

Comparative study
Student C (HL)

**EXHIBIT A:
A PLACE IN
THE SUN BY
BRETT BAILEY
2010**



**THE MAN WHO
SANG AND THE
WOMAN WHO
KEPT SILENT
(TRIPTYCH)
1998 BY JUDITH
MASON**



**COMPARATIVE STUDY
HL**





EXHIBIT A: A PLACE IN THE SUN

Motivation: There are two bodies of works that have moved and inspired me for this Comparative Study: **Exhibit A: A Place In The Sun (Mathilda Joseph) (2010) an installation by Brett Bailey** and **The Man Who Sang and The Woman Who Kept Silent (Triptych) 1998 by Judith Mason**. Both Bailey and Mason are contemporary South African artists from different time frames; Bailey is essentially considered to have worked during the post-

Apartheid period as most of his works have been made after 1990. Mason however, painted during the period in South African history known as Apartheid and also during the post-Apartheid period. 1990 was the year that Nelson Mandela and other leaders were released and all political parties such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) were unbanned. During the post-Apartheid period, numerous South African artists including Bailey and Mason finally began to use their freedom of visual expression. I experienced Bailey's installations entitled **Exhibit A: A Place In The Sun (Mathilda Joseph) (2010)** during my visit to the annual South African National Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown. It is appropriate to say 'experienced' as that is exactly Bailey's intention for his viewers. I was also very fortunate to see Mason's powerful works **The Man Who Sang and The Woman Who Kept Silent (Triptych) 1998** exhibited at the South African Constitutional Court during a Visual Arts field trip to Johannesburg. Firstly, I have chosen to analyse **A Place in the Sun** from a series of installations by Brett Bailey that form Exhibit A.

CRITICAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF EXHIBIT A: A PLACE IN THE SUN (2010) BY BRETT BAILEY

Bailey establishes a strong emotional relationship between the installation and the viewer. Exhibit A was first shown in Europe in 2010 and received very critical reviews as he used live actors. To fully understand Bailey's intention, it is important to place the work in a historical and political context and the colonization of South West Africa by Germany during the early 20th Century. Whilst the names of Hitler's concentration camps such as Auschwitz, Dachau and countless others are associated with the Nazi holocaust almost hidden from European history is the period of systematic extermination of the Herero and Nama people at the beginning of the 20th Century in German South West Africa, now Namibia.

The extermination was instigated by the order of the German General Staff and the Kaiser. Once established in South West Africa, the Germans sought to gain space and wealth for their kind of 'civilisation' and thus began, strongly driven by ideologies and racial classifications, to eradicate what they called – 'sub-human species', (Lindqvist, S. 1992). Furthermore, from the 19th Century until the Second World War, Europeans displayed people who did not fit the 'Master-Race' profile in human zoos in order to demonstrate their inferiority and reinforce how 'they' did not fit the 'perfect' species that existed in the West.

The installation Exhibit A: A Place in The Sun is based on a photograph from the estate of Hermann Schlüter held by the Braunschweigisches Landesmuseum . A woman (played by Mathilda Joseph) sits with her fleshy, naked back to us chained to a bedpost in the "quarters of an officer of the German Colonial Forces, Windhoek, 1906." (Meersman, B. 2010).





ILLUSTRATION: HOLMES, R. 2007

SAARTJIE BAARTMAN

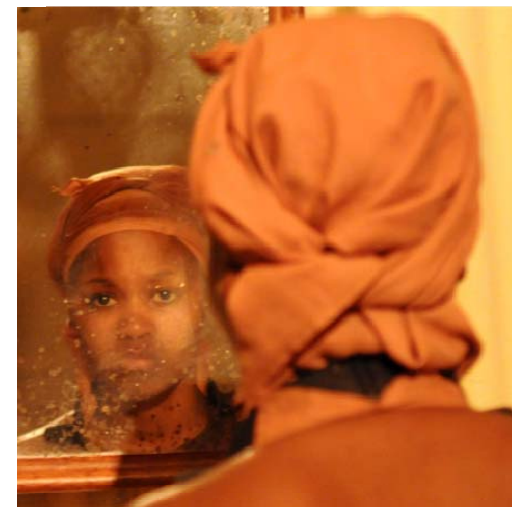
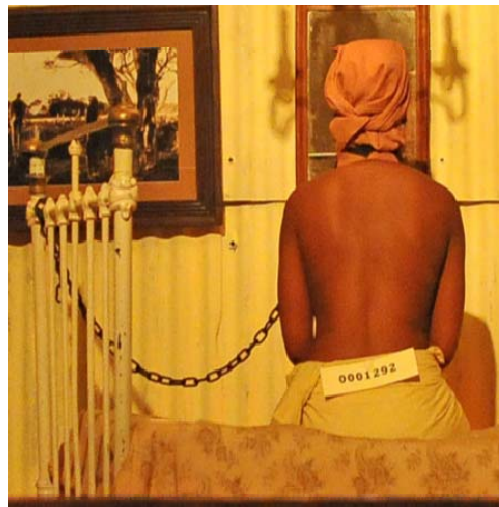
One such example of a ‘human zoo’ is the famous case of a San woman named Saartjie Baartman who was advertised as the ‘Hottentot Venus’. She was brought over to Europe in 1810 and was paraded in a cage in Piccadilly Circus and later on in Paris to excited onlookers who wanted to see her gigantic buttocks and genitalia. “Saartjie Baartman was subjected to dehumanising treatment by Victorian Britain, she was made to dance and sing semi-naked for the audience who were encouraged to touch her shapely bottom,” (Holmes, R. 2007).

Scientists during this period believed that investigating physical differences between Europeans and the so-called ‘savages’, they could conclude that these two groups could not be part of the same species. Charles Darwin’s writings ‘The Origin of Species’ (1859) and ‘The Descent of Man’ (1871) were used by these scientists to further support their theories. They found justification for the extermination of these people, (Lindquist. S. 1992).

However, Darwin assumed that all humans are from the same species but predicted in his book The Descent of Man that at some future point – “the ‘civilized races of mankind’ will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races throughout the world,” (Darwin, C. 1871).

Bailey combines extreme elements of two atrocities in his installation, entitled Exhibit A: A Place in The Sun. In order to recreate a Victorian type human zoo Bailey used the techniques of installation as the most appropriate medium. He used a live black actor to confront the viewer in a scene that depicts the treatment experienced by her ancestors under the German colonial rule in South West Africa.

Muted fleshy tones and live 'exhibits' becomes a key factor in Exhibit A: A Place in The Sun thus forcing the viewer to think about their own experiences with racism. In a sense Bailey is attempting to give his viewers a history lesson as in his opinion "there is still a lot of prejudice in the Western mind," (Kehe, J. 2012).



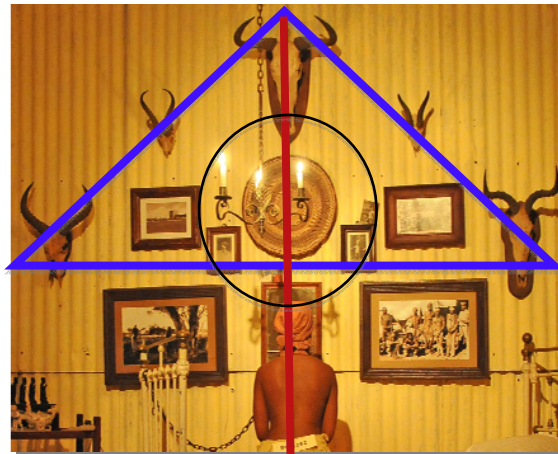
The chained woman with her back to us watches us in a mirror. What is held up to us is not our reflection but the way the 'other' sees us while she sits there wearing a neck iron chaining her to the bedpost with an exhibition serial number attached to her lower back. Is she an artist's muse offering us a gaze?

A caption for the exhibit states: "I have seen women and children with my own eyes dying of starvation and overwork, nothing but skin and bone, getting flogged every time they fell under their heavy loads. I have never heard one cry, even when their flesh was being cut to pieces with the whip. All feeling seemed to have gone out of them." (Cape Argus, September 28 1905).



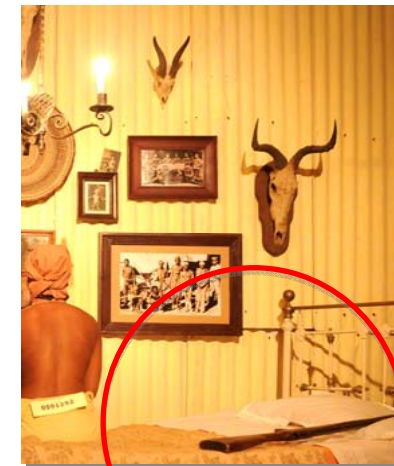
Our only eye contact with the woman is through a mirror; is she ashamed to look at us directly? The two photographs above the mirror may be the officer's wife back in Germany. Some men in colonial Africa led two lives. The viewer only sees her through the officer's eyes, as an object. Many Renaissance artists used geometric formats in their compositions. Bailey has constructed an installation that

reveals a bilateral line of symmetry. A circle and an isosceles triangle rise above the woman's head when viewed directly from the front. Does Bailey want us to make associations with the Holy Trinity, perhaps a reference to the strong Christian belief of the German officer? Often the atrocities that were committed by Europeans in colonies were in the name of God and for 'King and Country'. The woman sits in a central



position below the largest trophy on the wall; is she also a trophy? Was she also captured like the animal? The museum serial number at the base of her spine further confirms she is an object to be viewed in a museum. The bilateral

symmetry implies the structured life of the officer; perhaps in contrast alluding to the chaos created by colonialism. The woman is helpless, sitting chained by her neck to the bedpost, a sexual object for the officer, in his room, with all his objects; a part of his collection. Bailey wants us to question the role of the rifle on the bed that creates a right angle to the woman: it is within reach, why does she not pick it up and use it to free herself?



Bailey initially developed the ideas for his Exhibit A series through a recognition of parallels between the human zoos of the 19th Century and his own work as a Director who tours a great deal in Europe using a black cast. Bailey explained, “My work might be provocative and challenges European audiences to think about certain issues, but I’m still a white guy taking black artists across to entertain white people” (Smith, T. 2012). The promoters of the human zoos in the West offered their audiences a gaze into such a new world ‘fabulous myths and traveller’s tall tales about wild Africa to emphasise their strangeness, (Holmes, R. 2007). Exhibit A: A place in The Sun shows how black women were often objects of desire for European men; they were the exotic ‘other’. They often became victims of ownership and sexual abuse by men in power during colonial periods, enslaved with often very little opportunity of escape.



It is ironic that Bailey places the rifle within reach of the woman. Perhaps he wants us to question whether her enslavement probably meant freedom from starvation and that she would be less free if she were to use it to free herself. Thus Bailey aims to create an emotional relationship between the installation and the viewer. He believes creating the exhibition was a way of coping with the past to explore what he was fed, his ancestors were fed in order to perpetuate the myth that one is better than the other, (Kehe, J. 2012).

According to Bailey, the series of works in Exhibit A is not a clear narrative but something that explores issues rather than telling a story. Some of the works transport you back in time enabling you to experience a moment in our colonial past on a very emotional level; it is Europe’s history through Africa, (Smith, T. 2012).

CRITICAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE MAN WHO SANG AND THE WOMAN WHO KEPT SILENT (TRIPTYCH) 1998 BY JUDITH MASON



The Man Who Sang and The Woman Who Kept Silent (Triptych) (1998) was inspired by two stories Judith Mason heard on the radio at the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings. They told of the execution of two liberation movement cadres by the security police. One was Herald Sefola, who as Mason relates, "asked permission to sing *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica* before he was shot; the other Phila Ndwandwe, "who was tortured and kept naked for ten days and then assassinated in a kneeling position", (Mason, J. 2004).

Mason created *The Man Who Sang* and *The Woman Who Kept Silent* to commemorate the courage of Phila Ndwandwe and Harald Sefola whose deaths during the Apartheid struggle



period were described to the TRC by their killers. The TRC was established with Archbishop Desmond Tutu as the chair, to uncover the truth about

THE MAN WHO SANG AND THE WOMAN WHO KEPT SILENT (TRIPTYCH), 1995

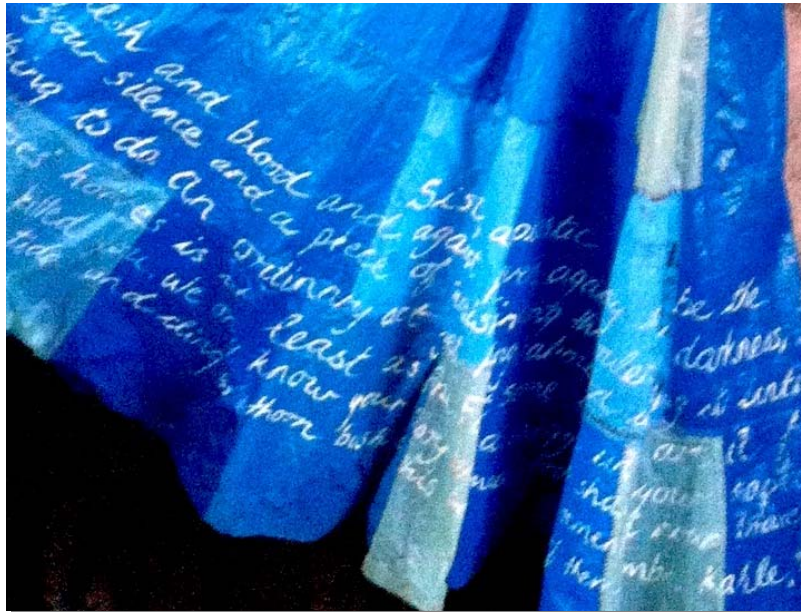
(1) SCULPTURE (DRESS) 200 X 70 X 45CM OIL ON CANVAS, (2) 166 X 122CM (3) OIL ON CANVAS 190 X 160CM.

PHOTOS & COLLECTION: THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

the atrocities committed during the dark days of Apartheid in South Africa. The killers were given a chance to make their submissions to the TRC and then come forward to reveal the truth; often families of the deceased wanted to know what happened to the body of their relatives. Some families were able to give the deceased a decent burial; one mother whose son's hands were cut off wanted to know where the parts were. When the severed hands were found, she said, 'Now my son is whole again', (TRC, online. 1998).



Furthermore, the TRC was conceptualised by Mandela and other leaders whilst they were still on Robben Island; they believed that setting up such a commission would prevent Nuremberg type trials in the post-Apartheid period. The woman who kept silent, - Phila Ndwandwe, was shot by the security police after being kept naked for ten days in an attempt to make her inform on her comrades. She preserved her dignity by making panties out of a blue plastic bag. When she was exhumed, the garment was found wrapped around her pelvis.



“She simply would not talk”, one of the policemen involved in her death testified. “God ...she was brave,” (TRC, online. 1998).

Mason recalled how she wept when she heard the story of Phila Ndwandwe and said to herself “I wish I could make you a dress.” Acting on this childlike response, she collected discarded blue plastic bags that she sewed into a dress. On its skirt Mason wrote an apology to Phila Ndwandwe.

Sister, a plastic bag may not be the whole armour of God, but you were wrestling with flesh and blood, and against powers, against the rulers of darkness, against spiritual wickedness in sordid places. Your weapons were your silence and a piece of rubbish. Finding that bag and wearing it until you were disinterred is such a frugal, commonsensical, house-wifely thing to do, an ordinary act... At some level you shamed your captors, and they did not compound their abuse of you by stripping you a second time. Yet they killed you. We only know your story because a sniggering man remembered how brave you were. Memorials to your courage are everywhere; they blow about in the streets and drift on the tide and cling in thorn-bushes. This dress is made from some of them. *Hamba kahl e, Umkhonto.*

“The dress, swinging on its hanger in the breeze, reminded me of the drapery on the Winged Victory of



WINGED VICTORY OF SAMOTHRACE (CIRCA 220-185 BC)
MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

Samothrace in the Louvre. So I painted a local Victory figure moving through imprisoning grids of wire accompanied by a hyena – a predator and a scavenger in a sense to represent the state butchers who were responsible for the deaths of countless others as well as Phila Ndwandwe and Herald Sefola,” (Mason, J. 2004). Phila Ndwandwe’s body was never found until one of the officers that killed her led the family to the grave

after being granted amnesty by the TRC. The officer only remembered her because of her courage. He said, “No matter what they did to her she never told them anything. She never gave them any information or gave up anyone. She died being loyal to the ANC and gave up her life for the cause,” (Mason, J. 2004).

Mason's dress with text forms the centerpiece of the triptych, flanked on either side by a painting in which the blue dress hangs suspended. In one of them, a predator, clearly representing "the rulers of darkness",



and partially held back by a honeycomb-like grid, is seen with a piece of the dress in its mouth.

The man who sang, - Herald Sefola, was electrocuted together with two comrades. While waiting to die he requested permission to sing *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* the banned hymn of the ANC. His killer recalled, "He was a very brave man who believed strongly in what he was doing," (TRC, 1995, online). In the painting dedicated to Herald Sefola the predator is also depicted, this time without the piece of dress in its mouth, and again caught in the honeycomb-like grid. Mason has used almost an equal combination of



cold and hot colours. The bottom third of the composition radiates heat and light from the three braziers that are aglow. Placed in a



curve, three to represent the dead men, the light from the braziers illuminates the floating blue dress on the right. The predator is ever present in the centre but somewhat diffused. The honeycomb grid shields the viewer from the objects and creates a distance. The floating mug may be a reference to the last drink Herald Sefola may have been granted. The upper two-thirds of the painting is dominated by a deep brilliant blue sky, perhaps an indication of an end to the day as well as an end to the dark period in South African history. Justice Albie Sachs, looking for appropriate pieces for the "brilliantly designed new Constitutional Court building" saw

the first painting and said to Mason, "Judith, it is so hard to put this in the Court. It will make people deeply depressed and distressed... make it just a little softer, a little more reconciled," (Sachs, A. 2004). Mason made a third painting, this time without the piece of dress in the predator's mouth but extended by a mug and three braziers aglow; the triptych was completed.



When Justice Sachs saw the painting Mason had completed, he felt "a warm glow, the sense of reconciliation, of coming to terms with the terrible pain of the past. The predator trapped in the fence, keeping it at bay, the dress soaring." But, says Sachs, it was "too soft . . . too kind . . . too reconciled." What Mason and Sachs agreed upon was to combine the dress and the two paintings, so that it formed a composite work. "They belonged together," says Sachs. "There is a story in the visual objects themselves, in the way she produced them." [?] Sachs considers *The Man Who Sang* and *The Woman Who Kept Silent* to be "one of the great pieces of art in the world of the late 20th century, that emerged out of our artistic imagination, our social experience, our sensibility," (Sachs, A. 2009).



CONSTITUTION COURT OF SOUTH AFRICA, JOHANNESBURG.

PHOTO: Courtesy of fromagie - flickr

Mason's triptych is exhibited in the South African Constitutional Court in Johannesburg where hundreds of visitors have access to see a collection of art that mirrors the Apartheid history of South Africa. *The Man Who Sang* and *The Woman Who Kept Silent* is a reminder of the crimes of Apartheid and the violation of human rights. They also remind us that not all victims of Apartheid were found through the TRC; some families continue to wait in vain. Justice Sachs used a blue dress image for the cover of his book about cases that really moved him and made him cry.



INTERIOR OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT. JOHANNESBURG

PHOTO FROM: <http://www.joburg.org.za>

COMPARISON BETWEEN EXHIBIT A: A PLACE IN THE SUN BY BRETT BAILEY (2010) & THE MAN WHO SANG AND THE WOMAN WHO KEPT SILENT BY JUDITH MASON (1998)

EXHIBIT A: A PLACE IN THE SUN BY BRETT BAILEY (2010)

Bailey used the technique of installation to depict a concept of the 19th Century type 'human zoo'. He used live actors to inhabit the installations. A Place in The Sun was part of Exhibit A series that dealt with addressing post-colonial questions dealing with the treatment of black people in Africa. Bailey aimed to change perceptions, to take the viewers out of their comfort zone and to communicate his concerns about the treatment of black people in colonial Africa on an emotional level.

For Exhibit A: A Place in the Sun he chose Namibians who were willing to confront the viewer and share their stories of racism in their daily life. Bailey employed a unique approach to communicate history through the technique of installations and most visitors were profoundly affected by the experience of seeing a Brett Bailey installation, (Meersman, B. 2010).

SOME COMMON ELEMENTS

Both Bailey and Mason strive to achieve an emotional response and a historical awareness from the viewer. Both are critical of systems of injustice.

Bailey emphasised that colonial powers should be blamed and not the viewer personally. "It is not a clear narrative, it's something that explores issues rather than telling a story. Some of the works take you back in time and let you experience a moment in our colonial past on a very emotional level," (Smith, T. 2012).

Both Bailey and Mason used conceptual methods to communicate. Bailey used more 'ready mades' to create his interior and Mason fashioned a garment from blue plastic bags to depict a metaphor. Therefore, Mason's work also elicits a combination of emotional response and a historical awareness of the Apartheid era. Through the triptych, we are made aware of the dark days of Apartheid and the courage of the tortured victims. Mason concluded, " Having the opportunity to honour The Man Who Sang and The Woman Who Kept Silent has been a privilege, but it leaves me with an abiding sense of shame." (Mason, J. 2009).

THE MAN WHO SANG AND THE WOMAN WHO KEPT SILENT BY JUDITH MASON (1998)

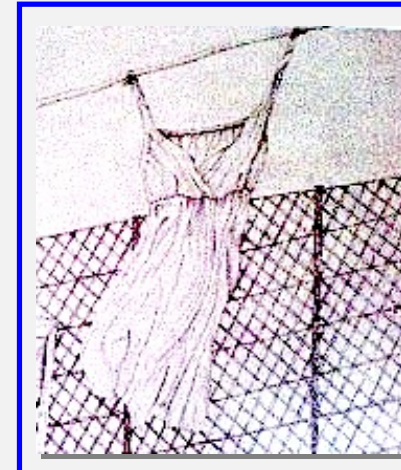
Mason created a three-dimensional object using blue plastic bags. The blue dress is made as an offering to Phila Ndwandwe who was left naked after being tortured. Mason used the surface of the plastic dress to write an apology to the dead activist. The other two pieces that form the triptych are paintings that are directly related to the dress and once again Mason used metaphors to compose the narratives of The Man Who Sang and The Woman who Kept Silent; both pieces include an image of the floating blue dress on the right hand side. Perhaps Mason wants us to will the dress to float out of the composition; perhaps in future there won't be another dark period in the history of South Africa. For the present it is a timely reminder of the past as the works are exhibited in the Constitutional Court of South Africa that upholds the 'new' constitution of a democratic system of governance.

STUDENT ARTIST

USING JUDITH MASON'S BLUE DRESS FOR INSPIRATION

The South African artist Judith Mason inspired my series of drawings. Mason's blue dress shows the unseen presence of a person and not only reveals the atrocities committed during Apartheid in South Africa, it also resonates hope. As a young South African I am becoming more aware of the history of my country, particularly through the works of South African artists such as Judith Mason and more recently Candice Breitz. Mason made the blue dress as an apology to Phila Ndwandwe, an activist who was tortured, left naked for 10 days and then killed. She made herself a pair of panties using a blue plastic bag to maintain her dignity and when her body was discovered this is all she was wearing. Mason was very moved by this story and I too found that I was deeply affected. I also found it difficult to comprehend that such atrocities took place in South Africa. The story shows courage and strength of the human spirit and the blue dress is a timely reminder to the young people such as myself of the dark history of South Africa.

I began my experiments by hanging my own blue dress on a washing line in the garden and made studies using pencil, black pen and watercolours. At first I wanted to capture the shape of the dress against a stark backdrop, to depict the presence of a person using the blue dress. I made several sketches and even tried to show the dress in front of a metal fence in contrast to Mason's painting, she had placed the blue dress behind the fence in one of her paintings that forms the triptych.



Experimenting with pencil, black pen and watercolours.



I used watercolours to try and introduce a subtle blue for the dress. I realised that although the blue began to really define the influence of Mason's blue dress; I needed to return to this subject matter at a later stage and make a larger drawing.

STUDENT ARTIST

EXPERIMENTING WITH BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY USING MY BLUE DRESS

We had a project using black and white film and SLR camera to take photos and to develop and print them in the darkroom. I chose to use my blue dress. Once again I used my blue dress to see if I could achieve different effects, this time using photographs. I also wanted to make a social comment by showing the emptiness of the space surrounding the dress but at the same time allude to the presence of a person.

Experimenting with a digital camera

I hung up my blue dress in the garden to capture some images, initially in colour using a digital camera to practice. I took some shots of the dress wrapped around a branch of a tree to show the contrasting textures of fabric and the ruggedness of the bark.



I realised that I preferred the effects of the dress draped on the branch as it successfully revealed contrasting textures and made the dress appear more as a shape against the branches.

Process: The film was unloaded in a dark bag and placed into a container. Next the developer and water were poured in for a set time, dependent on the temperature of the liquid. The film was agitated every minute. The developer was poured out and the film was rinsed in running water.

A test strip was made to determine the exposure time.



I am very pleased with my first print using these specifications:
F – 50mm, Enl – 4, Exp – 4.5 secs.



STUDENT ARTIST



TITLE: BLUE DRESS #1
MEDIUM: PENCIL
SIZE: 102 x 76 cm
JULY 2012

Over a year after completing my large pencil drawing entitled **Blue Dress #1** based on Mason's blue dress, I decided to make an oil painting. **Blue dress #2** is a continuation in the series of blue dresses. I wanted to include more details and to continue the story by

BLUE DRESS #2

adding more dimension to the series. My starting point was a photograph of a friend wearing the blue dress not revealing her identity but making the dress the main focus of the composition. Like Mason I wanted to represent the blue dress as an act of heroism.

Symbolism of the lily

In some cultures white lilies are associated with deaths and are often placed on graves. White also represents purity of the soul and eternal life. Sometimes people place lilies on graves of people wrongly executed, (online, 2013). In my painting I decided not to give the lily too much detail because the dress was still the focus. I depicted the lily piercing the dress to represent the symbol of unjust death, taking hold of the dress, the symbol of heroism. This painting concludes the series of the blue dress and shows that although Phila Ndwandwe was subjected to an unjust death; Mason has ensured that her story will be remembered. I want my lily to represent an inner peace for Phila Ndwandwe.



TITLE: BLUE DRESS #2
MEDIUM: OIL PAINT
SIZE: 110 x 50 cm
AUGUST 2013



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