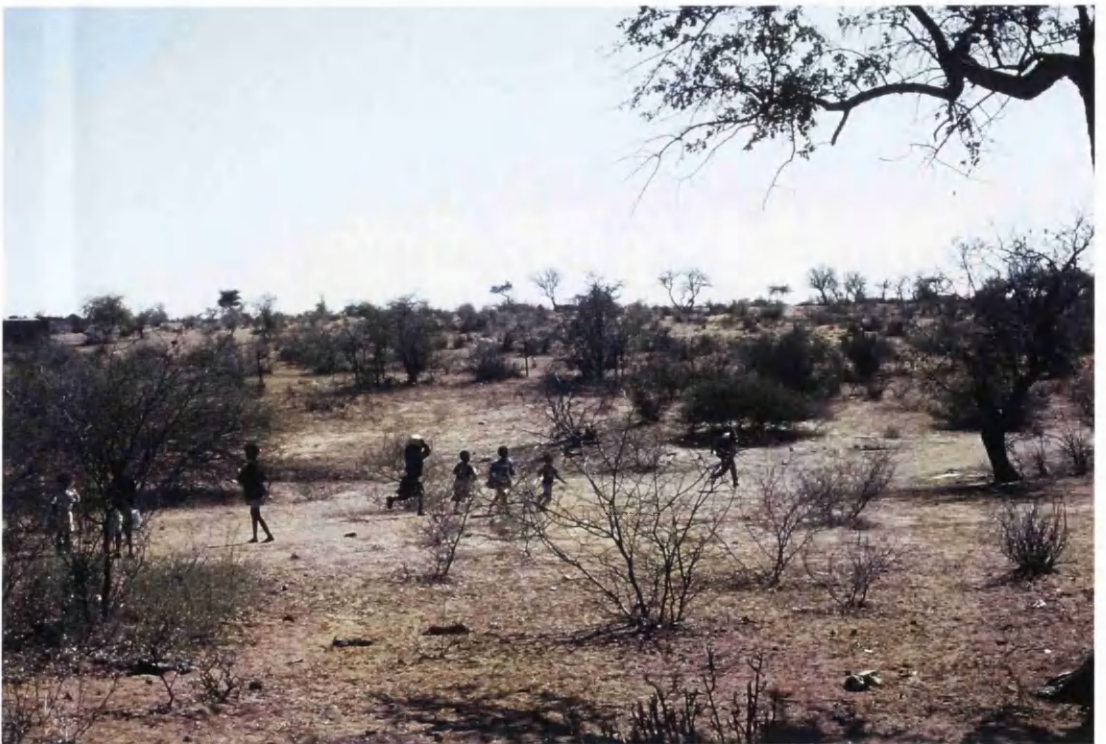


Figure 2.49 The Ghanzi desert surrounding the project. 1996.



Figure 2.50 The communal studio.



Figure 2.51 An artist working outside.

Dada (Coex'ae Qgam)



Figure 2.52 Birds and plant forms. Lithography, 1995. 50x40cm.



Figure 2.53 Dcaro Dxam (Ostrich thorn plant). Linocut. 60x60cm. 1999.



Figure 2.54 *Kalahari veld destroyed by ants*. Linocut. 50x50cm. 2000.



Figure 2.55 *Trees*. Lithography. 40x30cm. 1994.



Figure 2.56 *Birds and plants*. Lithography. 40x40cm. 1994.



Figure 2.57 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 84x110cm. 1994.

Ankie (Nxadom Qhomatca)



Figure 2.58 Ankie at work at the Kuru project. 1996.

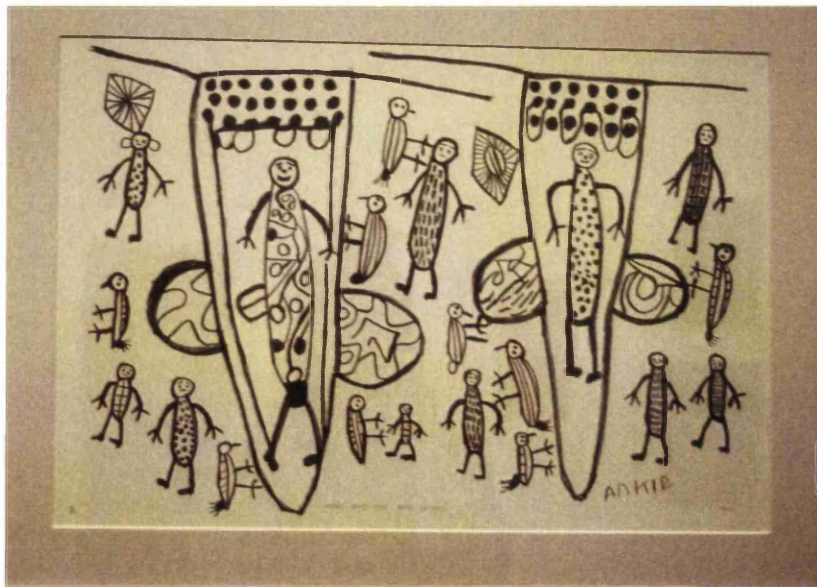


Figure 2.59 *Birds and aprons*. Lithography. 35x27cm. 1994.

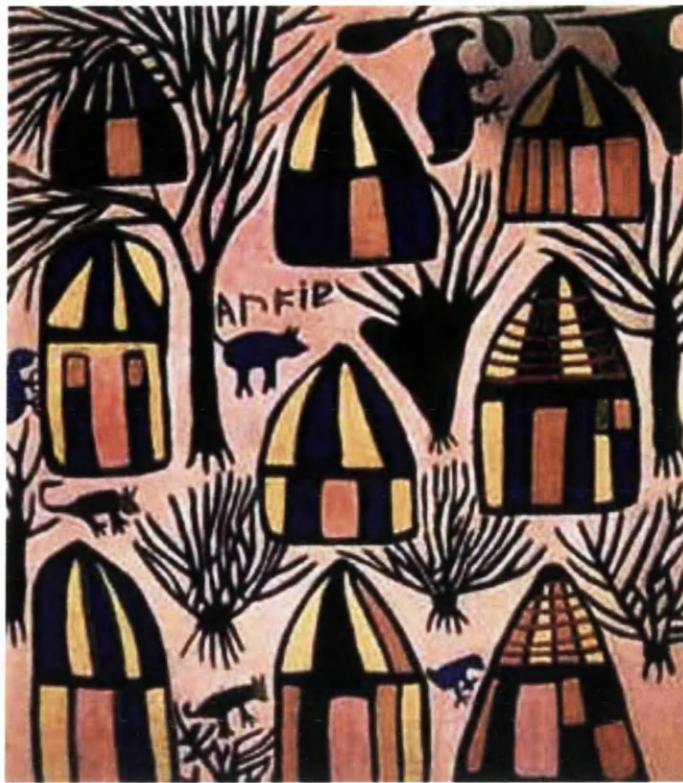


Figure 2.60 *Huts and animals*. Oil on canvas. 71x104cm. 1995.



Figures 2.61 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 79x63cm. 1995.

Cgoise (Cg'oses Ntcox'o)



Figure 2.62 Cgoise at work. 1996.



Figure 2.63 Birds. Oil on canvas. 61x107cm. 1995.



Figure 2.64 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 84x110cm. 1996.



Figure 2.65 *Bag, bird and tree*. Lithography. 25x35cm. 1992.



Figure 2.66 *Tortoises*. Linocut. 25x35cm. 1994.



Figure 2.67 *Dog barking at visitors*. Linocut. 30x25cm. 1999.

Nxabe (Ncg'abe Tase)

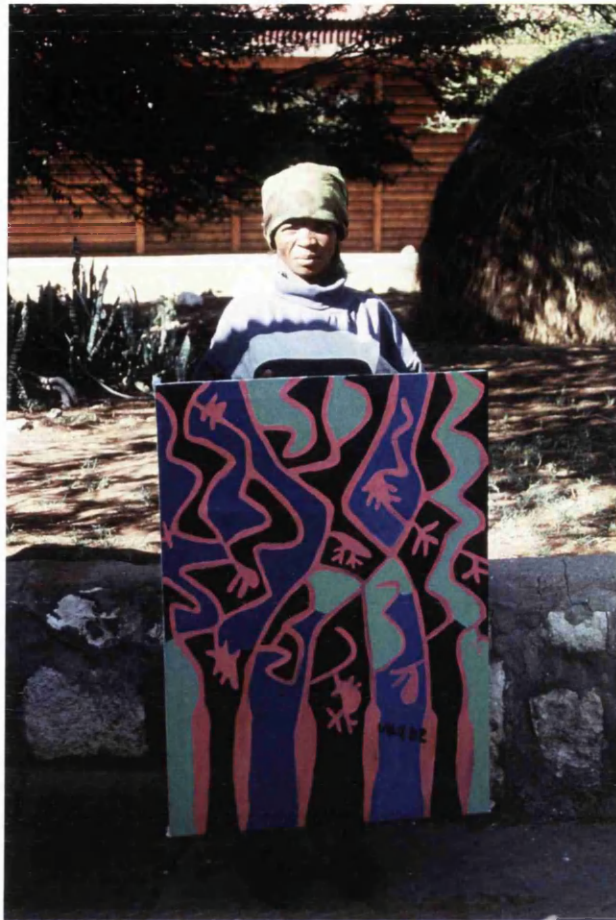


Figure 2.68 Artist with her work. Title unknown. Oil on Canvas. D'Kar, 1996.



Figure 2.69 Artist working outside at the Kuru project. 1996



Figure 2.70 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 61x74cm. 1993.

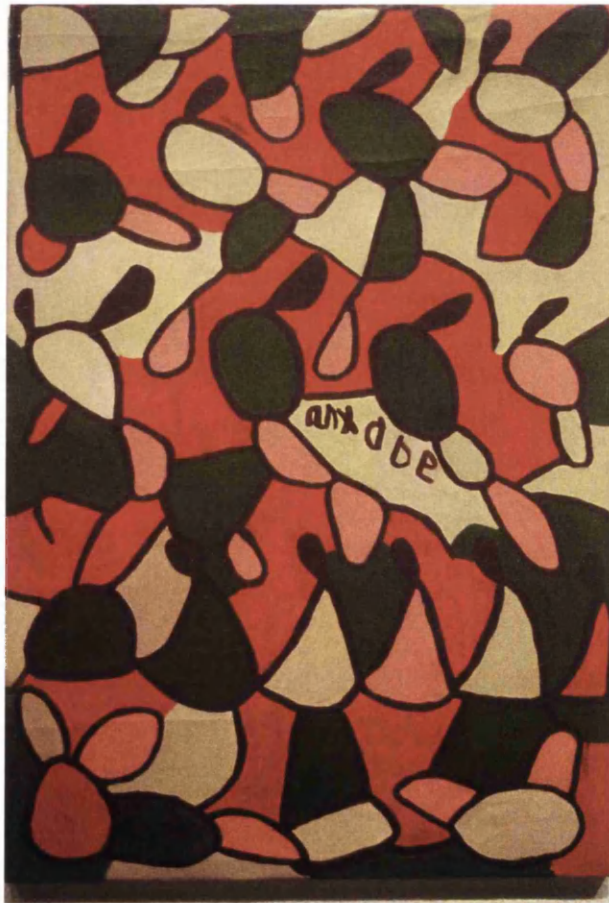


Figure 2.71 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 79x63cm. 1994.



Figure 2.72 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 50x30cm. 1994

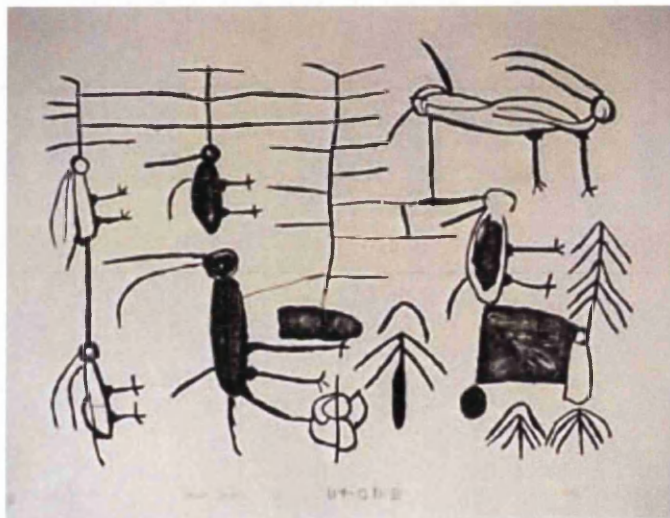


Figure 2.73 *Desert insects*. Lithography. 30x20cm. 1996.



Figure 2.74 *Puff adder and other veld food*. Linocut. 20x20cm. 1999.

Coxae/ Ennie (Coex'ae Bob)



*Figure 2.75 Artist with her work. **Untitled.** D'Kar, 1996.*

Qwaa (Xg'oa Mangana)



*Figure 2.76 **Desert animals.** Oil on canvas. 50x70cm. 1996.*

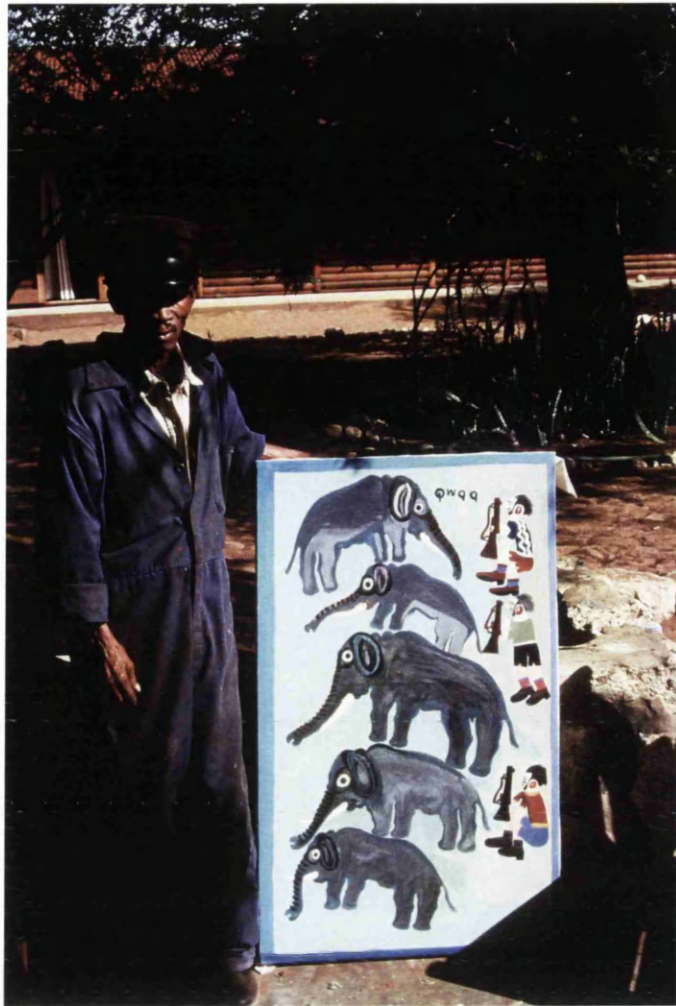


Figure 2.77 Artist with his work. D'Kar, 1996.

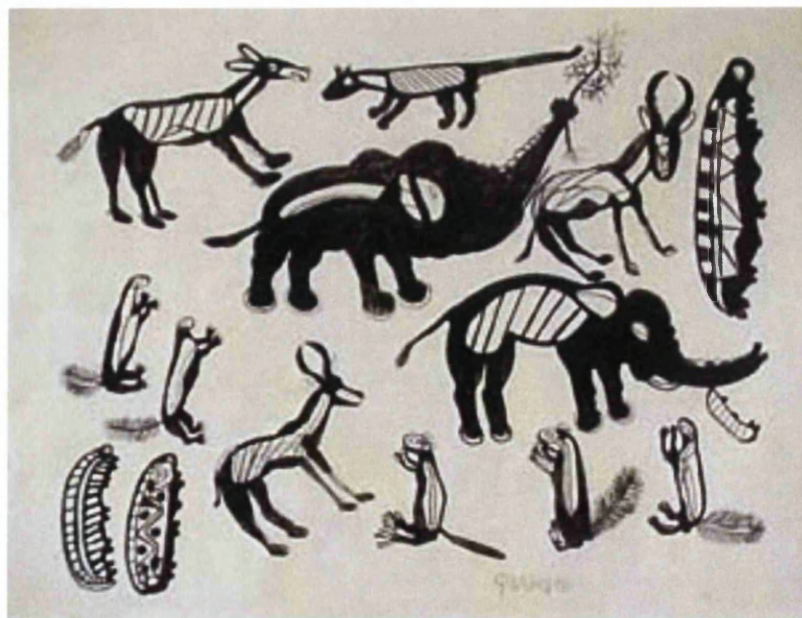
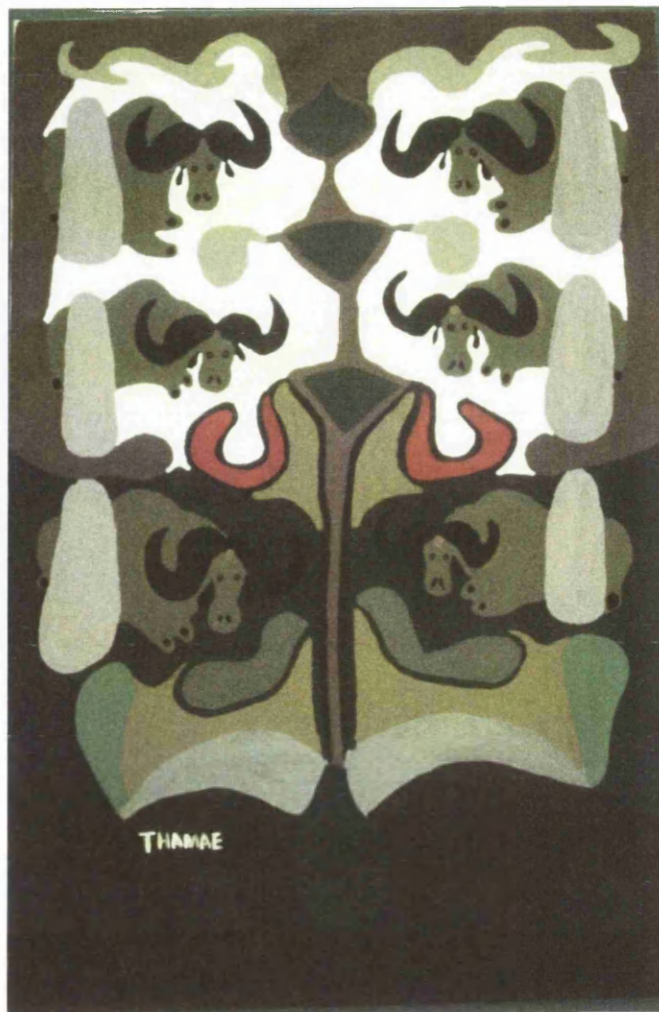


Figure 2.78 Elephants and creatures. Lithography. 20x20cm. 1992.

Thamae S. (Thama Setshogo)



*Figure 2.79 **Untitled**. Oil on canvas. 100x55cm. 1995.*



*Figure 2.80 **Lion and ostrich**. Linocut. 25x25cm. 1996.*



Figure 2.81 Title unknown. Linocut. 30x30cm. 1995.



Figure 2.82 *Insects in the garden*. Linocut. 65x54cm. 1996.

Qhaqhoo (Xgaoc'o X'are)



Figure 2.83 Two Leopards. Oil on canvas. 55x55cm. 1992.



Figure 2.84 Gemsbok, duikers and birds. Linocut. 50x65cm. 1996.

T. Kaashe (Thama Kase)



*Figure 2.85 **Hunting**. Linocut. 40x30cm. 1996.*

S.Sobe (Sobe Sobe)



*Figure 2.86 **Artist at work**. D'Kar, 1996.*

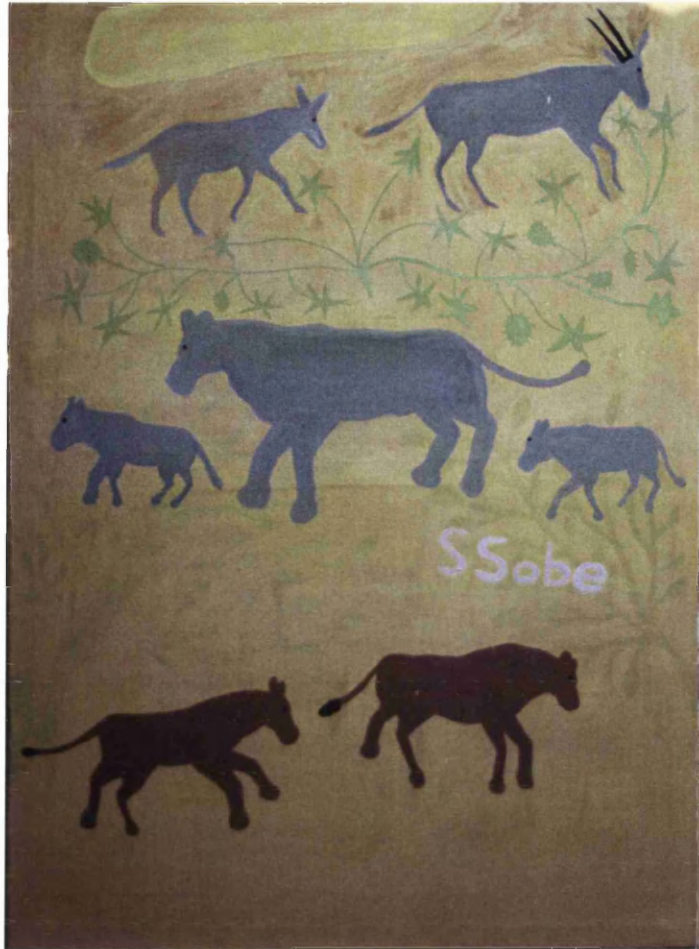


Figure 2.87 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 102x55cm. 1995.



Figure 2.88 *Abundance*. Linocut. 40x40cm. 2000.



Figure 2.89 Animals from the Kalahari. Linocut. 40x40cm 1999.

Q.Moses/Olebolong (Qaetcao Moses)



Figure 2.90 Storks, porcupine and worms. Linocut. 30x40cm. 1996.

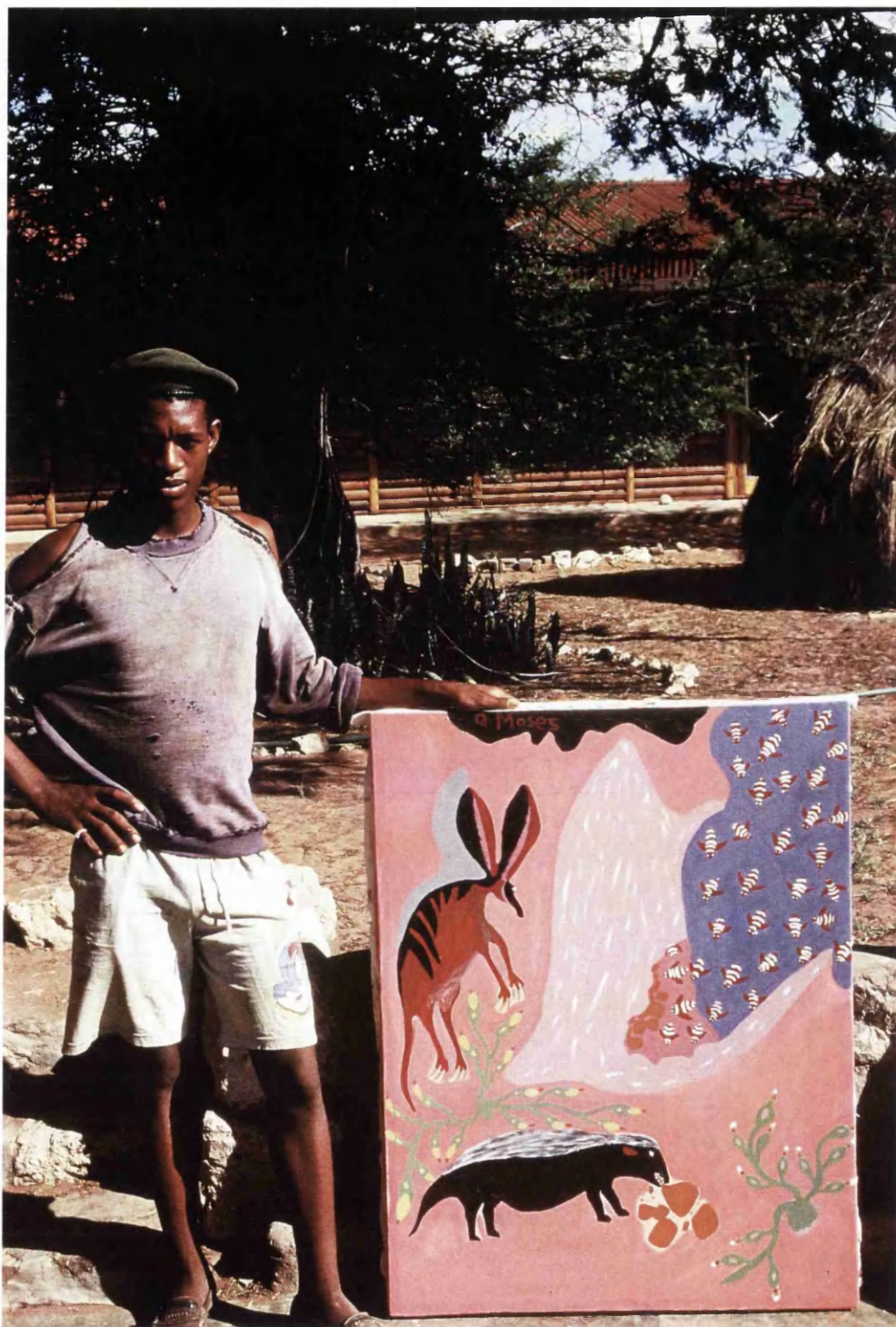


Figure 2.91 Artist with his work. D'Kar, 1996.



Figure 2.92 Ostrich eggshell jewellery. Linocut. 40x40cm. 1999.



Figure 2.93 Mountain, streams and rock art images. Linocut. 40x40cm. 1999.

Qmao (Qgoma Ncokg'o)

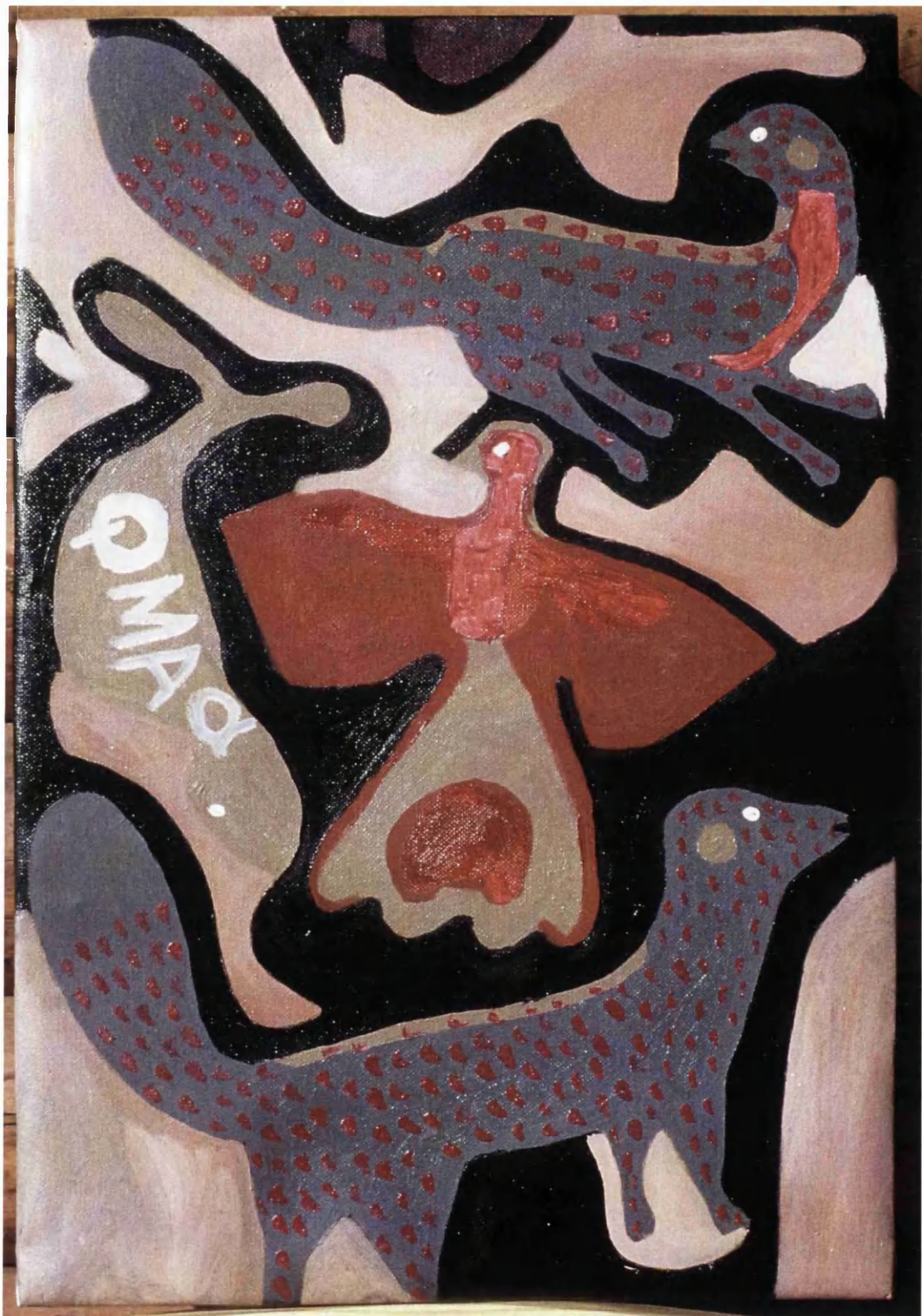


Figure 2.94 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 80x80cm. 1996.



Figure 2.95 *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 80x 50cm. 1996.



Figure 2.96 *Man hunting Ostrich*. Linocut. 30x30cm. 1993.

Chapter 3

Women painters in Botswana.

Neo Matome

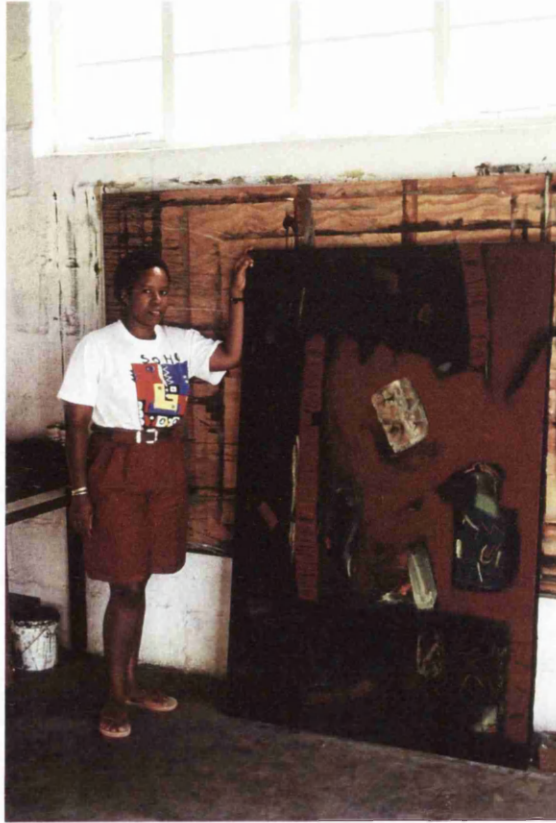
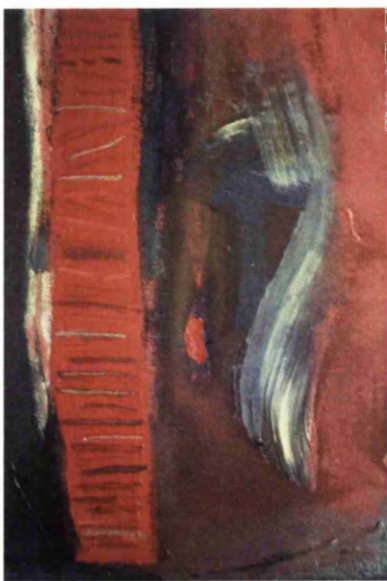


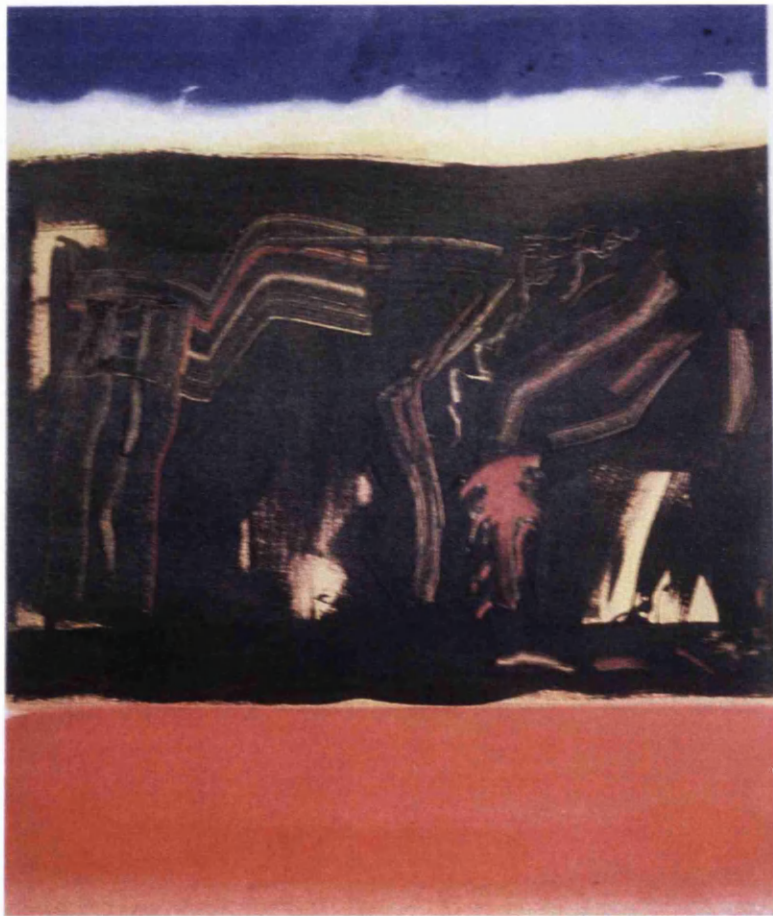
Figure 3.1 The artist in her studio near Bulawayo. 1995.



*Figures 3.2 and 3.3 Details of above painting: **Untitled**. 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 80 x 120 cm.*



*Figure 3.4 **Untitled.** 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 100 x 60 cm.*



*Figure 3.5 **Title unknown.** 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 60 x 100 cm.*



Figure 3.6 *Cruciform*. 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 60 cm.



Figure 3.7 *Contemplation*. 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 65 cm.

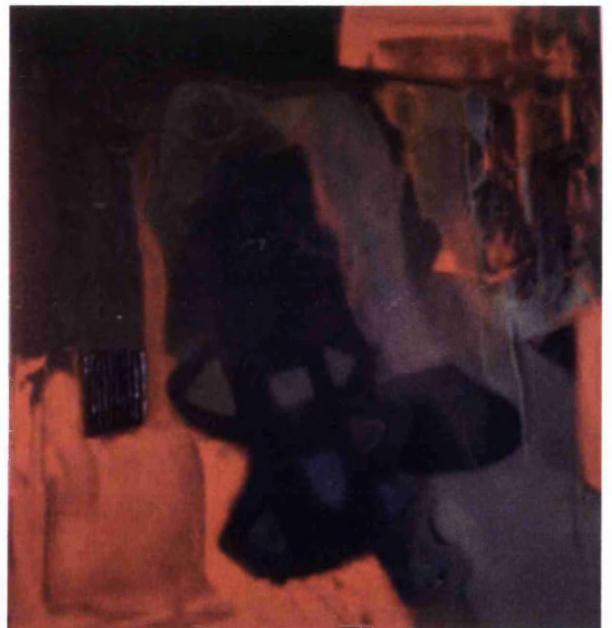


Figure 3.8 *The keeper of the souls*. 1999. Acrylic on canvas. 60 x 60 cm.



Figure 3.9 Threatened Landscape. 1999. Acrylic on canvas. 90 x 70 cm.



Figure 3.10 Mask. 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 90 x 80 cm.



Figure 3.11 Transitions II. 1993. Acrylic on canvas. 70 x 75cm.



Figure 3.12 When the serpent strikes. 1999. Acrylic on canvas. 70 x 70 cm.

Dada



Figure 3.13 Dada's first Table cloth. 1990.
Approx. 90 x 110 cm.



Figure 3.14 Table cloth. 1990.
Approx. 100 x 100 cm.

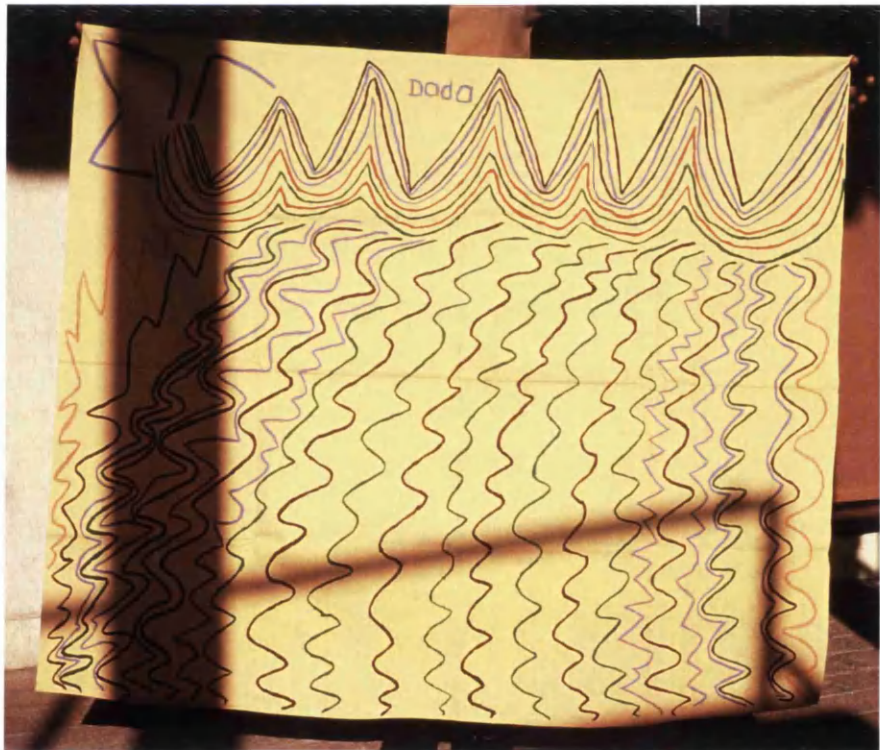


Figure 3.15 Table cloth. 1990. 110 x 110 cm.

All the above are acrylic on cloth and in the National Museums of Botswana Collection.



Figure 3.16 Title unknown. 1992. Acrylic on canvas. 150 x 70 cm.
In the National Museum of Botswana collection.



3.17 *Mokabi Tree*. Detail used as a postcard by the Kuru project.
1992. Oil on canvas.



Figure 3.18 Title unknown. 1995. Oil on canvas. 70 x 60 cm.



Figure 3.19 The artist with her work at the Kuru art project, D'Kar. 1995.



Figure 3.20 *Insects*. 1995. Oil on canvas. 110 x 60 cm.



Figure 3.21 *Trees*. 1995. 50x140 cm.
Oil on canvas.



Figure 3.22 *Trees and gemsbok*. 1995.
60x130 cm .Oil on canvas.

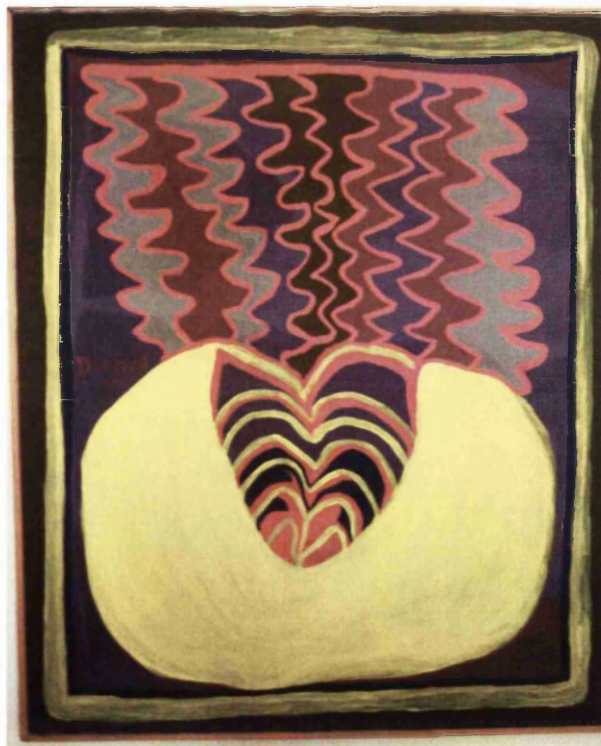


Figure 3.23 *Plants*. 1995. Oil on canvas. 70x100 cm.



Figure 3.24 The artist preparing a linocut in the Kuru printmaking studio, D'Kar. 1995.



Figure 3.25 The artist in the Kuru printmaking studio, D'Kar. 1995.

Monica Mosarwa

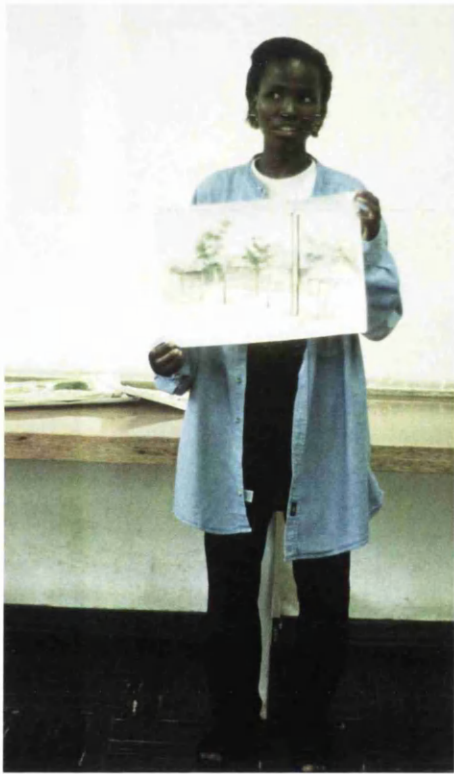


*Figure 3.26 **Untitled.** 1996.*



*Figure 3.27 **Untitled.** 1996.*

Watercolours. 35 x 23 cm.



*Figure 3.28 **The artist with her work.** 1996. NMMAG, Gaborone.*



*Figure 3.29 **Untitled.** 1996.*

Watercolour. 35x 23 cm.



*Figure 3.30 **Untitled.** 1996. Watercolour. 35 x 23 cm.*



*Figure 3.31 **Untitled.** 1996. Watercolour. 35 x 23 cm.*



*Figure 3.32 **Happy Life.** 1994. Acrylic on canvas. 100 x 80 cm.
Collection Robert Loder.*



*Figure 3.33 Struggle. 1995. Acrylic on canvas. 113 x 174 cm.
Collection Robert Loder.*



*Figures 3.34 and 3.35 The artist showing her more recent painting and textile work.
NMMAG. 2000. Photographs from the Thapong website.*

Veryan Edwards



Figure 3.36 The artist in her studio, Gaborone. 1996.



*Figure 3.37 **Untitled.** 1996. Oil on canvas. 80 x 50 cm.*

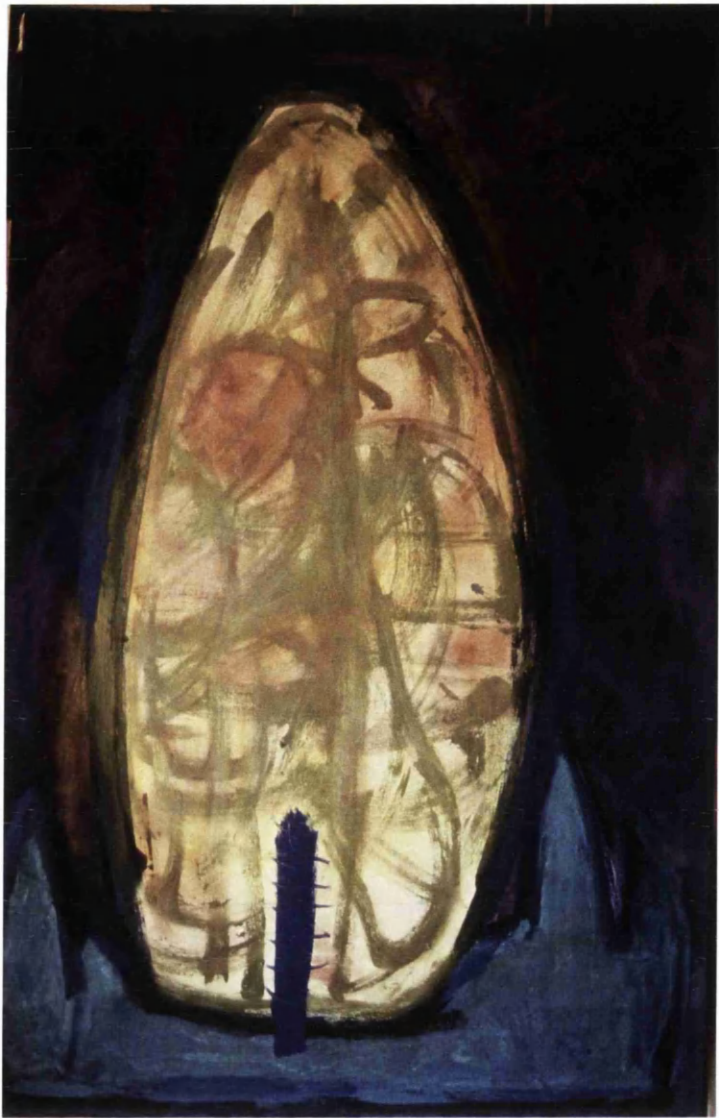


Figure 3.38 *Untitled*. 1995. Oil on canvas. 90 x 200 cm.



Figure 3.39 *Title unknown*. 1996. Oil on canvas. 225 x 100 cm.

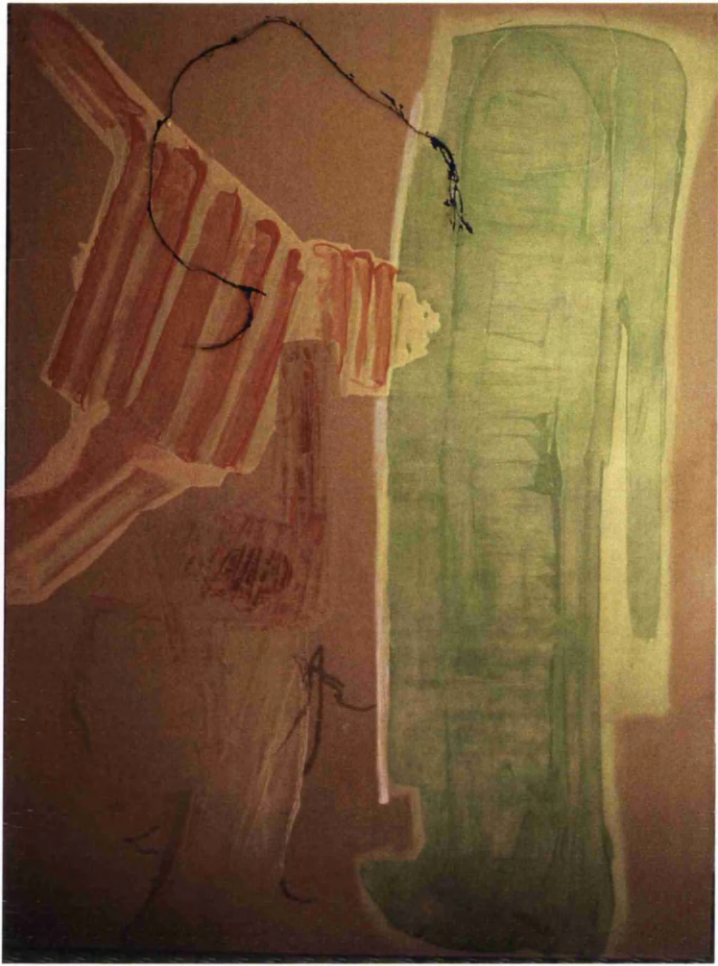


Figure 3.40 Title unknown. 1996. Oil in canvas. 90 x 135 cm.



Figure 3.41 Untitled. 1996. Oil on canvas. 90 x 90 cm.

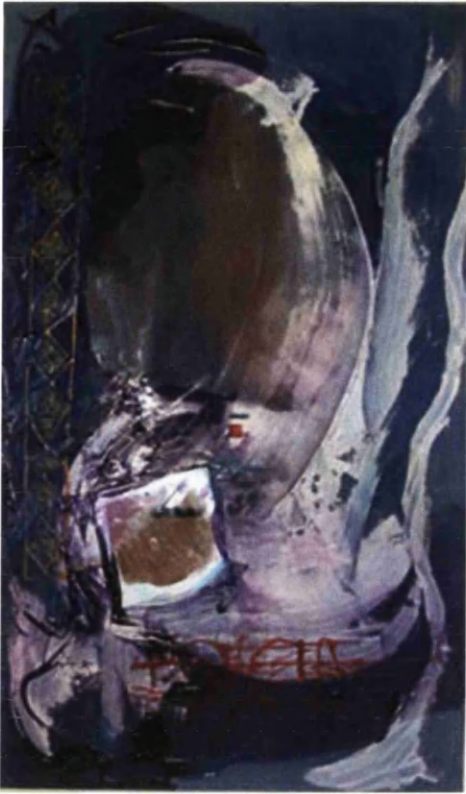


Figure 3.42 **Identity.** 1998.
Oil on canvas. 60 x 100 cm.



Figure 3.43 **Construction in Kanye.** 1996.
Mixed media. 100 x 120 cm.



Figure 3.44 **Untitled.** 1996.
Mixed media. 100 x 160 cm.

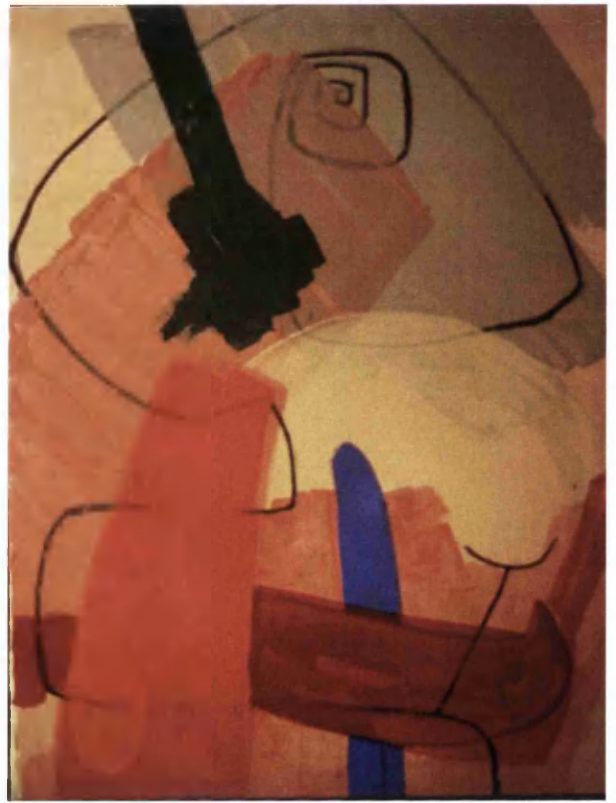


Figure 3.45 **Title unknown.** 1996.
Oil on canvas. 115 x 150 cm.



Figure 3.46 *Through the barrier.* 2000.
Oil on canvas. 40 x 100 cm.



Figure 3.47 *Fertile Meeting Point.* 2000.
Oil on canvas. 150 x 200 cm.



Figure 3.48 *Specific Infinite.* 2000. Mixed media. 100 x 80 cm.

Ann Gollifer

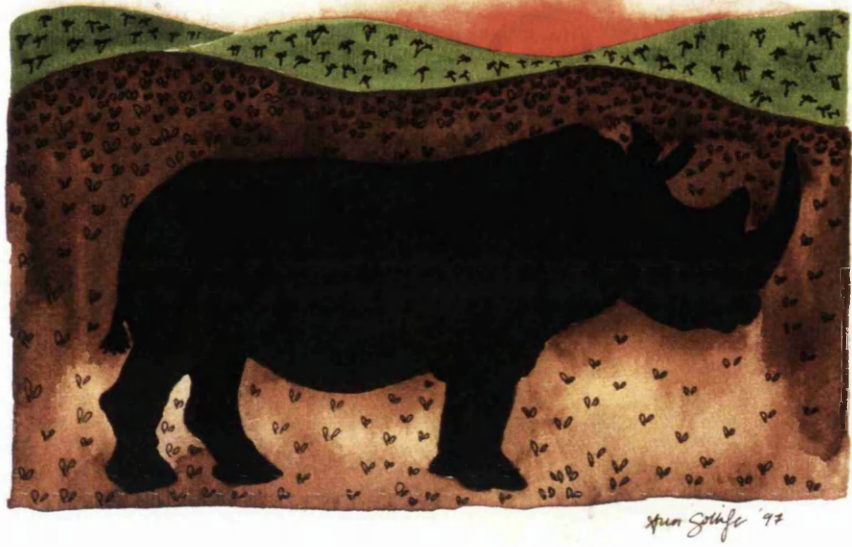


Figure 3.49 *Rhino*. 1991. Watercolour and pen. Card illustration: 14 x 10 cm.



Figure 3.50 *Baskets*. 1994. Card illustration: 10 x 14 cm.

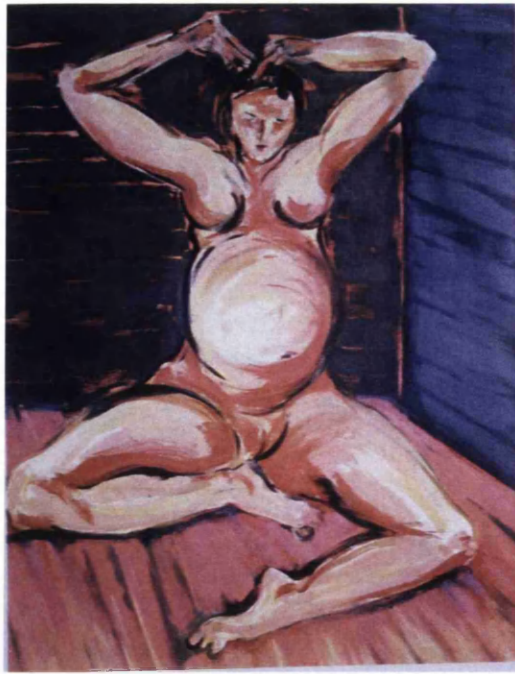


Figure 3.51 *Hot in the shade*. 1994. Acrylic on canvas. 105 x 150 cm.



Figure 3.52 *Mother and child*. Sketch for a mural. 1996. Pastels. 90 x 100 cm.

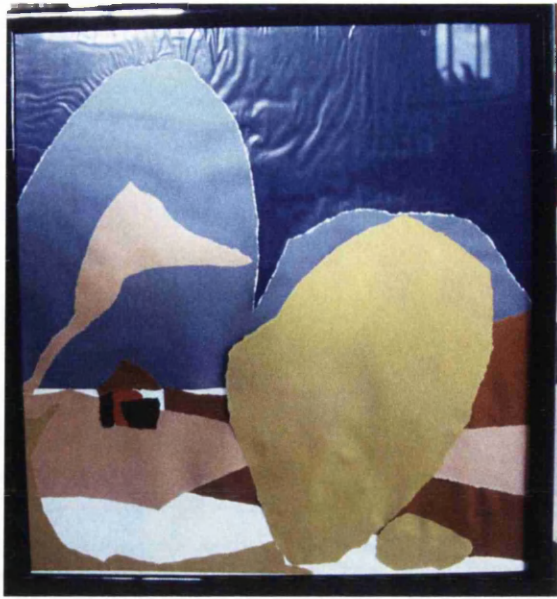


Figure 3.53 *Landscape*. 1995. Collage. 40 x 40 cm.



Figure 3.54 *House*. 1995. Collage. 40 x 40 cm.

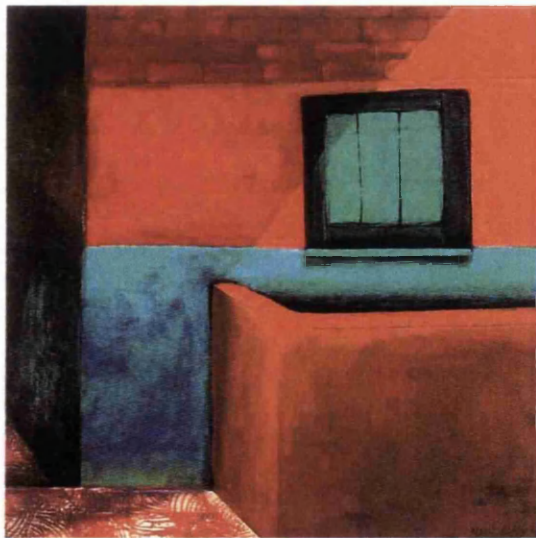


Figure 3.55 *Old Home*. 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 50 cm.



Figure 3.56 **Untitled.** 1995.
Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 50 cm.



Figure 3.57 **The End of the Day.** 1995.
Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 50 cm

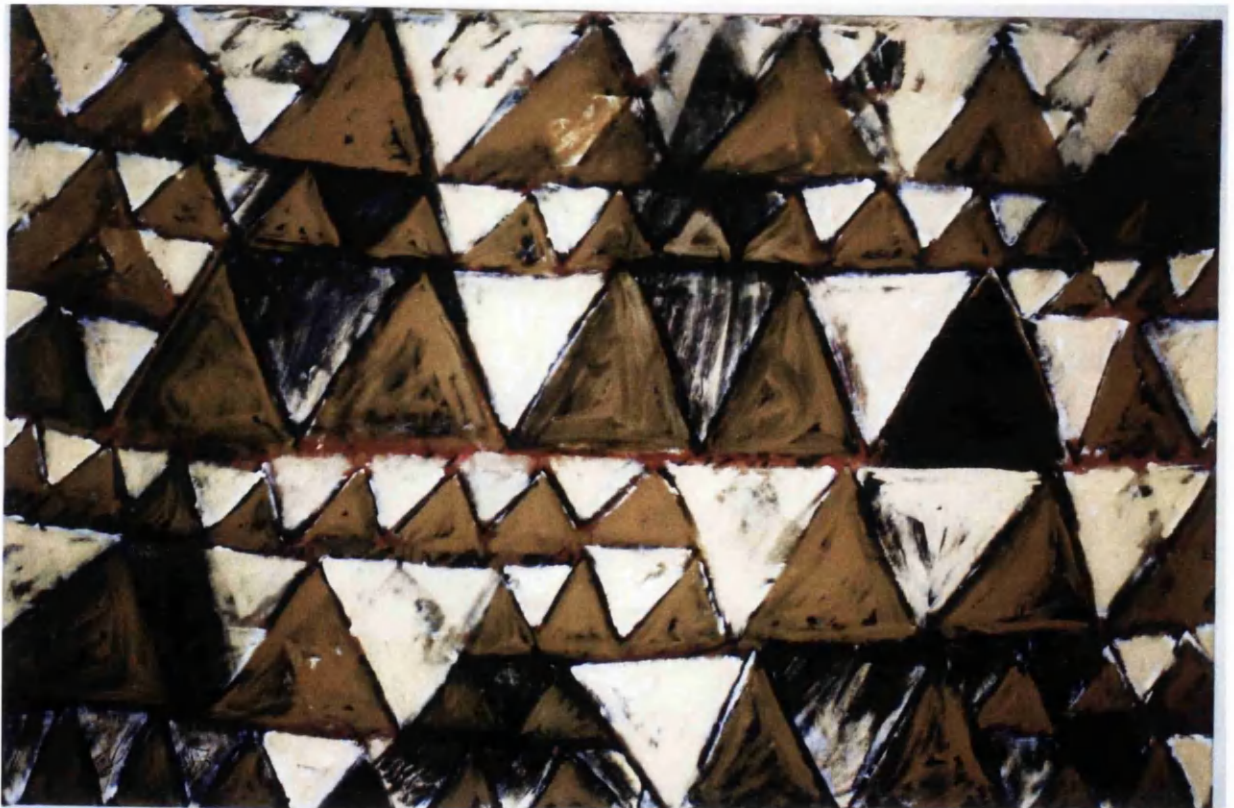
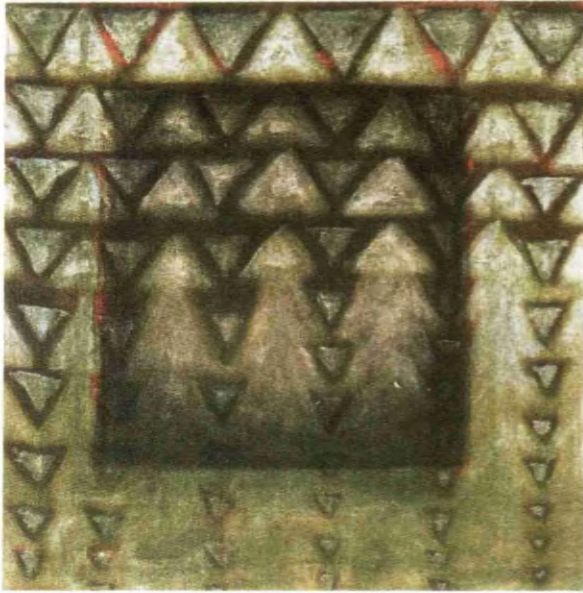


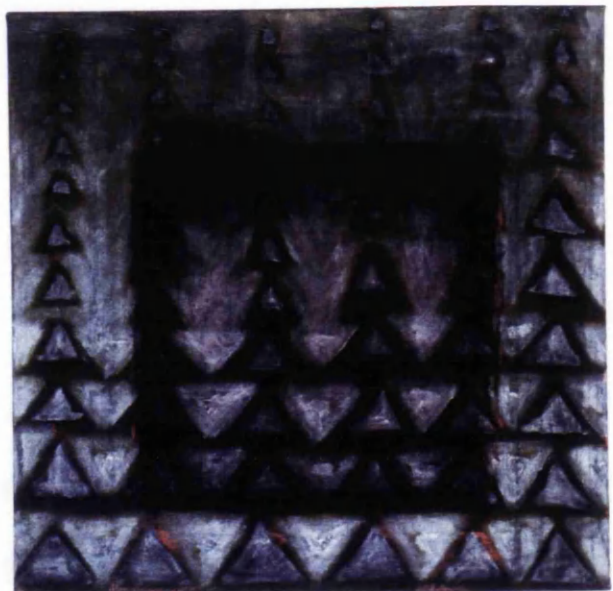
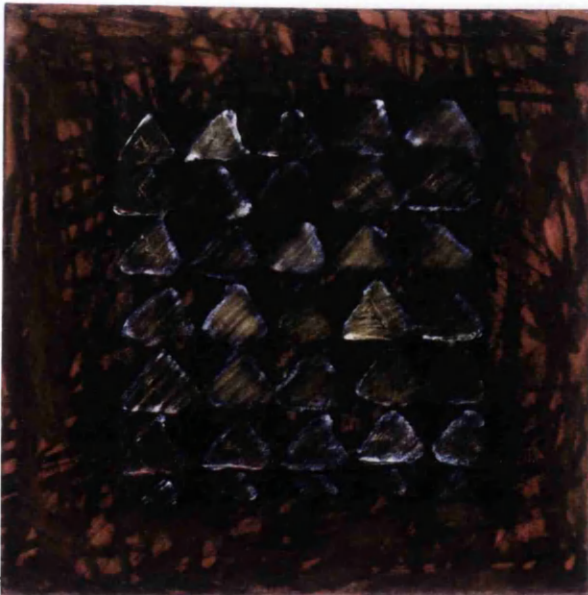
Figure 3.58 **Untitled.** 1995. *Acrylic on canvas. 95 x 60 cm.*



*Figure 3.59 Old Naledi – Dawn. 1996.
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas. 50 x 50 cm.*



*Figure 3.60 The Tip of the Iceberg. 1996.
Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 50 cm.*



Figures 3.61 and 3.62 Untitled. 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 50 cm.



Figures 3.63 *Untitled*. 1996.
Acrylic on canvas. 50 x 50 cm.

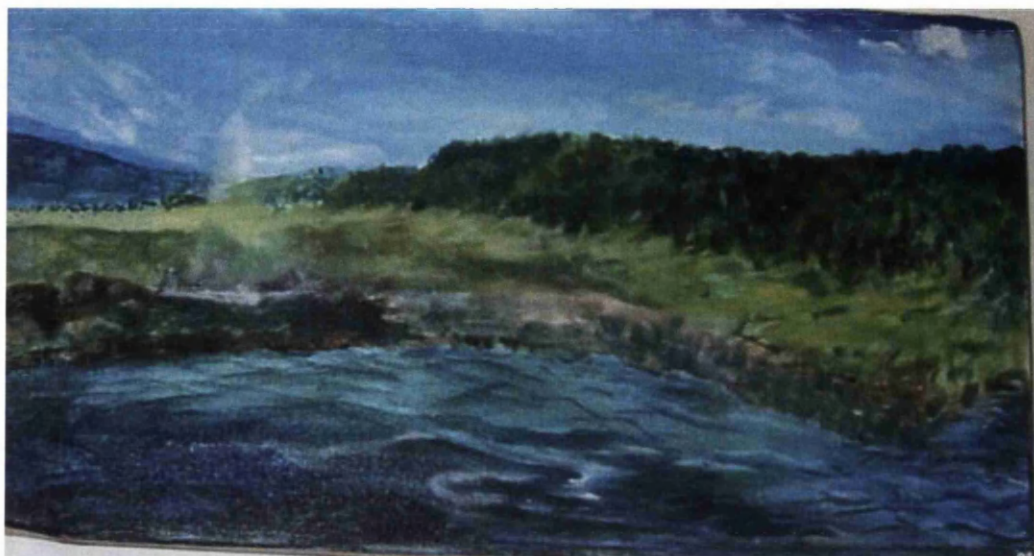


3.64 *Untitled*. 1996.
Acrylic on canvas. 40 x 60 cm.



Figure 3.65 *Africa*. 2002. Acrylic on canvas. 70 x 135 cm.
Photograph from the Thapong website.

Doreen Gomang



*Figure 3.66 **Untitled.** 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 120 x 70 cm.*



*Figure 3.67 **White Van.** 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 105 x 95 cm.*



Figure 3.68 Monkey. 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 60 x 60 cm.



Figure 3.69 A shared studio at Thapong, Mahalapye. 1996.



Figure 3.70 *Untitled*. 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 120 x 95 cm.



Figure 3.71 *Untitled*. 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 80 x 80 cm.



Figure 3.72 *Untitled*. 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 80 x 65 cm.

Students' work

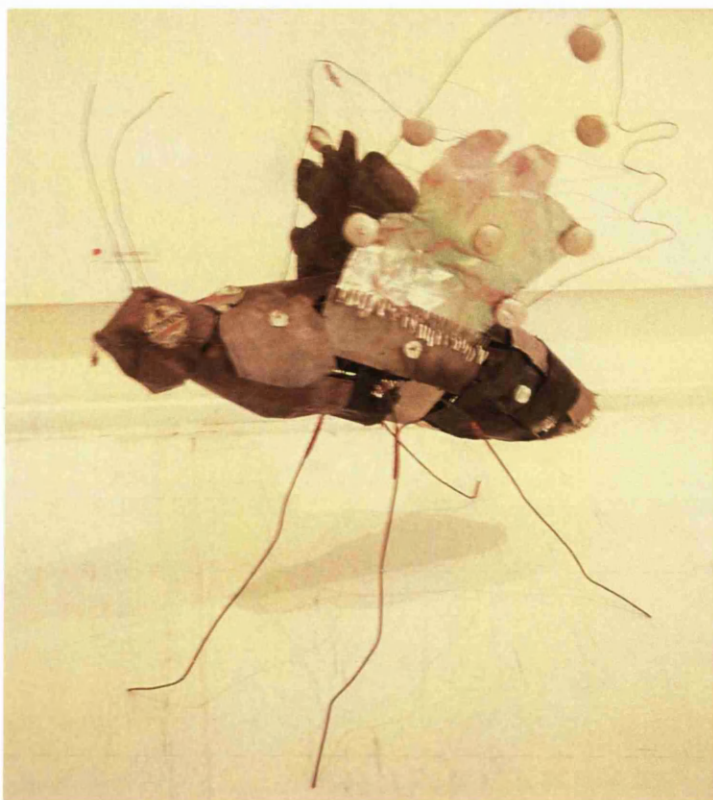


Figure 3.73 **Insect.** Mantho Baliki. 1995. Metal sheet and wire. Approx. 80 x 100 cm.

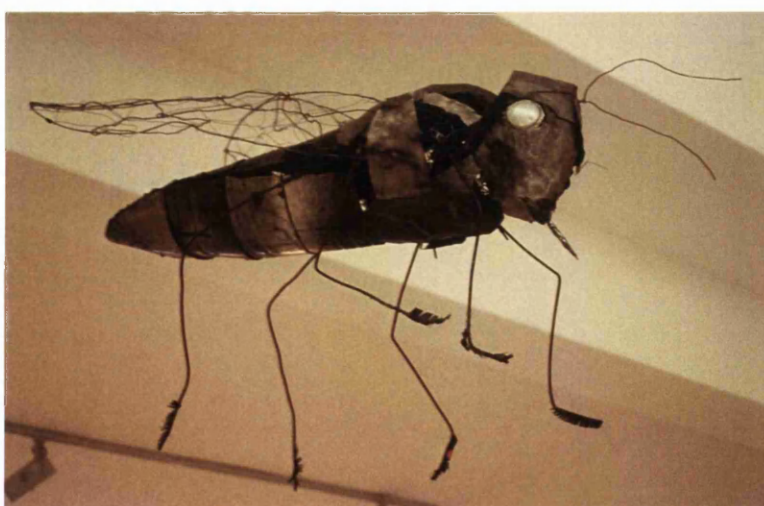


Figure 3.74 **Insect.** Elizabeth Kgotlafela. 1995. Sheet metal and wire. Approx. 100 x 80 cm.

4.00 Meeting
Why?
Any further?

Chapter 5

Triangle workshops in Botswana.



Figure 5.1 Outside studio spaces.

Figure 5.2 A marquee studio for the painters.



Figures 5.3 and 5.4 Indoor studio spaces.



Figure 5.5 Works in progress. Thapong 2006.



Figure 5.6 Acrylic paints free to participants.



Figure 5.7 The sculpture tent. Thapong 2006.



5.8 Velias Ndaba. *Work in progress. Thapong 2006.*



Figure 5.9 Semina Mpofo. **Kanamo bird.** Thapong 2006.



Figure 5.10 Transporting the work from the Thapong studios to the gallery in Gaborone.



Figure 5.11 Hanging the works.



Figure 5.12 Works ready to hang.

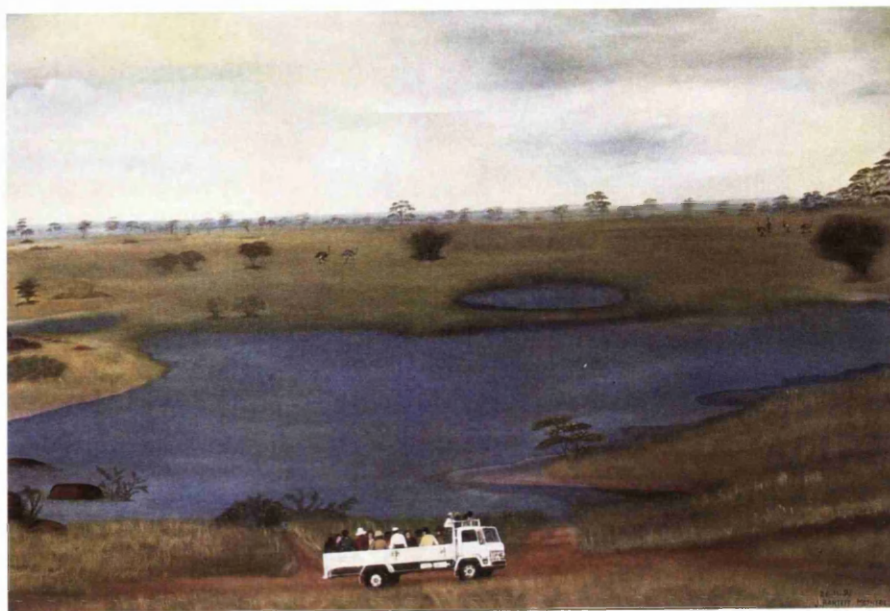


Figure 5.13 Outside the National Museum and Art Gallery, Gaborone. 1996.



5.14 Time for celebration at the end of Thapong 1996.

The following photographs were taken from 1990 and 1993 Thapong catalogues. No sizes of the works were given.



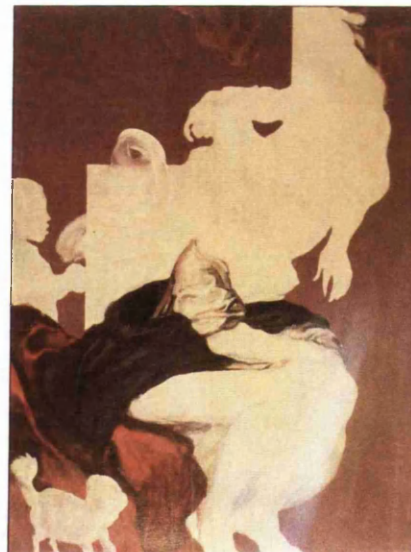
*Figure 5.15 **Ga-Sita Pan.** Rantefe Mothebe. Thapong 1993. Acrylic on canvas.*



*Figure 5.16 **Hunger.** Albino Zaqueu Lucas. (Mozambique). Thapong 1993. Wood.*



*Figure 5.17 **Through the Bush.** Stephen Mogotsi. Thapong 1993. Acrylic on canvas.*



*Figure 5.18 and 5.19 **Leggings on Blue and Untitled 1.** Johannes Phokela. (England). Thapong 1993. Acrylic on canvas.*



Figure 5.20 People must work together – Batho ba dirisanye mmogo.
Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse. Thapong 1990. Acrylic on canvas.



Figure 5.21 Bar scene. Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse. Thapong 1993.
Acrylic on canvas.

Motako



Figure 5.22 Cinah Tladi with her painting from the workshop Motako at her place of work- Ithuteng.



Figure 5.23 Still Life. Cinah Tladi. 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 70x85cm.

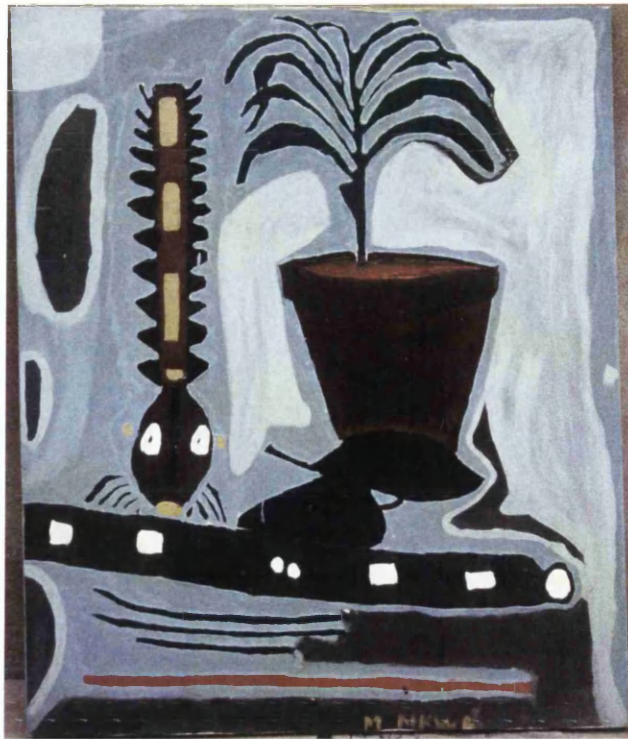


Figure 5.24 *Still Life*. Monica Nkwe.1996. Acrylic on canvas. 70x85cm.



Figure 5.25 Monica Nkwe at home with her painting from Motako.



Figure 5.26 Lesego Sefak with her painting at her place of work - Ikgabiseng.

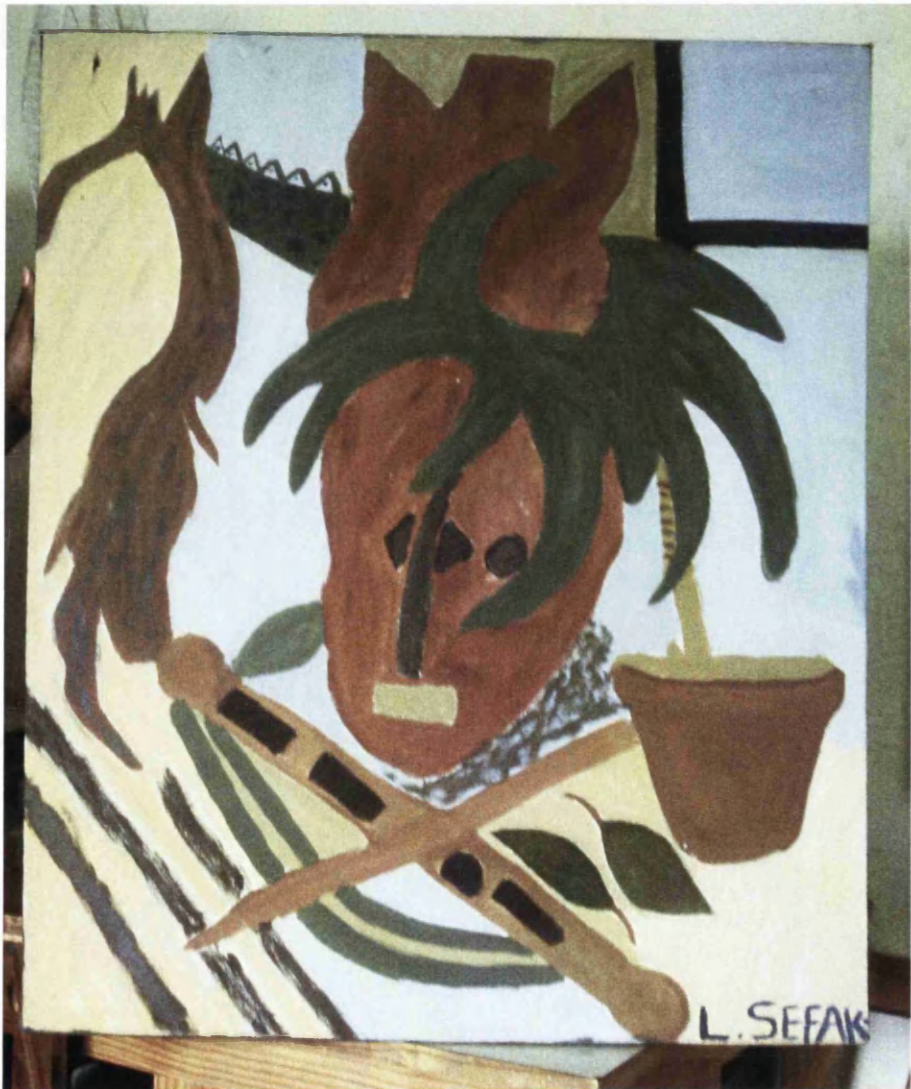


Figure 5.27 *Still Life*. Lesego Sefak. 1996. Acrylic on canvas. 70x85cm.

Chapter 6

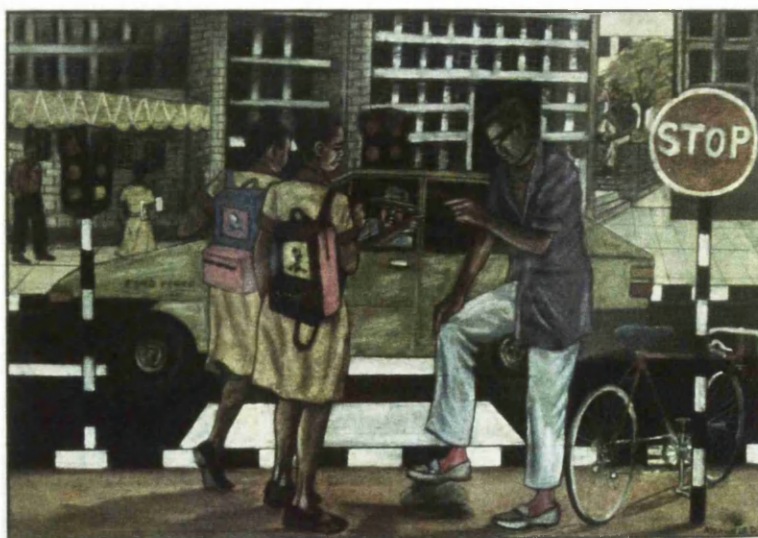
Exhibitions, art institutions and patronage of the arts.

National Museum, Monuments and Art Gallery, Gaborone, Botswana:



Figure 6.1 The National Museums and Monuments and Art Gallery of Botswana, in Gaborone.

Contemporary work hanging alongside historical portraits and artifacts:



*Figure 6.2 Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse. **After school.** Pastel. 40x35cm. NMMAG Collection.*



Figure 6.3 Portraits of The Moffatts. Oil on canvas.
NMMAG collection.



Figure 6.4 Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse. *Catching a Thief*. Pastel.
45x35cm. NMMAG Collection.



Figure 6.5 Philip Segola. *Nkwana (Pot)*. Mixed Media.
55x36cm. NMMAG Collection.

Gallery Ann Exhibition: *How we all live with AIDS*. 1995. Gaborone, Botswana.

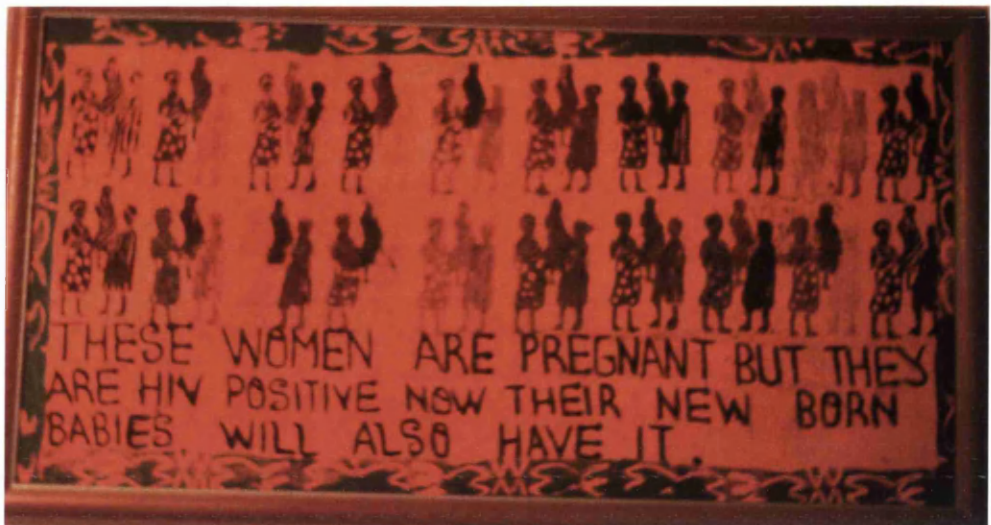


Figure 6.6 *Pregnant women with AIDS*. Ellen Pholo. 1995.
Fabrics. 120x50cm.

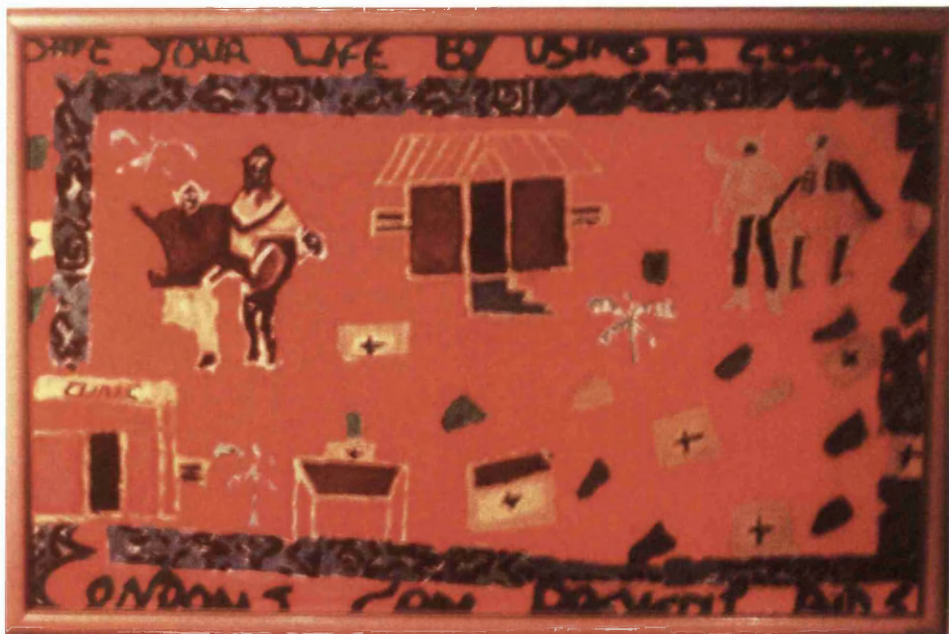


Figure 6.7 *How you can prevent AIDS!* Kamogelo Phogo. 1995.
Fabrics. 80x70cm.

Botswana Live! exhibition. 1993. London, UK.



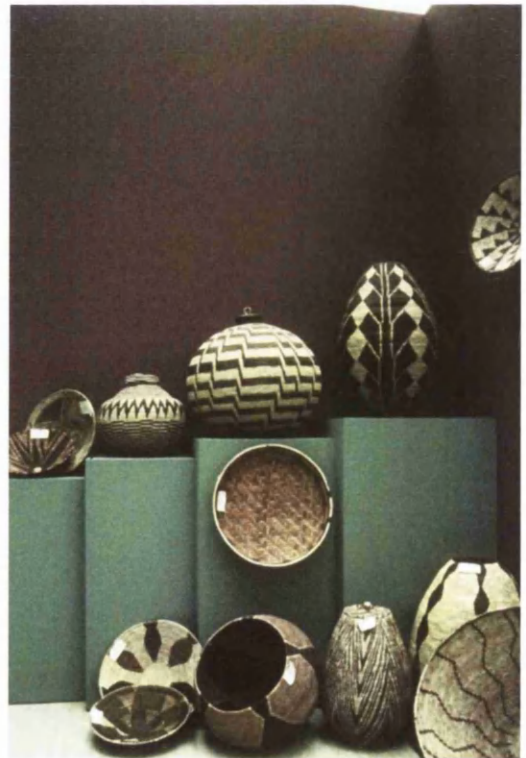
Figure 6.8 *Drinking and Driving*. Mokwaledi Gontshwanetse. 1989. Pastel. 47x35cm. NMMAG Collection.



Figure 6.9 *The Running Hare*. Philip Segola. Pastel. 55x36cm NMMAG Collection.



Figure 6.10 Large Traditional Pot. Pelegano Pottery. Clay.



*Figures 6.11 and 6.12. Ngamiland baskets.
NMMAG Collection.*



Figure 6.13 Ngamiland basket. *Running Ostrich*.
NMMAG Collection.

Rebecca Hossack exhibition. *Baskets at the Barbican*. 1994.
London, UK.

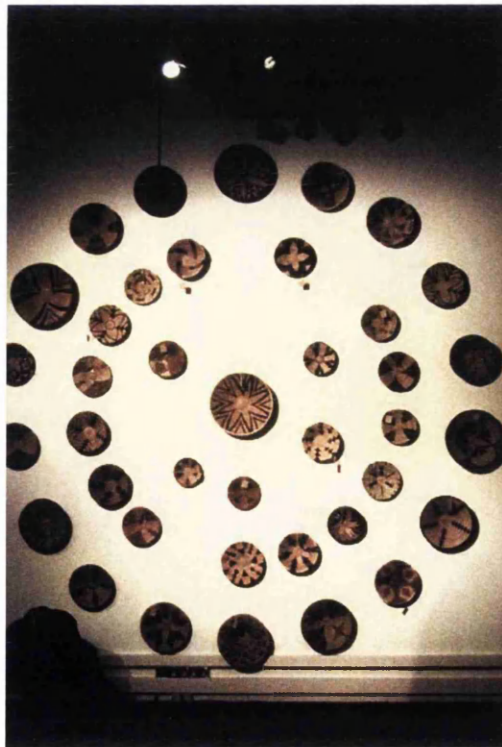


Figure 6.14. Display of Ngamiland baskets at the Barbican organized by the
Rebecca Hossack Gallery. 1994.

Return of the Moon: Bushmen art from the Kalahari exhibition. 1994. Rotterdam, Netherlands.



Figure 6.15 Display of contemporary paintings from the Kuru art project.

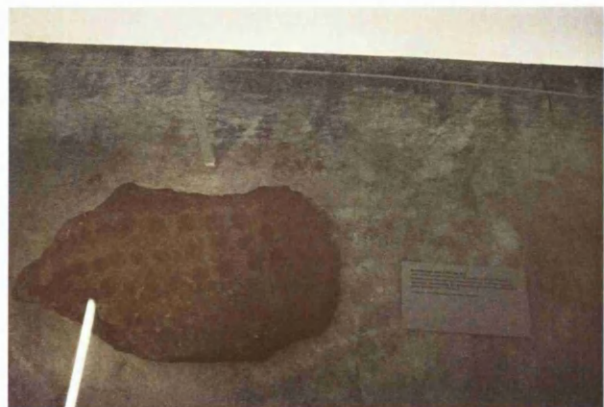


Figure 6.16 and 6.17 Fragments of rock paintings from Namibia exhibited alongside the contemporary paintings.

Appendices

(1.i) The people of Botswana.

Botswana literally means 'the land of the Tswana'. There are currently 8 main Tswana tribes in Botswana (The suffix 'Ba' denotes 'of Botswana' the tribe's name then follows) of which the first three are the largest group: Bakwena (Molepolole area), Bamangwato (Shoshong/Palapye/Serowe areas), Bangwaketse (Kanye), Bakgatla (Mochudi area), Bamalete, Barolong (East Botswana), Batawana (North East Botswana), Batlokwa. Other groups include: Bakalanga (originally from Zimbabwe now in the Francistown area), Bateti (originally from Zimbabwe), Bakhurutshe (in the North of Botswana), Bakgalagadi (of which there are 5 sub-divisions), BaHerero (originally from Namibia now in the Ngamiland district), Bayei, Bahamukushu and Basubiya (all settled in Ngamiland and live along the Okavango waterways), Basarwa (the San of Botswana living in the Kalahari). This is as comprehensive a list as I can give. Despite Issac Schapera's extensive writings on the peoples of Botswanaⁱ, information on the current status of the population varies and research seems sparse. I refer to Wim Van Binsbergen's 'Botswana's Ethnic Structure'ⁱⁱ where he states: "More in general, however, there is a remarkable paucity of publications specifically on ethnicity in Botswana".

(1.ii) How baskets were used.

Whatever their current uses, their history is firmly rooted in domestic usage. Here I briefly outline the most common baskets known about today and their functions:

Leselo (plural: *maselo*)

This basket is flat and circular. It is used for winnowing, sorting or drying grains. It is also used as a component of the musical instrument the *Sevukuvuku*. It is made using the coil method and is made exclusively by women. It can measure anything between 23 and 38 cm in diameter.

The *leselo* is indispensable to every woman. (Lambrecht, 1976: 179)

Setego (plural: *ditego* Yeiⁱⁱⁱ: *dlitundu*)

Another basket made only by women. It is used alongside the *leselo* for winnowing mealies although it can also be used for storage purposes. It has a round flat base with slanting sides. The bases can be between 13-15 cm and the open tops between 33-53 cm. The height can be from 13-24cm. again made using the coiling technique with invisible core.

Baskete (plural: *dibaskete*)

This one is made by older men. Made of twigs of *moretlwa* (*Grewia flava* (Latin) or wild raisin bush) it has a circular base and nearly straight sides. It always has a handle. Used for carrying meat, fish etc... it is a very cheap basket. The size is usually about 23x30x18 cm. There are several variations on the *Baskete* made by women for storing seeds etc. These are woven with the use of dyes to pattern them. One has a square base with a round body and a stiff handle: *moloka Baskete*. Another has with a square or rectangular base and top with inward slanting sides, or with a square base and circular top with inward slanting sides.

Manke (Yei: *umanke*)

Made by women to store soap, needle, tools etc. It is usually spherical sometimes oval-shaped with lids and handles. Height between 25-51 cm.

Setutwane (plural: *ditutwane* Yei: *untutwane*)

Made by women they vary enormously in size. They always have a small opening and a lid. Small versions are attached to a belt and worn as such. This small version of the *setutwane* acts as a purse and is always highly decorated. The slightly larger version is used to store herbs or jewellery. The large size is plain or only decorated near the collar and is used for fermenting beer. It has no lid. The extra large *setutwane*, without decoration, is used for storing grain.

Another vessel for beer is the *nkgwana*, which combines pottery and basket work, these are made by men.

Setsuma a. (plural: *ditsuma*)

A lightweight basket of twinned weaving made by men and women but never decorated. Used for carrying fish or fruits. They have a wide aperture and no lid but always have some sort of handle. They come in a variety of sizes.

Setsuma b.

Made by man from split poles or bark. Roughly made they are nevertheless very strong and used for carrying chickens. The opening is just big enough for a chicken and is closed by ropes. 76x76 cm.

Mothotho (plural: *methotho* Yei: *muthotho*)

An indispensable woven basket made for squeezing beer. Women make this. It is never decorated.

Sekgoma (plural: *dikgoma*)

Originally made by the Rotse it is bought by people in Ngamiland. Made by men it is a flat wallet, which sits on a shoulder strap. The weave is decorative.

The above list shows that all baskets mentioned were originally made with a specific function in mind. Most are decorated to some extent and the majority are made by women for their own use.

(1.iii) Method and material employed.

Elizabeth Terry is an American who worked in Botswana from 1980-1988. She worked as a freelance craft advisor, at times working for the museum and for the commercial organisation Botswanacraft. She spent a lot of time in the Okavango region with the Hambukushu women learning their basket making skills. From there she went on to carry out research into both the impact of basket making on the environment and the influence of commerce and marketing on the craft. She is currently working along similar lines as a craft advisor in Namibia.

In, *Anatomy of a Ngamiland Basket* (1997) she describes in detail the lengthy process of basket making. I will summarise the process here:

Firstly the producer will need to collect the materials; these will vary from area to area depending on what is available. In Botswana, the majority of baskets are made from boiled and then sun-dried strips of palm leaves: *mokola palm* (*Hyphaene petersiana*/ 'vegetable ivory'). The younger leaves (seven to ten years old) are used, as they are more pliable, they are gathered by women who sometimes have to walk for hours to find a supply. Other materials that women need to search for and collect are the dyes and the material to form the inner core of the baskets.

There are three main sources of dyes.

1. Roots of the *Eclea divinorum* (Latin) tree, *metlhakola* in Setswana, which produce a rich dark brown colour,

2. Roots and /or bark of the *Berchemia discolor* (Latin) tree, *motsentsila* in Setswana, produce a reddish brown colour,
3. The leaves of a shrub called *Indigofera tinctorum* (Latin) *mohetsola* in Setswana (which produce a mauve or purple tone.

The inner core of the baskets varies depending on the makers. For example the Hambukushu^{iv} weavers will use *Eragrostis pallens* (Latin) grass (*muhonyi* in Thimbukushu^v) whereas the Bayei^{vi} weavers will use the *Hyphaene petersiana* (Latin) palm leaf (*mokola* in Setswana). They take strips from the outside of the leaves, these strips are called *ditsitsiri*.

The most recent problem here is that as supplies nearest to home are used up, women have to travel greater distances to find the materials they need. In the meantime areas of palms are being destroyed and trees are damaged when the roots are dug for the dye. This environmental damage was something that Terry highlighted in her research (Terry, 1984: 153) and steps are now being taken to redress the balance.

The leaves need to be moistened by being boiled in water for 30 minutes before weaving, this will also help to preserve the leaves and stop them decomposing. They are then split into strips and laid out to dry. To dye the leaves the roots need to be peeled and crushed and added to the boiling water with the leaves, which need to be already split into thin strips. The longer the dye is left, the darker the colour. Again the strips are laid out to dry.

For the weaving process very little equipment is needed: a bowl for water, an awl (*Lemao* in Setswana), and a razor blade. The basket is started by making seven or eight coiled rows using the preferred material, and then the maker will start to weave in the strips of *mokola* palm.

The weaving or wrapping of the coil is done by inserting the awl into the previously wrapped row in order to pierce a hole. A strip of *mokola* is then inserted into the hole and brought around the coil material, pulled tightly and made ready to place in the next hole. (Terry, 1984: 154)

Designs are made by inserting the dyed strips at appropriate places to form the image

(1.iv) Early influences on basket designs.

Dora Lambrecht, in her article on basketry for 'Botswana Notes and Records', examines early external influences on the development and designs of Botswana baskets. She points out that the two Setswana terms for baskets are: Baskete and Manke and that Baskete probably comes from the English word "basket" and Manke from the Dutch "mandje". Both of these types of basket have handles which indicates the Western way of carrying goods as opposed to the more usual way in rural Africa of carrying loads on the heads. (Lambrecht, 1976: 182) This shows how, as European colonisers bought and used baskets, the makers adapted the forms and shapes to their needs. This is an example of the very early influence of the external market and sales on the production of baskets.

(1.v) Pottery.

John Picton and William Fagg (1970) in *The potter's art in Africa* give a comprehensive history of pottery in Africa and one of the few sources of information about pottery in the region is A.C.Lawton's *Bantu pottery of Southern Africa*. This is an extensive survey of pottery in southern Africa between 1961 and 1963. Although not necessarily comprehensive it does give a good idea of what was being made, where, and by whom during these dates. From this survey it would seem that pottery was widespread throughout Botswana being made and used by most groups of people. Regional variations in method, style and usage occur due to materials available and the indigenous groups' lifestyle history; for example whether they were travellers, beer makers or crop gatherers would determine the type of pots made. Among the many very specific uses for pots made in Botswana are: fermenting beer or serving beer, cooking, serving food, carrying water, cooking gravy, sour porridge and preparing yeast.

Historical documentation of pottery in Botswana shows that, as for contemporary pottery, it was generally women who were the pot makers. However, it is not all women but women belonging to families of specialist potters. Within these families the craft is passed down from mother to daughter.

As it is a specialist skill that not all women are able to do it does mean that women are able to sell their work and for many, pottery is an important source of family income.

During the summer months rural farming families leave their homes and travel out to grazing areas known as cattle posts. The children will spend time looking after the cattle and it is there that the women have time to spend making pots. On their return home women will take a cart full of pots to the nearest or best market.

Women who could make pots would make them for her own use as well as for sale. In the past it would often be the only source of cash income for a family and was in some cases a source of independent income for married women. For example it was stated that BaKgatla^{vii} women would keep all of the income from the sale of her pots apart from a very small amount, which would be given to the husband in return for delivering her wares. This demonstrates that a certain amount of financial independence available to women potters. This potential income was particularly important for single parent families.

Daughters learn the skills of pottery, working with clay, firing and decorating the pots, during their time at the cattle post by watching and copying their mothers.

(1.vi) How pots are made.

The most common method of making pots in Botswana is the following:

Clay is collected, this could be a short distance away but more often than not women have to walk up to ten kilometres to find the right clay. The right clay is the sort that their mother or aunt would have taught them to use, one that moulds well and fires well. The clay is dug out and then carried home. One woman told of having to spit on a green twig and throwing it towards a clay bank for “good luck” before beginning to dig with a pickaxe. (Vorting and Lekhutlile, 1987:15)

Women have a ‘place of work’ either at home or at the cattle post. This is often an area under a tree, which is her designated space to work and where her tools, clay and bowls of water can be laid out. (Horner, nd: 12)

A detailed description of the process is given by Bothoboile Mokganedi, a Kalanga^{viii} potter, in the *Zebra's Voice* (Vorting and Lekhutlile, 1987:16) where she explains that first, the clay lumps are pounded into a fine powder then a winnowing basket is used to separate out the stones. The clay is then kneaded with water. Clay sausages are then made and moulded around a plastic lid or cooking pot. This continues until it the pot is half completed. The pot is then ‘pulled up’ with a wooden spatula or a rib that makes the surface smooth.

The uppermost part is then made even with string. A piece of wet goat skin is used to give the rim its final shape and then cloth is wrapped around the worked surfaces to prevent them from drying out too quickly. The pot is then turned upside down and moulding is continued on the bottom half of the pot. The surface is then again smoothed over and finally the bottom hole is filled in.

The colours for the pots are prepared by grinding colour stones such as black lead or red oxide and seeds from the *moretologa*^{ix} fruit. They are mixed to a paste and rubbed onto the surface of the pot with the fingers. When the colours are set the pots are polished with a smoothing stone. Now they are ready for firing. Pots are fired in a hole in the ground up to three feet deep, placed on and between pieces of *mokomoto*^x wood and surrounded by dung and/or bark from local trees. It is said that during the firing and whilst waiting for the fire to burn down one must not eat or smoke. The firing takes about twenty minutes. Finally the pots are then made watertight by boiling bark from the *mogonono*^{xi} roots in them.

Although the principles are the same there are slight variations throughout the regions of Botswana. Depending on the clay women will often mix in different materials such as ash or asbestos bearing ore to give it substance. Other women will collect clay from anthills rather than riverbanks. The method of moulding also differs. For example the Bangwakatse^{xii} will mould the smaller pots from a lump of clay rather than carefully building up the clay in two halves. These differences are related to the different regions where the women live and the different families. Ritual practices, such as the spitting on a twig before digging for clay, that surround the making of a pot are again regional and passed from mother to daughter.

The shapes of the pots have always been dictated by the uses they were made for and the function of the various pots made varies from grain storage to brewing beer and cooking giving a wide range of shapes and sizes. The surface decoration would be a combination of colours applied and patterns incised into the clay. The most common colours in Botswana are yellow or red ochre, graphite that gives a grey/black and a white chalk powder. However, more recently, store-bought enamel paints have been used (painted on after firing) and many more colours are now available. Despite this, the majority of potters still seem to stick to a limited few colours. For example, the Bahuruthse^{xiii}

pottery are known to use blue or green paint whereas the Bakwena will use yellow gold or lime green. This choice implies a chosen aesthetic and/ or a keenness to maintain an identity in their work. Where before the colours used on pots were indicative of the soil colours available in the women's area, now, with the option of a wide range of colours, other factors that dictate a woman's choice of colour and design must come into play. For example for her to choose the colours her mother and grandmother used will indicate a wish for her work to be identified as from a particular region or group of people or family, whereas another set of colours, more usually shop-bought paint, will indicate individuality and a desire to create something apart from the 'traditional'.

Patterns are simple, often bands of colour emphasising the shape of the pot or geometrical shapes repeated around the widest part of the pot. Some of this patterning can be compared to house decoration, the bands of colour and zig zag motifs. Some patterns are incised into the clay using a sharp stone; these decorations are generally bands of geometrical shapes such as zigzags, squares and triangles around the neck of the pots. Decorations can also be, although much less frequently, moulding. In these cases women build up clay ridges on the surface of the pots.

The following is a review of the pots made by the west Tswana peoples who live around central and eastern Botswana (Basasura, Bakgalagadi and Bakalanga are not west Tswana groups but are included here as they live among them). See appendix 1(i) for more details of the peoples of Botswana. It was found that each group of people had their own distinctive form of pot, use, decoration and name. The following list is based on A.C.Lawton's survey during the early 1960's:

Bathlaping: People living in the Taung district around Modimong/Matsheng. The pots here were made exclusively by women. Known types of pots are:

- Pot with neck: *Nkgwana*, used for serving beer, decorated.
- Undecorated bowls. Wide mouthed, used for cooking.
- Bowl with neck: *Seyana*, for fetching water, undecorated.

The decoration, where seen, was with ochre, often burnished over the whole surface, graphite and a white powder. Patterns were of deeply grooved zigzag

lines. The material used was clay mixed with ashes and grass. Women make the pots to order for her neighbours as well as for her own use.

Barolong: Prefer to buy pots from the Bangwaketse and Bahuruthse potters.

Bahuruthse: People from the Mankgodi/Molepolole/Zeerust district.

Potters are women specialists who learn from their mothers and make pots for sale as well as their own use.

Known types:

- Bowls:
- *mothuba-tlhogo* used for serving meat
- *potowane* for serving food
- Pots wide range of sizes generally decorated:
- *nngo/tsaga* for beer
- *nkgwane* for water
- *pitsa/pitsana* for cooking

Graphic designs of bands of triangles, ovals and squares etched into the clay. Coloured with ochre and lightly burnished. The use of store bought paint is very popular. The entire pot can be painted inside and out with a plain colour, usually blue or green, it could also have raised motifs painted white. Pots are made using clay from anthills mixed with an asbestos-bearing ore. They are built from the largest diameter up to the mouth and the base is then added on after the upper section has dried for a while. They are fired in a hole in the ground.

Lawton also found pottery copies of European crockery, casseroles, vases and jugs decorated with enamel paint found around Molepolole.

Banwaketse: People from the Kanye district.

Potters are women who learn the art from their mothers. There are many potters in the Kanye district. The main pots found were:

- large, *tatolela*, used for brewing beer,
- medium and small *nkgwana* for storing beer and water and for drinking.

There is a graphic decoration of bands of a triangular design or of ovals. Pots are coloured by a red ochre bought from travelling salesmen who get it from deposits in the Kalahari. Also with a black material, manganese, obtained from Kawakgwe mine near Kanye. Animal fat is also rubbed onto the pot giving a shiny surface where colour has not been applied.

The potter uses a mixture of brown and grey clay that she fetches herself from deposits far from the cattle post. This is mixed with water to the right consistency. Small pots are moulded from the lump. Larger pots are built from the widest diameter up and again are inverted to complete the base. The pots are then fired in a hole about three feet deep and covered in dung.

Women often make the pots whilst on the cattle posts she will then load them up and take them to Lobatsi or even as far as Gaborone to sell.

Bakwena: People from the Molepolole district.

Potters are women specialists who make pots to sell to supplement the family income.

Pots in a wide range of sizes:

- Very large: *Tsaga/tatolela/tshekega* for making beer,
- large: *nkgo*, for storing beer,
- medium: *nkgwena* for serving beer,
- small sizes: *sejana*, for drinking.

Modern/European style pots are also in use; decorated with enamel paint mostly, lime green, gold and yellow and ochre. Patterns on the pots are inscribed whilst still damp and then generally coloured with ochre and graphite or manganese. Made to order the pots are sold for cash. If a bartering system is used then the pot will be exchanged for the amount of grain it can hold.

The clay is collected from about 10 miles away and is mixed with an asbestos-bearing ore. Starting from their widest diameter the pots are built up to the neck, they are then inverted after some drying and the base is completed. The pot is covered by a tin to stop discolouring and fired in a hole packed with cow dung.

Bamangwato: People from the Ratholo and Serowe district.

The potters are women. Very few, however, and none in Serowe.

- Bowls: decorated with a honey combed pattern
- Pots without necks: decorated with red ochre
- Pots with necks: *pitsa*, used for storing beer, undecorated.
- carrying water, decorated and coloured

There are three types of decoration: 1. multiple stamping in a honeycomb pattern, 2. moulded vertical ridges around the upper section of the body, coloured with ochre. 3. red and black designs (the red is ochre, the black, graphite or clay). These pots are made by joining large pieces of clay together and building up from the widest diameter.

Bakgalagadi: People from the west of Molepolole district.

The potters are women, supplementing their family income. The pots in a wide range of sizes.

- Large: *tsaga/tsagana*, for making beer;
- Medium: *nkgwana*, for storing beer;
- Small: *sejana*, unknown use.

The pots are decorated with patterns with a thorn whilst still wet. Ochre from the Ngwaketse river is bought and made into a paint, which is then applied to the pots before firing. Enamel paint is applied after firing, by thorns into the incised patterned areas. Pots are fired on their sides in a deep hole and packed with cow dung or the bark of local trees. Women sell many pots to the Kwena around Molepolole.

Bakalanga: People from the Serowe region.

Potters are women who have learnt from their mothers. Made for their own use and for sale to the Mangwato who no longer make their own pottery.

- large, *tatolela*, for brewing beer;
- medium, *nkgwane* for beer or water
- small, *pitsan/sebjana*, for cooking/for water.

They also make large unfired granaries.

Most are decorated with burnished red ochre *letsoku* dug from nearby river deposits. Simple designs are outlined with incised lines and coloured with graphite. This is found in sites near the Sashe and Itokwane rivers.

The women collect clay from Shushong it is not filled with anything but prepared very carefully. The dry material is ground and also occasionally sieved before being mixed with water. The same technique is used of building up from the widest part to the rim. Pots are fired on the ground with a fire built up around them and are for sale locally to the Mangwato.

Basasura: People originally from Zimbabwe, the Masasura have settled in Lobatsi.

The potters are women who make them for sale.

- large: *merimo*,
- medium: *tshirongo*,
- small *Zibfuko*.
- Duck shaped pots for use as flowerpots: *zamba*.

The clay is collected from some distance and is mixed just with water. The pot is started by joining two pieces of clay together to form a cylinder. More clay is added and smoothed to increase the size. Generally the pots are decorated with enamel paint. The Sasura are not farmers and concentrate on the manufacture of articles for sale. Pottery is a large part of this industry.

West Tswana: People from the Ngamiland district (undifferentiated):

Very little information about techniques, however, they are distinctive. They are decorated by red ochre triangular designs, sometimes outlined with incised lines. One has been seen with a Greek key design.

East Tswana: Amongst the many East Tswana groups there is only information on the Bakgatla and Batlokwa potters:

Bakgatla: People from the Mochudi/Thamanga district.

Women potters making pots for their own use and for sale. Generally specialist potters from certain families in which the craft is handed down mother to daughter.

Bowls without necks:

- open-mouthed, decorated with colour;
- incurved: *lefiswana*, undecorated, for serving meat and vegetables.
- sub-carinated, *sejana*, moulded and coloured decoration, for eating from.
- with necks:
- everted: large, *kgamelwana*, for serving beer;
- small, *tsegana*, for sour porridge

pots:

- Large, *tsaga*, for storing or making beer
- small, *setsaga*, for storing grain

- large, *nkgo*, for storing water
- small, *nkgwana*, for storing water
- Large, *motsega*, for beer
- small, *motsegana*, for preparing yeast
- large, *pitsa*, cooking
- small *pitsana ya sesebo*, cooking gravy

Granaries were also seen: *sehalana*, large size, *Popejane*, smaller portable granaries (no longer made). Pots are decorated with a red ochre, and burnished (yellow ochre on some pots). Also a black material, not graphite, was used in the designs on the red ochre finish of the pots.

The clay was obtained from the west of Mochudi also from anthills. All were mixed with a filler. All potters started at the widest diameter and either worked up to the rim or up to the base then, after a period of drying were turned over and completed. The pots were fired in a deep hole covered in dung.

The pottery industry is busiest in the summer when families move to the cattle posts. Pots are bought into the towns to sell. A pot is worth the value of the amount of grain it can contain. Potters generally keep all the money received from the sales except, occasionally for a small amount to their husband for delivering their wares.

Batlokwa: Women potters who learnt from their mothers and sell their work to other women in the village.

- Bowls: *mokojwane*, used for porridge
- Pots without necks: *kgamelwana*, for measuring
- Pots with necks: *tsaga*, used for making and storing beer. Coloured with red ochre and designs outlined with a black material.
- Granaries: *sehala*

Pots are not patterned but are generally coloured red with ochre (*letsoku*). Anthill clay is used mixed with a strong filler. The potter always collects the clay herself although she will accept help with transporting it home. The pots are made again from the widest point up to the rim and are fired in a hole filled with dung.

Pots are made to order. Generally made in the summer months when the climate is suitable and the potters are not too busy in the fields.

Baherero: No potters were found during their field trip, however, it is understood that they used to make pots; this is supported by the fact that the Angolan Herero have a strong pottery tradition and continue to make it today. A few Herero use pottery, which they buy from the Ambo or Himba in Angola.

The above information is not historical. It charts the situation of pottery in Botswana in 1963. It is nevertheless a useful document giving details of the makers of pots, the styles and methods as well as the materials used.

(1.vii) House Decoration.

Existing documentation on Botswana house decoration

In 1988 Barbara Anne Ashworth, who was then a tutor in Graphic design at the Bolton Institute of Education, carried out a short study of house decoration in Botswana. She was awarded a Rolex travel grant to travel through the southern Africa region to document house decoration. Her proposal for this project was:

Rural houses and their documentation are an essential part of the art and culture of southern Africa in the 20th century. They are vital: they are alive: they should not be allowed to die. It is a great pity that the world is not able to see and appreciate the creative and artistic skills of these people. They want their work to be appreciated; they are proud of it; they value it greatly and are pleased when others do the same. If we are not careful a whole lifetime and more of visual imagery will disappear: never known, never understood. That cannot be right! Why should the Tswana of Botswana and the Bophutswan suffer the ignorance of the world? (Ashworth, 1988: 265)

Despite her sentiments about the art form being “vital, (they are) alive: (they) should not be allowed to die”, her findings were never published and so we cannot know the situation of house decoration as she found it in 1988.

During 1996, an American research student, Elizabeth Gron, was working for the NMMAG. She decided to undertake some research into the house decoration of Botswana. Her aim was to analyse the materials used and provide a detailed study of the clays and colours. Her long-term aim was to try to replicate the materials such as clay and colours gathered from the soil, with a new modern paint that might last longer or, in fact, be a permanent paint.

Unfortunately, this project was also never completed. So, as the research and evidence gathered by Barbara Ann Ashworth and Elizabeth Gron has never been published or made available to anyone, the first real documentation on

house decoration^{xiv} in Botswana remains the Larssons' book *Traditional Tswana Housing*. It is the first ever published study on the Batswana home and includes what must also be, although minimal, the first ever published research on house decoration.

Since then, however, in 1995, *Decorated Homes in Botswana* was published. Written by Sandy and Elinah Grant it is a serious study of the art, documenting what they see as a potentially dying art form. Sandy Grant, an expatriate, has lived in Botswana for many years and is married to Elinah, a Motswana.^{xv} They spent many months traveling around Botswana, with Sandy photographing the decorated walls they found whilst Elinah interviewed the women about their work. Their aims were to document as much as possible but also, hopefully, to encourage an interest in saving the 'tradition' of house decoration from disappearing altogether.

(1.viii) Methods and Materials.

The methods used are basically the same throughout the region. The walls of the house and lolwapa are covered with a thin mixture of soil, water and cow dung. This gives a smooth surface on to which the women can paint. The colour of this base can vary depending on the choice of soil used. The soil is generally collected from a nearby source unless women want a very specific colour in which case she may have to travel some distance. Simple variations on the local soil used for the base are achieved by adding extra cow dung for a darker colour or, if a whiter colour is wanted then lime (if found locally) is added (Figures 1.36 –1.37). The more recent development is the use of shop bought powder paint which has allowed for a few more colourful variations (Figure 1.38).

The decorations are done using different colour soil mixtures as well as a mixture of other ingredients depending on the colours wanted or available. Because of the very local nature of the materials used house decoration can often be located according to the colours used. This is not something that the women are particularly aware of or feel strongly about. However, as a curious viewer or researcher it is interesting to be able to locate buildings by the colour of the soil they are made from.

Mochudi and Oodi colours are generally reds and whites, colours that are available in most parts of the country whereas. Gabane and Kanye are distinctive because they have a pink colour that is not found elsewhere while Gabane and Rasesa also have a light grey and a chocolate brown, and Letlhakane has a rich brown and Mosu a brilliant white. (Grant and Grant, 1995:49)

The basic house decoration is usually a darker colour on the lower half of the building and another lighter colour on the top half. More elaborate decorations may then be painted in other colours over the top.

The most commonly repeated design throughout Botswana is the one around the *lolwapa* wall. These are lines decorating the edges and corners of the wall, particularly around the entrance gate. The patterns are made by putting a coating of white paint over a dark brown surface and then the lines are etched through the white paint with the fingertips. This method of design is called *Lekgapho* meaning a 'design made with the fingers' (Figures 1.29, 1.30, 1.32 and 1.33) and is something that is also done in the mud of the floor of the *lolwapa*.

Generally most of the designs are symmetrical non-figurative patterning such as lines and shading emphasising the windows and doorways (Figure 1.31, 1.34, 1.35). Another much used form is the zigzag running around the house. Some designs are figurative most commonly the flower in a very schematic form. Other images can include birds and occasionally people.

The materials available locally (certain soils, colours, textures) to the women and their already developed vernacular architecture (house style and shape) have, to some extent, dictated a Batswanan house decoration aesthetic. However, despite this 'dictated aesthetic' that the women house decorators unconsciously develop as they work, the colours of the land are chosen and put together in an instinctive way; there is no strict formula that women feel they have to follow. The women I interviewed about their work always answered the questions of "why do you do such and such design?" or "where do the ideas for the designs come from?" with "from my head". They do not acknowledge any external influences. However, by looking at the documentary evidence dating back to the 1920's (Grant and Grant, 1995:77) we can see the same designs. In fact there would seem to be a repertoire of images and forms that are the basis

of the tradition which are handed down from mother to daughter; and when the women painters today say they “just know” when something is right or wrong, although they cannot say how they know, it is clearly a knowledge that has been handed down, an inherited aesthetic.

Despite the differing reasons for house decoration there remains no clear significance in any of the patterns used for any particular purpose. Neither my own research nor the Grants' (1995) reveals any hidden meanings to any of the designs.

Over the years, regular questioning about the possible symbolical meaning of orthodox Bakgatla designs has failed to prompt satisfactory explanation. Not a single person has even claimed that knowledge of its original meaning might have been lost. (Grant and Grant, 1995:74)

(1.ix) The Herero Dress.

The Herero dress is a one piece dress called an *ohorokueva*. This is made up of a short, long sleeved bodice *otjari*, which joins the skirt above the waistline and usually has a collar *osengo* and fastens at the front with buttons. If it does not have a front fastening then it will be decorated with stitches *ourenga* instead. Up to seven petticoats *ondoroko*, a shawl *otjikeriva*, a head dress *otjikaeva*, and an apron *oruhira*. The dress will take 10 meters of cloth to make and usually brightly coloured or patterned cloth is chosen. The petticoats will be generally made from plain dark cloth. The head dress is a distinctive cloth turban with two points and is a development of the original Herero head dress called *ekori*:

It consists of two cloth pieces, one worn over the other. The bottom one *ohore* is made up of white cotton while the top one *otjikaeva* is usually made of the same material as the dress. ...the points which have developed over the years, like those of the *ekori*, are known as *ozonya*, meaning ‘horns’. (Guedes and Otto, 1985:16)

The shawl and apron are the final touches to the outfit. The shawl is often made from heavy blanket material or at least a light weight wool, which is then wrapped around the woman's head on cold days. The apron is purely decorative and usually only worn on special occasions. The designs have changed minimally over the years. Dorothy Guedes describes in her article, the changes in the dress that she has been able to observe through photographs:

Generally the dresses were much shorter than those of today, since the feet of most women were visible, but the most important differences seem to have been in the

pattern of the sleeves and the skirt. The second gathered tier of the skirt, which today starts over the hips, was then further down, sometimes only about 20cm above the hem. In some cases this lower gathering was demarcated by braiding worked all around the skirt, and in others it was attached to the upper portion in such a way that a frill was left above the seam. The original sleeve was usually close fitting from the wrist to above the elbow, from where a wider section extended to the shoulder, the length of this wider section varying according to taste. In some cases, however, sleeves could be close fitting throughout their whole length, or loose fitting from shoulder to wrist, and without cuffs. (Guedes and Otto, 1985:14)

The head dress too has developed from a simple cloth strip tightly bound around the head to a much higher turban style head dress that some older women still wear today to today's more common two pronged hat.

(1.x) Beads.

A report by Per Jenson in the *Zebbras Voice* on how the beads have always, and still are made today.

The first thing she did was to break the shells into small pieces, and for that she used her hands, the stone and occasionally her teeth. When she had enough pieces, she started to drill holes with the long drill. The drill is made from a 50cm long, thin branch with a nail in the end. The nail has been hammered flat and sharpened. She used the drill nearly all the way through the beads, and the awl to finish the hole. She told me that she can't use the drill all the way through because the beads would break. After finishing making the holes she started to make the beads more round, using a sharp corner of a stone and an Impala horn. Patiently she started working on each bean until it was nearly round. It took a long time, and when she finished she put the beads on a string. This again took a long time, because in between each bead, she had to put some plant fibres from a root so that the beads could be kept tightly together while she ground them round to make them smooth. Finally she used the round stick and the grinding stone. Move the grinding stone a few times up and down is what makes the difference between good ostrich beads and the best ostrich beads. (Jensen, nd: 16)

2(i) History of rock art in Botswana.

Carvings about 70,000 years old on a snake-like rock in a cave in Botswana indicate that Stone Age people developed religious rituals far earlier than previously believed. Ancestors of Botswana's San people apparently ground away at a natural outcrop about 2 meters high and 6 meters long (6 by 20 ft) to heighten its similarity to a python's head and body, said Sheila Coulson, an associate professor at Oslo University. "We believe this is the earliest archaeological proof of religion," Coulson, a Canadian expert in Stone Age tools, told Reuters of findings made during a trip

in mid-2006 to the Tsolido Hills in north western Botswana. The previous oldest archaeological evidence of religious worship is about 40,000 years old from European caves. The Botswana find bolsters evidence that modern humans originated in Africa, along with religion and culture. Coulson said the python-like rock had 300-400 carved indentations. In flickering firelight, the patterns might have seemed like scales and given the impression of movement to the rock as part of some sacred rite. Scores of carved stone items, including 115 points and 22 burned red spearheads, were abandoned on the floor of the cave beneath the snake-like rock. Many had been brought more than 200 km (125 miles) across the Kalahari Desert. "The snake symbol runs through all the mythologies, stories, cultures, languages of southern Africa," Coulson said. The cave, with a floor of 26 square meters (280 sq ft), was not known to archaeologists until the 1990s.

Slithering Python: In San mythology, humankind descended from a python, and ancient streambeds nearby were believed to have been created by a snake slithering around the hills in search of water. The archaeologists, with Coulson leading a team funded by a Norwegian research program and Tromsø University and Nick Walker heading a team from the University of Botswana, found stone tools when they dug a pit two meters deep below the snake. They estimated that the artefacts were 70,000 years old, based on comparisons with carved stones found in other well-dated sites in Botswana. "In the upper levels there is a distinct change to objects from the Late Stone Age" which began 40,000 years ago, Coulson said. The scientists were working to get more precise dates. Coulson said she and Walker had decided the findings were startling enough to publicize them before writing up a report for a scientific journal. <http://www-gatago.com/alt/atheism/38696604.html>.

6(i) NMMAG.

Museum (NMMAG) definition of their departments. Taken from their brochure:

Archaeology: The division is one of the largest in the museum with a staff of seven whose responsibilities range from salvage archaeology, which is the inspecting, and reporting of an area prior to development, and protecting old buildings. Additionally we have to look after National monuments such as the

famous rock paintings at Tsolido hills....We have undertaken numerous projects in conjunction with some foreign researchers. Work on Tsolido Hills comes to mind...These excavations have shown that Botswana has been occupied by pastoralists for at least 1500 years longer than we used to think. The significance of these excavations partly lies in showing us that contrary to conventional views Botswana was not a cultural backwater in the past.

Ethnology: The ethnology division is the oldest in the museum and today it holds a large ethnographic collection representing the cultures and peoples of Botswana. The core functions of this division are to collect, preserve and document Botswana's material heritage, including history as told by the people of Botswana. The mid 70's were an important period for this division, because the museum had a reliable budget to purchase objects from the rural villages and cattle posts. Since then the division has grown and undertaken regular ethnographic and ethnological expeditions.

Natural History: Responsible for the display and storage of animals, plants and mineral. It is situated at the village suburb of Gaborone. The division is staffed by eight people and with time will build a two story natural history building and a 'living museum' comprising a Botanical garden and a zoo. Other displays at the Gaborone village include plants in the botanical garden arranged according to the six regions of Botswana. These regions are Chobe, Okavango and Pans, Mophane, North Eastern Kalahari, Mashutu and South west Kalahari respectively. The Herbarium contains the largest collection of dried plants in Botswana.

Education: The education division interprets the Museum and its collections to the public. The division processes and simplifies the researched information from other divisions and, by using artefacts as teaching aids, gives lectures or conducts guided tours for visitors. The mobile museum takes the museum to schools and villages in rural areas of Botswana.

Notes to appendices.

- ⁱ Issac Schapera, 1952, *The ethnic composition of Tswana tribes* and 1984, *The Tswana*.
- ⁱⁱ van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1992-1994, 'Proposed joint research on ethnicity in Botswana: A programme to be undertaken by the National Institute of Development Research and Documentation, University of Botswana, and the African Studies Centre, Leiden University, The Netherlands, internal memorandum, Leiden: African Studies Centre' www.ethnicity-bravepages.com
- ⁱⁱⁱ Yei language of the Bayei.
- ^{iv} Bahambukushu: hambukushu people of Botswana. See appendix 1(i) for more information.
- ^v Thimbukushu language of the Hambukushu.
- ^{vi} Bayei: Yei people living in Botswana. See appendix 1(i) for more information.
- ^{vii} BaKgatla: Kgatla people from Mochudi/Thamanga region
- ^{viii} BaKalanga: Kalanga people from Botswana. See appendix 1(i) for more information.
- ^{ix} *Moretologa*: Sourplum: *Ximenia caffra* var. *caffra* (Latin)
- ^x *Mokomoto*: *Commiphora edeulis* (Latin)
- ^{xi} *Mogonono*: Silver cluster leaf tree: *Terminalia Sericea*(Latin)
- ^{xii} Bangwakatse, Ngwakatse people from the Kanye district of Botswana.
- ^{xiii} Bahurutshe: Hurutshe people from Botswana. More information in appendix 1(i).
- ^{xiv} There have been a handful of books documenting the architecture of Botswana homes although I do not include them here as they do not cover house decoration they are: James Walton, *African Village*, J.L. Van Schaik, Pretoria, 1956, (this architectural study was limited to South Africa and, although it covers Tswana houses, there gives no indication of house decoration); G. J. Hardie, *Tswana design of house and settlement – Continuity and change in expressive space*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 1980; Franco Frescura, *Rural shelter in Southern Africa*, Ravan press, Johannesburg, 1981.
- ^{xv} Elinah was born in Molapowabojang in the Southern District of Botswana although she then grew up in Zimbabwe. She later returned to Botswana where she studied English and Environmental science at the University of Botswana. She currently works for the Botswana Book Centre in Gaborone. Sandy Grant was born in the UK but now has Botswana citizenship. He works in the Mochudi area of Botswana and was a founder of the Mochudi development and refugee centre -now the Brigades Centre- and the Phutadikobo Museum in Mochudi amongst other things. He writes regularly for the daily newspaper *Mmegi*.

Glossary

BCC	Botswana Christian Council.
BDC	Botswana Development Council.
Batswana (pl.)	The people of Botswana. Batswana are one of the three divisions of the Sotho-Tswana people; the others being the Basotho of Lesotho and South Africa and the Northern Sotho of the Northern Transvaal (see also appendix 1(i))
CORDE	Co-operation for Research, Development and Education. A fully Batswana group funded by Botswana, was set up as an umbrella group to help the various projects in Botswana with marketing and training.
CUSO	Canadian Services Overseas.
DanChurch	Danish Church donor agency.
HIVOS	Humanistisch Instituut Voor Ontwikkelingssamewerking (from the Netherlands).
KDT	Kuru Development Trust.
Kgotla	The village meeting place.
Lekgapho	A pattern made in wet cow dung on the ground of the courtyard.
Lelapa/Lelwapa/ Lolapa/Malwapa	Different names for homestead linked or contained within a courtyard.
Motswana	Sing. of Batswana.
Mma	Woman, mother.
Rra	Man, father.
RSAD	Regional School of Art and Design.

SADC

Southern African Development community:

The Member States are Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Setswana

The language of the Batswana.

USAID

United States Agency for International Development.

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