

Tales of History Retold

Curated by Kim Gurney & Carlyn Strydom

Iyatsiba Lab

5 -28 November 2025

66 Greatmore Street, Woodstock

SAJX CO FRXX 056

PARIS 56/51 11 1604

CAPE TOWN / 8001

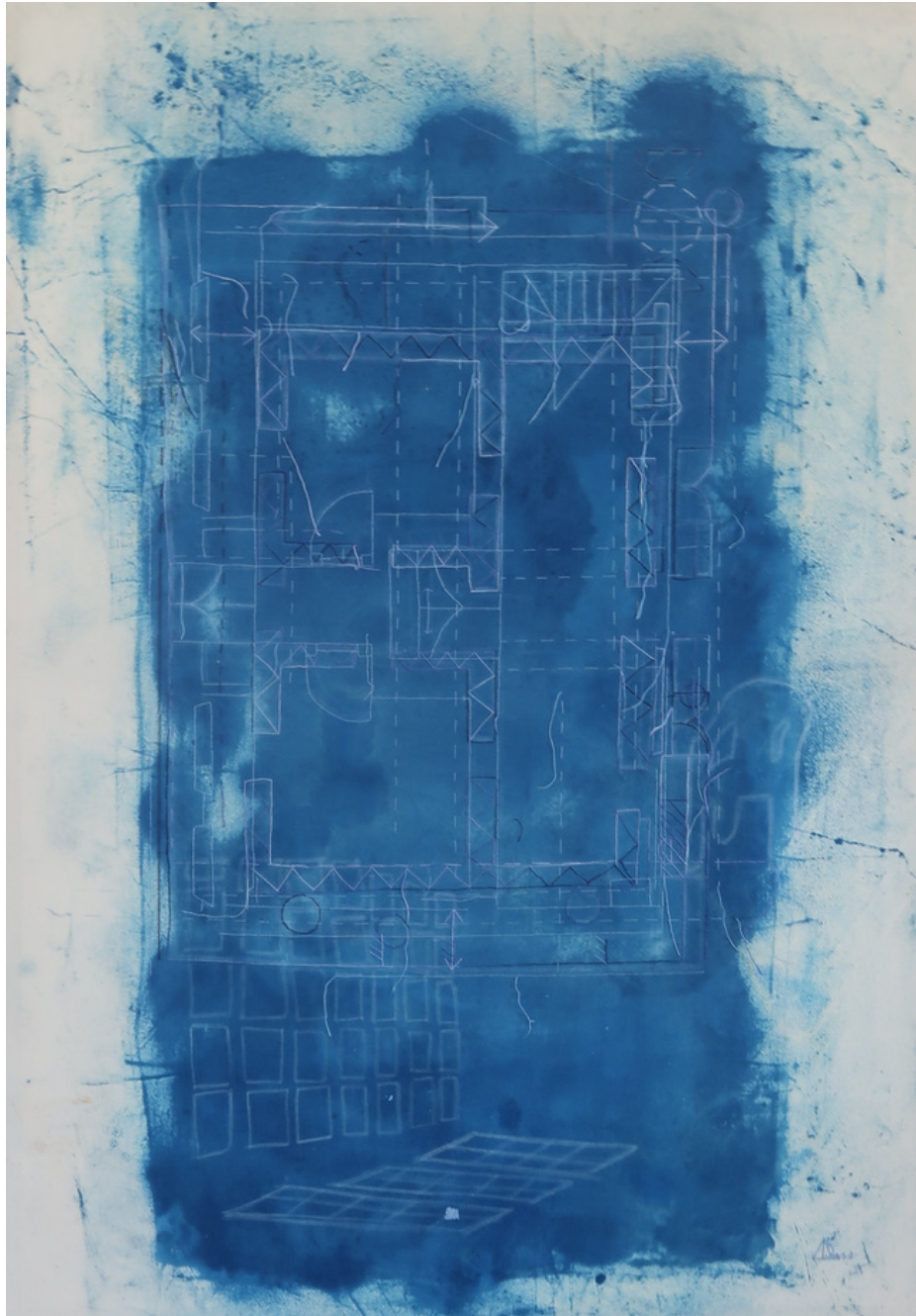
Tales of History Retold

This co-curated group exhibition re-imagines selected artefacts from the document archive of the Association for Visual Arts (AVA), a not-for-profit gallery and members' association in Cape Town. The AVA Archive spans roughly 25 years to either side of the political watershed of 1994 and thus offers in its temporal arc a compelling backstage narrative about institutional and sociopolitical transition whilst also testifying to the invisible labour of curatorial care and exhibition-making. The physical materiality of these artefacts and the artistic responses they elicit from artists help lead the curatorial way. That said, the broad idea is to bridge past and present with creative futuring by demonstrating how archive is a creative tool to both make and unmake knowledge canons. This exhibition approaches archive as unstable and constantly morphing as context shifts and artefacts help to disrupt and rewrite their own story. Revisiting archives has particular urgency worldwide in this increasingly digital age as more institutions in possession of physical records consider what to do with them, and what ethical obligations custodianship brings in contemporary times.

Tales of History Retold presents new works by participating artists:

**Alka Dass, Hasan Essop, Husain Essop, Ange-Frédéric Koffi, Kitso Lynn Lelliott, Emma Minkley,
Mandisi Nkomo & Scott Eric Williams**

Alka Dass



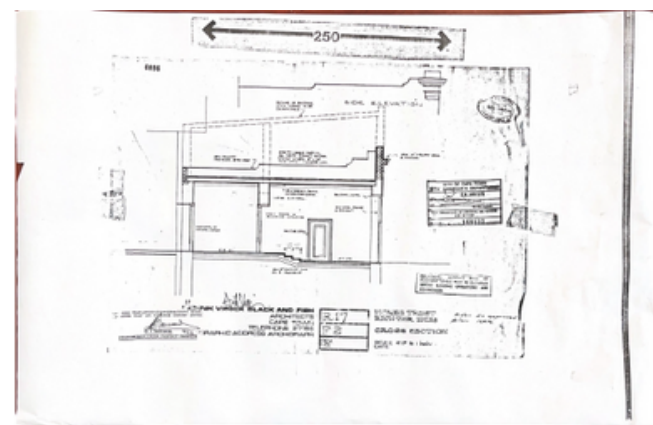
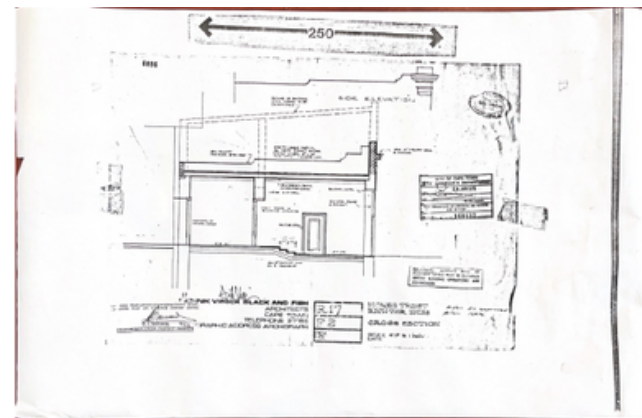
Alka Dass
Everything That Was Once Drawn Here
2025
Cyanotype, thread, chalk
840 x 1185 x 50mm

This work begins in the archive of AVA, tracing the many blueprints that have marked the gallery's changing architecture across its hundred years. The term “blueprint” itself recalls the cyanotype process, a technique that once translated technical drawings into reproducible form. In this work, I return the blueprint to its origins while undoing its promise of clarity and permanence.

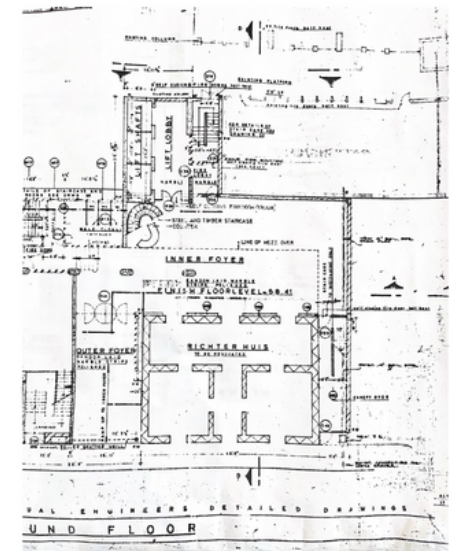
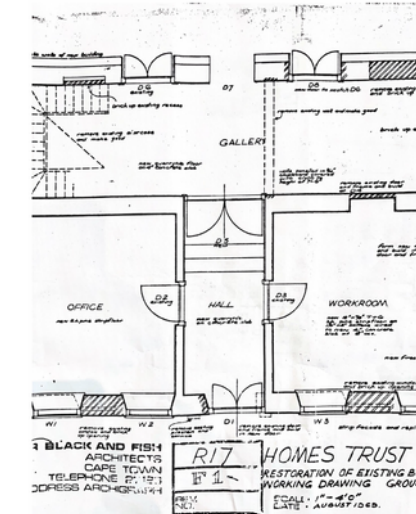
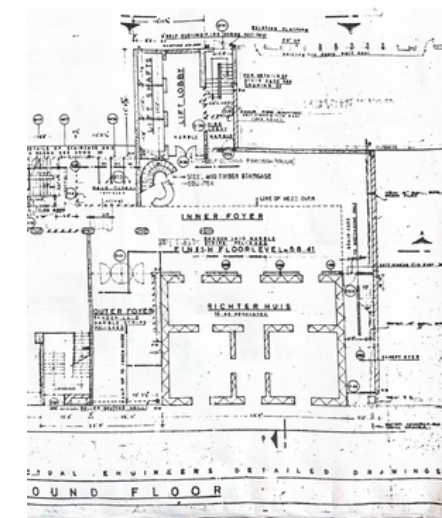
By embroidering archival blueprints directly onto calico, to create a layered palimpsest of overlapping plans, walls, doors, and foundations collapse into one another until no single structure remains legible. The result is not an ordered building but a tangled mess of histories: an unattainable, unstable architecture that could never exist in physical space.

The work plays with the gap between the room as imagined — drawn, drafted, promised — and the room as lived. To be told of a space is different from being inside it; to inhabit an institution is different from the way it imagines itself. This is particularly poignant in the South African context, where few buildings bear such long, layered histories. In Durban, where I am from, architectural survival is rare; the endurance of this institution is unusual, even anomalous.

Through the act of reworking its blueprints, the gallery's many lives are reassembled not into a stable whole but into a speculative, impossible structure. One that both commemorates and unsettles the idea of institutional permanence.



Archive reference:
Architectural plans of AVA by Munnik Visser Architects
Located in physical archive

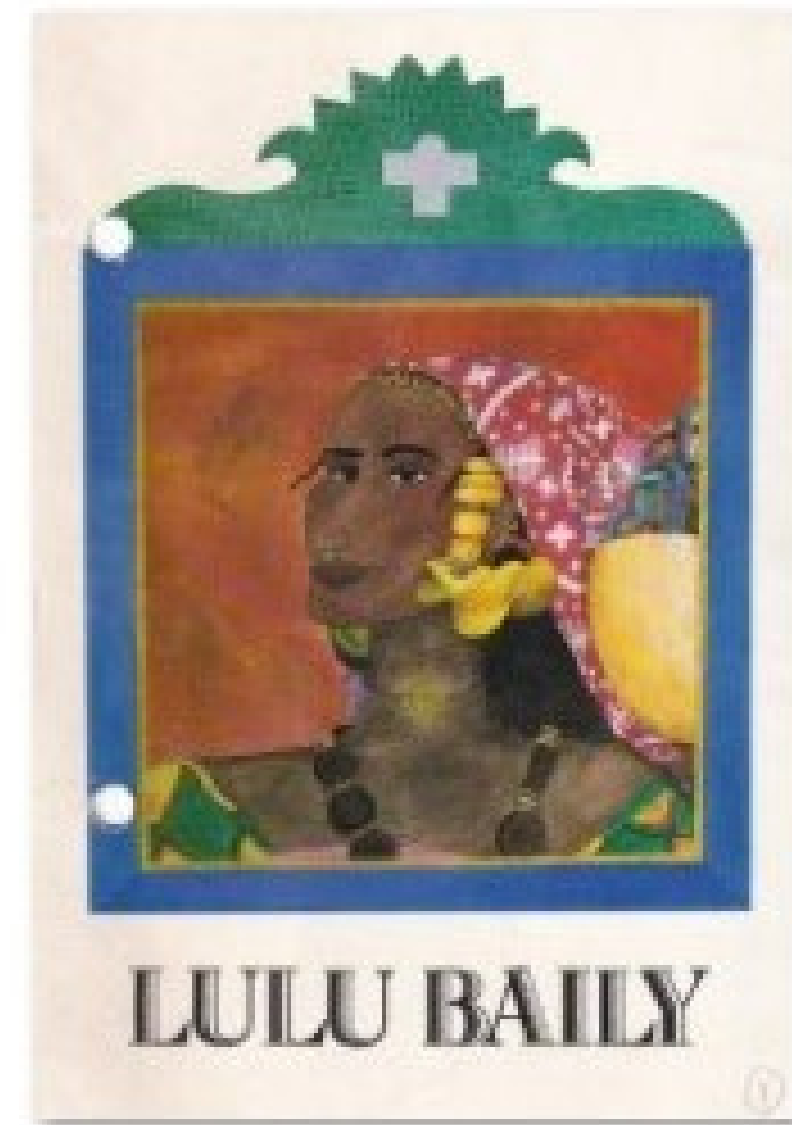


Hasan Essop



Hasan Essop
Archival Echoes (After Baily)
2025
Acrylic on board
1110 x 850 x 50mm

Lulu Baily's painting of a woman in traditional attire is the archival artefact I chose to respond to for my artwork. I was inspired by her use of vibrant colours, patterns and the way the composition celebrated cultural identity. With my own Indian heritage, I felt a deep personal connection to the imagery and traditions expressed in the work. In response, I created a self-portrait that draws on Baily's stylistic choices, incorporating her palette, motifs and decorative detail. Through this process, I sought to both honour the cultural resonance of her painting and reinterpret it through the lens of my own identity.



Archive reference:
Exhibition invitation for Lulu Baily's solo show
Digital archive ID: 1989H241
Location in physical archive: Box H - File 24 - Item 1

Husain Essop



Husain Essop

Trinity

2025

Water coloured pencils, black & white prints on Fabriano paper

670 x 950 x 50mm

Institutional archives often portray themselves as neutral spaces, demonstrated for instance in the values embedded in the constitutional records of the AVA and its predecessor, the South African Association of Arts (SAAA). This artwork, on the contrary, makes its positionality quite plain. It suggests that archive, as a power of ‘instituting history’, is not dead and buried but living ongoing second lives.

During my interaction with the AVA Archives, I was inspired by two documented works: a photograph of a lithograph by Jo Ractliffe and a photograph of an etching by Alma Vorster. These two pieces have moved me to create a drawing that captures the mystical and dark features present in both works.

The stillness in these double-layered images is something I echoed in my own drawing, which was inspired by the imagery and form found in both pieces. I worked by using printed images of Ractliffe and Vorster’s work, layering their imagery into my own. Pattern is key in my process, so I carefully considered which patterns and symbols to use.

My vision and theme connect to desert hills and kinship characters with their weapons and patterns, a visual language that recalls early scripture and battle. I have interpreted this through the biblical narrative of the crucifixion of Jesus (peace be upon him). The story is part of a larger history of the early killings of prophets (revolutionaries), which I wish to retell with a contemporary lens and in relation to the turmoil of today.

These killings, both past and present, are something we would be inhumane to ignore. My work seeks to reflect this truth by drawing from the archive while also creating a new voice that speaks to our current reality.



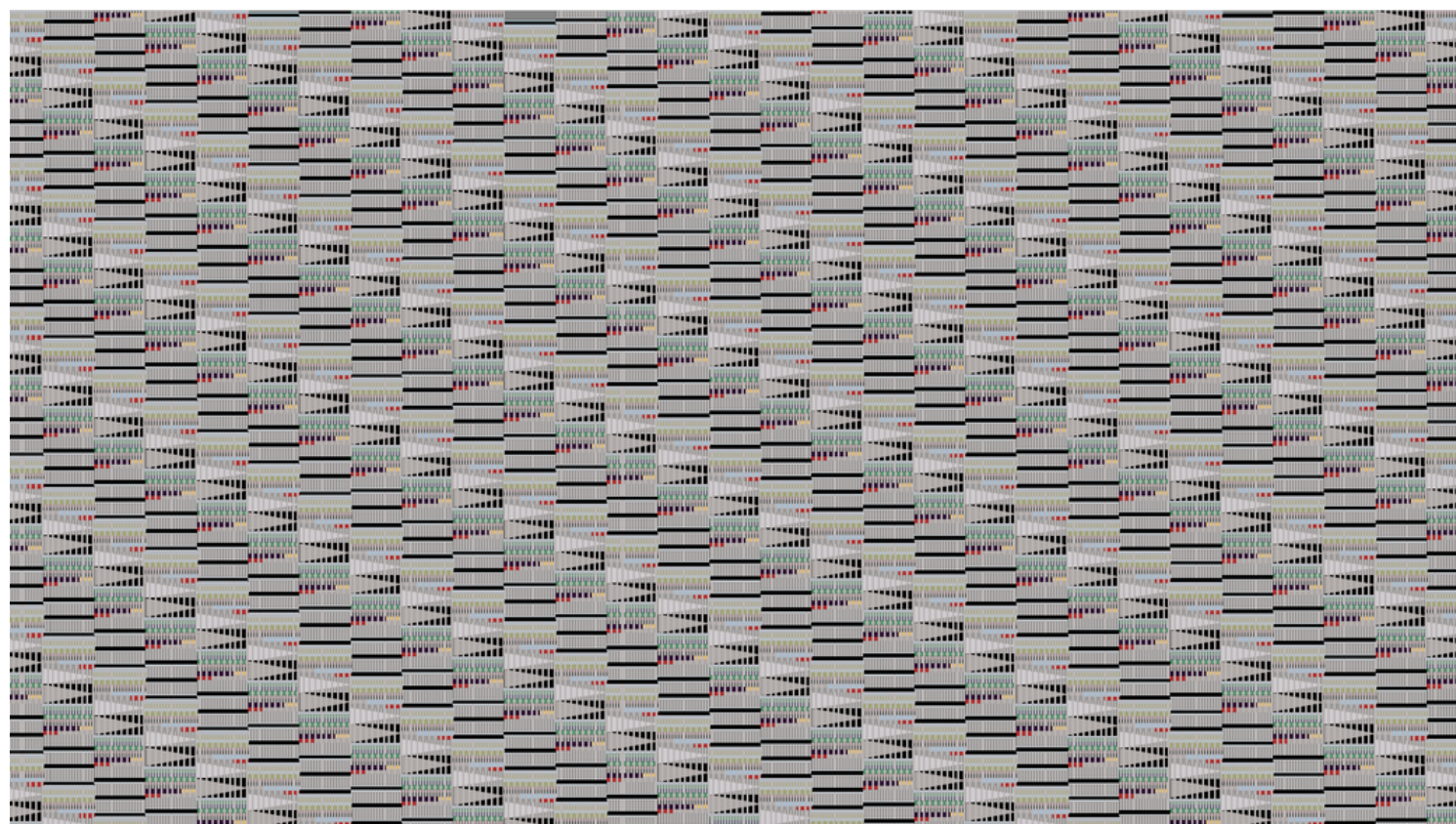
Archive reference:

Alma Vorster and Jo Ractliffe images from group exhibition

Item ID. 1989H132 & 1989H133

Location in physical archive: Box H - File 13 - Item 2 & 3

Ange-Frédéric Koffi



Ange-Frédéric Koffi

*a sort of mental envelope in the middle of which
our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world*

2025

Wallpaper

Variable dimensions

My project consists in reactivating the artefact *White Giant* (Kathy Comfort, 1994) through the creation of wallpaper. This approach is anchored in research begun in 2016: the deconstruction of the kita/kenté motif—that Akan weave which traverses the territories of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, carrying within it the sedimentations of a textile memory. This inaugural gesture has generated, through successive transfers, new variations on carpets, silk, wallpaper; so many surfaces that welcome, transform, and replay a memory in perpetual displacement.

In dialogue with *White Giant*, these motifs allow for the tensioning of two seemingly disjunct symbolic orders: on one hand, the cosmological and infinite vision inscribed in Comfort's archive; on the other, the textile weave as social and historical matrix, bearer of memorial circulations and interwoven narratives.

The wallpaper then becomes far more than a decorative surface: it operates as a wall skin—neither simple ornament nor archival document, but a space of superimposition where constellation and weave, intimate memory and collective narrative, enter into dialectical relation. This poetic and critical reconfiguration of the archive echoes the very spirit of the exhibition, which considers archives not as fixed entities but as unstable materials, open to rewritings and displacements of meaning.

Thus, this project proposes a singular way of inhabiting the archive through motif: questioning the narratives it conveys, revealing the tensions it harbors, and making appear—through the surface itself—alternative histories that remained in latency.



Archive reference:

Image of *White Giant* by Kathy Comfort

Item ID: 1994E135

Location in physical archive: Box E - File 13 - Item 5

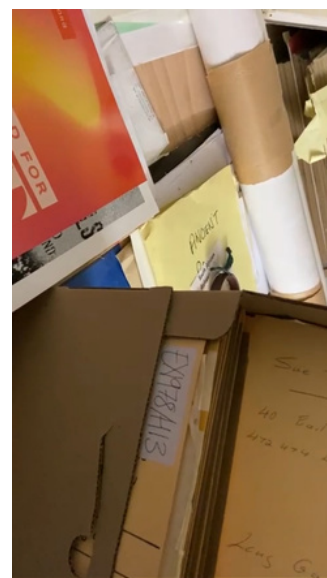
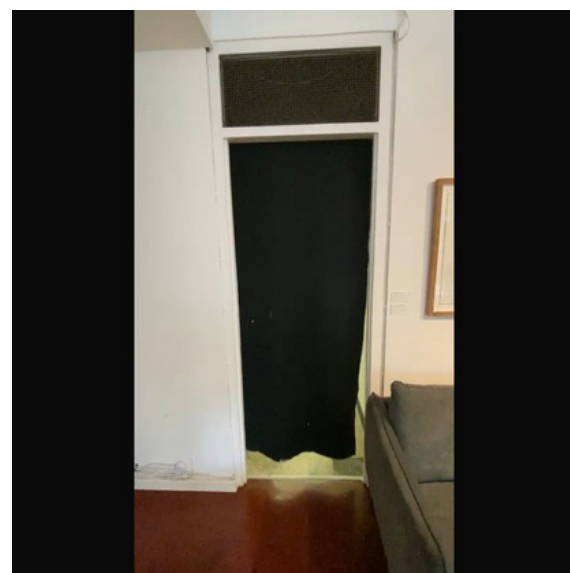
Kitso Lynn Lelliott



Kitso Lynn Lelliott

Notes on Errantry no'1: AVA Archive, //Hui !Gaeb (Cape Town)
2025

Still from digital video



Archive refernce:

Kitso used a video of the AVA's archival storage space as her reference. These are some images from that footage.

'I write to show myself showing people who show me my own showing.'

- (Trinh T Minh-ha 1989, 22)

I have been thinking about archival parameters, their logics and delineations, and the negotiation of the archival frame.

This work considers where 'the Archive' begins and ends - the ways in which material trace gets pulled out of the miscellaneous detritus of the everyday to become embalmed, cast out of the flow of life's decay and return, and is deployed to linger as an emissary of a past times.

I am curious about the logic of a place, an institution, a people, a way of seeing and valuing and the way in which these become articulated in their archives - what constitutes these and ultimately how they direct us to see, or more importantly not to see, about those past times. I am always preoccupied with what is obscured and cannot be seen given the things we are directed to look at. AVA as an institution dedicated to art is particularly interesting in its participation in and negotiation of conferring value around art. In turn, its archive participates in negotiations of, tracking and producing what is of import historically in these moments of sorting particular kinds of aesthetic articulation from the rest of the things humans make to live with and through.

In the background of these considerations lingers the questions; when did art get separated from life, when did archive get separated from participatory, embodied and communal memory practices?

Which is to consider what logics, mechanics and apparatus of recording it is participating in, reproduces and legitimates.

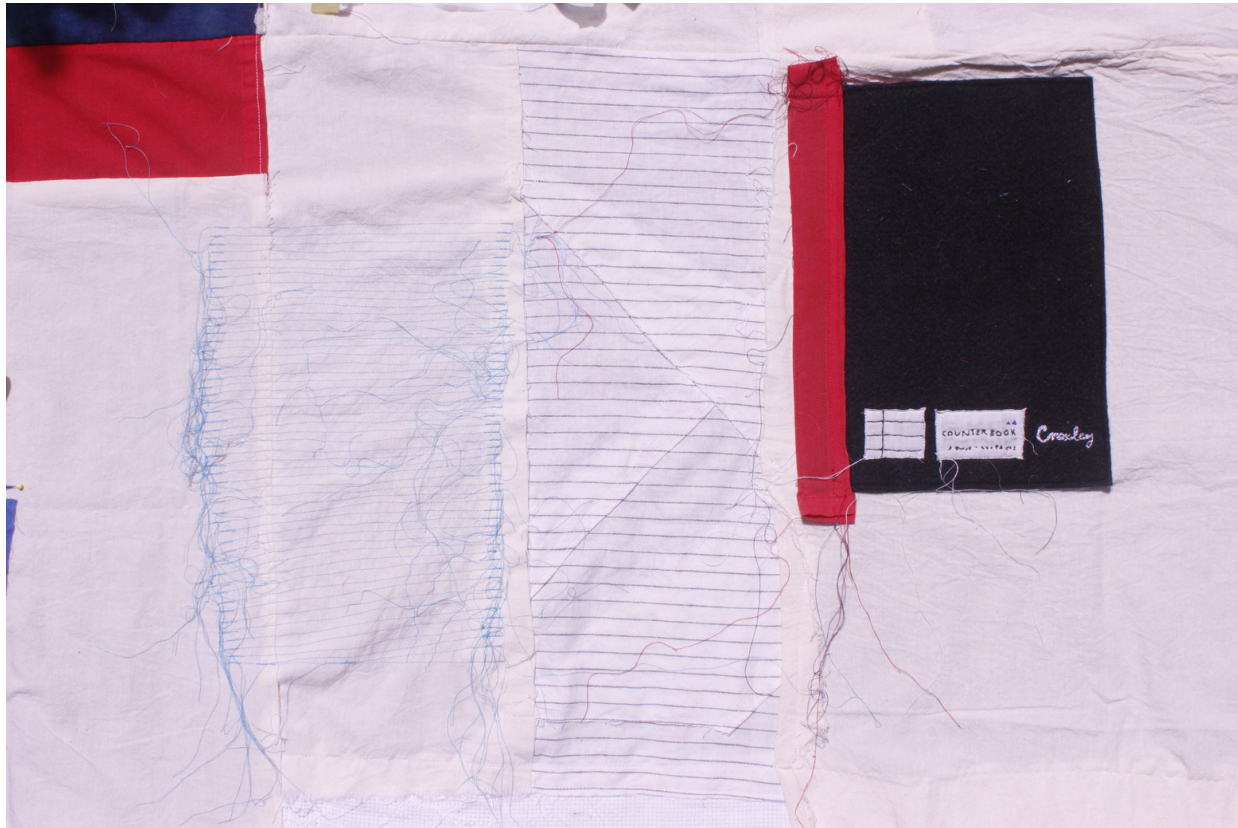
In this video the processes of producing parameters, of sorting and the taxonomical impulse come under consideration. Following Gumbs'^[1] reflection on all things returning to undifferentiated particles of sand, I trace a path (an errant path?^[2]) through a digital rendering of AVA's archive where undifferentiated pixels collapse, on a representational plane, the logics that delineated the traces ordained as archival from the other miscellaneous objects around it - the wall, a filing cabinet, a ladder left leaning in the archival storeroom.

A rock lingers (appositionally?) alongside what the archive re-calls. Perhaps to recall the land on which this structure stands, the miscellaneous detritus of life [and aesthetics] that an archive [in a storeroom, a budling, a street, a city] emerges out of.

^[1] Alexis Pauline Gumbs. *M Archive: After the End of the World* (Duke University Press, 2018), 18.

^[2] Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, (W. Norton & Company, 2019)

Emma Minkley

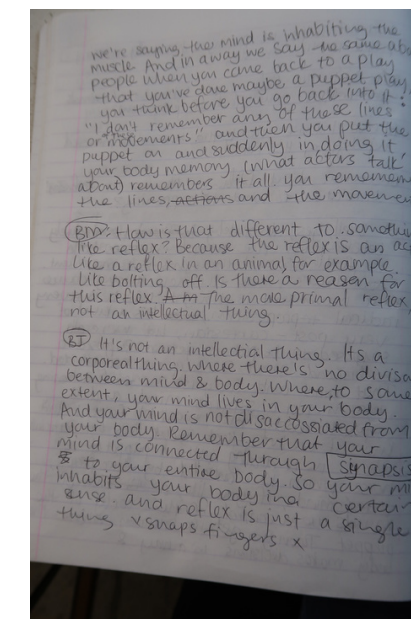
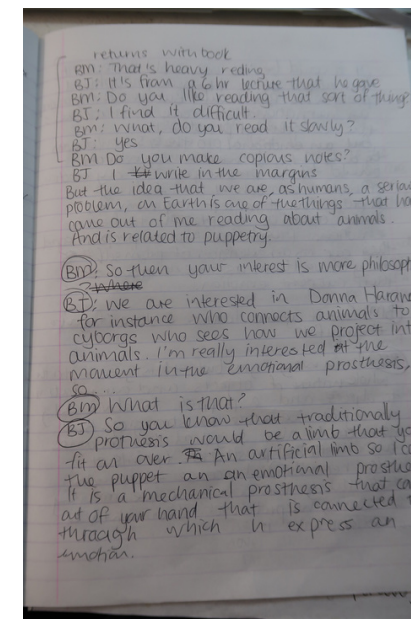
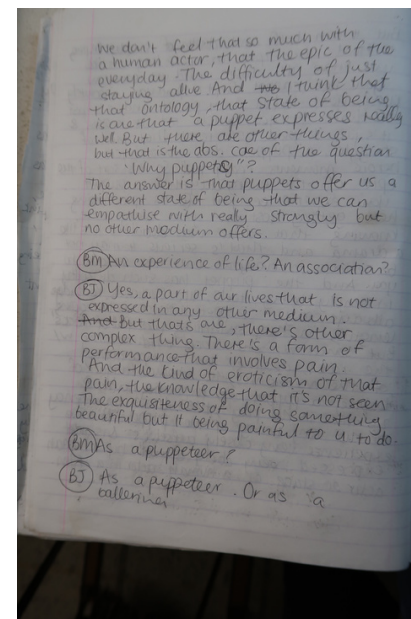


Emma Minkley
Homage to the Archive
2025
Fabric collage
1210 x 1700mm

My work is in part a homage to the seemingly mundane paper materials used to organise archives, and the histories/historiographies of the hands that organise them. I have written previously about the material histories of the Handspring archive which I worked with in 2018, by describing the tears, folds, holes, crumples, residues and chemical damage of the paper archive as the “blurs” and “breaks” of the materials and drawings. Going into the AVA archive I found the material to be reminiscent of the paper material of the Handspring Puppet Company archive, and as such I wanted to draw links between the materials while also bringing in some key ideas discussed in the interview. The Company’s emphasis on the hand and the importance of drawing within their puppetry-making practice is also of significance here.

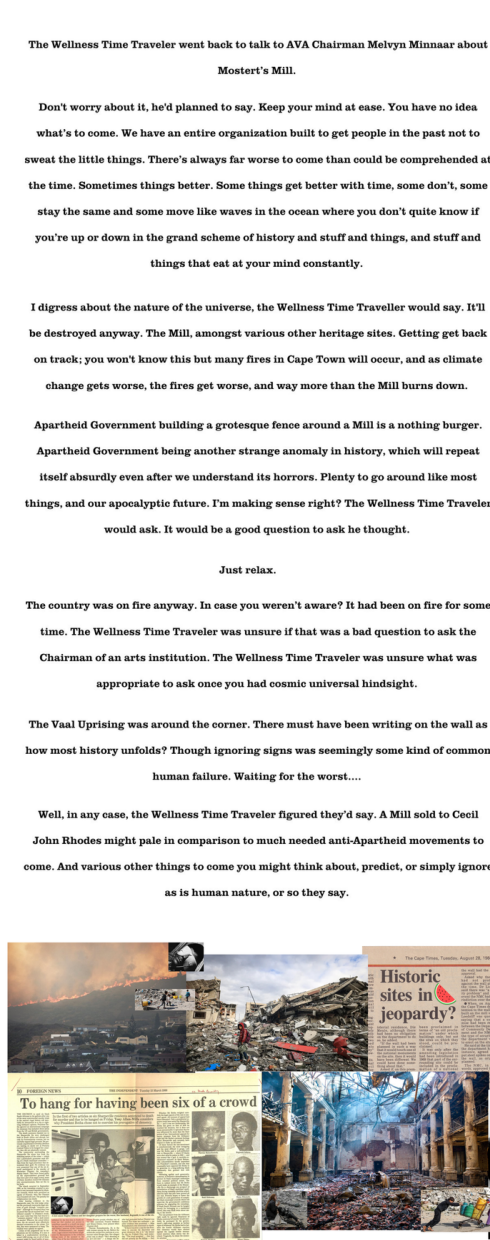
My work emphasises the hand through the creation of a “fabric drawing,” composed of A4 sized blocks of found, dyed and embroidered fabrics which together will form a larger hanging sheet. This speaks to the significance of sewing as a “handicraft,” as well as the relations in materiality between paper and fabric, having similar roots in plant fibres such as cotton and hemp. The blocks are worked into and “drawn” in varying ways (including sewing and dyeing techniques) to represent the blurs and breaks, as well as some of the storage devices of a paper archive such as lever arch files, paper concertina folders, and manilla envelopes and folders.

My chosen artefact is a handwritten interview between former AVA Director Brenton Maart and Basil Jones of Handspring Puppet Company, transcribed by an intern at the time in an A4 foolscap exercise book.



Archive reference:
Excerpts from interview
between then AVA Director
Brenton Maart and Basil Jones
of Handspring Puppet
Company, transcribed by an
intern.
Located in physical archive

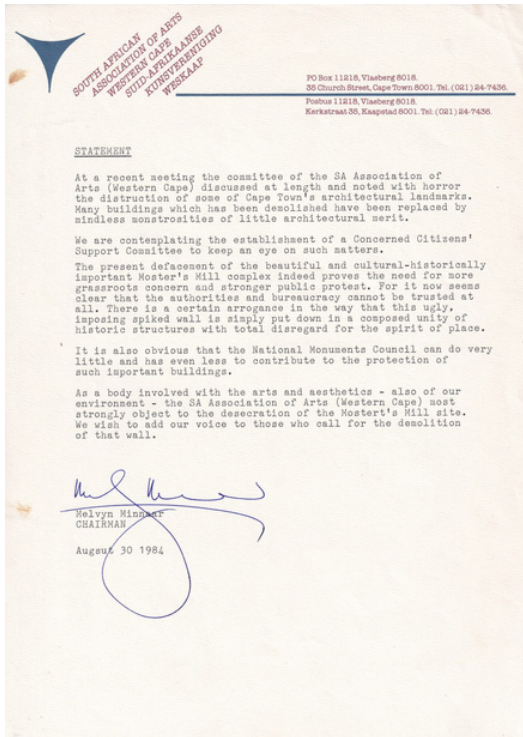
Mandisi Nkomo



My work is a written response to the Mostert's Mill controversy of 1984. Presented as an internal dialogue with protagonist, it reflects on how the passage of time can drastically change our priorities; how the passage of time and looking back and forward in time can feel strange and ethereal. The controversy around Mostert's Mill, which was about a fence being erected around the Mill, feels difficult to grasp when contextualized within current and future concerns around climate change.

One feels a sense of disconnect with the concerns of a select few, considering the brutality of the then Apartheid Government, the uprisings and by the state of emergency that was soon to be announced in South Africa.

A collage of images accompanies the written response. One part a reflection on resistance to oppression. Linked to that is fire and destruction, which are often viewed to work both positively and negatively. Whose destruction is valued over others? Do we value the destruction of buildings or human bodies more, and how does it all interact?



Archive reference:

Newspaper article about the Mostert's Mill controversy published in the Cape Times Item ID: 1984D62

Open letter by Melvyn Minnaar criticising the proposed building of a museum/

monument at DelvilleWood. Published in the Cape Times. Item ID: 1984D63.

Statement issued by Chairperson Melvyn Minnaar about the "distruction of some of Cape Town's architectural landmarks" as well as the controversy surrounding the erection of a new wall around Mostert's Mill. Item ID: 1984D61

Location in physical archive: Box D-File 6-Item 1/2/3

Scott Eric Williams



Scott Eric Williams
By any means necessary
2025
Mixed media installation
1.4 x 1.4m

Folder F16 contains a news article and flier that reveal 3 different spellings of “Inyezane” alongside the story of how Timothy Mlambo accessed an arts workshop by the same name. “By any means necessary” scratches the surface of events around the time of South Africa’s State of Emergency. This sampling from the exhibition, “Inyzane”, gives rise to questions about non-formal educational initiatives, the perennial struggle in accessing arts opportunities, and questions of epistemic injustice. Through the use of wheatpaste, zine forms and screen-printing, this is a riffing on inexhaustible anti-algorithmic strategies.



Archive reference:
Exhibition invite in card format for the group exhibition Inyezane. The names of the artists are included, and the definition of the word inyezane.
Item ID: 1987E161
Newspaper article published in Weekly Mail, 11 December 1987
Physical location in archive: Box E - File 16



Afterword

Tales of History Retold saw eight artists immerse themselves in the document archive of the AVA (est. 1995), one of South Africa's oldest living not-for-profit arts institutions with a fascinating genealogy dating back to the 19th century. The works created range from flash fiction to video, wallpaper art to installation. The artists share a skepticism about the archive as the fount of all knowledge and offer instead a playfully disruptive account of history as a palimpsest of constant reworkings. Archive is not a monolithic and static authority, these artworks suggest, but a shapeshifter whose meaning remains up for negotiation.

As curators, we found one another through a joint interest in independent art spaces, artistic thinking, arts-based research and DIY institution-building as artistic practice. Both of us have delved into archives as researchers, and have a keen interest in bringing other perspectives and understandings to bear in unearthing latent gems in the stacks. This group exhibition is our joint curatorial effort towards that end, working with the archival documents of an autonomous art space that conjoins our ongoing curiosities.

We are grateful to the artists who responded with generosity to our invitation and have taken the time to create an artwork bespoke for this exhibition. It had its roots some time back in another iteration and has finally seen the light of day. We thank all the participants for their patience and engagement with the ideas behind the show and have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of learning from their process as the show has coalesced into what it is today.

--KG & CS, November 2025

Artist biographies

Alka Dass (b.1992) is a transdisciplinary artist based in Cape Town, South Africa. Her practice is grounded in memory work and the poetics of belonging, drawing from personal and collective histories of migration, trauma, and inherited knowledge. Working primarily with cyanotype, thread, found materials, and family archives, her process leans into modes of making often dismissed as craft or domestic labour—such as embroidery, beading, and textile-based assemblage. Rooted in slowness and sensitivity, her process becomes a form of quiet resistance, making room for what is often unspoken or discarded. Each work becomes a site where memory, myth, and personal history are gently reconfigured.

Husain Essop is a passionate visual arts educator and practising artist, currently serving as the Head of the Art Department at Bishops Diocesan College in Cape Town. With a deep commitment to fostering creativity, critical thinking and cultural awareness, he has taught and mentored students from Grades 8 through 12, guiding them through both practical and theoretical components of the CAPS Visual Arts curriculum. Husain's teaching philosophy and artworks emphasizes storytelling, identity, and social consciousness, encouraging learners and viewers to reflect on their personal and collective histories through artistic expression. His own artistic practice spans photography, mixed media, and narrative-based work, often exploring themes of faith, heritage and belonging in a contemporary South African context. Beyond the classroom, Husain regularly contributes to curriculum development, adjudicates at visual art exhibitions and competitions, and works to promote collaborative projects across schools and communities. His belief in the transformative power of art continues to shape the next generation of thoughtful, expressive and globally conscious artists.

Hasan Essop, born in 1985 Cape Town, South Africa, is a Visual Artist and Educator whose work examines identity, faith and contemporary global politics through a uniquely South African and Islamic perspective. Hasan earned his Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art from the Michealis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town in 2006, majoring in Printmaking. He later pursued a Postgraduate Diploma in Art (2009) specialising in Print Media and Photography, followed by a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (2012). His works, alongside his twin brother Husain, have been exhibited both locally and internationally. Beyond his artistic practice, Hasan is deeply committed to education, sharing his expertise and mentoring emerging artists while continuing to push boundaries of visual storytelling.

Ange-Frédéric Koffi (b. 1996, Korhogo, Ivory Coast; based everywhere) explores the complex articulations of movement, travel, and wandering within the history and practice of photography. His practice traverses disciplines as diverse as political history, exhibition history, anthropology and design. A graduate of the Sorbonne, the Haute école des arts du Rhin (HEAR) and the Ecole Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne (ECAL), Koffi is a laureate of Foam (Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam) TALENT 2022, was a Zeitz MOCAA & University of the Western Cape Museum Fellow, and has held several artistic residencies including Polyominos (Nancy, France, 2023), Black Rock (Dakar, Senegal) and the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation at Carraigna-gCat [sic] (West Cork, Ireland, 2024) and Fondation Zinsou (Cotonou, Benin, 2025). He has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions, including Territoire des perceptions, Sérénade des Formes at Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan (2023); At the limit of dream at Nosbaum Reding Gallery, Brussels; On the Vastness of our Identities at Les Rencontres d'Arles; First proposition – Word images & myth representing the Biennale de la Photographie de Mulhouse at Réseau LUX #1, Paris (2024); and Encounters at Centre Culturel régional de Dakar Blaise Senghor, Dakar (2024) during the 15th Dak'Art Biennale.

Kitso Lynn Lelliott practice moves between video installation, film and writing. She is preoccupied with enunciations from spaces beyond epistemic power and the crisis such epistemically disobedient articulations cause to hegemony. Her work is an enactment of enunciating from elision and between historically subjugated subjectivities, privileging South-South relations that are in relation to yet imaginatively and epistemologically unmediated by the Global North. Lelliott was an artists in residence with the Centre for Humanities Research at the UWC from 2019 until 2022 when she took up a senior lectureship with the University of the Witwatersrand.

Lelliott is preoccupied with enunciations from spaces beyond epistemic power and the crisis such epistemically disobedient articulations cause to hegemony. Her work interrogates the ‘real’ as it is shaped through contesting epistemologies, their narratives and the form these took over the Atlantic during the formative episode that shaped the modern age. Her work is an enactment of enunciating from elision and between historically subjugated subjectivities, privileging South-South relations in relation to yet imaginatively and epistemologically unmediated by the Global North.

Emma Minkley is an artist and postdoctoral Research Associate in Visual History at the Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape. She earned a PhD at the same centre with a focus on the archive of the Handspring Puppet Company, particularly in relation to the hand. Her current work explores shadows, human/nonhuman relations, and the sea.

Mandisi Nkomo is a South African writer, drummer, composer, and producer. He currently resides in Hartbeespoort, South Africa.

His fiction has been published in the likes of Afrosf: Science Fiction by African Writers, Omenana, The Big Book of Cyberpunk, and The Best of World SF Volume 3. His poetry has been published in #The Coinage Book One, and Shoreline of Infinity and his academic work has been published in The Thinker. His works have been longlisted for the Nommo Award for African Speculative Fiction. He has been shortlisted for Toyin Falola Short Story Prize. He is also a member of the African Speculative Fiction Society.

Scott Eric Williams is a visual arts practitioner from Cape Town, South Africa. (b. 1980). He creates his art, predominantly, with textile media, wheatpastes and zines to reflect on questions related to rogue urbanisms, labour, the archive, and non-formal education. Williams holds an MAVS (Cum laude) from the University of Stellenbosch and contributes to the visual arts landscape as a visual artist, youth educator, curator, writer, and scholar. Williams is a Canon Collins alumnus (2023), an Andrew Mellon award fellow (2019) and JP Morgan Abadali award winning artist (2022).

Williams has participated in residencies and workshops such as Joule City - Cape Town (2013), Openlab -Free State Art Festival, Bloemfontein, South Africa (2016) and Situate Lab, Tasmania (2018). He has exhibited and performed at The Free State Art Festival, Gallery MOMO, Geumgang Nature Art Biennale, ICA online Fellowship, UCT Michaelis & the Gallery of the University of Stellenbosch – amongst others. As a founding member of the collective Burning Museum, he has exhibited at The Centre for African Studies (University of Cape Town), Brundyn+, Kunsthaus Dresden and on the streets of Cape Town. More recently he has exhibited with WHATIFTHEWORLD, ROAM (Massachusetts) and The Alliance Francaise, Cape Town. Williams has worked with organizations such as ASAI, AFRI, Greatmore Studios and is currently the Art Education Lead at Lalela Projects.

Curator biographies

Kim Gurney is a researcher, writer and visual artist. Her latest book, 'Flipside: The Inadvertent Archive', is a creative non-fiction response to a long-term immersion in the AVA Archive. Kim's research focuses upon independent art spaces and artistic thinking whilst her practice engages disappearances of different kinds. Previously curated shows include Sounding Out at the Bag Factory with Thato Mogotsi, and Cape Town Under: The Third Voice, a live art trio of lullabies from stormwater tunnels performed by Pauline Theart and curated via guerilla gallery, a nomadic platform. More: www.linktr.ee/kimjg

Carlyn Strydom is an independent curator, researcher, and ecological worker. She curates exhibitions that speak to her research interests which extend to the role of museums in contemporary society, the use of art as a social tool, and the ways people engage with the natural environment. She currently works at PecanBerry Farm in Hartbeespoort, a family owned working farm which offers creative and wellness retreats, and is the founder of MuseumHer, a cultural platform for all forms of art.

All queries can be directed to the curators
Kim Gurney: kgurney@uwc.ac.za
Carlyn Strydom: museumher@gmail.com

Acknowledgements

This exhibition project is organised under the auspices of the British Academy/NRF, UK-SA Bilateral Chair in the Digital Humanities at the Centre for Humanities Research, as part of its inaugural international workshop in Culture & Technics (10-12 November). With thanks to the AVA, for collaborating on archival materials, and to HogHouse Breweries, our opening night sponsors.



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE



Centre for
Humanities
Research ■



Association *for* Visual Arts

Cover image:

Telegram to Vicky Rueda, “Wishing you every success on your exhibition debut” Friends and colleagues at the Ruth Prowse”, 1993, AVA Archive.