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“Africanness” as a Professional Trading Chip: Contemporary African Artists as Producers and Secondary Arbiters in the Gatekeeping Process

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ABSTRACT

How can gatekeeping theory in the circulation of cultural objects, including knowledge production, inform the way cultural sociology investigates the role of the producer and the cultural object as "gated" entities? Using the case of producers working under the rubric of "Contemporary African art" to investigate opportunities and restrictions to inserting themselves into the gatekeeping process I ask: How do artists differentially position their work in relation to the idea of "Africanness" and how does this impact the way they frame their work alongside *primary gatekeepers*? I explore this process of professional self-positioning using 30 interviews with contemporary artists, 6 curators, content analysis of 130 artist profiles, observations of 6 art talks and secondary interviews with artists on online platforms. The findings suggest that as an artist's biography interacts with the thematic content of their work, a focus on method, form, or an issue-based agenda offers three ways to distance the artists' work from "Africanness" and yet "Africanness" functions as a productively ambiguous misnomer. The data also suggest that variation in how one trades in (eschews) or trades on (employs) Africanness provides the basis for an institutionalized culture of diplomacy in contemporary art and scholarship, one that prioritizes cooperation over confrontation. "Africanness" is a professional trading chip and Contemporary African art acts as a kind of boundary object. While it is useful for assembling thematic exhibitions, accessing resources, networking, and gaining exposure, a focus on "Africanness" is restrictive for consolidating artists' efforts to pursue specific professional, social, political, and economic agendas through art. As *primary gatekeepers* in the development of Contemporary African art genre continue to use "Africanness" as a legitimate way to group artists spanning a wide range of generation, genre, and geography, artists expand their locus of

control by curating, teaching, publishing in books and articles and initiating organizations that relate to but demand attention beyond “Africanness” and the art objects they produce.

Keywords: Contemporary African art, Africanness, boundary object, trading chip

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Sakhile Kaone Keolebale Matlhare

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1. INTRODUCTION

A Motswana[1] artist based in New York City opens his lecture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with a brief history of his country of origin. He uses a projection of a map to explain that Botswana is approximately the size of France but only hosts a population of about 2 million people before moving into a discussion of his coming of age as an artist. He firmly states: "I am a history painter. An artist is someone who is interested in the sociopolitical aspects of daily life."[2] Sharing a list of self-imposed rules in his art practice, he describes how he works only from *his position* with what he has access to and with what he knows. "If I started painting landscapes in South Carolina, it would be weird. What does this African guy have to say about South Carolina? What is this guy doing painting people in South Carolina?" He answers his own question with the conclusion that, "every artist works from their own position …their own matrix identity…my identity is somehow always ready to be collapsed into what I am doing." Either by self-imposition or the failure of his audience to accept his input, he is not someone with the authority to document or comment on the everyday sociopolitical aspects of daily life in South Carolina.

The problem is that this question of whether an artist's work is appropriate in relation to his or her biography does not always come up. After all, historians of art who study Western artists and their work do not view the exploration of African cultures by painters like Pablo Picasso, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, or Paul Klee as a lack of artistic integrity. Presumably, these artists did not think it 'weird' that they were painting objects and scenes they saw in the African

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[1] A Motswana is a citizen of Botswana (singular).
[2] Taken from field notes, observation of artist lecture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (March 2015).

villages they visited or on photographs they saw. Picasso's, Kirchner's, and Klee's inspiration from the African continent was and still remains accessible to Western audiences and the foreign symbols they incorporated into their work are now an integral part of the European Expressionist movement.

Professionally, the Contemporary African artist is in a particular existential position he cannot escape without intentional and sustained effort. In stating this, I do not argue that this identity vis-à-vis profession or work phenomenon is unique to the Contemporary African art genre as it appears in other genres and industries and at different historical moments. This phenomenon appears in and is experienced by individuals in other non-hegemonic groups of all kinds, including other contemporary and non-Western visual art genres. For example, Contemporary African artists like El Anatsui and Yinka Shonibare enjoy international acclaim in their areas of specialty, while their work is primarily cited as both, "contemporary" and "African", as do artists like Ai Weiwei and Zeng Fanzhai, whose work is categorized as Contemporary Chinese art. In the field of literature, before the middle of the 20th Century, female authors were not afforded the same access to training, selling opportunities, and recognition for their work compared to their male counterparts (Wilentz 1992; Jehenson 1995; Gallagher 1995; Gallagher 2015). In fact, there were highly celebrated female authors who published under male pen names in order to avoid the negative stereotypes associated with female writers and to gain access to opportunities that largely favored literature written by men.

Karen Blixen wrote *Out of Africa,* a novel that received acclaim in the literary world. She opted to publish it under the pen name, Isak Dinesen[3]. Louisa May Alcott, who wrote *Little Woman,* had her work published under another name, like A. M. Barnard[4]. A well-known example today is Joanne 'Jo' Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* series, who is better known as J.K. Rowling because her publishers worried that young boys would not want to read a novel written by a "Joanne"[5]. The modern day example of this phenomenon is not as drastic as earlier cases, but points to the kinds of gendered-considerations some writers still make when presenting themselves or their work to an audience. It was with the rise of women's movements and the continuing push for more equal rights that the literature landscape began to shift the needle in terms of gender representation and recognition.

Even with the incremental progress towards parity in professional access and recognition despite gender, race, and sexuality, among others, there is an argument that could be made that the heterosexual artist, for instance, is not compelled to "deal with" how sexuality relates to his work, especially when his work is not primarily about sexuality. However, the homosexual artist may have to confront and consider a number of positions within his practice in relation to sexuality: He might ask, "Do I have an obligation to represent other homosexual individuals?" – "Does my work speak to the LGBTQI community?" - "Whether I want it to or not, is my work an extension of my sexuality? If I do not believe it is, how do I respond to those who expect it to

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[3] Recently published by Penguin Books as Karen Blixen, (Blixen, Karen, and Isak Dinesen. 2001. *Out of Africa*. Penguin UK).
[4] Batman Dell, a division of Random House, Inc. recently published Louisa May Alcott's *Little Woman* under the author's name, (Alcott, Louisa May. 2007. *Little women*. Bantam Classics).
[5] Author's official website: https://www.jkrowling.com/about/. Para. 14. Last accessed on February 2017.

be?" We might imagine that the constraints, both real and imagined, vary for different people depending on a wide spectrum of things. Among them, their own self-imposed constraints, "I am a figure drawer not an activist" - "What are my obligations as an artist?" - "Am I a token?" - "What ability or authority do I have to act as an advocate?" - "Can I simply be a history painter?" as well as professional or working context, "Is it safe to address this topic here?" – "Does my work have any efficacy in a gallery space, in this neighborhood, state, or country?"

The female artist finds herself in a similar conundrum, but perhaps because there are now more recognizable female artists in the present day than in the 40s and 50s, she may not experience as much pressure to "choose" or "claim" a position in relation to her womanliness or even other women. Still, in efforts to gain access to shows she may have to decide whether she wishes to partake in the upcoming feminism exhibition because she cannot land a spot in the portraiture exhibition, what she would rather be known for. The portraiture exhibitions are few and already have well established artists dominating the art circuit, but in the movement to include more women, regardless of the medium or style they work in, she has a shot at getting into the latter exhibition circuit as a "feminist artist" because, after all she is an artist, who happens to also be a woman.

In a similar way, while it may be thrilling to have your name listed as a rising Contemporary African artist in 2016, for some artists the "African" piece, like the sexuality piece or the gender piece, is given too much weight in why they are receiving recognition for their work within the contemporary art world. Of course they may wish to be among the select few, but they may also want the basis of that selection to prioritize their technical skills, the richness of their creative ideas, or a specific issue they use their art to explore and mobilize others around,

rather than their birth country or in many cases, the link between the artist and the general place: Africa. Hence, here I will give an overview of what examining the role of visual artists as mediators in the framing of their own work can reveal about the ways in which cultural production (and producers) are influenced and influence knowledge production. Knowledge production here refers to intellectual and art historical information about the visual art discipline and industry. The visual artists in this project include artists who draw, paint, sculpt, work with textiles, wood, and charcoal, do photography, video installation, and a few also incorporate performance art and sound in their work.

Study Overview

Art is an ideal subject for sociological inquiry concerned with the politics of knowledge making among which the politics of classification are an important part (DiMaggio 1987; Edelman 1996). The idea of art as a transformative device for social change, evidenced in the 50s and 60s African American civil rights movements, the Chicano movement in the 60s, the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 60s and 90s, the American Indian movements (formally established in the late 60s), and the ACT UP campaign against AIDS (founded in the late 80s), has shifted the philosophical treatment of art as purely a matter of taste or aesthetics towards an interrogation of art as sociological and historical text and artists as social agents, workers, activists, and public intellectuals (Chandler and Neumark 2005; Jasper 2008). However, scholars who insist on addressing questions of aesthetic value argue that by disregarding the question of aesthetics, sociology of art falls into a reductionist and relativism trap (Wolff 1993, also see Zangwill 2002). They argue that even as sociological analysis attempts to render all art as a historically specific product of identifiable social relations and practices, sociology of art must continue to

grapple with how to theorize aesthetic value as aesthetics may not wholly be reducible to historical, political, or ideological components.

Overall, the sociology of art focuses on the circulation or non-circulation of objects and the networked structures, relationships, and processes that these objects develop and move through, either in the way art objects become socially imbued with meaning or how they enter systems of valuation and status-making (Bourdieu 1993; Ashenfelter and Graddy 2003; Velthuis 2013). While the field takes into serious consideration the social networks that shape meaning making and the material and intellectual mechanisms that characterize "art worlds", there is a growing cohort of art market researchers who are investigating the relationship between artistic production, social context, and the network of individuals and mechanisms engaging in the processes of producing, valuing, pricing, investing in, and auctioning artworks (Ye, Wang, Huang 2016; Zorloni 2016; Komarova and Velthuis 2017).

Art scholars also study the general topic of art production as a contestable arena in intercultural spaces (Marcus and Myers 1995; Samson 1995; Root 1996; Bennett 2005; Smith 2009). Between the 1990s and early 2000s and amidst studies of the continued impact of colonization, globalization, mass migration, and digital media on art movements and the art industry, there was a growing momentum to examine the shifting "narratives" that constitute the institutional collection, representation and theorization of visual art by Africans on the continent and abroad (Vogel et al. 1991; Oguibe et al. 1999; Enwezor 2001; Grinker et al. 2010; Berzock and Clarke 2011; Chikukwa 2011). One of the more recent debates in this field concerns the long-term implications of the term "Contemporary African art" when referring to works by artists from the continent of Africa and the dominance of Western capital in the development and

analysis of this genre (Enwezor 2010; Baskett 2016). Within the literature that traces the development of the Contemporary African art genre, the role of the art historian often overlaps with that of the curator and art critic as many of the leading historians and researchers of Contemporary African art are also practicing curators participating in regional and international art exhibitions and art fairs on the African continent and abroad. These art historian-curators are some of the key gatekeepers in the process of bringing art and artists seen to belong to a Contemporary African art genre to a broader audience through their publications, the exhibitions they curate, as well as their collaborations and reviews of each others' work. Examples of these key or *primary* gatekeepers include the aforementioned Susan Vogel and Okwui Enwezor as well as others like Olu Oguibe, Simon Njami, Bisi Silva, Koyo Kouoh, Hannah O'Leary, and Kevin Dumouchelle, some of whom teach and have also founded art centers and critical art journals.

I use the term *primary gatekeepers* to emphasize the processes through which there are specific individuals who, through their expertise and access to resources, including the infrastructure of an institution, funding, and information platforms, are in a position to select and promote specific artists and artworks (and not others). The research specifically focuses on the gatekeeping processes in the art industry and discipline, and explores the ways in which artists might come to insert themselves in these processes. By gatekeeping, I am referring to the filtering processes that control access to information, objects, spaces, and people (Lewin 1947). The research develops with the understanding that while some art scholars may focus on the role of gatekeepers themselves rather than the artists *in* the gatekeeping process, gatekeeping involves group decision-making within specific and changeable social contexts. The uses of the concept

of gatekeeping in art scholarship vary, as some scholars may not explicitly refer to a curator in a museum as a gatekeeper per se. For example, art scholar, Jonathan Harris (2013) discusses 'gatekeeper' organizations as, "a power network whose 'nodes' – that is, its key pressure points – are controlled by a very limited number of key players in financial and institutional terms" (536). And in his analysis, art market researcher Derrick Chong (2009) refers to curators in museums as an example of a 'core operation' within the museum institution, but he also gives actors and musicians as some other examples of individuals who make up the core operation in their field. Art historians, curators, and theorists have therefore been crucial in the shaping of art scholarship, including the history of Contemporary African art as a genre within the visual arts discipline and as many curators and cultural entrepreneurs also receive training in art history there are notable clusters of intellectual gatekeepers that have also shaped which artists appear on lists and in exhibitions titled, "Contemporary African art". Some of these gatekeepers do make an effort to focus on specific topics (e.g. environmental justice, LGBTQ rights, urban poverty) or medium (e.g. painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, video-installation).

The artists working within the global art market, alongside these *primary gatekeepers* appear to enjoy a considerable level of recognition for their achievements in ways that are not often extended to African-born professionals excelling in business, science, and even academia. We see a similar pattern in sports and entertainment, where musicians, writers, and top-level performing athletes from African states are highly sought after by non-African based organizations and audiences. Within these "entertainment" industries is this subset of individuals who, in addition to their visual art production, also participate in lectures, conferences, contribute to publications about their work, and initiate social projects with explicit political, economic, and

cultural agendas (Kasfir 1999; Mosely 2007; Williamson 2010). I refer to this capacity for the artist to participate in the knowledge production around their work as "extra-studio production", a process through which artists insert themselves in the spaces where *primary gatekeepers* work. Despite the growing literature on African art and contemporary visual art by Africans, however, few scholars place extra-studio production of the artists at the center of their analysis (Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009), opting instead to focus on the collection, classification, and circulation of art objects, the process of production, the building of art exhibitions and the mapping of historical and contemporary, institutional and intellectual trappings that are born out of said processes (Mudimbe 1999; Oguibe 1999; Bhabha 2012). This is unfortunate because contemporary artists' extra-studio production is an important example of how artists participate in the production of knowledge around their work. Artists are strategic agents, active influencers and social advocates through their art practice and the communities they are able to work in; many are not only producers of art objects, interested mainly in self-referential discussions about their creative process and production.

Case studies offer the opportunity to analyze context-specific factors that shape artistic production. They also offer a granular analysis of the effects that historical periods such as the colonial era, African independence, civil wars, and post-1980 migration within the African continent and of Africans moving abroad may have had on the way artists think about and frame their work. For example, these studies provide detailed accounts of artists in Ghana (Svašek 1997), Nigeria (Oguibe 1999; Freeborn 2005; Okeke-Agulu 2015), South Africa (Koloane 1993) and Senegal (Harney 2004), while others also provide accounts of artists from different African countries working abroad (See Kasfir 1999:190-213; Enwezor 2001), and in specific countries

like Britain (Mercer 1999; Bailey et al. 2005) and Germany (Mutumba 2012). Historians and art scholars who take interest in tracing the development of Contemporary African art (even as they themselves help to shape it) also discuss the role curators play as *primary gatekeepers* who decide which artists and artworks are selected for Contemporary African art exhibitions, art biennales, and art fairs that receive local, regional, and international audiences on the African continent and abroad (Ogbechie 1997; Silva 2000; Okeke-Agulu 2007; Chikukwa 2011).

Examples of these biennales and fairs include, documenta established 1955 in Kassel, Germany, the Cairo Biennale established 1984 in Cairo, Egypt, Dak'Art established 1992 in Dakar, Senegal; Bamako Encounters established 1994 in Bamako, Mali); and the more recently conceived 1:54 art fair established 2013 in London, UK adding new locations, on in New York City, USA in 2015 and one in Marrakech, Morocco in 2017. There are also national and regional art fairs like GRID Cape Town Biennale established in Cape Town, South African in 2015, Something Else: Off Biennale Cairo in Egypt, which also launched in 2015 followed by another fair, the Cairo Art Fair II which opened its doors in 2016. Others disappeared shortly after they were started, like the Johannesburg Biennale, which after its debut in 1995, a year after South Africa's first democratic elections, struggled to maintain momentum following its second iteration in 1997.

To date, most of these biennales, art fairs, and the galleries representing the artists interviewed here include educational programming with lectures, panel discussions as well as Q&A sessions that involve curators, critics, artists, art historians, editors, entrepreneurs, and interested members of the audience. It is in these spaces that we see the collaborative potential in bringing together individuals and institutions, often from different parts of the world and with

different roles and expertise within the larger creative production (art industries, art worlds, and art disciplines) under one roof.

With this backdrop, I ask one general question and two specific questions:

Research Questions

1. How do contemporary artists born on the African continent employ the concept of "Africanness" in a highly globalized contemporary art market? I discuss this in Chapter 5, where I expand on the concept of "Africanness" as a trading chip and identify three frameworks (*pragmatic, substantive, and tangential*) artists use when discussing their work in relation to "Africanness". In Chapter 6 I discuss the ways in which funding and access to resources can shape how and when artists employ the pragmatic, substantive, tangential frames. The data show that although there are those who reject the relevance of "Africanness" in their work (*trade in* the Africanness chip), they may still pursue opportunities for access funding, exhibition spaces, and art lectures through the Contemporary African art genre. The data also show that artists who would like their work to gain relevance in other genres and industries are hard pressed to find ways to re-frame the relationship between their work and "Africanness" unless they gained financial independence and/or prominence before the recent boom in the Contemporary African art genre.
2. Do contemporary artists who leverage "Africanness", not by distancing themselves from it but by demanding specificity, do so in identifiable ways? In an effort to investigate the cases where artists manage the framing of their work in relation to 'Africanness', I focus on artists who explicitly talk about their commitment to a particular social or political agenda in their community. In Chapter 7 I identify three approaches to how artists position themselves

within this "Africanness" mosaic while at the same time demanding specificity by emphasizing a political and collective mobilization agenda within their creative process. The three approaches include, (1) using art to mobilize around a specific social justice issue, (2) using art as a political tool and to highlight how the art world reproduces inequality, and (3) literally becoming advocates of the art itself – pooling resources and turning art literacy into a profitable business.

3. How do artists become *secondary arbiters* working alongside *primary gatekeepers* in the gatekeeping process? Chapter 8 considers the role of artists who also work as curators, professors and publish on art in scholarly journals and art magazines as secondary arbiters. The data in this chapter show that artists especially work as *secondary arbiters* when they are unable to find *primary gatekeepers* to work with, when there is a principal-agent problem[6] and when the artists think of their extra-studio production (the work they do in addition to making art objects) as an extension of their studio production. Some of these artists make a move to not only master their art history knowledge (most gain this through completing a Masters of Fine Arts and other art programs), and learn to curate art exhibitions and publish in journal articles and on art platforms. These artists are either called on or feel compelled to use the tools and practices that primary gatekeepers use, and where they have the opportunity

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[6] The principal-agent problem is a concept in economics and political science that describes a situation where one entity (the agent) is in a position to act on behalf of another entity (the principal). The problem in this arrangement arises when the agent makes decisions that benefit his own self-interest but does not benefit or is explicitly detrimental to what is in the principal's best interest. This is also a useful concept for theorizing about misaligned goals and incentives in collaborative projects or endeavors. (For a study on how economists use principal-agent model to theorize about incentives see Laffont, Jean-Jacques, and David Martimort. 2009. *The Theory of Incentives: The Principal-Agent Model*. NJ: Princeton University Press.)

to, artists employ this expertise and these mechanisms to participate in gatekeeping processes.

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This study examines the impact of Contemporary African artists on knowledge production as cultural producers with increased opportunities and access to resources and platforms for exposure and contribution through four channels: *travel*, *teaching*, *funding*, and *curatorial practice*. First, as more artists *travel* with their work to art fairs and exhibitions, give art lectures, and participate in art residency programs, their ideas about what they are doing can be compared with official artist profiles and written documents such as temporary exhibition catalogues. Second, there is an increase in the number of artists going through Fine Arts training (both on the African continent and abroad), some of whom then go onto *teaching* and training a new generation of artists in how to engage in curatorial and art theory building practices. Third, *funding* supports the work artists do and while artists have their own initiatives, they also procure financial support from various sources, including private investors, financial and cultural institutions, and governments and these external sources of support often have their own mission driving their investment. And finally, *curatorial practice* here strictly refers to the building of art exhibitions. Artists broadly participate in the interpretation and promotion of their work through interviews with writers on digital magazines, some of the artists have official websites and they also engage in virtual collaborations with other artists and art audiences as well as initiating and running non-profit and for-profit art and social justice organizations.

The approach in this study is to identify how the spatial and social contexts in which artists work, influence the ways in which they respond to "Africanness" in their work.

Africanness refers to an "essence" that something or someone is of or related to a space or culture on the African continent, often associated with race (black), region (South of the Sahara), or citizenship to an African state. I this study I describe "Contemporary African art" as a boundary object (Star and Griesemer 1989) – a framing tool that different groups may have access to or collaborate around, without consensus in terms of the ways in which it is significant or the way it should be used. This serves to show that even when artists disagree or resist the connection between their work and some amassed notion of "Africa", it is this very ambiguity or non-specificity of what is "African" about Contemporary African art that provides the basis for an organizing principle.

Contemporary African art does less to provide context for the artwork and artists of various citizenship (not necessarily of an African state or based on heritage, race, or generation) and rather acts as an organizing principle, which allows individuals with different interests, concerns, backgrounds, and goals, who find themselves working together, to use "Africa" as an entry point and adhesive for their association. Once an "Africa" association is established, the association, which participants and collaborators might describe as strong, weak, appropriate, or inappropriate, provides the basis for exhibitions, collectives, and programming. Moments of conflict between art practitioners and other art patrons rarely manifest as open confrontation, in part because the planning leading up to programing often takes months or even years of negotiations and this in turn is more likely to reinforce an investment among those involved in seeing that the programing runs smoothly. Additionally, the individuals and institutions that are interacting within the Contemporary African art genre often have something at stake in their

collaboration, however differently understood, and so they are on some level invested in seeing the exhibition and discussion programs they participate in come to fruition.

An Extended Case Study: New York City and Berlin

This research study grew out of the extended case study design in which New York City and Berlin were the localized starting points for artist recruitment. However, over the three years of data collection the research opened up to include artists based on other cities in the U.S., Germany, and in other countries including Botswana, Egypt, England, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa. Taking New York City (U.S.A) and Berlin (Germany) as the starting points for an extended case study, I investigate how professional base influences the way artists position themselves to "Africanness". For example, an artist in New York City is professionally based in a global art city in a country with an established "raced" and racial politics and a long history of racism (from the displacement and decimation of Native Americans since the 16th and 17th Centuries, the Atlantic slave trade since the 15th Century, to the globally aired and present day racist, xenophobic, and anti-Muslim tensions and violence). Whereas an artist in Berlin is professionally located in a global art city in a country with a more muted legacy of racism and a more historically visible legacy of anti-Semitism and fascism (usually related back to World War II, Hitler's Nazi Germany and the Jewish Holocaust) and far less publicly discussed history of racism (between the 1700s and 1800s Germans brought Africans from the western coast of Africa as slaves, some of these enslaved Africans included children who were sent to Potsdam and Berlin[7]. During the colonial era between the late 1800s to early 1900s on the African

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[7] See Prem Poddar, Rajeev Patke, and Lars Jensen. 2008. *Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures--Continental Europe and Its Colonies,* Edinburgh University Press.

continent, the German settlers carried out the 1904-1907 Herero and Nama Genocide in German South-West African, present day Namibia).

These legacies make a difference in the kinds of national ideologies of belonging in each place as well as the kinds of intellectual spaces an artist might be expected to participate and talk about their work, perhaps facing questions about origins and therefore finding that they are confronted with the insistence that they or their work are first and foremost, attached to an "African" narrative or place. In locating art centers in two so-called "Western" countries, particularly in the Euro-American "West", while also including others in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Botswana, France, and the U.K., I investigate whether the artists' professional base, rather than their place of birth (or African origins), is a significant factor in how artists come to frame their work, specifically in relation to "Africanness".

In doing so, I also consider the different types of art spaces available for an artist to participate in within a city like New York City (U.S.A.), for example, or a city like Berlin (Germany), and note historical and infrastructural differences and similarities in each city's contemporary art scene, the commercial and non-commercial exhibition spaces, and the cultural and art institutes that offer lecturing, residency, and funding opportunities for artists. I do so while still remaining cognizant that there are also art centers on the African continent, such as Lagos (Nigeria), Dakar (Senegal), Cairo (Egypt), and Johannesburg (South Africa), with active networks of artists and cultural producers working to create and sustain spaces for these artists and art scholars to do their work.

The West vs. African contexts are usually set apart in terms of the skewed availability of resources (most of the infrastructure and funding for the arts and cultural production is in or

comes from the Western countries, including U.S.A., Canada, England, the Netherlands, Sweden etc.), whereas artists and cultural producers working in African countries have access to fewer spaces and funding originating in their local or regional base. What receives less attention, however, is how access to and in Western art spaces (or even "African" art spaces based *in* Western countries) presents challenges that are similar across cases but also different in some potentially significant ways, especially when thinking about how *primary gatekeepers* and art audiences see these practitioners from African countries as *apart from* or *a part of* the professional bases in which they live and work.

Keeping in mind an overview of historical background of the artists' professional base, which I expand on in Chapter 2, I consider the ways in which artists' experiences living and working in a specific professional-base inform how artists position their work in relation to "Africanness". Although the focus remains on how artists position their work in relation to "Africanness", the research also pays close attention to the way artists talk about their experiences of their interactions with gatekeepers and art audiences in different contexts.

In order to examine how the artists' professional base informs the ways artists engage with "Africanness" as *secondary arbiters* in the gatekeeping process, this study draws on the cultural diamond (Griswold [2008]/2012). The basic premise of the cultural diamond is that an object becomes a cultural object when it enters a circuit of human discourse and that these cultural objects and their significance exist in relation to their producers, consumers and the social world in which they circulate and interact. What I mean by a *secondary arbiter* is a cultural producer who mediates understandings of their work by participates in the gatekeeping

process once the *primary gatekeepers* (i.e. curators, auctioneers, editors, gallerists, art historians) have selected the cultural objects that will reach a given audience.

Although the cultural diamond does not highlight the gatekeepers' role, it is a useful conceptual tool that stills the moving parts of a "cultural production" and offers a systemic way of discerning how objects might come to be understood as "cultural". Griswold (2008) identifies four major parts of the cultural diamond (the creator (producer), the receiver, the cultural object and a given social world). I use the cultural diamond to show what might be learned from using gatekeeping theory to examine how a group of producers (artists) who are sometimes represented as cultural objects (Contemporary African artists) representing a collective (e.g. an entire nation or culture) through their work, also work as self-advocates and mediators working in contested circuits of social discourse.

Expanding on the cultural diamond, I suggest that it is an analytical tool that offers us a useful framework for mapping out the elementary parts of cultural production within a given social system, but as most analytical tools do, it also flattens out the role of agents who occupy several nodes of the diamond. For instance, the artist as a producer of cultural objects (making art objects) is simultaneously a receiver (participating in the consumption of said objects) and in the case of producers working in the Contemporary African art genre, several are also objectified subjects (unable to escape the objectification of Africanness as inextricably linked to and embodied in the creator and the cultural object, and quite literally circulated through traveling exhibitions and art talks along with their work). This is not merely a case of overlapping roles (e.g. artist working as a curator) or lack of agency (artists having no say in the process of gatekeeping). The visual artist embodies all three spaces (artist as producer, receiver, and cultural

object). This is of critical importance because understanding the role of artists as *secondary arbiters* puts a spotlight on the multivocal manifestations of cultural production, the extra-studio production and practices that artists engage in and the complex issues of power and access that are revealed through but are oft-times concealed in the interactions between artists and *primary gatekeepers* and the social structures (organizations, institutions, and networks) in which they work.

Instead of assuming that all the artists who appear on Contemporary African artist lists personally identify as "African" or associate their work with "Africa" or "Africanness", I compare the ways artists respond to the question of Africanness in their work (during art talks, in printed material, and in interviews). Understanding that art and cultural institutions assemble and invite artists to give lectures and presentations about their work, artists themselves become part of the circulation of art objects and producing knowledge about it. The study therefore locates artists as both *cultural producers*, engaging in strategic self-positioning in relation to Africanness and *cultural objects*, selected (collected) and assembled by critics, curators, collectors, dealers, and art historians along with the art objects the artists produce. While this is true of all artists, it becomes acutely problematic when a group is reduced to and confined in a single frame of "Africanness". In turn, this research makes the case that living contemporary artists are uniquely positioned arbiters in the production and circulation of knowledge about their work, whether unquestionably or tenuously housed under the "Contemporary African art" genre.

Contribution

This dissertation contributes to two strands of scholarly and policy-oriented social science research. First, the study speaks to cultural sociology and expands on the social role of the

producer of cultural objects, in this case the visual artist, as a participant in both revisionist gatekeeping processes and cultural entrepreneurship. In carefully monitored social systems, researchers in various fields including media studies, education, science, and health, understand gatekeepers as individuals or mechanisms that perform a filtrating or mediatory role that determines which objects and information reach any given audience (Shoemaker and Reese 2013) or determine which people gain access to a specific space, profession, or resource (Oliver and Kettley 2010; De Brún et al. 2013).

Borrowing from the concept of gatekeepers in the cultural industrial framework, I study how contemporary artists working under the rubric of "Contemporary African art" contribute to the gatekeeping process as *secondary arbiters* once the art they make leaves their literal or metaphorical (for those who also do public art) studios. A focus on not only the circulation of art objects (defined as "African" and "contemporary") exchanging hands and institutions, but the circulation of art makers themselves, points to the producers' potential for accumulating and re-distributing influence in the places they live, exhibit, and work in the short-term and especially in the long-term. By examining the artists' role in both interpreting and demonstrating the supposed usefulness (or the lack thereof) of locating them and their work in an "African" and "contemporary" art genre, this study aims to show how artists develop entry points and strategies to increase their sphere of influence in the work that *primary gatekeepers* (curators, art historians, art critics, auctioneers, art dealers, gallerists, and other cultural entrepreneurs and the institutions and organizations they work in) are doing.

Secondly, social scientists concerned with the art world focus on the production, consumption, and circulation of art objects but sometimes they also discuss the role of living

artists in influencing the canonization of art genres through the networks they work in (Becker 1976; Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1993). Cultural theorists and art historians offer an even more critical overview of how art movements and artistic endeavors develop alongside historical moments like political revolutions, war, economic depression, national independence, mass migration, and the compounding effects of globalization (Enwezor 2001; Gardner and Green 2016). At a time when social scientists, public intellectuals, economists, educators, and business investors refer to artists as art makers, creatives, and social commentators, I look at artists as social agents who are in a position to mediate understandings of contemporary art *and* its practical applications in informing collective understanding and mobilizing social action beyond the "art world".

By focusing on the differences between working in cities like Berlin and New York City, this project adds a cross-continental comparative lens to current debates about the place of "Africanness" and artists working under the rubric of "Contemporary African art" as cultural producers and social agents in a monolithic and hegemonic "West" in contrast to a seemingly always emerging monolithic "Africa". The assertion that temporary and spatial context matter in how individuals relate and interact with cultural symbols, especially in their professional lives, informs the choice to begin with two cities that are often referred to as cultural melting pots and have a large "African-born" population compared to other cities in each respective country, and have institutions that take different approaches to integrating and representing Contemporary African art in relation to other art genres, therefore leading to peculiar variations in how funding, education, and identity shape the Contemporary African art "scenes" in each professional base.

2. METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

The research design consists of three parts of data collection. First, this research is primarily based on 30 interviews with artists, 6 supplementary interviews with curators, and observations of art lectures and panel discussions in art fairs and gallery exhibitions with African-born contemporary artists. Half of the artists mainly live and work in Germany (most in Berlin) and U.S.A (most in New York City), and others are based in Algeria, Botswana, Britain, Canada, England, Ethiopia, France, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Interviewees include first and second generation artists who identify with some African state or region or specifically locate their work on the African continent (See Table 3 in Appendix 1). Table 3 shows simple statistics for the artists who participated in this study, including age, self-assigned gender, and self-positioning in relation to "Africanness" signaled by place of birth, nationality, or citizenship. The appendix deliberately excludes the curators as they acted as informants to gain insider perspectives from some primary gatekeepers and in some cases to give additional background knowledge for the interviews with the artists.

The list shows 30 artists in total, numbered 1 through 30, with their age at the time of the interview and whether or not they have an advanced degree. For the purposes of this study, self-assignment and self-positioning means that the identification of the artists' gender/nationality/primary citizenship and affiliation to a racial category are exclusively left up to the artist to decide. I indicate any instances where an interviewee, given the option, chose not to provide an answer with "abstained". Some artists who explicitly refused to answer the question on race, did explain that although they are aware that others assign a race category to the artist, it is the artist's personal decision not to ascribe to a race category.

In the art industry, the concept of a "global art center" covers a wide spectrum of cities including Basel, Miami, Paris, Los Angeles, and Montreal and more recently non-Euro-North-American cities like Hong Kong, Singapore, Dakar, São Paulo, Johannesburg, Tokyo, Istanbul, and Shanghai. For an extended case study that allows a maximal vantage point to observe potential differences in artists' self-positioning to "Africanness" based on the conditions within the city and country they are professionally based, I chose New York City for its legacy as an undisputed major global art hub in terms of commercial art and Berlin as a predominately experimental and collaborative contemporary art scene. I deliberately talk about the New York City hub and the Berlin scene to depict the way in which the two cities have structurally and organizationally different art spaces, including the place that Contemporary African art occupies in each city. As the word "hub" suggests, artists and gatekeepers working under the rubric of Contemporary African art in New York City have infrastructure, fixed (e.g. galleries, museums, art residency programs) and temporary spaces (art fairs) where they have opportunities to overlap and interact because these spaces have missions that are specifically committed to the promotion of Contemporary African art and artists. And in Berlin, although a vibrant art city with hundreds of galleries, museums, and other cultural organizations, the spaces where artists working in the Contemporary African art genre are housed in spaces that have more of a cultural exchange and diplomacy approach, where the point is to educate a German audience about a foreign group rather than to present a group that is understood as part of Germany and the German art industry.

How I carried out the research design

The interviews lasted an average of two hours and took place in a local art gallery space, library, or the artists' studio as well as via Skype. Interviewees were recruited through online searches of artist websites and artist profiles on gallery and museum artist lists and catalogues. I specifically chose interviews to have an opportunity to ask artists about aspects of their development that are not documented in their public artist profiles, art work themes, or public press releases and interviews (Weiss 1995). Interviews with curators are supplementary to provide context for the interactions between artists and *primary gatekeepers* and the institutions and organizations in which artists and gatekeepers work.

In the second phase, the study incorporates archival data from artists' press releases and online professional artist profiles to identify instances when the words "Africa" or "African" are used and in what context they are used. This content analysis section supplements the primary interview data and also gives an overview of how an artist's self-positioning to "Africa" may have evolved over their career. Content analysis is useful here as a method to examine the way artists talk about their work on the multiple kinds of platforms that artists use and interact with other art practitioners, *primary gatekeepers* and their audiences (Kohlbacher 2006).

In the third and final stage, I analyze the interviews with the artists alongside interviews with 6 curators who have worked under the rubric of Contemporary African art in the U.S. and Germany. In this phase I also use secondary interviews in print and online Contemporary African art magazines, personal websites, and other online platforms as background data. A few artists have academic publications and monographs available in print and online, which I use as additional data on each artist to trace their self-positioning towards the concept of "Africanness"

or the link between their work and “Africa” or their “African” background. I consider research and art review publications written by artists as one of three concrete examples of how artists insert themselves in the gatekeeping process. The other two include artists’ curatorial practice and advocacy work, including their contributions as professors teaching and training the next generation of art practitioners and theorists.

Why Contemporary African artists?

Based on the theory of differentiation and the outlined ideation of “African” and “contemporary” art and artists, I expected to find that professional base rather than a generalized affinity to race, regionality of citizenship shapes how artists position their work in relation to “Africanness”. I also expected to find that artists who distance themselves from “Africanness” focus on artistic form as something separate from their individualized body, their identity, and their biography and that this move allows them to maintain focus on aspects of their work that do not foreground “Africanness”. Identity here refers to any number of traits that can be thought of as markers that locate specific bodies as naturally belonging to particular physical (geographic landmass) or intellectual (ideological or expertise) spaces. Since Africanness seems to evoke race, geographic region (Africa South of the Sahara), and citizenship (by birthright or naturalization), biography is an essential aspect of identifying with or associating someone with Africanness. However, this also raises great within-group variation among the people who embrace and eschew Africanness in their work because not all of these practitioners couch their work in the Contemporary African art genre. Even as the second group self-distances, I anticipated that most of these artists would continue to participate in Contemporary African artist workshops, panels, exhibitions, and digital art magazines creating visible tensions in face-to-face interactions and on virtual discussion

boards.

I use this data to build a theory of the visual artist a *secondary arbiter* in cultural production, one in which the artist operates as a mediator in the gatekeeping process within a larger network of sponsors, producers, and *primary gatekeepers* in the circulation of art objects and knowledge produced about the artists' work. I also show how this filtration process involves Africans who are actively engaged in re-framing the genre of Contemporary African art and claiming their stake in it while some attempt to opt out of discussing their work as part of the genre in an effort to gain recognition that does not foreground their "Africanness" or an "African" narrative informing their work.

3. LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND

Abstract

Drawing from the sociology of art, this chapter traces the development of the Contemporary African art genre as a collective production involving networks of differently positioned individuals and institutions operating within different spatial and temporal contexts, geographic and pedagogical spaces, each network with its own histories. I discuss the definitional understandings of "Africa" as an interaction of three factors, race (black), region (South of the Sahara) and citizenship (to an African state), in tandem with the ways in which the Contemporary African art genre developed following the independence of African states from European colonial rule. Citing the work of art historians who focus on the position of art made by Africans, I consider the concept of "Africanness" as an essence in something, someone or some place that is associated with Africa. I suggest that the history of the professional base in which artists work matter for the ways in which an artist positions themselves in relation to "Africanness", especially when considering the difference between, say an artist working in a city like New York City (U.S.) with black and African diaspora art spaces (physical and financial infrastructure) where a black African artist could potentially become *part of* the art world versus a black African artist working in Berlin (Germany) with no spaces primarily dedicated to black African diaspora artists, where black artists from African states likely remain *set apart from* the general Berlin scene. In the effort to understand how artists locate and position themselves and their work, there is a benefit in acknowledging the within group similarities and differences in the history of the places in which these artists are based. I expand further on this in the background section where I offer a brief outline of the historical legacies of the U.S. in relation

to non-white people, especially black people of African descent compared to Germany's history with people of African descent. I ask how the professional experiences of an artist based in the U.S., where there is a prominent racialized politics might differ from those of an artist based in Germany, a country with a national politics that rarely references its ruthless past as a colonizer on the African continent.

Keywords: Contemporary African art, professional base, historical legacy

Sociology of Art

Since the 70s and 80s, sociologists of art have been developing ways of understanding artistic production as a political and contested arena where art making is a social project and a reflection of social status and stratification expressed in both local, regional, and global market trends (Bourdieu 1968; Becker 1982; Zolberg 1990; Bryson 1996). The sociology of knowledge, concerned with the study of ideas, ideologies, and the politics of knowledge making, and how these constitute and are constituted by a network of mechanisms and individuals interacting in society continues to shape our understanding of artistic production as a result of specific social forces and structures that appear in other phenomena that sociologists concern themselves with. However, not as much work has been done on how artists (or the producers of art objects) contribute to the discourse and knowledge making about art beyond the art studio and the production of art objects. The gap may be the result of the tendency for sociology to prioritize theory building over detailed analysis, for example, in the introduction of *The Traffic in Culture: Figuring Art and Anthropology* (1995), anthropologists George Marcus and Fred Myers accuse sociologists of over theorizing at the expense of descriptive analyses of the interactions "between

the critical ethnographer and the art critics" (2). Marcus and Myers point out that even with his very personal knowledge of the art worlds he was studying, Howard Becker generates generalized and neutral theory in his classic study, *Art Worlds* (1982), and "the potential of the work to be an engaged form of cultural criticism […] is suppressed by a greater concern with constructing general social theory" (Marcus and Myers 1995: 2).

Cultural theorists and art historians study the role of collectors, dealers, curators, and other art scholars, many working within established institutions, including museums, galleries, auction houses, universities, and cultural foundations. Art historians often pay very careful attention to say, the oeuvre of a single artist, a selection of artists, or the development of a specific genre (Enwezor 2001; Njami and Durán 2007; Berzock and Clarke 2011). Other scholars who study the development of Contemporary African art also examine the quest for authenticity in "African art" (Kasfir 1992) and the role of independent curators and private art collectors like French curator André Magnin, who specializes in art from 'non-Western' cultures and Italian businessman Jean Pigozzi, whose private collection, The Contemporary African Art Collection (CAAC) that he created in 1990 now boasts artworks in the several thousands, some of which featured in the controversial *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition in 1989, which some scholars credit as a key turning point that pushed African practitioners to become more active in the collection, curation, and theorization of art by Africans (Figueroa 1995; Adesokan 2001).

Sociologists who've made art or art worlds the focus of their study concern themselves more with the artist and art within a larger network of institutions and the meaning making and decision making processes that constitute what we come to know as an "art world", "art market", or "art industry". Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (1982) analysis of art production as a

collaborative effort that involves division of labor offers a remedy understandings of art that prioritize certain kinds of art or artists to develop art theories imbued with value judgments and arguments of hierarchical taste. While confirming much of Becker's sociological analysis of the production of art as a social and collective process that involves a network of art dealers, suppliers, performers, critics, consumers, and artists, I focus on the role of living artists as social agents through their active participation in processes of interpretation, community organizing, curation, teaching, and publishing, in addition to their creation of art objects. Without suggesting that the case of contemporary visual artists working under the rubric of "Contemporary African art" is necessarily different to other art group genres (e.g. Australian contemporary art or Chinese contemporary art), I use the case of contemporary artists working in Contemporary African art as an example of how variability in social location, professional context, and access to platforms engenders contested and strategically formulated working frames within creative genres. The artists in this study are therefore an identifiable example of a phenomenon that arises in other industries.

In *The Rules of Art* (1996), Bourdieu suggests that in cultural production the practices of the cultural producer, "starting with their work, are the product of the meeting of two histories, the history of the production of the position occupied and the history of the production of the dispositions of its occupants" (256). Here he places emphasis on the latter, the occupants, as autonomous and therefore having the capacity to help *make* positions even as they do so within an array of institutional and societal constraints. As the position has the potential to influence disposition, when we think of cultural producers as arbitrating agents we come to appreciate that the disposition of said agents can help mediate their position. And perhaps it is necessary to

expand this meeting of two histories to a relational meeting of multiple other histories, including those of the physical and intellectual spaces within which these cultural producers work.

Over the past two decades, there has been an increase in the political and academic commitment to addressing questions of representation, sociability, and the interactive connections among artists, art objects, art scholars, art dealers, and art consumers. While some studies focus on the role of museums and galleries as holding the capacity to educate art audiences, what some refer to as visual literacy, others address the place of these art institutions within the community they exist in, for instance looking at how the art industry, whether local, regional, or international, shapes and is shaped by not only the individuals participating in its production, curation, and circulation or the system of funding and exhibiting institutions, but also by the specific neighborhood, city, village, country, and global politics and niche markets within which these art objects, artists, gatekeepers, and consumers interact.

In this research I examine the role of the artists in the gatekeeping processes through which their work filters as it reaches different audiences. As artists' platforms to showcase and discuss their work are increasing in number and renown, opportunities for solo exhibitions to break into non-specifically African art fairs and galleries are highly sought-after but are reportedly limited. This competition for access and resources is partly true for all contemporary artists. For example, an exhibition about the women's suffrage movement may not be very crowded or competitive to participate in, simply because there aren't a lot of artists whose work specifically deals with the women's suffrage movement. Whereas an exhibition that does not discriminate by issue/theme/time period (or any other specified sub-category) but instead focuses

on artistic technique such as photography, drawing, or painting may pull in a larger crowd and in turn produce steeper competition for artists who wish to participate.

A focus on artists working under the Contemporary African art genre is therefore not to carve out a theory of artistic production as a general network of people and things interacting in cultural production or a study in aesthetic value, but rather is meant to focus more on the within group variation in the continued efforts by artists to participate in the knowledge making that usually occurs within the gatekeeping process; And specifically, it is an effort to draw points of contestation, integration, and consensus to the foreground, when making sense of the provisions and limitations of working within the Contemporary African art genre.

Africa, Africanness, and Contemporary African Art

Africa, as an amassed object of study has been taken up in several fields including history, economics, geography, archeology, anthropology, political science, race theory, global development, global health, and international policy and law (Thornton 1998; Young 2005; Carmody and Owusu 2007). While most historical studies on and about people and spaces on the African continent center colonialism and failing governance as significant factors in explaining historical and current social, political and economic life, few scholars explicitly reference race as a social fact or primary factor when discussing social, economic, and political phenomena on the continent. Except, perhaps, in countries like South Africa where a white minority made race a governing principle, by law, therefore etching a legacy of racism into the historical understanding of citizenship in the country.

Whether one chooses to engage with this legacy or not, the question of race is arguably relevant yet appears less prevalent in research based in countries like Botswana (See Makgala

2004; Gressier 2008) or Namibia (Melber 1985; Zimmerer 2005) where white Europeans settled albeit with varying degrees of permanence and violently enforced racism. In these countries where race does not appear as an explicitly dominant factor in discussions about national identity, individuals and organizations alike rarely use race, in both the social and physiological sense, as a signifier or independent variable to build their portfolios, mission statements, shape policy, and develop programming. More common are discussions and debates about language group tensions shaping political and economic opportunity as well as the impact of ethnic differences and regional xenophobia (Campbell and Crush 2015).

However, in the case of the U.S., race has been a dominant feature since the independence of the nation in 1776 and race has shaped and continues to shape law, access to housing, education, employment, as well as private/public social and civic programs. With regards to racial prejudice in the United States of America, for instance, Baraka (1980) states that, "[t]he material base of racism, what allows it to exist as other than a 'bad idea,' is monopoly capitalism. Its material base before the Civil War was the slave system and developing capitalism." This suggests that while grouping people according to race is broadly accepted in the U.S., the very notion of race, although not based in biological fact, is a powerful social fact that gained currency precisely because it offered a convenient way for the early European settlers to organize the economic (and political) system. Even as acts of racial discrimination appear less overt in the 21st Century, arguably, most social scientists studying race insist that racial prejudice persists and despite law and policy interventions, racial prejudice shows only incremental signs of decline in the social organization of both economically developed and developing counties alike (Massey 1993; Richmond 1994; Alexander 2012).

Race theorists also argue that there is in fact a race hierarchy in which different groups find themselves competing with each other, economically, politically, and socially, while moving along a continuum from "black and brown" at the bottom to "white" at the top (Blumer 1958; Bonacich 1972; Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Trietler 2013). In the debates about whether race is in fact significant for determining the life-chances of individuals it appears that those for and against the significance of race argue past each other primarily because they attempt to isolate race from other factors that interact with race such as ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, religion, and geography (Essed 1991; Freeman 1998; Kahn 2006). A fairly well known example of this is William Willson's attempts to foreground class, rather than race, as a more significant factor in determining the life chances of African Americans. Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race* (2012), first published in 1980, hit a nerve for those who looked around and saw discriminatory policies based on race and racial prejudice that harkened back to the Jim Crow era. In doing so, Wilson was downplaying the role of race as a present day organizing principle used to determine "deservingness" and resource distribution among American citizens.

The study of race as a social fact may risk conflating the myriad effects of other factors (such as class, gender, religion, and citizenship), when studies of race and racialized structures fail to take these other factors into account, and therefore rendering academic research on race effective in maintaining the awareness of continued inequalities and yet limited in its ability to combat racial prejudice or to contributing to effective anti-racist policy and social action (where these are the intended goals of such research). Whether or not one thinks race, as an organizing principle, makes sense, is unjust, or unethical, race scholars maintain that race matters in social organization and assessing access to opportunities and the distribution of resources and

citizenship rights. So it is imperative to understand in what ways individuals, groups, and institutions orient themselves and their goals in relation to race. And given that race and racialized stereotypes may impact attitudes, behaviors, and performance (Massey and Fischer 2005, Steele 2011), it may also not be surprising that some people, if given a chance, show signs of opting-out of what they experience as a disadvantaged or disadvantaging "raced" category. However, "opting" out is an approach that carries different social sanctions and benefits depending on the individuals acting on it as well as the context in which they attempt to do so.

Despite the diversity of language, ethnic, racialized, and religious groups occupying the continent, the notion of "Africanness", based on the understanding of "Africa" to geopolitically refer to "Africa South of the Sahara", is often connected to race. And in terms of artists as citizens of particular countries, based in one or more professional bases, it is unclear how and when contemporary artists call on or emphasize this idea of Africanness in their work, especially when they reject race as central to their work, when they are not "black" and when they would rather draw focus to other aspects of their work. It is even more unclear whether there is a systematic way to identify the conditions under which artists with different biographies who in some way share this single category of "African" and "contemporary", position themselves to Africanness.

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In art history, race, generally, and blackness, in particular, occupies a historically marginal but highly contentious position within sub-fields or area studies like African-American art history, Diaspora studies and accounts of the Black Arts Movement from the mid 60s to the mid 70s (Mercer 1999; Copeland 2013). However, the growing literature on Contemporary

African art offers surveys that trace the development of the Contemporary African art genre alongside global historical events affecting African states and the citizens of these young African states following the waves of national independence starting in the 1950s, mass migration in the 1980s and 1990s, and the exponential rise of globalization and digital media in the 2000s (Enwezor 2001; Oguibe 2004; Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, 2009). Though theories and uses of the term globalization are numerous and therefore there is no consensus on what the precise consequences of globalization are, for the purposes of this project I adopt Arjun Appadurai's conception of globalization as, "a deeply historical, uneven and even *localizing* process" (Appadurai 1996:17). So the impact of globalization on cultural production is understood here as he suggests; as a localized hybridity rather than a homogenization or Americanization of culture, thereby acknowledging and indeed in some cases prioritizing multiple centers rather than locating some regions or people at the periphery of innovative thought or creativity, while at the same time recognizing historically unequal pressures of influence.

The Contemporary African art genre has flourished over the past two decades through the concerted effort of curators and artists on the continent and abroad, including Bisi Silva[8] in Lagos (Nigeria), Bonaventure Ndikung[9] in Berlin (Germany), Chika Okeke-Agulu[10] in New

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[8] Bisi Silva is founder and artistic director of CCA (Center for Contemporary Art in Lagos), founded in 2007. Note: Five of the interviewees in this project have exhibited at CCA or led lectures/training at the ASIKO school, which is the traveling Pan-African art school that Bisi Silva initiated in 2012. These artists include, Zanele Muholi, Sokari Douglas Camp, Akinbobe Akinbiyi, Nnena Okore, and ruby amanze. Also see Silva, Bisi. 2010. "The Politics of Re/Presenting: Within and Without." In *A Fateful Journey: Africa in the Works of El Anatsui* (exhibition catalogue), translated by Marie Yasunaga, Yukiya Kawaguchi et al., eds, 198-205. The Yomiuri Shimbun/The Japan Association of Art Museums.

[9] Bonaventure Ndikung is an independent curator and founder/art director of SAVVY contemporary, a laboratory/workshop art space that expands the Euro-North-American centered

Jersey (U.S.A), Gabi Ngcobo[11] in Cape Town and Johannesburg (South Africa), Issa Samb[12] in Dakar (Senegal), Karen Milbourne[13] in Washington D.C. (U.S.A), Koyo Kouoh[14] in Dakar (Senegal), Okwui Enwezor in Munich (Germany), Olu Oguibe[15] in New York (U.S.A), Salimata Diop[16] in Dakar (Senegal), Simon Njami[17] in Paris (France), Trevor Schoonmaker[18] in North

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internationalism in Berlin's art scene. SAVVY also produces an art publication. See Siegenthaler, Fiona. 2011. "Afropolis–Stadt, Medien, Kunst. Kairo, Lagos, Nairobi, Kinshasa, Johannesburg." *Savvy: Art, Contemporary, African* 1: 162-167.

[10] Okeke-Agulu, Chika. 2007. "Venice and Contemporary African Art." *African Arts* 40(3): 1-5. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press and Okeke-Agulu, Chika. 2010. "Nka Roundtable II: Contemporary African Art History and the Scholarship." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 26(1): 80-151.

[11] Gabi Ngcobo is an artist and independent curator based in Johannesburg, curated the 2010 Berlin Biennale and co-curated the 32nd São Paulo Biennale. See published panel discussion with Gabi Ngcobo, moderated by Steven Lam. Lam, Steven, et al. "Art, ecology and institutions: A conversation with artists and curators." *Third Text* 27.1 (2013): 141-150.

[12] Issa Samb is an artist and one of the founding members of Laboratoire Agit'Art an art collective founded in Dakar, Senegal by writer and fellow performer, Youssouf John in 1973. The collective critiqued institutional status quo and Senghor's and Cesaire's philosophy of Negritude, which promoted the use of French to critique French colonialism and called for a global unification of black Africans.

[13] Karen Milbourne is a curator at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., U.S.A. where she has developed several programs including the "Artists in Dialogue" series to bring artists working across borders, artistic material and style to collaborate and be in conversation with each other about their work. Also see Milbourne, Karen E. 2013. "Earth Matters: Land as Material and Metaphor in the Arts of Africa." *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* 2013(33): 100-111.

[14] Koyo Kouoh is an independent curator and educator. She founded and is artistic director of RAW Material, an art center in Dakar as well as the curator of the 1:54 art fair education program.

[15] Olu Oguibe is an artist, writer, art critic, and curator and he is a Professor of Art and African American Studies at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, having also taught at Goldsmiths College and in the School of African and Oriental Studies in London. He has published several books and articles, including *The Culture Game* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[16] Salimata Diop is a curator and critic working as the Programming Manager at the Africa Center of London and she is the artistic director of the international art fair, AKAA (Also Known As Africa) in Paris.

[17] Simon Njami is an independent curator, critic, writer, and lecturer. He is co-founder of Revue Noire, journal of contemporary African and extra-occidental art. See Simon, Njami, and Lucy

Carolina (U.S.A.), Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi[19] in New Hampshire (U.S.A), Yesomi Umolu[20] in Chicago (U.S.A.), and Yvette Mutumba[21] in Frankfurt (Germany). Certainly not an exhaustive list and the few I mention here are among a growing constituency of cultural workers contributing to the proliferation of exhibitions, art fairs, online platforms, publications, lectures and art collectives that draw attention to Contemporary African art and artists on the continent and abroad.

As most countries on the African continent gained independence in the 50s and 60s, tensions grew between the homogenizing compulsion of nationalism and the diverse language groups that now had to contend with the idea of sharing a single group identity. What has been curious about the case of Contemporary African art reflects a similar tenuous relationship between identifying and including newly captured access and citizenship for artists born on the African continent, while attempting to acknowledge previous contributions by older generations of artists and integrate (rather than reconcile with) this renewed attention with past

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Durán. 2007. *Africa Remix: Contemporary art of a continent*. Jacana Media. He was also the Artistic Director of the Edition 12 of Dak'art, the Dakar Biennale, in Senegal (2016).

[18] Trevor Schoonmaker is Chief Curator and Patsy R. and Raymond D. Curator of Contemporary Art at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, NC and has played a key role in developing the museum's contemporary art collection to include internationally active artists including, Berlin based Robin Rhode and New York City based Wangechi Mutu.

[19] Artist, art historian and curator, Nzewi, Ugochukwu-Smooth, is the curator of African Art at Dartmouth College's Hood Museum of Art in New Hampshire, U.S.A. Also see Nzewi, Ugochukwu-Smooth. 2013. *The Dak'Art Biennial in the Making of Contemporary African Art, 1992-Present*. Diss. Emory University.

[20] Yesomi Umoly is curator at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago. She is also a writes and lectures in the humanities division.

[21] Yvette Mutumba Co-curated the African Perspectives section at the 2016 Armory Show in New York City with Julia Gross. Also see, Mutumba, Yvette. 2012. "Artists of African Descent in Germany." *The Little Book of Big Visions. How to be an Artist and Revolutionise the World,* 15-31. *Münster: Edition Assemblage*.

accomplishments. Slogans like, "Not 'African' but 'contemporary'", "Can we shift the conversation (from Africanness)?", and "All So Fucking African" by art entrepreneurs and artists whose work features in Contemporary African art exhibitions mirror the broad range of responses and critiques by curators, art scholars, and artists now working under this collectively understood genre called, Contemporary African art.

The first response is one end of an extreme stance that attempts to promote creative production by contemporary artists, from an African perspective but rejects the category of "African art", while the other end mocks the very idea that it is possible or even fruitful to debate questions of "African" authenticity[22] and social impact using art in galleries and art fairs to host such debates. And between these two extremes is a spectrum from the highly invested to the coolly indifferent.

While it is important to locate the architects of Contemporary African art as a genre in the pioneering group of experts and invested stakeholders, some of whom I mention above, I suggest that, because the Contemporary African art genre has come to include such a large variety of artists and artworks covering different materials, generations, and geographies (artists needn't be from Africa or of "African descent" for their work to be Contemporary African art), the possibilities of who gets to shape the genre remain somewhat fluid and open. It is those who feel strongly in either direction who end up being the instrumental architects of the genre but it is also the ambivalent participants in the middle rugs (those who don't feel strongly about whether their

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[22] For a brief but useful analysis of why questions of authenticity in contemporary art may not be fruitful, see Oguibe 1999 "Art, Identity, Boundaries: Postmodernism and Contemporary African Art." Oguibe, Olu and Okwui Enwezor, ed. *Reading the Contemporary: African Art From Theory to the Marketplace*, 25-28. London: Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA).

work is or isn't Contemporary African art but still participate in African contemporary art programs) of the spectrum who through their participation, fuel the production of art fairs, art panels, exhibitions, and the new structures of distribution that house these debates and discussions. These instrumental architects of the genre and the artists who range in their acceptance of the genre interact within physical and pedagogical infrastructures with lingering histories that in turn inform the way in which artists position themselves in these spaces.

Contemporary (African) Artists in New York City

There is a contingent of contemporary artists born on the African continent who are based in New York City, although, like many other contemporary artists, the art they make shows in other large cities and university towns around the world. The environment in which this particular sub-set of artists work is fast paced and market oriented, with several stretches of boutique galleries and community art spaces specializing in contemporary art. However, in some New York City art spaces there is a very strong push for research and education on and through art. For example, as recently as 2012, some of these artists have participated and crossed paths in art residencies at the Studio Museum in Harlem. The Studio Museum was founded in 1968 with the primary goal of supporting and promoting the works of artist of African descent. Other art spaces in the U.S. that support and promote Contemporary African artists include museums like the Brooklyn Museum also in New York City, LACMA in Los Angeles, Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art in Washington D.C., and cultural research institutes like the Africa Center in New York City.

These New York City based artists have also had their work exhibited at the 1:54 art fair[23] focusing on Contemporary African art, won national recognition awards/scholarships, and they have given lectures about their work and their creative process in different cities in the U.S. and abroad. Although they may be thought of as belonging to the same generation, based on age and their active professional resumes, their work addresses different aesthetic, technical, and contextual concerns. But the question of race, especially from an African and/or immigrant perspective, enters the reading of their work in one form or another even in instances when artists insist that their work is not a commentary on race or their "African" background.

In this project, I argue that because of its legacy since the Atlantic slave trade, continued re-articulations of racist policies and race-based violence and discrimination well into the current era, the history of the U.S. is a racial history and the artists working in the U.S., especially those in a global art city like New York City, position themselves and their work within this already established landscape. In most industries, including the art industry, consumers receive creative production by anyone read as "black" within the U.S. context through a race lens, regardless of the artists' goals or intentions. However, this assumption is further complicated by the prominent position of the non-black artist in Contemporary African art who has come to prominence as say, a ("white") South African photographer or a British painter living and working in Kenya. To use Zerubavel's (2002) term, the Contemporary African art genre can be thought of as truly existing in the 'social mind' of the people participating in it, where it is a collectively learned, shared, and understood way of seeing the social world and interacting with other people in it. Differences

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[23] The 1:54 art fair was founded by Touria El Glaoui, who worked in the banking, technology, and telecommunications industries in London and is the daughter of Moroccan artist, Hassan El Glaoui.

among group members, working contexts, and individual member orientations are not a threat to the overall cohesiveness of the genre as long as each member has some conception of the genre, a thing that one's work belongs or does not belong to.

Contemporary (African) Artists in Berlin

Berlin, referred to by some as Germany's global art capital, has a thriving contemporary art scene with museums, workshop spaces, and cultural institutions that support artists from African countries to come and give lectures and participate in one-year art residency programs that often culminate in an exhibition. Although there are spaces comparable to the Studio Museum in Harlem that are invested in confronting the historically Euro-North-American centric dominance in art, such as SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin, the Studio Museum in Harlem really concerns itself with artists of African descent whereas SAVVY Contemporary takes on the broader North-South debate, including artists who may not be of African descent or part of an African diaspora. SAVVY Contemporary also offers artist in residency programs and aims to foster exchanges with artists and cultural entrepreneurs from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America. Other German institutions that promote the work of Contemporary African artists include museums like MMK (Museum für Moderne Kunst) in Frankfurt am Main, the Deutsche Bank KunstHalle in Berlin, and cultural institutions like *ifa (*Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen or institute for foreign relations) in Stuttgart and Berlin, HKW (Haus der Kulturen der Welt or House of world cultures) in Berlin, and DAAD (The German Academic Exchange Service) in Bonn and Berlin. What these institutions share in common is that in one way or another they frame the exhibition and engagement with art by Africans in terms of

cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy rather than as part of a larger, integrated commercial *and* intellectual enterprise.

For example, four of the artists interviewed here have worked or given a lecture at Iwalewahaus at the Universität Bayreuth, in Bayreuth, which started its artist in residency program in 1981. But while New York City dotes galleries like Lehman Maupin (also in Hong Kong), David Zwirner (also in London), Marian Goodman Gallery (also in Paris and London), Jack Shainman Gallery, Barbara Gladstone, Skoto Gallery, and Richard Taittiinger Gallery, which represent established and upcoming artists often listed as Contemporary African artists, Berlin lacks this kind of gallery infrastructure that either focuses on or incorporates Contemporary African art and artists in their core programming. Similar galleries like those we find in New York City but are quite lacking in Berlin include Mariane Ibrahim Gallery in Seattle, galleries in London such as Victoria Miro, Tiwani Conetmporary, October Gallery, and Tafeta + Partners, and galleries in South Africa including, Stevenson Gallery and Goodman Gallery in Cape Town and Johannesburg and Gallery MOMO and MOAD (Museum of African Design) in Johannesburg. Artists based in Berlin, therefore, may cross paths in SAVVY Contemporary-like spaces but often do not cross paths in spaces created specifically for Contemporary African art or artists who are part of the African diasporas in Germany. Most of the Berlin-based artists with gallery representation have this representation elsewhere, though their work also exhibits in the museums and other cultural institutions in Berlin.

"Africa Focus" Global Art Fairs and the Benefits of Close Proximity

The artists in both New York City and Berlin share the benefit of living and working in cities that host or are within close proximity to international art fairs that draw audiences from all over

the world, including local and more regional audiences. While having representation by a gallery that is either close to or can afford the cost of showing at these art fairs is an advantage, living in the city where these art fairs take place can also greatly benefit an artist, especially as artists who do not live in or close to global art cities cannot always find the means to attend the fairs due to immigration restrictions such as rejected visa applications, or they simply cannot afford the trip. The curators who set the parameters and pace for Contemporary African art are usually based in global cities, on the African continent and abroad and are active in such cities. So that, gaining access to or the attention of these curators poses more of a challenge for an artist who is not based in one of these global cities. And for some artists, whether based in global art cities or not, the ideal scenario is having both gallery representation and face-time at these fairs in order to reach more of their audience and get to attend the exhibition openings or lecture programs at the fairs.

The biennales and art fairs that host the work of some of the practicing contemporary artists I discuss here are located both on the African continent proper and abroad. There are old international biennales, like documenta, established in 1955 in Kassel (Germany), Dak'Art or the Dakar Biennale established in 1989 in Dakar (Senegal) which focused on art and literature and turned to focus on Contemporary African art in 1996 and Bamako Encounters, the African Photography Biennale established in 1994 in Bamako (Mali) and promotes Contemporary African art and artists. Younger art fairs focusing specifically on Contemporary African art and Africa's diasporas are also sprouting on the continent and abroad.

For example, the Johannesburg Art Fair launched in 2008, 1:54 Contemporary African art fair, which now has locations on three continents, was established in Europe (London) in 2013

by Moroccan curator Touria El Glaoui and later in North America (New York City) in 2015 and Africa (Marrakech, Morocco) in 2017, the Cape Town Art Fair established by Fiera Milano Exhibitions Africa in 2013, AKAA (Also Known as Africa) in Paris, launched by Victoria Mann in 2016 and the Art Africa Fair in Cape Town, which opened its doors for the first time in 2017. Even older biennales like the Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy, established in 1895 recently made a turn towards "African" and immigrant perspectives in 2015, the Armory Show, in New York City, established in 1913, had an African Focus in 2016, and younger non-African art fairs like the Art Paris Art Fair, established in 2012 are following suit, deciding to invite "Africa" as a guest of honor in 2017.

International art fairs, which present an overwhelming array of galleries, and artists each year, are one place where art consumers can go to see a lot of work by artists of a wide range of styles, media, and substantive focus. Visitors have an opportunity to access a massive one-stop-and-shop commercial art space. There have not yet been any reports of a Germany based or even Berlin based art fair with a particular focus on Contemporary African art, and I boldly suggest that cities like New York City, London, and Paris are compelled to carve out institutions and meeting spaces specifically for Contemporary African art and artists precisely because they are cities which may not be on the African continent but have strong historical ties to the continent and a noteworthy percentage of their populations are people of African descent. Whereas in Germany, a country with a colonial past on the African continent and with a German-Afro population from the World War I era, maintains an arms length distance, focusing instead on art by Africans and people of African descent as transient elements, important for cultural exchange rather than as an integral part of the German (art) world.

In the following section I outline the historical links between the U.S.'s coming of age as a nation of (white) immigrants and "others", to show how "Africanness" has always occupied a central yet despised place in the making of the U.S. and contrast this with the overshadowed relationship between Germany's nationalism, its role on the African continent and Germany's attitude towards Afro-Germans. These historical legacies, perhaps a stretch for the sociology of art concerned with rather localized networks and processes of decision-making, is the foundation on which I rest the theory that Contemporary African art (isolating "Africanness") is a productive misnomer. This notion is employed and consumed by various actors often without consensus about what "it" is, "who" belongs to "it", and "what" places it can rightfully and appropriately occupy. Artists working in a place (institution, city, country) where race, region, and citizenship have been a contested triad that often determines opportunity, access, and resource distribution since the birth of such institutions and the cities and countries they are located in, will likely have a qualitatively different experience compared to artists working in a place (institution, city, country) where race, region, and citizenship are connected but not seen as a fundamentally contested trio.

Background

Historicizing a Professional Base: The U.S. and its forgotten White Immigrants

The aftershocks following World War II, the Cold War, mass migration, and the independence of African states meant that Western countries that had imagined themselves and their histories as the center of "world history" had to adapt to the exponential demographic and political shifts both within and beyond their national borders. In the U.S., the national self-image has historically prioritized white settlers as the rightful citizens of the country and with the British

ruling, many of the other Northern European immigrants arrived as indentured servants who would later become farmers.[24] The early settlers who were mainly made up of British immigrants were followed by additional waves of North European immigrants of Dutch and German ancestry, with German immigrants growing their strongholds in New York, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. For much of the period prior to the Second World War, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, often referred to as WASPs, held considerably more political, economic, and social power than any other group (Kaufmann 2004). To accommodate new Protestant arrivals of different social classes, the term WASP would increasingly expand to include anyone of white Protestant ancestry regardless of political or socio-economic status.

A Nativist/Know Nothing movement erupted between the 1850s and 1890s as Protestants saw Catholic immigrants as a political and economic threat controlled by the Pope in Rome and the movement attempted to thwart Irish and Catholic migration and naturalization (Anbinder 1992; Higham 2002). Resistance by German and Irish Catholics led to riots in cities like Philadelphia and New York City and members of the two groups would later join the Union Army in droves. The anti-Catholic and anti-foreign sentiment held by the nativists did not completely dissipate and even came to include Irish Protestants and German Lutherans, who because of their "foreignness" did not perfectly fit the initial nativist profile. However, German and Irish (Catholic) immigrants who fought for unification in the American Civil War would

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[24] These indentured servants were given more rights after the passing of the Virginia Slave Codes in 1705, which officially defined non-white (specifically black/African) and non-Christian indentured servants as slaves and property, thereby making it legal for previously marginalized poor and white people to join in the enslaving, maiming, raping, and killing of black and Native people (See Billings, Warren M. 1991. "The Law of Servants and Slaves in Seventeenth-Century Virginia." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 99(1): 45-62.

later earn the opportunity to be folded into mainstream U.S. identity in a way that other groups who also fought for the Union Army, including African Americans, Jewish Americans, and Native Americans, could not.

As a nation, the U.S. has continued to experience this constant repression of new and mainly non-white immigrant groups, who nativist-like and white-nationalists see as a drain on their rightful economic and political entitlements. The unyielding pressures to integrate non-white citizens and new waves of migrants, including immigrants from African states, into the U.S. national self-image are accentuated by the idea that having terrorized and displaced Native Americans, enslaved and criminalized black and brown Americans, the U.S. has always been a country of immigrants. As the population of other ethnic groups increased in number, the once exclusive white Protestant majority, with its own internal squabbles over power also came to accept other white European immigrants (Eastern and Central Europeans as well as French Canadians from the North) into the dominant citizenry, while other groups such as the Native Americans, African-Americans, Hispanic and Latino Americans, Japanese-Americans, and Chinese-Americans would routinely face political and economic exclusion. While second and third generations from these groups become more naturalized, many still experience their American identity as encompassing alien elements or second-class citizenship status (Ahmed 2010: 121-159).

National identity can be described in a wide variety of ways, and although historically messy (as evidenced above) mechanisms such as the national census have become one way for a nation to signal how it recognizes and breaks down the different components of its population. The national census uses demographic identifiers such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, age,

education, and other characteristics like housing and transportation, in many cases revealing what factors the state sees as significant for carrying out its governing objectives (Goldscheider 2002). For instance, race as a means of classifying different groups of the population shows up in the national census of countries like the U.S., where racial and ethnic difference has had a central role in the organization of political and economic rights. Whereas, other countries that may have historically employed nationalism as a principle governing tool to carry out anti-foreign nativist movements of their own, like France and Germany, do not include race in their national census. Instead, these countries insist that their citizens are first and foremost "French" or "German" (Brubaker 2009). For instance, "race-thinking" is considered anti-national in France, which is why France stresses international rather than intra-national racial differences (102). And in Germany, a country that might take in immigrants (e.g. Turks or Syrians) is certainly not one that conceives of itself as a nation of immigrants. Opposition towards enumerating people by race or ethnicity in France and Germany came after the use of a systemic census of the Jewish population during World War II, which was key in locating Jews and other groups like communists and political refugees to round them up, deport them and eventually send them to internment camps in France and then later to Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau, three of the largest German Nazi concentration camps.

Those who continue to support an a-racial national identity argue that asking people questions about race and ethnicity delegitimizes their equal citizenship, but some still maintain a separate-but-equal orientation for those who are assimilated immigrants (See Brubaker 2001). However, refraining from officially grouping people by race and ethnicity does little to eliminate actual instances of racial violence and exclusion. With the backdrop of purist nationalism, there

is a move to investigate the role that race place in intra-national politics as French academics, influenced by the Chicago sociological tradition research on race in America, have gradually taken up once taboo terms like "race relations" and began to conduct research that investigates race and racism in France (Masson and Schrecker 2016) and academics in Germany also study links between racism, the eugenics movement and anti-Semitism in German history (Weindling 1993; Friedlander 2000).

Historicizing a Professional Base: Germany's Overshadowed Past in Africa

An organizing principle that does not require the face-to-face interaction and indeed the physical presence of those who champion it to uphold it is what social scientists comfortably refer to as a social construction. Of course most social scientists adopt this analytical framing of social organization to different social phenomena and give it new names. Anderson ([1983]/2006), for example, describes countries as imagined communities. He demonstrates how, although nationality or nationhood is collectively held in the mind of people (like Zerubavel's (2002) 'social mind'), it has very real consequences based on how we connect specific human bodies as belonging to specific geographic spaces. A similar kind of "self-imagining" through geographic space is evident in the way some people describe themselves as belonging to a specific city, village, or neighborhood. Some examples are the enthusiastic "New Yorker" who swears they are nothing like a "Chicagoan", or "Brooklynites" who might also differentiate between Brooklyn neighborhoods like Williamsburg and Flatbush, or "Berliners" who are certainly more hip but perhaps less refined than someone who is more at home in Munich and certainly nothing like a nationalist who is most comfortable in a small German village like Jamel.

In a similar vein, the imagined community-territory is reflected in the work of some scholars who focus on the African continent who begin with an understanding of how “Africa” is an invention (Mudimbe [1988] 2008), not of the people we refer to today as “Africans” but of the Europeans who first traded in and later came to settle on the African continent. Figure 1 (below) shows a map of the African colonies following the Berlin Conference that took place between 1884 and 1885 where the European settlers divided up the African continent among themselves.

Figure 1. Map of African Colonies after the 1884 Berlin Conference.

On the African continent, national borders emerged not as a result of the self-determination of African individuals and their leaders who saw themselves as belonging to the geographic territories they occupied, but as a result of Europeans with an eye to expand their own sovereign reach. It was during the "Scramble for Africa", which culminated in the Berlin Conference, when European countries like Britain, France, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and

Germany divided up the African continent among themselves. In so doing, inventing the national borders that remain today, separating what is Burkina Faso from what is Ivory Coast (Cote D'Ivoire), what is Nigeria from what is Ghana and what is Namibia from what is South Africa.

However, in present day imagined communities of these European countries, the emergence of African states is overwhelmingly depicted as a result of Africans fighting for and negotiating their independence from European rule in the 50s and 60s, a historical break which largely left the Europeans' "imagined communities of Africa" in place. In present day 2016, European nations still struggle to imagine how their national identity relates to and in some cases is even comprised of African sovereignty. In the well-documented negotiations to divvy up of the African continent, in which no African leaders were present, the results of the Berlin Conference show British and French dominance. It is therefore no surprise that the study of British and French conquests in Africa overshadow the role of other European countries like Germany on the African continent.

Germany's national identity in relation to the African continent suffers selective memory as its connection to Africa is distinctively unknown or largely unacknowledged by most white Germans (Aitken 2016). Before the Berlin Conference, Germans occupied Cameroon, German East Africa (present day Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania), German South-West Africa (present day Namibia), and Togoland (present day Togo and Ghana). In contrast, even if marginally placed and sometimes viciously contested, there is at least some historical acknowledgement of the legacies of empire on the African continent in Britain and France, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the Americas.

Scholarship on Germany's historic involvement in the collection, categorization, and classification of the African continent lumps Germany under "the West", among a group of other economic-power states including Britain, France, and the U.S. (Schildkrout and Keim 1998). However, this research does not contextualize Germany's contemporary position in relation to living cultural producers from African states, who participate in the discourse, practice, and collective action through their work. With a comparatively small minority of African immigrants compared to say the U.S. and Britain, Germany maintains an arms length involvement on the African continent, focusing on providing financial aid for educational and cultural exchange programing[25]. While much of Germany's direct involvement on the African continent remains distant, cultural institutions present Germany's stance as one of very enthusiastic but general optimism and cooperation between Germany and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Germany's colonial past on the African continent is not as well documented as the colonial empires of countries like France and Britain, or the Americas' Atlantic slave trade. Even so, Germany's occupation was in no way less present and violent for the places where the Germans settled on African soil. Before World War II, a turning point after which Germany came out as an enemy of human rights for murdering 11 million of its own citizens, the

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[25] According to Euroactiv, a site that creates content in European global geo-political and economic investing and news, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research has contributed some €76 million for social and economic development programming in African countries, including South Africa and Egypt, http://www.euractiv.com/section/development-policy/news/germany-announces-new-approach-to-africa-development-cooperation/. Examples of institutes that promote and offer funding opportunities for research and cultural exchange between Germany and African states include, TURN (http://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/cms/en/programme/Afrika/turn.html), Institute for Cultural Diplomacy – Experience Africa Program (http://www.experience-africa.de/index.php?en), DAAD (https://www.daad.de/en/), and Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen or ifa (http://www.ifa.de/en/about-us/mission-objectives.html).

relationship between the U.S. and Germany was more intimate and significant than national narratives in both countries might otherwise suggest. The origins of the eugenics movement, for instance, originated in the U.K. (Hansen 2001), gained momentum in the United States of America and key actors in the U.S. later spread it to Germany.

The development of the Nazi Eugenics program, which implemented the forced sterilization of groups seen as threats to the purity and therefore genetic hygiene of the white Aryan race in Germany took directly from the blueprints of Californian eugenicists. According to Schafft (2004), The Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology in Berlin, founded in 1927, specialized in social and physical anthropology, including human eugenics. The institute came into being with financial support from the New York City based Rockefeller Foundation, a well-known American philanthropic group. In fact, in the period between 1950 and 1980, the U.S. had developed its own elaborate policies that tied the eugenics movement to the ongoing battle for government restrictions on women's productive rights (Kluchin 2009). While the methods for eugenics came from the United States, Germany had already established the testing grounds for the mass extermination of an entire group of people in its South West African colony. However divergent the national coming of age narratives of Germany and the United States post World War Two, the two share nationalist factions that cling onto a pure-white-race framing of full citizenship, of which blackness and Africanness along with other non-white elements of civic life, continue to point out persisting exclusionary, exploitative, and discriminatory policies and social attitudes covertly present in the first and overtly present in the latter of the two nations.

In *The Devil's Handwriting* (2008), Steinmetz offers a contextualized and detailed analysis comparing Germany's colonial rule in Samoa, Qingdao, and South West Africa.

Between 1904 and 1907 the German government committed a mass extermination of the Ovahereros and Nama of the then German South-West Africa, modern day Namibia (Steinmetz 2008: 210-213). An estimated 100,000 people died. The fate of the Samoans was different because the Germans viewed them as "noble savages" whereas the Ovahereros were viewed as volatile. In 1985 the UN officially recognized this massacre as genocide, now known as the Herero and Namaqua Genocide. The German government made an official apology in 2004 but refused to offer any financial reparations for the descendants of the victims. To the present day, Germany maintains an arms length to its African colonies, including Namibia, preserving a well-inoculated legacy that most people separate from the African continent, especially in comparison to other Western economic and military rivals who have a longer history of settling bets on the African continent.

Germany's national profile is more readily tied to the rise of the Third Reich and Nazi Germany, which propped itself on the mass murder of approximately 6 million Jews as well as 5 million other groups who did not neatly fall into the category of the "pure" White (Aryan) race. However, according to Madley's 2005 historical analysis, rather than independent historical moments, the genocide in German South-West Africa actually acted as a precursor to the Nazi German imprisonment and genocide of Slavs, Gypsies, and Jews in Eastern Europe. As Germans had declared certain groups in South-West Africa as "undesirables", the Nazis identified "unfit" and "dissenting" groups for forced sterilization and extermination, including individuals who were homosexual, Slavic, Jewish, those with physical and mental disabilities, Jehovah's Witnesses, prostitutes, alcoholics, and black-Germans.

Taking on a race theory lens rather than an anti-Semitic lens to study the underlying logic of racial purity in Nazi Germany, Campt (2009) argues for an understanding National Socialism (better known as Nazism) as a project of enacting a "pure race ideology" rather than a strictly anti-Semitic one. Although German history and Holocaust Studies scholars largely theorize the National Socialist era as destructive, Campt's analysis shows how in an effort to achieve racial purity, National Socialism in fact contributed to the conditions for new formations of non-Aryan German subjects/citizens, of which black Germans are one example. Even as many still imagine German nationhood as "White" or "Western", the failure to completely purge the German population of non-Aryan and specifically "black" Germans who were the children of Aryan German women and black African soldiers fighting on behalf of France in World War One, demonstrated the absurdity and impossibility of desiring racial purity.

As the two countries tussle with these surviving legacies of racism, anti-Semetism, and xenophobia, they have taken very different approaches to their official self-perception. As outlined earlier, the U.S. census shows a fairly detailed framework of how the country has attempted to come to terms with its use of race to identify, organize, and govern its population. The use of hyphenated titles to signal set sub-groups of the population has historically set European settlers as the standard race "White". All other groups, including those indigenous to the land are American Indians and Alaska Natives, Black or African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders, with Hispanic set apart as separate

from the race categorization.[26] Interestingly, some non-European people including people from the Middle East and North Africa also fall under the "White" category. Unable to escape this differential conflation of race and ethnicity as markers of nationality and as social facts for most non-European groups (a circumstance not grounded in science or biology, but one that nonetheless orients and influences social interactions, policies, and laws in a given society) we are less likely to find parallel references in colloquial language to refer to German Americans, Polish Americans, White Americans or European Americans. Over time, these groups have collapsed into a standard "White" or "American" national box.

There is no such race or ethnicity data in the German census and so there is no formal procedure to identify and separate the population into race-groups. As discussed earlier, historians often cite this as a correction of Nazi Germany's anti-Semetic surveillance policies of the 30s and 40s. However, Germany distancing from racial theory even as they practiced "race purification" ties back to its colonial past on the African continent and the humiliation the German government endured when black African soldiers had babies with white German women during and after World War I. Like their fathers before them who had fought on behalf of France during the First World War, black-Germans or afro-Germans were shut out of mainstream German nationhood and civic life. They were a reminder of white German women being intimate with black African men. When the German government began enumerating groups by race and ethnicity in 1939, the Nazi state was not collecting statistics for governing purposes but to

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[26] See the official U.S. Census Bureau website for a full breakdown of the "race question" in the U.S. census. Accessed on January 2017.
https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html.

calculate the number and location of Jewish citizens for the purpose of targeting this group and others deemed "undesirable" for forced sterilization and extermination.

A Call for a differentiated "West": The Basis for the Extended Case Study Approach

In giving some historical context for the development of national identity in non-African territories as it relates to the African continent and non-white individuals, including black Africans, I take into serious account the impact that understandings of these histories have, not only on access to resources and opportunities, but also on how art practitioners may draw upon these legacies in the places they work in. An understanding of the historical context in which art institutions and artists operate suggests that even with the tendency to depict the contemporary moment as a cosmopolitan residue of the past, a fair number of those who were once subjects of study; predominantly understood as art-object producers waiting to be discovered, collected, and theorized about, are taking up active roles in the research, curation, and dissemination of knowledge production. The consequences of African independence and the exponential increase in regional and global migration have also led to a spurt in national, regional, and trans-national discussions about this impact on artistic production on the continent and its diasporas (Enwezor 2003; Oguibe 2004; Hall 2006; Njami and Durán 2007; Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009).

Developments in African art history unfold in the period leading up to the wave of independence in African states and so rides on the legacy of these historical configurations. It is at least theoretically possible and perhaps unsurprising to imagine that artists' self-positioning and institutional framing of cultural production that is both "contemporary" and "African" would result in varied insistence on or refusal of "Africanness" as an organizing principle in its own

right (not presented as exotic, mystical, or pre-historic) anywhere other than on the African continent, South of the Sahara.

For the reasons briefly outlined above, to generally refer to countries like Germany and USA as "the West" when mapping out and analyzing the recent developments in knowledge production, both within contemporary art and beyond, confounds the way individuals and institutions variably side step and bank on the implications of this monolithic signifier. While racial and colonial undertones in relation to the African continent exist in both countries, they vary in kind (at least in collective memory) and perhaps even in form. This variation suggests that we need, on one hand, a contextualized understanding of what we mean by the "West" in scholarship and on the other hand, what factors may shape differentiated self-positioning towards "Africanness".

This study highlights the possibilities that country of professional base informed our working frames for "the work we do" and therefore may generate or shape how we position our work and ourselves in relation to certain identity-specific categories. In the case of artists working under the rubric of Contemporary African art, I argue that the perceived legacies of their professional base(s) in relation to the continent of Africa and people of African decent allows for or forecloses certain approaches that an artist can employs given their working context. The way an artist connects their own understanding of these histories to their work or to them as citizens of specific African countries or a non-African country may also shape the way they pursue goals beyond the art studio. By focusing on the self-positioning of African-born artists based in a small selection of "Western" countries and African countries, I investigate how individual artists respond to the conflation of race, region, and citizenship/nationality in "African" spaces and in

contexts that have historically located Africans and perhaps “Africanness” on the periphery of knowledge production and citizenship.

4. THEORY

Abstract

This research makes two key theoretical interventions mainly drawing from gatekeeping theory and the concept of the boundary object. First I describe "Africanness" is a kind of *trading chip*, one that artists (and others) can trade in (to eschew or reject) or trade on (employ, even in instances when there are diverging understandings and uses or even disagreement about what Africanness is or how significant it is). Second, I show how Contemporary African art is a boundary object, which refers to a mechanism or tool that different groups can collectively use, often without consensus on what its appropriate use or function is. The characteristics of a boundary object means that the Contemporary African art genre maintains its integrity even when different individuals and institutions making use of the genre disagree on how it should be used and who or what belongs in the genre. I also make the argument that contemporary artists working under the rubric of Contemporary African art often work as both producers and *secondary arbiters* in the gatekeeping process. The idea of the *secondary arbiter* refers to artists who work alongside primary gatekeepers (e.g. curators, art historians, critics) and participate in influencing the interpretation and dissemination of their work as it reaches audiences. In cultural sociology, artists are producers of cultural objects. This study, specifically in chapters 7 and 8, I elevate the role of the artists to fully examine the full range of expertise that many of these artists call on and employ in their work, including but not limited to their understanding and use of art history knowledge, social science theory, curatorial practices, research and publishing.

Keywords: Professional trading chip, boundary object, secondary arbiters

Gatekeeping the Secondary Arbiter

In cultural sociology, gatekeepers are people or mechanisms that control what reaches any given audience (Hirsch 1972; Shoemaker and Vos 2009). Often associated with censorship in the media and the Internet, gatekeeping is a filtering process that controls access to information, objects, spaces, and people (Lewin 1947). Gatekeeping studies also cover the process of screening, accreditation, and professionalization, for example, in fields like social work where certifiers are concerned with ensuring that only competent social workers "get through" while at the same time ensuring that there is racial and ethnic diversity in their field (Gibbs and Blakely 2013) and networked gatekeeping in primary health care where health physicians work with health organizations to inform their medical referrals system (Forrest 2013).

To apply gatekeeping theory into a study that examines the role that producers of cultural objects play within the gatekeeping process, I employ Griswold's (2012) cultural diamond with an intentional revision of the 'creator' node (See figures 2). Figure 2 shows Griswold's culture diamond, which identifies four nodes; that of the creator, the receiver, the cultural object, and the social world. The cultural diamond is a useful schema for identifying the complex relationships that are associated with a cultural object within a social world. To operationalize the cultural diamond schema, I apply the gatekeeping theory to the diamond to highlight the creator node (the producer of the cultural objects or the visual artist node) as a site of production and mediation between the cultural object and the receiver(s) or art audience and consumers. In gatekeeping theory, gatekeepers are the primary mediators who control what art objects and artists actually reach any given audience. This investigation is therefore not going to present visual artists as gatekeepers themselves, as they and the art objects or projects they create are

'gated'. However, the research does investigate the position and role of the visual artist as a *secondary arbiter* within the gatekeeping processes in cultural production, as their work reaches audiences and circulates in the "social world".

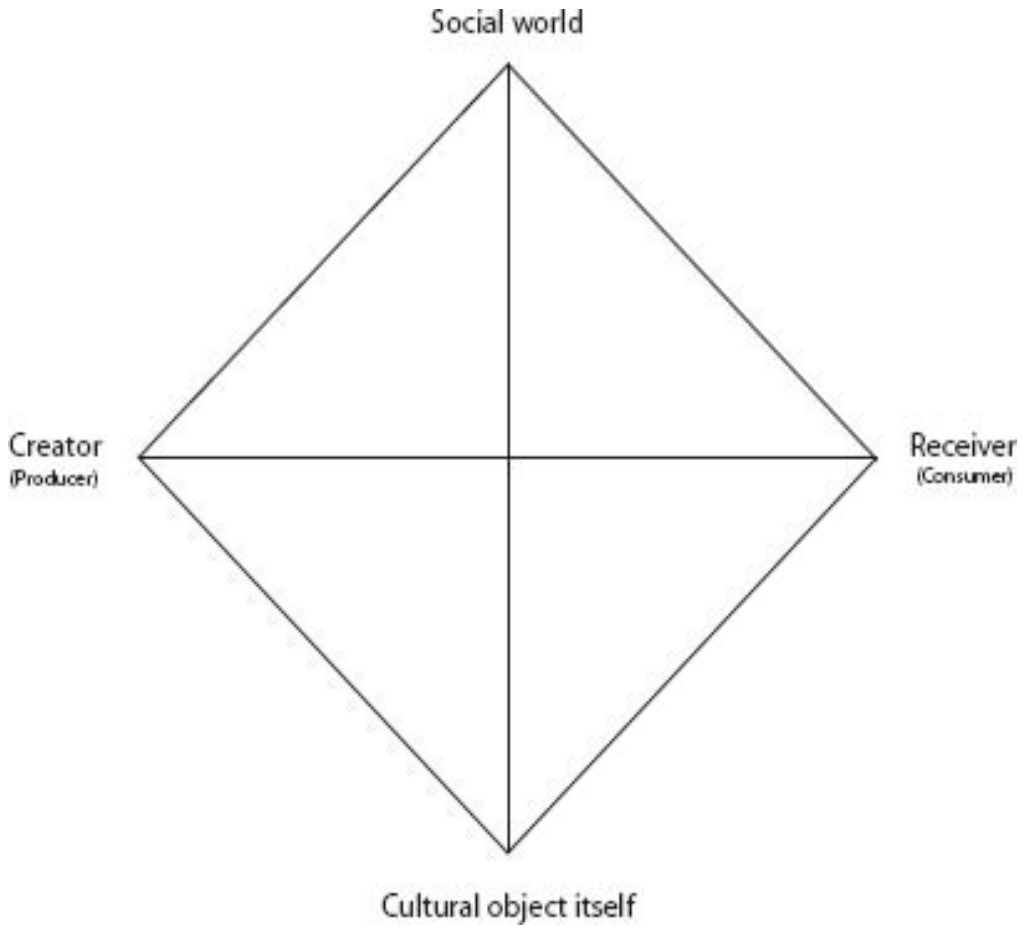

Figure 2. Griswold's Cultural Diamond, Griswold (15:2012)

Within the fields of visual cultural production are underlying micro-level interactions between the cultural (object) producers and patrons and the meso-level interactions in which artists (as producers of cultural objects) engage directly with institutional agents or *primary gatekeepers* (in galleries, museums, auction houses, grant institutes, cultural institutions, and art fairs). At the meso-level, some artists' self-positioning to a concept like Africanness (either by

embracing or avoiding it) may contradict institutional understandings or uses of the concept. The ambivalent significance of Africanness as an identifiable association to an African place, person, idea, or thing and therefore a way of grouping artwork (and artists) as part of the a Contemporary African art genre reveals a wide variation in how individuals in any given role within a cultural production network can position themselves and their work to Africanness. In interactions between artists and their audiences at art talks, for example, and through their interviews with content creators on print and digital platforms, artists have an opportunity to self-represent by taking part in the interpretation and assembling of their own work. In this way, artists are also mediators in the gatekeeping process, not as *primary gatekeepers* but rather as *secondary arbiters*. This is most pronounced in contexts when artists view their contribution to how gatekeepers frame and share the artists' work as a continuation rather than a break from the work the artists do inside the art studio (the work they produce before gatekeepers are involved in the creative production, e.g. collecting, caring for, and exhibiting the work to an audience).

Identifying a genre as "African" is useful for the elementary purpose of grouping things and people "of" the African continent and its diasporas, but too ambiguous to signal specific formalistic art contributions, specific histories, geographic context, or the precise issue based concerns any given artist is attempting to address through their work (Copeland 2013). Even the efforts to differentiate between the African continent proper versus its diasporas do not always ensure specificity or the accurate contextualization of objects, people, or ideas as "African". In *A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States* (2011), Thompson discusses the Anthropological origins of African Diaspora art studies in which the term diaspora is, "a catchall word for many different types of movement" and she argues that,

"Lumping migration, exile, and cosmopolitanism under the same term may render invisible and trivial the movement of people under distinct conditions of force, removal, and dispossession and their aftermaths that continue to shape African diasporas" (30). Despite this and other calls for attention to geopolitical, temporal, and spatial specificity in African Diaspora art history, visual arts platforms and forums still largely appeal to a very broad notion of perspectives of Africa and its diaspora(s).

This research shows how some artists develop the tools to and in some cases also manage to carve out spaces to rein in on the precise framing and articulation of their work. For artists who are aware of the underlying historical contexts in the places they live and work and also see them as relevant and in relation to the institutions in which they work, there is a concerted effort to either engage with it in their work or in discussions about how "Africanness" is relevant or not relevant to their work. The study is largely based on interviews with artists and textual analysis of website profiles, publications, and secondary interviews with artists featured in digital art magazines and non-commercial art spaces like *Contemporary &* (co-founded in 2013 by Yvette Mutumba and Julia Grosse), *NKA* (founded by Okwui Enwezor in 1994), *ARTsouthAFRICA* (founded by Suzette and Brendon Bell-Roberts in 2002), Art Base Africa (organized by African Artists' Foundation, which was founded by Azu Nwagbogu in 2007), Omeka magazine (founded by Oliver Enwonwu in 2013), Studio Museum in Harlem (founded in 1968 by a group of artists, activists, and philanthropists, Iwalewahaus (founded by Ulli Beier in 1981), and SAVVY Contemporary (founded by Bonaventure Ndikung in 2010). Other art forums that do not have an "Africa" focus but cover several of the artists whose names appear in Contemporary African art review lists and exhibitions include, Artforum, ArtNet News, Frieze (publication arm of Frieze

art fair in London and New York City), and Artsy[27], an online platform for art education and collecting. The study aims to show how a group of artists engage in self-advocacy through their use of research methods, social theory building, and re-directive purposing of a productive misnomer: African.

Cultural industry scholars refer to gatekeepers as part of a larger analytical framework in which all cultural objects are always situated within larger networks of financiers/investors/sponsors, producers, and gatekeepers. Art scholarship often depicts art collectors, dealers, curators, and scholars as the *primary gatekeepers* of art-objects, artists, and the knowledge produced about them. Gatekeepers are therefore conceptualized as separate from cultural object producers and are more so part of the filtration process that takes place after object production and determines which objects or information will reach any given audience (Hirsch 1972; Foster et al. 2011). In this study I refer to a *Secondary arbiter* as a second tier mediator in the gatekeeping process (a person engaged in the filtering process through which *primary gatekeepers* select the cultural objects and knowledge that reaches a given audience) whose social identity is tightly associated with their position as a producer or the cultural objects they produce. I conceptualize *secondary arbiters* as cultural producers who may also self-position or are positioned as cultural entities (representing a culture X or the face of group Y) but also finding ways to insert themselves in conversations about and the curation of their work. These are not simply people who are passively assorted by experts, but they are individuals who, because of their position (social status, professional position, access to expert knowledge and

[27] This is by no means an exhaustive list of art platforms or forums.

tools, or access to public platforms), are able to leverage their position and influence the outcome of discourse about their work and their contribution.

Unable to escape questions of how their Africanness influences their work, for instance, some contemporary artists may opt to overtly challenge understandings of what is "African" about their "contemporary art". By doing so in face-to-face conversations, virtual lectures, and published accounts, these artists claim some locus of control over what audiences see in and come to understand about their work. While foregrounding practicing artists in this study, this definition of *secondary arbiters* may expand to include curators, art directors, art critics, and art collectors who also engage in mediating the work that other *primary gatekeepers* do. The filtering processes, in which *secondary arbiters* who are also producers of art objects, affords artists opportunities to exercise creative freedom beyond the art studio and opportunities to contest or revise information reaching their audiences. Artists use their knowledge of art history, the inner-workings of the art industry in which they work and also tap into their personal narratives or artistic tenure (their expertise as practicing artists), as a legitimate basis for their authority to contest or revise others' interpretations of their work.

Not all artists wish to participate in the gatekeeping process, preferring instead to defer to others reception and interpretations of the artwork, especially artists who believe that their locus of control over how others see or use their work ends the moment the art objects leave the artists' hands. In this investigation of agency and self-advocacy it is important to point out that the artists who expand their role as art practitioners beyond the making of art objects, doing so as teachers, community organizers, social advocates, cultural entrepreneurs, and curators, contribute to knowledge production about contemporary art but in doing so they neither threaten nor

diminish the genre of Contemporary African art itself. In fact, I argue that it is these contestations that sustain the genre, for better or worse.

Social Agents: Artists as Secondary Arbiters

To operationalize the theory of *secondary arbiters*, I look to groups that are at once bounded within a category but engage in meaningful and consequential self-positioning that filters who and what else they and their work may be associated with. Based on artist talks and interviews conducted between the summer of 2014 and the winter of 2016, several artists in this study (primarily based in the U.S. and Germany) frame their work as "research-based" and connect it to themes of historical documentation and/or social activist agendas. The process of self-distancing when the question of "Africanness" arises is not unlike the approach we find in many academic pursuits, where distancing the personal from what one is studying and producing is sometimes seen as a desirable goal, if not a prerequisite (Merton 1973: 124-129; Faraday and Plummer 1979; Labaree 2002). The researcher, being an instrument of data collection and analysis, is not always understood as a subject of analysis and the historian who documents, overviews, and relays specific historical moments is also a social agent *and* an instrument of data collection and analysis. To understand this conceptual separation of *who* the practitioner is and *what* the practitioner is exploring or examining, is one way that a research-based artist can place emphasis on the work they do rather than on their biography or other social identifiers, even when they sometimes choose to make reference to how their personal background informs the work.

As stated in the introduction, a similar pattern exists in other creative production fields, for example, according to Minh-Ha (2009) in literature one might come to the reasonable

conclusion that overall recognition for, "Being merely 'a writer' may ensure one a status of far greater weight than being 'a woman of color who writes'". Minh-Ha goes on to point out that, "Imputing race or sex to the creative act has long been a means by which the literary establishment cheapens and discredits the achievements of non-mainstream women writers." (6). Yet there are several factions who believe the opposite, quick to celebrate being "the first" of a previously left out racial, ethnic, gendered, or religious group to accomplish a professional milestone, for instance – And the goal of the latter attitude is to highlight *and* celebrate the accomplishments of individuals who belong to previously disadvantaged groups or to celebrate difference rather than to deny or diminish it.

However, not all artists have the opportunity or wish to become known or celebrated as the "first" of anything, what they desire is the ability to move in their chosen artistic media genre or to experiment with their work within and across different social groups, genres, and platforms. Artists who cushion their work as fundamentally an act of creative freedom and draw on the idea of academic and intellectual freedom theorize about their work through research-focused approaches. These artists have both the space to experiment and offer social commentary, but also take advantage of the language and tools that come with such creative license. They are able to respond to and contribute to the work of other cultural and knowledge producers, especially those who are in position to shape the ways in which audiences reach, receive, and interpret the artists work.

Academic freedom is the belief that the academy is a space in which scholars are free to do research using any number of methods and to teach any number of issues or ideas that others may deem controversial or uncomfortable (Hofstadter and Metzger 1955; Metzger 1969; O'Neil

1990). However, this freedom has some limitations. Following publicized social experiments in which people who participated in the studies were harmed and in some cases intentionally left to die, the academy has developed mechanisms such as the Internal Review Board (IRB) to provide checks and balances that protect human research participants. See experiments by Nazi doctors during World War Two and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service between 1932 and 1972, where doctors purposely withheld penicillin (a drug proven to treat Syphilis) from infected African-American men who were left to die from Syphilis after the researchers told them they were simply in a program to receive free health care from the U.S. government.[28]

Interview data with contemporary artists based in Berlin and New York City suggest that artists deliberately embrace or eschew the idea of "Africanness" in their work, sometimes in divergent ways to how funding institutions, curators, and other art experts describe them and their work. In this project I refer to Africanness as a "trading chip" and this accomplishes a dual function. First, it demonstrates that there is a generally shared awareness that there is in fact such a thing as a uniquely African thing, idea, issue, or person. And second, it suggests that there is some stake (whether high or low) in singling out or signaling this African uniqueness as a central part of individual or collective action, for example in creative production, circulation, and consumption.

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[28] Angell, Marcia. 1997. "The ethics of clinical research in the Third World." *New England Journal of Medicine* 337(12): 847-848.

Contemporary African art as a Boundary Object

Sociologist Thomas Gieryn (1983) describes the problem of demarcation in differentiating science from non-science as a case of boundary-work. He explains that although delineations in what counts as science are ideological, they hold extremely high stakes for those able to establish their work as "science". The stakes in making such distinctions include determining the distribution of opportunities ranging from job offers, funding grants, and other less tangible resources such as social prestige. Research on experts and expertise expands Gieryn's boundary-work to systematically examine the processes and consequences of demarcating boundaries of knowledge expertise to include the role of lay experts. For example, a UK study on scientists versus farmers in assessing the effects of a potentially harmful herbicide (Irwin 1995) or the role of the AIDS movement activists in reshaping established practices in biomedicine research and policy (Epstein 1996). Individuals and groups who employ different forms of knowledge, understandings, or perspectives and combine these with a mastery of the technical know-how and language that experts use, are sometimes able to place themselves in a strong position to challenge or even influence technical expertise and therefore the outcomes of applying such expertise.

In the first case, insider experts (scientists) in the laboratory testing of herbicides ignored the lay or non-scientific experts (farmers) who were opposed to approving the use of the tested herbicide. The scientists insisted that the herbicide was safe, as long as farmers followed the recommended safety measures, such as wearing a protective coat. The farmers argued that the scientific conclusion was faulty because it was based on tests in laboratory settings, which the scientists obtained in a self contained and carefully controlled environment, which is unlike the

open-air environment where the farmers would have to use the herbicide. Failing to find tools, methods, and language comparable to that of the scientists, the farmers' misgivings went unheard and the farmers were unable to influence the final outcome.

In the latter case, non-scientist activists who were part of the AIDS movement of the 1980s in the U.S. were infuriated by the slow pace in which the F.D.A. (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) approved drugs and they lamented the deaths of people with AIDS who had been given placebo drugs in the F.D.A. mandated drug trials. The ethics of scientists using placebo drugs on patients the name of "good science" were actively and reasonably challenged. Through staging protests and engineering other ways to infiltrate the controlled laboratory settings and protocols that researchers were so accustomed to operating in, the activists mastered the science behind AIDS research and transformed themselves into an alternative expert group. Epstein (1996) discusses how the interactions between scientists, activists, and policy makers revealed the ways in which knowledge about AIDS actually came about from what he refers to as "credibility struggles" as activists could stand their ground in debates with technical experts. The activists were able to critique medical expertise, using the experts' technical language and ultimately prompted changes in government policy and in the way that biomedicine research was conducted. Unlike the farmers in the herbicide case, the nonscientist activists were able to affect change in both research protocol and policy outcomes.

The consequences of sorting or classifying people (experts versus non-experts), knowledge (expert versus lay), and things (worthy of research or not) are widely varied in kind, degree and consequence. Bowker and Star's *Sorting Things Out* (2000) study shows processes of classification ranging from labeling diseases, the codification of death on death certificates to the

varied life chances for people labeled European, Asian, colored, or black during apartheid South Africa. *Sorting Things Out* has a moralizing bend in which the researchers refer to classifying systems as information infrastructure and offer empirical evidence that shows that, while the impulse to differentiate is human and often very useful in general, some classification systems produce real advantage for some people and real disadvantages for others. One of the many key points is that standardizing tools and processes of standardization depend on how we define the objects of classification, what is at stake, and what other competing interpretations would need to be overcome. These processes of classification involve boundary making and are collectively produced, often by particular groups of people in positions of power to do so. However, because forms of classification depend on changeable definitional processes they may be relatively fluid and over time, individuals, objects, and ideas may find different ways to break, reformulate, or opt-in and -out of their assigned group or set definitions.

Similar to classification, differentiation occurs in everything from the type of work we do and where we were born to categories of objects, non-sentient beings, animals, human beings, or planets and ranges in consequence depending on the relational *position* of each of these entities to whatever they might be set in contrast to. Here position should be read in three interrelated ways, (1) position in terms of *social location* (e.g. demographic background, including socio-economic, ability, sex, race, religion, political and cultural factors*)*, (2) – *geographic or spatial location* (e.g. local, regional, global, universal), and (3) *historical context* (multiple narratives – e.g. personal or individual testimony, group affiliations, and official scripts).

Using this understanding of differentiation, this study examines whether country of professional residence (as opposed to country of origin) affects how artists and *primary*

gatekeepers categorize the artists' work as "African"? In other words, rather than identifying with other artists simply because they are "African" or "from the same country", might there be systemically identifiable differences among African-born artists based on professional base? If so, what are these identifiable differences? I examine whether artists display these differences in three primary ways, by distancing their biography from their art practice/form, by focusing on framing (e.g. concentrating on their creative process or formal aspects of the work) or by explicitly highlighting issue-specific content rather than focusing on the aesthetics of the work.

Contemporary art includes a broad spectrum of media and styles including painting, sculpture, drawing, digital graphics, architecture, film, and photography but also performance, literature, dance, music, and theatre. However, for the purposes of this study the focus is on object-making "visual artists". In other words, artists whose art can be physically separated from its producer, for instance, their living body and voice is not present at all times or necessarily present in the circulation and consumption of the art object. This distinction is to parse out the insistence on locating the artists' personal biography in the art objects the artists make as necessarily central to the artists' creative project, especially in cases where the artist pushes back on this assumption with the purpose of highlighting some other aspect of their creative objective(s).

As a genre, contemporary art therefore generously includes a variety of painters, sculptors, mixed-media installation artists, and photographers (not an exhaustive list). Does something different happen when "African" artists and their object-based work enter the process of knowledge making around cultural knowledge and its pragmatic and theoretical usefulness? Recent scholarship on the historical development of Contemporary African art suggests that the

associations between “African” art as the work of unknowable and anonymous creators, as archeological remnants or exotic finds in “Western” exploration, scholarship, and cultural institutional practices, might help to explain why some African born artists eschew a connection between their work and anything particularly “African” (Kasfir 1999: 170-171). The research shows that the representation of African, Asian, South American, and “indigenous” art follows a historical pattern of collectively juxtaposing these groups with “Western art”, where the latter is often associated with a movement towards Enlightenment and overall human progression (Price 2001). Gell (1998) criticizes the dominant approach in art history to understand art through a cultural frame, arguing that by focusing on meaning and symbolic communication, the art historian approach championed by scholars like Panofsky actually obscures very specific actors and processes of agency (of objects and those who produce and consume them), causation, result, and transformation (6).

Other analysts offer an alternative explanation and describe the distinctions among artists from African regions as a matter of periodization (Smith 2009) and as a product of the delayed historical development of visual art production and art education on the African continent (Svašek 1997; Kasfir 1999:124-130). These scholars argue that differences in how Contemporary African art developed were primarily due to lacking material and particular types of technical art vocabulary on the African continent, which were introduced by missionaries and other European settlers during the colonial period. Within cultural studies, the period following World War Two marks a critical historical moment of rupture in a modernism that that centered and privileged ‘the West’ (Hall 2005; Heartney 2013). In, "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling ‘the Heritage’, Re-Imagining the Post-Nation", for example, Hall (2005) discusses how museums of modern and

contemporary art were among the many cultural and governing bodies that promoted the concepts of 'the modern', 'modernity', and 'modernism', as exclusively 'Western' inventions.

Modernism, then, found its foundation in Western philosophy's rational thought and a universalism that locates 'the West' as its starting and central point, whereas postmodernism proposed a revision of this understanding of history as singular and Euro-centric (Belting et al. 2013). Contemporary African art develops with this backdrop of a break from modernism, to a shift towards an understanding of multiple histories unfolding simultaneously with moments of convergence and conflict, and at times foregrounding questions of power through resource allocation and gatekeeping, not simply in intellectual, economic, and political life but also in cultural production and dissemination (Hall 1992, Hudson 2000). As new spaces of art and cultural production emerge, they inherit this scattering of any attempt to offer singular or monolithic readings of history and the current historical moment in cultural production and the groups of people and institutions who get to assemble and disseminate knowledge about these histories.

The main finding in this study is that despite professional base, self-positioning, or differentiated understandings of what "Africanness" is or whether a Contemporary African art genre is a particularly useful category, the artists, curators, and other cultural entrepreneurs in this study find an entry point to working under this genre, even when they question its efficacy. Consistent with the concept of the boundary object, the data suggests that "Contemporary African art" is an organizing principle for an otherwise bifurcated, multi-generational, transnational genre with varying forms of experts and expertise. Boundary objects are objects or information, which allow for differently oriented groups to coordinate or collaborate, often

without consensus over how to define or use the objects or information in question (Star and Griesemer 1989). As Star and Griesemer explain, these objects are, "weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual-site use. These objects may be abstract or concrete" (Star and Griesemer 1989: 393). Using the boundary object to understand how conflict in differentiation can sustain integrity rather than weaken the ties within a cultural and knowledge producing community is a useful way of identifying the processes through which individuals who are grouped together under a category they variably understand as "a real category" can work together, and often without consensus. Rather than discouraging collaboration among none like-minded people, the malleability in how different individuals and groups can use the object creates an ambiguity that makes such collaborations possible. As Figure 3 below shows, the idea of a boundary object offers a crude but useful way to understand how it is that a genre as broad and perhaps even abstruse as Contemporary African art is the basis for massive fundraising efforts, intellectual production, and collective action.

Here I suggest three cases to demonstrate how an artist might think about the genre of contemporary African genre as a legitimate organizing principle. First, is the *pragmatic frame*, which views the genre primarily as a pragmatic tool (e.g. useful for organizing a thematic exhibition or for throwing a fundraiser for an "African" cause etc.). The second case is the *tangential frame*, one in which "Africanness" is not central but the artist still associates some aspect of it to their work. And finally, I identify the *substantive frame*, which prioritizes the association between an African person, place or thing as central and significant to the artists' work. A frame offers a sense of orientation, which can inform the strategies, tools, and spaces an

artist might employ and occupy as part of their creative production and may also apply to institutions, organizations, and content producing platforms.

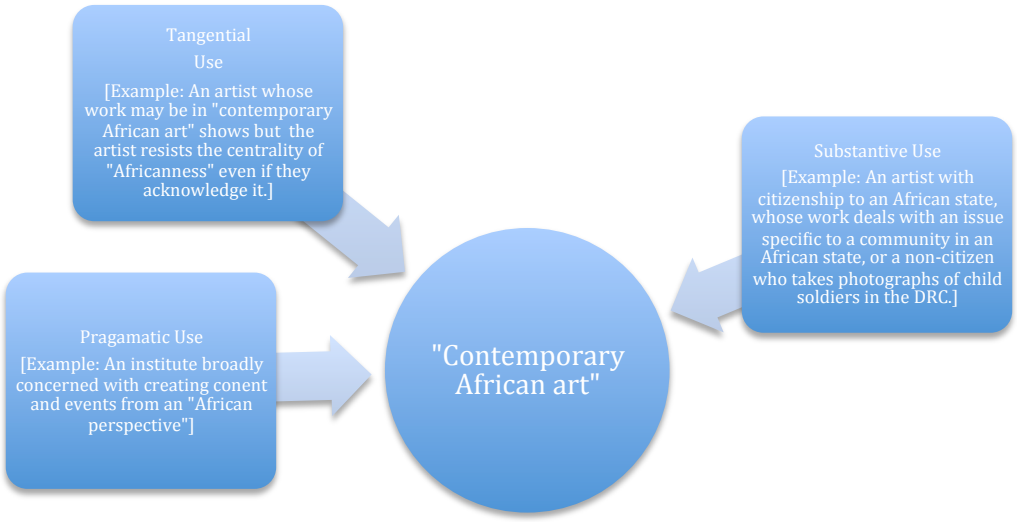

Figure 3. Contemporary African Art as a Boundary Object

Contemporary art is a field of economic and cultural production, in which Contemporary African art is an example of a boundary object that individuals, groups, and institutions can put to use with the backdrop of Africa as a cultural and economic global frontier (Klein 2002; Latour 2012; Miguel and Easterly 2009; Enwezor 2010; Mahajan 2011; Bayly 2004). What counts as Contemporary African art? To answer this question we might first ask what makes African art "African"? For example, a survey of art theory, history and practice literature, and syllabi suggests that art forms made by African-born artists between 1950 and the present is largely bounded by citizenship to or residency in an African state and region, rather than race. However, observations of Contemporary African art talks and panel discussions will show that the interaction of race and citizenship is as relevant to the genre as geographic region (place of birth

and professional base). While there might not be a true and fixed answer to "what is 'Contemporary African art'?" the genre holds real consequences for the people taking part in asserting the existence of art that is at least in some way "contemporary" and significantly associated with an "African" person, place, or phenomenon.

Sociological analysis of how people make judgments of whether something is appealing or not appealing as art also indicates that our preferences are rarely the result of purely objective or infallible motives (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Peterson and Kern 1996; Baumann 2007). Rather, the research suggests that if the stakes attached to our social position or affinity to a particular group, category, or cultural object was to change, so might our preference. In other words, at least in the process of establishing oneself as an artist, there are considerations that each artist can take into account in how they talk about their art. As the literature cited thus far suggests, art genres are highly contested categories, and like other categories, genres are a collective achievement; one that is socially constructed through social and historical processes and often have real consequences.

In a recent reiteration explaining what a boundary object is and isn't, Star (2010) elaborates on the 'object' part of the boundary object, "An object is something people (or, in computer science, other objects, and programs) act toward and with. Its materiality derives from action, not from a sense of prefabricated stuff or ''thing''-ness. So, a theory may be a powerful object." Following from both the idea of the gatekeeper in the cultural industry sense and the enacted boundary object, I use the case of contemporary artists working under the rubric of Contemporary African art as individuals who act on and are acted upon by a very powerful boundary object - "Contemporary African art". Debates about which objects and people are

"African" and "contemporary" have led to the founding of several dozen platforms that use strategic positioning to "Africa" so that rather than preventing individuals from collaborating on projects or indeed, using the same language to do their work, Contemporary "African" art offers a productive organizing principle, whether its users are in favor of it, find it inaccurate, restrictive, or even harmful. An understanding of this process of locating "Africanness" – a term often connected to a historical and global interplay across race, region, and citizenship and thinking about artists as secondary arbiters in the gatekeeping process thus expands on the sociological concept of boundary objects.

The New York City based artists who specifically identify "Africanness" as a key aspect of their work, for instance, tended to have a thematic focus on race/racism but also focused on other substantive themes such as sexuality, immigration, poverty, and play. Whereas, most artists based in Berlin had a more generalized or cosmopolitan attachment to "Africanness" with or without relating it to a particular African space (region, country, city). However, it may be worth mentioning that the Berliners did not reject their personal connection to "Africa" but they rejected the idea that their artwork is particularly "African"; for example, it is African *and* European or African *and* about mega-cities, in general. On average, those who lived in Berlin (and were not there temporarily on cultural exchange or artist in residency programs) had also lived in Germany for more years than the New York City based artists had lived in the US. The Berlin based artists who distanced their art from "Africanness" did appear to focus on artistic form or material, opting to emphasize intellectual moves in their creative process rather than necessarily making links to issues such as class, gender, race, and sexuality as driving motives. Regardless of their professional base, the artists who actively interrogate how their work relates

to any space, history, or idea as "African" demanded specificity in terms of what specifically about their work might be restricted to any given "African" space, and what that imagined "African" space is, to name the place, the people, and the things upon which the artists base this association.

Similar tension is evidenced in art talks, digital magazine interviews, and artist profiles providing a cursory survey of the ways in which artists based in Berlin, New York City, and other cities, including Addis Ababa, Johannesburg, and Cairo, might characteristically respond to questions about Africanness as it relates to their work. However, regardless of where the artists were based, open contradictions about African classification between what the artists said and what curators or funding agencies said rarely led to publically visible ruptures in continued exchange, collaboration, or support (at least none that could be readily observed from the researcher's position). It is this ability for a group of people to have differentiated access to the same framing tool – Africanness – to work together with different goals that makes "Africanness" more broadly, and "Contemporary African art", more specifically, an expedient and exchangeable boundary object.

For example, a curator looking to organize an African themed exhibition and panel requires both a selection of Contemporary African art and presumably the artists who created them. Some of the chosen artists may wish to gain exposure by joining an "African art panel" related to the exhibition, even if they do not identify as African or are from an African state but do not see their work as representing anything particularly African. The following is an illustrative example from a panel held in a collaborative artist space in Berlin in 2014. One of the artists on the panel states, "I'm a social theorist but I am also an artist. I ask research questions.

For example, right now I am very interested in understanding why people participate in activities or support processes that hurt them. What is that about?" There is a sense that the artist poses the question in a confrontational way, not to shutdown discussion but to open up a conversation with the audience and to have a discussion about why it is that some individuals participate in the very systems and structures that harm them.

This artist was particularly vocal about rejecting the "African artist" label and became visibly agitated when one of the audience members asked her about being a Nigerian artist working in Britain. She firmly responded, "I'm black but I grew up in the UK". As she points out in her next few sentences, she knowingly accepted the invitation to participate in an African artist panel in a workshop space that prioritizes Contemporary African art and other non-Western contemporary art genres in Berlin and abroad. "I am here because I fit and it works." Following the panel I tried to ask her for an interview after the open discussion but she hurriedly said she had to go; she had a flight to catch the next morning. I wanted to ask her what she had meant when she said, "I fit and it works" and how she grappled with this idea in her own research.

She had accepted the invitation to join the panel because she "fits" and because "it" works. But if she did not see herself or her work as having anything specific to do with or say about an experience, subject, or idea that relates in some way to Nigeria, "Africa", or its diasporas, then which part fits? What works in that space and for whom? The artist's push back did not turn into an extended confrontation as the conversation moved into a discussion about language, translation, and how these influence perspective. Although there was clearly some conflict in the way individuals in the space were understanding what was "contemporary" and "African" about the artists presenting on the panel and their work, it was smoothed over by a

commitment to talk through the tension by focusing on the multiple other ways in which one might come to associate with "Africa" or "Africanness" through art. Perhaps it was that the British artist had African heritage, and that alone gave her legitimacy to speak on an "African artist" panel, but she also insisted that, while it was useful for access into the space, this biographic legitimacy is separate from the content and purpose of her work.

She was not alone. During an interview with the 2013 online issue of Canadian Art, another misidentified artist, Mohamed Bourouissa said, "I'm always asked about Algeria, about being Algerian…But although I was born in Algeria to Muslim Algerian parents, I grew up in the suburbs of Paris, and I think of myself as French." According to these artists, the first in a face-to-face public forum and the latter in an online interview, insist that her Nigerianess and his Algerianness are inaccurate classifications and they openly express the discontent and distress caused by this error: They insist that they are European not African.

Even as they each reject the particular African country in which audience members and sometimes even curators and art content developers locate them and their work, "Africanness" remains a valuable trading chip – something that, although inaccurately capturing how they want others to identify them (or their work) still serves a vital purpose in allowing them and their work access to "African" focused exhibitions, artist in residencies, workshops, and art panels. At least in the case of the first artist, artists may employ their African heritage to register for the workshops, sign up for the panels, or accept invitations to showcase their work in African group exhibitions. They are happy to trade on Africanness in this way, but trade in Africanness if it draws unwanted attention on personal, national, or biographical affiliation to any particular

African space. More than a genre, "Contemporary African art" is a professional placement strategy and is therefore as instrumental as it is expressive.

Contradicting the event organizers (who were in the room) and raising her voice at the audience member who had made the mistake of referring to her as an African from Nigeria, the first artist's response was an effort to filter information that had already been printed and distributed – labeling her "Nigerian-British", "African", and "contemporary". As a *secondary arbiter* (See Figure 4 below), the oscillating effort between trading on and trading in her Africanness becomes part of her artistic practice (production and interpretation).

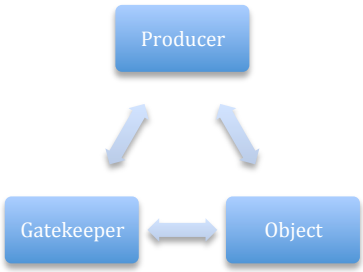

Figure 4. Secondary Arbiters: Cultural Producers Participate in the Gatekeeping Process

Trading on, meaning to use Africanness as a trading chip, signing up to participate in a Contemporary African art panel discussion could signal that even though she rejects "Africanness" she has access because the organizers read her (or her work) as belonging to the Contemporary African art category. However, once on the panel and in the face-to-face interaction with an audience the artist opts to trade in (release/relinquish) association with Africanness, at least in as far as her personal biography as a British citizen with Nigerian ancestry is concerned.

The basic idea of the producer as *secondary arbiter* is that creative producers, provided that they have access to or can create their own platforms to do so, are producers of cultural objects in circulation and they can also engage in the space between *primary gatekeepers* and art consumers. Not all artists have access or the means to participate in this way. For some artists the art objects they create get to travel the world through museum collections, gallery exhibitions, and international art fairs, even when the artists cannot. These art objects can therefore be thought of as possessing some semblance of autonomy and instructiveness separate from their producers. Whereas, gatekeepers in the cultural industry literature can be understood as mediators who stand between the producers/creators and the consumers in Griswold's cultural diamond, contemporary artists are producers who sometimes have the platform and tools to participate in this gatekeeping process.

The artists of course do this mediatory work in concert with or alongside *primary gatekeepers* in the art and creative industries, including curators, art historians, art critics, and cultural entrepreneurs. Gatekeepers, who write about artists and the art objects they make, often approach the artist as part of a legible object of study from which new knowledge and understanding can come or as an extension of the artwork itself. Contemporary artists participating in discussions, research, and publication of knowledge about their work, not only those working under the rubric of Contemporary African art, recognize this working dynamic. While some artists continue to defer to gatekeepers, others view themselves not only as producers but also as contributors in the knowledge production around their work and therefore engage in different forms of self-advocacy, editing and corrective rewriting of others' understandings of the artists' work.

In other words, along with curators, art critics, and art historians, artists who engage in debates over categorization not only through their work but also through face-to-face, written work and digital media interactions are participating in the gatekeeping process – having some influence in the co-editing of the production and dissemination of knowledge on the cultural material they create, and sometimes suggesting alternative interpretations of their material and conceptual creative production.

In what follows, I'll examine how Contemporary African artists, mainly in Berlin and New York City, are a group of social agents who are professionally, geographically, and historically positioned and have a somewhat shared understanding of what constitutes "Contemporary African art" but also variably employ this category in situations where there is perceived mutual personal and institutional benefit. From this understanding, I theorize the Contemporary African art genre as a boundary object that accommodates diverse and sometimes incongruent elements of the art genre.

5. AFRICANNESS AS A TRADING CHIP: THE POLITICS OF ARTISTIC TENURE

Abstract

From the boutique gallery to the public museum, Contemporary African art is enjoying increased attention in academia, the art market, and political social movements, both on the African continent proper and abroad, within the last 10 years. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role of the artist as a cultural mediator and knowledge producer working within a growing and relatively unregulated visual arts industry. Using direct quotes from interviews with 30 visual artists as well as observations of artist talks and 6 supplementary interviews with curators, I analyze the way artists working under the rubric of "Contemporary African art" frame their work in relation to "Africanness". Artists map moments of individual and collective meaning making during the production of knowledge about their work. The data suggest that within the Contemporary African art genre some artists are compelled to engage Africanness as a "trading chip", trading in (eschewing) or trading on (employing) Africanness in their work (to gain access to resources, exposure, and financial support or as a central topic in their work), while others occupy a freelance position, free to affiliate with or dissociate from the genre without the threat of professional penalty. Artists respond to the framing of their work as Contemporary African art in three main ways, *pragmatic*, *substantive*, *tangential,* and those who are vocal about their position understand their participation in this self-positioning process in terms of artistic tenure. Where an artist has a narrative of their coming of age as an artist, they often also have a set of parameters, allowances, and resources they tap into to orient themselves and their art in relation to the work that primary gatekeepers do. From these findings I suggest that the grouping of

people, objects, and spaces as "African" and "contemporary" is, in its most basic state, a kind of boundary object and in its most transformative state, a productive misnomer.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Africanness, trading chip, artistic tenure

> "I am there because I am an artist. I want my work to be the determinant of where I get into."
>
> *Interview with Addis Ababa based artist (June 2016)*

> "The main concern for me has been that so much of my work is about Nigeria, my experience or my life as a cosmopolitan Nigerian woman, I worry that that is where all the discussion and discourse will rest and there won't be as much emphasis or attention paid to parts of the work that engage the history of painting, the different languages of painting, ways of putting together a composition, the formal choices I am making. And that does happen, I am seeing more and more, so it is always tricky when I talk about my work, wanting to talk about Nigeria and how it influences my work but also worrying that…always being conscious of bringing the discussion back to painting, otherwise it just never gets really seen or talked about."
>
> *Interview with Los-Angeles based artist (October 2016)*

A growing body of literature in art history, art theory, and cultural anthropology indicates that while Contemporary African artists on both the African continent and abroad have received more

attention in the academy, international cultural institutions and online cultural news platforms within the last 10 years, this attention is simultaneously limited or expanded by persisting expectations of what and who counts as "African" and how this might pigeonhole the contributions of African-born artists (Kasfir 1999; Oguibe 2004; Grabski 2008; Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009; Wallin 2014). There is a key difference between contemporary art (lower case 'c'), which refers to the art of the current historical moment and Contemporary African art, which really refers to an assemblage of art produced since the 1980s alongside the culmination of African independence from colonial rule. The literature on Contemporary African art refers to the notion of "Africanness" as a collectively acknowledged albeit a debatable and theoretically identifiable "essence" found in something or someone who is of, or associated with, the African continent.

Much of the work on Africa, its diasporas, and global migration studies rests on discussions over the demarcation of where "Africanness" naturally belongs, to whom it belongs, and what spaces it can safely and rightfully occupy, if any (Dancygier and Laitin 2014; Davidov et al. 2014). Although largely fluid in application, Africanness is oft-times connected to *race* (black), *geographic region* (usually South of the Sahara), and *citizenship* to an African state. However, there are scholars who investigate the historical position of non-black citizens of African states that destabilize assumptions about race, region, and citizenship on the African continent. For example, German-Namibians (Steinmetz and Hell 2006), Saharan Jews (Boum 2011), South African Jews (Adler 2000), Dutch-South Africans/Afrikaners), British-South Africans, Indian-Kenyans (Frenz 2013) and Chinese South Africans all lay claims on their rightful place as citizens of an African state. Apart from its connection to birthright, heritage, and

citizenship, the notion of “Africanness” also gets its expansive application from the suffix “-ness”, which transforms an adjective or descriptor into a noun while still maintaining the properties of the adjective. This is important because in language, we often think of a noun as something of permanence, an unalterable or unchanging thing whereas an adjective merely describes a noun.

The characteristics of “Africanness” listed above along with the use of geographic region and proximity as a proxy for group affinity and a perceived collective accountability to define “Africanness” forms the basis of the following intertwined research questions: How do contemporary artists born on the African continent employ the concept of “Africanness” in a highly globalized contemporary art market? And in what ways do contemporary artists overtly eschew or embrace “Africanness" in their work and how does their self-positioning help to frame the interpretation and understanding of their work?

Framing Africanness as a kind of *bargaining chip*, I also ask along what factors and contexts we see difference and similarity in when and how artists embrace, eschew, downplay, or criticize others’ referring to their work as “African”? What might cultural sociologists who are interested in understanding the role of producers and the limitations of the efficacy of assigning group affinity based on identity markers (e.g. citizenship, race, class, gender) learn from a mapping of artists’ varied self-positioning to “Africanness” (in form and degree)? How might an examination of the artists’ use and critique of social science theories and methods as a means to deconstruct or challenge the knowledge others produce about their work inform the way sociologists theorize about producers, not only as producers but also as participants in the curation, knowledge production and consumption their work?

During the interviews in this study, artists who responded to my questions about "Africanness" in their work report that they have already had experience doing so in professional settings, for example during art panels, in interviews with art publications, with curators they work with and others who are interested in starting a new working relationship. Similar to other professionals like athletes and actors, visual artists' professional titles often conflate the artists' biography + work (professional base). So this is in no way unique to African-born artists. For example, on their website many artists have a bio page and art labels in exhibitions that read, "X-born artist based in Y city or country" where "X" usually represents the artist's country or city of birth and Y is their professional base. This practice is embedded in Art History as a discipline in the West, dating back to Giorgio Vasari's Lives of the Artists (Holly 1985). Exhibition labels and artist bio blurbs might highlight the artist's country of origin, and not their professional base but often include both. Below is an example of an exhibition label (See Figure 5 below) and an artist bio blurb (See Figure 6 below) that only focus on the artist's place of birth, or nationality.

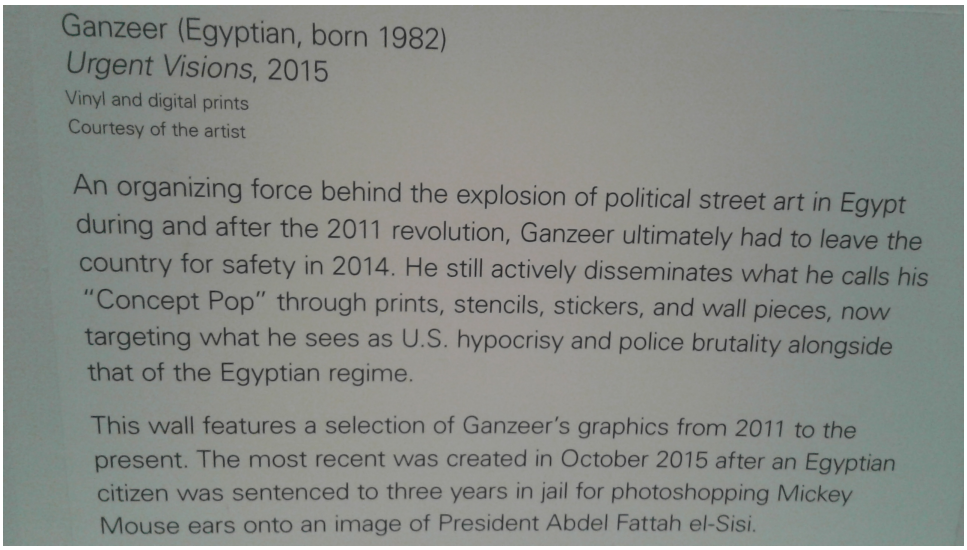

Figure 5. Bio+Work 1 - Information Card Describing the Artist and His Artwork[29]

[29] Photo taken by researcher during artist group exhibition in New York City.

about

Of German Jamaican Parentage brought up in England, China and Cyprus Sonia Elizabeth Barrett has an international range of cultural influences. She is a graduate of St Andrews University where she studied Philosophy, Literature and International Relations graduating with an MA in litterature. She also graduated recently from the Transart Institute and now has a MFA in Studio Practice.

Figure 6. Bio+Work 2 - "About" Summary on Artist's Website[30]

Figure 5, shows an information card describing the work of Egyptian artist, Ganzeer mounted next to his work in an exhibition space in New York City. The artist, who is sometimes referred to as "The Banksy of Egypt" is based in Brooklyn, New York City but the placard only displays the artist's country of birth. The artist's work has been a critique of Egypt's dictatorship prior to the 2011 revolution and a reflection on the events and movements that have followed the Arab Uprisings. He is also a writer, designer, and teacher. Figure 6 is a screenshot taken directly from artist, Sonia E. Barrett's "About" page on her official website and shows that she is of "German Jamaican parentage". Primarily working through sculptural and installation pieces,

[30] Screenshot taken from artist official website, http://www.sebarrett.com/about

Barrett's work deals with the question of human objectification and wrestles with the possibilities of developing strategies of release or escape from objectification.

The precise identification of place of birth and/or place of work (sometimes to signal citizenship) in artist information cards and about blurbs is also sometimes accompanied by the artist's date of birth or the even more prevalent practice of the date when the work was made or "completed". These details become useful mechanisms to place the artist (and the art work) in relation to other artists (and art works) and often to signal that they are part of a certain generation, region, or art era. The demographic differentiation alone is a worthy object of study for social science research seeking to theorize the significance of identity in knowledge making and how social identity (e.g. race, gender, class, citizenship) influences or interacts with group affinity, for example. These artists, along with others, pursue and in many cases vie for resources, space, and platforms to exhibit and discuss their work and they do so through a variety of ways, sometimes through close personal connections they have with other cultural workers who have access to these resources but mostly through applying for access into and gaining recognition from cultural institutions, including museums, galleries, artist residency programs, and workshop spaces, universities, ministries of culture, and government embassies. The mission statements, grant descriptions and residency programs sometimes emphasize an intentional focus on "African perspectives". So that, although the study focuses on the artists' self-positioning in this *biography+work* matrix, this research is also relevant to cultural and educational institutions and programs that make assessments about merit-based accomplishments and expertise, while also distributing resources based on social identity.

I argue that along with the important work being done by art historians and scholars working in the sociology of art looking at the effects of globalization, shifts in the billion dollar art market (Velthuis and Cosler 2012), professionalization, and the role of curators and cultural institutions (Balzer 2014; Kurin 2014), the work artists do in addition to producing art objects contributes to the knowledge-making processes that occur outside the art studio and the art objects they make. *Who* these artists are is important, and for some *where* they are from is just as significant, but at the risk of repeating the pitfalls of the old colonial collectors and traders who gathered objects made by people from African regions as anonymous relics and curiosities, this chapter does not refer to artists by name. These omissions are an effort to bring focus to *what* the artists are saying rather than on *who* they are or *where* they are from. I acknowledge the superficial constraints of this approach, which is meant to function more as an analytical tactic to focus on how artists think about "Africanness" and position themselves within the Contemporary African art genre. Table 6 (Appendix 2) shows a detailed overview of art practitioners' bios and artist statements whose experiences I directly reference in this chapter.

Related to the efforts by *primary gatekeepers* outlined in Chapter 2, to articulate a recognizable genre of Contemporary African art through exhibitions, to organize art conferences, publications, and increase in the number of Contemporary art fairs are three ongoing developments in the contemporary art world. First, more artists are now traveling with their work to art exhibition openings and art fairs to give art talks and participate in art residency programs where they share ideas about what they are doing in relation to interpretations by curators, critics, and art theorists. Second, there is an increase in the number of artists going through Masters of Fine Arts training (both on the African continent and abroad) and through these

programs many incorporate curatorial and art theory building practices into their work. Third, artists are increasingly promoting their own work through digital and print media as well as community organizing and virtual collaborations. This final point is particularly significant for artists whose work has more physical mobility than they do, either because the artist cannot afford to travel with their work or cannot get the required travel visa to attend art talks and art fairs where their work features.

There is research on the role of curators, gallerists, and art critics as brokers in the collection, categorization, and circulation of artists, the artists' work and knowledge about it (Dewey 2005; Batinic 2005; Balzer 2014). Economically, the global art market is a multi-billion dollar industry (Thompson 2008; Horowitz 2014), and in the words of ARTnews reporter M.H. Miller, "The art industry is notoriously opaque (and) the cliché is that it is the largest unregulated industry in the world, besides guns and drugs".[31] Art researchers also study the role that money and law play in the art market and how individuals moving in these circles are aware of the multifaceted high stakes in art, stakes that go well beyond debates over the limitations of genre, politics in art and the transformative capacity for art as a tool to edify, inspire, and entertain (Fenton 2016; Gawthrop 2016, Howland, Lillehoj and Mayer 2016). Much of the research on contemporary art and artists discusses the historical developments and current interactions between the artists' role as social agents and their art as material for developing discourse around art.

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[31] ARTnews official website. ARTnews is an online international contemporary art platform with catalogues and news content for artists, galleries and curators. Accessed on December 17, 2016. http://www.artnews.com/2016/04/25/the-big-fake-behind-the-scenes-of-knoedler-gallerys-downfall/.

The capacity for the artists to access and accumulate resources in the massive machinery of the international art scene in order to establish and maintain some control over their creative process and the dissemination of knowledge about their work centers around the art-object and art-object production, rather than the artists' role as a knowledge producer in their own right. To mediate the processes of interpretation even once their work has reached their audiences, some artists rely on emphasizing a researcher's approach to their work, stating what it is and isn't, collecting and using historical texts as guides for their creative choices, and prioritizing issue-based agendas over aesthetic appeal, especially when the appeal appears to rest on what some refer to as a monolithic "African" yet "contemporary" narrative or expectation. For instance, artists who are willing to engage in discussions about their work sometimes find it both necessary and responsible for them to edit knowledge and understandings about their work.

Opening with a brief overview of what Africanness means and an introduction of the theoretical development of Africanness as a "trading chip", I use this idea of a trading chip to signify the extreme ends of a spectrum in how artists orient their work to "Africanness". On one end, artists eschew (trade in) the use of Africanness in their work and on the other end others embrace (trade on) Africanness in their work. These are not fixed stances or orientations as an artist may move from one to the other throughout her career (e.g. refusing expectations to work in "African" aesthetics in early art school years, but then building a portfolio exploring this expectation in later work) or depending on the context in which she is showing or discussing her work (e.g. does the audience already have a strong grasp of the artist's work or is the exhibition dealing with a specific aspect of the artist's creative process that might be confined to an association with "Africanness"?).

I organize the chapter into four main sections, each showing how artists differently position their work in relation to the notion of "Africanness" that is imbedded in the Contemporary African art genre. Through this differentiated self-positioning, where Africanness appears to some as a monolithic and inhibiting concept, while to others it is a varied and at least in some partial sense an accurate and useful label, Contemporary African art becomes a boundary object. A boundary object is a mechanism that, although defined and employed differently by individuals and groups (with different orientations, considerations, or goals), allows for partnerships and collaboration, even without group consensus (Star and Griesemer 1989). In other words, ambiguity and fluidity are strengths, not weaknesses or threats to the integrity of the mechanism.

In the first section I present three examples of artists who respond to ideas about the viability of centering "playfulness" and the expectation of "seriousness" in working within "African genres and spaces", noting that the pressure to justify one's work as "serious" is felt in both creative and intellectual pursuits. In this section, I also discuss historical focus and the research-based approach that some artists use as a dominant tactic to actively refocus attention on the work and the purpose of the work, and away from the artist's personal or biographical background. These artists have a *pragmatic* orientation towards the Contemporary African art genre, even if it is not an entirely desired "endpoint", they recognize that it is useful for organizing exhibitions (by theme, geography, or citizenship), which in turn provide opportunities for them to participate in exhibitions and programing that often also have a platform to speak on the specificities of their work. Africanness, even when it is constraining, is a concept that artists

with a pragmatic frame trade on or use in their work, often with an underlying critique of the assumptions and limitations that accompany working within Contemporary African art.

The second section offers two examples of artists for whom working within the Contemporary African art genre is central to their work and therefore has *substantive* use in the work. The first holds our attention on the use of archival material as a strategic means for creating art objects that are at once cultural object but also act as a critique of the unwavering faith scholars place on the historical artifact, with specific focus on archival materials. The second draws our attention to the question of "home" and belonging, and discusses how this has been a central part of developing her artistic practice and exploring an African aesthetic in her work. These artists approach the Contemporary African art genre with a substantive frame, suggesting that Africanness (or a specific space, issue, idea that is closely associated with or located on the African continent) has a meaningful and primary significance in the artist's work, even as the artist's work addresses other key issues or ideas.

In the third section, the link between the personal and the professional in the way an artist frames their creative production reveals a restrictive feature in the conflation of biography and work in the artist's professional title. The *bio+work* matrix in the art title restricts some contemporary artists more than others in how they can self-position and those who express the desire to distance themselves or their work from "Africanness" find they must constantly formulate a response or preemptive tactics to deflect from the expectation that their work is inextricably linked to some African "essence". I offer two examples of art practitioners who insist that the conversation must shift away from self-referential "Africanness" to focusing on the very context-specific elements in each artist's work. The first is a London-based artist and the

second is a curator who studied art and is based in South Africa, and both encourage a movement away from "Africanness" to digging beneath or progressing beyond it.

Artists who do not see their work as part of the Contemporary African art genre even as they and their work appear in exhibitions and artist lists in the genre, tend to view the pragmatic and substantive frames as damaging and limiting. Their orientation towards Contemporary African art is *tangential*, so they might acknowledge that "Africanness" is a thing, useful to other people but not to them even though in some ways they still gain access to space and resources because gatekeepers attach an association to "Africa" to these artists work, no matter how accurate or general the association is to the artist's work. It is in this tangential frame group that we find artists who choose to opt-out or "trade in" their Africanness rather than to do what the artists in the first two groups do, and "trade on" it.

In the fourth section I introduce the case of non-African contemporary artists and artists who are read as "white" while their work is read as "African." These individuals' experience of the freedom to disassociate from African identity without facing inescapable interrogation by historians and theorists differs from that of black and other non-white contemporary artists for whom the dance of self-positioning one's work between biography and "Africanness" is almost a given. However, this "race" interpretation is further complicated by the experience of artists who gained access into the art industry precisely because a gatekeeper made a loose association between the artist's work and Africanness and thus creating opportunities for artists to partake in the blooming Contemporary African art genre. Even as they confirm the limitation in working within the Contemporary African art genre, in their experience, these artists are able to participate in the Contemporary African art genre and do so even when they feel that they must

constantly formulate a response to others' expectations that the artist's work is inextricably linked to Africa or to "Africanness".

Where "Africanness" appears to hinder an artist's creative process (rarely their access into the contemporary Africana art genre), artists either continue to work within the constraint, if they experience it, or develop ways to manage or use it. I liken the artists' pursuit for creative freedom that isn't predicated on centering biography to the appeal of academic freedom, which gives precedence to the pursuit of knowledge without necessitating the centering or even fixing the researcher's biography to his work. Like the theoretically unburdened researcher, the artist desires freedom to explore and experiment with materials of his choosing, addressing social ills, playful ideas, provocative subjects, potentially non-conventional or controversial social critiques that may or may not rest on association to "Africa".

On Africanness in Art

The etymology of the word "Africa" goes back to the ancient Romans and the Greeks and referred to modern day North Africa, the region geographically north of the Sahara Desert, but has increasingly come to refer to Africa South of the Sahara, with a focus its non-Arab black population (also see Diop 1989). Although the continent, north and south combined, is more readily labeled "Africa", the continent of 54, perhaps 55 countries in 2016 is still geopolitically and economically organized into roughly two mass regions; "North Africa", which includes countries affiliated with the Middle East and "Africa South of the Sahara", including West, East, Central, and Southern Africa, both regions are made up of populations that are vastly diverse in race, ethnicity, religion, and language groups. The idea of Africanness is therefore often fraught with debates over whether or not it incorporates artists from all parts of the continent, including

North Africa. History, as its been told through Western perceptions, more readily links North Africa to the Middle East and Europe and separates it from Sub-Saharan Africa, which helps to explain how these places are also separated racially, North Africa as part of the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa as "Black Africa."

An understanding of the process of locating "Africanness" as connected to a historical and global interplay across race, region, and citizenship then, is an illustrative case of the sociological concept of boundary objects. Star and Griesemer (1989) conceptualize a boundary object as a commonly understood thing or idea that allows collaboration among otherwise differently oriented individuals and groups, often without consensus. In their study of methods of standardization in the development of the Berkeley Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, the two researchers found that groups with very different objectives could agree on the utility of certain tools even if they did not agree on how to operationalize these tools. Star and Griesemer go on to define boundary objects as, "objects which are plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain common identity" (393). They found that although museum collectors and amateur collectors, for instance, made use of the same field notes, maps, and specimen and could comfortably agree on some technical language, they often used these tools to meet very different goals.

The concept of the boundary object is useful for identifying the processes through which individuals that are grouped together under a category they variably understand as "a real category" work together, even without consensus on its appropriate use. Cultural producers and brokers who are differently positioned socially, geographically, and historically collectively re-produce a somewhat shared understanding of what constitutes "Contemporary African art", and

even though they variably employ this category they are willing to work together when there is perceived mutual professional and/or institutional benefit. The tensions that arise from definitional variation in the genre or priorities that do not quite align do not threaten the integrity of the genre precisely because there are so many entry points through which an artist or art audience can make an association between an artwork and "Africa" or "Africanness".

I observed three main differences in the way artists with different understandings of and pressures to place their work in relation to "Africanness" come to occupy the same working spaces, team up to collaborate on projects and why others can fully reject "Africanness" and still thrive in the Contemporary African art genre. These three working frameworks demonstrate how Contemporary African art functions as a boundary object: a legitimate organizing principle or mechanism mainly legitimized by the individuals who participate in the genre, whether or not they agree with how others define or use Africanness. The first approach is the *pragmatic frame*, which views the genre as a pragmatic tool (e.g. used to outline the parameters for an exhibition or to throw a fundraiser event for an "African" cause etc.). The second is the *substantive frame*, in which those who employ it tend to prioritize association between an African person, place, or thing in their work (e.g. an artist whose work content or subject matter is about a specific community in an African country or investigates questions about "Africanness", like nationality and authenticity). The third frame is the *tangential frame*, one in which "Africanness" is not central to the work but is marginally associated with the artist or their work. These frames are not static as some artists report moving from one frame to another depending on context and opportunity.

Pragmatic Use: No Room for Frivolity and Limitations on Creative Expression

The data suggest that, while Africanness is a useful organizing principle for bringing differently oriented groups of people into the same working space (physically and virtually), its application by curators and art historians as an art category is characteristically diverse in nature and is perhaps productively ambiguous (Kasfir 1999; Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu 2009). Whereas we often think of categories as closed, separating what and who belongs from what and who does not belong, in the case of Africanness we have a contested "open" category.

The following excerpt describes an event that took place during a panel discussion at the 2016 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in New York City, an art fair that also takes place in London (and Marrakech in 2018), focusing on what might be broadly understood as Contemporary African art or art from African perspectives. The excerpt illustrates how a Nigerian-born artist based in New York City participates in a public exhibition, joins a panel discussion with a curator in a Contemporary African art space, and openly eschews the classification of her work as specifically "African". She draws the audience's attention to her deliberate focus on experimentation and the theme of play in her work. It is worth noting that 1:54 describes itself as, "a platform for galleries, artists, curators, art centers, and museums involved in African and Africa related projects and aims to promote art by established and emerging talents amongst an international audience.[32]" In this exchange, the curator responds to the artist's creative process as an exploration of play:

> "It is a process that relieves itself from the burden of context", comments the curator, who is also acting as the panel discussant. The artist explains that much

[32] 1:54 Website, Access: http://1-54.com/new-york/.

> of her work is, "never *about* x, y, and z" but rather about finding a resolution of where to place the characters she draws or how to create a specific experience through their interactions. The artist adds, "When people ask, 'What is this piece about?' I can rarely answer because that is not how the work is made. [In] Some of the work, the characters are actually playing together…It is about space, making spaces, play, freedom – those sorts of things."
>
> *Panel discussion between independent curator and New York City-based artist at 1:54 art fair in New York City (May 2016)*[33]

After the artist goes into more detail about the characters she has created whose relationships shape her work, the curator shares some of his own observations about artists working in spaces like the 1:54 art fair, "In these black spaces most of the time artists are dealing with weighty questions, important questions…so we forget that beyond colonialism and oppression we have the right to experiment." Before the Q&A, the artist adds a statement about the expectations that come with working in "black" and "African" art spaces,

> "…most especially in a black *and* African space, what right do I have to locate play in my work? *Play is a frivolity* (emphasis added), but I do think there is politics in play. The question of 'where is the…It is more about trauma…Africa part of this?' whether it is aesthetic or thematic. But it does not mean that I am

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[33] The artist and independent curator, Dexter Wimberly, in discussion on a panel titled, "The Politics and Privilege of Play" as part of the 1:54 Contemporary Art fair 2016 discussion and education program, curated by Koyo Kouoh. Kouoh is the founding artistic director of RAW Material Company in Dakar, Senegal and the curator of the 37th edition of EVA international – Ireland's Biennial.

> ignorant of police brutality. I think there is more freedom for artists of European decent to do pretty much whatever they want. Your work can be purely mechanical…you can say it means nothing."
>
> *New York City-based artist during panel discussion at 1:54 art fair in NYC (May 2016)*

Although many other artists are willing to participate in Contemporary African art exhibitions or panels, not all keep their misgivings about the use of Africanness to define an art category or genre private. In discussions, this tends to necessitate continued return to what inspires the artist, if not their "African experience". During the Q&A, a young man in the audience stands up to congratulate the artist for, "swimming against the stream" and being one of the few artists he knows who is offering a counter-narrative to the idea that African artists only deal in naval gazing or depressing topics. To which the artist immediately responds, "I don't agree that I am counter, but what the artist does in the studio I hope is for the artist's own personal exploration. Once it leaves the studio of course it gets placed into boxes by curators, dealers, and others". The young man sat back down, and with that the artist had reinforced her insistence to remain playful in her work without the work itself being trivialized or pitted against work that deals with "serious" or "weighty" issues. Fundamentally she asks who among us has access to "play"? The artist props her point about limitations on artistic expression for artists of African descent with a statement about how artists of European descent can get away with saying their art is about nothing. In three years of research I have observed similar phenomenon at work; this is further addressed in section four.

I had sat down with this artist 6 months earlier in a café in New York City to interview her about her practice and interactions with curators and other artists in the city. In our discussion she evoked similar points to describe her frustration with working under the rubric of Contemporary African art, that her passion is actually in developing her drawing technique and finding ways to push her practice through exploration and reiteration. She continued, "I had a conversation about this with another artist and good friend of mine. I was thinking about sitting out the upcoming 1:54 and he said, 'I have to participate. Yes, it is problematic but because it is problematic, I have to participate'". She had just explained to me how she does not have a specific issue with "Contemporary African art" or "African contemporary art", per se, but rather that the question of diluting specificity of place and content, and the tendency to be reductionist, are actually characteristically "contemporary" issues. Complicating this further, she went on to state, "Note how there is no desire to talk about Europe or European-ness in an exhibition. No desire to talk about European identity…I can't think of an exhibition on African art that does not talk about identity." The opportunities to focus on discussing her creative process as an artist who draws on paper are riddled with questions about her African identity and how it influences her work.

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714 miles away in Chicago, another New York City based artist addresses an auditorium full of art practice and theory students about his work. He opens his art talk by first sharing a brief history about his country of origin: Botswana. With a projection of a map beside him, he explains to his audience that Botswana is about the size of France with a population of about 2 million people. He moves into a discussion about his coming of age as an artist by telling a story

about why he chose not to become a performance artist because, "performance is limited in the sense that it ties my body to the art object and limits my identity."[34] He explains how his projects are circumscribed by specific spaces, that pedagogy is a central part of his art practice, and for him history painting, like any other medium or style goes through cycles of privilege and that, "although all media are limited, the point is to hover above the limits or the margins in order to see the scope of possibilities."

The artist describes how his work begins with research. He collects newspaper clippings, creates a mini-archive of secondary sources; he returns to places where events are said to have taken place; like a detective, he takes pictures, collects sand samples and from these materials and hours in his studio comes his large scale storyboards. He only works from his position, he says, with what he has access to and with what he knows. "If I started painting landscapes in South Carolina, it would be weird. It would be - What does this African guy have to say about South Carolina? What is this guy doing painting people in South Carolina? Every artist works from their own position …their own matrix identity…*my identity is somehow always ready to be collapsed into what I am doing*" (emphasis added). Still referring to the tension between wanting his work to be both close to his biography while at the same time acknowledging a need to distance his biography from the art work itself, he moves on to discuss the development of his artistic form as research-based history painting. The artist speaks at length about his choice of medium and explains that his use of the cinematic panorama is a conceptual device, "I am not interested in discrete objects".

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[34] Quote taken from field notes, observation of artist lecture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (March 2015).

This readjustment from content to form as a way of explaining the tension between wanting to at once acknowledge one's subjective experience as it informs an artistic approach, while at the same time rejecting the primacy of said identity in the possibilities and questions opened up by the artwork, becomes an important and recurring theme throughout the interviews and art talks that follow in the next three chapters.

Unlike the artist in the 1:54 Art Fair, the artist in the lecture delves into the nitty-gritty of why and how he came to define his creative practice as a history painter and why it is so important to parse out the individual artist's identity from the broader context in which his work is situated, especially when the first appears to eclipse the latter. The different platforms, panel discussion versus lecture, undoubtedly affected how much detail each artist was able to plunge into their creative process. Whereas the artist in the panel discussion was responding directly to pre-set questions, the artist in the lecture was able to set the parameters of the lecture. The lecture format therefore allows the artist to state his position and priorities to the audience as a starting point that often shapes the discussions that follow. The art lecture had a follow-up Q&A session similar to the one that followed the panel discussion, but perhaps because the artist dealt with his stance on identity during the lecture, the students stuck to questions about his use of materials, the theoretical underpinnings in his canvas-as-movie reel approach and his other technical decisions.

This particular artist would later have a solo show in a highly respected art gallery in New York City, in which he incorporates excerpts of folktales written in Setswana alongside large scale paintings, deliberately excluding any English translations of the text. When I asked the gallerist why there were no translations of the text, she plainly explained that the artist had

made the very conscious decision not to provide translations because the work was also making a point about the slippages in language and what is inevitably lost in any attempts to translate across language, be it in the form of text or imagery.

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I had seen this use of un-translated text to tell a story and make a larger point about translating across language two years before, in the work of a South African artist in residency at the ifa-Gallerie: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen in Berlin. The Johannesburg-based artist used Tswana and Sotho words painted free hand in bold bright colors throughout his montages as references to the psychological and social impact of moving from the countryside to the city and the disorienting experience of moving between the two. In an interview with the exhibition organizers, the South African artist describes his work as transcending the materiality or aesthetic of the art objects and as a landscape that represents a kind of self-reckoning that can come from the process of translation and transition. In thinking about a city like Johannesburg, which was once a thriving city of gold mines but today stands on mine dumps where millions of black South Africans are unemployed and living in makeshift shelters, the artist asks his audience to think about what happens when there is no reference point to begin translation. He talks about how he uses his own experience of moving from a village to a city to talk about the changes in one's self-understanding and sense of faith as a broader commentary on what it means to be a human being making your way between the urban and the rural landscape.

Unlike many of the artists I spoke with, this South African artist explained that he, "chose not to make this a sociological investigation but to have more poetic nuances – so that is why there are no actual buildings in it." However, the Johannesburg-based artist does refer to his

work as a series of chapters or a larger collection of work and describes how James Joyce's Ulysses was a useful guide for the way the artist thinks about his creative process. He talks about the author's use of shape shifting as a strategy; use of different kinds of languages, analytical yet poetic, and how this inspired the artist to use different kinds of elements to form his work as various snippets. The artist also talks about the arbitrariness of the place he came of age in the countryside, not metaphorically but in that it was actually not recorded on national maps during Apartheid (the period between 1948 and 1994 when an all-white government legalized racial segregation and the subjugation of the non-white population in South Africa). From this personal experience, the artist makes a broader statement about the disillusionment of those who would leave the village to go to the city with the hopes of improving their lot in life but would instead encounter harsh living conditions.

As an artist-in-residence working in Berlin, the artist expressed his appreciation of being in a space where his work may freely or at least potentially speak to a wide spectrum of people from different parts of the world who may have in common, this disorienting sense of at once living in a place but also remembering and experiencing yourself as belonging to some other place. At no point does the artist reference being boxed in, Africanness or being African, but instead, he points to the colorful assortment of plastic poles anchored in car tires and draped with top hats and veils and he speaks about his childhood and the experience of transitioning between the village and the big city. Like the New York City based artists, the Johannesburg based artist combines play/experimentation and history in his work, but unlike them he is not burdened by the prospect of defending his work as the work of an African drawing from personal experience nor does he couch his work in non-biographic research. In fact, his work is a playful biographic

expression that invites the audience to personally insert themselves into the work in order to relate to potentially heavy questions about home, feelings of not belonging and transitioning between familiar but hyper invisible spaces (the unmapped village as one example) to unfamiliar yet hyper visible spaces like the city.

Each of these artists participates in exhibitions and programs that label them and their work as "African" and "contemporary" even though they relate their work to Africanness in different ways or not at all. The artists recognize the practical use of the Contemporary African art genre to plan and organize exhibitions and talks about their work. It is within these spaces that they are willing to participate, that they have the opportunity to discuss the details of their work, to respond to, and interrogate the concept of "Africanness". The first discusses how seriousness stands out as a prerequisite in Contemporary African art (and black) spaces, the second relates his work to Africanness because he is from an African country, and the third artist does not directly reference Africanness, but instead draws on a universal appeal for people who have had the experience of moving from a familiar place to an unfamiliar place.

Substantive Use: Intentionally Exploring the Margins of the "Africa" Category

In a group conversation with art historians, curators, and art theory students, a French-Algerian artist based in Berlin and Algiers discusses his intentional use of history materials in his work. He describes his approach as "killing the archives" to which, a historian in the room requests that we reframe that as "rehabilitating how we use archives". The artist talks about the way researchers take documents in history archives as fact rather than carefully curated collections that point to the interests of those responsible for their production, collection, and inclusion in the archive. The artist goes on to expand on the idea of killing the archive as exactly that; an

effort to unpack the confidence researchers have in archival material and the people who collected these objects as "African" objects, a category that is simultaneously confining and dismantling, dispersed and yet delimited.

As with the artists in New York City, the Berlin based artist speaks of his artistic practice as non-mystical, which he achieves by employing a research process and writing. Through his use of archives to incorporate detailed parts of history in the form of artifacts and text, this artist emphasizes form as well as the substantive content or theme of "collecting and archiving". Perhaps with the exception of the Johannesburg-based South-African artist in the pragmatic section above, who insists on not intellectualizing his work, this artists and the first two liken themselves to social theorists, questioning ideas that are taken for granted about what constitutes "Africa", "an African", or "African artifacts". As artists, they exercise their creative and poetic license to investigate the legitimacy and purpose of positioning certain objects, events, and ideas as "African" in order to teach history and question the faith that gatekeepers, like historians of art, place on their research and teaching tools.

What is also evident in the aforementioned cases is that, the purposes of artistic pursuit as both a professional and personal process are malleable, and therefore the production of art objects is employed both as a means to exercise creative expression but also to edify (oneself and/or others). The first from West Africa, the next two from Southern Africa, and the latter from North Africa (and France), their work finds a place on a list of reviews, articles, and exhibitions that are deemed both sufficiently African and contemporary. However, the way they express these affiliations is shaped in part by their individual studio practice as well as the platforms they choose and have the means to participate in. The ability to physically occupy the

same space as their work and at least some of their audience affords these artists the opportunity to interact with other art consumers directly, and in many cases to discuss and co-edit knowledge about their work. In this way, each artist trades on "Africanness", not necessarily because there is a consensus about what is and isn't "African" about their work, but precisely because there isn't one and these artists are welcomed into spaces that focus on artists and artworks that are "contemporary" and "African".

The Berlin based artist who speaks of killing the archive describes the category of Africanness as both restrictive and enabling but explains that his use of archives is a deliberate disturbance of curated "official documents and images" sometimes bestowed with the authority of historical fact and presented as infallible sources of knowledge. His innovation is to use the museum and library archives as his data source *and* as raw material for art installations. Another artist who is primarily based in Berlin describes herself as an insider-outsider who explores the possibilities of merging European artistic traditions in her paintings as she grapples with the experience of working as an Angolan-German based in Berlin.

> "Okay, in the beginning [I focused on] themes of my country because you know, when you go from your country the first year or two everything is new. But after that […] I felt that I am not a European. The first time I felt, I am African. While I was in Africa, in Angola of course, it was second nature. I didn't think about that. But then after these first two years I understood that I am really coming from another culture and from another continent. So the first part of my work was very much dealing with these origins…of mine, of my own family because I'm from a mixed family. My father was Angolan, my mother was Portuguese but I was born

> in Angola and raised there so I am completely Angolan. Of course I have my European component too, in my genes, but I understood that Europe is not really mine. And it was very interesting because when I was on holiday in Portugal I felt like 'I'm not home', of course…for two, three months, but really the stay in Germany was very important for me to understand my own individuality […] Yes, of course. Berlin is my home. But mmm, I have to say yes Berlin is my home. I love to live in Berlin. Erm, but I would not say that Germany is my home I would just say that Berlin is my home."
>
> *Interview with Berlin-based artist (August 2014)*

Sitting across from me in a café in Mitte, in the center of Berlin, the artist tells me about how her creative process developed from her experience moving from Angola to Germany to study literature. She describes her position as both an insider and an outsider, with experience living and working on the African continent and abroad. During the interview the artist, who considers herself a Berliner and who, unlike most artists who describe this insider/outsider duality, (living and working *here*, but coming *from there*), talks about the feeling of simultaneously belonging and not belonging in positive terms. This question of origins she talks about in detail is an interesting one because it informs part of the research question on the framing and organization of cultural and knowledge production by artists based on their geographic region and identity. And in this artist's individual case she was the first person to refer to this duality, "I am here, not there but I belong there, not here", as grounding. This duality of belonging in, while set apart from, the place in which they are living and working comes up

during other interviews but it evokes feelings of restlessness in artists who talk about "returning home to retrieve something" or to find a way to "fit back in" or "give back".

Having lived and worked in Germany for almost three decades (28 years), the Angolan-German not only talks about her experience as someone who feels home in Berlin but not in Germany as grounding, but she also creates her work from this understanding of living a life of conjoined yet different cultures, places, and nationalities. She also tries to visit Angola every year and mentions that she has just returned to Berlin from a two-month visit to Angola. She is very close to her Angolan family, she says, but having first arrived in Germany to study German literature and language, with a grant paid for by the Angolan government she explains that her initial plan was never to remain in Germany. She stresses that in the decision to stay, she had to take the time to understand what it meant to be an Angolan living and working in Germany. "To live in Germany, for me, it was extremely necessary to understand that…what was happening. Of course, everybody is different. For me it was a very important issue. If I hadn't understood it, if I hadn't analyzed it I could not continue living here. For me it was really essential."

The Angolan-born Berliner talks about never having to think about her "Angolan-ness" when she lived in Angola, it was second nature to her. She talks about not feeling at home in Portugal or Germany and places herself outside "Europeanness" when she says, "I understood that Europe is not really mine". Not feeling that she belongs in Portugal even though she is half Portuguese and not feeling at home in Germany helped to sharpen her sense of self and her individuality as an Angolan-born German citizen and artist. The sense here is that in formulating the idea of Africanness in relation to the artist's work and creative process, there is a personal layer of understanding how identity and a sense of belonging in the genre inform the way an

artist works and frames their work. Additionally, there is a secondary layer that is perhaps part of a professionalization, which at least partly involves answering to or at least being aware of how others come to label the artist and their work, one way to do this being to assign identity markers and judge where and whether an artist belongs.

This understanding also reflected in her work through which she explores a particular question about what happens when artists from the African continent draw from European artistic traditions. As she elaborates on how her art evolved over time, she says,

> "In the last four years I started analyzing this issue in the way that I am asking myself what would happen if African artists do the same, like European artists did at the beginning of the last century…from 1900. I don't know? Picasso was one of them…they started analyzing and using African artistical languages and using it for their work. […] So, for me it is interesting to ask what happens when we as African artists do the same. Of course it is beautiful to analyze other artistic languages to see what happens in your work if you use some formal or some content of the artistical language and artistical meaning of another culture. So that's what I am doing now, for the last four years, that I am analyzing the old European art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance… Well, this kind of European traditional art and I want to see how it works with my African formal language."

Interview continued with Berlin-based artist (August 2014)

As an artist who has lived and worked in Germany for almost three decades, she understands and incorporates European art influences not only as a central part of her artistic process. In the interview she explains this approach as an appreciation of how several well-known European artists like Picasso and Matisse drew inspiration from "African artistical languages". These artistic borrowings by "Europeans" from "Africans" led her to ask herself, "What would happen if African artists did the same?" In her work she integrates what she refers to as European artistic elements from the medieval period as a deliberate artistic strategy. The artist is comfortable speaking in generalized terms about there being an artistic language "of Europe" and an artistic language "of Africa". It is this understanding of art, form and content, as a language system and therefore a way of communicating, that lends "Contemporary African art" the characteristics of a malleable system of communication, with multiple points of entry, rather than a fixed or fixing art genre.

Unlike the artist in New York City who questions the validity of an African guy painting scenes in North Carolina, the Angolan-German and Berlin-based artist takes her personal biography and creative process in her adopted home as an expansive combined position made up of African and European parts. She embraces and uses Africanness in her work while also using her merging two parts into one approach to inject "European art influences" into her paintings. In addition to this non-oppositional self-positioning to both an imagined "Africa" and an imagined "Europe", the artist does not limit her contribution to producing art objects and communicating about Angola to audiences. She has also worked as an Angolan ambassador for an institution that educates German companies and business travelers about the political, economic, and cultural landscape in Angola.

The Angolan-German artist personally and professionally sees herself as a bridge between Angola and Germany, not only because she has studied, worked, and now has a family in Germany but also because she draws from her biography an "Africanness" that is not set in antagonistic opposition to "Europeanness". Even though she does not claim Europeanness as "hers", she has come to a place where she is comfortable trading on Africanness and Europeanness in her work as a way of exploring and examining what that might look like.

Artists who do not want their audience to view and understand the their work in terms of a very generalized idea of "Africa" or in relation to "Africanness" resisted my questions about working under the rubric of Contemporary African art. Even if these artists and their work have some association with African places, people, or issues, they demand specificity in every aspect of their work. These artists use the *tangential frame* when asked to position their work in relation to Africanness.

Tangential Use: Do you Wake Up Thinking, "Am I an American Researcher?"

Right off the bat, the artist begins by asking me on how I found her work and why I decided to include it in a study on the Contemporary African art genre. She explains to me that, a bit like conceptual art, 25 years ago very few people obsessed over this contemporary African genre. I in turn explain that I did in fact find her work and her name through a fairly general online search for "Contemporary African art and artists". Even as I sensed the anger and frustration in her voice, I asked her what her general thoughts were on working under or having art scholars and patrons locate her work under such a genre. To which she responded,

> "That is a peculiar question. When I wake up I think, 'What am I going to do today?' I do not go on thinking whether I realized I was black... It just doesn't

> come into my mind. But there is an absolute tendency at the moment to focus on that but I much rather talk about my work. I mean, if you want to talk about the category talk to an art historian or someone who is marketing artists in this way. I can't say I am an authority."
>
> *Interview with London-based artist (August 2016)*

Most artists regardless of age or generation shared examples that capture the ways in which a sense of biographical difference rather than the work itself seems to foreground their professional development, as black, as immigrant, or as "returnees" of a specific African country whether or not they consider it "home" either based on birthright, heritage, or formative-year experiences. I had not asked about race yet, but she brings up race and goes on to point out that she has been an art practitioner for decades and this current focus on the Contemporary African art genre in academia and the global art market is a fairly recent phenomenon. The artist states that she wants to refocus the attention on the work she wants to make rather than fixating on or indeed even being conscious of her blackness. She points out the absurdity of asking an artist to speak of her work in relation to the Contemporary African art genre and adds that, like some of the artists before her, the role of the artist is to create rather than to concern herself with how others categorize, theorize, or "market" her work. For her, placing her work within the Contemporary African art genre is a recent development that she sees more as a marketing strategy or intellectual move rather than a substantively useful aspect of her creative process or production.

Even as she denies the centrality of blackness (read "Africanness" based on how the artist responded) in her work, she goes on to talk about how her work as an exploration and celebration of the positive aspects of her Nigerian heritage and an effort to subvert negative images about African people and spaces[35]. She describes her work as coming from an interest in her identity and in wanting to focus on things she loves. She says, "I enjoy the black aesthetic. I like to celebrate the positive things". Like the artist in the first section who argues for play and playfulness as legitimate topics in "black" and "African" spaces, but also demands that the representation of art and artists of African heritage ought to have access to more than "African" spaces in which to work, teach, and celebrate. She also emphasizes the importance of sharing the positive contributions of people of African descent, instead of fanning dominating narratives that only emphasize victimhood, servitude, persecution, and deficits.

Speaking on what it might mean to work in the U.S. context, she says, "In America, if you like, there are clear spaces, clear markets for black audiences." Whereas for her, "The kind of art [she] wants to make [is] not necessarily the kind of work people want to live with"…but at the same time she understands that, "Galleries also have a question of audience, bringing in, or reaching black people, for example". Despite her reluctance to refer to her work as Contemporary African art she does confirm that her work is about investigating how historically, citizens of African states, have contributed to the growth of European empires.

The London-based artist was not the only artist who expressed frustration with the very idea of "Africanness", let alone framing her work in terms of it. During a panel discussion with

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[35] For work on the use of art and images to subvert negative stereotypes, see Gallagher, Julia, ed. 2015. *Images of Africa: Creation, negotiation and subversion*. Oxford University Press.

artists, writers, curators, and critics at an art fair in New York City, a South African based curator outlines what she believes are vital steps that cultural producers need to take in order to progress beyond discussions about "Africanness"[36]. The curator says there is a need to "change the conversation, we are stuck in this loop about Africanness […] change the conversation as part of a way to progress beyond this point." She highlights three points to address the role that art fairs play in exposing limited but widespread attitudes about African art and artists. The first is shifting the focus from, "Africanness", the second is engaging differently with the concept and finally, finding one's own language because, as the artist states, "language fails so often and it is in this failure that one finds opportunities for creativity". The point about language failure as opportunity for creativity reflects the idea of Contemporary African art as a boundary object – the idea that a failure for precision in language (or any other device or mechanism used to communicate or carry out certain tasks) and definitional ambiguity creates openings for innovation or cooperation.

However, the tangential frame is the trickiest of the three frameworks to identify and pin-down, partly because there is fluidity across the frameworks but also because it stands between the other two. An artist (and curator) can be cognizant of the pragmatic aspect of referring to a "Contemporary African art" genre and showcasing artwork under this genre, while at the same time personally rejecting or finding limitations of foregrounding "Africanness" or the categorization of the artwork as Contemporary African art. The artist may still hold these reservations even when they make references to drawing from or drawing attention to specific

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[36] Quote by South African artist and curator, taken from observations during an art fair panel discussion in New York City (2016).

events, people, and places with historical links to a region or population on the African continent, especially when they see a focus on some "African essence" (rather than technical skill, conceptual contribution, or some other creative innovation) as the prerequisite or primary reason for belonging to the genre.

Freedom to Freelance: The White African and the Non-African Artist

A fourth category of artists is what I loosely refer to as the *free to freelancers,* those artists who, unless they explicitly state otherwise, are not burdened by the task of self-positioning or positioning their work to an amassed unspecified "Africanness". These are the artists who, where they are citizens of an African country, are usually identified by the specific country from which they come from, rather than "Africa" more broadly, and where they are not citizens, are able to move across the Contemporary African art genre into more medium and technique specific genres (photography, painting, drawing, sculpture) and therefore gain access to exhibitions and other art spaces that are not necessarily for art that is both "African" and "contemporary".

> "I have difficulty with it (the genre) but it does make sense, in terms of my practice because I am very much influenced by my surroundings, my environment, my community and nature and that's Botswana and so the work that I produce has that influence in it, which is African but *I myself don't feel that I have the right to call myself African* (emphasis added) […] I feel that I am an observer and I am on the outside looking in, which is part of my work. I think that my work itself is from the stance of observation."
>
> *Interview with British-Caribbean, Gaborone-based artist (July 2016)*

The burden of representation is a key concept in understanding the differentiated self-positioning of artists and their work in relation to Africanness. In "Black Art and the Burden of Representation" ([1990] 2013: 214-215) art historian, Mercer refers to the burden of representation as the context in which cultural institutions place Black British artists on the margins, framing the few artists who do manage to make it into these spaces as the sole representatives of the presumably marginalized (Black) communities they come from or belong to.

In, *In Senghor's shadow: Art, politics, and the avant-garde in Senegal, 1960–1995* (2004), Elizabeth Harney quotes Dimé, a Senegalese sculptor explaining that, "The real battle over art" is both, "economic and ideological because the West has never accepted the true culture of the African world. But if the African continent develops, then things will change. If it doesn't change, and if Africa continues to depend on others then African artists will remain in their little ghetto" (170). Dimé, who managed to gain recognition for his work both on the African continent and abroad, also refers to the notion of working "as an African" as a dishonest, Western, and racist concept. Rather than representing "Africa", "an African perspective", or an ethnic group, he explains that he is above all else, one Senegalese artist working among many Senegalese artists.

The artists who echo Dimé's assertion that the idea of working *as an African* artist is dishonest were the artists who locate their heritage in Europe or are white, even if they have lived in an African country for many years. In the opening quote, an artist of British ancestry who is based in Gaborone talks about her struggle locating her work within the Contemporary African art genre. In the artist's words, "I myself don't feel that I have the right to call myself

African", there is a self-distancing from Africanness even though she states that it is reasonable to refer to her work as Contemporary African art. Throughout the interview she repeats that she really sees herself as an observer in her environment, rather than a native of it. The other participants in this study were aware that there is a palpable expectation by some gatekeepers and art audiences that, as they view Contemporary African art, there is in fact such as thing as "an African artist" who can offer an "African perspective". However, not all artists take on the task of representing an entire racial, ethnic, or national group. This expectation does not appear to apply in the case of artists like the Gaborone-based Brit, whose work exhibits as Contemporary African art but she either does not identify as "African" or "Motswana"[37] because she locates her heritage elsewhere. Although she says she is proud to represent Botswana and describes her work as "African" she hesitates to claim herself as "African". She frames this hesitation as a sense that she, as a white woman born in British Guinea (Guyana) with British heritage, does not have the right to claim Africanness.

Similarly, another artist whose work appears in Contemporary African art exhibitions describes his ambivalence towards the idea of Africanness. Asked what his observations have been as a contemporary artist working within the genre of Contemporary African art he says,

> "I think, let's dive into the deep end. I have ambivalent feelings about this category because sometimes I am and sometimes I am not. And personally I am happy when I am. But some of my friends are not because they are enclosed…Having said that I am definitely ambivalent about it. Because I don't

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[37] A Motswana is a citizen of Botswana (singular).

know…when someone asks me, 'Where are you from?' I say, Nairobi, not even Kenya. And 'Africa' is too abstract."

Interview with Nairobi-based artist (March 2016)

There is a sense of hesitation and ambivalence in the accounts of the two artists, the first self-identifying as British-Caribbean and the second as "other" or "white", one based in Gaborone and the other a British descendent born in Rome but raised in Kenya and England. In both cases the artists believe that their British heritage somehow precludes them from asserting their Africanness, yet does not preclude their work from inclusion in Contemporary African art exhibitions. Although they both emphasize the significance of their environments, living in Gaborone (Botswana) and Nairobi (Kenya), respectively, they locate Africanness within the art-objects they produce as they draw from their experiences living in these cities. In other words, although "Africanness" is an important factor for why their work is accepted within "Contemporary African art" exhibitions, they are not always obligated to answer questions of how their "African" perspective weighs in on or informs their creative process, although they may choose to do so. So that even as they enjoy the freedom to be practitioners within the genre, they are not tethered down either by biography nor citizenship to speak from an "African perspective" or to cushion the significance of their work within any "African" experience, per se.

The difficulties that the British-Caribbean artist describes working under the rubric of Contemporary African art artist and the ambivalence with which the British-Kenyan approaches the genre are less pronounced or don't produce the same feelings of discomfort in other artists. In the following case, for instance, a New York City based artist who was born in Cape Town,

South Africa shares that although she has spent more years in the U.S. than anywhere else, she is still contacted by curators who what to set up exhibitions that deal with Contemporary African art. Although the artist later discusses herself as an insider-outsider (part of an African diaspora living and working in the U.S.), she qualifies her experience by highlighting her race, as a white woman working in the Contemporary African art genre,

> *"* I personally am not defensive about my position within that (African) diaspora and then of course it is qualified by the fact that I am white and not black. And I'm not defensive about it despite of the fact that I have spent more years here (the U.S.) than anywhere else at this point. So I ought not to be pigeonholed in that absurd way but again I am not defensive about it, I have been in millions of exhibitions and they haven't all been 'African diaspora themed'."
>
> *Interview with artist based in New York City (November 2015)*

We were sitting in the artist's living room in her New York City apartment as she told me about her experience working as an artist who is sometimes approached to participate in exhibitions that focus on Contemporary African art and artists. The artist continues to tell me that of course there is such a thing as an African diaspora, just like there are diasporas from other regions in the world, but that the question of there being an African diaspora identity is the big question and any time definitions are so broad and unspecific, that is problematic. She describes herself as non-defensive towards being pigeonholed into the Contemporary African art genre even as she acknowledges that the pigeonholing is absurd. She also points out that being white is a factor in explaining why she is not defensive about the labeling, because even though she (and

her work) is labeled in this way, she has not been professionally confined to exhibitions or art spaces (both physical and intellectual) that highlight Contemporary African art as the main association connecting the artist or their art in the space.

Juxtaposing the New York City-based white South-African artist's experience (not restricted by the genre) and orientation toward it (not defensive about being included) to the experience of artists who talk about their inclusion in the Contemporary African art genre as restrictive, suggests that gaining access into art spaces (intellectual and physical) by way of association with "Africa" or "Africanness" is ideal in as far as it affords artists access to resources and audiences to begin engaging with. However, it becomes undesirable when it forecloses the artist from participation in non-African art spaces and opportunities or denies the specificity of the artist's work. So the point of discussing how the three artists based in Gaborone, Nairobi, and New York City talk about their experience with working as "Contemporary African artists" or gatekeepers and others framing the artists' work as "Contemporary African art" is not to suggest that only white (African) artists do not respond defensively or with ambivalence when their work is confined to Contemporary African art. The point is that these artists talk about their position in Contemporary African art as one that is open rather than restrictive. These artists talk about the flexibility they experience in their work because they can focus on "Africanness", other aspects of the work that do not have any "African" association, *and* they can also work in non-African focused art spaces. It is reasonable to imagine that any artist, regardless of race, nationality, place of birth or professional base, who does not experience their association with "Africanness" as something that limits their access to non-African spaces when they seek them or as eclipsing other important aspects of their work,

would likely also not be defensive about the association. In fact, for some non-white artists, the recent wave of interest in artists associated with "Africa" has meant some artists now have access to resources they did not have before. For example, a French-Ivorian artist who is based in Paris, tells me that he is not defensive when others refer to him or his work as Contemporary African,

> "To be honest, I would say I don't struggle with it. In a way I find it a little bit embarrassing, but I need it today. Since the past few years African art is kind of a new fashion. I stopped painting in Paris…the first three years nobody was interested in my work. But two years ago I applied to the Dak'Art Biennale and fortunately I was selected so then people could know my name. That is why I say I need it."
>
> *Interview with artist in Paris via Skype (March 2016)*

This follows the pattern that, when access into the art industry comes *because* an artist is read as "African", the inclusion on its own without engaging with other aspects of the artist's creative production may be enough for gaining access. The challenge then comes when an artist who gains access in this way attempts to break into non-Contemporary African art spaces. When an artist is seeking access, having such an open and ambiguous genre is useful because new opportunities arise for artists as the number of old cultural institutions that incorporate Contemporary African art into their more traditional and anthropological art collections increase, as new art fairs devoted to Contemporary African art launch and more gatekeepers seek out artists to include in their programming. The creative careers of some artists, like the French-

Ivorian, who have been practicing decades before the recent upswing in Contemporary African art gets a chance to flourish as these artists gain access into old and new "Contemporary African" spaces.

In terms of professional mobility within and beyond the Contemporary African art genre, the freedom (to freelance) that white practitioners (presumably of European heritage) describe suggests that they experience the creative license to offer and share legitimate takes on aesthetics or issues in specifically African contexts while some African-born non-white (presumably black) artists experience restrictions to exploring contexts or subject matter that are not uniquely or generally "African". When we look at the position of white artists who locate their biography, heritage, and citizenship in an African state we see that what separates these artists from their non-white counterparts is in fact the same elements that usually define "Africanness"; race, region, and citizenship. The difference is that these do not apply to them in the same ways they do to black and other non-white artists.

Put in other words, for the white (African) artist it appears that it is usually possible to trace their heritage to some other place other than the African continent, even if the artist primarily identifies as a citizen of an African state. This aspect of classifying white artists in the Contemporary African art genre is usually unspoken, as they are often unquestionably referred to in distinctly specific terms, by country and even city rather than as simply "African" (read *black*). Artists born on the continent but with heritage-parentage from elsewhere are simply South African, German, British, or American. Whereas many black African practitioners report that they participate in a looping conversation about a generalized "African" origin, one in which

they must make a concerted and constant effort to demand specificity when others insist on conflating the artists' biography with their work.

In the face of sweeping analyses of colonial and post-colonial influences and legacies, art scholars present Contemporary African artists in reactionary terms as pushing to redefine how their work is collected, curated, circulated, and interpreted. However not all artists who have lived through remnants of the colonial period (note, most African countries are a mere 50 or 60 years old), have to deal with the "African question" although they do draw on their experience of living and growing up "African". In official artist statements, on their websites for example, some black artists deliberately avoid any reference to themselves as Contemporary African artists or their work as Contemporary African art, and instead refer to themselves as "artists", mentioning where they are based, the material or artistic style (photography/painting/work on paper/fabric or textiles) they work in and perhaps, but not always, where they were born, where they have studied and where else they have lived and shown their work.

Freedom in the Academy: "I hideout in Universities" and Art that does nothing

Sitting in a studio in the middle of Manhattan, I listen to a New York-based South African artist describe her family's exodus from Poland to South Africa and then the United States. The artist does not shy away from the very personal experience of growing up in Apartheid South Africa but also makes it a point to talk about how in her experience she is rarely made to feel like she has to speak for "Africans" or from an "African's perspective". However, she says a few times when she studied abroad in Europe she personally felt uncomfortable being the "white" South African although she was not constantly confronted about it.

Free to outline the edges of her own biography (not only in the formal lecture setting) in relation to her artistic practice, the artist focuses on language and experimentation as the public face of her art practice, and highlights personal healing as an important but private matter. She stresses the use of experimentation as a key aspect of her craft as she draws from philosophy, her knowledge of South African history as well as her family history. However, as she talks about an experience she had exhibiting her work in one of South Africa's biggest art biennales she says, "It was a cold and bitchy environment but a couple of the African artists there were warm." Unclear what, from whom or where the coldness in the environment might have come from, the artist goes on to talk in very broad terms about her general approach to how she positions herself and her art.

> "I hide out in academic art galleries – they may not be selling spaces but they focus more on the academic. I am an example of someone who hides out in university art galleries."
>
> *Interview with artist in New York City (November 2015)*

This idea of the academic sanctuary is similar to the emphasis on the research-based approach as a means of carving out the parameters of both the creative process and production, helping to orient the creative process and discussions about the creative production. Like the artists who present their art as a culmination of careful investigation in which material, method of analysis and execution are as significant if not more significant than the art objects themselves, this artist talks about her work as not primarily about showcasing artistic skill or

presenting aesthetically pleasing art objects. Making the art object is an investigation and it is deliberately experimental.

Some artists are more outspoken about their need to be "free", a freedom that does not require any rigid framework or process to carve out space for their creative explorations. In the following excerpt, another white South African artist describes his creative process and production as a place free of obligation. In response to an interview[38] asking about what the purpose of his work is the artist says,

> "I don't think art needs to do anything. And art pretty much doesn't really have a function. Curator Francesco Bonami once mentioned: 'I think art is the most useful of the useless things in the world.' The thing is that, in the past 10 years and especially in South Africa, the art world has expanded exponentially, it has become far more inclusive and is also shifting its focus to a more pan-African inclusion. There are more galleries than ever and there is an art fair around every corner. So there is a lot of stuff. And stuff easily disappears when you don't know where to put it."
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> *Secondary interview with Cape-Town based artist (October 2015)*

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[38] Full article with interview with South African-based artist written by Jessica Hukin (October 7, 2015) for digital arts platform, Between 10 and 5: http://10and5.com/2015/10/07/featured-i-see-art-people-ed-young-talks-politics-and-trends-in-contemporary-sa-art/ Accessed April 2016. Between 10 and 5 is a digital arts and culture platform that focuses on the arts in South Africa, founded by Uno de Waal.

In a 2016 review following one of the South African artist's taunting exhibitions on race and Africanness, a fellow South African and art critic said of the artist's work, "[It] speaks to the deeply-held, superiority complex of a confident, deliberately obtuse, 'white' art world, who chooses self-negation as opposed to reflexivity […] It would be the equivalent of 'NGO' work in the art world, complete with a benevolent, white benefactor – wouldn't it?"[39] The art critic likens the inclusion of white artists who do not interrogate and are rarely asked to interrogate their position to the legacies of racism and exclusion not only in the African countries they live and work in, but in the art industry they thrive in as "Contemporary African artists". The reviewer was calling out what he saw as an artist who represents a middle class white suburbia that enjoys to consume 'black' culture in the art world, the same art world that crates "ghettoes" for black artists and black cultural production.

Not unlike the artists I spoke with who felt that they are constrained within the Contemporary African art genre when they would like to gain access into spaces for the artist's specialized art practice (e.g. drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, video-based media). The reviewer suggests that the artist's disregard for being self-reflexive and his belief that his art "does nothing" is a freedom he possesses precisely because he is a white artist working within the Contemporary African art genre. It is also noteworthy that although the artist brings up Pan-Africanism and inclusivity, Pan-Africanism does not come up in the interviews with the artists I spoke with, a point I do not interrogate here but I would insist that it is both relevant and

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[39] Review by Lwandile Fikeni, essayist, art critic and award winning arts journalist. Review on pamphlet accompanying the South African artist's solo presentation titled, *ALL SO FUCKING AFRICAN* on view at the 2016 Armory Show: Africa Focus in New York City, represented by SMAC Gallery.

significant. Perhaps it is far less likely to come up for an artist who does not see the efficacy of working from a Pan-Africanist position or indeed talking about their work in such a way. What is also striking about this South African artist who says art does not need to *do* anything and that there is *so much stuff* in the genre, is his experience of the genre as open and perhaps too open to really locate context or specificity in the genre.

The idea that some artists have the freedom not to associate their biography to the work they produce and not to grapple with questions about their association with "Africa" or "Africanness" is further evidenced in the case of practitioners who thrive simply as artists working in "African spaces". For example, during an art talk and photography exhibition of miners in the Congo, I spoke with an artist in the audience who expresses her initial discomfort when she first saw the work on show that evening. She questioned the validity of a European artist traveling into war zones in Africa and other parts of the world to take photographs of the plight of local people living in those regions for "art". Even as she grieves over the footage mounted on the wall, taken by a non-African photographer she expresses admiration for the photographer,

> "I wondered if there was anything that could justify him being there, filming the death of these people in the Congo, for art. But I suppose there was also something admirable about that. That he felt the freedom to do that, to make his art, and to tell this story he was witnessing."
>
> *Interview with anonymous artist in Chicago (May, 2016)*

Rather than part of the environment he is working in, the photographer is an observer; detached and witnessing. Refreshments lined a long table at the entrance of the large room and all along a tall brick wall hung large high resolution photographs of black boys and men with their feet knee deep in mud, crouching and holding woven baskets with rocks and blackened water, some of them staring back at the lens, others smiling. People mingled through the long corridor leading deeper into the room with tall ceilings to an enclosed section with rows of chairs facing a white projector screen next to a table with three chairs and small water bottles placed in a straight line, one in front of each chair. As the room filled up, a woman stood up at the front of the room and spoke into a microphone. She introduced herself as the co-founder of this organization that she envisioned as a place to bring together art and human rights education. Through programs in which she and her staff invite artists whose work educates and raises awareness about human rights and environmental issues, her organization provides a space for community-based discussions and workshops.

In her brief introduction of the man behind the striking photographs on the wall, she mentioned one of her staff members as someone who was born in the Congo, where the photographs had been taken. Although her staffer was not part of the planned program (not mentioned in the program of events for the evening), she asked her employee to step to the front and say something about herself and growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The woman approached the front of the room and gingerly speaking into the microphone she first begins by expressing gratitude to her boss and went on to explain that when she first moved to the United States she did not like to talk about home. She talked about how she stopped following the news updates on what was happening in the DRC because it was painful, to see, to

hear and not know what to do to help or change the situation for her family back home. In the brief silence that followed her emotional share, the audience erupted in applause and she disappeared to the side of the room away from the brightly lit front. The photographer stood up next to the table as another man joined him at the front of the room and sat himself on one of the chairs.

Flashing blown up images of maps and the photographs on the wall, the photographer begins by first telling us that he was not always a photographer, that his passion for photography really grew out of his dissatisfaction working in the financial sector. He quit his job and began traveling around the world taking his camera with him wherever he went. He then developed an interest in documenting warzones, particularly areas where there is a link between militarization and the mining of natural resources. The DRC just happened to be one such place but he had also covered wars in other places like Darfur, Sierra Leone, Kashmir, and Georgia. Now he is a photographer using the camera as a tool to spread the word about what is happening in these places and hopefully to increase awareness and possibly influence policy makers in governments and in the industries that benefit. As a photojournalist of sorts, this presenter does not face questions about how his biography connects to or informs his work. For all intents and purposes, he is a photographer or a photojournalist.

The *bio+work* matrix that we find in (contemporary) visual art for instance does not broadly apply to professions like journalism. Instead of drawing on his biography (in the way the staff member was asked to speak about) he is able to focus his talk on his work and his goals, framing the personal background informing his work as a professional transition narrative about a decision to move from one career to another. That so many of his photographs portray

Africans, are taken in African countries and indeed substantively deal with an issue that is prevalent in several African regions does not land the work to the Contemporary African art genre. However, his work has landed him acclaim and awards for revealing the human cost of modern technology and is exhibited in art spaces.

On the surface, the presentation that the photographer-photojournalist gave in Chicago is different from all previous examples of artists that I discuss in this chapter. Is he African? Is he black? Does he ever have to answer questions about how his personal connection or association with and African place, person, or thing influences his work? Would be approach the Contemporary African genre with a pragmatic, substantive, or tangential frame, or is he free to move between and across genres? Perhaps it is that he describes himself as a photojournalist, and perhaps it is that he is not a citizen of any African country nor has he exhibited his work in strictly Contemporary African art spaces. But the subjects of his work, the place he does his work and the very specific issue that his work tackles is in the Congo. This example helps to reveal, at least in a rudimentary way that even when a practitioner possesses some of the qualities that could qualify his work (and by extension him) as part of Contemporary African art, he needn't enter the genre in order for his photographs of miners in Congo to exhibit in art spaces and social activism spaces.

Conclusion

Africanness is a concept that can and indeed continues to host several definitions at once and like any language or communication tool, I argue that what is useful to contemplate is *how* people use it rather than whether or not it is good/appropriate or bad/inappropriate that they use it. When the Los-Angeles based artist who expresses concerns over how to balance wanting to

acknowledge how her experience as a Nigerian woman influences her creative process without foregrounding "Africanness" in her work opens this chapter, she does not seek complete denial of "Nigerianness" or "Africanness" on her work. What she does insist on is that we attend to other important aspects of her work, without having "Africanness" eclipse the interventions she makes through her formal choices, her intentional use of composition, her conceptual use of doors and windows, and the way she integrates modern elements while still drawing on traditional forms of painting.[40] Once based in New York City, the artist moved to Los Angeles in part because compared to New York City she could find an affordable and good-sized art studio in Los Angeles. Refusing to think of others' pigeonholing her work to the "Contemporary African art" genre as restrictive to her creative process, she admits that she would really like to have her work shown in contemporary art and painting exhibitions and describes her attitude towards obsessions over her origins as "just another challenge to figure out".[41] This artist may see the practical use of the Contemporary African art genre but highlights that while it might not be inaccurate it is certainly incomplete, so her frame may integrate the pragmatic and substantive while at the same time she, along with the artists using all three frames, desires the freedom to move within but also beyond the Contemporary African art classification.

The pragmatic and substantive frames encompass artists who, on one hand recognize and perhaps even respect the practicality of the "open" Contemporary African art genre for their own work even if they do not want their work confined to it and on the other hand those who center the "Africanness" question in their work and therefore do not see the genre as a restriction. The

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[40] From interview with artist (October 2016).
[41] Interview with artist continued (October 2016).

third and final frame captures artists who fall or move between the pragmatic and substantive frames. This dispersed third frame, what I refer to as the tangential frame, is the most volatile of the three, meaning artists who adopt this frame tend to express a stern rejection of the Contemporary African art genre and/or the association of their work to "Africanness". In so doing, they are more likely to stay away from discussions that foreground or bring into focus questions about "Africanness" in their work or their place within the Contemporary African art genre. The following section shows two cases, the first is one of an artist who expresses irritation that her work falls in the very broad Contemporary African art genre and the second blatantly rejects the connection others attempt to make between his work and Africanness.

In the interviews, most of the black artists raised the tendency for stakeholders and art theorists to constantly address the question of how their work relates to "Africa" but not every artist felt the pressure to couch their work in relation to "Africa". As one of the artists based in New York City put it, "They have this need to zoom into your African narrative and you have to decide how to respond to it". Even when the artist wishes to address themes or to engage in artistic techniques that are not uniquely "African", artists are confronted with this insistence to foreground the artist's biography in the artwork. Perhaps it is also worth noting that the "African perspective" and the "black perspective" are used interchangeably throughout many of the interviews and art talks, by both artists and curators, although some distinctions are made between working while black in the United States, versus in Europe and on the African continent.

From the self-reckoning that artists do when faced with questions about origins and how their biography influences their work comes three approaches (pragmatic, substantive, and

tangential) to positioning one's work to "Africanness" generally, and within the Contemporary African art genre more specifically. And to refer to "Africanness" as a trading chip within this self-curation serves a two-part function.

First, "trading" implicates that there is an aspect of exchange and procedural placement in identifying "Africanness" as relevant to artistic production or purpose, and this self-positioning is therefore not fixed or a given. In other words, because an artist emphasizes or downplays Africanness in their work in one context it does not pre-determine how they use or alter this position in other contexts, both spatially and temporarily. Second, a trading chip also suggests some element of strategy and therefore agency in the part of the artist when deciding how to position their work in relation to Africanness, if at all. This highlights the significance of the artists' simultaneous attachment to their professional or artistic goals and their relationship to the aspects of their personal experience or identity that they identify as African and important for understanding their work.

Although money is a hush-hush topic for some, it not only affects the pragmatist but attitudes towards money linked to this idea of "trading in or on" Africanness creates a kind of anxiety for some artists who see Africanness as important but tangential to some other goal. These artists recognize that even if they disagree with how *primary gatekeepers* or art consumers relate their work to "Africanness" they may have to entertain the foregrounding of "Africanness" as long as they have opportunities to continue confronting it and bringing the conversation back to other aspects of the work, such as the artist's technical choices, innovative use of materials, or their incorporation of social and art theories.

More than simply personal or professional preferences in self-curation, artists working under the Contemporary African art rubric face qualitatively different pressures and expectations. There are opportunities and foreclosures that this genre makes possible, where several black artists or artists of African descent report increased opportunity to access spaces and resources carved out specifically for “black” or “African” artists, yet once they have gained said access, the artists who wish to occupy more than “African” art spaces also report experiences of resistance to them “moving out” of or expanding beyond the genre. However, Contemporary African art is also an “open” category that is accessible to artists who are white citizens of an African state as well as those who are white and not citizens. Not only do these artists have access to the genre, but they also describe a sense of freedom in their creative process because they rarely experience others (primary gatekeepers and other consumers) confining them or their work to the “Contemporary African art” genre, an “African” perspective”, or indeed questioning the basis for their inclusion.

6. MONEY, MORES, AND MORALS: IT COSTS MONEY TO CREATE PRICELESS ART

Abstract

What can an analysis of the ways in which visual artists talk about money reveal about the various levels at which access to resources generally, and money specifically, influences the professional decisions that an artist makes? Using content analysis of one financial institution website that gives non-monitory recognition awards to visual artists, participant observation of an art panel discussion and eight interviews with visual artists, the data in Chapter 6 show that money is important on three main levels; Money is important to meet the artists' *baseline needs*, (what artists need to survive e.g. rent/food), *patronage* (e.g. the support artists need to carry out their creative productions, this includes art material, freedom from needing other lines of employment, funding for traveling to attend exhibition openings), and money also functions as a metric for measuring the artists' status or defining their reputation (If no one buys your art, is it any good? I am not the kind of artist who only works for money). This chapter offers an investigation of the way money comes up during discussions about creative production and creative practice, and although it is important and necessary, there is a sense that money is a taboo subject because of its potential to threaten the integrity of an artist's creative process and willingness to take risks. Despite attempts by some practitioners not to talk too openly about money, some artists see money talk as a vital part of taking control of their career as cultural entrepreneurs. The data also show that when an artist is financially independent, this informs whether or not the artist sees the benefit of explicitly inserting themselves in gatekeeping processes or deferring to primary gatekeepers.

Keywords: Money, mores, morals, baseline need, patronage, status, reputation

On February 23rd, 2010 Deutsche Bank named New York City based Wangechi Mutu as their very first "Artist of the Year" recipient. The honor came with an opportunity to show a solo exhibition at the Deutsche Guggenheim (now Deutsche Bank KunstHalle) in Berlin. The exhibition, titled, *My Dirty Little Heaven*, went on to show at the Wiels Center for Contemporary Art in Forest, Belgium. The honor is unlike many art prizes in that it does not include a cash prize and this move is meant to signal that Deutsche Bank not only appreciates young and prolific contemporary artists, but also that the Bank's appreciation is not simply about money and monetary investment. Artists and their creative endeavors occupy a vital role in society; holding up a mirror to the local and increasingly globalizing communities they move in and Deutsche Bank wants to demonstrate that this idea is part of its ethos.

Year	**Artist of the Year**	**Country of Birth, Professional Base**
2010	Wangechi Mutu	Kenyan-born, based in Brooklyn
2011	Yto Barrada	French-born, based in New York City / Tangier, Morocco
2012	Roman Ondák	Slovak-born, based in Paris, France
2013	Imran Qureshi	Pakistani-born, based in Lahore, Pakistan
2014	Victor Man	Romanian-born, based in Berlin / Cluj, Romania

2015	Koki Tanaka	Japanese-born, based in Los Angeles
2016	Basim Magdy	Egypt-born, based in Basel, Switzerland / Cairo, Egypt
2017	Kemang Wa Lehulere	South African-born, based in Johannesburg, South Africa

Table 1. List of Deutsche Bank "Artist of the Year" Awardees (2010-17)

The Deutsche Bank's Global Art Program page, ArtWorks, states that, "Art spawns new ideas for shaping our future. It questions, inspires people, opens up new perspectives, and thus enables them to embrace unusual and innovative solutions. The bank's involvement in art is a pillar of its "Art, Culture & Sports" division. The new global unit concentrates, cross-links, and develops Deutsche Bank's activities and strengthens the company's cultural diversity."[42] The Bank has a Global Art Advisory Counsel that consists of four prominent curators, Okwui Enwezor, Hou Hanru, Udo Kittelmann, and Victoria Noorthoorn.

Since honoring Mutu with the "Artist of the Year" prize in 2010, the six recipients of the art prize that followed are also internationally active. They have also have a base in and/or have their main gallery representation in the U.S. (New York City/Los Angeles), France (Paris), Switzerland (Basel), and Germany (Berlin). The 2017 recipient, South African (Born in Cape Town and Johannesburg based), is Kemang Wa Lehulere, who showed his first American museum exhibition, *In All My Wildest Dreams*, at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2016. The

[42] ArtWorks, Deutsche Bank global art program official website. Accessed, February 2, 2017. http://art.db.com/en/concept.html.

artists on the list all have what might reasonably be referred to as "global" or international careers, born in one country/continent and professionally based in another or born and based in the same country but with their work showing internationally. By the time they are presented with the Artist of the Year award, they have demonstrated their artistic talent and have received recognition for it elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, recognition begets more recognition and as the Bank emphasizes, it isn't all about money.

However, money comes up as an important factor when artists talk about their work and their interactions with *primary gatekeepers* (i.e. curators, gallerists, art historians). It comes up in three key ways, as a baseline need, (to pay rent, buy food), professional patronage (e.g. support to buy equipment, gain exposure, travel, freedom from having to take up other employment that takes time away from creative production), and as a metric to measure status and define reputation (e.g. an artist asking, "What does it mean that people aren't buying my work?" – "What does it mean if I accept (this much) money for this artwork?" – "Am I the kind of artist who accepts money from this kind of source?" – "Should I be selling my work in this way?").

Art, Money, and Value

The Sociology of culture literature that looks at the way money and culture are co-constitutive demonstrates a curious tension between the way we accept the use of money to measure the value and worth of objects and services, while at the same time we vilify those who use monetary incentives in certain social interactions like marriage, family, and other forms of intimacy, "passion" work like caregiving, or altruistic activities (Zelizer 1997; Zelizer 2000; Velthuis 2013). This tension exists in the art industry where money, in many ways, is a measure

for assigning worth or value to artworks, while at the same time making art *for* money is depicted as taboo or distasteful.

In *The $12 Dollar Stuffed Shark: the Curious Economics of Contemporary Art* (2008), Thompson investigates the structure and the inner-workings of the international art market and shows how the use of branding as a marketing strategy can help to explain some of the exorbitant price tags on contemporary artworks. The research, largely based on interviews with auctioneers, art dealers, collectors, and artists, many of whom participate in some of the most lucrative art sales in the global market, sheds light on the business end of art; an industry that is usually shrouded in secrecy. Thompson draws particular attention to the relationship between artists and money and does not appear to give much credence to the argument that some art is highly valued because of creative genius or its cultural importance.

This understanding of art as a commodity raises concern for those who view artistic production as a priceless and aesthetically pleasing, educational, culturally enriching, and socially transformative endeavor. Even for the artists and art entrepreneurs who do not speak about their work as a profitable enterprise, there is a clear understanding that in order to continue making work they need to be able to be financially stable to do so. Most ensure this inflow of income and financial support through grants, artist-in-residency programs, teaching, and running small businesses both in and outside the creative fields, and those who are unable to do so, may hang up their painting aprons, cameras, and pencils for another career.

With price inflation in every sector from pharmaceuticals, housing, and education, the visual arts industry is no different. Studies on the relationship between financial markets and the art market show a correlation between the these markets and the art market and go as far as to

suggest that financial markets influence the global art market (Chanel 1995; Velthuis 2013). So the question of how commodification influences the way cultural producers frame their work is relevant, especially for those whose work makes it to auction houses and commercial art galleries (Velthuis 2003). Whether or not a contemporary artist is interested in "framing" themselves in such a way that makes them attractive to the highest bidder, to exercise their creative muscle and gain some form of recognition for it or is more interested in using their art to teach and mobilize people around certain social issues, it is undeniable that they need money to support their projects. Contemporary artists, particularly those working internationally, are working in a time when the sales in contemporary art are circulating billions of dollars globally through gallery spaces, auction houses, and cultural institutions including museums and art research institutes.

According to some leading curators who are working in these cultural and educational spaces and specialize in identifying and promoting Contemporary African art, the amplified interest in Contemporary African art boomed within the last 10 to 15 years, although the genre itself has really been around since the 1970s and 1980s following the wave of political independence in African states (Oguibe et al. 1999). The genre has mushroomed through the concerted effort of certain curators and other cultural workers who have created new art spaces, including Contemporary African art fairs and publishing platforms as well as the increase in the number of millionaires on the African continent who have the interest and can afford to invest in art by African citizens.

Trading on "Africanness": A practical or perverse incentive?

Cyrus Kabiru, an artist who rejects others' framing him as an "African" or "Kenyan" artist (despite being born, raised, and based in Kenya) asserts that he is not an "African" artist and therefore he does not partake in discussions about working as "an African artist". He has no interest in the intellectual exercise of framing his work based on an "African" perspective and suggests that he has a problem with the Contemporary African art genre, and it is not because of false or inaccurate interpretations by *primary gatekeepers* who are defining and developing an art category or the art patrons satisfying their own appetites for it. He takes issue with the complicit artists who are willing to sell their personal stories rather than their artistic skills.

In a 2013 interview with CNN, the artist says, "You get people saying, 'I grew up in the Kibera slum, I grew up in this place and this place, buy my art […] I want to change that, not telling people about my problems, the poverty."[43] In his responses in this interview, Kabiru does not aim to educate anyone about anything "African", "Kenyan", or raise awareness, critique, or represent any "African" perspective through his work. Instead he suggests that focusing on where he is from would highlight the poverty and struggle in his background rather than the creativity in his work. And at the same time, he says, there are plenty of artists who are "selling poverty instead of creativity".

The Kenyan artist views the foregrounding of Africanness in a negative light, and as somewhat taking away from the integrity of the art and defines an artist who does so as one who makes a living out of "selling" an African narrative rather than his creativity. The artist's

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[43] Interview excerpts from CNN 2013 interview with Teo Kermeliotis: Article available at: http://www.timeslive.co.za/sundaytimes/lifestyle/2015/09/27/The-recycle-of-life-turning-industrial-waste-into-art.

concerns about selling or marketing art as "African" does not give clear examples of what is appropriate for an artist to "sell". However, his concern over artists who "sell" also echoes those of other artists who demand a critical and detailed engagement with their work that is not merely informed by the artists' "Africanness". For example, London-based artist, Sokari Douglas Camp tells me that not only is this fascination with "Contemporary African art" rather new[44], but she prefers that the focus remain on her work and like Kabiru, the highly respected artist who has been active since the 80s says that she too would much rather talk about her work. While most artists who demand specificity in their work and would agree that simply lumping them as "African artists" erases the specificity and context in their work, most also highlight that making a living and sustaining oneself (and in many cases one's family) was one of the challenges they faced. So there is a fairly common need for artists to strike a balance between achieving economic sustainability while still maintaining their creative freedom and integrity.

Although this research is not concerned with matters of commodification of art in the monetary sense or comparing commercial and non-commercial art spaces, it does take into account the way artists talk about money as a factor in how they frame and respond to gatekeepers and other art patrons classifying the artists' work as "African". I consider the specific settings in which these "money talks" take place and how money is set up in relation to art (art making and sharing), as this appears to help define how artists are thinking about their work and the extent to which they can or ought to participate in how others frame it. On the one hand, if an artist views their work as a product that, once "sold" belongs to whomever "purchased" it, perhaps it is no longer in the artists' purview or interest to insist on framing or re-

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[44] Interview with artist, Sokari Douglas Camp via Skype (August 2016).

framing the purpose or interpretation of the artwork, especially when it contradicts the "buyer". On the extreme end, an artist who is invested in maintaining some semblance of ownership of their work might keep an eye out for instances of embellishment, reductive analysis, or what they see as harmful inaccuracies in how others represent the work, long after that work is in gallery hallways, museum collections, on art fair walls, in catalogues, and other art publications.

When thinking about how artists situate themselves and their work in relation to "Africanness" and within the Contemporary African art genre, money is a key factor, especially when we think about the position of artists within the gatekeeping process (rather than working in opposition to gatekeepers) as a question of power. Artists who insert themselves in the gatekeeping process (usually because they have the means to do so) are not subversive because they are challenging, replacing, or even changing the role of the *primary gatekeeper*. The artist who participates in the gatekeeping process is subversive because he brings together his concerns as an artist (baseline, patronage, and status concerns) and marries these with the concerns, language and tools that are usually dominated by *primary gatekeepers* (endorsing new artists, training young generations of practitioners who may one day become gatekeepers, and publishing art literature and reviews). And in order to pull this off, it is useful to have an understanding (even if partial) of how money and 'money talks' inform the interactive work that artists and their gatekeepers do.

The Commercial vs. non-Commercial Artist

The African continents' growing economies have seen an increase in interest from African collectors and non-African business investors in Europe and China, mainly, and this is also reflected in the growing attention to and scouting for new artistic talent on the continent by

galleries and auction houses as the reception of and pricing for Contemporary art by African-born artists exceeds expectations[45]. Although quite modest in numbers, the African-born artists who do make it into the global art market and art fair scene find an avalanche of opportunities which they pursue in various ways within and beyond their art making process. However, for some artists, entering the contemporary art market as a Contemporary African artist comes with openings but can also be restrictive for their creative growth as New York City based artist, Onyeka Ibe shares,

> "I have a gallery owner who used to know my old work when I was still working in Atlanta. I had some small press coverage and when he tried to share some of my current work, he tried to show it in Atlanta and people said, 'This is not Ibe's work!'"
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> *Interview with artist in New York City, Onyeka Ibe (March 2016)*

Ibe expresses a challenge he has faced in his career as an artist, negotiating with art patrons who could not accept that the artist could work in multiple styles and explore different subject matter. Surely, a challenge that any artist who has become known for a particular style faces when they introduce works showcasing a very different style. However, in his experience Ibe goes on to elaborate on the issue as part of a larger phenomenon, the idea that there are

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[45] Julie Baumgardner. 2015. "Understanding Contemporary African Art's Hard-won Rise to the Art World Main Stage." Last accessed, April 4, 2017. https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-understanding-contemporary-african-art-s-hard-won-rise-to-the-art-world-main-stage. Also see Jacopo Prisco. 2016. "Looking for an Investment? African Art is hotter than gold." Last accessed, April 4, 2017. http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/17/arts/africa-contemporary-art-investment/.

commercial and non-commercial artists. Ibe says, "This issue of commercial versus non commercial art…some people create work that they believe is commercial work but then suddenly when they start talking differently about what they are doing, it is not commercial".[46] He explains that even for the artists who do not consider themselves commercial, they may still have to do work on commission just to support the other work they actually want to do.

Investment in Contemporary African art and artists has certainly opened up access to more resources in the form of exhibition and speaking platforms for artists like Ibe. However, as he shares his experiences he echoes other artists who have found that access into the industry *as* a Contemporary African artist can come with a limited scope and understanding of the artists' work and may also limit them to material and content that others can readily identify as "African". Those with the resources (networks, funds, language) to do so go beyond the art studio and use their resources to collaborate with other creative entrepreneurs to curate exhibitions, run NGO's, start businesses, and use art as a teaching tool. For example, artists like Berlin based photographer, Akinbode Akinbiyi also curates, New York City based artist, Wangechi Mutu initiated *Africa's Out*, an NGO that promotes social justice awareness and supports young artists, and Addis Ababa based photographer and filmmaker, Aida Muluneh founded a company, Developing and Educating Societies Through Arts (DESTA), which offers photography training and curates cultural programming, and British-(Kenyan)[47] Nairobi-based artist, Sam Hopkins also curates ands co-founded the media collective Slum TV with Alexander Nikolic to produce and distribute local audio-visual material in Nairobi.

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[46] From interview with artist, Onyeka Ibe (March 2016).
[47] Note: During the interview with artist, Sam Hopkins, he mentioned that he was in the process of having his Kenyan citizenship approved by the Kenyan government.

Despite the evidence that economics matter for furthering both art making and pursuits that artists might have beyond the art studio, there is some resistance towards discussing how money factors into the development and activity of artists in the contemporary art scene. Although art experts use the increased monetary investment in the Contemporary African art genre in international auction houses, white cube spaces, public museums, and other cultural institutions as a clear sign that there is a rise in the recognition and appreciation of art and artists working in this genre, there is also a clear hesitation on the part of some individual artists and their patrons to speak openly about money. In contrast, there are artists who have an overtly pragmatic eye for "working to support their work" and suggest that the hush around discussing making art as "work" is part of what keeps artists in this genre particularly stifled. In a group interview with an artist, an art teacher, and an art collector, different understandings of how to measure and assign value to artistic expression come out of our conversation.

Money, Morals, and Mores

The art collector who is based in New York City tells me that when she started collecting "African" art she was very cognizant of the pressures for the artist to conform to certain ideas of "Africanness" and she was very weary of the artists who produce "afro-kitsch" artwork to satisfy the expectations of their European buyers and collectors. She goes on to explain that this is why when she is looking for work she wants to find an artist who works for their love of their craft not for money. To which the artist sitting with us abruptly interjects, "Yes, but how do you discern that?" The artist expands on her frustration with what she refers to as "a false dichotomy between working for money and working for pleasure" and how when she is working she works out of her love of the craft but she also has bills to pay saying, "I do not shy away from that need,

how my work is like any other work. I work to survive". The artist bemoans the idea that true artists must be "starving artists" when in fact many respected artists are partially able to thrive from their craft *because* they are able to earn from art sales and receiving grants.

Art patrons have to find a way to identify "worthy" art from "not worthy" art and one way to achieve this is by assessing and placing a high price on technical skill, but this becomes increasingly challenging when so many artists demonstrate highly technical abilities. So there is a need to look to other factors like innovation, artists' personal narratives, and social commentary in the work relative to other art that has come before. This is where the expertise of curators and art historians becomes highly sought after as they occupy the role of discovering, identifying, and promoting certain artwork and artists based on expertise they have developed over years of observing, tracing, analyzing and making links between artists, styles, and themes. The challenge for the private collector who depends on art experts is developing one's own personal point of reference for say, measuring quality of the artwork. While skill appears to be a logical place to begin, in an art genre where the world of ideas often appears to supersede technical skill (although some might argue that, at least in theory, this is not true) it is an incredibly risky project. Still, this does not deter everyone from using unlikely pairs like "authenticity" and "skill" as primary prerequisites for measuring the value or better yet the potential value of an artwork.

The challenge leads to variously positioned individuals like collectors and dealers arbitrarily assigning the value of art objects based on what they classify as pure (love/passion driven) and impure (money driven) motivation behind the production of the artwork. Though some deem it wise to heed the advice of art historians, advisors, curators, and critics, the

exchange between the artist and the dealer is sometimes direct and unfettered. And although private collectors do not necessarily occupy the same spaces and access to audiences that curators, critics, and art historians do, some private collectors have played a key role in bringing attention to and contributing to the impetus for curators and art historians to actively investigate and document the work of specific artists who gain prominence as African practitioners. Some examples of such collectors include, Italian businessman, Jean Pigozzi who owns the Contemporary African Art Collection (CAAC) which he initiated in 1990[48] based in Geneva and is known for his endless quest for "authenticity"[49] as well as Ulli Beier, whose collection of Nigerian visual arts and culture formed the basis of Iwalewahaus, which Beier founded in 1981 at the University of Bayreuth in Germany. Beier too, who then moved to Papua New Guinea in 1895 was also concerned with making sure that he did not influence the artists he was meeting and working with so that their work could retain its authenticity. So, if in fact the artist is "truly" African (presumably making the work he makes "African") this on its own may be enough to attract the initial attention of a dealer looking to focus on "Africa". But even though collectors like Pigozzi and Beier have contributed to creating spaces that promote certain artists and art, without the vetting of identifiable gatekeepers like curators and art historians in the industry, a search based on authenticity or passion might not be enough to sustain that interest for an audience that may not already be invested in Contemporary African art, specifically.

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[48] Official website of the Contemporary African Art Collection (CAAC). Last accessed, April 3, 2017. http://caacart.com/aboutus.php.

[49] See Figueroa, Eugenio Valdés. 1995. "Africa: Art and Hunger: A Critique of the Myth of Authenticity." *Third Text* 9(31): 3-8.

Since the contemporary art market (and this includes Contemporary African art) does not base value on how old an art object is in the same way that art belonging to older art categories and movements or objects in traditional and ancient art auctions, archeological sections of museums and ethnological museums are, the processes of gatekeeping in contemporary art are not always clear cut and certainly aren't fixed to *primary gatekeepers* (Robertson and Chong 2008; Horowitz 2014). This leads to all kinds of value-laden judgments about how money might affect creative choices, for example, an artist who shares that some projects came about because a gallerist really wants to see the artist produce a particular kind of "African" aesthetic that seems to sell well, or an artist who does so not by any overt request but by noticing and following a trend in what kinds of art by Africans appears to attract audiences. Two artists who ask to remain anonymous here, explain that they understand that after all, the consumption of art as is with most cultural consumption is conceivably more to do with what the consumer is trying to signal about himself and is therefore just as much, if not mostly, a business transaction rather than genuine interest in the artist's creative innovation or educational exchange.

For an artist who sees money as a morally questionable incentive, it is perfectly reasonable to forgo participating in an art project or accepting commission work that does not further the artist's personal creative journey. However, another artist who sees economic opportunity as a practical incentive to support their passion work is likely to accept commission work that may not completely align with what the artist focuses on in his or her own work. How each artist interacts with a *primary gatekeeper* who focuses on marketing the art and artist versus investing in educating an audience about the artist's creative vision, for instance, often varies

depending on the artists' different ideas about money, their access to funds, and the priority they place on "sales" or "selling".

Artists are cognizant of the role of money in art, specifically about how money (having it or receiving it for their work) influences the decisions they make within their creative process and production and sometimes even their decisions about which work to share and in what format. However, the concerns over how to make a living while still managing to have time to make art are common and, in the conversations about "making a living", funding becomes a key determinant in how artists talk about not focusing on money because such a focus may cast doubts over the artistic integrity of the artist and their work. For example, once New York City based artist, Brendan Fernandes, who was in the process of moving to Chicago at the time of the interview, says of the main challenges facing artists, "I think funding is the biggest issue."[50] However, he also goes on to talk about how focusing on art as a commodity or a product limits creative exploration. The idea here is that money matters but creating work that is mainly driven by monetary incentive means an artist may be more inclined to alter or compromise their own creative independence in order to deliver what an art patron wants to see. In pursuing monetary gain, an artist risks distorting or diminishing the integrity of his creative process.

At the same time, the artists who do not see money as a threat to the integrity of their work talk about economic pursuit as an integral part of sustaining the art making process itself. Pamela Sunstrum, an artist based in Johannesburg, describes this as, "Finding a balance between making things economically sustainable, studio time, making time, and translating it into an

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[50] Direct quote from interview with artist, Brendan Fernandes, in Evanston, IL (April 2016).

economically sustainable income."[51] Rather than viewing money as taboo, Sunstrum is an example of an artist who sees and is transparent about how money or financial stability is a vital element that ensures an artist's survival and their capacity to thrive. These different orientations towards money in art also often inform an artist's view of *primary gatekeepers* and the work that primary gatekeepers do, in some cases money (having or lacking it) becomes a reason for the artist to insert themselves in gatekeeping processes and other times contributes to a sense that the artist's place is in the studio and not dealing with the business of art packaging, marketing, and distribution.

Addressing the Role of Money in Art Making: "Talk About the Money!"

It is important to understand how it is that I came to address the issue of money in an entire chapter in a study that is neither an art market analysis project nor a project addressing questions that are strictly about marketing or art valuation. In looking at framing, the way artists position themselves in or in relation to the Contemporary African art genre (and market) and frame their work in relation to 'Africanness', money comes up at various points during interviews when the artists share about some of the challenges of working as a contemporary artist or in discussing their relationship with an institution they work for, a gallerist who represents them or a curator they once worked with. However, when the research began I did not foreground 'money talks' in discussing the decisions artists made about inserting or removing themselves in the gatekeeping process. That is, the importance of money, which had been there all along in the handful of interview transcripts I had by the end of 2016 had not jumped out at me until I attended an event in which I expected to meet a woman whose name came up during an interview as an important

[51] Interview with Johannesburg based artist, Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum (September 2016).

Contemporary African artist in New York City. I had attended the event in the hopes that at some point during the evening, after the planned panel discussion and Q&A, I could introduce the project and myself to the artist and ask her if I could interview her about her work and her experience working in New York City. The evening did not go as planned.

A well-known art institute in New York City had put together an event in recognition of the historical exclusion of black female artists from the institute's women artist collections. The event was set up as an overview of how far the institute had come in recognizing and including black female artists in its collections and programing. Set up in an open atrium, the audience sat in rows of chairs facing a panel of artists on a slightly raised platform. On the panel sat five black women, one of whom I had hoped to interview after her name came up during an interview with another artist working in New York City.

The panel discussion at the art institution was supposed to highlight the contributions of black women artists who had been active through the 70s and 80s. The artists talked about their experiences and being barred from places like the institution where they were now presenting. They echoed each other, pointing out that it had taken the institution far too long to correct this but also expressing gratitude that the corrections were under way. As each artist gave an overview of the work they did and continue to do, it became apparent that two of the artists wanted to talk about the issue of access, not simply in terms of the physical access to show and discuss their work but also in terms of opportunities to apply for funding and other financial support to continue their art. Their concerns were monologues as there was no one from the institution on the panel to respond to any 'money' questions and talk through what lack of funding meant for the work these artists do.

The artist I had hoped to speak with was one of the two who brought up money, but missing an interactive format with a representative from the women's art collection, the money point in both artists' cases was subsumed in extended monologues about their art as "passion work", because they had to get other jobs to make a living. They shared details about what other work they did so they could continue to make art, because they could not simply stop making art when they could not make money from it; their creative work was a life calling, not a choice.

It wasn't until the Q&A that money came up again, when in the audience, a lone voice heckled, yelling towards the panel of artists, "Talk about the money!" The women on the stage glanced at each other. Perhaps because the heckler was making more of a command than asking a question, no one seemed to want to be the first to respond. A hush fell over the atrium. I recall making a note, "Talk about the money!" on the side of my notepad and immediately wondering, "Where are the organizers? Why are there no discussants or moderators on this panel? Where were the panel organizers at this art institution who had organized this panel?" Filling the void between the meandering voice in my head and the heavy silence in the room, the heckler attempted to reframe her command into a question. She said something about the artists elaborating on how they could continue to do good work as artists back then, especially when their time and energy was going into other jobs. "How could you be an artist when you're scraping to make a living?" She had no questions about being a female, black, or African artist and she received no answers regarding the impact that financial instability or the lack of financial support had on the creative life of these artists.

The artists on the stage as well as the rest of the audience members effectively ignored her, moving on to discussing the kinds of projects and artist collectives they participated in. After

the Q&A the heckler, who was also a black woman and wore jean overalls with noticeable colorful smudges (paint? perhaps a working artist herself?), mumbled something to herself and headed for the door. The other members of the audience mingled for another 15 to 20 minutes, standing in small groups, smiling and waving across the room, hugging and taking turns to speak with the presenters.

It was apparent that many of the people in the audience were quite familiar with each other and in the end I was not able to speak with the artist I had come to see, but the event had highlighted another factor that could play into how artists self-present or advocate for themselves and their work – Is money in art really a taboo topic? Or are there simply more appropriate times and places to bring it up? How does money factor in, in the question of self-presentation and relating one's work to "Africanness" and could an artist's attitude towards the place of money in her creative process also shape how far she is willing to go to insert herself in the gatekeeping process?

Money and Mores in Art: Working for your Stomach, Working from the Heart

Artists are acutely aware of "money talk" in the art spaces they move and work in but some artists did not bring up funding or making money as part of their concern with the way they do their work and the way others, especially gatekeepers, perceive the work. The following excerpts show how among the artists who were vocal about money without being prompted during the interview, money came up in three ways, first in covering their *baseline needs*, second in terms of the significance of *patronage* to support the artist's work, and finally, money an important but risky *metric for measuring status or reputation* for the artist and the artwork). These three levels

are at times set up as complimentary parts of creative production but at other times they come up as creating tension and possible contradiction for the artist's creative process and production.

> "You have to do work for your stomach and you have to do work from your heart. […] I see it economically and politically […] at the end it is your persistence that will make a difference."
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> *Interview with Addis Ababa based artist, Aida Muluneh (August 2016)*

> "I think for African artists living and working on the continent it is a challenge if they work internationally. They have to pay a lot of customs. I think for me I am quite lucky because I have been working as an artist for a long time and I am represented by good galleries whose mission matches mine."
>
> *Interview with Accra based artist, Zohra Opoku (May 2016)*

> "I think funding is the biggest issue. But I am lucky that I am from Canada because we have a specific program that funds artists. That's why I say American art is very commodified, so even when you are teaching students it is about producing a product that can be sold…but in Canada there is room for experimentation."
>
> *Interview with NYC/Toronto/Chicago based artist, Brendan Fernandes (April 2016)*

The relationships artists draw between art and money sometimes shape both the way artists discursively frame their work in relation to Africanness as well as the strategies they

employ to enact these frameworks. In order to sustain creative production, there is a baseline need that must be satisfied. When Muluneh says that one has to work *for* their stomach and *from* their heart, she also explains that these two things needn't be viewed in oppositional terms and they are in fact complimentary. She promotes the idea that it is possible to produce meaningful work and remain transparent about the fact that this work also sustains you and allows you to make a living. In order to thrive, an artist must have their *baseline needs* (e.g. food, shelter) adequately met and meeting these needs needn't contradict or hamper the production of meaningful work.

Muluneh, was born in Ethiopia, spent her childhood living in Yemen and England, and spent some years going to boarding school in Cyprus before her family settled in Canada. After graduating from Howard University, Washington D.C. in 2000 she worked as a photojournalist for the Washington Post and moved back to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2007. The artist trains young photographers in Addis Ababa and is vocal about encouraging artists to educate themselves about their rights and to take on an unapologetic investment in their professional advancement, which undoubtedly includes their financial wellbeing. In her work, Muluneh bemoans the popularized images of poverty and squalor in Ethiopia that dominates some international news reports and NGO advertisements and says, "I want to make 'Africa' digestible in a different way."[52] She shares how this pushed her to think about ways to offer counter narratives as a photographer and filmmaker and started her on the path to training Ethiopian

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[52] Interview with Addis Ababa based artist, Aida Muluneh (August 2016).

youth to document the things they care about and the things they see around them, contributing to a growing archive of images of Ethiopia taken by local Ethiopians.

The artist also discusses how money and power intersect, for example in explaining the disproportionate representation of Ethiopia from the lenses of photographers and photojournalists from outside Ethiopia, especially those from Western countries. She also says it is a real concern that, "most of the funding for artists comes from outside the (African) continent […] I teach my students versatility. You have to be technically wise but you never stop being curious. You stay humble […] 1% of the time you're pressing the button, 99% you are interacting with people, your environment. Negotiation is a huge part of it".[53] Although Muluneh appreciates art theory and literacy as worthy pursuits, she also emphasizes the importance for an artist to return to the reality on the ground in order to understand what it is that is actually required for the artist to accomplish what they set out to achieve.

There is variable transparency in how artists talk about how expensive it is to make and share the work they make with others. Accra based multi-disciplinary artist, Zohra Opoku shares her thoughts about what she sees as the differences between her experience and the funding challenges that her colleagues working in Ghana have when they prepare for international exhibitions. Having moved from Germany to Ghana, the artist explains that her situation is different because she has been a practicing artist for a long time and in that time she has been fortunate to get representation by well-respected gallerists who she works well with. Opoku, who is German-Ghanaian, uses photography, installation, and sculpture to create work that explores West African traditions such as masquerade ceremonies, spirituality, family lineage, and how

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[53] From interview with artist, photographer Aida Muluneh (August 2016).

these relate to the politics of hybrid identity. According to her artist statement, "A globalized social consumption and the commodification of all things African are a driving force in what she sees as the nemesis of her thesis, and the relevance of cultural credentials within this state of being."[54] So the artist tightly cushions herself and her work in questions of identity and "Africanness" in an unambiguous way.

Opoku has been based in Ghana since 2011 and shares that she does get involved in the planning of her solo exhibitions, which is typically done one-on-one with her gallerist. However, her gallerist usually has the final say in decision-making, "because she (the gallerist) has invested the most […] We started our relationship before any other gallery." The relationship between the artist and her gallerist, who is based in Seattle, U.S.A., is one that is both positive and supportive and Opoku considers herself lucky because when she compares her experiences to those of her peers in Ghana, she reports that her peers have to pay high shipping costs for their work to get to international shows. In certain respects this artist, like many artists with gallery representation, defers to their gallerist when it comes to decisions such as whether or not the artist's work makes an appearance in any given international art fairs (costs of participating in fairs often include renting a booth at the fair, insurance for the artwork, shipping, and handling). Making an appearance at an international art fairs is expensive and in most cases if not all, the gallerist picks up the tab. And as Opoku mentions, this front-end financial investment that the gallerist makes is in fact an investment in the artist and the artist's work, and the artist both recognizes and appreciates this.

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[54] See artist Zohra Opoku's 'About' page on her official website. Accessed February 2016. http://www.zohraopoku.com/index.php/ABOUT.html.

Opoku's good working relationship with her gallerist and the artist's discussion about how her peers in Ghana struggle financially is an example of how money makes a difference for an artist through *patronage*. Patronage is a significant part of how artists manage their creative practice and production, so not only to fund the making of the art (art material, art studio etc.) but also to gain access to other resources such as exhibition space and publicity. Not only is this financial support important but also having support from individuals and institutions whose mission and vision matches or at the very least compliments the artist's goals is most ideal. The artist highlights that beyond taking care of baseline needs, money makes a difference when it comes to the relationships that an artist has with people who are willing and able to financially invest in the artist and their work.

Even when artists recognize the necessity to earn a living and nurture their art, as Muluneh encourages others to, there is still a concern that money may have a multilayered and not always a positively productive influence on the artist's creative process. Visual and performance artist, Brendan Fernandes, highlights how making art for the commercial market may also thwart creative exploration. When the artist's focus is on art as a product to sell and when art students' primary concern is whether their art will make it into the commercial art market, something is lost, perhaps limiting artists' and art students' willingness to take risks and experiment in their work. Fernandes, who made a recent move to Chicago, spoke at length about the high cost of living in New York City, where he was based for several years. He talked about New York City as, "sterilized and expensive" and reflecting on the opportunity to move to Chicago added, "Even a city like Chicago has more subculture […] New York City is a playground for a very specific socioeconomic class."

Elaborating on the interaction between class, cost of living and the experience of working as a visual and performance artist in a very commercialized New York City art scene, Fernandes says, "10 years ago my first shared apartment was $700 and now it is $1400 each! There were no banks in Williamsburg now it is all CVS, Starbucks, Condos, and banks." The artist's work combines his art practice (visual and performance) with teaching and writing and he tells me that in his art practice, he is very open about the struggles he has with looking at colonialism and other hegemonic systems though his work; exploring the question of how objects were removed from the African continent with the identity of the people who produced them unrecorded and unacknowledged, and connecting this to narratives of migration and his own identity as a Kenyan, Indian, Canadian.

Fernandes is an example of an artist who recognizes the practical need of money as well as the potential for money to pervert the creative production. The tension he stresses is the fundamental question of how money in art as the demarcation of where *baseline needs* (making money to live) and *patronage* (securing funds to support the making of priceless art or passion work, as Muluneh says, art "from the heart") interact, crosses over to questions of artistic integrity. What Fernandes helps to illustrate through his experience as a practicing artist living and working in New York City and comparing this with working in Toronto and now Chicago, is that while artists discuss their thoughts on money, morals, and mores in their creative endeavors, artists are also aware that how they orient themselves towards money in art can signal to others what kind of artist they are. As Ibe, the artist who is active in New York City and shared the difficulty in finding art patrons in Atlanta (because they were used to seeing him work in a certain style that the artist has since moved away from), says, the difference between the

commercialized artist and the non-commercial artist appears to be in the language artists (and gatekeepers) use when talking about their work.

Conclusion

Most artists respond to questions about money in terms of supporting their art, ethics, and integrity rather than in terms of valuation and business transactions. Regardless of what framework they use (*pragmatic, tangential, or substantive*) to position their work in relation to Africanness, their attitude about money in their work is significant in a number of ways; in how artists meet their *baseline needs* (artists need money to live), secure *patronage* (besides food and rent, artists need resources to make, maintain and share their art which also costs money, so an individual or institution that offers artists financial backing is a valuable source of support), and use money as a gauging *status and reputation metric* (confronting the notions that money is a useful measure of worth, that a focus on money eclipses the non-monetary value of the artists' work or that artists have creative freedom but commodification can impede it and taints their artistic integrity). Ultimately, in their quest to get funding to support their art and in their relationships with gatekeepers and other art patrons, there is a general sense that artists should be mindful of what their relationship to money signals to others about what *kind* of artist they are.

The decisions artists make about how to self-present and what the role of money is in that self presentation, especially as they work alongside *primary gatekeepers*, interact to constitute a complex set of allowances and foreclosures for artists, depending on where they work, where they are able to travel, and what institutions and *primary gatekeepers* they are able to work with. The role of money in art is a multifaceted one, and while some artists make great effort to neatly group art into commercial versus non-commercial spaces, efforts to do so are complicated

because the mechanisms and social agents working within the commercial "art markets" often overlap with mechanisms and social agents who are not always seen as working in and for "profit" organizations and institutions (e.g. experts and primary gatekeepers working in academic and other cultural research spaces). Even when an understanding of these overlaps is implied, the impact of the overlap on how relationships unfold and how information is shared is not always openly discussed.

To investigate how artists insert themselves into gatekeeping processes it becomes imperative to consider discussions about money and about how artists talk about money. The attitudes towards money may impact the way artists moving in Contemporary African art circles (for commercial and non-commercial purposes) interact with *primary gatekeepers*. What the declaration of non-monetary recognition by the Deutsche Bank's Artist of the Year prize suggests, at least indirectly, is that even as an institution whose primary purpose is the collection, accumulation, and circulation of money and other financial investments (art being one), art ought to be cherished for more than its potential monetary worth. Yet, some might argue that with price tags of Contemporary African art ranging anywhere from $1,000 to $5 million, money is a clear, if not one of the clearest indicators that art is valuable. The question, is it expensive because it (and the artist) is worth it, or is it valuable because the prices are so high, is an intriguing "chicken or egg first?" puzzle, which is intriguing on its own but does not distract from the central role that money plays. Whatever angle one wants to take it, money in art matters and artists articulate this in different ways.

7. A POLITICAL AGENDA: ARTISTS, ACTIVISTS, AND ADVOCATES

Abstract

This chapter explains how the development of the Contemporary African art genre perpetuates the ghettoization of artists and their work despite reports of increased discovery of and opportunities for new talent. African-born artists cope with this by acquiring tools and skills that afford them alternative approaches to becoming arbiters of knowledge through art. Using interviews with three contemporary artists and ethnographic observations of two artist talks with audience participation, I explain how the social role of artists who work as social agents is different from other art experts who primarily frame and offer readings of artistic production. I show that, in framing their art process, form, and material as tools for a corrective and explicit political agenda, rather than as a predominantly aesthetic endeavor in which they are an observer and not a participant, some artists present themselves as both activists and artists. I identify three variations of this approach, *artist activists*: artists who also work as activists, *visual activists*: activists who use art as a political tool and *art advocates*: artists who are advocates of education through art and art enterprise. An emphasis on advocacy tilts the focus from art consumers as an audience (seeing and potentially learning from viewing art work) to consumers as participants and potential advocates (implicated in the issue-specific concerns presented through the art object and with the capacity to use art as a mobilizing tool). Artists who frame their art as social justice work discuss how this approach bridges creative freedom and social responsibility in cultural production, thus promoting advocacy work through contemporary art.

Keywords: Creative freedom, social role, political agenda

> "As long as blacks are suffering from inferiority complex, a result of 300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration, and derision, they will be useless as co-architects of a normal society where man is nothing else than man for his own sake. What is necessary...is a very strong grass-roots build-up of black consciousness such that blacks can learn to assert themselves and stake their rightful claim"
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> *Steve Biko ([1970] 2015), Anti-Apartheid activist in South Africa*

A 2007 report on Africa as an exceptional challenge for global poverty reduction and sustainability sciences shows how when compared to other developing regions, the African continent shows an exponential regression in improvement in quality of life, health, and food security (Kates and Dasgupta 2007; also see Sandbrook and Barker 1985). The study shows that over time, the number of people living under the $1 per day poverty line is increasing exponentially while life expectancy and food production per capita decreases. Several scholars bemoan the dominance of this negative representation of Africa in scholarship and some go as far as to suggest that it might explain why there are people of African heritage who, when given a chance, might choose to distance themselves from anything that might highlight their "Africanness". Instead, these purposeful dissenters choose to focus attention on positive interpretations through historical investigation or specific issue-based case studies that highlight the relationship between local, regional, and global social conditions rather than offering an overgeneralized critique or celebration of the African region.

In this chapter, I use three case studies of artists who represent three approaches to refocusing the generic "African" narrative or perspective to a very particular place, purpose, and issue-specific priority. Table 2 below illustrates these three approaches; practicing artists who also work as activists (*artist activists*), activists who use art as a political tool (*visual activists*), and artists who are advocates of art education and enterprise (*art advocates*). In some ways, it appears that while they agree that limiting their art to the politics of identity or an "African narrative" is restricting, all three groups of artists speak their way out of this bind by working through this tension in their work as visual artists and their work as activists, all the while emphasizing the versatility of artistic production beyond the art market and cultural institutions and acknowledging the danger of limiting their artistic "home" to gallery and museum walls.

Name	**Description**
Artist-Activist	Artist who also does social justice work. The artwork this artist makes may or may not explicitly engage with or reflect the artist's political agenda but the artist initiates or participates in organizations and programs that promote social justice.
Visual Activist	Activist who uses art as a primary tool for activism work. This is the activist practitioner who uses art and art tools as a vehicle for educating, raising awareness, and building archives to document social injustice issues.
Art Advocate	Artist who invests in developing their local art industry through skills training, art literacy, and research. This artist may self define as an activist or not, but promotes the use of art tools for self-education and self-empowerment purposes.

Table 2. Artist-Activists, Visual Activists, and Art Advocates

The case of artists who also do social advocacy work offers a chance to take a close look at how some artists pre-define the parameters within which others can locate their creative work. Here, work includes art making but also extends to other activities (extra-studio production) that the artist invests in as an extension of their creative production (e.g. raising funds to support other artists, mobilizing collective action or training young people to use art tools for creative and political work). The political agenda focus does not suggest that there aren't other ways for artists to set up parameters to situate themselves and their work in a larger network of artists, specifically within the Contemporary African art genre. For example, in earlier chapters there are artists who emphasize their research-based process to bring attention to their formal and conceptual process rather than the centering of their biography in the work. Another example is the artist who openly states, "No, I am not an African artist. I am an artist who happens to come from an African country." Which is not always an effective way for an artist to have his name removed from contemporary African artist lists but it certainly informs an audience about the artist's stance on others referring to him as an African artist.

Both the research-based artist and the artist who says, "I am an artist, not an African artist" may talk about working within the contemporary African art genre as a limitation, but as demonstrated in Chapter 4, these artists explain that this trading in (eschewing "Africanness") is not to deny their Africanness. However, they would rather be known for their technical skills or conceptual interventions, for instance. Bringing up the connection between their work and the artists' "African" background is not an issue, as long as the focus is on the artists' proven command for a particular technique or style, their mastery over certain material, and the artists' issue-specific concerns and interests that may not be confined to an "African" context. Where

geography or regionality is relevant to the artists' work, it is most ideal when it too is given specificity (where in Africa? which country? which city?), and not generally placed in "Africa".

Artists who outwardly declare themselves as committed activists or advocates do not appear to distance their art from "Africanness" or from the influence of their biography. In fact, they address Africanness and their personal coming of age as artists and use this as an entry point to outline their political and social advocacy focus. However, they also demand specificity. The following three are examples of artists who divert the obsession with locating an "African narrative" in their work by reiterating a specific social issue they use their work to explore, interrogate, and educate others about. The first is an example of the *artist-activist*, an artist who expands on their studio practice and initiates collectives that collaborate around specific social issues, raising awareness, and funds to support other artists and programs that address said issues. Second, is an example of a *visual activist*, one who is an activist who uses art as a political tool to document, build archives, and contribute to discussions about the political, social and economic rights of a historically persecuted group. And finally, the art advocates, the artist who thinks about art tools as not only empowering but also transformative tools. This artist also does not shy away from addressing economic success as a fundamental pillar for sustaining creative production and incorporates this approach in training a younger generation of artists to become curious, creative, and active citizens in their own communities.

The Artist Activist: Wangechi Mutu's *Africa's Out!*

We sat around a wooden table with professors, students, and a visiting artist whose work was up in the large exhibition room next door. Mutu, based in New York City and born in Kenya, describes her experience when she first moved to the U.S. and the strange concept of "legal

aliens" now infused in most of her collages of monster-like female figures. She makes her figures from cutout pieces of motorcycle, national geographic, and porn magazines, and a commentary on the odd juxtaposition of coexisting opposites. The artist finds creative expression in bringing together objects that seem oppositional – at once human, machine, and plant life – into single cohesive humanoid beings. In her talking about her process creating some of the images in this exhibition she talks about how it always seemed odd to her that media depictions of black females either show black women as non-sexual bodies, as in the bare chested women in National Geographic photo spreads or as hyper-sexualized, as in pornographic magazines. From this extreme oppositional placing of the black female and the denial of some "in-between range" for black female bodies to occupy, she decided to create female monsters that exude power and vulnerability and are simultaneously alluring and disturbing to look at. Although Mutu's work addresses socio-political issues such as female vulnerability and strength, overconsumption and its impact on the environment, and takes on the performativity of identity and cross-cultural perspectives, it wasn't until recently that she took her political lens from the art itself and on to creating a physical and virtual space to bring together creative entrepreneurs who also wanted to signal their support of and connection to specific social and political issues.

In 2015 an article in the international edition of Okayafrica introduced a report on a new campaign called *Africa's Out* that rallies artists and others to "change the way we engage with Africa, and more specifically, the way Africans reach out to empower each other"[55]. Okayafrica

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[55] Okayafrica official website. Article by Alyssa Klein, June 3, 2015: http://www.okayafrica.com/culture-2/africas-out-wangehi-mutu-lgbtqi-africa/. [Also see original quote taken from official artist website. Accessed December 20, 2016. http://wangechimutu.com/news/.

is a virtual platform that covers and shares news on arts and culture coming from Africa and its diasporas. The article was about Mutu's arts and social justice initiative. Inspired by a fellow Kenyan, friend and winner of The Caine Prize for African Writing, Kenneth Binyavanga Wainaina's coming out in 2014, Mutu established *Africa's Out* stating, "I want people to understand where gay rights are in East Africa and do something that actually makes an impact […] So that's what Africa's Out is, it's this big, big powerful love fest of politically minded cultural makers coming together to do good stuff, important stuff quickly." Since the launch of *Africa's Out* on December 12, 2014, the campaign has grown into a fundraising and networking platform with three boards of directors, the artist as Chair/President, an arts educator as Secretary, and an international corporate strategist and consultant as Treasurer, with the endorsement of over 100 "cultural makers", how the artist refers to her collaborators.

Africa's Out primarily functions as a resource hub, offering grants to support organizations that are promoting more inclusive communities on the African continent and supporting artist residencies and commission work to help promote artists of African descent. Using a guiding principle they refer to as, "Imaginative Activism", the *Africa's Out* team brings together art and activism by strengthening the ties between artists, curators, and collectors working in the diaspora, encouraging collaboration to draw audiences to attend and contribute to events, and developing programming that celebrates the courage of and shows solidarity for groups who are ostracized based on markers like their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

Wangechi Mutu is an example of an *artist activist;* an artist who devotes her time to making art objects but is also a practicing and self-proclaimed activist. She is not only a "cultural

maker" but also locates herself within a large network of individuals and organizations with a clear mission statement with a politically conscious agenda. Although she too refers to her work as "research-based", by also owning the political program in her work she moves away from the idea that her use of the research approach is to signal "academic distance" for the purpose of gaining more creative license (which appears to be limited by the association with "Africanness"). In fact, contrary to withdrawing from talking about Africanness in her work, Mutu directly brings up specificity in her personal experiences as an African woman from Kenya working in the United States.

She celebrates having found a place where she could ravel in her creative process while at the same time addressing the alienating experience of not being able to freely travel between Kenya and the United States during her early years. Having lived in New York City since the 1990s, she also talks about how she watched her work travel to exhibitions in other states and around the world before she had as much freedom to travel and before her first solo exhibition in New York City. Like other artist activists, Mutu is not only interested in educating or raising awareness but also uses her access to resources and networks with other established artists, curators, and collectors to raise funds and bring real warm bodies into the same room to collaborate on projects and contribute to organizations that deal with very specific social justice issues.

The Visual Activist: Zanele Muholi

> "Remembering that we are dealing with delicate spaces, which were not meant to be for us. We're speaking from a continent, which is Africa here, where most of our countries were previously colonized and not every country within the

> continent is free as yet in terms of sexuality, gender expression, articulation. And remembering that my intervention in all of this mess is specific and looking at LGBTI individuals…and not every country in Africa has legalized freedom of expression when it comes to sexuality, when it comes to transgender people."
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> *Interview with Zanele Muholi, (September 2016)*

Zanele Muholi is one of the most politically vocal artists who agreed to share her experience working under the rubric of "Contemporary African art" with me. She began the interview with a very clear request, "Hold on, hold on, let's first not limit this into 'African Art'. Let's mainstream our issues, as Africans, as LGBTQI people, as human beings. I don't know what limits my life to African art because my target audience is beyond Africa," to which I explain, her push back is part of the reason why I ask the question about how artists position themselves, because in fact, regardless of how they may personally feel about the genre, it exists and they are aware that their names and work appear on lists broadly titled, "contemporary African. […]" And in response to my, "I think your take on this is important, this is why I ask" she quickly acknowledges my reasoning with a, "Yeah, sure" before continuing,

> "I don't want to limit my life, my work into a sideline and limited space…because you have countries like the U.S., countries in Europe that won't recognize black artists, that won't recognize black LGBTQI artists and you have places in Europe, in Africa, in Asia, in America that won't even have same sex marriage like we do in South Africa. So South Africa then becomes an exceptional space where we have the laws, where we have the constitution. Which is why I don't want to limit

> my life into 'Africa' because I am speaking from a specific, exceptional space and point of view."

Interview continued with Zanele Muholi (September 2016)

Muholi refers to herself as, "A South African photographer who works as a visual activist; one who uses photographs to push a political agenda, through articulations of gender and sexuality." She explains that demanding specificity in the way we think and talk about her work is important because of the real differences in how open and safe art spaces and classrooms are compared to other spaces when it comes to talking about sexuality and LGBTQI rights. Pointing out differences in legal rights and constitutional protections as well as the social acceptance afforded to queer people in different countries, Muholi also explains that the paradox is that legal rights do not always align or match the social reality of the individuals said laws are set up to protect. Muholi also speaks openly about her experience as an artist who has been able to gain access to art and educational institutions to speak directly with audiences about her political agenda, when other queer individuals may not be welcome to even enter such spaces. Although she acknowledges these limitations, the artist highlights the freedom of expression that appears to exist in art spaces in a way that it does not exist in other spaces.

> "But talking about the art, I get to showcase my work in America, in Europe where the space is more open, freer in terms of people featuring my work but at the same time one should be mindful that not every queer person has the same access to the spaces I get to access. I get to speak in classrooms in Europe, I get to speak in classrooms in America articulating my own issues and agendas in a safe

manner, given platforms that I won't be given in the whole of Africa. So again, I am mainstreaming a queer agenda."

Interview with Zanele Muholi (September 2016)

A 2010 newspaper article reported on an incident that had taken place the year before at the debut of the *Innovative Women* exhibition in Johannesburg, South Africa. Following harsh criticisms over homophobic tendencies, the Arts and Culture Minister, Lulu Xingwana, reached out to the reporters to attempt to clear her name. She had apparently walked out of the 2009 exhibition that was set up as part of the women's month celebrations and also aimed to promote the work of black South African female artists. The exhibition featured 10 artists, Zanele Muholi, Dineo Bopabe, Nandipha Mntambo, Ernestine White, Ingrid Masondo, Nontobeko Ntombela, Usha Seejarim, Senzeni Marasela, Lerato Shadi, and Bongi Bengu (who also curated the exhibition).

In her own words, the minister had walked out because the art works she saw were "immoral". She explained that, "Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this."[56] Minister Xingwana apparently left the exhibition shortly after seeing some of Muholi's photographs depicting women in intimate poses. In her response to attacks over her use of "immoral" to refer to the artwork she said, "I have not imposed censorship on any artists and the funding policies of my ministry are very clear" and adding that, "[there is] a long overdue debate on what is art and

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[56] Mail & Guardian, Arts and Culture article available online. Written by Lisa Van Wyk (5 March 2012). Accessed, December 14, 2016. http://mg.co.za/article/2010-03-05-xingwana-homophobic-claims-baseless-insulting.

where do we draw the line between art and pornography". However, it is this very idea that artists are "reckless" with their creative license that Muholi seems to be pushing back against, because matters of what is art or isn't art are not really her primary concern.

In 2011 the artist published an article titled, "Thinking Through Lesbian Rape"[57] in *Agenda, Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, a journal that aims to facilitate dialogue and debates between academic gender researchers and activists within the women's movement. Muholi's concern, and what she keeps repeating throughout our interview is that hers is a political agenda not a matter of aesthetics – she wants to draw attention to the fact that while some observers' sensibilities are scandalized by photographs, these portraits represent real people who are facing real threats, such as corrective rape and other forms of violence against lesbians, especially in South African townships.

Whether we wish to label the photographs as art or pornography does not take away from this objective, to draw attention to the real lived experiences of the people in these photographs and the many others whose lives are in danger and are not documented. Muholi states, "When a minister, or someone in a position of power, makes homophobic comments, it could perpetuate hate crimes. You might be putting people at risk. This issue goes beyond art". Perhaps revealing some of the limitations of using art as a tool to transform social and political climate, the minister's visceral reaction to Muholi's photographs also shows that although, legally and constitutionally, South Africa is ahead of many other countries (not only on the African continent) in terms of recognizing LGBTQI citizens, there is still social resistance to the ways in which these individuals take up space, even in art and educational spaces.

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[57] See Muholi, Zanele. 2004. "Thinking through lesbian rape." *Agenda* 18(61): 116-125.

Living and working in Johannesburg, South Africa but having lived in Canada and traveled with her work to other parts of the African continent, including in Nigeria and Mali, and abroad including in Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the U.S., Muholi elaborates on her frustration with the general "African" art genre – Put plainly, the genre is too broad and therefore refuses the specificity of place. Specificity, she emphasizes, is a central prerequisite in her work as her goal is to increase the visibility of specific queer folks in her South African black community. Later in the interview she tells me that art spaces where many of her photographs are shown and glorified are not spaces where many of the people in her photographs would be welcomed, but she wants to bring them into these spaces to make them more visible, have them and their experiences included in major national and art archives and to keep raising questions about visibility, inclusion, and access to opportunities for LGBTQI people.

Regarding her choice in photography as her medium of choice, Muholi says, "photography is my first love" because for her photography is about the likeness of people. She does not work with objects, she works with people, and photography offers immediacy and it is common to many. "The people you work with, they need to be taken care of. They are not subjects but participants […] Photography is about relationships" she adds. She refers to herself as an insider because she is a South African, black, female bodied being who wants to be identified as a photographer because when she shoots, "the button does not take through a gender lens". Her work has a clear political agenda and her goal is to "erase the silence" of queer people in black communities, communities she is part of, and to "rewrite them" into history by creating and contributing to a growing photography archive that captures these other women and female bodied beings.

In 2002 the artist co-founded FEW (Forum for the Empowerment of Women), a black lesbian organization to provide a meeting place for women to organize and she also documented incidents of hate crimes to inform the public about what black lesbians in South Africa face, including corrective rape, assault, and HIV/AIDS. With the well-received series of portraits the artist began in 2006, aptly titled, "Faces and Phases", she also conceptualized Inkanyiso, a not-for-profit organization. In 2009 she officially registered the organization with the South African Department of Social Services and almost 30 other artists have contributed to the organization that provides visual arts and media advocacy and visual literacy training. According to the Inanyiso.org website, the members of the organization "Produce, educate, [and] disseminate information…to many audiences especially those who are often marginalized and sensationalized by the mainstream media"[58] and is a direct response to, "the lack of visual histories and skills training by and for LGBTI persons, especially artists (in the form of photography, film, visual arts, multi-media)."[59] Muholi insists on placing emphasis on people, relationships, and interactions rather than art objects and tells me that she still keeps in touch with most of the people she has worked with on the "Faces and Phases" since 2006.

In her words, "This issue (sexuality rights and LGBTQI visibility) goes beyond art" and for that reason, Muholi will reject whatever threatens to limit (in art or otherwise) the effort to, "produce, educate, and disseminate information to all LGBTQIA communities who might not have the same access to information or the privilege to be at spaces where you venture"[60]. As an

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[58] Inkanyiso official website. Accessed September 14, 2016. https://inkanyiso.org/about/.
[59] Inkanyiso official website. Accessed September 14, 2016. https://inkanyiso.org/about/.
[60]Inkanyiso official website. Last accessed September 15, 2016. https://inkanyiso.org/2013/02/04/2012-dec-8-present-inkanyiso-contributors/.

activist-artist, Muholi also teaches photography to youth in South Africa so a younger generation can also learn to use the camera as a political tool to document its communities. The artist values art not only for the creative freedom it offers but also more importantly for its usefulness as a political tool. Muholi is an example of someone who does not get bogged down by the question of "Africanness" in her work. Her response to questions of "African" and/or "aesthetics" in her work is swift and leads us right back to the same place, an unwavering prioritization of the issue-specific political agenda not simply in the photographs but through the photograph as a political tool; one that gains access to platforms to discuss sexuality rights, homosexuality, and spaces that still exclude homosexual and transgendered individuals.[61]

The Advocate and Cultural Entrepreneur: Aida Muluneh

It was 10pm and the artist was moving equipment into a van with her team, preparing for an exhibition opening that was set for the following day. Hearing the conversations and shuffling in the background, I suggested that perhaps we could wait until after the show so that she could focus on her preparations. She quickly responded, "No, no, let's do it now. I have time now and there is really no saying when the next time I will have a chance will be"[62]. From the beginning of the interview it became very clear that I was speaking to an artist who had a sense of urgency about her work and unlike many artists I had interviewed before, one who had no qualms about discussing matters of money, politics, and business in art. One of the challenges she raises is that individuals and institutions outside the African continent fund most of the artists we find under the Contemporary African art genre.

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[61] Muholi has also participated in *Africa's Out* and has been recognized for her work as an artist and activist exploring black queer identities in South Africa.
[62] Excerpt from interview with artist, Aida Muluneh (August 16, 2016).

"We need more accountability", the artist continues. "Where is the direction of the art going? How are we marketing ourselves?" she asks, I assume rhetorically. And she continues, "I mean, it's sort of my day to day. I run a company, not an NGO [...] I am tired of talking about the problem…I'm not into over intellectualized talk. I'm looking at it as, 'here is the problem and here is the solution.' As a lifelong investment." Muluneh talks about photography as a powerful tool because, "you don't have to be literate to understand an image […] I want to create images that are beautiful to look at, that my uncles and aunts in the village can also look at and enjoy but I am also creating work to ask questions."[63] Having lived in Yemen, Canada, Cyprus, England, and the U.S., the artist talks about her commitment to developing the field of photography in her birth home, Ethiopia, where she now lives and works in the capital city, Addis Ababa. The artist openly talks about how when she was growing up and she would tell people that she is from Ethiopia there was an immediate association with the famine in Ethiopia, which came from this one image that they had seen. She wants to show that there are other parts of Ethiopia.

In 2010, the artist established the bi-annual Addis Foto Fest (AFF), which brings together photographers from African states and abroad (including the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East), through a series of exhibitions, lectures, and conferences. The team of six, Muluneh as the founder and Director, along with an Operations Manager, Assistant, Graphics Designer, Business Development Coordinator and a Multimedia Manager, put together the fourth AFF in December 2016. In my interview with Muluneh she spoke at length about the challenge of funding and opportunities drawing artists away from the African continent, why she wants to contribute to developing a stronger culture of sharing, being more conscientious of what we are consuming,

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[63] Excerpt from interview with artist, Aida Muluneh (August 16, 2016).

the importance of artists knowing their rights and understanding the business aspect of their work.

> "To me if we are having this brain drain, that's the problem because many artists reach a certain level and move to New York City or Paris. So for those of us who decide to stay, or remain […] you can't just be an elitist where it is you and 'the contemporary art world'. On one hand you are an artist, but you are also an advocate and educator […] a lot of artists don't know their rights. This means we need to be better educated, not just the creative side but also the business side. So I am big on self-sustainability and that is what I think the conversation needs to be."
>
> *Interview with Aida Muluneh, August 16, 2016*

According to an interview with Tadias Magazine, a New York based platform that describes itself as an online magazine that creates content on business, health, opinions, fashion, art, culture, and history for the Ethiopian-American community, the artist "emphasized that she continues to curate and develop cultural projects with domestic and global institutions through her company DESTA (Developing and Educating Society Through Art) [or DFA (DESTA for Africa)], a creative consulting venture based in Addis Ababa." Before telling me about her passion for writing and her experience writing for various journals, she asks another question about impact but this time she does not talk about the creative power of photography or the importance of shifting from images of famine to shooting different angles of everyday life in Ethiopia, she returns to the business question. Muluneh, explaining why thinking about the

business side of art is a crucial part of her approach to advocacy work and empowering a new generation of photographers in Ethiopia, says,

> "The question is how do we increase our corporate engagement? Corporations are looking at 'How can I best get my brand out there?' It is piecing everything together. There aren't a lot of companies like ours that deal with cultural production. I want to inspire other folks. I don't call myself a curator but I love sharing what I love. I look at it from a very practical sense."
>
> *Interview with Aida Muluneh (August 2016)*

What isn't mentioned in the Taida article when Muluneh talks about her business but comes out during our interview is the frustration she feels when it comes to critics who say that African governments are not doing enough for the arts and yet these critics do not themselves take the time to sit down with the appropriate government officials to talk about ways to move forward. She describes how she has sat down with state officials to communicate why she believes so strongly that contemporary art in Ethiopia should be in the forefront of society, with the very clear goal of training youth and sharing images of everyday life in the city (Addis Ababa) and rural areas that balance the images of Ethiopia as a country in a perpetual state of famine. And through her work she hopes to inspire others to ask, what happens when we give cameras (and other investigative tools) to local Ethiopians so they can show us what Ethiopia looks like through their eyes and not through foreign albeit sometimes well-meaning eyes?

Like the artist activist and the activist artist, the art advocate combines the advocacy and art but highlights business as a key aspect of self-sustainability. She does not use the academic

distancing we see in the research-based approach, which allows some artists to talk about their work as primarily investigative, historical, and educational, yet she does emphasize education. She chooses instead to lean on the dual support of artistic license and business acumen, the first as a flexible tool for advocacy work and the latter to ensure pragmatism for long-term self-sustainability.

Muluneh uses her creative production with a sense of urgency to 'give back' to her community, not by highlighting or intellectualizing the social problems but by using art tools (the camera) and the artwork itself as a tool to educate, to train, to teach photography to her local community so they too can document their own environment and put a spotlight on the issues they care about. Simultaneously, Muluneh is contributing to a growing contemporary art movement made up of a new generation of photographers in Ethiopia and creating real jobs for young photographers who might also find their place in the arts or perhaps in photojournalism, a career the artist herself has experience in.

Conclusion

Most if not all artists desire some level of creative freedom in their art production and one way to carve out a locus of control is to explicitly frame one's work as political or part of a larger socio-political agenda. It is not surprising that some artists who use this kind of approach may not dwell on whether or not their work is located within the Contemporary African art genre as long as the interrogation of specific issues in the work remains clear. For the three artists above, the flexibility to explore creatively while at the same time confronting social and political issues directly gives the artists the sense that their locus of control in framing their work is expansive, not only inside the art studio but also when their work reaches their audiences in different

iterations (in face-to-face lectures and discussions, in print media, and on virtual platforms). Even for the art advocate whose artwork may not be overtly political, defining their creative production in political terms using the artist statement and in interviews with *primary gatekeepers* gives the artist an opportunity to assert her political agenda long after the artworks themselves have been mounted on gallery walls and admired for their aesthetic appeal.

Artist often occupy a special place in society as agents willing to take personal risks to offer social commentary, dissenting against authoritarian governments or exploitative companies or finding themselves on the other side lending their talent to creating slogans and posters that support a state, institution, or corporation. In these three cases, the artists' approaches to their "art practice" using a political agenda offers a reorienting remedy for restrictive or reductionist interpretations of "Africanness" in their work. Although these three artists address questions about their "Africanness" and coming of age (in Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia) in different ways, they have developed their art practice into an *and/for* endeavor (e.g. I am an artist *and* I do activist work for x cause/s) rather than an *or/but* debate (e.g. My upbringing in Kenya is an important influence for my work *but* I am not a Kenyan or African artist, my work is not "Kenyan" or "African"). An artist who relies on the "I am an artist, not an African artist" approach, tends to respond to questions about origins with great frustration, unless he finds some other way to deflect, re-direct, or tune out such questions.

Artists who are not already invested in keeping an eye on how gatekeepers use and curate their work and are also in a position to "opt-out" and they are also often those who are already well established and have little interest in entertaining anyone who is not already focusing on the

specific art work or project, material or medium the artist is working on and with as well as the artists' past accomplishments and creative innovations.

Not all artists defined their work as political work or their art as part of a political agenda. However, artists who were invested in defining or demanding the specificity of the parameters within with others locate the artists' creative production and contribution found other ways to assert their position. For example, as I show in the following chapter, some artists who are invested in and comfortable moving from occupying the artist role and occupying the spaces that primary gatekeepers work in find opportunities to insert themselves in the gatekeeping process. In fact, most of the artists who occupy these primary gatekeeping spaces (curating, training, publishing) do not emphasize a political agenda but instead talk about "owning" their position as artists (not simply their creative process). Like the politically active artists, they also see their participation in art fair panels, lectures, and interviews as part of their work (rather than an additional activity separate from their creative life). These artists are also not turned away by debates about "Africanness" and like the politically engaged artists they tend to lean towards these politics of classification discussions. Some are drawn to the work that primary gatekeepers do precisely because of their interest in such debates. In other words, rather than rejecting "Africanness" because it is problematic they engage in questions about "Africanness" because it is too problematic not to. They are the most willing to talk at length about how they challenge, subvert, and take advantage of others' flattening or reducing their work to their personal association to "Africa".

8. SECONDARY ARBITERS: ARTISTS WHO CURATE, TEACH, AND WRITE

Abstract

What can gatekeeping theory reveal about the extra-studio production work that visual artists do and how can this inform the way cultural sociologists think about the co-constitutive relationship between cultural production and knowledge production? Using interviews with 15 artists, 2 art directors-curators, content analysis of a digital art platform, IBAAZ, and field observation of one street art fair near Iwalewahaus in Bayreuth, Germany, Chapter 8 looks at the role of visual artists working under the rubric of Contemporary African art as *secondary arbiters* in the gatekeeping process. The data show how these artists contribute to the discursive and pedagogical understandings of Contemporary African art through their curatorial practice, teaching, and publishing. The data also suggest that artists who occupy these *secondary arbiter* roles view curating (exhibition building), teaching, writing, and publishing as supplementary to or extensions of their studio practice. This means that although these artists employ the tools, languages, and strategies that *primary gatekeepers* (e.g. curators, art historians, art critics) use, these artists do not view themselves as taking over from or replacing *primary gatekeepers*. However, some artists work for cultural institutions as curators, where they retain their studio practice and background but still become part of a network of gatekeepers working in the Contemporary African art genre.

Keywords: visual artists, secondary arbiters, curating, teaching, publishing

The three common threads running through the interviews with artists in this research are a demand of specificity in terms of the context in which they are working, artistic integrity and freedom that does not only depend on self-referential analysis but takes seriously the artist's issue-specific concerns and formal knowledge and decision making (composition, choice, and use of specific materials or media). When there is a scarcity in the number of *primary gatekeepers* who are already invested in foregrounding these aspects of an artist's creative process and/or production, artists are either called upon or compelled to engage in the practices that primary gatekeepers usually dominate in. I refer to artists who insert themselves into gatekeeping processes as *secondary arbiters* in an effort to differentiate them from *primary gatekeepers* (the key individuals such as curators, art historians, art critics, gallerists, auctioneers, and sometimes collectors and dealers who select, collect, promote, and share particular artists and their artwork with a given audience).

The gatekeeping practices I identify and highlight here include, but are certainly not limited to, the curation of art exhibitions, the teaching and training of art students and future art practitioners, and research and writing to publish articles in art journals, on art and culture publications (in print and online), cultural research journals and books. Other publications that feature artists' work, research, and writing include artist monographs. There is a multiplicity in the kinds of platforms and forms in which these artists seek visibility and as the following artist suggests, perhaps the more of them there are and the wider the variety in how they work, what they produce and where they extend their work to, the more chance they have to collectively confront the insistence that their work necessarily represents a monolithic "Africa" or embodies "Africanness".

> "It's great that there is visibility, but there is so much that could still be done…we need more voices. I fall under this umbrella (the Contemporary African art umbrella), but the more of us doing this work, the more likely it is that we can break down this box […] The work is going to happen regardless…it is not being made *for* that space – even though in some ways it is because that is where it is visible, but the intention…that is not always the intention in the studio."
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> *Interview with ruby amanze in New York City (November 2015)*

We sat across from each other in a small café in Brooklyn, as ruby amanze[64] told me about her experience living and working in New York City as a contemporary artist. She points out that the main issue she has with how others categorize her work is the tendency to dilute and use reductionist interpretations of her work, focusing on her identity. While she sees the dilution and reductionism as a contemporary issue (in other words, not unique to African artists), she sees the obsession with identity as particular to non-European artists. amanze is a visual artist whose work centers around drawing and works on paper[65]. According to her official website, "In a non-linear and open narrative, her drawings explore space as a malleable construct, the freedom to play as an (act) of revolution, and cultural hybridity or 'post-colonial non-nationalism' as a mundane norm. Design, architecture, roller-skating, and the movement language of Gaga are a few aspects of her current research and artistic practice." [66] These interests and aspects of her work come out during our interview, as she celebrates the fact that there is a soaring uptake and

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[64] Note: The use of lower case is intentional as this is how the artist writes her name.
[65] See artist's official website. Accessed June 2015. http://rubyamanze.com/story.
[66] Ibid.

interest in Contemporary African art by artists and curators from African countries because the more they become visible and share their varied ideas and goals, the harder it becomes to flatten, dilute, and reduce them or their work to any one thing.

There is a proliferation of historical and contemporary literature on the development of Contemporary African art, on *how* and *when* this genre emerged, *which* artists belong, and *where* they can be found. Taken collectively, these works appear to suggest that with the recent upsurge in attention given to established and emerging artists of Contemporary African art, the genre is somewhat confirmed, when in fact evidence suggests that it is still in flux, as a continuously expanding and contested category. Driving the project to identify and promote artists, *primary gatekeepers* such as art historians, curators, gallerists, art dealers, art critics, and other cultural entrepreneurs, partake in the great phenomenon of discovery; the idea that through expertise in art history and art curation in museums and galleries, identifiable networks and relationships emerge and there are specific individuals who are discoverable as worthy of inclusion and recognition. These gatekeepers are among a larger and growing group of scholars who are committed to identifying old and new contributors to cultural and knowledge production in various fields, including medical science, philosophy, astronomy, sociology, political science, literature, and other art forms. Some of these practitioners are invested in highlighting the contributions of individuals who are or are seen as *a part of* a historically underrepresented group and have therefore been set *apart from* the so-called mainstream accounts of their respective profession or field.

While these sometimes revisionist and oft-times reorienting historical overviews usually involve exhuming bodies of work by deceased contributors, many now take place within the

lifetime of the contributors who belong to previously left out groups. One of the key differences between capturing, theorizing, and circulating knowledge about the contributions of deceased practitioners as opposed to living contributors is that the living can potentially respond, revise, confirm, or reject how others interpret, use, and assign value to their work in real time. But often, even living individuals who gatekeepers mark as the "subjects" for inclusion in collections, professional groups, or social science inquiry are neither consulted nor do they have the tools, language, or access to resources and platforms to challenge or confront how researchers, certifiers, and policy makers portray or draw conclusions about them or their work. Granted, the protests of an individual who believes his work is important for a certain purpose, while someone else rejects it or uses it to mobilize a different cause, may or may not have any effect on how audiences receive the work. However, since so much of gatekeeping takes place through mechanisms and individuals with the expertise to name, classify, and group people, things, and information in an effort to package it for dissemination, discussion, and consumption, it is becoming increasingly evident that the gatekeeping process is not impervious to infiltration by individuals (*secondary arbiters*). Some of these *secondary arbiters* are artists who are or have been subject to being named and grouped as "contemporary" and "African" artists, and their work is selected, shared, discussed, and theorized about by *primary gatekeepers*.

Why do some artists insert themselves where gatekeepers work?

Artists are generally aware of the division of labor among the various individuals (with different sets of expertise and access to resources) that coordinate to bring artwork from the studio (or artist's body, mind, and hands) to an audience. These individuals occupy roles that are often hierarchical and the power dynamics between them can remain skewed because gatekeepers like

the curator, the gallerist, and the auctioneer often work within the institutions and organizations with the space, funding, and other resources that artists need to support and share their artwork. For example, all the artists I spoke with recognized the role that the art curator plays in presenting and helping to interpret the artists' work and therefore making the artist and their work visible to others. Those who are curious or skeptical about the expertise of some curators still maintain this awareness that curatorial practice is a vital step in increasing and maintaining the visibility of the artist and their work.

Even for the artists who refer to exhibitions as a collaborative effort combining the curator's vision with the artist's, there is a strong sense that the expectation is that the artist will defer to the curator. After all, it is the curator who knows the space he works in best, such as the architectural limitations in size or lighting, the kind of audiences the space serves, and the budget that is available for the institution to put together an exhibition. Generally, curators express the desire to present the work in a way that gives the art and the artist the most visibility, but also to do so in a way that will engage the audience. Ideally, once he has done background research on the artist and the artist's work, the curator is in an even more unique position because he has access to all the needed pieces of an exhibition, the space, the art (the artist), a team with various useful kinds of expertise, and the funding. However, the following excerpt from an interview with a U.S. based Nigerian artist reveals some of the challenges artists face, so that even if they do not wish to participate in "gatekeeping" decision-making, they understand why other artists do. Referring to the title of Contemporary African artist, the artist says,

> "I have never been comfortable with the title, not because I don't want to own it but many artists I have met also fight against that because it restricts their

> creativity. Especially for artists who love their work […] Artists have been reduced to a commodity. Some artists thrive on that, market this, market that… But some artists want someone who will grow with them, someone who will go to the studio and be proactive […] It's a problem when you're an artist and you're cut off from your audience but your gallerists has no idea where Kano[67] is. How can they be my mouth-piece?"
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> *Interview with Wok Marcia Kure (November 2015)*

Nigerian-born artist, Wok Marcia Kure, appreciates that there are people who specialize in curating so that artists can focus on making art, but laments the instances when she meets curators who want to work with her, but appear clueless about the specificities in her work or where she was born. Kure expresses discomfort with the Contemporary African art genre and like many other artists before her, the reason is not to disown it but she explains that the genre places constraints on her creativity. She mentions Kano, Nigeria, as an example of the kind of basic knowledge she expects someone who will be sharing her work with an audience to know even as she does not want her work limited to her Nigerian background. She goes on to talk about this kind of ignorance as a potentially productive thing, because it signals to the artists who care about these details that it is necessary for them to equip themselves with the language and tools that are needed to fill in the gaps that others may not[68].

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[67] Kano is the state capital of Kano State in Northern West, Nigeria and it is where the artist was born. Wok Marcia Kure is based out of Princeton, NJ, U.S.A.
[68] From interview with artist, Wok Marcia Kure (November 2015).

Exhibitions of her work have shown internationally, including in Nigeria, Canada, Japan, United Arab Emirates, the U.S., and Germany. And she tells me that she has noticed that because of these gaps in knowledge and how to present it in relation to the work, "people are just struggling to feed their tribe, even if it is just two or three like-minded people, but in noticing this need and when they find each other they nurture each other. I know there are people out there who do not want to be categorized…" Speaking specifically about the "Contemporary African art" genre she continues,

> "I have never been completely comfortable with the title, not because I don't want to own it but because it puts you in a box…but meeting other artists from different parts of the world, they seem to have this same problem too. And many artists I have met fight against that in many different ways because they feel like it restricts them and their creativity and it forces them to act [quote on quote] 'act' a certain way, or 'react' a certain way even if they feel differently. And sometimes, especially for artists who's first law is just that fact, that you have this thing and you want to share it with the world but it is like your baby - I remember I just wanted to hold my work close, but then when you put it out there and somebody else starts pointing things out sometimes it enlightens you in such a way, and you go, 'Oh okay! I didn't know.' But other times, most times it is like…I just don't appreciate their input because sometimes you are still trying to understand your work, it is in the process of becoming…and all of a sudden someone has decided what it is. So it takes a lot of guts to just go back to the studio and be who you want to be, let that voice come out. But perhaps,

sometimes other people throw their own parties, and other times you think, 'Well, I didn't realize that is how people saw my work, so let me read up a bit more on this and see what kind of information I can get from it.' So it is both ways, but most times, even in terms of 'African art', I think it is a struggle that every artist has, so depending on what kind of balance they are trying to get they operate from that place."

Interview with Wok Marcia Kure continued (November 2015)

Kure was speaking to an awareness that other artists discuss in interviews, an awareness that may not only make it possible but also necessary for artists to pay attention to how others are framing and circulating their work. As fellow artist, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, who moved from New York City to Los Angeles put it, one comes to the realization that, "you have to police the framing of your work".[69] In order to "police" the framing of the work, it helps to be in the room when *primary gatekeepers* are doing that work of framing. Njideka also firmly states, "In terms of the way I make my work I don't want to deal with it (the Africanness debate) by running away from my heritage." Artists like Njideka who find the need to "police" the framing of their work accomplish this in different ways, sometimes by changing something within the art itself, such as avoiding certain subject matter that appears to encourage reductionist interpretations of the artist's work, giving interviews about their work or being in the same room with gatekeepers during panel discussions and the planning of exhibitions to explicitly state how the artist frames the work.

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[69] Interview with Njideka Akunyili Crosby in Los Angeles (October 2016).

In the case of artists who have gallery representation, the gallerist is often just as invested if not more invested in publicizing the artist's work as a curator who has made his selection, very often with the added goal of selling the work rather than mainly presenting the work for viewing. As some artists shared their experiences of unsuccessful gallery relationships, a prevalent reason for the breakdown in the union was that the gallerist simply didn't care about the artist's goals which in many cases the artist translated to the gallerist not caring about the art. Generally, when there is a sense that a gatekeeper is not concerned with exploring the edifying potential of the artwork or the artist's creative intervention, the artist who cares about this kind of investment tunes out. Even if they do not leave because they really need the platform to showcase their work, they may be in the process of seeking other representation or other ways to share their work in a more meaningful way. Even if an artist disagrees with how *primary gatekeepers* position the artist's work, whether the gatekeepers in question are working within an educational institution or a commercial space, if the artist believes that the gatekeeper is invested in the specificities of the artist's creative process and goals, what the artist cares about, then the artist is more willing to defer to the gatekeeper as an expert in their field and as the key to accessing the resources and platforms to share the work.

Primary Gatekeepers: In Two Case Studies - The Art Director and the Curator

Outside the building we were standing in and just five minutes around the corner a loud crowd strolls up and down a cobbled street lined with hot food stands and tents full of bright pattern print clothes and wood carved sculptures of giraffes and elephants. Inside I stood with a U.S. based artist and curator I had hoped to interview who had been invited to give a lecture at Iwalewahaus at the University of Bayreuth, Germany. Iwalewahaus was founded in 1981 by Ulli

Beier as a place for the focus on Africa at the University and has since grown into a treasure trove for the collection, production, and presentation of Contemporary African art and other visual arts from Africa, Asia, and the Pacific region. It has an active artist in residency program and art lecture series program that bring in several Contemporary African artists from around the world, some of whom are interviewees and contributors in this research.

Before the meeting with the artist he introduces me to the Deputy Director, Nadine Siegert, and the three of us have a conversation about the hustle and bustle outside. Nadine explains that the excitement outside is the sound of the annual African-Caribbean Festival that takes place every year in Bayreuth during the month of July and it is organized by a group of businessmen in the area. Siegert tells us that at one time the University had tried to collaborate with the festival organizers as a way of marrying the educational institution's mission not to exoticize but to actually learn about other cultures with the clear interest that festival goers had for artifacts and food from Africa and its diasporas. But the relationship didn't last. Iwalewahaus was committed to sharing and educating their audiences whereas the businessmen down the street were most interested in selling, with or without the buyers' understanding of what it is they were buying, where (in Africa or China) it had come from, and who made it.

Downstairs in the exhibition area, a show titled, *Things Fall Apart* is on display. The exhibition shows a selection of work by artists, filmmakers, and other groups from Africa, Asia, and North America exploring the link between Africa and the Soviet Union.[70] In the two hours that I was at Iwalewahaus it seemed the exhibition halls remained empty except for the two staff

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[70] Official Iwalewahaus website with information on the exhibition, *Things Fall Apart*, May 26, 2016 to August 18, 2016. Accessed July 2016. http://www.iwalewahaus.uni-bayreuth.de/en/program/archive/2016/20160524_Things-Fall-Apart/index.html.

members working in the space. Siegert tells me that they do struggle to attract people into the space. The stark contrast between the crowds outside and the empty exhibition space led me to ask a question: Does the history of Bayreuth reflect on the environment in which artists and their work are presented? How might an understanding of this history inform how we think of the possibilities of and limitations to attracting a local audience and even the larger student population that is not already part of the art and African studies program at Iwalewahaus? And in turn, how might the work that a cultural entrepreneur does morph as she attempts to accommodate an audience that sees itself as *set apart from* rather than as being *a part of* the art and the artists on display?

The established institute for African art is located in the heart of Bayreuth, a Bavarian city that is the home of Wagner, a famous German composer who during his career was not shy about publically declaring his anti-Semitic nationalism and his strong belief that Western civilization was doomed because of the mixing of "superior races" and "inferior" races. But we don't delve into this history and its possible implications. Our conversation veers off into the layered work of cultural entrepreneurship and cultural exchange, where in the effort to maintain the integrity of one thing (learning about what we are consuming rather than blindly consuming it) we also risk denying or downplaying the historical imbalance in how we value objects and people working inside the cultural institution versus those working from outside. In reviewing specific exhibitions, the commendable inclusion of this artist or the disappointing exclusion of that artist, others insist on reminding us that it is, at least in part, the interest of European collectors, traders, and tourists that sparked the market for African sculptures throughout the continent, where questions of authenticity and credibility fanned the metaphorical bonfire. We

downplay the role of European collectors, traders, and tourists, whose collections are the starting point of these cultural, educational or art institutions as disruptive or destructive, even as we want to acknowledge the impact their adventures had on the African communities they collected and traded in.

As we walk through the building, looking through the Iwalewahaus collection, Siegert emphasizes her awareness of the problematic aspects of art collection not only in the colonial period but also in the ways knowledge has been produced and circulated about Contemporary African art and artists. The contributions of scholars, artists, and other kinds of cultural entrepreneurs in these spaces have helped to either continue, confront, or offer alternatives to reductionist readings of art by Africans as tribal and/or distant (once upon a time because of geographic distance and the anonymity of its creators and the places they live and work in but even with internationally active creative African practitioners on the continent and abroad, anything or anyone that is "African" is treated as necessarily qualitatively different).

The focus on art as a tool to edify and quite possibly bring people a little further out of their comfort zone, but not so far that they disengage, is a fine line to walk for many curators and cultural entrepreneurs who are invested in this line of work. But the spaces they do this work in are sometimes cushioned from having to directly address certain questions of power and self-perpetuating corporate and political tensions that arise when bringing work to different audiences. For all the distress over the businessmen down the street making a pretty penny selling ignorance to those who gladly buy it, we spoke briefly about how the African trader or artist selling his work on the street, who has paid the businessmen to rent a tent for three days, is probably making a modest living selling elephant carvings compared to the contemporary artist

whose work makes it into Iwalewahaus or the director of the cultural institution whose work involves discussions about the difference between the sculptures in the trader's tent versus the sculptures standing in a temperature controlled vault just down the street.

On the surface it seemed that we were talking about how, yet again, money talks, but more than that we were also talking about the principal-agent problem. There is always a possibility of definitional and goal misalignment when you have a group of differently positioned people (some with the support of an institution and others without) who would like to work together because they have an association ("Africa"). Especially when it is not clear how this association (weak or strong, congruent or incongruent) influences the way in which they frame the artwork or project for a given audience. As long as someone sets herself up or is set up by others as a spokesperson or expert (the agent), and that person acts or speaks on behalf of another (the principal), there is a potential for the principal-agent dilemma to arise if the agent acts only in his or her own best interest. The *primary gatekeeper* (as the agent) is often in a position to decide how and how far along the gatekeeping process the artist (the principal) and his work can go. In the case of the cultural entrepreneur, the work of "speaking for" becomes increasingly complicated when those she speaks for enter the space in a position to speak for themselves, especially when their approaches to or interpretations of the artwork and its purpose differ.

While the African trader or artist selling his work in a tent outside may not enter the space to see the *Things Fall Apart* exhibition, for instance, even if he did, he would be in the space as a viewer, at the very least, and at the most as a passing enquirer or a subject of the exhibition. A conversation like the one I was having with the Deputy Director and the artist-

curator would be a far less likely scenario for a cultural producer working in the festival outside to participate in. The artist-curator who is invited to give a lecture at Iwalewahaus is among the cultural producers (including artists) who work under the rubric of Contemporary African art, set apart from the traditional or tourist art that appears in the street art festival. The spaces in which creators of cultural production have access are important for thinking about the possibilities that artists have to participate in and contribute to the way others frame and understand their work, if and when the artists wish to engage with their audience(s).

Artists who see gaps in the way *primary gatekeepers* select, present, or discuss the artists' work, in contemporary art generally or in Contemporary African art more specifically, *and* have the desire and opportunity (access to resources, including money to travel, the ability to obtain a visa where needed, art history and tools, or physical and virtual platforms to discuss their work) tend to do so. With one caveat, rather than a contribution to art literature or to knowledge about contemporary art, what an artist says about their creative process and knowledge within the genre or field is more often than not taken as an extension of or expansion on the work itself; an anecdote to accompany the art and art making process. In other words, as long as the artist is taken, first and foremost, as the creator of the art object (rather than someone who is a discerning expert, contributing to knowledge production about art in the ways that art historians, curators, critics do), the artist remains a subject of study or inquiry, part of the cultural matter waiting for *primary gatekeepers* to sort, select, and share with an audience. These *primary gatekeepers*, eager to support and present the artists and their work to an audience also do this work with their own understandings, their own host of objectives as well as the resources to do so within contextual limitations based on the institutions and network of gatekeepers they work with and

for and the geographic spaces (e.g. city, country or region) they are located in when they do this work.

The Curator is Not a Solo Act: The Curator's Audience, Labeling, and the Budget

In an interview with Christine Kreamer, Deputy Director and Chief Curator at the National Museum of African Art Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., she outlines some of the major challenges of working under the rubric of Contemporary African art, accommodating a mainly tourist audience. With her many years of experience as a curator, a PhD in African Art History and minors in Anthropology and African studies, Kreamer is considered an expert in both traditional and Contemporary African art. She has been working at the Smithsonian since the 1980s, joining the curatorial team at the National Museum of African Art in April 2000 but firmly states, "The curator is often the lead because she is closely affiliated with all the major players and pieces in organizing an exhibition […] but the curator is not a solo act". She likens the role of the curator with that of an editor, and points out that curators working in large institutions like the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art must also think about things like funding and how the exhibition fits with the mission of the institution and with museum visitors.

In 1964, Warren M. Robbins, a former U.S. Foreign Service officer, founded the Museum of African Art. It was not until August 1979 that the museum became part of the Smithsonian Institute following the enactment of Public Law 95-414, which authorized the acquisition of the museum. The museum was initially located in a house that was once home to abolitionist, writer, and statesman, Frederick Douglass and designed as a private educational

institution that encourages cross-cultural understanding.[71] The space was later renamed the National Museum of African Art in 1981 and in 1987 it moved to a new location on National Mall, a national park in downtown Washington D.C.. Although not attached to a university, like Iwalewahaus, the National Museum of African Art maintains a strong commitment to education, research, and disseminating information about their collections and exhibitions with yearlong public outreach programs, films, and lectures. Like Iwalewahaus and other older art institutions that opened their doors between the 60s and 80s, the National Museum of African art has expanded its collection, conservation, and exhibitions to go beyond the traditional arts of Sub-Saharan Africa and include modern and Contemporary African art by artists working on the African continent and in its diasporas.

During the interview, Kreamer identifies the following main challenges she faces in her work building on and educating others about Contemporary African art: First, the question of audience and who and what is "African", second are the technical expertise and infrastructure (this includes the tools, physical space and labor), and third, is the budgetary considerations that make the collection and exhibition of art possible. In detail, she discusses some of the deliberations that go into developing an exhibition that focuses on Contemporary African art,

> "Given our visitor-ship, which is largely tourists, [the challenge] is to make sure visitors coming through the door with little or no understanding of Africa and Africa's arts understand, first of all, that there is a vibrant and engaging sector of contemporary artists out there working on and off the continent. And so getting

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[71] See the official website for the National Museum of African Art – Smithsonian Institute for the extended history of the museum. Accessed September 2016. https://africa.si.edu/about/.

> visitors who are getting into the museum expecting to find the so called traditional arts of masks and figures and so on, and opening up their eyes to Africa's contemporary art is a challenge but it's one that we embrace."
>
> *Interview with Christine Kreamer in Washington D.C. (June 2016)*

The idea of meeting the audience where they are is quite common so it is ideal when a curator, working in Germany, the U.S., South Africa, Senegal, or Egypt, finds an artist whose work they believe in, have the means to accommodate it and are able to find a way to communicate the artist's work to any given audience. For Kreamer, serving a tourist audience from all over the world and of different ages also means thinking about ways to combine historical, recent, and current developments in African art and Contemporary African art, which raises all sorts of questions about which artists and art to include, what kind of art *is* "contemporary" and "African", and what the best way to expand, accommodate, and educate a diverse audience about a still developing and evolving genre is. The result of attempting to marry such diverse goals is having a rather open framing of Contemporary African art that bases the inclusion of artists and art on a broad spectrum of "African" association(s), not solely based on geography (region/country/city/village) or heritage (parentage or ancestry), but also on professional base (e.g. German artist working in Cape Town, South Africa), subject focus (British photographer taking pictures of miners in the Congo) or the history of art materials (e.g. an artist from any country working with materials that are associated with or come from an African country or region like Kente cloth from Ghana, Leteisi from Botswana, Ankara, Holland or Dutch wax print in the general West African region).

Kreamer goes on to explain that if there is a connection that an artist has or makes to Africa, even if they were not born on the continent, the National Museum of African art can liaison with them and collect their work. She does however also acknowledge that there is still that question of *who* and *what* counts as African. And this question is also relevant for thinking about the artists who wish to avoid the self-referential focus on their background as Africans even as their work reaches some audiences through art and cultural institutions that wish to emphasize the artist as part of the Contemporary African genre.

> "You know, when you create an exhibition about Contemporary African art one of the questions that comes up is, 'who is African, what is African?' and I know many artists who sort of don't identify themselves as African artists, they identify themselves as artists. And so having an exhibition at the National Museum of African art is, you know, is welcome to many artists who are delighted to be on view somewhere. It's all about their promotion and their marketability and their visibility but it is also something that they sort of wish, and I wish it for them too, that they would move on from and in addition to our museum be welcomed, as many have been, at MOMA, the Museum of Modern art in New York or at the Hirshhorn Museum here at the Smithsonian."

Continuation of interview with Christine Kreamer (June 2016)

Kreamer goes on to mention the highly acclaimed Yinka Shonibare (M.B.E.), "the major star of contemporary art who was born in London but makes very close connections with Africa, especially with Nigeria where he spent a lot of his early years. So that is how we sort of think of

African artists."[72] Other examples of artists who were not born on the African continent but whose work has shown at the Smithsonian National Museum of African include American photographer, Roger Ballen, who was born in New York City but has lived and worked in South Africa for over three decades. Initially working as a geologist, Ballen's work took him into the countryside where he started to photograph what he saw. He reportedly shifted his attention from the countryside to his adopted home city of Johannesburg after 1994, when Mandela was elected the first black president.[73]

During the interview, Kreamer commends the work of other curators and art directors such as Laurie Ann Farrell, who used to head the Center for Africa and is now the executive director of exhibitions at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). Farrell oversees the exhibition programs at the SCAD Museum of Art and all SCAD galleries in Savannah, Atlanta (U.S.A), Lacoste (France), and Hong Kong. Kreamer describes Farrell as, "a champion for African artists" and adds that when the Smithsonian partnered with Farrell to organize the *The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African artists* exhibition, Farrell made things go faster and more streamlined. Using Farrell's contribution as an example, Kreamer emphasizes the importance of having the right kind of real estate and budget. She describes that Farrell's working conditions are ideal, "I think she is great, she is at a well funded institute and she is not tied to a large bureaucratic institute."

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[72] Interview with Christine Kreamer, (June 2016).
[73] Artist, Roger Ballen's official website. Accessed on January 2017. https://www.rogerballen.com/about/roger-ballen/. According to the artist's official website, his work documents South Africa's outsider communities or "people living on the margins of South Africa's society.

From the examples of artists that came up during the interview, it was apparent that curators work comes with an understanding that determining who and what is African also means opening up and being open to dealing with questions about origins and being aware of who they collaborate with to organize exhibitions and programing. They must consider whether or not the criteria for including and promoting an artist is based on the artist having African heritage/parentage, whether or not the artist was born on or outside the continent, and whether or not to include artists who may not be of African heritage/parentage or nationality/citizenship. But as Kreamer points out, it is enough that the artist is professionally based or professionally identifies as a contemporary artist working within an "African" space, subject area or with "African" people. Curators care that the audience will be able to engage with the work and not simply view it. Similar to the concerns that Siegert expressed about having trouble bringing in a local audience that is happy to consume food and wooden sculptures into Iwalewahaus without perpetuating incomplete or inaccurate ideas about "Africa", Kreamer and her colleagues have to think about how their largely tourist audience visiting the National Museum of African Art will receive and engage with the exhibitions in the museum.

Meeting the audience where they are, defining what and who is "African" and managing logistics such as space, technical expertise, staffing, and financial budgets are all reasonable considerations that curators must take into account when planning and organizing an exhibition with both established and emerging artists, for solo and group exhibitions. For the most part, artists recognize the curator as an expert at what she does, although curators, like artists, also have their own creative visions within the spaces and institutions they work in. Ideally, an artist will find that the curator's creative vision for how to present the artwork is not antithetical to

what is important to the artist. In some instances when the curator's creative vision does not align with the artist's, in part because of logistical constraints but also because they prioritize different aspects of the work, artists have decided not to work with the particular curator and forgo the opportunity to exhibit their work. Kreamer continues to expand on the technical and budgetary constraints that she and the team she works with grapple with when planning and putting together exhibitions,

> "Another challenge, and it is double, is technical and budget. And by that I mean, when you are dealing with living artists there are technical challenges to installing their work, getting permission to use their work, especially time based media artists. What are the technical requirements? Can we meet those requirements? Somebody is a video-based artist and they want a super big screen in an all-dark room and if you walk around our museum at all, you'll see that we have a very small space and we can't even give artists necessarily the kinds of spaces they need for their work. And so there's negotiations that go on and we can't give it either because of spatial reasons, technical reasons, we don't have the expertise here or for budgetary reasons. That we are not going to break the budget just to meet their technical requirements. And then of course, they would all like to be here for openings and we get that, and that is a budgetary challenge as well as a pragmatic one when people have to come in and get visa…"

Interview with curator, Christine Kreamer (June 2016)

The concerns that Christine Kreamer highlights are considerations that most if not all curators must contend with and artists are well aware of factors such as, the size of the artwork relative to the space that is available, the kind of lighting that is required for the artwork, whether the funding that is available can cover costs for accommodating the artwork and the artist (e.g. offering travel funds for artists who are not based locally to attend the opening night of their exhibition). Although some artists outright state that they do not make their work for people who don't get it but they make it for those who do, many really do appreciate the audience-centered approach to interpreting the work for the audience, what curators like Kreamer advocate for, especially as they simultaneously welcome the contribution of artists with diverse perspectives.

However, not all artists get to work with curators who are eager to learn about their specific work and creative processes and who are also willing to negotiate and find the right accommodations that are within reach for their audience and the space and budget available. Where artists cannot find a curator they can work with or when the curatorial practices of the curators they have worked with do not address the specific concerns or goals an artist has, some artists simply move on to another project and others learn to curate and organize exhibitions themselves. In the same way, where some artists are dissatisfied with the way art historians, art critics, and art professors write, debate, teach, and train younger generations of artists, some artists bemoan it but continue with their studio practice while others use their art history knowledge, equip themselves with other skills, give lectures, and write to publish alongside art historians, critics, and other cultural entrepreneurs. And often, artists who do one (curate, teach, or publish) also do or are open to doing one of the other two as well.

Generally, when a curator draws up a shortlist of artists to include in an exhibition, they have done extensive research on the artist(s) and their work. Granted, the field observations contained herein mainly show the artist-curator pairings that "worked" or in other words, where the curator and the artist or artists whose work the curator presents to an audience were able to negotiate and agree on a course of action. And like the artists discussed in the previous chapter who initiate their own organizations, several curators and art directors who do not work for institutions (academic, private, and public) like Iwalewahaus in Bayreuth, Germany or the National Museum of African Art in Washington D.C., U.S.A., also initiate their own organizations, cultural institutes, and exhibition spaces. Some examples include curator Bisi Silva who founded and is art director of the Center for Contemporary Art in Lagos, Nigeria in 2007; curator Koyo Kouoh, who founded the RAW Material Art Company in Dakar, Senegal, first as a mobile art initiative in 2008 and later opening an art center with an art residency program in 2011; and curator-biotechnologist, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung[74], who founded SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin Germany in 2010, to serve as an art working space that offers art lectures, exhibitions, residency opportunities, and art publications.

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[74] On his curatorial practice and reason for opening the art space, Ndikung says, "Being an art curator and a scientist, my motivation takes the word SYNAPSE for its weight in gold. In many ways, my curatorial concepts and projects are reminiscent of the synaptein, i.e. clasping together and building bridges, as defined by Sir Charles Scott Sherrington. Bridging the cultural gap. My interest in building bridges is reflected in projects I initiated, such as the art space SAVVY Contemporary, where my exhibitions are always engaged in a critical dialogue between "Western" and "Non-Western" art. By bridging the alleged gaps between the two, I strive at questioning these circular terminologies on the West and Non-West, placing art in a primary position and geography in a secondary position." Taken from the official website, SYNAPSE: The International Curator's Network, 2015 workshop. View full curatorial statement here: http://www.synapse.info/profiles/bonaventure/.

When Artists Curate, Teach, and Write

The extra-studio production that artists participate in might be thought of as career or professional shape-shifting, code-switching, or role-swapping, however, the most prevalent way of thinking about this extra-studio work is as an extension of or a continuation of the artists' creative process and production. In other words, artists who also curate exhibitions, train younger generations of art scholars and practitioners, and publish do not necessarily see this work as oppositional to, in contest with or as a vilification of *primary gatekeepers* (e.g. curators, art scholars, and critics). They see their full immersion into the spaces (both physical and intellectual) that curators, art scholars, and critics occupy as an important aspect of the artist's development, informed by and informing the artists' studio practice. It is also worth mentioning and highlighting that some of the active and prominent curators in Contemporary African art studied studio art but decided to focus their career on curatorial practice. In addition, many artists who participate in curatorial practices, teach/train, and publish have also studied art history, taken courses in curatorial practice or invested time in learning from and working with peers and mentors to develop the skills, language, and tools to curate, teach, and publish. In the first of following two excerpts, an artist-turned-curator explains how he came to his curatorial practice because of a shortage of locally active curators at the time when he was looking to share his work and educate himself about what it would take to do so. The second excerpt is of an artist who sees his contribution and creative production as strictly art-studio based and not involving curatorial practice.

> "I started off as an artist and I was involved in making exhibitions because no one was doing it in the early 2000s. Bisi Silva was not really working in Nigeria at

that point; she was more like a critic of the very conservative Nigerian art scene and more a curator in the international scene. I was part of an art collective and in the course of making exhibitions I felt I needed more of a handle on the process of curating so I went to the African Program of Museums and Heritage Studies. To think back, it wasn't really hip to be a curator – but there was also no interest on the part of the international scene. So maybe we weren't doing something right. So I decided that I was going to go for art history, because it is a boon for a curator to have an art history background because you have to be able to situate the work in its history and I think that is very important. Learn the work of translation…translate the work for both local and international audiences."

Interview with curator/artist, Nzewi, Ugochukwu-Smooth (March 2015)

"I don't get involved in curating […] I am not that kind of artist. My work is in the studio. When it is finished it does not belong to me."

Interview with artist, Gopal Dagnogo (March 2016)

The artists in Chapter 6 maintain a locus of control over how others frame their work by centering social activism and art advocacy work in their art practice, whereas artists who curate (build art exhibitions) overtly insert themselves into the spaces and work that *primary gatekeepers* occupy and do. Some artists see their curatorial practice as an extension of their creative practice and others like Smooth, develop their curatorial expertise because they could not find a curator to work with. On one hand, thinking of Smooth as a visual artist who also

curates would make him a great example of a *secondary arbiter*, but even with his visual art background and practice, Smooth's active and current position as the curator of African Art at the Hood Museum of Art[75] in New Hampshire, U.S.A, he is also part of a growing network of *primary gatekeepers*. And on the other hand, Dagnogo is an example of an artist who views the curator as separate from the artist and curatorial practice as the domain of the curator rather than a possible extension of the artist's own creative process. Artists like Dagnogo tend to defer to curators and do not seek out active participation or involvement in curatorial practices.

The overlap across artist-curator-researcher-lecturer-writer creates fluidity in the physical and intellectual spaces in which artists can (if they so wish to and have the expertise and opportunity to) become more than subjects of inquiry in knowledge written about Contemporary African artists and art. Just as *primary gatekeepers* do the important work of researching, collecting, promoting, communicating, and caring for the artwork, some artists too do their research and consider what options they have access to and in what formats they want others to collect, promote, and discuss the artists' work. These artists are *secondary arbiters* and they curate, teach, and write to publish. In the following excerpt, visual/performance artist and writer, Wanja Kimani,[76] describes how people have told her that her work does not seem "African" and talks about what she refers to as a "discovery conundrum" in the art industry. Kimani says, "I've lived in Addis and there my work was not really seen as art…I'm not painting beautiful paintings

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[75] Note: The Hood Museum is at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, U.S.A.
[76] Note: Artist, Wanja Kimani is Kenyan born and although most online profiles on the artist show that she is based in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), she in now living and working in Peterborough (U.K.).

and I am not making sculptures so people would ask, 'why are you sewing?' And I was dealing with issues that were not openly talked about."[77]

> "The challenge I think is this expectation people have of *what* is African and categorizing all artists as 'African artists' without a common understanding of what that means. With all this hype, you don't know how long it will last. And there is *a discovery conundrum*, the savior mentality when someone *discovers* you…this brings up issues of ownership, the lines can be blurred."
>
> *Interview with visual artist and writer, Wanja Kimani (June 2016)*

The artist works with found objects and embroidery to explore personal memories of trauma that have happened to her and people she knows. She considers the body, patriarchy and the female body, home, memory, displacement, and processes of recovery and resilience. A defining moment in her (creative) life was when she met her father who she hadn't seen in 17 years, and he said, "You haven't changed", which would go on to inspire a project she titled in the same words that featured in the 2012 Dak'Art Biennale for Contemporary African art in Dakar, Senegal. Before the reunion she tells me how she had used a lot of photography and spoken word performances but then shifted to working with found objects, embroidery, and more text-based work rather than spoken word. "I also started using bark cloth, so it looks like fabric but it is made from the stem of trees in Tanzania"[78].

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[77] Interview with visual artist, writer and researcher, Wanja Kimani (June 2016).
[78] From interview with Wanja Kimani (June 2016).

As the artist went into detail about her process, she also mentioned that she got a Masters in Human Rights because at the time she was failing to see the efficacy of art as a socially transformative tool. But after exploring work in international relations she started working in galleries and when she moved to Addis Ababa she says, "I needed a way of expressing myself in a place where I felt misunderstood and now coming back to the U.K. I am pushed to do more work." Unpacking the reasons why she made certain choices versus others in her creative process, she shares a little about the work she does outside the art studio. In part, this interest in the intersection between politics and art comes through when she elaborates on what she refers to as the discovery conundrum, basically the circumstance in which various primary gatekeepers, on a quest to build up an encyclopedia of Contemporary African artists and art, begin rounds of searches to discover the next or "emerging" talents. However, some of these artists who are being newly discovered have actually been practicing for decades, but it is only when a primary gatekeeper takes interest in what they are doing that the artist joins the ranks of acclaimed and celebrated Contemporary African artists. Kimani does not state this as a problem or issue, per se, but she refers to it as a conundrum because even though it is desirable to have primary gatekeepers notice, appreciate, and promote your work, one must be weary if this selection is based on a savior mentality – one in which, in order to continue surviving as an artist, one finds that they must constantly ascribe to the "African" interest that initially caught the gatekeepers' attention, sometimes to the detriment of the artist's creative process if they wish to work in other art spaces besides Contemporary African art.

In 2010, Kimani's article, "Emancipatory Practices: "Ethnicity" in the Contemporary Creative Industries in Kenya" was published in *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global*

Contexts. In this article, Kimani (2010) discusses the role that visual artists and writers play in promoting a vision for Kenya that transcends class and ethnic divisions, particularly in a hostile climate in which political life is organized along ethnic affiliation. In this article, Kimani offers a historical overview of how the British used ethnicity as a divide and conquer tactic to pit different groups against each other during the colonial period. Another tactic the British used to further their goals was to ban any art and literature that encouraged Kenyan independence (253). Kimani's article identifies specific creative initiatives, like GoDown Art Center's April 2008 exhibition titled, *Kenya Burning,* which depicted photographs of post-election violence that were not reported on national or international mainstream media outlets and Picha Mtaani (Heal the Nation), a non-profit organization, that organized a national reconciliation tour that began on 6 December 2009. Other artists who write have their work featured in the online art platforms and they offer analyses of the link between art and contemporary social and political issues, some highlighting their visual art practice in relation to their written analyses.

While Kimani's article is not a typical art review article, offering specific names of artists or cultural entrepreneurs, exploring the strengths and weaknesses of an exhibition or the selection of artists a curator made, it does give an analysis of how art intersects with the political life of Kenyan society, and perhaps makes an argument for art and other creative endeavors such as writing and publishing, as tools for responding to, interrogating within and challenging the status quo. Kimani has also contributed a chapter, "Re-imagining Ethiopia: from campaign imagery to contemporary art" in a 2015 publication, *Images of Africa: Creation, Negotiation and Subversion* (Gallagher 2015). In the interview she emphasizes her continuing interest in connecting politics and art and says, "What you won't get from my CV is that I want to do a

Ph.D. - I want to research the challenges of working between art and politics, to explore the interaction between the two."[79] Kimani has followed this interest in her career beyond the art studio as she has given lectures on art and politics at educational and cultural institutions, including the British Council, Ethiopia; University of Cambridge, UK; and Uppsala University, Sweden.

The artists who see their work in terms of activism and advocacy subtly insert themselves in the gatekeeping process and maintain the division of labor without relinquishing all the say to *primary gatekeepers* and other cultural entrepreneurs. They already see themselves and approach their work as cultural entrepreneurs, while still keeping some separation between them as the producer pursuing their own goals and the *primary gatekeepers*. This is not to say these activist artists do not participate in curatorial decision-making or that they do not push back or confront during panels and interviews when they disagree with how a reporter or reviewer frames their work. In fact, the three selected artists who contribute to Chapter 7 are very proactive, vocal, and involved in how their work is brought into a space and in managing the curatorial decision-making around their work – but they do so primarily as artists, advocates, activists.

The activism and advocacy work takes place in and beyond the art studio but the artwork and art making tools also remain an integral part of the artists' activism. Artists who overtly insert themselves into the gatekeeping process include artists who curate, teach/train, and write to publish, as an extension of their creative work and not necessarily to drive a political agenda (at least not explicitly). Some curate simply out of need when there are no curators where they live and work, while others curate because they want to bring to light issues that they do not see

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[79] From interview with Wanja Kimani (June 2016)

curators grappling with. Some work as art professors and teach in order to make money, while others teach in order to mentor younger generations of artists and cultural entrepreneurs, like Muholi teaching photography to youth in South African or Muluneh teaching photography to youth in Ethiopia, these artists wish to influence the next generation of artists. And just as some *primary gatekeepers* who do the discovering, selecting, assessing, and sharing of art by specific artists also write and publish their understanding of the work artists do, some artists also research, write, and publish in scholarly journals and for online art platforms.

Secondary Arbiters: Artists who curate

At the onset, Guyana (British Guinea) born, Gaborone-based Ann Gollifer, who defines herself as a print maker, photographer, and writer, let's me know that questions about her as a Contemporary African artist are very complicated for her. She is not African but her work is very much included in Contemporary African art and she says that she has "self-curated", in other words she has used some of the tactics and tools that curators use to build an exhibition with her own artwork in an effort to share her work with an audience. By engaging in the building of exhibitions to share her work, Gollifer was participating as a mediator between her own work and her audience. In response to the scarcity of practicing curators in Botswana and gatekeepers who were sensitive towards what the artist wanted to communicate through her work, Gollifer explains that she had to find a way to do it herself, not with the goal of becoming a gatekeeper but to employ the tools and language that some gatekeepers use to share and communicate artwork to an audience.

> "The thing is in my career I have self-curated just to get myself exhibited in Botswana and then I began to be represented by a gallery in Johannesburg. But I

> came to realize that the gallery did not give a shit about my work, they just wanted to sell and now two other galleries represent me. I feel like my work has found a home [...] As I said, we do not have a curator (of contemporary art) in Botswana, which is very negative because it is very hard to be self-critical. But it is a real honor to have someone curate you properly."
>
> *Interview with Ann Gollifer (July 2016)*

Gollifer is a resident of Botswana who has lived in the country for 30 years and says as an artist, she was "made" in Botswana. Gollifer says she used to mourn the fact that she is not based in Johannesburg because, "Gabs (Gaborone) is quiet but it is pretty cool actually. I used to mourn that, that I was missing out in Jo'burg (Johannesburg) but I am also privileged because I have opportunities that my peers in Botswana don't have."[80] She shares that she got into curating because at the time when she wanted to share her work, she could not find curators to work with in Botswana so she began to curate her own work.

When she began curating for other artists she realized that she really enjoys curating other people's work. The way she talks about her curatorial projects, Gollifer talks about the artists she has curated for in a similar way to the way Siergert and Kreamer spoke about their work. Gollifer talks about the difficulty in sharing work when there is no broker to introduce the artist and the work to an audience and she adds, "I think as a person you can't just go off by yourself because then it [the work] is meaningless. You need a community. And perhaps it is

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[80] Excerpt taken from interview transcript with artist, Ann Gollifer (July 2016).

because I am not a Motswana so I am very acutely aware of it."[81] Unlike the art Siegert and Kreamer, Gollifer highlights that she prefers to work with artists who hold a work ethic that is similar to hers as a practicing artist, one that is serious, one that expresses conceptual interventions and goes beyond demonstrating the artist's technical skill or ability.

Beyond the issue of having a scarcity in the number of curators in Botswana, the incentives to become a curator "out of need" might also include a lack of curators who specialize in a particular region or art form that the artist works in. Most of the artists who talk about making a move into curatorial practice talk about this as a move to meet some unmet need or to fill a gap. Some artists come to curate exhibitions because they are well respected as experts in their specific art form and others turn to them to organize and present other artists' work. When an artist reaches a stage in their career where, through their artistic practice, their writing, and training others, they stand out as an authority in the field they are in a position to contribute in spaces that are dominated by curators, art directors, and art historians and critics.

The following is an excerpt of a conversation with an artist who also writes, trains a younger generation or artists but has also curated exhibitions in Berlin and Stuttgart, Germany as well as in Bamako, Mali. The artist demystifies the idea that 'expertise' belongs to a select few thinkers or practitioners and suggests instead that anyone who is willing and persistent enough to take the time to learn can *more or less* equip themselves with the tools and language to create art *and* share it in a thoughtful and fruitful way.

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[81] From interview with Ann Gollifer (July 2016).

> "What I always tell my younger colleagues is 'read the instructions manual of the camera, and once you've got that, off you go. More or less, what you have to do is school yourself, your inner eye, your inner vision."
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> *Interview with Akinbode Akinbiyi in Berlin (August 2014)*

Oxford-born, Berlin based photographer, Akinbode Akinbiyi is also an internationally active curator and writer. Akinbiyi studied English and Literature in Nigeria, England, and Germany. He focuses on street photography in megacities around the world, in Africa, including Lagos, Cairo, Johannesburg, and Kinshasa and others in Europe, North America, and South America. He has represented Germany in various art fairs, and in 1993 he co-founded UMZANZI, a cultural center in Clermont Township, Durban, South Africa. Akinbiyi says that what he is really looking for through his work is serendipity, moments of grace within the city.[82] While his photographs have shown in several cities around the world including, Havanna, Johannesburg, Paris, Philadelphia, and Tokyo he has also curated for the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa), including *STADTanSICHTEN – LAGOS*[83] in 2004 and *Spot on DAK'ART – die 8. Biennale zeitgenössischer afrikanischer Kunst*[84] in 2009 presented at the ifa galleries in Berlin and Stuttgart, and in 2013 he also curated the German contribution to the Rencontres de Bamako – Biennale de la Photographie Africaine in Bamako, Mali.

Akinbiyi is a photographer, curator, and writer, and he also describes himself as a mentor and invests in training a young generation of photographers. In 1993 he co-founded UMZANZI,

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[82] From interview with Akinbode Akinibiyi (August 2014).
[83] English translation of the exhibition title: "CITY VIEWS: LAGOS".
[84] English translation of exhibition title: "Biennale of contemporary African art".

a cultural center in Clermont Township, Durban, South Africa. And even though he is best known as a street photographer and curator, he says that initially he wanted to be a writer, "I started reading very early, English literature like Walter Scott […] and then from about eleven, twelve getting into more serious literature, serious world literature like Charles Dickens and then later on, fifteen, sixteen, going into African literature." He picked up photography as a hobby when he moved back to Europe from Nigeria and says, "[I] realized that photography is a form of writing. I didn't go to photography school, I am very much self taught…in fact back then that's how it was. I had a friend, he was a photographer and he taught me the rudiments of photography, using a dark room […] Those days I was living in Germany already but I learned the dark room rudiments in London, came back, set up a dark room in Germany and since then I have worked analogue, I don't use digital cameras. And you just… you learn by doing, more or less."

Akinbiyi's promotion of self-schooling is an attitude and approach that artists who curate, teach, and publish share and these artists encourage this open sourcing method in their colleagues, as long as they are willing to re-tool or acquire new skills. Schooling yourself is not the same as "self-taught" vs. going to art school, but it involves a willingness to teach oneself, including taking non-conventional paths to acquiring formal and technical skills. It refers more to an openness to acquiring new forms of expertise that allow the artist to use and speak with say, the language and authority of a curator, critic, or historian, suggesting a "can do" attitude that minimizes hesitation in moving, working, speaking across two or more professional roles; for example, as an artist who also engages in curatorial practice.

Even if an artist wants to spend as much time as possible in the art studio creating art they may still become invested in managing how curators and other art scholars use their work. Educating themselves about the processes, tools, and languages that gatekeepers use increases the chances that an artist inserts himself in the gatekeeping processes that make up the larger creative project, moving between making art objects and reflecting on art objects to participating in the orchestration of getting artwork from the studio to an audience. This is a different take from an artist like who disqualifies himself from discussions about curatorial practice, stating that he does not have the authority to speak about let alone inject himself in the work that gatekeepers do. For example, Gopal Dagnogo, quoted earlier in this chapter, under the sub-heading "When Artists Curate, Teach, and Publish" says, "My work is in the studio. When it is finished it does not belong to me…"[85]. The assertion here is that the artist belongs in the studio and gatekeepers (and others) dictate what happens once the artwork leaves the art studio. An artist who views their creative practice as studio-bound is also likely to excuse himself from extra-studio production, including responding to questions about the politics of knowledge production and positioning their work within the Contemporary African art genre.

Other artists like Akinbiyi receive deference from *primary gatekeepers* who admire the artist's work and see the artist as an authoritative voice with expertise within his specific field, in part because the artist has become an expert in what they do but also because of the artist's long tenure as a creative practitioner in his respective field, in this case photography (specifically, analogue). Akinbiyi has been a street photographer for over four decades. For other artists who do not have careers that are as long and perhaps as established in their field, their curatorial

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[85] Excerpt taken from interview with artist, Gopal Dagnogo (March 2016).

practice may still come about in an effort to meet some other need, not necessarily because there are no curators. Part of the curator's and art director's role is to act as that *primary gatekeeper*, and in the process of selecting some artists to promote, some other artists are inevitably left out. These selection processes are not always transparent and imbalances in how artists come to be selected for exhibitions emerge as *primary gatekeepers* often work off of each other's research and shortlists to build their own collections and exhibitions.

In *STADTanSICHTEN – LAGOS*, for example, Akinbiyi worked in collaboration with curator Simone Scholten as well as the Nigerian city planner and architect, David Aradeon to curate the 2004 exhibition. The exhibition had the explicit intention of depicting the urban space, a subject matter that is central to Akinbiyi's artistic practice, as seen through lens-based media (photography), which is also Akinbiyi's specialty. The three curators selected which artists to include and developed an exhibition that aimed to give a viewer different perspectives of the city of Lagos. To do this, they designed different thematic routes for viewers to explore and experience various aspects of the city such as, the links between colonial and post-colonial urban development, the planned and spontaneously growing parts of the city and the market place as a vital center of trade and commerce embedded within the city structure[86]. The exhibition presented designs and urban planning surveys by Nigerian architects and city planers as well as drawings, photographs, and video works by Nigerian and German artists whose work deals with urban life. The curators highlighted photographs by J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere from the 1960s and 1970s to trace one thread of the evolution of Lagos in the colonial and early post-colonial era. In

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[86] Detailed description of the exhibition, *STADTanSICHTEN – LAGOS (2004)* can be found on the *ifa* German Galleries website. Accessed on April 2017. http://www.germangalleries.com/ifa-Galerie_Berlin/STADT_an_SICHTEN_Lagos.04.html.

addition, six Nigerian photographers, Kelechi Amadi-Obi (lawyer turned photographer), Uche James-Iroha, Toyosi Odunsi, Amaize Ojeikere, Emeke Okereke, and Toyin Sokefun-Bello (also singer, songwriter, and philanthropist), shown in the exhibition represented the current image of Lagos, giving some insights into everyday life in the city. The curators also included the drawings and commentary by Berlin- and Brussels-based German artist, Christine Meisner, whose work explores the history of colonization in Africa, the Americas, the Atlantic slave trade, and questions of freedom, in an installation and video format. And in the background, a soundscape by another Berlin-based, German artist, Lorenz Rollhäuser, whose work also looks as the colonial consumption of Africa, to add to the idea of the viewer becoming emerged in the exhibition and imagining the different aspects, visual and auditory experience, of Lagos.

In the Lagos exhibition, the artist working as a curator really taps into his knowledge as a practicing photographer whose creative production is highly invested in exploring urban spaces and capturing moments or everyday life in the urban landscape. His participation in curatorial practice is connected to his larger creative work as a photographer in and of large cities on the African continent and abroad. In this way, Akinbiyi's is a *secondary arbiter* who works alongside and not in replacement of *primary gatekeepers*. His contribution in cultural production is not confined to the decisions he makes in and about his own art making processes, but seriously incorporates or integrates knowledge about and investment in sharing other artists' work with audiences.

The following case illustrates how curatorial practice in itself can become an important subject of inquiry in investigating the ways in which an artist comes to be a "Contemporary African artist", a "South African artist", "a history painter", or "a photographer". The expertise

that goes into presenting art and artists to an audience might begin with research and a studio visit, although a studio visit is not always possible if the curator cannot travel to where the artist is based. The next step is an initial short list (of artists and the selected artwork) that is further edited to make a group exhibition or to highlight a single artist for a solo exhibition. The solo exhibition, as the next artist attests to, is often a vital point in an artist's career, one that can lead to an artist gaining more attention from other curators, cultural entrepreneurs, and art consumers.

> "To challenge the imbalance, what we see as an imbalance in the visibility of artists in Jo'burg in 2010 Thenjiwe Nkosi and I curated an exhibition. Even though our work isn't collaborative, we decided to embark on this together to challenge the imbalance that we saw in the visibility of artists in Jo'burg. Our first was to stage our dual solo-exhibition. A solo exhibition is sort of this mythical thing – this construct of power. It is a construct therefore it can be undone or challenged. We did three, as artists and as curators, just to show what it might take to do this visibility work."
>
> *Interview with Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum (September 2016)*

The Mochudi-born, Johannesburg-based artist describes her work as drawing, working with paper, board, and sometimes animation and performance, and says, "I have always been interested in this question of origin, self-hood […] The idea of residue, things that persist through time. We are all these vessels of residue…" She goes on to say that in her earlier work she was more political and anthropological, with a lot of her work speaking to "oppressors". But then things started to change. "I was realizing that I didn't always have to be subject or let my

work be defined by these outsiders. I allowed the enquiry to broaden."[87] Sunstrum talks about her collaboration with Nkosi as an exercise to demystify the solo-exhibition. She explains that at times within the Johannesburg art scene it seems that there is an imbalance in representation and in some cases this raises a question about curator carte blanch; The idea that curators have free reign and are always authoritative experts at what they do. Sunstrum and Nkosi do not simply examine this idea by writing a review or discussing difference of opinion on art panels but they do so by actually taking up the very task of curating an exhibition. Even though they are not known as curators, the two artists take up the role of the curator, simultaneously filling a need while aiming to demystify the curatorial process of building a solo-exhibition.

In 2014 the two artists also published an article titled, "Disrupters, This is Disrupter X: Mashing up the archive" in which they discuss their multi-media performance exhibition, *Disrupters, This is Disrupter X*. This was a project they started working on in 2013 and they shared it during their art residency stay in the Iwalwahaus African Art Archive at the University of Bayreuth. In this space, Sunstrum and her colleague explored the use of sci-fi as a means of, "imagining and 'occupying' new African futures".[88] Designed as an "anti-opera", they had their audience walk through various stations set up in Schokofabrik, an old chocolate factory that was turned into a sports, cultural club, and arts space that collaborates with Iwalewahaus. In the exhibition stations, Sunstrum and Nkosi combined pieces from the old collection in the Iwalewahaus, sketches of scenes, with new digital media, soundscapes live-streamed in from Johannesburg and handmade replicas of archival objects.

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[87] Interview with Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum (September 2016).
[88] Sunstrum, Pamela Phatsimo, and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi. 2014 "Disrupters, This is Disrupter X: Mashing up the Archive." *Technoetic Arts* 12(2-3): 293-307.

Secondary Arbiters: Artists who teach, write, and publish

The art lecture, like participating in curatorial planning (as an artist or without necessarily replacing the curator), is a common practice that contemporary artists engage in even when they are not a professor in an educational institution. Artists who give lectures usually do so to talk about their own personal creative process and are often giving these talks and visiting lecturers to a group of aspiring art theory and practice students, although they may also present talks to cultural entrepreneurs and general art going audiences. One of the main differences between the artist who gives guest lectures and an artist who is also a professor or professional trainer is that the artist in the latter group, not only gets to instruct an audience in ways to think about the work or the art materials, but they also have an opportunity to contribute to the kinds of literature, key actors, and histories a new generation of artists and cultural workers will consume and use to inform their own creative practices. However, for an artist for whom teaching and training students forms part of the artist's creative process, even if the role of an artist is separate from those of *primary gatekeepers*, the artist still sees them as roles that are in constant conversation. For instance, in the excerpt below, Brendan Fernandes who also teaches, shares his experience of when a curator visits his studio not as a fixed moment in which the curator selects what works they like or don't like, but rather as part of a longer and ongoing conversation,

> "I see curatorial practice as a practice. So when I am invited to exhibit my work, I see myself as an art practitioner and a curator as involving me in their project. So in some ways it is a collaboration and I am always interested in being involved, to see how my work is being positioned. That said I like to have curators come to my studio or my laptop. I enjoy those conversations because it becomes an

> investigation. It doesn't guarantee that I'll have a show. So I'll get friends who'll say, 'So, did your studio talk go well? Did you get a show?' And I have to tell them, 'Well, it doesn't quite work that way – it is a continuing conversation.'"
>
> *Interview with Brendan Fernandes (April 2016)*

The notion of using art as a teaching tool is a key concept and some artists view teaching (including giving art talks about their own work) as mobilizing the art objects they make, not simply as aesthetic or creative endeavors or even as political projects, but also as instructive tools. Of course not all artists are of this school of thought, in fact, in one interview with one of the artists who is also a professor of art the artist blatantly discounts the suggestion that art or art making is a transformative tool. He explains that, to him art is like any other kind of work, if it turns out that you are good at it, you find your niche and you find a place where you can make a living doing it, then great.

Brendan Fernandes is a Canadian artist of Kenyan and Indian descent who was based in Brooklyn, NY for an extended period of his practice (also with a base in Toronto and a recent move to Chicago). Even though Fernandes differentiates between curatorial practice as the curator's domain and making art as the artist's domain, he does talk about the curation of his work as a collaborative project and he reflects this in his teaching. Fernandes is a visual artist whose practice is very much imbedded in performance art and dance and he also teaches. In his lecture-performance at Northwestern University in Illinois, U.S.A, where he was a 2015-2016 artist in residency and lecturer in the Department of Theory and Art Practice, the artist incorporates dance into his lecture about the idea that art viewers in spaces that exhibit art have

to follow strict sets of rules about where they can and cannot stand, how they must not touch, point or make too much noise. As he reads the lecture to the audience in the auditorium, two dance students move in synchronized motions behind him sometimes mirroring Fernandes as he moves, gestures and points across the room. The lecture format becomes an extension of the artist's creative working space and production.

In his work, Fernandes tackles many of the questions I raise throughout this research about identity and the significance of the self-referential in framing cultural production, although he does it by paying even closer attention to the discursive and pedagogical practices of art historians, museum curators, and other art scholars in the collection and classification of art objects and creative production by Africans. The artist states, "my work explores the thesis that identity is not static, but enacted, challenging accepted ways of thinking about what it is to have an 'authentic' self."[89] Talking specifically about the focus on Africa to question the very idea of 'authenticity', he says,

> "In my work I am working with or trying to challenge the idea of 'what Africa is' but within that I use the same tropes others use, so sometimes this is turned against me. So I think that's one challenge. I think working outside the continent and being 'Western educated', I wonder how does that resonate within spaces I am talking about, like Kenya, which is my place of birth…how does that change […] I have shown my work in so many other platforms but I have never shown on the continent, so I am really curious about that."

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[89] From artist's official website: http://www.brendanfernandes.ca/new-page/.

Interview with Brendan Fernandes (April 2016)

As he discusses the challenges of knowing "what is African", in spaces where he is sometimes embraced but at other times he is not, he tells me that he has found that people who call themselves African are open and embracing of others as "African", whereas the rejection comes from foreigners or people who don't understand that there are Indians in Africa. "People will ask me, "are there many Indians in Africa?"[90] And maybe that is just part of my experience, that not all African countries have a large presence of South East Asians but the British did bring them over as indentured servants […] so in my work I am being very open about the struggles with colonialism and hegemony."[91] In his art practice and teaching, Fernandes is constantly interrogating these questions of authority and boundaries. And he acknowledges that within his own work, as he challenges an art history in which African artists were once anonymous because the names of those who made the objects that are in museum collections, cultural institutes, and private collection archives, he too personally grapples with his own place working within these art collecting, art making and knowledge producing spaces. Perhaps because of this self-reflexivity, he says that his teaching philosophy is one that emphasizes, "generosity, kindness, and collaboration where both parties are gaining. Teaching art is a social practice and I do it as an artist, a teacher, a Kenyan, a Canadian so we can see ourselves as taking and giving."[92]

Another artist who teaches is New York City-based Meleko Mokgosi who is from Botswana and whose lecture at the School of the Art Institute vividly opens the introduction

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[90] Excerpt from interview with artist, Brendan Fernandes (April 2016).
[91] Excerpt from interview with artist, Brendan Fernandes (April 2016).
[92] Excerpt from interview with artist, Brendan Fernandes (April 2016).

chapter. Mokgosi is an assistant professor at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study where he continues his interdisciplinary approach, offering courses on Topics in Painting, Art in Critical Theory, Artist's Books, Exhibition Systems and Curating, and Drawing: Body and Narrative[93]. Describing his emphasis on details and paying close attention to the way his work is represented, he explains that he applies the same kind of attention to detail in his teaching and when he gives interviews he says,

> "I try to micro-manage as much as I can, from the lighting to the labels. I think the work is made to inhabit the space so the lighting, for instance, is vital. […] Representation is always a big key, so how people frame and discuss the work is important. […] I do the same with lectures and interviews. There are artists who don't like talking about their work, but people like us, whatever that means, we are put in a position where we have to talk about those specific histories because they rub against the institutionalized history. I mean a historian could do it, but perhaps not in that context. And if we don't talk about it, who will?"
>
> *Interview with Meleko Mokgosi in New York City (March 2016)*

Mokgosi shares that most of his work is done exclusively using oil paint on canvas and charcoal, because that is what he was trained to do. Using history of painting and the history of representation he focuses on the histories of Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa. Mokgosi came to the U.S. in 2003 and says, "I was not chasing anything. Someone said, 'I'll give you a

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[93] Official Gallatin School website, available courses webpage for Professor Meleko Mokgosi, http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/courses.html?netid=mm6439. Last accessed online, April 2017.

scholarship' and I said, sure. It's not a bad life. It is great to find people who can and want to support you."[94] He says is was not until 2008 when he started his Master's program at the University of California in Los Angeles that he started to think more actively about who he is, where he is from and what he wanted to say or add to the conversation about social justice and, "How to make the work biographical but not autobiographical because it is a lot more interesting to see and hear something by someone who is invested in it and not just in a high theory abstract way…" Following this move towards figuring out how he thinks about the relationship between himself and the kind of work (and conversation) he wanted to produce and participate in, the artist took up residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem, in New York City. At the Studio Museum, Mokgosi's residency overlapped with Njideka Akunyili-Crosby's residency during their 2011-2012 stay[95]. An idea that both artists evoke, although using different language, is the idea of micromanaging or policing how others present or represent the artists' work and it is common among *secondary arbiters* who see extra-studio production and practices as necessary supplemental and extensions of their studio practice.

I asked Mokgosi whether he teaches in any other context besides the University and he replies, "No. I don't work for free. If someone wants me to teach, they must pay me […] making a living is a big challenge. I mean, if I was in my country I wouldn't sell anything. So I think that's a big challenge, trying to sustain yourself as a practitioner."[96] He shares with me that New York City is home in so far as it is where his wife and child are, but home is also where his

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[94] Excerpt from interview with artist, Meleko Mokgosi (March 2016).
[95] Note: New York based American artist, Xaviera Simmons, was also in residency at the Studio Museum in Harlem during same period (2011-2012).
[96] Excerpt from interview with artist, Meleko Mokgosi (March 2016).

grandparents are, where his parents are (Botswana). "But I have never been interested in geography. Some people miss home, miss chesanyama (food), but I couldn't care less. I mean, I enjoy it when I get it, but basically I have two homes; here and there."" He goes on to talk about this position he occupies as someone with two homes.

Mokgosi's relationship with his work, living and working in New York City and teaching as a pragmatic aspect of his work in some ways reflects the way he relates to his work. He sees his teaching as work but also points out that he is able to support himself and his work precisely because he is in a place (New York City/U.S.A.) where there are people with the interest and means to pay him to do this kind of work. He explains that this matters because he would not be afforded the same opportunity were he doing this work in Botswana. Mokgosi combines a respect for history with an acute recognition that the flexible and filtered iterations of memory, identity, politics, and culture often complicate historical interpretation, emphasizing the difficulty of translating across language and culture. He also writes and published an article, *Pax Afrikaner* (2013) where the artist examines the way people construct language that justifies their xenophobia in South Africa. In his work, Meleko also talks about institutionalized histories and the slippages in translating across language, suggesting that the way he presents history or the aspects of history that he emphasizes in his work and teaching may not be reflected in the history or art history that is taught as core/mainstream history in the U.S., for example. And this makes it all the more imperative that he articulate the historical specificity in his work. For example, when someone (this could be a *primary gatekeeper* or a general art consumer) says a certain painting by Mokgosi is about Southern Africa, the artist would ideally be present to restate the specific local history in say, South Africa or Namibia, that informs the painting, especially in the

absence of a gatekeeper or someone who communicates the artist's work with the same level of detail and accuracy.

Not all artists frame their work and teaching through a historical lens. For example, Australia-born, Chicago-based Nnena Okore, who teaches sculpture at the North Park University in Chicago, says she is a fiber artist and her work is open to interpretation.[97] She is of Nigerian parentage and spent many of her years growing up in the University town of Nsukka. Okore works with a wide array of natural materials including rope, clay, sticks, paper, and fabric as she explores the process of aging and she is inspired by landscape, architecture, language, and culture. In response to the idea that her work as an artist and professor working under the rubric of Contemporary African art she says,

> "There is always this presumption that *being an* African *you become an authority in everything concerning African issues or topics*. So I find myself at work being approached to speak to matters relating to Africa, whether I am an expert or not. I got a request to do an interview on AIDS in Africa…I don't have enough expertise in that field but because I am an African there is a sense that I would know. I remember when I first started working here the first thing was they said, 'Would you teach the African art seminar?' And I said, "I'll have to think about it" because although I do have some background in different African art practices, this is not a field I feel I have expertise in. I find that there is an assumption that when you have African heritage you become an emissary of some sort, or a messenger that knows all the answers. So in my profession as a teacher, that

[97] Interview with artist, Nnena Okore, Chicago (October 2016)

> comes up a lot. I have increasingly brought it up in my own teaching pedagogy because I do like to diversify knowledge for my students to let them know what else is applicable elsewhere. I do refer to a lot of African experiences, or themes or topics that are being discussed in my art practice. Clearly there is a tendency for galleries and curators to seek you out *because* you are African and you practice art, so they put you in this box."
>
> *Interview with Nnena Okore, artist based in Chicago (October 2016)*

As an internationally active artist and a professor of sculpture, Okore shares her frustration with the pigeonholing that comes with having her work placed under the Contemporary African art genre. Even as she acknowledges that the connection between her work and "Africa" is not far fetched, and in some instances is actually accurate because she does make reference to her experiences growing up or living in Nsukka, she also talks about times when she has leaned towards framing her work in this way in order to meet grantee or sponsors' expectations that her work will be about something or someplace "African". She discusses her many interests, some of which she does not see as quintessentially "African" issues or even "Nigerian" issues and talks about being approached to teach about anything that others associate with Africa or Africanness. Even though her expertise is in sculpture and art, and not "in all things African".

Okore points out that her resistance to being approached mainly because she is a female African artist is not that she denies her Africanness, womanliness or Nigerianness. She is aware that she is an artist, a woman and an African so the association is not totally misplaced but it is

limiting because "you are not seen as this universal person, you are seen as this one thing". Okore further qualifies this concern about pigeonholing and says, "When I am seeking opportunities, I try not to make my being African a main point. I want to be able to use my work to speak to women's issues, American issues, children's issues. But sometimes curators want you to speak to 'African issues' […] I think there are some biases towards people like me. When I have applied for grants they want me to focus on African politics or African identity – so I tend to tap into memories of my childhood, which sometimes relate to that – or the ephemeral experience, which I think everyone has."[98]

Like Mokgosi, Okore tells me that she insists on making her exhibitions hers, "especially if it is a solo show. I make it very clear from the beginning that I will not be molded into what the curator wants. Most of the time we have similar interests. I do not like to be told what I can and cannot do. If they say, 'we want the recycling work you used to make' I would say no. So I would turn that down."[99] Similar to most of the artists I interviewed, Okore reassures me that she has had very few conflicts with *primary gatekeepers* as she has had a lot of success in defining her shows. As she shares more about her assertive approach in managing how her work is curated and talked about, much like Mokgosi, she also talks about how she teaches her students not to completely remove themselves from their work by working in abstraction. On her teaching she elaborates on the importance of thinking about art making the way we think about living,

> "I have a four page teaching philosophy. I think first and foremost I am striving to emphasize to students that life is a lesson and in everything we do, we are

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[98] Interview with Nnena Okore (October 2016).
[99] Interview with Nnena Okore (October 2016).

practicing artists, we are problem solving, we are thinking critically, and the process of making is like the process of living. Just doing your every day things. We are always confronted with having to figure things out and it's not very different. When we speak our experiences come through in the things we do, when we make art we should also allow our experiences to come through in the work we make. Because I think that one of the challenges that students have is that they tend to distance their lives from the art making process. They sit down and they think so hard, 'what am I going to make? What is it going to be about?' Without realizing that the making is just another process in your life, it is like making tea in the morning and drinking it. So making art should be fluid, it should be a process that you adopt, that embodies who you are. That is one core philosophy."

Interview with Nnena Okore (October 2016)

In her teaching, Okore reflects on her experience as a female African artist looking to establish herself as a contemporary artist rather than a contemporary "African" artist. As an internationally recognized artist, she makes it a point to educate her students about the ways in which different artistic practices apply in other parts of the world, and not just in African regions. Even as she first shares the absurdity of being asked to teach on topics that are "African" even though she was not an expert in any particular "Africa" topic, she discusses how her teaching now covers certain African art practices and the ways in which curators and gallerists sometimes box artists of African descent.

Although Fernandes separates curatorial practice from art practice and Mokgosi and Okore talk about the importance of asserting themselves in curatorial decision-making, none of these artists make claims about being *primary gatekeepers* (perhaps as they shape curricula and direct what students read and specific art practitioners and historians they learn about). However, they do talk about the importance of relaying the constraints, gaps, and strengths in educating others about prioritizing specificity in what they mean when they say "Africa" or "African" in art and art practice. In some form, these artists express their insistence to participate in the curation or their work, even as they maintain their position as artists. And in their teaching they emphasize the tendency of some actors in the art industry and discipline to lump art produced by contemporary artists from Africa and the artists who produce this work under one flattened label, as "African" and "contemporary", mirroring the previous lack of attention to detail in the collection of "African arts" as artifacts and souvenir trinkets made by anonymous people in some unknowable, unreachable "Africa".

Acting as a communicator and mediator of one's own work as work that is not confined to studio-practice (especially for artists who work in public spaces and produce street art) but also as social inquiry, commentary, and critique, expands the understanding of artists as producers of art objects to also think of them as *secondary arbiters* working within the art and teaching spaces that *primary gatekeepers* work in. These artists' varied sets of expertise, practices, and the opportunity to employ these skills opens artists' up to engaging in and reflecting on how others come to view the artists' work.

On May 2016, Beirut-born, Cairo-based, Lara Baladi presented a lecture at the, *Listening In: Sonic Interventions in the Middle East and North Africa* at Northwestern University.

According to the event flyer, the interdisciplinary conference was set up to reflect on the political, representational, and affective economies of sound at the five-year mark of the Arab Uprisings. Baladi, a photographer, archivist, and multimedia artist, whose work tackles the hostile sociopolitical conditions in Egypt, was a fellow at the MIT Open Documentary Lab in 2014. As a fellow she conducted research for a project called, *Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age*. In the same year she published an essay, "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistence" in IBRAAZ, a contemporary platform for visual culture focusing on North African and the Middle East. In 2017 BaLadi contributed a chapter, "When Seeing is Belonging: the Photography of Tahrir" in *The Screen Media Reader: Culture, Theory, Practice* edited by Stephen Monteiro.

Baladi framed the project as an installation piece that represent an interactive timeline of the Egyptian revolution and its impact on and significance in the uprisings and sociopolitical movements that followed.[100] Four years before the publishing of her work, ""When Seeing is Belonging: the Photography of Tahrir", Baladi had given a lecture about this topic at the American University in Cairo where she expressed that she does not only want to be an artist but she is compelled to engage questions of what each of us, as citizens, can do to educate ourselves and change things on the ground[101]. Giving lectures and publishing her thoughts on how her work connects to the political reality on the ground in Egypt is one way that the artist is able to contribute to a broader discussion, as she points out, not just as an artist but also as a citizen.

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[100] Official Arts at MIT website with artist residency information page. Accessed July 2016. http://arts.mit.edu/artists/lara-baladi/#about-the-residency.

[101] See extended lecture presentation by artist, Lara Baladi online. Accessed August 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i13g4IKpD-A.

Artists who do cross over into primary gatekeeping spaces do so not to replace *primary gatekeepers* or to discredit the work that *primary gatekeepers* do. In fact, most of these artists see their participation in gatekeeping processes as collaborative, supplementary, and in-conversation with *primary gatekeepers*, whether the artists do this by framing their work through a political lens, through teaching or in investigating the question of expertise and authority through research and writing. And they participate in these extra-studio production practices by employing some of the language and tools that gatekeepers use. Not so much a case of constructing "credibility struggles" as in Epstein's (1996) AIDS activists, who were able to transform themselves into alternative experts but also not in the hopeless case of Irwin's (1995) farmers who, although they had expertise working in the relevant unpredictable non-laboratory conditions they could not wield their know-how to convince scientists to abandon plans to use a potentially harmful laboratory tested chemical. The farmers were completely disregarded by the scientists who were relying solely on scientific expertise to prescribe the best course of action. In the artists' case, there are certain opportunities, platforms, and tools that are available for some of them to potentially carve out spaces to use their art history knowledge, their knowledge of curatorial tools and strategies and research and writing skills. So they work as artists who move, out of need, curiosity or to strengthen their professional position, to equip themselves with the means, the tools, and language to take up space in gatekeeping processes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how artists who also curate, lecture/train, and publish in art journals and magazines act as *secondary arbiters* in gatekeeping processes. The ways in which artists come to employ research, art history, and curatorial practices in their careers resonate with the

concerns over access, framing, and representation that artists stress in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. How Africanness acts as a trading chip in creative production, the variation in how artists understand the use of 'Africanness' in relation to their work as *pragmatic*, *substantive*, *tangential* or elusive, how access to resources (undeniably affected by funding), and the use of a political focus as an indicator of specialization that demands specificity of context for and purpose of the artist's creative production all work together to support the theorization of the visual artist as a *secondary arbiter* in gatekeeping processes.

The dismissive attitudes and restrictive policies toward the contributions of African practitioners that some gallerists, collectors, art institutions perpetuate, exist throughout a broader culture, one in which academic disciplines and processes of professionalization are intertwined with a legacy of historical but enduring racist and jingoist scripts. When it comes to research and knowledge on and about Africa, the dominant narrative is that a majority of social scientists, theorists, and historians in universities have historically been white (male and increasingly female) and of European descent, and therefore the individuals viewed as experts, knowledge makers and history surveyors reflected this narrative. In turn, black and brown people en masse were a curiosity set apart from knowledge production and viewed as objects and perhaps foreign subjects for collection and study, to map out, govern and theorize about. The post World War Two development of Area Studies in the United States, for example, came at a time when very few researchers considered doing work on or in non-Western parts of the world. After the war, it had become clear that being ignorant about the histories of and contemporary developments in other parts of the world meant that countries like the U.S. were in a weak position to understand, assess, and defend themselves and their assets against outside threats.

Funding from three foundations, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Rockefeller Foundation and Ford Foundation, all headquartered in New York City, poured into developing these area studies programs for researchers to focus on the then Soviet Union, China, and the aftermath of national independence of Asian and African countries (Parmer 2012). Worth noting is that although the history of area studies is often connected to the period at the end of WWII, a German Studies Program at Brown University was established in 1891. Area Studies was research by region or geography, and therefore did not and still does not necessarily include interdisciplinary research areas like Disability Studies, Gender or Women's Studies, Native-American, African-American or Latino Studies. This suggests that an entire discipline, say computer engineering or art history, could develop without addressing the contributions of other researchers or practitioners in these "non-Western" and interdisciplinary studies. The assumption being that not taking on a global or international lens, one that does not consider the role of ableism, racism, sexism, classism, or xenophobia in knowledge production was and is not only legitimate but preferred. If one is concerned with sexism, they should major in gender studies – long live the classical curriculum of our discipline's (white) forefathers. The knowledge being produced in universities then, particularly those in the U.S., Europe, and the regions that have been affected by American imperialism and European colonialism, has long been commonly understood as uncritical of using definitions like "classic or "foundational theory", for instance, which leave out swaths of knowledge and knowledge producers who are not considered rightful citizens of "Western" countries.

This overview reflects a difference between how knowledge by and about people from African states is integrated into what we might come to call an art curriculum in the U.S., a

country that exited WWII as a victor compared to Germany, which left as a disgraced loser. While one was fortifying and consolidating its power for the future and the Cold War the other was recuperating and rebuilding its position on the world stage. Area studies in the U.S. became a national priority in the 1950s has mainly developed as programs within the university, it was not until 1964 that the German city of Hamburg came together with its business community to found GIGA (the German Institute of Global and Area Studies). Compared to the U.S. approach, GIGA focuses on four main regions, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and in 2009 they established an office in Berlin. Operating in tandem with other research communities, GIGA collaborates with universities in other "Western" countries, including the University of Oxford in the U.K. and Sciences Po in Paris. This West and the Rest model within academia remains prevalent and for most artists, mostly vocal being those who pursued their MFA (Masters of Fine Arts) or Ph.D. (in any field), this pattern showed up in their academic experiences as well as their professional dealings with curators, art dealers, art historians, and cultural researchers and interpreters.

Artists who did not attend art school nor depend on the language of any given discipline are positively reinforced as "self-taught" creative geniuses but describe pressure to learn art history and jargon in order to be taken seriously. The artists who couch their work in art history training, whether they take a post-colonial, decolonization project or Western-centric lens, talk about knowledge of art history as a prerequisite to entering conversations about how they and their work is curated, theorized, marketed, and absorbed into the art history literature. In both groups we find artists who, understanding that being proficient in art history and "art speak" does not an effective self-advocate make, they go on to equip themselves with curatorial experience,

they teach and shape curriculum for new generations of art students, and write and publish in peer reviewed journals and magazines alongside the art historians, cultural entrepreneurs and critics who are the *primary gatekeepers* in the industry.

9. CONCLUSION

This study is set against a backdrop of regional and international debates about "Africanness" in an upsurge of Contemporary African art fairs, art magazines, and art education programs and markets, both on the continent and abroad. Optimistic coverage of Africa as a re-emerging frontier for economic and cultural investment in the last decade or so (Radelet 2010) re-opens questions about how potential stakeholders are choosing to engage within and outside previously set boundaries for participation. In the art world, there are growing and overlapping groups of art scholars and experts/stakeholders and increasingly self-advocating artists whose criticism of misclassifications in assigning "Africanness" is filtering understandings of what is so "African" about Contemporary African art (Hassan and Oguibe 2001; Enwezor 2006; Bisi 2010; Milbourne 2013).

The study uses gatekeeping theory to theorize the extra-studio practices that producers of cultural objects employ in their efforts to participate in gatekeeping processes. I investigate how gatekeeping theory in the circulation of cultural objects, including knowledge production, can inform the way cultural sociology investigates the role of the producer and the cultural object as "gated" entities. Africanness is an "essence" in something or someone who is of or related to a space or culture on the African continent, often associated with race (black), region (South of the Sahara), or citizenship to an African state. As a pragmatic device, curators, collectors, and critics may base their career on identifying, assembling, and analyzing the developments, relationships, and prospects of a group of artists or art works using Africa or an African theme as the criteria for selecting the artists and artwork to include. Rather than a pure "political" or strictly self-referential label, Africanness becomes an invaluable trading chip for art practitioners (artists,

historians, and theorists) moving in and across the Contemporary African art genre whether they dismiss it or recognize it as generative.

Based on three years of qualitative data (field observations of six artist talks, 30 interviews, six supplemental interviews with curators and content analysis of official artist websites, Contemporary African art magazines, and journals), this research with African artists confirms findings in past studies that indicate the strong influence that perceived physical, political, and phenotypical proximity have on the way social scientists and other social theorists assign group affinity. Artists who want to address themes or to engage in artistic techniques that are not uniquely "African" are confronted with this foregrounding of their biography (conflated to "Africanness") in their work. While some use a division of labor approach "as an artist, my realm is the art studio or where I make the art", others see a need to "police" the way *primary gatekeepers* perceive, frame, and disseminate the artwork. The most dramatic example of such artists comes in the form of artists who wish to tackle a particular social issue, for instance homosexual rights, but wish to do so by highlighting a very specific policy in one African nation or to make specific global comparisons. Two of the artists focusing on homosexuality, for example, discussed how their work is often broadly framed as "an African perspective" which removes specificity from the work and therefore has a generalizing rather than a contextualizing effect. The findings also suggest that although artists refer to themselves as African, the way they position their work (not themselves) in relation to "Africa" matters because it sends a signal about assumptions and expectations that others place on them based on ideas of *who* and *what* counts as *"African"*.

The dissertation is organized into eight chapters, the first chapter is the introduction, in which I outline the main research questions addressed throughout the paper: How do artists differentially position their work in relation to the idea of "Africanness", is professional base a factor in how artists orient their work the Contemporary African art genre, and how does this impact the way they frame their work alongside *primary gatekeepers*? I break this broad question up into a three-part question: How do contemporary artists born on the African continent employ the concept of "Africanness" in a highly globalized contemporary art market? Do contemporary artists who leverage "Africanness", not by distancing themselves from it but by demanding specificity, do so in identifiable ways? How do artists become *secondary arbiters* working alongside *primary gatekeepers* in the gatekeeping process? Chapter 2 outlines the research design, methods, and data collection processes I use to begin addressing these questions and I also explain the selection of New York City and Berlin as two global and "Western" art cities with different orientations towards "African" as my starting point. Incorporating data from interviews with artists based in other cities, I use New York City and Berlin not as a comparative case study but as an extended case study and the starting point to explore within-group variations in how the professional base in which an artist lives and works might shape how he positions his work in relation to "Africanness".

Following an outline of the research design in Chapter 2, I discuss the literature and background in Chapter 3, which gives an overview of how a sociological approach views art as a collectively produced phenomenon made possible within specific processes and orchestrated by specific groups of networked but variably positioned cultural producers and institutions. The literature chapter includes an overview of how Contemporary African art has developed as a

result of the work of art historians, curators, and critics who noticed that art work by African-born artists was not receiving much attention in art history and in highly acclaimed gallery and museum exhibition spaces. Highlighting the importance of spatial and temporal context in our understanding of the macro-meso-micro interactions, the background section also provides some historical analysis of the way national identity in the U.S. and Germany have historically set the "African" *apart from* the norm, rather than as *a part of* the core national self-image.

However, this setting apart manifests differently in both countries, forcing us to consider what is lost when we refer to a monolithic "West" in relation to a monolithic "Africa". The differences in national self-image *vis-a-vis* "Africanness" and non-white-Europeanness, shaped by each country's historical involvements in the continent, the continuing movement of Africans within the continent and abroad, and the political and economic developments of African states in the last decade has contributed to the kinds of art institutions in both countries that focus on African spaces, people, and contributions as well as the proliferation of exhibitions and art fairs focusing on Contemporary African art. I suggest that the fast paced, yet self-contained, reconfigurations of the Contemporary African art genre are propelled by the visibly researched and discussed racism in the U.S. and the far less interrogated race-based-yet-somewhat-open-to-cultural-exchange nationalism in Germany.

There are also infrastructural (including both physical art spaces and funding structures) and historical (the town, city, country the artist lives and works) factors that influence how some artists think about the concept of "Africanness" or their work in relation to "African" people, ideas, issues or things. Depending on how an artist thinks of Africanness as *a part of* or set *apart from* the most significant aspects of their work, an artist will adopt a *pragmatic, substantive* or

tangential frame. In turn, this frame will inform the kinds of strategies or approaches they use when positioning their work in relation to Africanness. For example, an artist might avoid working with certain materials, change formal choices or switch out subject matter in their work, emphasize their work as research-based, activism, or entrepreneurship, and also do curatorial practice, teach, and write (and publish) on their work and on investigative topics, often related to their studio practice.

Chapter 4 lays out two key theoretical interventions I use to make the argument that contemporary artists working under the rubric of Contemporary African art often work as both producers and *secondary arbiters* in the gatekeeping process. First, I describe "Africanness" as a kind of *trading chip*, one that artists (and others) can trade in (to eschew or reject) or trade on (employ, even in instances when there are diverging understandings and uses or even disagreement about what Africanness is or how significant it is). Second, I show how Contemporary African art is a boundary object, which refers to a mechanism or tool that different groups can collectively use, often without consensus on what its appropriate use or function is.

The data in Chapter 5 show how artists have different understandings of and therefore orientations towards the significance of a Contemporary African genre, how Africanness relates to their work, and why they see it as either beneficial or restrictive. Artists respond to the bio+work(base) framework in their field, where their biography is conflated with their work, not only highlighting "Africanness" but centering its influence in their work. Three frameworks emerge in the way artists think about their work in relation to "Africanness", the pragmatic, substantive, and tangential frameworks, that allow some artists to compartmentalize their disdain

for entertaining people who see their work as limited to an essentialized *and* generalized idea of "Africa" in order to access funding as well as working and exhibiting spaces to share their work with their audiences. There is a constant struggle and contestation to define an art genre, but through this struggle, new opportunities and fodder for new projects, exhibitions, panel talks and lectures are generated.

I found that in interviews with non-black (South Asian, White, and Arab) Africans, their affiliation to "Africa" is usually rendered ambiguous mainly by non-African born observers. This ambiguity affords some entry into the Contemporary African art genre in some contexts but not in others, but also serves as a buffer from being enclosed in an all encompassing "Africa" genre that lumps artists by race (black), region (Sub-Saharan Africa), and citizenship (of an African country) while also including others who are not of African descent, who deny having African heritage and celebrate the ability to dissociate from "Africanness". Even if the artist centralizes their affiliation to some specific or general "African" space, idea, issue, or thing in their work, within this ambiguity, this second group of artists seems to have more opportunities to choose when to emphasize the significance of "Africanness" in their work (opting in or out) without facing sanctions from their peers or other cultural entrepreneurs (e.g. being excluded by other artists and *primary gatekeepers* in professional and social gatherings or work collaborations).

The very idea of professional self-positioning is an intellectual exercise that allows the artist an increased sense of agency to compartmentalize or at least potentially compartmentalize their loss of agency in any given situation. For instance, an artist who frames the Contemporary African art genre as a product of academic and art theory might say, "I am a visual artist and the domain of the artist is in the art studio. I do not have the authority nor desire to categorize my

work under a genre, that is the concern of those whose career is based on coming up with categories, like curators and researchers, much like the researcher of this study". With this kind of framing, the artist may or may not choose to concern herself with debates over whether or not her work ought to find a home in one genre and not the another. She may be annoyed that others misrepresent or misclassify her or her work, but ultimately she understands this placing of people, things, and ideas into regional boxes as a legitimate part of the art industry, one that she needn't burden herself with as long as she finds ways to maintain the freedom to practice her craft as she sees fit.

In Chapter 6, I explore how money is an integral part of framing in creative production and how this significance manifests in three levels (as *baseline need*, for *patronage*, and as a *metric for status/reputation*). Even though funding is important, from paying for the art materials an artist uses to the art space they work in or exhibit in, there is a hush around how money shapes the relationship between art production and the work that artists do as cultural workers and entrepreneurs. Chapter 6 shows an overarching or perhaps underlying monetary factor, a mediating factor that may shift the framing or orientation an artist has towards "Africanness". In this chapter I show that although money is essential to ensure and sustain creative production, some artists approach it as a taboo topic. However, the idea of (working for) money as taboo appears to be inversely connected to an artists' actual or perceived tenure or their career stage. For example, an artist who believes that he has not yet "made it" may be less likely to voice or confront misconceptions about Africanness in his work, opting instead to feed into stereotypes and expectations in order to make a commissioned piece or to gain access into an upcoming group exhibition about "African perspectives". Whereas, an established artist can reject offers by

curators, gallerists or other cultural entrepreneurs who flatten or generalize the artist's work as "African" art rather than focusing on the precise contributions and creative decisions the artist has made in and with their artwork.

The different strategies of using the artwork and creative process itself to serve a particular purpose beyond the making of art objects in Chapter 7 highlights at least one way artists can use their position as artists to increase their control over how others frame their work without explicitly inserting themselves in the gatekeeping process. These artists use their studio-practice as a starting and focal point, but in addition to that they initiate organizations to mobilize others around a specific issue. Mobilizing around a specific issue and enlisting others to join the artist has the dual effect of (1) creating multiple avenues for refocusing the artists' work from an essentialized or generalized idea of "Africa" or "Africanness" back to the work itself, specific political agenda, and the specific geographic places the artist is interested in and (2) collectively confronting concerns about and correcting misconceptions and stereotypes that inform the *what, who,* and *where* the place of "Africa" and "African" people, ideas, and objects belongs.

Throughout this research, artist after artist and some gatekeepers like South African curator, Lerato Bereng quoted in Chapter 5, demand specificity in how others frame their work and a move away from the self-referential that reduces artists and their work to Africanness. These art practitioners do not view this distancing move as a denial or rejection of Africa, as many still reserve the space to make their work, at least partly but in a very precise ways, about an place, issue or people somewhere (temporally or physically) on the African continent or in the history of political, social, and creative practices in African countries. However, they insist that

there is a need to develop new vocabularies and starting points to engage with the work that artists and other cultural entrepreneurs working under the rubric of Contemporary African art do.

Chapter 7 is the artist professional framing strategies within the creative process chapter. Based on case studies of artists with a specific political agenda, the data in this chapter show how artists can strategically use their role as artists to assert a particular political agenda in three ways, in the process also deflecting generalized associations between the artists' work and "Africanness". First, I identify *artist activists* (artists who also work to mobilize other artists, cultural entrepreneurs and their audiences to educate themselves about social justice issues and to participate in collective actions around said issues). Second are *activist artists* (artists who use art as a tool and entry point for spreading awareness about a political or social justice issue and to build archives of this work in art and cultural institutions). And finally, the art advocates, (artists who work to promote the use of art and art tools to educate and to develop a locally-based generation of politically active and economically self-sustaining creative entrepreneurs).

Artists do not have the same opportunities to travel with their work, and while some are able to travel and others cannot, some artists have more than one professional base. For artists who are able to travel with their work (or live in close proximity to important cultural and art institutions or international fairs in which their work shows), this is an advantage especially when they wish to interact face-to-face with their audiences to talk about their work. The artist for whom creative production involves more than talking about her own work and interests, may be called upon to use her other skills including research, curatorial practice, teaching, and writing to engage with their audiences. In the absence of gatekeepers who share the same kind of vision that the artist has, the artist may be compelled to engage on multiple platforms and through

different channels to share her thoughts and aspects of their work that extend beyond the art studio.

The final chapter is a discussion of artists' contributions as *secondary arbiters* in the way others frame and receive their work, but also in the way artists are able to promote the work of other artists and cultural producers. The *secondary arbiter* role refers to the artists whose practice goes beyond the making of art objects, through their research, teaching, curating, and writing, especially where they explicitly reference their use of research to develop their art practice and minimize reductive interpretations of it. In this chapter I introduce a working definition of artists caught in a principal-agent dilemma with *primary gatekeepers*, which informs the idea of artists as *secondary arbiters* "trading in" and "trading on" Africanness. This helps to explain how and why it is that some artists come to occupy roles that are usually thought of as the *primary gatekeepers'* roles. I incorporate the evidence laid out in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to show how it is that these cultural producers who also participate in gatekeeping practices and processes because of framing misalignment, managing their funding baseline needs, patronage, and reputational profiles, and defining the edges of their artistic practice (as political, as a mixture of in-studio and extra-studio production or as historical or social inquiry), come to work as *secondary arbiters,* often working alongside *primary gatekeepers* in the art discipline and art markets.

The findings also suggest that the less explored impact of what political scientists and economists refer to as the principal-agent problem contributes to how a set of individuals (visual artists) may have to work strategically because they often have to depend on others (such as curators, art historians, critics, dealers) to present and represent the artists and share the artists'

work with viewers and consumers. In instances when artists cannot find an agent who can represent them, or represent them in a specific way, some artists figure out other ways to meet their own goals. In these cases, some artists gain influence over how others reach or read their work by finding opportunities to act and speak on their own behalf. As the principal, the artist must always decide where to position himself in relation to any number of art gatekeepers or agents who represent the artist or supports him, for example (funders, collectors, dealers, curators, gallerists).

Even as visual artists working under the rubric of Contemporary African art continue to rely on gatekeepers like curators, art historians, critics, gallerists, collectors, dealers, and funding institutions for access to exhibition spaces and other resources, artists not only exercise agency through their participation in art lectures and panels, but some of these artists also contribute to knowledge production and gatekeeping processes through their research, curating, teaching, and writing endeavors. How might thinking about producers of cultural objects as capable, legitimate, and intentional *secondary arbiters* in gatekeeping processes give cultural theorists and researchers a more complex understanding of the relationship between the creator or producer of the cultural object and the receivers (including gatekeepers) of the cultural object? These artists, potentially influenced by the social context in which their careers are based, mediate some of the gatekeeping processes within their work filters in art industry through their active self-positioning. As *secondary arbiters*, these artists are catalysts that mediate understandings of their work and much of this mediation occurs in gatekeeping processes in the circulation and dissemination of the artists' artwork.

This project takes up two tasks, first the task of asking what happens when we bind identity to certain kinds of cultural producers (and objects), and how this opens up or limits how producers of cultural objects get to contribute to the knowledge produced about their work, not as subjects of research or historical artifacts, but focusing on the artists themselves as contributors to critical thinking and the production of literature in their field. The second task, is that of elevating the other sets of expertise that many artists possess, such as their grasp and use of art history that also informs their studio practice, or their years of experience interacting with older and younger generations of artists in their field of specialization (e.g.. drawing, painting, textiles, sculpting, lens-based media such as video and photography) not only locally but also internationally as these artists interact in artist residencies and meet during art fair panel discussions or art workshop lectures. On the other side of this generative aspect, for some of these artists, many of whom have international careers, equipping themselves with the knowledge, language and tools to work alongside *primary gatekeepers* does not always guarantee freedom from the unyielding expectations to fit generalized ideas of what it means to be both "African" and "contemporary". This research also shows, at least in part, how an entire industry survives and at least to date appears to thrive on the institutionalization and circulation of regionalized cultural and racialized stereotypes associated with "Africanness" and how the producers within this industry work with, against, and through the monolithic framings of "Africanness" and "African" cultural production.

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9. Conclusion

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APPENDIX 1

Participants by Age, Education, Nationality, Race

Table 3. Participants by Age, Education, Nationality, Race (Berlin)

Artist	Age	(F/M)	PhD/MFA	Nationality	Race
1	68	M	N	Nigerian/British	Abstained
2	50	F	N	Angolan	Angolan
3*	65	M	-	Togo/German	Black
4	40	F	N	German	Ghanaian/German
5	61	F	Y (DE/USA)	German/Jamaican	Abstained
6	37	M	N	Afro-German	Abstained
7	37	M	Y (UK)	British/Kenyan	White
8	44	M	N	French	Abstained
9	41	F	Y (UK)	Afro-German	Abstained
10	50	M	Y (DE)	German	White

Table 4. Participants by Age, Education, Nationality, Race (New York City)

Artist	Age	(F/M)	PhD/MFA	Nationality	Race
11	45	F	Y (USA)	Nigerian	Abstained
12	58	F	Y (FR/USA)	South African	Abstained
13	34	F	Y (USA)	Nigerian	Black
14	37	M	Y (USA)	Nigerian	Abstained

15	43	M	Y (USA)	Nigerian	Abstained
16	34	M	Y (USA)	Motswana	Black/African
17	35	M	Y (USA)	Kenyan/Canadian	South Asian
18	41	F	Y (USA)	Nigerian/American	Black
19	43	F	Y (USA)	American	White
20	33	F	Y (USA)	Nigerian/American	Black

Table 5. Participants by Age, Education, Nationality, Race (Other)

Artist	Age	(F/M)	PhD/MFA	Nationality	Race
21	36	M	Y (UK)	British/Kenyan	Other/White
22	42	M	N	French/Ivorian	Human Being
23	29	F	Y	Kenyan/British	Black African
24	57	F	Y (UK)	British	British/Caribbean
25	57	F	Y (UK)	British	Human Being
26	43	F	N	Canadian/Ethiopian	Black/Ethiopian
27	44	F	Y (CAN)	South African	Black
28	38	F	Y (FR)	French	None
29	36	F	Y (USA)	Canadian/Motswana	Black
30	38	F	Y (USA)	American	White

*	Passed in November 2016
Red	Artist/Initiated an NGO
Blue	Artist/Writer/Professor

Green	Artist/Entrepreneur
Purple	Artist/Curator

APPENDIX 2

Participants' and contributors' professional bios and personal statements

Table 6. Participants' and Contributors' Professional Bios and Personal Statements

Artist (Professional Base)	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	Education	Art/Artist Statement
Wanja Kimani (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)	1986	Nairobi, Kenya	B.A. Fine Art. Studied fine arts at the University of the Creative Arts in Canterbury, U.K. M.A. in Human Rights at the University of Essex, U.K.	Her visual practice weaves stories and visual histories, which explore and reflect upon the fragility of memory, the imagination, loss, and trauma. Her work functions as a medium by which the artist and participants are able to understand the past and locate the present. She imposes elements of her own life into public spaces, creating a personal narrative where she is both author and character. (Taken from online cultural content and information platform, Culture Trip.[102] Artist's official website under construction.)
Njideka Akunyili Crosby (Los Angeles, U.S.A, once based in New York City, U.S.A.)	1983	Enugu, Nigeria	BA (Honors), Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, U.S.A. MFA, Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT, U.S.A. (2006)	Drawing on art historical, political and personal references, Njideka Akunyili Crosby creates densely layered figurative compositions that, precise in style, nonetheless conjure the complexity of contemporary experience. Akunyili Crosby was born in Nigeria, where she lived until the age of sixteen. In 1999 she moved to the United States, where she has remained

[102] http://theculturetrip.com/africa/ethiopia/articles/utopia-in-ethiopia-a-rendez-vous-with-artist-wanja-kimani/

		Post-Baccalaureate Certificate, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA, U.S.A.	since that time. Her cultural identity combines strong attachments to the country of her birth and to her adopted home, a hybrid identity that is reflected in her work. On initial impression her work appears to focus on interiors or apparently everyday scenes and social gatherings. Many of Akunyili Crosby's images feature figures - images of family and friends - in scenarios derived from familiar domestic experiences: eating, drinking, watching TV. Rarely do they meet the viewer's gaze but seem bound up in moments of intimacy or reflection that are left open to interpretation. Ambiguities of narrative and gesture are underscored by a second wave of imagery, only truly discernible close-up. While the artist's formative years in Nigeria are a constant source of inspiration, Akunyili Crosby's grounding in Western art history adds further layers of reference. Religious art, the intimism of Edouard Vuillard's intoxicatingly patterned interiors, the academic tradition of portraiture and, in particular, still life painting become vehicles for delivering, Trojan horse-like, new possible meanings. (Taken from artist's about page on Vitoria Miro website.[103] No artist statement on artist's official website.)

[103] http://www.victoria-miro.com/artists/185-njideka-akunyili-crosby/

ruby onyinyechi amanze (New York City, U.S.A)	1982	Nigeria, grew up in the U.K.	B.F.A. from Tyler School of Art, Temple University	ruby onyinyechi amanze is a visual artist whose practice is primarily centered around drawing and works on paper. In a non-linear and open narrative, her drawings explore space as a malleable construct, the freedom to play as an of revolution, and cultural hybridity or 'post-colonial non-nationalism' as a mundane norm. Design, architecture, rollerskating and the movement language of Gaga are a few aspects of her current research and artistic practice.[104]
Meleko Mokgosi (New York City, U.S.A.)	1981	Francistown, Botswana	MFA, Interdisciplinary Studio Program from the University of California in Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, U.S.A. (2008-2011) Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. (2007-2008) Slade School Of Fine Art, London, U.K. (2005-2006) Bachelor of Arts, Studio Art Williams College, Williamstown, MA, U.S.A. (2003-2007)	Meleko Mokgosi (born in Francistown, Botswana) is an artist who works within an interdisciplinary framework to create large-scale project-based installations. Mokgosi works across history painting, cinematic tropes, psychoanalysis, and post-colonial theory. His studio program interrogates narrative tropes and the fundamental models for the inscription and transmission of history along side established European notions of representation in order to address questions of nationhood, anti-colonial sentiments, and the perception of historicized events.[105]

[104] http://rubyamanze.com/story
[105] http://www.melekomokgosi.com/about-1/

Moshekwa Langa (Johannesburg, South Africa and Amsterdam, Netherlands)	1975	Bakenburg, South Africa		i think i learnt how to read and write before my grandmother, so when she eventually learnt to do so, i was already in what was then sub B. however i learnt as a child from her how to describe the world around me, and how to make sense of it. although bakenberg had no street names in the conventional sense, it did not mean that there were no names; there was and is another system to get around that, well-known probably all over the world, of using landmarks and associations to describe the wheres and how-to-get-theres. somehow making maps, or killing maps started with making sense of conventional map-reading and aligning that with a system that was known to me. since there was no church street in bakenberg as such, it was about associating places with people, with families, schools, shops, naturally occurring objects to navigate the landscape that i was getting to know. (Artist official statement found on the Goodman Gallery website[106])
Kader Attia (Berlin, Germany and Algiers, Algeria)	1970	Seine-Saint-Denis, France (spent childhood between France and Algeria)	Studied Philosophy and Fine Art in Paris and spent a year at Barcelona's School of Applied Art in 1993	Kader Attia (b. 1970, France), grew up in both Algeria and the suburbs of Paris, and uses this experience of living as a part of two cultures as a starting point to develop a dynamic practice that reflects on aesthetics and ethics of different cultures. He takes a poetic and symbolic approach to exploring the wide-ranging repercussions of Western modern cultural hegemony and

[106] http://www.goodman-gallery.com/exhibitions/312

				colonialism on non-Western cultures, investigating identity politics of historical and colonial eras, from Tradition to Modernity, in the light of our globalized world, of which he creates a genealogy. For several years, his research focuses on the concept of Repair, as a constant in Human Nature, of which the modern Western Mind and the traditional extra-Occidental Thought have always had an opposite vision. From Culture to Nature, from gender to architecture, from science to philosophy, any system of life is an infinite process of repair.[107]
Manuela Sambo (Berlin, Germany)	1964	Luanda, Angola	Studied German literature and literary studies at Leipzig University (1985-1993)	Female figures are frequently the subject of Manuela Sambo's oil-pastel drawings and paintings. The artist uses expressive colours to depict faces and bodies, filling the almond-shaped eye contours (à la Amedeo Modigliani) with bright, monochromatic colours. Despite her idiosyncratic visual ideas and pictorial language, the styles and themes she draws on are part of Western art history. That she was inspired by Modigliani's depiction of eyes is a double reflection of sorts given that Modigliani himself had drawn inspiration from African art. Besides references to Western art, Sambo's figures are reminiscent of African masks and their formal idiom. Clarity of composition and focus on the main figures characterizes her style. Owing to the allusions to

[107] http://kaderattia.de/ biography/

				African mask traditions, the aesthetics of Sambo's formal language is highly valued by the expressionists as well. (Taken from artist's CV page on ARTco[108])
Sokari Douglas Camp (London, U.K.)	1958	Buguma, Nigeria	Studied fine art at Central School of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art.	I am very conscious that my home in Niger Delta is in a very bad place at the moment because of pollution and lack of employment. I work hard, thinking of positive things that could happen – I feel that the negatives are so big that if we talk about them all the time we will have nothing to look forward to. Funnily enough , this brings out humour in the work I make. William Blake has a drawing of a figure that looks as if it is creating the world; Urizen- I like this drawing . I love poses done with hands and bodies by rap stars and foot ballers. Far from Blake but not so far. Anyway my' god' is a woman, she is creating growth from a split oil barrel, Her lower half is covered by smurf pattern. I did not want to go down the path of ' African' material. There was an article in the times newspaper of a roman sculpture that had been found off the coast of Gaza, a fisher man found it caught in his net and got his friends to use their boats to drag it to the beach. When they finally got it onto dry land, some cultural police came along and said the sculpture was against Islam and then some other police came along and said it should not be seen by anyone because it

[108] http://www.artco-art.com/Manuela-Sambo/manuela-sambo.php

				was an abomination. There was a little photograph of this sculpture and it was resting on a mattress which had a pattern of the Smurfs. Very often when you see tragedy or something very serious there is a commercial light thing in the same picture. People in temporary housing with a Mickey mouse poster keeping their shelter intact. A fierce Taliban fighter hiding his identity with a picture of Britney hanging off a wall…[109]
Lerato Bereng (curator at Stevenson's Gallery in Johannesburg, South Africa)	1986	Maseru, Lesotho	BA Fine Art in 2007 from Rhodes University	Our focus is on contemporary African art, contemporary art from people who have a relationship with the continent. We don't exclusively work with people who are born in Africa, we work with a lot of people in the Diaspora. We have artists that spend some time and are influenced by being here and they might not be African. We are very interested in art that challenges things, and thinks through a lot of things. We enjoy being challenged and sharing this challenge with the society at large. (Excerpt on curator's work as Johannesburg Stevenson Gallery Associate Director, taken from interview with Shots011, an online photography culture website[110])
Ann Gollifer (Gaborone, Botswana)	1960	British Guyana (Guyana)	Masters degree in History of Art at Edinburgh	Ann Gollifer is a visual artist based in Gaborone, Botswana. She is a painter,

[109] http://sokari.co.uk
[110] http://shots011.com/an-interview-with-stevenson-gallerys-associate-director-lerato-bereng/

			University in1983	printmaker, photographer and writer who moves between these disciplines in search of ways to tell the stories that she finds relevant to contemporary discourse; stories that question the stereotyping of the 'other' that so often de- humanizes a human being, whether male or female, foreign or national.[111]
Sam Hopkins (Nairobi, Kenya)	1979	Rome, Italy (raised in Kenya and the U.K.)	Studied History and Spanish in Edinburgh and Cuba. Postgraduate studies in Contemporary Art in Oxford and Weimar, Germany. (Kulturstiftung des Bundes Fellow at the Iwalewahaus Bayreuth, Germany)	Sam Hopkins is an artist whose work responds to the specific social and political context within which he is living, exploring and re-imagining elements of daily life. As his practice is triggered by a context, it exhibits a broad spectrum of both media and content. Much of his work orbits around issues of public space and the negotiation of participatory practice. Critical to this engagement is a keen attentiveness to the ways in which media produce realities, as opposed to simply transmitting them.[112]
Vivienne Koorland (New York City, U.S.A.)	1957	Cape Town, South Africa	Graduate of University of Cape Town, South Africa (1978) MFA from Universität der Künste Berlin (1981) The École des Beaux-Arts Paris (Médaille de la Ville de Paris (1982)	Born in 1957 in Cape Town, South Africa, Vivienne began painting at an early age. Educated under Apartheid, studying Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, she was politically engaged and illustrated the Xhosa-language dockworkers' newspaper ABASEBENZI (worker). Her ideas and work practice were also powerfully influenced by the philosophy of Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School. Her layering of content and material invests her work

[111] http://www.anngollifer.org/ about/
[112] http://www.samhopkins.org/ about.html

			MFA from Columbia University in New York, U.S.A. (1984)	with meaning beyond its historic and narrative sources. Her work has been discussed in terms of its relationship to history and growing up in South Africa and then leaving.[113]
Ed Young (Cape Town, South Africa)	1978	Welkom, Freestate, South Africa	MA in Fine Art from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, South Africa	With an emphasis on conceptualism, Ed Young is a master of subversion and not afraid to take risks. He is best known for his various irreverent and, at times deliberately, politically incorrect and provocative pieces. Refraining from using 'traditional' media, Young's practice remains challenging and varied. This may (or may not) include; found objects, text based works, video, performances, neon-lights, installations and sculpture – and sometimes painting.[114]
Marcus Bleasdale (Oslo, Norway)	1968	U.K. (Irish heritage)	Studied photojournalism at the London School. Studying for an MSt in International Relations at Cambridge University, U.K.	Over the past eighteen years spent documenting some of the world's most brutal wars Marcus has focused on campaigning against human rights abuses. He has been documenting these issues for Human Rights Watch and he is a contributing photographer for National Geographic Magazine. Using his background in business and economics, he researches the sources of financing driving the conflicts, which usually leads to the mines, and the armed networks linked to them. Marcus covered the wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African

[113] http://www.viviennekoorland.com/ about.php
[114] http://www.smacgallery.com/artist/ed-young/

	Republic, Somalia, Chad and Darfur, Kashmir and Georgia. Since 2000 Marcus has worked extensively in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo documenting a war funded by the extraction of the minerals used in every day electronic products. [115]

NB: Two artists in this project have explicitly asked to remain anonymous.

NB: Excerpts taken from artists' official website where available or information on the practitioners' work found on gallery representing the artist or secondary interviews

Exhibitions

The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994 – Curated by Okwui Enwezor (2001) In Germany at Museum Villa Stuck (Munich), Matin-Gropius-Bau (Berlin) and In U.S.A. at MoMA PS1 (Long Island City, NY).

Name	Name
Georges Adéagbo	Raoul Peck
Ghada Amer	Marc Riboud
Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé	Malick Sidibé
Frédéric Bruly Bouabré	Twins Seven Seven
William Kentridge	Sue Williamson
Zwelethu Mthethwa	
Ben Oswawe	

[115] http://www.marcusbleasdale.com/about/

Artist list incomplete
* Passed on April 2016

Afropolis: City, Media, Art – Curated by Kerstin Pinther, Christian Hanussek, Larissa Förster (2011). Shown at Iwalewa-Haus, Bayreuth, Germany.

Name	Name
Akinbode Akinbiyi	Sabelo Mlangeni
Lara Baladi	Sam Nhlengethwa
Rana El Nemr	Uche Okpa Iroha
Hala Elkoussy	Emeka Udemba
Ismail Farouk	Minette Vári
Constanze Fischbeck	
Laura Horelli	

The Progress of Love – Shown in Lagos, Nigeria and St. Louis, Missouri in exhibitions and live performances at the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos (October 2012 - on January 2013) and at The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts (November 2012 - April 22013) and, curated by Bisi Silva in Nigeria, at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos, and by Kristina Van Dyke at The Menil Collection in Houston, Texas. Also shown at the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts (St. Louis, U.S.A.).

Name	Name

Kelechi Amadi-Obi	Toyin Odutola
Joël Andrianomearisoa	Emeka Ogboh
Dineo Sheshee Bopape	Temitayo Ogunbiyi
Zoulikha Bouabdella	Wura-Natasha Ogunji
Mary Ellen Carroll	Senam Okudzeto
Samuel Fosso	Ricardo Rangel
Kendell Geers	Nadine Robinson
David Goldblatt	Zina Saro-Wiwa
Felix Gonzalez-Torres	Yinka Shonibare, MBE
Romuald Hazoumé	Malick Sidibé
Lyle Ashton Harris	Lynette Yiadom-Boakye
Zwelethu Mthethwa	Billie Zangewa
Zanele Muholi	

The Divine Comedy: Heaven, Purgatory and Hell Revisited by Contemporary African artists – Curated by Simon Njami (2014) In U.S.A at Smithsonian National Museum of African art, (Washington, D.C.), SCAD Museum of Art, (Savanna, Georgia) and Germany at Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main (Frankfurt)

Name	**Name**
Jane Alexander	Kiluanji Kia Henda
Ghada Amer	Jems Robert Koko Bi

Joël Andrianomearisoa	Abdoulaye Konaté
Kader Attia	Ndary Lo
Bili Bidjocka	Ato Malinda
Wim Botha	Pascale Marthine Tayou
Zoulikha Bouabdellah	Julie Mehretu
Mohamed Bourouissa	Myriam Mihindou
Edson Chagas	Nandipha Mntambo
Kudzanai Chiurai	Aïda Muluneh
Christine Beatrice Dixie	Hassan Musa
Dimitri Fagbohoun	Wangechi Mutu
Franck Abd-Bakar Fanny	Youssef Nabil
Jellel Gasteli	Lamia Naji
Kendell Geers	Moataz Nasr
Frances Goodman	Cheikh Niass
Nicholas Hlobo	Maurice Pefura
Mwangi Hutter	Zineb Sedira
Mouna Karray	Yinka Shonibare MBE
Amal Kenawy	Guy Tillim
	Andrew Tshabangu
	Minnette Vári

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner – Curated by Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi (2015) In U.S.A at Richard Taittinger Gallery (New York City, U.S.A.)

Name	Name
Aida Muluneh	Gopal Dagnogo
Amalia Ramanankirahina	Halida Boughriet
Amina Menia	Onyeka Ibe
Beatrice Wanjiku	Sam Hopkins
Chika Modum	Uche Uzorka
Chike Obeagu	
Ephrem Solomon Tegegn	

Senses of Time: Video and Film Based Works of Africa – Curated by Karen E. Milbourne of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and Mary (Polly) Nooter Roberts) of UCLA and LACMA (2015-2017). In U.S.A at Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, (Washington, D.C.), Wellin Museum (Clinton, NY), and LACMA (Los Angeles)

Name	Name
Sammy Baloji	Berni Searle
Theo Eshetu	Yinka Shonibare MBE
Moataz Nasr	Sue Williamson

Mythopoeia – Curator or curatorial team undisclosed. At Tiwani Contemporary, (10 April 2015 to 9 May 2015). Tiwani Contemporary is a gallery in London (U.K.) that exhibits and represents established and emerging artists who focus on Africa and its diasporas.

Name	Name
Mequitta Ahuja	Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum
Kapwani Kiwanga	Alida Rodrigues

NB: Other sources referenced during the preparation and data collection phase of this project include art fair catalogues for the biennales and art fairs that the researcher attended. These include the Venice Biennale 2015 chief curated by Okwui Enwezor (first African-born chief curator of the Venice biennale in its 120year span), the Armory Show in March 2016 - Africa Focus (in New York City) curated by Julia Grosse and Yvette Mutumba and 1:54 (in New York City) in May 2016 with a lecture series and panel discussions curated by Koyo Kouoh.

Galleries carrying participants in this study (partial list):

Name	Name
Victoria Miro (London, U.K.)	Goodman Gallery (Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa)
Jack Shainman (New York, U.S.A.)	LUMAS (46 in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia – 17 of these in Germany)
October Gallery (London, U.K.)	Out of Africa (Barcelona, Spain)
Skoto Gallery (New York City)	SMAC Gallery (Stellenbosch/Cape Town and

	Johannesburg, South Africa)
Marian Goodman Gallery (New York, U.S.A; Paris, France; London, UK)	Gallery MOMO (Johannesburg, South Africa)

Auction houses showing participants in this study (partial list):

Name	**Name**
Sotheby's (Hong Kong, China; Geneva, Switzerland; Milan, Italy; Paris, France; Zürich, Switzerland; New York, U.S.A; and London, U.K.)	Christie's (Amsterdam, Netherlands; Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Geneva, Switzerland; Hong Kong, China; London, UK; Milan, Italy; Mumbai, India; New York, U.S.A.; Paris, France; Shanghai, China; Zürich, Switzerland)
Bonhams (London, UK; Los Angeles, U.S.A; New York, U.S.A.; Paris, France; San Francisco, U.S.A; Sydney, Australia)	Stephan Welz & Co. (Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa)
Strauss & Co. (Johannesburg, South Africa)	Art House Contemporary Limited (Lagos, Nigeria)

Museums showing participants in this study (partial list):

Name	**Name**
Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (Washington D.C., U.S.A.)	MoCADA (New York City, U.S.A)
Tate Modern (London, UK)	LACMA – Los Angeles County Museum of

	Art (California, U.S.A.)
Hammer Museum (California, U.S.A.)	MOMA (New York City, U.S.A)
Brooklyn Museum (New York City, U.S.A.)	Studio Museum (New York City, U.S.A.)
Weltkulturen Museum (Frankfurt, Germany)	Haus der Kunst (Munich, Germany)

Cultural institutions showing participants in this study (partial list):

Name	**Name**
Iwalewahaus (Bayreuth, Germany)	SAVVY Contemporary (Berlin, Germany)
Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Berlin, Germany)	Deutscher Akademischer Austausch-Diesnt/DAAD (Berlin, Germany)