

A Sense of Belonging—Natasha Becker’s Black Feminist Radical Love Curatorial Practice

Sharlene Khan¹



Art on our Mind Creative Dialogue, *Natasha Becker in Dialogue with Sharlene Khan*, 2019, Wits University, Johannesburg. Photograph by: Mosa Kaiser. Courtesy of *Art on our Mind* Research Project.

At the end of 2020, the de Young Museum in San Francisco announced that they had appointed Natasha Becker, a South African, as their inaugural curator of African Art. As reported by online media, it was the first time in their 150-year history that they appointed a Black² curator. This article celebrates her accomplishments in the United States and traces the roots of her critical, black feminist thinking and vision to her unique trajectory in South Africa and across Africa and America.

In 2019, the *Art on our Mind* research team—a visual arts research project based at Wits University in Johannesburg—held a one-and-a-half-hour public creative dialogue with Becker. Excerpts from that conversation form the basis for this article. Black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins defines dialogue as the non-dominant humanising speech between two subjects,³ while bell hooks views it as “the sharing of speech and recognition.”⁴ hooks further states that the “awareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives, is one way women of color begin the process of education for critical consciousness.”⁵ Speech acts between women, between people of colour, are not just loaded with information about the personal, but also histories, knowledges, and society, and, as hooks poignantly notes, in the act of recognition, subjects and subjectivities are grafted. Thus, dialogue is an important black feminist methodology, and my dialogue with Becker reveals both personal information about her trajectory and the ways in which she navigated larger sets of South African and US cultural politics.

Becker was born in 1974 in apartheid South Africa (SA) and attended segregated schools, not having much exposure to art at either primary or high school. Her parents and schoolteachers, however, encouraged her voracious intellectual curiosity, and this continued when she went to study at the University of the Western-Cape (UWC), a historically black university campus known for its political consciousness during apartheid. Becker was fortunate to have activist teachers and university professors who helped her to channel her intellectual energies and hone her critical thinking. If evidence of this is needed, one only has to read a review published by Becker in 2001 in the scholarly journal *Kronos* of the photographic exhibition *Lives of Colour* (1999) when she was a twenty-year-old Philosophy Honours student. In it, Becker's nuanced, ambiguous readings of the role of photographic representations in Coloured lives under apartheid and how these personal narratives come to contest "officially" instituted ones demonstrated the type of disruptive thinking that is a hallmark of her career.⁶ Becker completed a Bachelor of Arts in History, Philosophy, and English. She also holds a Diploma in Education from the University of Cape Town and a Master's Degree in African History at the University of the Western Cape.

During her graduate studies with historian Patricia Hayes, Becker became intrigued by photographic archives. Together they developed and taught a course called "Visual History" that problematised photographic representation in writing about the past. With Hayes' encouragement, Becker embarked on a PhD in Art History at Binghamton University in New York, where she was part of an international cohort of graduate students in Visual Arts and Curatorial Studies. Her fellow students' curiosity about South African art prompted Becker to turn her attention to the history of art in South Africa and to an independent scholarly study of it from the early 1930s onwards. This was supplemented by her visits to contemporary art exhibitions in New York in the early 2000s. One of the highlights of her graduate student days was hearing Thelma Golden speak about the significance of culturally-specific institutions such as the Studio Museum in Harlem at a graduate student conference. She found the US an amazing place to study African Art, as the university and the city offered extensive access to archives, libraries, museum collections, art galleries, exhibitions, and a network of artists, scholars, and curators.

During this time, Becker was offered an opportunity to curate an exhibition by Juan Puentes at Whitebox Gallery in Chelsea. He had an enthusiasm for socio-political art and exhibited contemporary South African artists. It was her first foray into curating, but she embraced the challenge and plunged into the process. She good-naturedly describes the show as a "disaster" because she had a small budget and three ambitious artists but also notes that she learned valuable lessons about the practical aspects of curating through these early mistakes. Even as she wondered whether she was cut out to be a curator, on the creative front the gallery became a space for artistic and curatorial experimentation. At the end of her coursework, Becker moved to New York City and taught courses on photography in Africa at the New School and the School of Visual Arts, while continuing her research on South Africa's Johannesburg Biennales. In 2007, she accepted a position at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown as the Assistant Director for their Research and Academic Program (RAP) until 2013. The Clark is recognised as a dual-mission institution with both an art museum and a distinguished centre for research and higher education. She was responsible for implementing a three-year Mellon Foundation-funded research project on contemporary African art. She describes her time at the Clark as an exciting

opportunity to draw on her South African background and her studies in contemporary art, while the renowned network provided more learning opportunities.⁷

In 2009, another curatorial opportunity arose from Becker's relationship with conceptual artist Bradley McCallum, whom she had met in New York City two years earlier.

The artist now owned a historic building in the small town of Greenfield, Massachusetts (just forty-five minutes away from Williamstown). During a visit, Becker became intrigued by the abundance of empty storefronts and unused historic buildings and the absence of art venues and programmes, and pondering on the situation, Becker and McCallum came up with the idea of a weekend festival to celebrate art and the historical architecture. McCallum took the role of festival organiser and Becker that of curator. Video was decided on due to the variety of forms that the medium could take and that could feasibly be hosted within the town's unconventional spaces. They drew on their networks to invite local and international artists. McCallum secured the support of the town mayor, building owners, and the Greenfield Chamber of Commerce.

Students and residents of the town assisted and volunteered their time by managing spaces, leading tours, and monitoring different sites. Two months later, the *Brick+Mortar International Video Art Festival* opened, engaging with issues that were of concern to residents at the time. These included drug abuse, lack of public space, the war in Iraq, and various identity politics. The festival had all the usual challenges (of fundraising, tech problems, communications, staffing, etc.), but it drew thousands of visitors over a three-day weekend in October 2009. Its success led to three more editions organised by McCallum and Becker with guest curators Loretta Yarlow, Christopher Cox, and Denise Markonish between 2010-2012. The festival was a formative moment in Becker's decision to pursue curating. The experience made her aware of a few things: she enjoyed connecting to people she didn't know; she was open to experimentation, new audiences, and spaces; she valued an authentic relationship with artists and communities; and it revealed the political nature of her intellectual curiosity and curatorial aspirations.



Natasha Becker and Jaishri Abichandani, *Perilous Bodies*, 5 March–11 May 2019, Ford Foundation Gallery, New York. Photograph by: Sebastian Bach. Courtesy of Natasha Becker.

A Sense of Belonging—Natasha Becker's Black Feminist Radical Love Curatorial Practice Instituting Feminism



Natasha Becker and Jaishri Abichandani, *Perilous Bodies*, 5 March–11 May 2019, Ford Foundation Gallery, New York. Photograph by: Sebastian Bach. Courtesy of Natasha Becker.

While the US and South Africa may seem to share some similar class, gender, and racial struggles, this text argues that Becker’s upbringing and having to overcome the challenges racism (and the intersecting matrices of identity issues) posed for black South Africans prepared her to a large extent for dealing with US conditions. Living in the US for almost twenty years has allowed her to experience that country’s unique socio-political, historical, cultural, and artistic formations. In working between the two, however, I suggest that Becker has displayed an extraordinary capacity for empathy and developed a transcultural, feminist approach to speak to globalised audiences. I will highlight three of her curatorial ventures that particularly embody this: the Ford Foundation Gallery’s exhibition *Radical Love*; the setting up of the Assembly Room Gallery; and the *Underline Show*.

In 2019, Becker co-curated a series of exhibitions for the Ford Foundation Gallery in New York with Jaishri Abichandani.⁸ The first of these, *Perilous Bodies*, was centred around the theme of violence (systemic, inequalities, Otherness, gender-based, political, historical, environmental). The opening night was attended by 1,000 people. Becker says it was overwhelming to see lines of people around the block waiting to get into the exhibition who were not the usual New York gallery crowd. She recalls, “You would think in a city like New York City with so many museums, galleries, so much to offer that people would actually feel welcomed in, like places were for them, but a lot of people don’t, a lot of people of colour still don’t feel places are for them, and it is still very segregated.”⁹ Becker’s statements may seem surprising. We understand that there is not such blatant racism as to prevent anyone from entering institutions; however, as many scholars of colour have discussed, systemic racism is written into the very codification of various arts fields.¹⁰

In 2019, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was accused of haranguing and mistreating a group of black middle school students who were reportedly told by a staff member, “No food, no drink and no watermelon.”¹¹ Moreover, the issue of whether *one feels*

welcome in a space is an entirely different matter. Even as a visual arts professor with two Master's degrees and a PhD in the field, I constantly feel frowned upon, surveilled and policed in art institutions by administrative and security staff even without encountering statements as blatant as those recalled above. Sara Ahmed¹² and Grada Kilomba¹³ discuss how the white body is free to move about, that in the *unmarking of whiteness*, it is always in place, while it is bodies of colour that are marked and are treated as being in need of policing and constant surveillance. Becker's statements testify to the socio-political reality that particular groups continue to find the visual arts/art history fields and their attending institutions alienating, in their continued servicing of their colonial-modernist foundations. This was highlighted in the #RhodesMustFall¹⁴ and #Shackville Protests¹⁵ in South Africa, which sparked international questions about the prevalence of hegemonic colonial formations in African discourses; the #MeToo Movement¹⁶ and #BlackLivesMatter movement, where not only the continued relevance of colonial cultural productions across the world were raised, but also tone-deaf and toxic working conditions of white museums and gallery spaces, which led to the firing or resignation of quite a few persons over the last few years.¹⁷

These movements are often seen as representing the “marginalised”, as the “oppressed” asking to be included, to be welcomed into institutions, to see themselves represented in discourses. When one starts to examine these groups—women of colour, people of colour, postcolonial subjects, women, transgender, etc.—one sees this is more than half of the world's population, the majority, and, therefore, far from not belonging and being accommodated, they— we— belong in every historical encounter and every institutional record *all of the time*. I want to quote an exchange between Becker and an audience member at length here that demonstrates this kind of radical thinking:

Audience: [...] I was thinking of activism, as you're talking about opening up creative space and the way in which certain people feel as if they don't belong and the internalised borders that get created by so-called culture—high culture versus popular culture.

Becker: Well, right, it's not just internalised, we don't just internalise where we belong and where we [are] made to feel like we belong and where [are] we made to feel like we don't belong, but it is also external, it is a real thing, it's not something that we kind of just imagine. [...] My experience of being on the outside had to do with being on the outside of society in general, and growing up as a “Coloured” in a southern suburb of Cape Town, you really are in this place of alterity because your heritage for 400 years is African, Asian and European, but you can't even trace your second generation. That's how deeply mixed you are and how deeply violent that has been right? So, I think that you come out of wherever you come out of and you see how things work in the real world, but then you have to make the choice, and for me it was this choice of, well, I am a part of this by virtue of the fact that I love art, that scholarship is a passion, art is a passion and working with art is, but by virtue of that alone, that is all I need. Speaking of the title of the conference, this quote was very gripping for me—to act from the epicentre of yourself, of where you come from means that you have to always overcome that and *see yourself as already belonging there, already there*. You know, *we were always already there* right and what would you do? So you are there, so what would you do if you didn't have to think, have to justify, explain, fight, argue, defend, what would you do? And then just do that. But you know it takes time, it's an arc, everybody's on their own journey.¹⁸

There is so much wisdom in this exchange. Becker is not denying the exceptional history of generational violence that her family, ancestors, and she, herself, have been subjected to by the fact of not being able to trace her family genealogy with certitude, by not knowing her indigenous tongues. Yet, it is not by this violence that she defines herself. She has chosen for her Self a different epicentre. The African Feminisms conference theme to which she refers was based on Nigerian Stiwanist theorist Molaria Ogunjide-Leslie's stance that Africans need to theorise out of our "epicentres of agency, looking for what is meaningful, progressive and useful to us as Africans."¹⁹ For Becker, this certitude is that people of colour have been ever-present in spaces, geographies, and histories, with their own creativities globally. We see this demonstrated in her curatorial practice in the following ways. As mentioned earlier, she never studied art at school or during her BA, but she grew up surrounded by creativity: her father was an aspiring musician, her mother an avid reader, her grandmother a great cook and knitter, in a home surrounded by an incredible garden.²⁰ These creative sensibilities make their appearance repeatedly in Becker's practice. As a Black South African, Becker keenly understands the inter-relationality between herself (the I) and community (we) through the concept of ubuntu—"I am because we are."²¹ The proximation of one is constant to the constituting, the state, and the consistent welfare of the other. In dialogue, Becker speaks often of creating and being "part of a community," whether that is the New York art habitus or a more general arts field, but also of being *in community with* other women curators regardless of space or time. This was part of the impetus that spurred on her other developments: the Assembly Room Gallery, which she established with Yulia Topchiy and Paola Gallio on the Lower East Side in New York in 2018, and *The Underline Show*, which she co-curated in Johannesburg in 2018. The other part of that impulse is pragmatic—working together and pooling resources to create professional opportunities.

Becker says the 300-square-foot Assembly Room²² came about after more than a year of informal gatherings between women curators meeting to support each other, offering a space for women to curate their exhibitions (even as the three curators also feature their own shows). The platform is funded by Becker, Topchiy, and Gallio. All artworks are available for sale, but unlike a traditional gallery model in which profits are split between the artist and the gallery, Assembly Room shares their commissions on sales with guest curators. In the past two years, they have hosted numerous public programmes, exhibitions, and professional enrichment workshops that included local and community collaborations. The platform has become a model of community and shared opportunity within New York City's ambitious art world.

In 2009, Becker brought this experience to South Africa when she founded *The Underline Show*²³ with Londi Modiko and Lara Koseff. Inspired by the *New York Spring/ Break Art Fair* format in which Becker has regularly participated since 2015, their goal was to provide much needed relief to the Johannesburg art scene, which has become stifled by the "institution" of the traditional art fair model. *The Underline Show* provided space to a number of emerging and young curators and artists to propose exhibitions and present their work to the public during the same weekend as the more established Johannesburg Art Fair. For the first time in South Africa, one could approach an art fair as an individual curator, collective, or artist. It was refreshing to witness a range of straight-out-of-university, cutting-edge, diverse, performative, and installation-based artworks, including community-based organisations. There was a core-curated section, a featured section focusing on individual artists, a site section for ambitious installations responding to the architecture, a performance programme, and a public conversation series. Some artworks were for sale, others not. *Underline* generated



Natasha Becker and Jaishri Abichandani, *Radical Love*, 11 June–17 August 2019, Ford Foundation Gallery, New York. Photograph by: Sebastian Bach. Courtesy of Ford Foundation Gallery.

excitement for experimental work and opportunities for emerging curators and artists. This may not sound particularly remarkable to outside ears, but it is for the SA art market, which almost always showcases artworks and artists that are well-established, even “safe.” If there was a marker of Becker’s methodologies, I would argue it was that for the first time in a long time, more people felt included than excluded (from the many young curators and artists participating to the audience who attended).

Becker makes no qualms about her curatorial interest in feminism and believes that there is no end to the redress that needs to be done to historical imbalances, although she doesn’t see this as ensuring any less rigorous and pleasurable fare for audiences. In her exhibition *Radical Love*, audiences were treated to a visual feast as an “antidote” to the violence of the preceding *Perilous Bodies* exhibition. Based on bell hooks’ idea that transformation can only transpire through revolutionary love, it aimed to also recuperate the word from its post-9/11 association with religious fundamentalism, and to talk about love as a radical act that transforms. The high white walls of the Ford Foundation Gallery were painted in a beautiful blood-red colour. The crimson walls can be read as a trace of the violence that seeped through from *Perilous Bodies*, but it is on this blood-red terrain that others more glorious have emerged in *Radical Love*. The deep colour could also be read as blood lines which mark out our common ancestry under our skins, or (menstrual) blood that ushers us into womanhood, birth, or old age. Sometimes, it is the cutting open of wounds that have to be cleaned up or sutured in order for healing to occur. It is also the feeling of a heart that is open and pulsating with blood when one is scared, faced with adventure or love. The group of largely international artists²⁴ presented artwork that resided between spaces, identities, histories, and languages, and these intersectionalities were seen in the vibrancy of their works that, at times, bordered on excessive. At the very least, the exhibition refuses sterility, including that of the white cube space, but the immoderation reminds one of traditional art and ethnic textiles in which colours and forms sit next to each

other without attempting dominance. The works move trans-continentially, as with many of Becker’s shows, and for someone who cannot trace her own genealogies, as a historian she connects us all through the visual and world cultures on display.

In this she reminds me of my mother. My elder sisters share a different father from my brother and I, but not once was the word “step-“ ever used. They were my sisters. I only got to know of the word “step-“ as a white person’s word that I encountered on TV and in books. My mum was afraid that when she died, when she was no longer our centre, we might be fractured. Since she passed, however, we have all been even closer, because we are now held together not by blood, but by choice and her love—a radical feminist love, that knew not the word “feminism,” but how to grow kinship that is not determined by sperm and an inherited patriarchal name. I see Becker as similarly reminding audiences of their common human kinship and that we can be determined by our radical love choices. This was a powerful message during the challenging US Trump administration and will continue to be for a long time to come.

Besides paying homage to hooks, whose thinking and theorising were inspiration for Becker and Abichandani, *Radical Love* also “wanted to express just the joy and the excess and the beauty and the richness of our lives, the richness of the lives of people of color, the lives of queer people, the lives of brown people, indigenous people as well in the US. So, the show, as you can see, it’s just very opulent, and very rich, it’s a visual feast [...].”²⁵ A politics of joy, excess, of beauty and richness is central to black-African feminists, for we are not defined solely by our suffering. While Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie says that the African woman labours with six mountains on her back,²⁶ we are reminded by South African feminist Pumla Gqola²⁷ that because it is on her back, she is still able to move forward. So, while it is tempting to focus on the travails of the oppressed, Becker chooses to highlight the multiverse and multidimensionality of black lives.



Natasha Becker and Jaishri Abichandani, *Radical Love*, 11 June–17 August 2019, Ford Foundation Gallery, New York. Photograph by: Sebastian Bach. Courtesy of Ford Foundation Gallery.



Natasha Becker and Jaishri Abichandani, *Radical Love*, 11 June–17 August 2019, Ford Foundation Gallery, New York. Photograph by: Sebastian Bach. Courtesy of Ford Foundation Gallery.



Natasha Becker and Jaishri Abichandani, *Radical Love*, 11 June–17 August 2019, Ford Foundation Gallery, New York. Photograph by: Sebastian Bach. Courtesy of Ford Foundation Gallery.

As a black feminist, Becker uses her lived experiences as crucial matter to draw on as research areas, as motifs, methodologies, and materialities. In her feminist curating, she speaks of her curatorial practice as her own creative aesthetic practice and engagement with artists as collaborative; she has to be in the space to hear it speaking to her (she discusses “space as a key ingredient,” of using one’s senses);²⁸ she mentions presenting a visual feast; her exhibitions feel like a rich quilt—all of these go back to the everyday creativities she grew up with, and an understanding that although we did not grow up with “fine arts”—as hooks,²⁹ Collins,³⁰ and Walter D. Mignolo have demonstrated—our home spaces and interior lives have been filled with creativity.³¹ In harnessing such language as a creative feminist curator of colour, Becker is able to use her intersectional positionality to connect with various communities to allow them the sense that they belong. She is keenly aware of the difficulty of working in North American or European institutions and knowing that even though you may curate successful exhibitions, these spaces may still remain violent, and that one has to continually work with the limitations of an institution that “does diversity work” as part of its programming. However, having grown up under those same structures in apartheid South Africa, she has learnt to recognise and seize the smallest opportunities to make a difference. In her essay for *Radical Love*, she says, “The enveloping red walls of the gallery allow us to literally and metaphorically recalibrate the space and create a positively exhilarating center for otherness and action.”³² To be woman is to be faced by a discourse of othering—not an othering itself. Knowing that distinction is key. That is the radical epicentre from which Becker works, and in doing so, she joins the ranks of those like Angela Davis whose famous quote she uses in that same essay: “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”³³

Notes

1 The author wishes to thank Kiani Ned at the Ford Foundation Gallery for assistance with the images for this text, Natasha Becker for her invaluable input and patience, as well as the *Art on our Mind* research team. This research has been made possible through a joint grant from the National Research Foundation Thuthuka Grant and Wits University, and funding from the Arts Research Africa for the African Feminisms (Afems) 2019 Conference.

2 This research utilises official South African racial categories as established under apartheid and their continued usage post-apartheid: “White” (persons of white European descent), “Black” (local indigenous Black Africans), “Coloured” (persons of mixed race and descendants of Malaya/Indian/Mozambican slaves and prisoners), “Indian” (persons of South Asian descent that arrived as slaves in Cape Town in the 17th century and, in the second half of the 19th century, first as British Indentured labourers and then as merchants). Where the terms “black” (lower case “b”) or “people of colour” are used, they are used in preference of “non-white” and include Black, Coloured, and Indian South Africans also grouped under the term “previously disadvantaged,” which in the latter half of the 1990s also constitutionally includes Chinese South Africans. These terms are also used to denote identification with blackness as a politically self-affirmative project and stance (e.g., “black feminism”).

3 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990/2009), 279.

4 bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 6.

5 *Ibid.*, 13.

6 Natasha Becker, "The 'Lives of Colour' Exhibition. South African National Gallery, September 1999," *Kronos* 27 (2001): 270-291.

7 The list of artists, scholars, curators, and artists she met there and engaged with is exhaustive and include Lisa Corrin (director of Williams College Museum), Julie Mehretu (artist), Chika Okeke-Agulu (visiting scholar), Maria Magdalena Compos Pons (artist), Hank Willis Thomas (artist), Darby English (scholar), Okwui Enwezor (curator), Christa Clarke (curator), Bisi Silva (curator), Michael Ann Holly (director of RAP), Willie Cole (artist), Kobena Mercer (scholar), among many others.

8 The exhibitions were *Perilous Bodies* (4 March-11 May 2019) and *Radical Love* (11 June-17 August 2019) co-curated by Jaishri Abichandani and Becker), while the final exhibition *Utopian Imagination* (17 September-7 December 2019) was curated solely by Abichandani.

9 Natasha Becker, "Art on our Mind Creative Dialogue with Natasha Becker," Interview by Sharlene Khan, *Art on our Mind*, 5 September 2019, video, 01:38:46, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wITsT0ZRk1k&t=5054s>.

10 In his text "Why the Arts Don't Do Anything: Towards a New Vision for Cultural Production in Education," Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández not only speaks of "arts" in a deeply pluralistic sense, encompassing many forms that are not traditionally taught, but also speaks to many of the governing elitist mechanisms that control the educational paradigms of the traditional "arts" fields and how they rely on such to keep the habitus small. See the works of the following scholars who have written on racism and aesthetics/racism in the arts field: Carolina A. Miranda, "Are Museums Still Racist? The COVID Reset," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 October 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-10-22/art-museums-racism-covid-reset>; bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press 1995); Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonial Options and Artistic/Aesthetic Entanglements: An Interview with Walter Mignolo," *Decolonisation: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 1 (2014): 196-211; Khwezi Gule, "Doing Ventriloquism," in *Aluta Continua: Doing it for Daddy... Ten Years On*, ed. Sharlene Khan (Johannesburg: Pole Pole Press, 2020), 34-39; Sharlene Khan, "Aluta Continua: Doing it for Daddy," *Art South Africa* 4, no. 3 (2006): 56; Sharlene Khan, "But What's All Dis Here Talkin 'Bout?," *Artthrob*, 2011, <http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/But-Whats-All-Dis-Here-Talking-About.aspx>; Sharlene Khan and Fouad Asfour, "Whitespeak: How Race Works in South African Art Criticism Texts to Maintain the Arts as the Property of Whiteness," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education*, eds. Amelia M. Kraehe, Ruben Gaztambide-Fernández, and Stephen

B. Carpenter II (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan/Springer International, 2018), 107-204.

11 William J. Kole, "Art Museum Accused of Racism Names First Director of Inclusion," *PBSO News Hours*, 3 September 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/art-museum-accused-of-racism-names-first-director-of-inclusion>.

12 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

13 Grada Kilomba, *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism* (Münster: UNRAST-Verlag, 2008).

14 The #RhodesMustFall student protests occurred at the University in Cape Town (UCT) in 2015 demanding the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue but also extending to discussions of UCT as an oppressive educational space, the decolonisation of university curricula, the role of "fine arts" and visual culture in hegemonies as well, and to the role of public culture and memorialisation in South Africa more generally.

15 In 2016, students at UCT erected a shack (an informal housing structure) as a symbol of both their struggles with accommodation and university costs in UCT and Cape Town, as well as the gross inequalities faced by Black students attempting to

access education at a former White institution. The structure was violently demolished on 15 February 2016 by private security, angering student protestors who went into nearby accommodation halls and pulled several artworks off the walls and set them alight on a bonfire. These incidents highlighted the tensions over the cultural symbolic values, as portraits of former white administrators, that nobody remembers anymore, were prized as more important than the struggle for human dignity for affordable housing and education, and as the protestors were called barbarians and their act analogized to Nazi-era book burnings. For an alternate reading which demonstrates how white violence is not only downplayed but aligned with white liberal arts values while black bodies are constantly made agonistic, see art historian Nomusa Makhubu's "Show Me the Flaming Art," in *Aluta Continua: Doing it for Daddy...Ten Years On*, ed.

Sharlene Khan (Johannesburg: Pole Pole Press, 2020), 8-12.

16 See, for instance, the Halperin and Burns's *ArtNet* report that shows that women remain utterly under-represented in all aspects in the visual arts terrain. Julia Halperin and Charlotte Burns, "Female Artists Represent Just 2 Percent of the Market. Here's Why – and How That Can Change," *Artnet News*, 19 September 2019, <https://news.artnet.com/womens-place-in-the-art-world/female-artists-represent-just-2-percent-market-heres-can-change-1654954>.

1 These include: SFMOMA's Nat Keeton and Gary Garrels; Montreal Museum of Fine Art's Nathalie Bondil; Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit's Elysia Borowy-Reeder; New Mexico History Museum's Andrew Wulf; Erie Art Museum's Joshua Helmer; Canter Arts Centre's Susan Dackerman; and Akron Art Museum's Mark Masuka.

2 Becker, interview.

3 In Desiree Lewis, "Desiree Lewis talks to Molar Ogundipe, leading feminist theorist, poet, literary critic, educator and activist, about the interface of politics, culture and education," *Feminist Africa*, no. 1 (2002): 6.

4 Becker, interview.

5 For more on this possibility of using proximity and ubuntu as a radical decolonising curatorial practice, see Sharlene Khan, "We-All-Fall-Down: Thinking Through Lines of Proximity and Ubuntu as Decolonizing Praxis in South African Museum Re-Presentations," in *What Do Museums Change? Art and Democracy*, ed. Sunhee Jang (Seoul: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, 2020), 222-243.

6 <http://assemblyroom.nyc/>.

7 <https://underlineprojects.art/>.

8 Artists in the exhibition included: Sue Austin (UK); La Vaughn Belle (Virgin Islands) & Jeannette Ehlers (Denmark); Maria Berrio (Columbia/US); Raúl de Nieves (Mexico/US); Omar Victor Diop (Senegal); Vanessa German (US); Jah Grey (US); Baseera Khan (US); Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt (US); McCallum & Tarry (US): Bradley McCallum & Jacqueline Tarry; Rashaad Newsome (US); Ebony G. Patterson (Jamaica/US); Jody Paulsen (South Africa); Thania Petersen (South Africa); Lina Puerta (US); Faith Ringgold (US); Athi-Patra Ruga (South Africa); Nep Sidhu (India/Canada); Rose B. Simpson (US); Imani Uzuri (US); and Lina Iris Viktor (Liberia/UK).

9 Becker, interview.

10 In her book *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*, Ogundipe-Leslie adapts Mao-Tse Tung's metaphor of the Chinese man having three mountains on his back (colonial oppression from outside, feudal oppression from authoritarianism, his own backwardness), while the Chinese woman had a fourth (oppression from men). Ogundipe-Leslie clarifies the six mountains on an African woman's back as: outside oppression (colonialism and neocolonialism); traditional structures (feudalism, slave-based, communal); backwardness; man; her colour (race); and herself. Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994), 28.

- 1 Pumla Dineo Gqola. "Ufanele Uqavile: Blackwomen, Feminisms and Postcoloniality in Africa," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 16, no. 50 (2001): 12.
- 2 Becker, interview.
- 3 hooks, *Art on My Mind*.
- 4 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
- 5 Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings," *Social Text Online* (2013); Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonial Options."
- 6 Natasha Becker, "An Ode to Love," Ford Foundation Gallery Website, 2019, <https://www.fordfoundation.org/about/the-ford-foundation-center-for-social-justice/ford-foundation-gallery/exhibitions/radical-love/an-ode-to-love/>.
- 7 Ibid.

Sharlene Khan is a South African visual artist who works in multi-media installations and performances, which focus on the socio-political realities of a post-apartheid society and the intersectionality of race-gender-class. She uses masquerading as a postcolonial strategy to interrogate her South African heritage, as well as the constructedness of identity via rote education, art discourses, historical narratives, and popular culture. She has exhibited in the UK, Italy, France, Germany, South Africa, India, South Korea, and Greece and has participated in various international conferences. Her writings on contemporary visual arts appear in journals, books, art catalogues, and magazines including *Art South Africa*, *Artthrob*, *Springerin*, *Manifesta*, *Contemporary-And*, *The Conversation Africa*, *Imbizo: International Journal of African Literary and African Studies*, *Agenda* and *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education*. She has been a recipient of the Abe Bailey Travel Bursary (1998), the Rockefeller Bellagio Arts residency (2009), the Canon Collins/Commonwealth Scholarship (2011), the African Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship (2017), the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences Award for Visual Arts (2018), and was runner-up in the Videokunst Preis Bremen Art Award (2015). She has been nominated twice for the South African Women in the Arts Award (Painting) and has received funding from the National Arts Council multiple times. She has published three books on her work: *What I look like, What I feel like* (2009); *I Make Art* (2017); and *When the moon waxes red... Negotiating Subjective Terrain as an 'Inside-Outsider', an 'Outside-Insider'* (2019). She is co-convenor of the annual African Feminisms (Afems) Conference; runs the *Art on our Mind* Research Project, the Black Feminist Killjoy Reading Group, and the Decolonial AestheSis Creative Lab. She holds a PhD (Arts) from Goldsmiths, University of London and is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Fine Arts, Wits University, Johannesburg.