



a series of creative gatherings around 'women's work as creative practice'

Gathering 2 A MATERIAL UPRISING

Wednesday 6 September 2023
4-6pm

PROGRAM

Welcome – Candice Allison

Introduction to prompter – Tracy Murinik

Keynote provocation – Weiwei Wang – soft material in thinking, doing and living

Speakers

- Kutlwano Monyani – logo mano: aesthetics of a/my black home
- Hannelie Coetzee – the other.wise.ness of boundary objects
- Adelheid Frackiewicz – a reflection on materiality within my practice
- Bev Butkow – plastic, a shimmering bead, and murmuring masses

Panel discussion and Q&A

Closing



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TRANSCRIPTIONS OF PROCEEDINGS

Editor's note – in places, spoken phrasing and repetitions have been cleaned up slightly to facilitate smoother reading

WELCOME – Candice Allison – co-curator

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Candice Allison and I would like to thank you for joining us today for the 2nd of the *woman's work as artistic practice* creative gatherings.

I am so disappointed that I can't be there in person but as a mother of a two-year old and a full-time working mom, I'm sure you can all understand the split between one, and the responsibilities that we have to navigate on a daily basis. Thankfully, we have the blessing of technology, and it allows me to participate virtually. I'm grateful to my collaborator and co-conspirator, Bev Butkow, for all the work that she has done. She is holding down the fort in the warmest and most welcoming way.

I won't say much about today's topic *a material uprising* as Tracy will introduce it to you in more detail, but this theme, in particular, is important to the journey that Bev and I have gone on since I met her more than

5 years ago at the Bag Factory. Learning about Bev's practice was an absolute joy of treasure hunting for the wonderful and sometimes weird materials that would find their way into her art studio and artworks. As the then-director of the Bag Factory, I had a very thinly-veiled agenda to increase the number of woman artists working in the space and supported through the artistic development programs. Like Bev, many of these women artists were using, reclaiming and working with materials in surprising ways, constantly pushing the boundaries and limitations of (often) domestic materials into abstract forms and powerful statements about women's identity. This series of creative gatherings could not exist without a conversation dedicated entirely to celebrating materials and materiality.

I would like to thank our prompter and speakers for generously sharing your time and thoughts with us today and their personal stories of this type of interior. I hope these gatherings will continue to grow organically into an encouraging and supportive network. Please enjoy the presentations, conversations and the gorgeous food that Langelihle Mthembu has loving prepared for this event.

INTRODUCTION TO PROMPTER – Tracy Murinik

I have been told that I must be at the mic where I admit that I would prefer to be sitting down there, but the angles are wrong. Firstly, to welcome you all here today. It's really wonderful to have such a gathering. Thank you sincerely to Bev and to Candice for conceptualizing and inviting us to a space where we can both have these conversations, and also share ideas with one another. I was saying to Bev earlier that spaces don't exist until somebody creates them, and then other people might have the idea to create other spaces. And there is reciprocity in that so that is very clearly felt. I am very pleased that we do that.

To briefly introduce myself, my name is Tracy Murinik. I am a rather eclectic range of beings, moving between an editor, writer, curator, educator, sometimes filmmaker. And, mostly, within and around the arts and particularly contemporary art, but with some short lifts that I take in a regular basis in between.

I would like to also very briefly introduce you to our speakers today, and I will give you a more concrete introduction to each of them when we get to the panel itself. We have our keynote speaker this afternoon, Weiwei Wang Who has recorded her presentation for us, she is based in Hong Kong. We have Kutlwano Monyai, Hannelie Coetzee, Adelheid Frackiewicz and Bev Butkow on the panel today.

Our session today is titled **a material uprising**. The session considers materials and materiality in art making, and the inherent associative, cultural, spiritual, energetic, frequential, vibrational qualities and meanings of these materials. I will elaborate on that after the keynote address where I will also respond to Weiwei's presentation and provocations before we go into the panel.

Without further ado, I'd like to introduce our keynote speaker Weiwei Wang who is currently the curator of exhibitions and collections at the Centre for Heritage Art and Textile (CHAT) in Hong Kong. She was previously a curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai. She participated in a curator and residence program at Kuando Museum and Fine Arts in Taiwan. She was in the international researcher program and at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul, South Korea both in 2017. She was then appointed as the co-curator of the 12th Shanghai biennale and awarded an individual fellowship by the Asian Cultural Council Hong Kong in 2018.

Since 2017, she has conducted a series of research on East Asian Contemporary Arts and has been at CHAT in Hong Kong since the end of 2019. We will watch her now and then come back to a conversation that responds to her keynotes.

Thank you.

KEYNOTE PROVOCATION – Weiwei Wang – Soft material in thinking, doing and living

Good afternoon, everyone, I'm Weiwei Wang. I'm the curator from the Centre for Heritage Arts and Textiles in Hong Kong. First of all, I want to say thank you to artist Bev Butkow and curator Candice Allison for inviting me to join this creative gathering.

Big congratulations to you, Bev, for the wonderful exhibition. I saw a lot of pictures from social media. I really hoped that I could be there to visit the exhibition, and also join the discussion with all of you. It is my honour to give the keynote speech address for the session of *a material uprising*.

I want to take a few minutes first to introduce our institution Centre for Heritage Arts and Textile, also known as CHAT. I'm going to make myself a bit smaller (changing screen). CHAT opened its door in March 2019. Our museum is located at the renovated cotton spinning mill. Our mission is to engage Hong Kong's community and visitors, offering them the opportunities for learning Hong Kong's textile industrial past, as well as exploring multiple roles of textiles in arts, design and culture context. CHAT facilitates a cultural experience overarching between Industrial Heritage, Contemporary Art and Design to bridge the past and present for our future. CHAT exhibitions are divided into 2 parts. One is permanent exhibition space called the DH10 foundation gallery. This gallery provides a brief, but very intensive, history of Hong Kong's textile industry. We are showing rich images, vintage cotton products and archival industrial documents and objects. The audience are also invited to experience the manual cotton spinning process, using traditional spinning instruments, and design and create their own label at the workshop station in this gallery.

Besides the permanent exhibition, CHAT's curatorial team curate 3 seasonal exhibitions every year, which always interweave textile culture with contemporary art, design and heritage. We also have our own collections, but we mainly collect artworks based on our new commissions in the group exhibitions or artist in residence programs. We always encourage artists to think about what textile means to them and what kind of culture elements is behind the textile.

My job in CHAT is to curate some of the seasonal exhibitions. I started to work in CHAT at the end of 2019, right before Covid. I'm from a contemporary art background. I have to confess that before I joined, I had very limited knowledge about textile. But after joining this museum, I started to realise the importance of textiles in art creation and, all of a sudden, a whole new world just opened up in front of me.

Since, in this session, we are talking from perspective of material, I feel like it is more proper to use the term '*soft materials*' instead of '*textile*' to summarise those textile-related materials of artistic creations because we know that the word '*textile*' could lead us to a narrow path. During my curatorial practises these years, I created several exhibitions collaborating with many different contemporary artists, designers and some of them are textile-oriented artists. Most of them don't use textile-based soft material for their works. I witnessed that most of them received strong inspiration when they interacted with those soft materials and sometimes even brought on big changes in the directions of their creations. While I'm speaking, I'll keep showing some pictures of the exhibitions with artworks which I curated, to give you some impressions about what I'm doing, and what our museum offers the audiences.

If you are interested in previous and current exhibitions, you're welcome to check out our social media on Facebook or Instagram to get more information.

(changing images)

The curatorial practices that I experience facilitate a lot of thinking about soft materials for me. For example, the tendency of dematerialisation, their interaction with space, the deep connection with traditional culture, lifestyle and individual life. As well as the form, language and power of the soft materials themselves. If you have interest or knowledge in traditional art, you will realise that materials used to create arts are extremely limited when compared to the richness and the colourfulness of the artworks themselves. In fact, the materials of traditional art-making are very limited to a small amounts of media, like brush, oil canvas, paper, clay, marble or metal. Soft materials, on the other hand, have really been adopted by art creators in the past. Someone will say that canvas and paper are soft material, but in the context of traditional art, they are only the media that carry the work. They have no special significance in their own rights, no other involvement in expression of artistic concepts. This contrasts with the frequent appearance of soft materials in contemporary art practices, raising serious questions:

- What are soft materials?
- When did soft materials become involved in art creations?
- Why have soft materials become important role in contemporary art creations?

Compared with other types of arts media, soft materials include a wide coverage from natural fibres and synthetics from the materials in daily life to industrial materials. Actually, most soft and flexible materials can be included into the scope of soft materials. Trying to give a clear definition of soft materials or give a detailed categorization is very difficult. This characteristic of soft material embodies a variety and openness which are full of uncertainties. And, as we know, what is often the most fascinating thing about contemporary art practices is the uncertainty, flexibility and fluidity it brings. It can be said that soft materials are, to a certain extent, integrated into the spectral spiritual characteristic of our time.

historical changes in Western-centred contemporary arts narrative

Now a days, it is very difficult to trace who were the first artists to use soft materials in their works. I know that all of you are experts who have been working in the contemporary art field for many years, whether with soft material or not. I'm not here to give a lecture about the historical changes in subtle material in contemporary art creation. But, as we all know, the Western-centred contemporary arts narrative is facing criticism and is required to be rewritten. However, we can't ignore the fact that, along with the radical, political and cultural changes of the 1960's, a large number of avant-garde artists use non-traditional and diverse everyday materials, including a lot of soft materials to create art as a means of rebelling against traditional, social and political structures and arts systems. And, by the way, we can now see there is an echo of the current states of the low global societies which are undergoing radical changes. And there is a boom in the use of soft materials in today's art world.

Of course, soft materials have completely different histories and meanings in different cultural and social contexts. It is about re-examining and understanding the whole history of culture and art. However, there are some universal characteristics regarding to the nature, unique form, language and cultural significance of soft materials that deserve our attention. The soft materials are often ready-made products, everyday things that are closely related to human life and, at the same time, they are materials with qualities such as spirituality, a sense of orders, change and power. Thus, when they are adopted into artistic creations, they naturally reflect one of the simplest cultural spirits – the pursuit of democracy, equality and diversity. More importantly, when we interact with these soft materials, they also suggest that the culture spirit of democracy, equality and diversity is itself complex, changeable, fluid and flexible.

Now, I want to show you 3 short videos of artist interviews which will present you how soft materials inspire the artists in developing artworks with different themes. All these artists are from Asian countries, whom I worked with before in my exhibitions. I also want to take this chance to introduce you about how Asian artists are working with soft materials, and I hope that there could be some dialogues and exchanges in the future.

first video - Jeehee Park

"History is not fact. Everybody has different opinions or different ideas of history. When they are faced with a long time that they have to understand, the only part they select is a few moments. I am Jeehee Park from Seoul Korea and I'm a sculptor. At the moment, I'm collecting bio samples all around the Mills building for the next Spring Show at CHAT. I know the Mills building are previously textile factory buildings.

I want to see, and I want to look at these buildings, with completely different species, like microorganisms. I think the microorganisms are not the object, but rather accompany my work. So, I collected samples from all over the buildings. So that those creatures become the partner of my work. I decided to use the microorganisms to show my understanding of the history of these buildings.

One is a silicone rubber, which is for making rubber moulds. It captures the surfaces of the building or machines, kind of like a different way of photography as a sculptor, like a photographer uses the camera to capture the images. But for me as a sculptor, I am using the silicone rubber to capture the moments and images.

At CHAT lab, the textile team helped me to develop the colour from the fungi. The sample probably has billions of microorganisms in one tiny sample. These are very unique species, not like humans. Their gender is totally different and sometimes they show totally different colours in cold temperatures, in warm temperatures; I think it is really fun to guess. This work is like a collaboration between other species and me. There are different species involved, one building. And then we try to understand what we are located in. We try to understand the space.

I have collected different types of silicon rubber casts so far. First, is the golden cup which is located on the ground floor of the Mills. The second one is historical factory machine parts. So, I casted the gear parts. And the other machines also from the 1950's is used for carding parts at the textile factory. I want to capture all the different times and eras in the textile business.

I want to show how individual people understand space, individual's time and also the person capturing the different species, species time as well. Because when I capture old samples, I believe that they have started their own time, maybe they also have their own history.

My work is decontextualised work. It is kind of related to history, but it also like a decontextualised work."

second video – Madina Zholdybekova

"Motherhood is bliss. It can be exhausting, and you can feel nothing towards your child during first time after giving birth. Unconditional love is a myth. You can experience postpartum depression. You can experience insomnia. You are no longer old you. You are different.

In the exhibition, 3 of my works are displayed. The first instillation is titled 'Regular Star. Neutron Star. Black Hole'. Basically, it refers to a diagram from physics about how the stars die. The bigger the star, the stronger the explosion, the stronger the gravitational force. It bends the space of time fabric. Like the black hole, no sun, breasts of lactating women under the influence of milk production and gravitational forces working. Your breast are going down, down, down, down

The second and third works are connected – they both refer to music. The whole breast-feeding process is quite musical and melodic. There is rhythm and tempo when your baby drinks the milk.

Mothers after breastfeeding; they feel quite exhausted. The work looks like audio plater and cassette: it's like your body no longer belongs to you.

The third work is called 'Vinyl Record', a music reference. The vinyl recorder would melt down your vinyl. When songs are played all over again, it feels like the vinyl record has melted on the carpet: you can see it literally melted like an ice cream.

Woman are expected to be a baby machine as well. Woman are expected to do all household work, and also work at the same time. Woman are raising kids, and also contributing to the GDP, while raising human capital. That is why we need to give more respect to women. Also, there is a lot of pressure on women, what you need to do in order to change the situation.

The name of the workshop is 'Parenthood Manifesto'. It consists of two parts, tufting and punch needling. These are carpet-making techniques and the aim was to start a conversation.

What is it like to be a kid here? What it is like to be a parent here? What are the expectations for them?

It's just good practice to learn more about Kazakh culture by creating those ornaments. It was collective work, and also discussion. Basically, in order to heal from this colonial trauma, it is good to re-exist, recreate and reproduce this heritage or ancestral experience, ancestral knowledge in order to reclaim and re-own it.

In the end, we got these word collages saying "we are all the same having the hassle with parenthood". Some participants wrote 'Hope' 'New Generation is Our New Hope'. Some of them wrote 'letting go'. Parents need to let go of previous experience. Or the word 'control' was also on the Manifesto.

I think in the end this 'Parenthood Manifesto' shows us that all these happy, sad or ugly sides of parenthood is a common thing for all of us. We need to start this discussion louder and talk about it more. I find it very beautiful to see that people from diverse backgrounds have similar thoughts on parenthood."

You can see that the curator actually never worked with soft material or textile before, yet she got a lot of inspiration while working with the artists in our residence.

third video – Alexandra Tsay

"These 2 words mean 'Another Asia'. It is actually what I said: it's like another Asia. I am from Kazakstan from Central Asia. I am a guest curator for Spring 2023 exhibition at Centre for Heritage Arts and Textile. And here I am doing cultural research, and also working with the Artist-in Residence. I'm interested in the similarities and resemblances between Central Asia and Hong Kong. For me, it was really interesting to see how the art scene has developed here. What art forms? What artists? Artistic practices, and trying to compare them with what we have in Central Asia. Because I think both societies are undergoing transitions and changing a lot, and that social, economic, political transitions somehow influence the artistic form and artistic practice.

I imagine Hong Kong to be a very dynamic and very developed city, but then at the same time, it's very friendly as a city. Something that feels new, but also familiar. What we have in common or what are similar in very distanced areas. But, if we have that in common, it means there is global process then.

This is my first time in Hong Kong, I have never been here, everything is a surprise. I was very interested because ornaments, textiles, patterns and everything was about what I was working on.

I visited a lot of textile shops, markets and talk with the people. Asking about the meaning of the traditional patterns and ornaments and which kind of textiles they are producing today. Most of them is polyester synthetic fabrics, so this is all opposite from natural textiles, this is all made by machine. This is a mass production. Everything I collected – dragons, phoenixes and flowers. This is what I see today, the reference to old pieces.

This is a kind of circle of life where is no beginning and no end. I mix all these elements. It is a little bit the same. Which also happened in Kazakhstan with classic ornaments because they are everywhere. Like glued or printed, people use them for clothes and decoration. But most of these people don't know what they mean.

The installation consisted of two parts. One is made of fabrics, Hong Kong Chinese fabrics and the second one from felt. Everything is made by hand using Kazakh traditional techniques. Both pieces are hanging in front of each other, and it is also kind of circulation, because one part starts and finish and then from this side, the felted one starts.

During my residency, I see that the meaning of this prosperity from dragons (male) and phoenix (female) is a bit lost. The tradition is getting lost. That way the dragons are cut up in this installation and then in some sections, there is a kind of battle of dragons. I felt a lot of hope. But this hope is the kind people want to believe in. At the same time, it does not exist anymore. All these emotions, all these feelings, it is also a kind of struggle. The pins symbolise this temporary time; to show the fragility. Maybe during the show, some of them may fall on the floor.

*This is life, I take it very naturally. With these, I want to show the process. This is not only to make or finish the work and everything is well made and well-fixed. For me, it is to show this fragility. Most of my assistants came from the technical team of CHAT. I was very grateful. This kind of possibility, the residency, they give me this opportunity. It was just like a dream.
Paxмет) (thank you so much)*

This is the end of my speech. I hope it raises some questions and discussion for today's session. Thank you very much for your time again. I wish you all the best and I hope that we will have some chance to get together in the future. And I do hope that we can visit Hong Kong and visit CHAT.
Thank you.

PROMPTER - Tracy Murinik

I have been given permission to release the microphone from its holder and go and sit down. I think first of all, just to thank Weiwei for a really interesting, rich and evocative presentation. I would like to reflect briefly on some of the ideas that Weiwei introduced to frame our conversations going forward. One of the things that I really enjoyed her describing was the idea of **soft materials**. And her also – importantly – describing how difficult it is to concretely define what **soft materials** encompass because they are so diverse, or they can be so diverse. They allow for and embody, as she says, variety and the openness and, in turn, intimate capacity for uncertainty, flexibility and fluidity, I think both materially and conceptually.

She argues also that soft materials are, to a certain extent, integrated into the spectral, spiritual characteristics of our time. And her thinking through the nature and potential of soft materials led her to consider the tendency for dematerialization. Those material inter-actions with space, their deep connection with traditional culture, lifestyle and individual lives, as well as what she called the 'home language' and 'power' of the soft materials themselves. I am really interested to hear from our following speakers in terms

of the meaning of the materials that they bring into their respective practices. While acknowledging that some of these materials have very specific cultural associations, it nevertheless suggests some universal characteristics regarding the nature, unique form, language and cultural significance of soft materials. Namely, that they are often ready-made products, everyday things related to human life, and at the same time are materials with qualities, she said such as spatiality, a sense of order, change and power. And that when incorporated into artworks, they reflect and speak to a particular cultural spirit. Which I thought was a really interesting idea, especially considering that spirit is, as she says, complex, changeable, fluid and flexible to reflect things like the pursuit of democracy, equality and diversity.

introduction of speakers

I think with that as a starting point to our discussion, I would like to introduce our speakers in more detail. I am going to introduce them all at once and then each of them will have around 10 minutes to present. We will follow that with a conversation between all of us, as well as obviously, you are very welcome to bring your own ideas, commentaries and questions from the audience and we will do that for about 45 minutes. Then afterwards, please of course stay and join us for a drink, a bite to eat and for us to be able to continue those conversations in this gathering.

Our first speaker, after the keynotes of course, today is Kutlwano Monyai, who recently completed her Honours in Fine and Applied arts at the Tswana University of Technology. Her work explores the bondages of culture, lifestyle and the social dynamics of care within her family through archives of spiritual processes, aesthetic, economic and terrestrial connections. These connections, she says, often reflect on lived experiences, revealing abstract nuanced relationships that narrate stories about her maternal and paternal lineages. Kutlwano describes that her weaving methodologies have been passed down through conversations and practice and by her maternal lineage. She explores various techniques and materials in her making, particularly plastics from trash bags to grocery bags. She describes these materials as being layered with nostalgic spirits of home, maternal care and teachings, economic struggles and common expressions such as 'if you can't afford it, do it yourself' or 'logo mano' a Setswana expression that loosely translates to 'make a plan'. Kutlwano has titled her talk today "Logo mano - aesthetics of a/my black home". Welcome Kutlwano.

Our speaker after Kutlwano is Hannelie Coetzee, who is a visual artist based in Johannesburg. Her relational practice regularly centres on public spaces, originating out of her respect and concern for the environment. Hannelie employs found materials, most often reclaimed industrial waste, to form unlikely partnerships with the surrounding land. Research into these materials and the context of their deployment on site remains a fundamental component of her process, allowing her to orient her work around its immediate community and locate meaning inherent to the materials used. Across disciplines, her practice seeks to marry environmental science and social action to better engage with nature. Hannelie's talk today is entitled "the other.wise.ness of boundary objects"

Following Hannelie will be Dr Adelheid Frackiewicz, who is a senior lecturer at the University of the Free State. Adelheid holds a PHD from the departments of Fine Arts and Art History and Image studies at the University of the Free State, with her doctoral theses titled "Art, Place, Death: the transformative power of dynamic thresholds". She was the recipient of the Absa L'Atelier ambassador award in 2021 and has exhibited extensively both nationally and international. In July this year, her three-person group show titled 'Refuge an uncommon home' was exhibited at the Institute Museum of Ghana-Noldor Artist Residency in Accra Ghana. Adelheid's talk will reflect on materiality within her practice.

Then finally, we will come to Bev Butkow, who you are all aware of by this stage. Bev started making late in the day but has made up for her belated moment. She started making her art in her mid-forties and is now a fulltime artist, serious about her responsibility as a maker, communicator and social actor. She works collaboratively, trusting in the intelligence of the hands and embracing the meditative, intuitive rhythm of

weaving. She completed her Master of Fine Arts from Wits University in 2022 with distinction. Bev's talk today is called "Thread, a sparkling bead, plastic and murmuring masses"

So please, Kutlwano, we look forward to listening to you.

SPEAKER 1 – Kutlwano Monyai – Logo mano: aesthetics of a/my black home

Good afternoon everyone, my name is Kutlwano. Thank you so much for that beautiful introduction. She has said a mouthful so far about what I do so thank you very much. I am going to briefly add to her introduction about my practice and why and how I do it. In the meantime, I will be scrolling through the images, and they are not in order, so please indulge in that as I tell you about what I do.

(scrolling through the images)

I crochet tapestries with plastic that sometimes imitates mundane objects, that interpret visual mythologies of taking care of one's home, one's body and one's mind. Acknowledging that this act of 'taking care of' comes with a traumatic economic and environmental experience. Reacting and reimagining the mundane domestic objects by crocheting and weaving them, for me is one way to dive into my childhood memories, and of being raised with morals, with principles of surviving, as well as coping.

My work comments on the economic, as well as the social sciences, with my community within. Because actually, the use of the plastic itself is a shared experience: we are surrounded by an abundance of plastics from industrial materials. This matter of polymer has become a vehicle for me to seek suitable ways for my expressions that have been influenced by the weaving practices from my maternal lineage. They weave and they crochet tapestries to beautify their own spaces, their own homes and they make up for what they cannot afford. This principal spreads through everything that they do. They had to improvise where there is a lack of. I see that as an aesthetical cultural formation, rather than reducing that to the practice of crafts work. These intricacies and the methods of their work has design intent and they are layered with a narrative: the layers of poor emotions. The grocery bags that I use are sort of a symbol for consumption, as well as a symbol of the will to fight poverty, enabling efforts to buy, to provide for one's family. It was also a symbol, or rather a reminder, indicating that women have for many years brought domestic environmental solutions through creative ingenuity within their personal spaces. In recent bodies of work, I continue to bring light into the historical and the present maternal experiences by using these plastic materials.

I have titled this talk 'Logo Mano: Aesthetics of a/my black home' because I wanted to put a spotlight on the existing aesthetics solutions of how the uprising material of plastics have been artistically utilized within a domestic space. 'Logo Mano' is a phrase in Setswana, or you can say it's an expression, can be considered as an idiom as well in Setswana. The phrase loosely translates to 'make a plan' or 'think about a solution'. When I break the phrase down, it also means that weave, sew or braid—put in labour to construct. 'Mano' alone means a plan, a solution or ideas. It is a phrase that my grandmother used to say to my mother all the time whenever she would encounter any problems within her own life.

In this talk, I'm asked to talk about what does the use of this plastic allow me to do. The use of plastic and crocheting, especially in the techniques that I use it, allows me to indicate the improvisational aesthetics within a domestic space that I grew up in. To speak about the little contribution of women's work that helps reduce plastic pollution. By establishing that relationship, I can see and understand the value of looking closely into the households and the community. The access materials that are available to use for production as well as artistic purposes.

The maternal lineage has been passing down these skills, the knowledge and the passion and the liveliness of making for oneself and valuing that process. Now these women have become a site of culture that has not been closely explored by the fine arts community. It allows me to disrupt that binary, or rather in a way of honouring or rather allowing the work to be gradually presented. To kind of speak of the mundane. When I'm advocating with these monumental presentations of the plastic tapestry in my practice or in my studio, it's another way of actually listening to the work itself, listening to the material itself, listening to how the domestic environment influences you or me to come up with solutions, on an every day-to-day basis. The use of plastic allows me to travel back in time when I am in conversation with my maternal lineage, with the history of their own education. How they learned to crochet. To share an anecdote: during the Bantu education in which my mom and grandmother were taught, it was compulsory at some point in their schooling that they learned how to crochet, and they used mostly wool and other fabric materials. But it was when my mom was in high school that her mother started using plastic. It's really hard to trace back as to when it became a style, especially within my black community.

I am also asked to showcase and talk about the receptor's synchronicity with the material so that I am able to hear the material, that I am able to be led by this material. Artists can demonstrate various ways in which they can utilize the versatile ranges of polymers and the expressive potential that they actually hold. The advantage of using plastic is that it stimulates my vision and, also, it is quite accessible. The traditional techniques as well have influenced my practice, along with my contemporary exploration, has been a profound experience for me: to learn from the old as well as the new. It reveals observations. It reveals the learning processes between the past generation as well as my generation. What I'm learning again from this use of material is that the possibilities are quite endless. In my creative process, the plastic transports the expressions and the intentions that I have, while the techniques that I use act as an agent for the aesthetics that I am trying to display.

Since I'm borrowing the plastic from industrial material, my experiences are quite trial and error and adventurous all the time. I'm also borrowing different techniques to using wool, by using plastic which is quite challenging. However, it is an open-ended area that I am exploring as we speak. My relationship with the plastic is challenging, but at the same time it is quite exciting, because I'm able to listen to the material and I think the material quite listens to me. I was usually doubtful during the beginning when I started exploring a lot more into this material in 2020 during lock down. Because I went to school, I studied arts, but I didn't look closely to the different design and the aesthetics that are inspired or that are from home. Going back to that, going back home made me look even closer into what the maternal family was doing and inspired my work recently.

Another popular and humorous phrase besides 'loga mano' that I want to share, when I think about my process and when I work in studio, is "ga eji bogobe" (Setswana) which loosely translates to 'it doesn't give up' referring to the material. Meaning that whatever material or challenge you are encountering, or you are working with, doesn't give up, meaning that it is not alive as you are alive. Therefore, you have enough power in the ability to overcome it even though it sometimes works against you.

Most of the properties of plastics and textures are different. I get plastics that are silky, soft yet sticky which makes it challenging because they grip on the crocheting hook while I am working. I also get plastics that are loud when you touch them, smooth, slippery enough to easily hook through the rows. When I mix different qualities of plastics, I have to mentally behave differently so that I am able to alert myself and also accept the inconsistencies of the different rows that I am working on.

The last phrase that has allowed me to sync with, to be in sync rather with the material is "O nale letsogo le le bonolo" or "O nale letsogo le le thata" (Setswana). This means that you have a gentle hand or rather a rough hand. It's a phrase that is said a lot within the family or rather just socially. It refers to when one is

braiding hair, or when you are sewing, or when you are crocheting, it means that your hand is soft. It also talks about how the artist or rather the crocheter is responding to the material bodily, so it's another way of critiquing how I'm handling the material. The process becomes, or acts as a metaphor, for how the personality, or the character of the artist is revealed by how they handle their materials, translating into different aspects of life. Another thing that I want to mention is that success cannot just be reached until the artist senses and also distinguishes the different meaning of the plastic. Which is quite interesting because Thelma Newman mentions the plastic's "frozen fluidity" and it is during this trial and error that the artist can reach some level of synchronicity, which is what I'm trying to achieve within my processes. Some plastic materials are relatively fragile compared to the strong plastics that the artists' intentions need to be fluently articulated.

When I'm in the process of creating my crocheting pieces, when I'm interested in permanence as well. I mentioned earlier that I am more alive than the plastic is alive, but that doesn't mean that the plastic is not alive. I have to think about how I'm leading the material into that aesthetic direction. How I'm making it a narrational tool and, at the same time, placing it in a higher attainment while beautifying the elements of the everyday life.

I think those are the 2 questions or rather 3 that I spoke to and tried to respond to. I would like to respond to the last one but briefly, so to what potential lies beyond excess consumption. We must definitely value the materials first for us to discover their potential. And that is when this excess material eventually is bound to confront us.

Thank you so much.

Editor's note:

Thelma Newman's book titled 'Plastics, Environment, Culture, and the Politics of Waste' 2023

SPEAKER 2 – Hannelie Coetzee – The other.wise.ness of boundary objects

I brought a stone with that you can pass around so long, followed by some paper with the drawing of a wing.

My talk today will focus on many projects that I have done. What I would like to share with you is how I try to instrumentalize our materials to connect with new audiences. I often work outside, producing works that go with walking and all other sorts of activations, and the sort of art objects I suppose is a remnant of the activation. Not only outside physically, but also outside of the art scene often. I will take you through a few works and then I'm just going to talk through specifically this work I did last year. It is a fallen ash tree, 130 years old and this sculpture park in Denmark invited me to illustrate one of the 17 sustainability goals. It was a quite a bit bigger than what I planned to go and do. I had a wonderful team of Latvian carpenters who deconstructed it with me. Very importantly, I wanted this sculpture specifically to stay connected to the ecology. Previous large works that I've done, sometimes the sculpture park would encourage you to do a foundation and all sorts of things, but this was the first opportunity where this will decay over time slowly.

(scrolling through the images)

- This is a body of work that started developing last year. A collective of artists invited me to look at the Shothole Borer infestation in South Africa. It is a tiny little beetle that eats up all our trees. It is from East Asia. What was really exciting about this process was to actually inject the tunnels that the little beetle eat in its lifetime with porcelain and then to fire it out. I made these micro little sculptures to juxtapose

the sort of scale of working to figure things out. The process is usually just to work out, and what was really interesting was finding the distance there from where the porcelain protrudes: how far these little beetles eat from each other before they kill a tree.

- When I showed this, it was that the Rupert Museum have this fantastic new Impact Art Prize. We were one of the finalists on that and got a research budget to figure things out. Part of what is shown on the right-hand side here you can see in the Rupert Museum how we exhibited, I cast the actual Shuttle Bora galleries, it's called Galleries – these tiny little holes that eat into silver, and then gilded it. To show not only to arts audiences, but also the scientists, what the optimal spacing is between the beetles when they kill a tree. I was really interested to know how they do it physically. What has happened since is that I worked with one of the scientists on the replant list because, with all these dead and dying trees, you can see how we did a walkabout on the right-hand side there. All these dead and dying trees really create paralysis, and that often happens in all sort of climate-related artworks. This replant list, very very short list of trees that are currently not affected by the Shuttle Bora, the scientist are happy to release. And we will launch it later this month at the University of Pretoria by the research guys there.

I'm just going to rush through a whole lot of stuff. We will have time to talk, to interact, later. I want to do a full circle visit here. I must say it is really exciting to see David also here. Like 25 years ago I was actually employed in this building as my first job ever. And then it became the Origins Museum, I don't know what the name was like a decade ago. I didn't know, but we actually operated on top of the watershed, the actual watershed where they rain falls here and when it goes south, it goes into the Indian Ocean, and when it goes north, it goes into the Atlantic. This is that high spot. I was very lucky to meet Lenore Manderson who is also here, in 2018, when she curated an exhibition here in the Origin Centre on the watershed and I was busy with hyenas, building new creatures, trying to figure things out. She, with Colleen Fergle, encouraged me to start writing this practice up because it reaches new audiences. I have just done a Master of Science with the Global Change Institute. What is really useful with this new knowledge is that now I can deliberately build new interventions that reaches new audiences, included in the actual design of the intervention.

I didn't realise we only have 10 minutes. I'm not going to go through all the details, but basically in my study, I interrogated 50 environmental artists around the world. I used my practice which is very intuitive. I like to work outside. I like people to participate.

I wrote that down as a list and that was my one data set which I could then compare to the 50 artworks and how they work.

This really rigorous interrogation gave me the sort of grassroots results of what are the qualities in these interventions that reach people. What came out in the study was participatory components in interventions, very deliberate educational components and co-learning, more than top-down knowledge transmission and a regenerative-type quality. Those 3 characteristics in interventions really reach new audiences. My interest is that I am not interested to preach to the converted and I love working outside. When I was a social documentary photographer, I went out and travelled all around Southern Africa to actually document people's lives. I've always had this natural way of wanting to be outside. Finding these 3 traits has become a confirmation that when new opportunities arise, I can now build these in and have the theoretical backing to, which I really didn't have before I did this MFA.

I want to take you through a few opportunities that I have had in the past few years. Anglo American commissioned these works, where, very importantly, the materials are all found objects. I went to their mines and picked up the hangers that they actually cast, you can see it there, the platinum with. It basically melts down so that it can't be used anymore. I saw it in the scrap yard and just picked it up and started creating these objects, that are now in their head office in Rosebank. The assembly of these creatures comes through drawing, so the little piece of paper that you are passing around is a bat's wing drawn on Anglo Ledger paper (showing the piece of paper). As part of the process, I got the books that white guys

wrote all the history down of each little transaction that happened a 100 and something years ago. Then, I started to build new creatures that help me share and build a climate culture with them. Then, also with the stone, this will be a bat wing (showing stone) that I take through a series of industrial processes. You can see it is just an old slab that was broken, that I picked up at a factory. I build relationships with all these guys, so then I have access to materials that have already got a meaning within them. This is an African marble. We're so used to Italian marble. I'm always interested to bring things home, and to work with the material actually having something to tell us even before we have conceptualized the artwork or an intervention.

(showing images)

To show you a sort of process piece. Part of working like this is that you meet a lot of people. And mid-lockdown in 2020, I got a call from the Joburg Roads Agency. They knew I wanted to go and look at the eye of the Yukskei river, especially after all the work on the Watershed. They had a writer Sean Christie with them and said we are going tomorrow. You must put all your safety gear on. We were still fully masked in lockdown, going under the city to look at the eye of the Yukskei river. These kinds of excursions create a massive body of inspiration that just continues throughout. This was done for an exhibition at UJ that Johan Myburg created, and that is the sad eye of the Yukskei river that basically comes out with clear water. We had a hydro engineer with us, Stu Dunsmore, and he had a little bottle and he tested that water going into this gunk. And that water is clear. I know Amanda (we have had many conversations about how can we revive this and celebrate this), but these are ongoing processes that sometimes manifest as boundary objects.

I should say what a boundary object is. In science or in research, a boundary object is something that you have that has multiple meanings for different people. It can hold opposing thoughts and contradiction within this object. Within climate change or that kind of space, you have so many conversations just to get everybody on the same page. I think one of the biggest frustrations with the climate scientists that I am working with is that it's so tricky to connect people with the urgency that we need to change.

I'm trying to connect with things that are familiar, not strange. If you think back to the work that I did with Anglo, with those metal pieces, those sculptures went into those offices and that is not an art audience. They have a lot of art around them. I really wanted to connect with people who work there. When they saw the hangers, they were like "hey check it's hangers, hey check it's a creature". That kind of connection and familiarity in material is just a way to expand our approach and how we can really instrumentalise art in this hectic time that we are living in. I mean Joburg is on fire, exploding, everything is happening. It is insane. And I think with the material understanding – what the importance of that material is – it grounds us.

Another project that I worked on earlier this year with Mawazi Mobongwa. She is working on medicinal plants and how the trade is happening throughout Southern African countries of medicinal plants. A lot of these plants are harvested out. Rural healers would come and buy plants in Joburg. They come from Zambia or wherever, so it's almost like a reverse logic happening, because of the demand. We spoke to the elders at the kwaMai market and they were very happy, very progressive and very open-heartedly accepted this intervention where we start growing these precious plants in vertical places. We make it Instagram-able. The kwaMai market is very fashionable to go on a weekend now, and young people who haven't frequented it in the past so much now really hang out there as a social space. This engagement really brought that home.

A recent project that is much more climate-culture focused, I developed it with Dr Wendy Foden who is the SANParks climate scientist. With this youth group on the right here, Echo Rangers, who organised themselves in high school before lockdown to figure out ways to do all sorts of conservation interventions at the Southern tip of Africa. Cape Agulhus is the southernmost of Africa. Plants and people and everything else can't go further south, it's the end of the continent and the oceans are pushing up. It's a very important

spot to have this very stressful conversation with. Wendy and I took the groups through a weekend workshop. They all have their own lives and work, so we could only have them for a weekend. And we spoke to them about holding this contradiction through art. They are not artists, but they engaged immediately in trying just to make things visual. We also did an unsolicited intervention on the memorial there, for which we got permission afterwards. We got the group to go and write their thoughts on this massive Africa Memorial that is there at the Southern Tip to really solidify. Then they all had to go to home, and I was left there with only one week to quickly produce an artwork. There were these massive boulders lying around because they are busy with the lighthouse renovation. I created this lesser-spotted cave creature. It really plays on extinction, the idea around it. The purpose for this work is to anchor the youth group. They have since gone out and have reached 43 000 people with their own campaign of reaching out to local people, visitors, on radio stations and it is ongoing. We have this WhatsApp group now and they keep telling us what they are up to. Wendy and I are both are also presenting it at conferences.

A full circle again – this is a very early work that I did with Sally Archibald, where I started realising in 2017, that if I take people on a walk to go and see something, it is an experiential thing and that kind of immersive space that we are now in has really become part of my daily practise. To figure out who am I going to take where? Or how? And how much am I going to charge them? Because I have got to pay my bills.

This was Felix. He has his Masters on savanna ecology and he was showing what we were doing to fire fighters. They were doing a block burn, and we were studying this site afterwards from a savanna ecology perspective.

My time is done.

SPEAKER 3 – Adelheid Frackiewicz – A reflection on materiality within my practice

Hello everyone, thank you so much for this invitation, Bev and Candice especially. There have been such lovely talks already.

Before I get going on my talk, I've got some material here – an object, some material, and these are nail clippings inside this container. I am going to talk about different materials that I use in my practice. I thought this would be nice to send around, as something that you can look at. I'll start with this one to explain what you're looking at. It's a resin object, but inside there is a stone that my youngest child swallowed and passed through her body. It was a very special stone, it slightly lost its colour, but we got it out and it went into my artwork. This is her Taggy, her special lovey, a part of it fell off, so it's a very special personal material that's in here. Those are nail clippings from the family that's being collected.

Let me now get to my talk. The two materials I'm going to talk about today are teeth and lint. This artwork titled 'Cleansing' that was part of the show for my Absa group exhibition, at the beginning of last year, brings these 2 materials together, so I chose to show you this work. In this work, I intended to suggest a shower, but as a way of also referencing a gas chamber. I work with my Polish heritage and my grandfather who escaped from Poland during the 2nd World War. I practice under his surname Frackiewicz. Some of the explorations are quite far removed from my own reality, yet the materials are used specifically and are very personal to me. It's also very special to talk about the material used in my practice.

I'm going to start with a story, but before, just to explain how I come to using teeth in this way. And how I see it as a material; it's an object but it is also a material for me. Before I come to that story, I pose this question to you that I asked myself, and that is: "why do parents keep teeth of their child?" Even if it is just that first little tooth that falls out. I have two daughters, aged 11 and 6 and even though I don't remember losing milk teeth as in any way traumatic, in my household it is very traumatic. Because my daughters have to let these teeth fall out, until there is this last little thread. There can be no pulling out this tooth and that often results in not eating, which stresses the mother out terribly. There was this occasion where my eldest had lost a tooth and it was after a two-week episode of waiting for this tooth to come out. I was holding this tooth thinking "oh, my g-d, I'm so relieved the tooth is finally out and she is going to start eating normally, not just drinking".

There was this relief, but also this excitement about playing the tooth fairy game. It's creative yes, part of our family ritual. And then also the thought of, this is not an easy object to throw away even if you have played that game. It's not something you just throw into the bin. Then, when I was standing with this tooth, I just realised there is a very rich quality in this object that I want to explore in my practice. So, I started then working with it in my practice.

And here is something that I realised: I do a lot of mould-making and casting and something very interesting about these teeth that I have now started exploring, was that the actual process of making a mould and a casting and pulling these teeth out, related to the object itself which was very interesting for me. Actually, pulling out. I made this mould like a gum. It made it very bodily and very visceral, so that was very interesting to me.

(showing new picture)

Here, I'm just showing where I have started exploring with the teeth to put the rods on them and create different surfaces. Other than exploring these teeth in their thousands, I then also started making larger teeth. White concrete teeth as a type of entry point into working with land art, but also land issues in South Africa. This brings me back to concepts that this material opened up. Or, this object, the tooth, opened up for me. So, I've come to explore the teeth as objects that are on the edge of our bodies, neither completely inside or outside. My little 11-year old daughter told me a little joke or titbit recently: that if we are brushing our teeth, we are brushing our skeletons, which I thought was interesting. Teeth can also be used to identify bodies, that are otherwise unidentifiable, so there is the DNA. The DNA identifies the bodies through the dental records, but also the DNA that survives in teeth and bones.

The idea of wisdom teeth came. I started using milk teeth, but then I went on to use wisdom teeth, because the milk teeth were just tiny. The idea of wisdom being in our teeth, or us getting teeth when we are a bit wiser, was interesting to me. Also, in here are especially notions of rootedness and uprootedness. Pulling teeth is something that is very difficult. These were 20-kilogram objects that were very difficult to move, very heavy.

Teeth implanted into the land allows the land to also become a type of body. While doing this work of planting these teeth and then pulling them out, the earth that remains on the root of the tooth is suggestive of blood, which was also interesting for me.

To answer the question why parents keep their children's teeth? This is the way I started to think about the teeth – these are two parents', site specific. This site specificity is due to an *imaginary* edge making contact with a *physical* edge. That's something that I believe one of the ways that materials can or objects can be imbued with a sacred quality. To explain this a bit further, I have another story. We went to the Natural History Museum and my youngest, at that time she was 5 and she asked "what is this random rock?" And we inspected a bit closer and saw it. I told her this rock is a moon rock. It was labelled as a moon rock and when she looked at the rock after she had this explanation, she immediately made that connection. This is a

way for me to explain to you this kind of physical object that we're looking at with this imaginary idea. It's like a physical edge which is visible, with an imaginary idea, or edge and through that, there's this connection that makes us part human. I won't say there are no animals that can do that, but it's a very human quality that we can make this connection with materials.

If we move to the second material that I just briefly touch on, lint. I have another story to explain how I started to work with this material, or how I started to identify with this material. I had just given birth to my second child and just two days after being home, I was at the tumble dryer taking out this piece of lint. Holding this lint again, I identified with it in terms of its fragility. It is held together somehow by magic with static cling. And it's also got the DNA of your family—the hair, so it's like a self-portrait almost of your family life. But the way that it was so fragile, I was just about to crush it and throw it away at this time when I felt very fragile after giving birth and getting home. I can't actually get up from this situation of taking out the lint. So that is how I identified with it, and then started to work with it.

This is my last slide, where I'm showing these 2 materials in their more basic form. Or, while I was exploring them or thinking about them, before putting it together in this larger artwork. This is actually bone ash, so I would fire animal bones in the kiln and I would put this ash into these resin teeth that I cast, so there is actually animal bones and teeth in the resin teeth. I also use this bone powder or bone ash at the bottom of the cleansing, or the artwork titled "cleansing" that I showed you first. These 2 materials have obvious differences: the one is very fragile; the other one is hard and durable.

I consider them as both site specific to the human body, and with this broader notion of site specificity, I approach many other ideas and materials in my art concept.

Thank you.

SPEAKER 4 – Bev Butkow – Plastic, a shimmering bead, and murmuring masses

Hi everyone. While Ilan is putting this on, I want to thank the organisers for inviting me here today. I have it on good authority that I was on the reserve list of speakers and only made the cut when other candidates couldn't make it.

I'm going to start my talk exactly where Shanti left off last week, which was me sitting on the floor surrounded by an abundance of materials. When I was thinking about what to talk about, it didn't come clear to me in the beginning that it is physical materials that I needed to talk about. Because my body is a material in my making. The people that I collaborate with are materials in my making. The stories and the narratives that come out of the work are also part of my making.

(images on screen)

But, somehow, there is a material stickiness, a kind of excess of materials that just always seemed to be around me. If you have a look at the material list, many of the materials that I work with is what Weiwei was calling soft materials. Textiles, off-cuts of fabric, wool, ribbon and that kind of thing. But then, many of them are also mass-produced objects that connect things, all man-made and have no particular value other than as an artist or possibly somebody who is making something.

To me, material's talk. On the one hand, there is very much a nostalgia that comes about that, when I realised I am working with materials that remind me of my grandmother. That I remember sitting as a child watching her rolling up the ribbon that wrapped a gift and keeping this thing, preserving it and storing it. There was a frugality to the fact that she needed to keep objects because there wasn't an abundance of objects then. She gave value to each individual object. I think beyond the personal, materials also bring social context, and we've all had these conversations as we have been speaking today about social context. There is something about the way African artists work with materials that I think has transformed contemporary art practice. El Anatsui taking bottle caps and making shimmering curtains and Penny Siopis working with glue and ink in these incredible surfaces that she makes. There is something about how we as African contemporary artists make the ordinary extraordinary, and make these kinds of monumental and amazing things out of it. For me, what's really important are that materials are a way that I start interrogating myself and interrogating my place in the world and the world around me.

I like to work with materials in the way that Anni Albers suggests to us. Her suggestion is to really get in tune with your materials. Kutlwano was talking about this as well; how you really have to indulge in a receptive relationship with your materials to start listening to it, and that deep listening is a slow process. Anni Albers says that the more subtly we are tuned in to our medium, the more inventive our actions will become.

Part of exploring materials is to really think about the singularity of every single piece of material that you work with. I understand that I am trying to listen to the materials and get receptive to them, but I think that's a lot easier when you are working with materials like bacteria, which have an aliveness to them in the first place. I'm not saying it's easy working with bacteria, but I understand that concept. Rather, I'm working with materials which are man-made, toxified, have undergone these processes so far from anything that is natural. And I am saying that I want to have a synchronistic relationship with them. And that is something that I grapple with.

It's very important in the way that I work with materials that every single bead is a specific object, and the kind of focus that I need to give to every single one of my materials, from the scrap materials to the plastic etc. If you think you are holding a tiny little bead... and you have to see where the hole is... and then you hold a thread... and you have to get that thread through the hole... and it frays at the edge... and then you lick your fingers and roll the edge... and you putting it through... That detailed specificity is what I was trying to show in the art, in that previous artwork.

Even in the curation of the exhibition, I have tried to draw attention to specific moments, so that you really look at a specific artwork and see it as its own unique thing. The next slide shows this lawnmower chord with the orange bits on the left-hand side: how it has a unique kind of characteristic of its own and that comes through in the artwork. There's not very much that I can do to fight it. I really play with what is there. There we go again, just asking for slow looking at the works in the show, as much as I am working with the works slowly.

There is something in the kind of materials that I work with that's about excess and surplus. A friend of mine has a dress-making business and she gives me all her scraps, and those are the fabrics that I work with. When a sheet gets torn in our house, I celebrate because then there is something else to take into my studio.

But this kind of shocked me when I put it together: I was just paging through my phone thinking about images to put on this presentation, and there was such a strong relationship between images that I have taken on my drives through Johannesburg and the works that appear on the show. None of these photos were ever printed and used as reference materials, so it shocked me how there is a seepage of your context around you. And how that just insinuates = into the works that get made. Even this one, where I had a

painted canvas, and I cut it and punctured to weave into it. Even this one gave a sense of fungi starting to grow and colonize onto the canvas. Even though they are not natural materials, there was a sense of something natural that came through it.

In the way that I work with material, suggestions of the body are absolutely critical. The way the forms come together requires my body to be moving in certain ways. It's an exploratory process where I get to understand what's happening through the making process, and through the doing, and through the experimenting and the playing. It's a deeply material process of literally thinking about every material in a very specific way.

The way that I think about working with materials is a methodology of care and of nurturing. It very much mirrors a mothering, where you look at the potential that a child has, and you try nurture that child and grow them to the best of their abilities, to expand them. As I said, it sounds easy to work as a craftsman: you're sanding a log and you can see that body moving in synchronicity with the wood. But how do you do that when you are using materials that are so removed from anything natural? Yet, I try my hardest to become receptive to them. I was at pilates yesterday and everyone had their leg up, and there was like one lady whose leg was down. Out of the corner of my eye, it just jarred how, when you are not in synchronicity, how things are really jarring. That synchronicity is the kind of mindset that I'm trying to bring to my process and to my making. There are moments when that entangling of human and form do seem to work: this (video) was, we were playing with light and shadow and movement and pattern and projection in the studio. There was that single moment that seemed to show that proper entangling and a proper interaction between material forms and myself just coming into being.

I think you can hear very clearly that I work with lots of stuff. When I am painting, collaging, even with the weaving, there is always this build-up of matter. My question is how do I compose it into an artwork? How do you make this work into something that looks like something? I had these little birds in my studio and the one of the birds was tweeting and I'm thinking about how they fly in formation with each other, and I came upon murmuring masses of swallows. How they are individual pieces and yet they all come together to create some kind of form. Another example would be like the plastic patch in the Pacific Ocean, where you have these square kilometres of waste, but the sea currents are flowing, and these bits of waste are flowing together, and creating some kind of movement or flow, connection.

The wonderful thing about creative making is that I don't have to make sense of things. I can see in some kind of ways that my man-made, consumer, factory-made materials have an aliveness. And even if that's only in my imagination that I can see that, I can see points at which material forms start developing their own kind of agency or their own kind of liveliness. It might only be imaginary, but I think there are possibilities that come from seeing forms as having some kind of aliveness. There is a lot of theoretical debate these days about whether materials are alive, whether they have agency or whether it's just a reflection of human agency? Is it that they're just moving into the flows of the world, and through that they develop some kind of liveliness and flow? What I am talking about here is that you take this physical object and through the magic, the alchemy that is creative process, you start transmuting it, you change the nature of that substance. And suddenly you have something that is mutable or that is lively, something that grows, that can be mobilised, that possibly becomes overpowering.

This is the point where I really start thinking about chaos and order, and materiality and excess in our world and in my process. And thinking that, just as I had this build-up of materials in my studio, there is a build-up of materials in the world. And the contradiction or contrast between the way my grandmother treasured her materials, to the way we have this excess around us. The contrast to how that craftsman works with his wood and carves it with synchronicity, to the way we've cluttered our world with so much. In the curation of the exhibition upstairs, I've tried to work with the specificity of an individual form, individual materials and then matter and clutter; to contrast these, so that we can see this intense build-up of materials.

But also, what I'm hoping comes through in my exhibition *re-weaving m/other* upstairs is the sense of possibly of soft arts that Weiwei spoke about, that Kutlwano has dealt with as well. This place of the soft arts as being the place of the *other* and in that place of the *other*, the possibilities for reimagining – for rethinking – for reclaiming our world. I'm asking the question, can we take the softness of soft arts, can we take the matrilineal kind of thinking that I'm working with my materials, and can that be a possible answer and a possible solution to the way we exist in the world today? To this over-cluttering of our world, the toxifying of our earth, the kind of damage that we're doing to the beauty of mother nature around us?

I want to end on an anecdote. At the Symbiosis Exhibition at FADA, I asked the one biologist what happens post-humanity to all this waste material that we have on our earth, to all these toxic things that we have accumulated?

He didn't have an answer.

But then he came up with something which I thought was very beautiful. He said the plants will most likely engulf and en-pod these bits of toxicity... and take them into their core... wrap them up... and cocoon them so that the toxicity is encased. The plants can then carry on living in the world and growing and thriving.

I think that was an interesting and a beautiful place to stop. Thank you.

Tracy Murinik – closing remarks

Thanks so much Bev, and to all our speakers for such wonderful, rich and varied presentations. I would like to invite all the speakers to face the rest of our audience. We're not doing great time-wise. We've got 10 minutes really. I think that so much of what I had anticipated, and would have wanted us to have a conversation around, has already happened in terms of points of connection between very different modes of making and approaches by each of you to your artworks, to the conceptual impetus of why and how you make.

I thought that it would be helpful to just pick up on some key words, key concepts that I could identify as each of you spoke and showed us your works. And then to invite any final comments from each of you. And for the audience to also have an opportunity to both comment and ask questions. Just a quick query in terms of timing is just to get a general sense of whether it is okay if we go over our time by a few minutes, or whether that is going to be extremely disruptive. Ok, there is some nodding, so I will take that as a yes.

I have been writing my thesis as I listened, and there are things that resonate so strongly with some of the things I have already pulled out of what Weiwei discussed, in terms of the nature of the materials that we are speaking about which are not necessarily the traditional North Western concepts of what constitutes an art material and what is intrinsically seen to inhabit some kind of material value. If there's anything that really feels exciting in terms of what you all spoke about, is that the nature of where value resides is so interlinked with the body, your walks, your entering into physical spaces—that the site specificity of what one brings is so much part of how artworks are conceptualised. There is a reciprocity in how people are invited to experience the artworks. Kutlwano, your reference to how both materials and the act of making becomes a cross-generational activity and wisdom, but also activity that becomes integrated into a familial lineage. Which I think was really beautiful and which also resonates so strongly with what Adelheid describe in terms of the very personal value and investment in materials. Like teeth where, yes, they're at a very level of DNA. It speaks back to us, but at the same time it also speaks to a type of reciprocity in terms of humanity. The experience of how we experience changes in our bodies, our growth. And then the referencing that

happens around that. What does a pile of teeth associated with a shower, associated with a personal history, related in your case back to Poland—what do all of those things trigger as emotional connections?

Bev, I thought that you also said something beautiful about what other materials can be beyond the physical materials. That the body, the anecdotes, the audiences that get brought into experience are similarly material constituents in a work. Hannelie, in your works and people recognizing the hangers from a mine, the plastic bags that you describe so beautifully in terms of their histories. These are both material histories of making and ingenuity that require people to use what's available in the face of very little being available. Materially, they also have histories of being reused, passed along materials, man-made materials, like the polymers, that don't just disappear into nature. They have an impact of an artwork, either sustain us or outlive us in many cases. Those were some of the points of connection that I just could identify even among disparate ways of making and engaging in bodily investment.

So much energy and value in a Western art environment is placed on the outcome of what exists as an artwork, which is labelled, captioned, studied and named. What happens when the act of making itself becomes something far more long-standing? You can't trace the extent of that value. You can't pin it down to the moment of its making, or of its presentation, because people take away experiences that inspire them to potentially experiment or think in new ways.

For me, that is something really critical in terms of the nature of reciprocity and the generosity of what materials can mean, where materials can be both almost incidental just because of their availability, but also extremely transgressive in realisation to the formal domain of what has been understood to be the authority of making a formal product or a formal art object. The nature of something that can be thought of both as ephemeral in terms of its physicality because of something that exists or may start to disintegrate, or an event that is the artwork that has a beginning and an end and then might have been recorded but has a different life. We enter a very different relational domain in terms of what constitutes value, and what has the potential to create change, or shift or alter perspective, so that the artwork isn't the event itself. The impact of the artwork has the possibility to feed back into the world.

Briefly, a couple of other things that came up for all of you were the issues of site specificity. Sometimes like Adelheid, the work, the nature of site being the body itself arose really interesting issues of fragility, that the nature of the materials are not necessarily things that are used for the purpose of their longevity. Which is also quite a rebellious response to where we are still. Thankfully, that is changing in terms of the pedagogy around art making, but there is still a very strong history, legacy and belief in the inherent value of materials as needing to have longevity, and some kind of intrinsic value.

Q&A

Editor's note – I have deleted the pleasantries, manners and thank you's

Tracy	I'm going to be quiet now and maybe pass the mic down to each of you to have some final comments. And then get an indication from all of you in the audience if you have any questions or comments.
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Hannelie	<p>What I wanted to say, and this is actually now embodied in this room, is that if you pare up to eco-feminism, queer theory and indigenous knowledge, there is a strong otherwise.ness that I wanted to mention in the title of my talk that surfaces through being and practicing in all of these spaces together. I think there is a great opportunity to really take this kind of talk into a collaborative space and activate all these voices.</p> <p>I am glad that I was chopped a bit short there because it just really feels comfortable that there is a space here for co-creation of important work that our society and we need. And to take it outside of the art museum context. But, also, to really take this moment to be very grateful that we have this opportunity to make art.</p>
Kutlwano	<p>Just to add onto what Tracy and Hannelie are talking about. The work that women are doing, and also about the value that Tracy is echoing. There is this silent learning, I speak from the maternal language. We learn so much by observing. It is not all the time that you are being spoken to, or being shouted at, or you have to be in class and be taught. There is so much learning outside of those spaces. And back again after learning outside and to come back inside and you have a different perspective and different knowledge, and you are wiser. In terms of the woman's work that they are doing throughout—raising kids and contributing to society and the economy.</p> <p>I just want to mention that silence, that quietness of just observing is important because when you sit and you observe and you ask yourself these questions, you begin to see the value. You begin to ask yourself more important questions as to why is tradition like this? Why are things done this way? Why are you creating a mat for your house?</p> <p>You know such mundane questions and observations within our own spaces, within our domestic spaces when we are being raised rightly by the woman It's important to be quiet and still within those moments, and that is when you are able to make it, to see value, to understand it more, to echo it even in such spaces.</p>
Adelheid	<p>To add on to what you were saying. These spaces where these things happen, we aren't busy making art now, but like you were saying, it is a special space where we are sharing with each other and getting some sort of insight. It is so valuable. The same way that we make connections when we are in the process of making work, we think through our work, which is practised based. There is that kind of space, but this is just as powerful. What stays with me, what I have learnt from everybody is how you have approached your materiality differently. And how you enliven your material differently to how I think about my materials. It has been a great experience.</p>
Bev	<p>I guess all I want to say is that these networks of care that I have been talking about so much, just keep on growing and growing and entangling all of us together. And I hope that you guys in the audience know that you are part of that.</p>
Question from audience	<p>How do you imagine, or what is your intention, with the materials that you use, for their lifespan?</p> <p>After you have created your creating, what do you imagine will happen to them?</p>

Kutlwano	<p>That is really really interesting.</p> <p>I will start by going back to how the making of the work began. Remember, it was made to be used in the first place, so it was created to be used in a home. And my intentions are a bit different to how my mother and my grandmother made the works. Also, I have to think about the work itself as you ask what are the intentions and what is going to happen to the artwork when I am not here, when it is being sold or it is somewhere sitting in a home?</p> <p>I think we have to think about the performative process that the work goes through. You know from being created to being used, to beautify a space and then having to be displayed in a gallery. And in that monumental aesthetic prospect.</p> <p>And then having to think that it is a polymer material and it lives for hundreds and hundreds of years after that. So, I guess the material itself contributes to the liveliness, or rather the longevity—the actual material itself kind of contributes to the lifespan of the artwork.</p> <p>I think many moons and many years from now on, it comes with the hope of the artist when they are creating the work. When they are in that meditative process of making the work and also hoping that it contributes to the viewer. It brings a memory, that nostalgic moment or memory that you experience when you are looking at the work. So, you think about the how long it is going to sit in one's memory and you think about the actual longevity of the actual material itself. When someone departs from the artwork, they are going to think about that. In one way it will live and in another way in a physical form, it still lives but eventually, to answer your question at the end of the day, I don't know.</p>
Hannelie	<p>I think for me it is actually much more about the memory that it creates, because not everybody can afford to buy an object. Or it is going to sit in someone's house, where no one else is going to see it? To capture the reason why that intervention was made in the first place, somehow capture it on another platform and share it and keep it in memory.</p> <p>I always go back to that moment when I saw my first like Van Gogh painting in London, and I ran out of that museum because I couldn't believe that I just saw it. And that memory that I can never own it is just burned into my memory.</p>
Question from audience	<p>This is a question for Kutlwano. So, you use the plastic bags to crochet, but how do you first make that into string?</p>
Bev	<p>It is a great question. I can say as a weaver that I never knew there were so many kinds of threads and lines. I look at them in everything I see now, so it's a really great question.</p>

Kutlwano	<p>It is. Thank you so much for asking. I actually skipped an anecdote responding to that question. So, the anecdote goes as so: when my grandmother started weaving them, she would collect all these plastics from different households, even from their own home. You know any plastic would not go to the bin, it would be washed. And there was a time when my mom tells me about how she used to do laundry of different plastic. Because her father would come home from the butchery and the plastic would be holding meat, and they had blood on them. Other plastics were obviously much cleaner. If bread rots in plastic, she had to go through the process of cleaning and washing those plastics until they were spotless. And then they sit down for another process.</p> <p>Kind of the performative act of the artists being in synchronicity with the work. They cut them into strips one by one. After that process, then they roll them into balls. So, it is quite interesting where and how this began and how they started before me. But they would roll them all into different balls, and there was also different plastics like the trash bags which are much bigger than the grocery bags. The municipality, I don't know if they still do that, they used to give them out to each and every household. So, my grandmother sometimes she would... you know at home anything that needs to be decomposed, you decompose... but anything that needs to be thrown away, it is thrown away. You save more plastics by that and also she would use those big ones and cut them into different strips until she also created those balls. Once you have the longest longest strip that has been rolled into a ball, it's so much easier to work with. Believe me.</p> <p>Because now what I am doing is quite different, instead of creating the longest ball out of the trash bag, I am kind of taking the shortcut, by cutting it strip by strip so that I can actually join every single time. I join more on my rows than they did. It is much easier to create the rolls of the balls out of the grocery bags and the huge huge bags. That's how I create my strips so that I can actually crochet and experiment with the weaving, and also braiding the strips as well, so that I can weave with them.</p>
Question from audience	<p>I guess this is for any or all of you. Because the material is so fundamental in your art making, do you find that you start with material and that leads to the concept? Or do you start with the concept and then find the material to match?</p>
Bev	<p>I very much start with the material and the gestures of making. And from the process of experimenting, playing, putting things together, weaving, some kind of energy or feeling or sense comes out of the work. Very often in my case it's like 'oh you work so hard, there is hard work embedded in it'. And then that starts becoming the concept that I work with.</p>
Adelheid	<p>For me it is the same. It is also definitely identifying the material, and then kind of going through a process that I am experimenting with what can be done with this material. Like lint for example, I wanted it to be a larger section, but first I looked at them separately and then made it work that way. Then connected the smaller parts. And then, so it is the technicalities of the material as well, that I think are interesting and challenging. And you have flops and what does that mean? Why are you working with this in the first place? I think that also comes to me in some sort of concept.</p>

Kutlwano	<p>For me it is a back and forth process. I sometimes begin with the idea or the vision. I would just be sitting and thinking and looking at my mom's curtain. And I would look at this beautiful pattern or something she had made long ago. And that for me sparks the idea of I want to make. But then how do you make it? What is accessible? Ok I have these materials, I can use them and experiment with this material and create what I want to create my vision.</p> <p>So, it works both ways in different artworks as well.</p>
Hannelie	<p>I mainly work the other way around. I've got a table and a whole lot of stuff lying around that I know I can access when I phone people. When things sort of align and new opportunities arise, I might phone a geologist again and go collect stone or whatever. But it is very much a network of materials, because it is often so large scale. I keep in contact with a lot of people to make sure that that network stays active. And then often it is in combination with the site visit that conceptually really develops a work for me.</p>
Question from audience	<p>Sorry, going back to the string making, so let's say you are making art with traditional media. If you are inspired, you are able to just immediately grab a pen and paper and start drawing.</p> <p>But with the crocheting, I would imagine that you are not able to do that immediately because you have to essentially put in efforts into making the materials and cutting up the string before you are able to place the idea into action. I just want to know how do you keep yourself going through that process? How do you motivate yourself, and discipline yourself enough to finish that string so that you can actually make the actual artwork.</p>
Kutlwano	<p>I think that you have to have a burn, the urge to speak, the urge to voice out another person's voice. I'm not only voicing my own voice and my work, but also I am echoing the maternal lineage. There is that first burn, the urge to bring this out to light. That is how I keep myself going.</p> <p>Secondly, I think I was born a creator but at the same time I went to school to learn how to create. There is a link between the two lives. I now have the education, but at the same time, there is this traditional, inspiration and the family unit that have been creative. I keep myself going and technically, you are also physically making the work. I will start a crochet line, go to the second one, go to the third one, and I will still think about this idea that I want to create. As simple as creating a portrait because the first time I sat hours and hours and trying to get this idea out of my head with this mundane material. I was making a portrait and that involved me separating different colours and into different shapes. I wanted to see it come to life.</p> <p>That vision is the first thing that keeps me going. And secondly having to see the audience, meaning the first people that see the work that I do and how they respond to it. They are like "I never thought that you could go as far as this". That contributes to me keeping going because now they get to realise, they get to learn as well as to what this material can do. Further than how they created the work for their own domestic spaces, so there is that.</p> <p>And the other thing that keeps me going, I get to release a whole lot of energies and stresses and frustrations. When I'm in my studio and I'm sitting and working, I'm in a comfortable, sometime cocoon position and I'm realising. And I'm meditating. It helps me a lot, so that's why I also keep going, besides from the pain that I experience sometimes when your fingers are numb. Sometimes you have to wear finger protectors so that I can actually keep going. When I have that on then definitely, I'm going but as much as I am experiencing that pain, there is the pleasure of making the work.</p>

	I would say that there are 3 or 4 things that keeps me going.
Tracy	Thank you for the lovely comments and the lovely insights, great questions and for just for a really, really special space that has been created here with all of you Please join us now for something to eat and to drink, and to continue chatting amongst yourselves.

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