

Martin Stevens 1-2

Interviewer: This is an interview with Martin Stevens in Cape Town at his office, the date is 26 March 2008, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Martin thanks for your time a lot. I have questions but they are not structured, and then we will just keep on talking. Can you just give me a background of where you were born and how you eventually became an artist, was it a natural born talent or someone taught you, how did it happen?

Interviewee: I was born here in Cape Town, I normally tell people I'm born under the slopes of Table Mountain. I think I was .., I don't like this thing natural talent but you know I've been drawing since I was a child, from primary school and when I went to high school I took art as a Matric subject as well, it was fortunate that the school I went to had art as a Matric subject. When I finished school I wanted to get to kind of an art college, then the Ruth Prowse in school here in Woodstock, by then it was segregated. We couldn't attend like full time classes, it was like a facility for part time classes

Interviewer: was it white?

Interviewee: ja, predominantly white and UCT was too expensive for me and also there you had to have a special permit from the Education Department. Well then, I did some work in sign writing and became a sign writer you know, a qualified sign writer. And then after about eight years or so I travelled around the country. So I was in Jo'burg for a while, and then I came back and then I enrolled at a Technikon

Interviewer: when were you in Jo'burg in particular?

Interviewee: say from 1974 to 1980, ja about six years

Interviewer: were you in the company of artists or were you doing something else?

Interviewee: well I met people but it's such a long time ago, I met people at the Katlehong centre, there was interactions but not much, I lived the other side and it was difficult to get there because of this whole thing of needing a permit to get into the township all the time. But I did connect with a group, they called themselves The Lot, there were not really artists but the very sort of ..(unclear) people, musicians, mostly Wits people. I just found that kind of company stimulating. So I mixed a lot with them in terms of stimulating my own interest as well you know. Ja and then I came back to Cape Town, three years national diploma course in graphic design which I felt was a waste of time because the stuff I learnt during my apprenticeship was basically the same stuff. I was pretty much advanced. By then computers were not really that common so everything was done by hand and so on. When I finished there I joined CAP, formerly as a person that would work there, as an employee. I was teaching print making, silk screen printing and lino cuts – I was teaching evening classes and drawing for beginners. Those are the areas I worked – worked with Lionel there, I worked with Dries de Villiers, I worked with Gaby Shamonade. I was an instructor for quite a while, for many reasons, mostly for economic reasons – you had at least some money, but during the processes (phone rang) – then I worked with CAP and started getting involved in a sense almost restructuring and new developments within CAP let's say from 1986 onwards

Interviewer: what kind of changes?

Interviewee: CAP was a very sort of open ended kind of organisation, right from the beginning we could come, it was sort of the only place around that we could come to and be able to express ourselves in terms of music, arts, sculptures, etc. And that was then in Mulberry and then they moved to Woodstock, Tshepo street and then it became more structured, more of a membership organisation, structuring itself around sort of ..(unclear) areas like having management committees and having more structured programmes in terms of let's say there's sort of like a curriculum being drawn up, but still very loose, and during that time also you started full time class with a national scope. People from Namibia, Northern Cape, Kwazulu Natal, Eastern Cape

and part of the Western Cape came there .., a lot of people came through CAP. A lot of the sort of, some of the established artists, a lot came through CAP.

Interviewer: what made CAP to tick?

Interviewee: there was this need you know, the exact years around 1976, 1977, just after the Soweto uprising, students from McCailus, UCT Arts school, John Burn, I think Gavin Young, the sculptor, they saw that there's a need, there is no real facilities in townships to practice art, they felt that practicing art was very isolated, like the Peter Clark and James Matthews as a writer, so once this ..(unclear) and people want to see their work, they would come to town and visit a gallery – a ..(unclear) to black people. So yes because there was a profound need, a very pertinent need, one could just .., reflecting back I can see we really enjoyed that space. Also there was the kind of space to interact with other artists, that we probably have never met across cultural .., it was great. I think that was good. So the courses were developed around those needs and yes there is really a need, not only in Western Cape but nationally and hence full time courses were structured. I was part of the .., sort of a facilitator eventually I ended up with a rural programme which was more the producing media, community media. And then I was with CAP until the project, CAP, media project divorced itself from the CAP arts project and became an autonomous body and it became media works. I used to work at media works until they merged back after ten years. They merged back with CAP arts project. So it was essentially then just visual arts, theatre and dance. I don't know if you heard they became AMAC, Arts Media Access Centre, they dissolved at the end of last year. I've been trying to catch up pieces in the beginning of this year but I would say officially ..(unclear). So it's quite sad. Those is the time when one had to be very critical about it when you look at the Department of Arts and Culture, CAP had a history with Arts and Culture department. Not to have been able to help the project later, it was well ..(unclear), there was no mismanagement of funds as far as I know. I mean there's probably just one, I don't know the ones up in Jo'burg like FUBA and those ones, it sort of started similarly ..(unclear). Those are those kinds of

things that one needs to probably highlight you know, why such organisations have to die ..(unclear) from a personal point in terms of management and mismanagement and bad management, I mean we were always critical about CAP in terms of who we appointed as directors and so on. It was sometimes people that art was never part of their lives, ..(unclear) – so it was sometimes really frustrating, ..(unclear) and I work there and people were talking about the black caucus – within the organisation. You know what that means

Interviewer: what was the black caucus?

Interviewee: It was us coming together, we could really talk but we couldn't really express ourselves in the open

Interviewer: why, was it a black and white world?

Interviewee: ja, it became that eventually

Interviewer: what caused that division?

Interviewee: I think suspicion and white were treated eventually after .., I think the whole restructuring also affected the artists because they were very used to the openness of just streaming in, doing our things and then standing up, but once it became restructured it was very ..(unclear) you were ..(unclear) that kind of thing. That was a debate as well in terms of how do one keep their spirit alive, within structure and since then people like David ..(unclear) started divorcing from CAP even the Holo brothers also left. Other guys who stuck around were sort of .., I wouldn't say younger artists but ..(unclear) David, and Robert, Zwelethemba in Woerster, Sophie ..(unclear) who was also young, they were young sort of students, they really did some great work in that period, I think in the early 1990s – Henri ..(unclear)

Interviewer: but this division, did you guys feel that whites were dominating the place or they over controlled the place?

Interviewee: I think they were controlling and also that the whole sense of superiority in terms of they probably at that point graduates from universities and so on, they were just like the ..(unclear) – very subtle and I suppose, I won't say we were over sensitive but we picked that up. I mean there's a lot of debates and I mean in 1989/90, that time where the whole thing of the black consciousness or whatever sort of – as ..(unclear) vs UDF, that kind of thing, that kind of tension was also there. It was in the media project that I worked at .., I was sometimes approached by COSATU and they told me you can't work with AZAPO people and so on. Nothing was going on, that's this project is here. Those kinds of tendencies that crept in to the point that at one stage we engaged into a debate and the aligned or non aligned kind of thing. Eventually everybody agreed, the organisation stayed non aligned as opposed to being opened like an ANC project. So there was a lot of those kinds of things going on under handed stuff, which affected people working there and people coming to use the place. Not so much so .., there was art classes for kids, not so much for them, there was also young adults and so on, they were affected by it

Interviewer: what was it, was it an ANC project, I mean looking at these banners and posters ..?

Interviewee: predominantly the people that were there were aligned to the ANC, you know the kind of .., the tendencies was definitely sort ..(unclear) aligned in terms of the UDF, you know Patricia, Gaby, John he sort of takes his position from sort of far left Communist ..(unclear) but I think also in the end he aligned himself with the ANC. There were very few of us that had sympathy towards the sort of AZAPO and PAC. I would say they were very much aligned to ANC politics then. Even this whole idea of art as a site of struggle, 1982 in Gaborone, they came back from there and initiated this media project. That's where the media project started as a facility to print t-shirts, make banners, posters for so many civil society, NGO's that were battling with the situation, anything ranging from health issues, employment, housing, union issues and so on, and educational issues, a lot of stuff was around, a lot

of the struggle was around educational issues at school and varsities and colleges.

Interviewer: ja before then, if you say that this kind of material was inspired by .., I don't know whether I am wrong, by that 1982 conference, that is what you are saying, what did CAP produce before then?

Interviewee: there was this open house in terms of art space, music, drama, this movement theatre kind of thing and visual arts, print making, ceramics. After that conference we started with the media project, one class then ..(unclear)

Interviewer: but then there's material on UDF and so on, and the ANC and so on, why did you not have material on the PAC or AZAPO?

Interviewee: I think there's one of Biko, something that I did, there's ..

Interviewer: but Biko died before the formation of AZAPO?

Interviewee: ja but I mean the commemoration of ...

Interviewer: okay I see

Interviewee: I think I have one here – it's funny I don't see it here (he looked for it), what is his name, Donovan Ward, this is his design – there were no computers at the time we were cutting stencils

Interviewer: but producing such work was this not going to land you in trouble as CAP?

Interviewee: from time to time we were harassed you know and most of the sort of work that we felt would .., how can I put it, we travelled to our door during the night, late after hours, but there was an attempt to set the place alight – in Chapel street, the print room and we moved from Chapel street,

media project to Community house .., the house was renovated, civil society organisations like the labour, union library, ...(unclear) children's resource centre, research projects, advice offices and of course we had a space here for the media project. And in the week that we moved in, the place was bombed, the security forces it, there wasn't much damage to the structure of the place but a few things were damaged. And there was also personal harassment, you would get phone calls, and people telling you all sorts of crap over the phone about your family and about yourself, intimidation.

Interviewer: if you say the stuff was produced at night ..?

Interviewee: some of them.

Interviewer: why not during the day, what do you guys do during the day?

Interviewee: during the day we had workshops, a school, a church group, a women's group, youth group would come in and facilitate, take them through the process for a concert, in preparation they printing off they go with their stuff, we keep the top copy. But there were times people would come maybe there's a march the next morning or a meeting and they need literature for it, they would come at night and those are the kinds of literature that would .., I mean it doesn't make sense to work there and get caught with it. So by the next morning people in the stations, the taxi ranks, bus terminuses, the stuff was up and you know it is circulated, those kind of .., through hit and run tactics

Interviewer: but was the stuff printed with the knowledge of the authorities, the jobs that was printed at night?

Interviewee: probably eventually, I mean they had spies all over, they eventually found out that CAP media project was printing a lot of the posters and the banners and flyers and stuff

Interviewer: but was the officials of CAP aware of this?

Interviewee: yes

Interviewer: but was it formally sanctioned?

Interviewee: it was something we didn't really talk about – this was a hand book (showing you a book) restructuring the project, just to teach people basic skills around printing, preparing and concept development, this is development, this is development, those kinds of stuff.

Interviewer: but you yourself, what was medium, and what was your focus in terms of art?

Interviewee: today still is print making, I had a great love for etching but unfortunately I've never done an etching press, so the circumstances have stopped etching, I would love to do it again, wood cuts and lino cuts and acrylics and oils. That's sort of the area I love working in. And of course drawing, I love drawing as well. (someone came in). That's an intern.

Interviewer: anyway, did you produce the kind ..(unclear) material yourself or it depended on ..?

Interviewee: as I said the .., a lot of organisations would come with a request and that would be ..(unclear) and we will take them through the process, to the point where they design and cut and do everything but we would just facilitate the process. We would prepare stuff for sort of the event, like a commemorative days of the struggle like May Day for instance, Sharpeville Day, Human Rights Day, June 16, days like, we would produce t-shirts and posters and take them to rallies and so on – income generating projects and so on.

Interviewer: but was there a time when management felt that we need to block you guys from producing this kind of material?

Interviewee: look Brown I think there was a ..(unclear) because we were in the Chapel 3 building, so we were together with the visual arts and drama and theatre but the day we left that building and moved to Salt River, about 3 kilometres, it was almost like a separation and tensions did begin to develop in terms of people at Tshepo street and with us down there because of the kind of stuff we were doing. Not that they were against it but it was more .., for me the strangest thing was that they couldn't combine or integrate art and media – it's almost a natural integration in terms of production, not so much concepts and those kinds of things. That has caused a lot of tension between individuals in the different projects, so it was quite sad to listen to them argue, in terms of that and that eventually led to the CAP media project, media works as a new entity.

Interviewer: okay, you also talked about the fact that at some point in time, Albie Sacks said you should stop producing works, what was the issue?

Interviewee: you see there was this cultural boycott during that time through SACOS??? And the small bodies, saying there's no normal ..(unclear) in an abnormal society, which was very much also in terms of art and a lot of imagery that came out .., like the ..(unclear), caspers, police with batons and guns, and police dogs, those kinds of imagery and when the ANC started negotiating, the CODESA and these kinds of talks were invented about and what I noticed during that time was the so-called liberals, whites from the university they were very isolated in these processes, that in terms of the production of art, and through turns around??< things like township art and so on, they derogatoritevely and I don't think that came overnight. Uncle Sacks found this debate was thrown open and I think Albie Sacks and was it a Sisulu .., they had

End of Side A

Side B Cassette no 1

Interviewee: contd - very fine but this is my understanding, my take on it. But I know this debate was with sort of initiated by him. Especially when I thought ..(unclear) remember when you were coming down here and we were talking about it, like the struggle is over and it should have more positive feeling, a street with flowers and things .., I mean very flippantly, I mean he was that type of person and we were saying "no man, the struggle is not over" – everyone looked at the kind of things that go on now in terms of the people that are ..(unclear) and demonstrations and marching, all sorts of things then that imagery just ..(unclear). There's still that repression and oppression, irrespective of whether you have political rights and all that. Things are very much the same in that regard.

Interviewer: so when did this thing come out, when was it exactly?

Interviewee: I don't want to guess, but I think it's prior to the CODESA thing where the ANC said, and I think it's 1991 around there – it's round about that time is where ..(unclear) came up, because now people were sensing the country is going to change, the ..(unclear) those kinds of things. I mean even the kind of funding directives from countries like you know Norway, Sweden, Holand and so on were saying things like, you've had your struggle now, now it is time to develop in terms of the kind of work that we were doing around the media and stuff and for me that was also very much connected to this whole ..(pause)

Interviewer: now was art at that time, was it a man's thing?

Interviewee: predominantly men were more visible but there was like, at CAP there was like Sophie Peters, she was quite strong in the ..(unclear) – you know there's books that relate to the work that they did, specifically that group. I don't know where's Eunice now, our CD was here – they are the only two that I can remember during that period. But in terms of the sort of open classes, a lot of women came and there was a lot of sort of the liberal white people, more and more of then sort of ..(unclear) they wanted to rub off, to get some of the talents that ..(unclear) and the work that was in a sense their

approach. I mean I sound very silly for that ..(unclear). I think also .., more so from the university side, like the whole advent of feminism sort of brought into the gender perspective and people got so clouded and say it's a woman's thing and it's both male and female. So there was those kinds of debates. In the CAP management, Chris ..(unclear) around commemorative days, June 16, May Day and for some of us ..(unclear). This series is the (he is showing you something) – Gaby, had a very strong influence on the gender and pushing the gender agenda, liberal agenda

Interviewer: and in terms of the market at that time, I mean as individual artists did you have a market to sell your works, or to exhibit your works?

Interviewee: Well had sort of annual exhibitions here at CAP, you know for people that worked for CAP and students .., ..(unclear) was a good rally point in terms of art appreciation, inviting people and it became quite known and well attended, that people would come and attend these exhibitions – obviously through that a lot of students got exposure and openings to UCT and I think CAP had a strong influence eventually on UCT and McCallis through people like Gavin Young and so on, to open its doors for CAP .., would access as a bridge for people to enter at university level as well. Yes quite a few people eventually ended up at UCT and went on. Others through maybe contacts and networking at these events, normally we would have Open Days, we would have annual exhibitions, those were the kind of days or events where works was marketed so to speak. We didn't have a strong marketing field, CAP and I think one have to now sort of look back, it is probably one of the reasons why the project has failed, because of not having strong marketing strategy in place. That is more or less how our work was marketed. And of course individual artists building their own networks and people like Tyran .., fairly well I mean ..(unclear) – I admire him for that, I think David worked for an architectural firm, Makatiah he is still working, people like Luthando Lufuwana, I think he is one of the best etchers in the country, those kind of things that really bugs you, why would a person with that ability to develop etching works and not being able to develop further. That kind of thing, but he is a graduate of UCT, and I mean ever since he has

never really worked for anybody and so it's just strange things when you start thinking about it, you wonder why these things are happening.

Interviewer: but was it ever easy to exhibit in white galleries as black artists?

Interviewee: no I don't think that was easy, it was only after this whole .., after 1994, or just prior to 1994 where there were sort of movement in a sense of forming National Arts blah blah blah, I don't know what these things were called. I can remember a lot of conferences were held around these kind of things where the same thing for me in terms of the whites getting back to power in terms of the art world and eventually you know got it back. Galleries were sort of transformed from the sort of institutional .., government bodies, if you saw a few black faces then it's fine on the governing bodies. I know it sounds very critical or cynical about it but for me that is what really happened you know. Some people were singled out and told to come and serve on this body and so, the arts association was one like that. Pronto exhibitions were put together by people saying they are marginalised and meanwhile people like this .., Easy Bailey and Robert Slinskey, it's the people that are millionaires but could say things like they were marginalised within their own country but they could take a plane and take their work to Holland or where ever, those kind of things. One is not blind not to see those things. So there's a lot of those kind of things that went on .., I have now forgotten the question you asked.

Interviewer: but I mean post 1994 what were you expecting as artists from the government perhaps?

Interviewee: personally I would have thought that there was ..(unclear) within this white world of the art world, they had it fairly and squarely organised in a sense that they could develop enabling atmospheres for the artist .., a lot of artists, I tried to forget them but their names are coming back. That they could leave this country, go to Holland and to France and be part of exchange programmes for two three years and work under sort of masters there and come back and then ..., and I thought that would have been ..,

not to replicate it but in terms of you know, the marginalised people, the black artists give them exactly the same chance, the new government – some exchange programmes, I mean our own brothers here in Africa you know, we don't really see their work, except now there's a lot of work clicking down but you don't see the real essence of the work like Nigerians, Ghanaians and so on. For me that would be fantastic if one could have these kind of exchange programmes in this country as well as with Europe and Canada or America. That kind of exchange needs to be built in – or have, not even guilds, but they have schools where people that can afford be trained properly, especially with things like that glaring omissions like marketing for instance, administrating your own business as an artist. It is only now with these learnerships were people have developed the kind of learnership around that. How can we enable or capacitate artists, craft people to be able to market their own businesses etc as artists. All those things needed to be noted already .. – I admit transformation doesn't happen overnight but there was like models in place that were .., the disparity was so great and could it just have been broken up and re-formulated, that kind of thing. Not easy but we know it could have been done. I mean if one look at The Department of Arts and Culture, they are putting their money into film making, which is not a bad thing but it's like probably one tenth of the film makers that are black. Not to say we don't want to make films, we want to make films .., but what about the visual artists, they put a lot of their money into theatre productions. Visual artists for some reason or the other are getting sword in this thing

Interviewer: so there's a sense in which you guys feel neglected as visual artists by the government?

Interviewee: ja I would say so. I mean just for the few people that I've interacted with, there's a similar feeling that we are not really looked after. I mean if one believes art is a vehicle of culture, I think you need to be .., at least be appreciated. Say for instance like pensions for artists, grants for artist, ..(unclear) is very competitive .., it's always been a competitive world. I mean

if I look at .., I read the papers I see there's a call for competition, a sculpture for ..(unclear) I can already say who's going to win it

Interviewer: really?

Interviewee: ja. I have a fair sense of who is going to win it

Interviewer: how do you know, let me talk as if I'm ignorant?

Interviewee: these people have been winning all these years, the same people they have their stuff all over the city and these are like professors at university and so on.

Interviewer: so there's no chance for you as black artists?

Interviewee: there's no chance, you will go through the process but ..(unclear) – just producing things at that scale is difficult because of money and space, that kind of things

Interviewer: and the solution to such problems where should they come from? And what kind of solutions?

Interviewee: well I think that you know, there's been a fair amount of initiatives from concerned artists across the board. So you unify artists, a lot of big players were involved in it, but invariably I think what I have sensed is these people are involved with for their own gain. If I have to get extra mileage after what they do and so on, so these things last for a year and then it falls flat, and you don't know what happened. So people don't attend these meetings anymore, talk shows and so on. The National Gallery has initiated ..(unclear) by artists, I think Visual Arts Association has tried there, NGO's have tried it, CAP has tried it, it fails all the time. Some of it I can't really say what it is but I think there's a fair amount of suspicion that has developed over the years, in terms of how the art world is treating artists. It used to be a great ..(unclear) – this is art appreciation. Otherwise people do

art and ..(unclear) which is not a good thing to say but obviously you want to make some money out of it. ..(unclear) appreciation, I mean a lot of the sort of exhibitions that I've been part of was at school, at libraries, and so on. If you can see the turn out it's not impressive. You look at the schools, there's probably one school here in the Cape peninsula that offers art as a Matric subject. Although in the new curriculum in Grade 10 they have now introduced art and design as a subject. ..(unclear) there were two schools, ..(unclear) at university as a Matric subject, incorporate appreciation needs to be ..(unclear) right from pre-history to the modern one. And of course content and ..(unclear) a range of things like that. But I think the art appreciation part is lacking and more so from an African perspective, there's no European perspective, or the West perspective. Ask me who an artist in Nigeria, I don't know, I can't even pronounce the man's name but ..(unclear) from other countries but there's no(unclear). Actually Jo'burg is much better from other ..(unclear) you can befriend somebody here, and that's it, there is no real interaction or integration in terms of sharing ideas and so on. The other idea I liked was Tukelo??, Lionel Davis and Gill Trapler ..(unclear) is to get artists from across the country like they came here, from the States, what they do is they get a lot of work, ..(unclear) I'm not sure for what reason, ..(unclear) and create space, set up in a work stations and produce over a period of ten days and have an exhibition. So that's what we really need – okay it's forced interaction but at least you work in the same space, you eat together, you talk, you whatever, you pray together, whatever. And that's for me is a more healthy space than to produce work. In a sense improved in ..(unclear) – you can never say you isolated ..(unclear) – now for every influence ..(unclear). That idea, I've always liked to fall on. I've been to one, twice ..(unclear – he murmurs a lot), it was really stimulating. You see with this kind of things, one can encourage across the country.

Interviewer: you said that our people don't necessarily understand or know about art, why is that the case, what about all these years, it has not necessarily clicked in their heads?

Interviewee: I think very much is a West thing, in terms of ..(unclear) craft from art, in terms of the kind of stuff would make in .., Limpopo and those areas and Eastern Cape and so on. They would create stuff, the kind of ..(unclear) they don't see that as art, art effects almost. It's only recently that that debate has also been opened up in terms of the work that craftsman have done to the ..(unclear) seen as art and again is the whole theory around art, for the quorum?? And art for ..(unclear) – you make a pot, that pot is functional you going to drink beer, wash yourself, whatever, as opposed to a pot that has got to stand on the pedestal in somebody's house, as an art piece, that kind of thing. So also in terms of probably ..(unclear) influences in terms of new art. But I would take a place like Cape Town, do you expose to art, there's a lot of art galleries here, white ..(unclear) galleries – so there's a lot of media and .., so your question is, why do people, I think that from school level, you divorce from school level, if it is left out at school level, specifically secondary school level. Apparently schools got this notion of arts and crafts as a game, it's not really opening up the whole art appreciation thing in terms of what this art really ..(unclear) not as a commodity but as a real functional tool. The teachers arrived at the school ..(unclear) to the point of artist, you walked around Cape Town you feel like you could be ..(unclear) somewhere if you look at the architecture of the buildings. Most of the cities ..(unclear)

Interviewer: and the Staff Rider, how did you connect with Staff Rider you guys, some of you appeared there?

Interviewee: because it was circulated and distributed and I think one could contribute towards it in terms of poetry, drawings and ..(unclear), there was that understanding, there was this other group. Bakalisa, Lionel was also part of that, Mario Siko, Gaby Erasmus, Jimmy Matthews, Rashid Lombard, the organiser of the North Sea Jazz Festival, they were all part of that collective. And even there you know I'm sorry to say it was very elitist in the sense that we had to almost beg them to work there, it was so tight, the resources that must be prepared ..(unclear) and opportunities, they can be ..(unclear) but that is how we felt, and the other people felt that way. But eventually they ..(unclear). So that kind of collectives was going around in terms of

distribution and sharing works which was really crazy, those are the kind of things one can resuscitate again in terms of ..(unclear) that's why this ..(unclear) and I really want to .., I've seen the opportunity in this year to start it again

Interviewer: to do it again? But did you go to the 1982 conference in Botswana?

Interviewee: I didn't go

Interviewer: interactions between artists across the country in the 1980s, was that easier or was it possible, or would you just meet at CAP?

Interviewee: basically we in Cape Town were connected to each other because we were all sort of emerging and finding ourselves and sharing ideas, but enough after a while, ..(unclear) Cape Town is a very kind of in group kind of place, you know what I am saying, in the group, the arts group, that whole ..(unclear) existing to a great extend

Interviewer: is it, someone did talk about that, that there's clicks here?

Interviewee: ja and it's happening amongst our brothers too

Interviewer: I know

Interviewee: sometimes they blame the economic situation that we are in, battling to sell work, ..(unclear) I can't take you to my buyer or share my buyer and so on, to a point that I would throw ..(unclear) so many works that's .., people that I've met from overseas ..(unclear) somebody gets married there's a small painting, you suppose to sell every month a piece

Interviewer: it would seem to me that as artist you haven't necessarily made money or making a reasonable living wage out of art?

Interviewee: one or two people have done so, Lionel has retired and he's got a different stature, but I think he has made quite well in terms of his own network ability and being the person that he is, the artwork and ..(unclear) he went into the right circles, he sits on every committee from ..(unclear) those kind of things they may sound flippant but it affects us in terms of our own relationship with each other and in terms of difference and so on. There's a competition or there's something, they are on the selection committee who sent their work in .., is rejected or is not conservative ..(unclear), those kind of things happened. When one thinks about why

End of cassette no 1

Cassette no 2

Interviewer: you were talking about the fact that it is difficult to get your stuff through because people sitting on certain committees have certain influences and so on. But what is the way forward in terms of that? Is it possible to have a ..(unclear) what should anyone do about it, it could be the government, it could be the artists or organisations, or is there nothing that can be done?

Interviewee: I think things can be done about it it's just some of these people just give way from these power ..(unclear) or have more competitions or more ..(unclear) you know where people can really exhibit, I mean to the point where I mean at one stage, specifically ..(unclear) people with degrees in art or so, but to the point that there's a bias in terms of almost academic art versus township art, who makes the value on such material, I always ask myself. I come from Khayelitsha in Mitchell's Plain where I did township art and it is not art, why term it township art, I think for me it just doesn't gel. I mean if I look at people like ..(unclear) and so on, their work is so internally .., so they call it township. This other guy from Cape Town once said to me Willie Bester, you've probably heard of him, he is practically a millionaire today because of art. I don't want to bad mouth these people, but there's various

forces or there are things in play that causes this and those things need to be rectified

Interviewer: but it's things like what exactly?

Interviewee: this kind of power mongering, almost to a point where you can oust other people, some people, closed doors in people's faces because you don't like them, that kind of stuff. I mean we should be matured enough not to brew that. I don't know it's probably a Western kind of approach to art you know, it's so competitive, especially again in terms of economic gain, people with ..(unclear) and work with a certain group

Interviewer: What about your own family, some artists were complaining about the fact that art is not see as the real job ..?

Interviewee: that is probably why I'm working. That whole CAP thing I think I landed up in this job. This project incidentally also grew up in the CAP thing as a gender and communications course that we designed in 1992/93 and then it was housed in media work, it's a women's media watch. And then it grew out of media works and formed it's own, like media work ..(unclear) a CAP project, came here and it is now called Sanzi???, it's a gender institute. So it has got a history linked with CAP. I was gonna say that I think I landed by default in the whole CAP situation as employee. Maybe because I've got so many children, I had to find work to sacrifice my own, by I got support from my family to work – my father and father probably never understood it, my wife probably understand. For years also I did leather craftwork to sustain the family

Interviewer: but if you say you landed in CAP by default, what would you have done with your life if you didn't necessarily land in CAP?

Interviewee: well I've always wanted to study art at sort of university level, so I studied for 3 years at the Technikon, I felt that was a serious waste of time. Then shortly after that, because I had ..(unclear) but I thought this, being

already part of CAP and knowing the vibe and so on it was to help out there in terms of production around screen printing .., ..(unclear) painting, those kind of stuff. It just came naturally and that's where I ended up, started working there

Interviewer: is there anything that you think is important perhaps we didn't speak about during this interview

Interviewee: no I can't think of anything, it's probably better if you ask questions, it's an effort to think back, actually a bit painful. I can't think of anything.

Interviewer: what is the future of visual arts in this country, when you look at the scenario?

Interviewee: I think the corporate world .., there's such a lot of money being wasted in the country they could invest a lot of money in artists. Look at the whole thing of grants and pension, that all those artists ..(unclear) it's very much also an idea, but to appreciate the people and encourage them .., all we found ..(unclear), give one person a chance, there's hundreds of others I think that probably would want the same chance of being exposed. I mean these competitions and biennales and triangles and stuff like that, I don't know, for me it's very elitist, even in the sense of the requirements and conditions that are laid here already have a whole range of people that probably could be part of .., so I would say have more exhibitions, invest more money, the corporate world, invest in showcases held at Grahamstown .., it is more theatre but visual artists are there but again is a handful of people – even the people in Grahamstown, there's a project called Dakawa. I visited them there at once, even those artists if they can be featured, they've been producing good work over the years, I don't know if they are still in existent. I sometimes come across their work you know – the Grahamstown, that review of .., Rhodes University Review, that media quarterly that they bring out – you see sometimes they use the work of Dakawa artist. So even in terms of illustration and so on, publishers, they should look around more and see that

there's other people that also want to contribute. For me it's not just a thing of standards, that whole thing of values and standards, it worries me. How can you say .., what is the criteria, what is the merits that you are building this on that person is not an artist, that person is an artist. I mean if one look at the expression and these abstract people what they would do .., (unclear) effect on the European kind of thing ..(unclear) paint a white square on a white canvas and call that supreme abstractism. I mean those kinds of things, they freaks you out, it freaks me out "what is this" you could theorise that he arrived at that after painless of hours of thinking he arrived at painting a white square on a white canvass and make a statement. I mean you can say it's art but now, use that as a merit, what is art, if people are producing that. So yes I think a lot of revolutionary thinking should go into the production of art and what determines art in Africa as opposed to the European standards.

Interviewer: I mean when you look at the townships and so on, do you think there's up and coming talent around visual art or do you think people are just locked into it, that there must be a problem about something?

Interviewee: ja, because there's no art..(unclear), no facilities, there's not too much centres that offer it, I mean CAP has now died here, a lot of tons of people came ..(unclear) actually learn the basics of drawing and painting and so on, they were able to go from there, develop themselves. If schools can open up more in terms of .., I don't know art and design, I've looked at the curriculum, it's also in a sense very directive in a certain way although they would say an outcome, this person would be able to make a living out of learning these skills, probably true. But I think in terms of painters, there's not much facilities and organisations or vehicles and mechanisms that can help them in terms of arranging exhibitions, framing, already from the start, from the get go, from the onset, you're in a fix because I can't afford to frame my work. I can't support my work because I can't afford the a frame, those kind of stuff. So yes one should look at the art, I think the art industry has a much bigger picture as well, and in terms of framing things, mounting and so on. Those facilities also sort of develop on power, production of art – specifically in townships. There's a lot of kids, a lot of young kids, a lot of artists practising

already but they would work on newsprint because they don't have cartridge paper or pre-stal board for proper presentation of their work. But the love for art is there, so they would draw on cardboard, on brown paper for instance, paint from pieces of wood that they would pick up and so on. So I mean, why, you probably know why, the economic situation is also not in their favour.

Interviewer: ja, what is the future of those kids in terms of art?

Interviewee: at the moment, they are going to struggle, but I would be optimistic and at least predict that you know, either the Department of Arts or the Education Department or in the Department of Labour that they are taking on some of these responsibilities to develop skills amongst youth and people you know, to look at this seriously in terms of art learnerships and so on because there's money. There's tons and tons of money laying around for these things. NGO's, it's become a very awkward battle in terms of NGO's in a one sense trying to give directives and not being recognised, having to go through service provider status in terms of registration and all these things, again it also reflects on the abilities of management and administration within NGO's and so on, and to have a proper mechanism in place you will be able to access those funds, to work with these kids, young adults and adults. A lot of those kind of things that one tends to overlook that they really exist, why this impediments, why is this organisation ..(unclear), if you try to find out, people don't have management skills, administration skills, they can't write a proper proposal, those kind of .., little things but it's there.

Interviewer: they count

Interviewee: ja, they have the effect, a serious affect

Interviewer: just maybe one last question, do you regret that you became an artist or was it worth it, when you look back?

Interviewee: I think it's been a hell of a experience for me, I still feel that ..(unclear) I would probably fall in the same boat .., being almost trapped in a situation, economic situation, I mean I ..(unclear) pay full time kind of thing, it's wishful thinking, but I would love to do that ..(unclear). By psychologically I think it helps me, it helps me in terms of just being sane I think, that one could turn some sort of thing where they could release energy and work on a very focussed kind of way, it's very important for me. Ja. I have no regrets.

Interviewer: any closing word perhaps?

Interviewee: So you say you doing it for this organisation and are you going to try and make an intervention?

Interviewer: no I'm gonna write it, I am a writer and submit it to a journal. I will write it up myself

Interviewee: I believe, just in terms of the intervention, at different levels, like the Department of Arts and Culture, Department of Labour, Social Development. I mean these people are talking about poverty alleviation and what is this ugly word, regeneration policies – open regeneration, that stuff exactly falls within the field where you can spend money on these kids or people out there

Interviewer: in terms of poverty alleviation and arts, which is in an important thing I think, what do you think can be done, to say this is what we have to fund, this is you curb poverty if you fund this project

Interviewee: I think they're capacitating artists, giving them skills that are marketing and administration, it definitely help them in terms of poverty alleviation, although people might argue to put bread on the table and those kind of arguments but I think the person is then skilled, she/he will find a far better opportunity to be able to grow and develop as artists. Perhaps even develop guidance and directives in terms of who to work for and how to work to be able to make sales. You get this .., I mean this whole thing

about artists, the few fine artists saying don't paint flowers you won't sell flowers, I paint my pain and that kind of stuff. But I mean if you look at that as a commodity then you have to look at it as a product. I think those kind of things people need to learn as well and produce products for the market.

Interviewer: any other measures that can be adopted?

Interviewee: Department of Labour is rolling out money, through learnerships and through the Seta's – ..(unclear) is very much prone towards the industry that is corporate and I feel it downsizes the NGO's even further – it's simply around this whole thing of accreditations and all that. But if they could offer some of these learners, for artists by artists, graphic designers whatever and also incorporate the art basics – it leaves that person could be able to illustrate for a publication, illustrate for whatever, they can design posters, you know there's all sorts of things where you use your artistic ability besides this painting and doing other things.

Interviewer: ja.

Interviewee: as I said earlier on it used to be seen in the bigger picture, this art, sometimes is not just a stand alone anymore, people use computers, and generate computer art and it is sold as fine art pieces – why is this a new tool – these animations of William Kentrics and so on, charcoal drawings and then he animates it through computer, it becomes a little ..(unclear) (someone came in), meet Brown a researcher from Ifa Lethu.

Interviewer: anyway, thanks for your time. Is there anything that is important that you would like us to talk about?

Interviewee: I think we covered everything, if you think about something just call or email me.

Interviewer: thanks a lot for your time.

END

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