

## Article

# A Critical Investigation into the Impact of Community Mural Art

Sabine Marschall

### **Introduction**

A tremendous increase in community mural art has been experienced in South Africa over the past few years. As a relatively cheap form of public art, murals are perceived to serve diverse purposes ranging from upliftment, education, job creation, skills development and cultural expression, to the encouragement of a sense of place and ownership. Although murals play a vital role in South Africa's contemporary public art scene, this vibrant art form has received surprisingly little attention from art critics, art historians and other academics. While the need for an in-depth analysis of the imagery of mural art will be considered elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> this article will attempt critically to assess – with respect to a case study of Durban, one of South Africa's major centres of mural art – the presumed effects and benefits of mural art on a) participating artists and b) the local community or target audience. Before focusing on the critical assessment, the article will provide a brief introduction to the history of the mural movement in Durban, a chronological overview of some of the major murals painted in the city since the early 1990s, and it will introduce the main project leaders.<sup>2</sup>

### **The mural movement in Durban**

In most international centres, mural art is a phenomenon that first flourished in the late 1960s and early 1970s, usually as part of that period's broader social upheavals and civil rights movements. These murals were initiated by minority groups often living in desolate neighbourhoods and usually carried a message of social protest (Barnett 1984, Barthelmeh 1982). In Durban, however, mural art occurred only on a very small scale before the early 1990s, mostly on the initiative of lecturers and students from the Fine

Arts Department of Technikon Natal. The reasons for this remarkable absence are too complex to be explored in depth here, but are certainly associated with the broader political climate at the time. The current community mural movement,<sup>3</sup> which involves the participation of a diverse, multicultural group of muralists – academically trained artists along with self-taught and completely untrained participants – began only around 1990. It should be seen in the context of the broader community arts movement in South Africa. Community art centres of various types have grown and increased in number dramatically over the past ten years in an attempt to provide an alternative art education programme accessible to ordinary people and as an attempt at reaching out into previously disadvantaged communities (Africus 1995, van Robbroeck 1991).

The city's most prolific mural company is Community Mural Projects, founded around 1990 by the socially committed and academically trained artists, Terry-anne Stevenson and Ilse Mikula, and the more informally trained Durban artist Thami Jali, who initiated the idea of community mural art following a trip to London. Their first work in the city of Durban – painted in 1992 – was the so-called 'Human Rights Wall' on the west-facing surface of the wall surrounding the former Central Prison, earmarked at that time for demolition. The mural, no longer extant, depicted a number of clauses from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The wall quickly became a landmark and when the prison was actually demolished, the 'Human Rights Wall', as it became known, framed by two watch-towers, was left standing as a memorial.

In 1994, following the country's first general elections, the east-facing side of the same wall was muralised depicting elements of South Africa's Interim Bill of Rights. When the South African Government of National Unity eventually developed and adopted its own Bill of Rights, the west-facing side of the wall was painted over in 1997 to depict the major clauses of this historic document.

The year before the first general elections, in 1993, Lawyers for Human Rights commissioned Community Mural Projects to paint the 'Voter Education' mural on the western facade of the Durban Central Station to provide a visual directory explaining the voting procedure to a largely illiterate community. In the same year the wall enclosing Medwood Gardens, a park in the Durban city centre, was painted with a paradisaical scene of lush vegetation, biblical allusions and hints at a well-known Zulu mythological story.



Figure 1. Bat Centre, Durban, 1995 Community Mural Projects.

A considerable number of murals were painted by Community Mural Projects in 1994, the best-known and most highly visible of which is the so-called 'Nomkhubulwana' mural, depicting an imposing, all-embracing figure of the Zulu goddess on a large wall in the busy Warwick Triangle area. The following year, 1995, saw the painting of the 'Community against Crime' mural, near the Pine Street Taxi rank and the 'Seven-headed River Snake' mural on an adjacent wall, as well as the extensive muralised facade of the Bartel Arts Trust (BAT) Centre in the harbour. During the same year Community Mural Projects created a mural in Johannesburg in conjunction with the Africus 95 Johannesburg Biennale, which became the springboard for the subsequent national expansion of the company's activity.<sup>4</sup>

Besides Community Mural Projects, the current mural movement in Durban is motivated by another project leader, Leoni Hall, who has until recently operated from a local community arts centre called 'Studio 849'.<sup>5</sup> Hall started co-ordinating murals in 1995 and she, too, employs diverse and multicultural groups of artists. Her first work was the mural on Effingham bridge off North Coast Road, with depictions of colourful plants and insects, designed to uplift this drab industrial area. As a result of her work in producing this mural, Hall was approached by a property management company to paint the tall concrete pillars on the east facing side of the Central Station, also to depict lush vegetation. Most recently she has completed a mural at a refurbished worker's facility at Maydon Wharf with scenes inspired by the surrounding harbour environment.

Some of the artists who originally started out with Community Mural Projects have recently managed their own murals, mostly at train stations in Umlazi and KwaMashu townships. Particularly worth mentioning is the mural at Umlazi Station, co-ordinated by Stembiso Sibisi with a small group of other artists. The mural is comprised of several walls, some of considerable size, depicting realistically painted township scenes, some with a humorous slant, some including recognisable landmarks from the surrounding township environment. Everywhere in this mural people, often painted life size, are represented as working together on various activities.

Among the various other murals in the city of Durban, the 'AIDS Awareness' mural along Alice Street, painted by Apt Artworks from Johannesburg, is worth mentioning. Most recently the mural movement has taken a decisively commercial turn, as some local businesses have discovered mural art as a way of attracting customers. The city council as well as the airport authorities have commissioned a number of murals aimed primarily at tourists.

#### **'Community art' versus 'fine art'**

Wall painting is a 'people's art', is the assertion underlying the titles of both Barnett's (1984) and Cockcroft and Weber's (1977) books on contemporary murals. Barnett (1984) claims that mural painting is the most democratic art America has ever produced. Assessments along these lines represent the majority voice. Murals are nearly always presented as a popular, community-driven reaction against the elitist, exclusive, and academic character of the 'fine art' tradition sponsored by state institutions and the official art establishment.

In South Africa, however, the relationship between murals and so-called 'fine art' practices, as well as the relationship between community arts in general as opposed to professional or state institution-based arts has changed dramatically over the past few years, mostly (but not exclusively) as a result of the country's political transformation. The 'White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage' declares that 'Access to, participation in, and enjoyment of the arts, cultural expression and the preservation of one's heritage are basic human rights; they are not luxuries, nor are they privileges as we have generally been led to believe' (1996:15).

Thus, while in the past, under the apartheid regime, the community arts movement had been closely aligned with the broader cultural opposition

front, which, in turn, identified itself with the wider political 'struggle' (van Robbroeck 1991:2), the relationship between 'community arts' and 'state-arts'<sup>6</sup> has become much more complex in the new South Africa. Since the democratic, majority-ruled state is now (presumably) no longer a repressive and totalitarian force, its institutions are not in opposition or irrelevant to the needs of 'the people'. This has important consequences in respect of the ideological perception of the art practiced in and promoted by such institutions as universities, galleries, schools, etc. Many official art institutions have (successfully or unsuccessfully) attempted to revise their policies and curricula in an effort to accommodate the needs of the previously disadvantaged and have established community outreach programmes, some of which include mural painting.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, many community art centres enjoy close links with established art institutions and do not perceive their art practice as being in opposition to the latter.

As mentioned above, major shifts have taken place not only in the political arena but also in the definition of 'art' and in the way 'fine art' is perceived to relate to 'community art'. Judging by the majority of newspaper articles, reviews, interviews, TV broadcasts and other forms of public response, community murals have gained a reputable status as a means of authentic cultural self-expression in a re-defined art world.<sup>8</sup>

However, not everybody agrees with the endlessly reiterated (and politically correct) standard appraisal of mural art. Local art critic Jeff Chandler in his newspaper article entitled 'Official graffiti or art' (*Sunday Tribune*, January 21, 1996) is one of the few who have articulated publicly an opposition view. He denies the Durban wall paintings not only the status of art but also the classification as 'murals'. He coins the term 'official graffiti', 'OG', to describe these paintings, 'a type of urban art tolerated by officials - a kind of official graffiti'. Unlike mural art, 'OG' - according to Chandler - requires from the participating artist 'no specific skill other than being able to hold a brush' and furthermore allows for 'untrammelled freedom, something that is not possible with mural art which involves intensive pre-planning, strict discipline as well as social and public accountability'. After a very negative critique of the BAT Centre murals, which has recently been supported by local art critic, Dan Cook,<sup>9</sup> Chandler concludes that there are very few actual 'murals' in Durban.<sup>10</sup>

Chandler's and Cook's criticisms reveal that the debate about community art and the significance of artistic standards, as well as the question about how to assess quality, is by no means settled even among the 'informed'

circles of the art world. What becomes evident upon closer analysis, is that critics like Chandler tend to focus on the community mural as a finished product, much like a 'fine art' gallery piece. The majority of 'praising' commentators, on the other hand, explicitly or implicitly acknowledge that the *process* of making the mural, with all its implications and associated benefits, may be more important than is the actual painting.

### **Presumed effects and benefits of mural art**

Internationally, extraordinary claims have been made by a variety of writers about the effects and benefits of public mural art. Murals are presented as a catalyst, capable of initiating social or even political change by creating public awareness, providing a social critique, asserting a community's identity, fostering team spirit, and sometimes encouraging action.<sup>11</sup> Barnett (1984:15) claims enthusiastically, 'murals are freeing ordinary people from ways of seeing that are not their own and helping them take control of their perceptions, which is necessary to their taking charge of their own lives'. In South Africa the main thrust of mural art's purpose and effect is perceived to be upliftment, 'empowerment', and the establishment of a national and community identity.

Catherine Slessor (1995:98), writing about the 'Nomkhubulwana' mural in Durban, for example, asserts, 'The project aims to bring a vibrant art form into public places, and act as a vehicle for communal self expression and empowerment. Besides enriching the environment, the murals develop skills and encourage creativity in people who have generally had little or no exposure to art'. The anonymous author of a brief article on mural art in the magazine *Parks and Grounds* maintains that 'Regardless of what they may depict, murals have the potential to transform our environment, allowing the inhabitants to "reclaim" that environment and in doing so, establish an identity with it' (Anonymous 1997:77). Under the heading 'reducing violence' the author even asserts that mural art gives people a sense of purpose, which helps channel their energies into the right direction and abstain from violence and 'counterproductive activities' (1997:78).

The fact that such notions, persistently recurring in one form or another in virtually every publication on mural art, are rarely based on verifiable data and methodologically sound assessments, necessitates a critical investigation and perhaps some qualification. Firstly, there needs to be a distinction made between various types of murals. It can be presumed that enthusiastic claims about 'empowerment' apply only to murals painted

with at least some degree of active involvement and participation of the local community. Some murals existing in the public domain in Durban and elsewhere clearly do not fall into this category. Even many of the murals featured in Barnett's book are purely decorative or ornamental, such as, for example, supergraphics, designed by an individual artist and executed by a commercial sign painter. Oscillating between highly commercial enterprises and truly participatory and collaborative projects exist a wide range of murals that cannot claim to involve the local community to any substantial degree. In fact, Barnett (1984:37) concedes that some murals are just imposed on the community, much like billboards.

Nevertheless, even in respect of participatory and socially critical murals, the question must be asked of how effective murals really are in bringing about change, particularly sustained or long-term change, and how one reliably measures a mural's effect? Barthelmeh, in his book on street murals, most of them in Europe and North America, represents one of the rare voices of scepticism when he contends, 'To claim that mural art effects lasting change would be an overstatement which would ignore the effects of social conditioning. It is, after all, hard to believe that a mural will transmit lasting cultural pride or even dignity to the many people living a desolate, marginal existence in urban ghettos, especially in the US. Even the community-building process of jointly creating a mural seldom has a lasting effect, since the concept of neighborhood or community is no longer valid in many cities' (Barthelmeh 1982:7).

Barthelmeh's observation could not be more poignant when we consider the contemporary South African context. Given the enormous depth and severity of the racial, economic and social divisions as a result of South Africa's apartheid past, it must be asked whether it is not a romantic myth to believe that a mural can reverse or even mitigate deeply entrenched sentiments such as racism, gradually acquired during decades of biased education, legislation based on an ideology of white supremacy and systematic indoctrination on every level of social interaction. As Okwui Enwezor recently noted, 'However hopeful one may sound in articulating the novelty and newness of South Africa, we must constantly remind ourselves that, while nations may disappear, the ideologies which feed and sustain them, and which form the foundational basis of their creation, are more difficult to eradicate' (1997:21-2). It may, in fact, be argued that the ubiquitous human rights murals and recurrent enthusiastic images of the non-conflictual 'rainbow nation' that tie in perfectly with current political

discourses in the new South Africa tend to downplay and sanitise existing problems and mask, rather than reflect, reality.

A process of critical investigation and demythologising of 'community murals' must also take a closer look at the degree to which the local community was actually involved in the mural. Were community members consulted about the site of the mural, did they actively participate in determining its theme and generating the basic concept and detailed design? Were they given the opportunity to take part in the painting process and, if so, to what degree were they able to implement their own creative ideas?

To complicate the problem further, it may be asked what or who 'the community' is in the first place, particularly when murals are located not in cohesive neighbourhoods with a fairly homogeneous population but in commercial or semi-industrial urban settings with no local resident population and a heterogeneous crowd of passers-by. Who is included or excluded from participating, and who makes this decision? Can public mural art be considered a true medium of popular cultural self-expression, when ultimately all murals are controlled by the person or community organisation that initiated the project and who may be accountable to the sponsor? Such questions are essential when considering the issue of identity, empowerment and the creation of a community team spirit. After all, the theoretical possibility should be taken into account that a mural may not only be unwanted but may even debilitate a community and create tension by, for instance, reinforcing an existing rift between conflicting parties through the ostentatious support of one party's agenda to the detriment of the other's.

Barnett (1984) has developed some criteria for the assessment of public murals, some of which are not pertinent to the South African situation, but others could serve as valuable starting points.<sup>12</sup> The development of criteria according to which not only the artistic merit, but also other objectives (such as empowerment) set out in the project proposal could be evaluated, seems long overdue, given the fact that some mural projects receive considerable amounts of sponsorship. The following will attempt to initiate this process by specifically investigating two aspects, mural art's 'empowerment' of participating artists and its benefits to the local community.



### **'Empowerment' of artists**

Empowerment of artists through mural art can occur on a number of levels. Mural painting, for example, may provide some artists with the opportunity to improve their skills, learn new artistic techniques, expand their scope of experience as an artist and learn about the various organisational issues that mural painting entails, thus potentially enabling them to co-ordinate their own project at a later stage. Many artists and project leaders emphasise that the *process* of making a mural is of equal, if not greater importance, than the end result, which is the finished painting.

In 1997 Caroline Smart, editor of *Durban Arts* magazine, conducted interviews with a number of mural artists in connection with the production of a TV broadcast focusing on wall paintings in Durban to be aired on *KZN Tonight*. In response to the question of what they see the benefits of murals to be, most artists focused on financial advantages, ranging from the creation of temporary employment to the indirect returns achieved through the attraction of tourists to the city.<sup>13</sup> Community murals, generally funded by one or several sponsoring organisations or businesses, can thus be seen as economically empowering as they provide employment and financial remuneration to the participating artists, some of whom might otherwise remain without sustenance. Support of the Durban city council for Community Mural Projects has always hinged crucially on the potential for job creation. That the objective of providing employment has – in the eyes of the city council – been successfully met is indicated by the fact that Terry-anne Stevenson has recently received an Award for Excellence in acknowledgement of her services to the city in terms of job creation.

Gainful employment for a few days can, of course, hardly count as economic empowerment if there are no regular and frequent follow-up opportunities. In this regard opinion is divided: interviews and informal discussions with artists<sup>14</sup> reveal that some artists have participated in a number of murals, but for others there was no further employment available in the community mural field. At best, long-term economic empowerment can be claimed for those artists who have been successful in initiating and co-ordinating their own mural projects, creating jobs for themselves and others. An example is Nkosinathi Jali who, after having participated in Community Mural Projects, began to run art projects at Umzansi Arts Centre in Clermont (Smart 1997). The Arts Centre gave him and his collaborators the brief to paint a mural at a school and then encouraged them to approach the principals of other schools in the area with proposals

for further murals. They were successful and painted murals at Moqele, Setheengele and Ntokozile High Schools.

Other artists who started their own mural projects are Khulekani Mncube<sup>15</sup> and Joseph Manana, who recently co-ordinated a mural in Stanger, as well as Sthembiso Sibisi from Umlazi, who painted the remarkable mural at Umlazi Station in collaboration with a couple of artist friends. Although these success stories are encouraging, they nevertheless pertain to a very small number of artists and a fairly small total number of mural projects. As Thami Jali, one of the co-founders of the community mural movement maintains, mural art is not primarily a source of material gain for artists.

The second most frequently mentioned benefit that artists see in mural painting is the exposure that the mural gives them and their work in the community.<sup>16</sup> Not only do artists derive much needed appreciation and confidence from the positive public responses, but sometimes concrete spin-offs may result from involvement in the mural. In Thami Jali's opinion, the true benefit and potential empowerment value of community murals lies in the creation of a network among artists, particularly black artists, the fostering of a team spirit and the indirect effects that may result from this activity. Networking among artists is the first step by which artists can organise themselves and thus stand a greater chance of being able to access funding and other opportunities. There is evidence to suggest that murals in Durban have been successful in creating a network and a co-operative spirit among black artists, at least to a limited extent. Informal discussions with various artists reveal that many of them know each other primarily from having collaborated on a mural at some stage. Artists who co-ordinate murals themselves tend to invite those other artists who have previously participated in murals. Furthermore, a group of black artists, Joseph Manana, Lindelani Ndnisa, Jabulani Cyprian Mkhize, Lalelani Mbhele, Innocent Hlela and Assistant Mzulweni, recently had a group exhibition of their work at Durban's foremost commercial gallery, the Natal Society of Arts (NSA) Gallery. Many of these artists – some of whom knew each other through mural painting – would hardly have been able to exhibit their work on their own. As Jali points out, the benefit of mural art is also its ability to break down barriers – barriers between black and white artists, but, perhaps more importantly and often ignored, barriers among black artists themselves.

However, the success of murals in creating an organised community of artists in Durban is clearly limited. Thami Jali, who has worked in

Johannesburg for a few months or even years at a time, reports that, from an artist's perspective, the local art scene differs considerably from that in Johannesburg, particularly with respect to black artists. Artists in Durban, according to his experience, tend to work more individualistically and there is relatively little evidence of artists organising themselves. This is confirmed by observation and corroborated by many others, many of whom – like Khehle Ngobese – expressed a great interest in joining an organisation of artists, should one be founded in Durban.

Another important area from which artists may benefit by participation in mural painting is in the opportunity for self-expression and personal growth. Many artists report that they tend to learn much from their participation in a mural. Community Mural Projects, in particular, place high emphasis on allowing artists the maximum amount of artistic freedom. The theme of the mural is workshopped with participating artists, often with the input from the local community and artists collaborate in creating the initial sketches for the mural in discussion with the project co-ordinator. Leoni Hall, on the other hand, has a somewhat more commercial, product-oriented approach, where artists' participation in the initial design is much more limited and participating artists subjugate some of their artistic freedom to a mutually developed common style that is meant to ensure cohesiveness and a professional appearance for the mural. In Community Mural Projects' works, the appearance of the final product is frequently somewhat incoherent and individual hands can often be distinguished. On the 'Human Rights Wall', for example, some artists even signed the section of the wall for which they were primarily responsible.<sup>17</sup> As Stevenson expresses it in the above mentioned TV interview: 'The concept behind Community Mural Projects is to create an opportunity for individuals, persons some who have experience in painting and others who haven't, who paint pictures of their hopes and dreams and just to have free expression' (Smart 1997). Thami Jali corroborates her point when he asserts: 'I found that people just tend to take it up and just become very free and start doing things on their own. If ever you have to help them, I have found that it would maybe be to improve the composition or give some suggestions on colour. But basically people just start doing things that they like to do' (Smart 1997). Based on observation and anecdotal evidence, there is ample manifestation of people's enjoyment of the mural painting process. This applies not only to those who participate in the actual painting activity, but also to people from the local community and passers-

by, who stop and look, get interested and excited, comment and make suggestions.<sup>18</sup> For many people, this is the first time they have ever been exposed to art or witnessed the making of a painting. In particular, seeing individuals from their own community involved in the painting process can have a very profound effect.

### **Participation of untrained or partially trained artists**

In the spirit of true community participation, Stevenson, and to a lesser degree Hall, insist that the objective of facilitating personal growth and self-expression should be extended to a limited number of ordinary members of the local community who have had very little or no prior training as artists. In Stevenson's view, murals are a way of giving ordinary people a chance to participate in art, an objective that meets one of the basic premises of the 'White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage'.<sup>19</sup> According to Jali and Stevenson (Smart 1997), murals provide an excellent opportunity to discover and develop artistic talent. Stevenson mentions the murals at the Valley Trust Clinic in Bothas Hill, painted in 1992 by a large number of completely untrained participants, some of whom suddenly discovered the incredible enjoyment that they derived from painting.<sup>20</sup> A few individuals realised their artistic talent. For one artist, Khulekani Mncube, this discovery fundamentally changed his life; he enrolled at ML Sultan Technikon to study graphic design and finances his studies by painting murals in shebeens and people's homes.<sup>21</sup>

A significant difference between Community Mural Projects and murals co-ordinated by Leoni Hall with respect to the employment of untrained artists from the local community is that Hall insists that all participating artists attend a workshop prior to painting the wall, where they are taught drawing skills, colour theory, and are encouraged to develop a common style. While the mural is being painted, untrained artists mostly do the work of assistants and partially trained artists work under the close guidance of trained artists. Most individual images are re-worked by one or several artists and integrated into the larger context to achieve a coherent style and professional look for the mural as a whole.

Community Mural Projects, who place great emphasis on individual artistic expression, usually refrain from subjecting participants to pre-mural artistic training. Workshops are run to develop a theme and see how individual artists' sketches fit into the larger concept, but not with the aim of developing a common style. Even lesser trained participants are allowed

## A Critical Investigation into the Impact of Community Mural Art

to actually paint, under the supervision and guidance of more experienced artists. Artists are not constantly swapped around to paint on other parts of the mural and individually painted sections are not usually re-worked by other artists. While Community Mural Projects' first wall paintings at the Valley Trust appear extremely incoherent and amateurish, some would say naive or child-like, as a result, in the later Durban examples, various methods were devised for integrating greatly diverse parts of the murals. In the 'Nomkhubulwana' mural, for example, the imposing figure of the Zulu goddess, sophisticatedly foreshortened, was the work of academically trained artists, while the smaller scenes of people revelling below, were largely painted by untrained local participants.



Figure 2. Nomkhubulwana mural, Durban, 1995, Community Mural Projects.

Community Mural Projects' rationale behind the rejection of training workshops is that artists should be able to express themselves freely on the walls in the communities' midst, and should not be influenced by prior exposure to academic methods that reflect western fine art standards. This attitude has been strongly criticised by local art critics Jeff Chandler (1996) and recently Dan Cook (1998) specifically in respect to the BAT Centre murals. It must be noted that both critics are located at Natal Technikon, an institution that dominated the mural scene before community driven mural projects were established in Durban. Still today, murals co-ordinated by Natal Technikon are typically of a very different kind, technically more sophisticated, stylistically and thematically derived from European and American models and executed by students from the Fine Arts Department.<sup>22</sup>

While for Chandler the fact that untrained artists were allowed to participate on the wall relegates the final product to the status of 'graffiti', Cook's criticism highlights a more interesting point. He argues that the decision not to provide prior training reflects the myth of the black African's natural talent, 'the idea that blacks are not thinking, but merely sensual beings' (Cook 1998). The implication, to expand on Cook's point, is that black Africans have an innate way of expressing themselves, the authenticity of which would be destroyed by exposure to, or imposition of, Western academic training.

The same point has been raised by South Africa's foremost art historian, Elizabeth Rankin, with regard to the !Xu & Khwe Cultural Project at Schmidtsdrift (Rankin 1997). Here members of the local Bushmen community have the opportunity to gain access to art materials and express themselves freely in a visual art medium without receiving any actual artistic training. Rankin exposes the myth of the concept of non-interventionist art making and hints at the unspoken but obvious rationale underlying the Schmidtsdrift project, namely that training these artists would destroy the authenticity and 'Africanness', as it were, of their cultural expression. Marketed internationally under the common name 'Bushman art', this perceived loss of authenticity could have serious financial implications in terms of the works' attractiveness to the international art market.

Community Mural Projects' policy of not providing preliminary training has also been criticized by some of the participating black artists themselves. Joseph Manana, for example, expressed concern about the overall quality

and professional standard of murals.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Leoni Hall's concept of demanding from all participating artists that they attend several days of training workshops to develop a common style has received mixed reactions among artists as well. For example, Khehle Ngobese, who has participated in Hall's murals at Berea Station and at a restaurant in Umhlanga Rocks, personally finds the workshop very beneficial, even for a partially trained artist such as himself, since it provides an opportunity to expand one's knowledge and skills. However, he reports that he knows of many other participants, who have expressed their dislike of attending workshops.<sup>24</sup>

The real issue, however, is not so much whether untrained artists should receive prior training or not. The point to consider is the uneasy fact that there still often exists a very unequal distribution of power, where the decision of providing training or not ultimately rests in the hands of the organisers. It could be argued that the empowerment value of participating in a mural would be increased if the respective participants' own views on the issue of training workshops were elicited, respected and implemented.

### **Impact of murals on target audience**

Project leaders of community arts initiatives are typically motivated by a strong desire to deconstruct the perceived elitist stance of 'fine art'. They also prioritise the need for bringing art into the streets to reach a wider audience and broaden the base of people who enjoy art and who participate in its making. According to Jali, the creation of a broader awareness of art among people who have never had much exposure to it is one of the most important aspects of mural painting (Smart 1997). The question is, how successful is mural art in creating such an awareness, dismantling common notions about art's elitism, and nurturing a greater understanding of art? Murals are often very large, located in public places and are likely to remain there for many years. Based on these facts it can be argued that a mural is capable of making a more powerful statement and is seen by far greater numbers of people than any oil painting in any art gallery. What effect does a mural have on the people who see it? How powerful can a mural be in influencing people's behaviour?

Artists tend to have idealistic views about the impact of their art on the broader community. Most artists, when asked, spontaneously assure one that they believe in the benefits of public murals on local communities,

often without, however, being able to specify, where such benefits may lie.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, observation reveals that people often walk past murals without paying the slightest attention. Some murals are vandalised or painted over by people from the local community. In other cases murals become temporarily or permanently hidden behind stalls or other obstructive articles. This raises questions about the murals' impact on the sensibility and aesthetic education of ordinary passers-by, their value in uplifting the area and, in particular, their effectiveness in getting the intended message across. How do people really relate to the mural and what does it do for them and for their environment?

It must be acknowledged that it is methodologically very difficult, if not impossible, to establish and quantify the impact of murals, or any other forms of public art, on people who see these works. The influence may be very subtle but it is nevertheless powerful; some people might sense but not be able to articulate certain effects that the mural had on them while others may be completely unconscious of such effects. The following evaluation of interviews conducted with a random sample of passers-by at selected mural sites in Durban should be understood as a tentative indication and certainly not 'the final word' on the impact of murals on the target audience.<sup>26</sup>

The majority of people interviewed were black Africans from different age groups and social backgrounds; some respondents were Indian, a few were white. All black Africans were interviewed in Zulu, their responses taped and later translated. The results of these interviews were as follows.

Eight people were interviewed at the 'Human Rights Wall'. With the exception of one, who was a Canadian tourist, all respondents frequented the area regularly, some every day and some on a weekly basis in connection with activities associated with the adjacent fleamarket. All respondents professed to having noticed the mural, but virtually nobody had ever looked at it closely. The majority of interviewees (five out of eight) had absolutely no idea what the mural depicted. Two respondents, both of whom appeared more educated than most other people interviewed (one being a high-school pupil, the other a student), identified the theme as being about human rights. The Canadian tourist felt the mural was about social justice and local people's aspirations. One Indian man explained that he had once looked at a section of the wall in an attempt to find out what it was about but had failed to understand its content.<sup>27</sup>



Virtually all respondents professed to liking the mural, although they could not specify what they liked about it, apart from 'the colours'. One woman remarked that although she liked the mural, she thought it would be more appropriate indoors 'for decoration'. An elderly man answered that he was reminded of painted advertisements. He understood the purpose of the mural to be purely decorative to 'make the place look beautiful'. Others responded in a similar vein, some remarking that they considered it to be amusing or diverting. Two people thought that the mural probably has some kind of message or a lesson to be learned by the community but didn't personally know what it might be.

At the 'Nomkhubulwana' mural six people were interviewed, all of whom were black Africans selling fruit or other goods in the area. One third of the respondents identified the big female figure as the Nomkhubulwana, although knowledge about the Zulu goddess appeared to be limited. Only one woman who was selling fruit near the mural felt that she could relate to the painting because 'it talks about black history, which is my history'. About half of the respondents did not know what the painting depicts or means, or even why it may have been painted. A young African vendor commented, 'I'm told this drawing is important to be seen, even tables here are not supposed to lean on the wall, because they might scratch the painting, and it might not be seen. But I do not know why it was done.'

While the figure of Nomkhubulwana did not appear to be meaningful to most respondents, two of whom even specifically expressed their dislike,<sup>28</sup> most respondents were able to relate to the smaller scenes painted below the great goddess. They particularly pointed out the images of people selling fruit, with which some personally identified.<sup>29</sup>

Asked whether they liked the 'Nomkhubulwana' mural, half of the respondents maintained that they did not like the painting. One woman said she found it too busy and dense; she felt that there are too many colours, and that the painting lacks clarity. Asked what kind of subject matter she would have preferred, she responded: 'Something nice, like flowers.' Another man also said that the painting looks 'too dense, one can't see what's going on'. He maintained that he couldn't see anything beautiful in it at all and that he would have preferred 'a vase with flowers'.

Five people were interviewed at the 'Medwood Garden' mural. While one respondent, a young male high school pupil, completely dismissed the mural and rejected all art as 'stupid' and a waste of time and resources, all

other respondents found something positive in the painting. One man liked the colours and the fact that the mural is near the bus stop, allowing people to look at it while they are waiting. One woman, a mother of two, said she liked the mural very much and her children loved it. She remarked that the colours are 'rainbow colours' that correspond to the colours of the South African flag. One middle-aged man felt that murals like this are important because of the lessons they teach the community, but he didn't know what the lesson of this work might be. Most other respondents also did not know what the mural was about. Only one woman said the painting was about nature and the subject matter was probably chosen because the wall encloses a park.

Several respondents preferred to talk about art in general rather than relating to this particular mural. Two people commented that 'black people are not much open to art' and don't understand art – a response that also emerged in Caroline Smart's interviews. Two other respondents felt that art was elitist and expensive.

While the previous three murals represented works that have a meaningful content, intended to be educational or instill pride in black heritage by representing themes drawn from Zulu mythology and folk legends, the mural at Durban Station was selected as an example of a primarily 'decorative' mural intended to accomplish nothing more profound than to beautify its surrounding. A total of seven people were interviewed at the Durban Station, all but one of whom had passed the murals numerous times or were working around the station on a daily basis. Most people reported that they liked the murals and identified them as being about nature and/or having some associations with the city's lush vegetation and serving to beautify the building and uplift the area. A car guard said he noticed that a lot of people admire certain details about the mural, in particular the peacock. A group of three cleaners reported that tourists sometimes take pictures of the murals. The car guard felt, however, that the background was unsatisfactory and agreed with a commentator from the previous day, who thought that 'the background should be painted white or something'. Another man said the mural is quite pleasant to look at, but not really exciting, since there is nothing in it that really catches one's attention.



Figure 3. Durban Station, Durban, 1995, detail, co-ordinated by Leoni Hall.

The AIDS mural in Alice Street turned out to be a special case. Although some respondents admitted to not having looked closely at the mural, its safe sex message was nevertheless clearly understood by all people interviewed at the site. However, the point of contention here was less the painting itself than the specific content of its message, which elicited strong, and often opposing, opinions<sup>30</sup> – a result that should be of great interest to health educators.

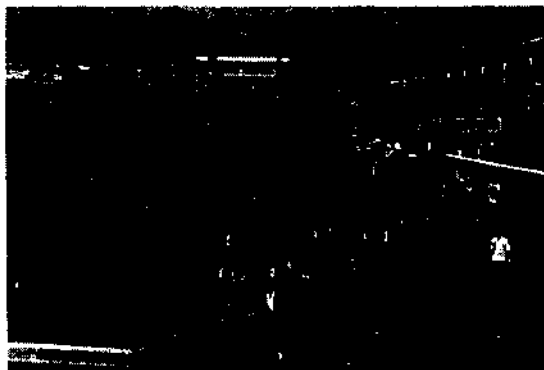


Figure 4. Umlazi Station. Umlazi, 1997, co-ordinated by Stembiso Sibisi.

A very different picture emerged at Umlazi Station where there are murals which exemplify a group of similar paintings, most of them located in the townships, that could be called contextual, ie photo-realistically painted murals that represent scenes inspired by the surrounding context.<sup>31</sup> Seven people were interviewed at Umlazi Station and almost every one was clearly able to relate to the mural. Many people volunteered to elaborate at considerable length on the various paintings and what they meant to them, often pointing out details. They had clearly taken a close look and engaged with the paintings. Most people identified the theme as being about 'Masakhane', the South African government's recent initiative that encourages people to work together to achieve development in their community. The respondents clearly identified with the people represented in the mural and most of them drew personal lessons from the painting. One woman by the name of Freda, for example, said: 'I see people busy with wheel barrows, showing that we have to come together. Showing that even I should come together with other people and do something for my community [...] You can see that woman sewing there, I can also start sewing or go learn how to sew and come back and organise other women showing them how it is done...' Most people responded in a similar vein.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 5. Umlazi Station, detail.

In conclusion, it becomes clear that there are considerable differences in respect of the way people respond to murals. These differences seem to depend firstly on where the mural is located, ie who the predominant target audience is, and secondly and perhaps more importantly, what is being represented and how it is represented.

The responses elicited at murals in the city of Durban reveal that, while most respondents have been passing the murals regularly, very few have ever taken a closer look. In particular, murals with a more profound 'message' – the 'Human Rights Wall' and the 'Nomkhubulwana' mural – did not appear to really 'reach' people in the manner intended. At the 'Medwood Gardens' mural, nobody picked up on the references to the Zulu mythological story or commented on the icon of liberation in the section on the right. The vast majority of respondents did not know what the murals represented and they did not seem to care. Most people professed to liking the murals, but it appears that they considered them to be merely colourful decorations that contribute to uplifting the area.

The 'foliage' murals at Durban Station, which were painted with the sole intention of uplifting the environment and did not attempt to communicate a specific 'message' or educational content, were generally well received, but evoked little excitement on the whole. The Umlazi Station murals, on the other hand, were by far the most successful in terms of the local community's ability to relate to the images and understand the intended 'message'.

Based on these interviews and the visual evidence of the actual murals, a number of observations can be made about the impact of murals on the target community and particularly about the effectiveness of communicating a 'message' through mural art. An important factor appears to be the way in which this 'message' is being presented.

Asked why people seem to have difficulties understanding some of the mythological stories and traditional legends, Ilse Mikula, co-manager of Community Mural Projects, points out that many black South Africans are strongly westernized and have lost the knowledge of their own traditional folk stories. It is one of Community Mural Projects' objectives to reintroduce these stories and re-familiarise people with aspects of their own cultural heritage (personal communication). A useful explanation is offered by Thami Jali, who attributes the lack of understanding specifically of the 'Nomkhubulwana' mural to the Zulu goddess' representation as a modern woman. The fact that the figure was originally 'labeled', with her name

spelt out in large letters, indicates that the organisers themselves seemed to have had doubts about whether people would be able to identify the figure. Jali raises an even more important point that may explain the public reception of murals with historical or mythological content. He points out that while many black South Africans may well be familiar with certain folk stories, legends, gods and goddesses, they do not have a tradition of visual representation of such legends. Based on this lack of a visual frame of reference as well as a general lack of exposure to visual arts, particularly painting, ordinary people would not necessarily make the intended connection, when encountering a figure such as Nomkhubulwana or a Zulu mythological story on the 'Medwood Garden' wall.

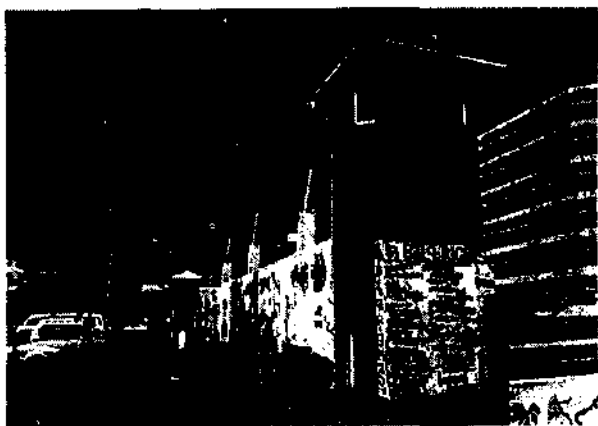


Figure 6. Human Rights Wall, Durban 1994 and 1997, Community Mural Projects.

Besides such issues of representation, a further problem appears to lie with the actual visual language chosen for the murals. Respondents at the 'Nomkhubulwana' mural criticised the mural for being 'too busy' and stated that 'one couldn't see what was going on'. The 'Human Rights Wall', too, was obviously perceived to be quite confusing. In many respects, the 'Human Rights Wall' can be placed in a 'fine art' tradition, where individual artists freely express themselves, with their own stylistic and compositional idiosyncracies, their personal interpretation of the subject, which may involve taking an oblique look at the subject and representing ideas cryptically, demanding the spectator's active engagement with the painting, rather than bluntly illustrating a point.

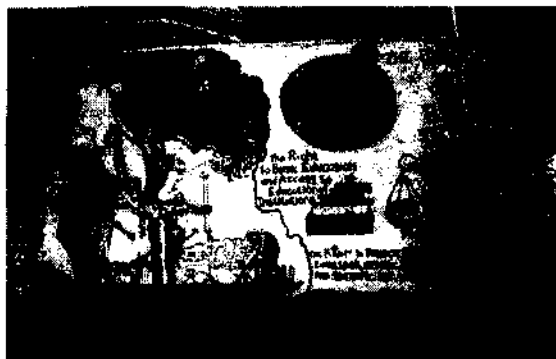


Figure 7. Human Rights Wall, detail.

The success of the 'Umlazi Station' murals, on the other hand, suggests that the target audience most strongly responds to murals that are painted in a realistic style, unified and coherent, based on a clear and plain composition that can be easily grasped at first sight. It must be kept in mind that the target audience of these murals – due to the paintings' locations – consists mostly of people who have had little or no exposure to art education, who do not have a strong tradition of painting as part of their own cultural background and whose exposure to visual 'art' is mostly limited to advertisements and popular media images. People seem to feel overtaxed by densely packed compositions containing a wealth of details and meaningful but not easily legible relationships of elements that require the viewer to inspect and personally interpret the painting.

In terms of subject matter, it appears that a coherent narrative, a scene that can be immediately recognised and that contains visual elements that the audience can relate to personally from their own experience is most successful. People like to be able to recognise what is familiar to them, such as specific elements of their environment, references to the activities they are pursuing and unspectacular scenes of ordinary life, perhaps with a humorous slant.

According to Jali, there is also a significant difference between murals that Community Mural Projects has painted in urban, metropolitan areas, such as Durban, and those in smaller towns or rural areas with regard to the desired topic or subject matter. In rural areas, where communities are smaller and more homogeneous, the mural's theme is usually developed in meetings with community representatives and thus tends to be more

reflective of the target audience's preferences. Depictions of heroic local leaders or aspects of local black history are, according to Jali, particularly welcome in these settings. In the case of most Durban murals, on the other hand, the theme (if not determined directly by the client) is generated in workshops with the participating artists. The mural's audience is largely anonymous, fragmented, heterogeneous, often representing a multiplicity of different cultural backgrounds, and largely consisting of township people who may have only little mutually shared history and sometimes limited knowledge of their own traditional folk legends. The relationship of mural to audience is thus a different one. This is an interesting and quite plausible explanation, but further research needs to be done in order to confirm this.

What also needs to be taken into consideration at this point is the fundamental difference between the Durban murals and social protest murals in other countries, which are typically initiated and executed by marginalised groups. Until very recently, virtually all community murals in Durban were initiated by socially committed white artists or project managers who raised funds, applied for permission, selected the artists, and organised workshops to generate themes for the murals. Even though there was a great emphasis on self-expression both in terms of subject matter and style of painting, the fact cannot be ignored that these murals are not truly community initiatives or an expression of a particular group consciousness. This point may also explain why the 'Umlazi Station' murals are obviously so much more successful. Co-ordinated and designed by a black artist from Umlazi<sup>33</sup> and painted by black artists, the murals depict what the artist's own community can effectively relate to and are painted in a style that he knows is attractive and accessible to his community.

### **Conclusion**

Murals are seen to provide the local community with a sense of ownership of and respect for walls or buildings. In Durban it may be observed that most muralised walls remain free of graffiti or other forms of defacement often for many years after completion of the mural, even in so-called 'rough' neighbourhoods. As evidenced by the interviews discussed above, even if the murals' intended 'messages' may not have reached people, virtually everybody liked the murals and welcomed them as a valuable beautification of their often visually impoverished environment. In a few cases, there is clear evidence to suggest that local people have indeed 'claimed' the mural.<sup>34</sup>



On the other hand it appears that many people interviewed did not seem to perceive the mural as 'their work' but rather as a piece of art that they had nothing to do with and don't know much about. The fact that several respondents – black Africans – explicitly stated that 'blacks don't understand art' suggests that it is not necessarily enough to bring art into the streets and passively 'expose' people to art. What is needed is an education process that creates a basis for the appreciation of a painting, provides an understanding of the sense and purpose of art, and sensitizes people to the power and pleasure that art can provide. It must be taken into account that the majority of South Africa's population have never had the most basic introduction to art-making or art appreciation and art in this country has a long legacy of being perceived as an elitist, expensive luxury, of little interest to people who struggle to sustain their livelihood. Thami Jali has cautioned that more and more murals might not be the right way to build an awareness of art because 'you just end up decorating the city'. As an alternative he suggests creating entire ensembles, such as parks, with crafted benches and other art objects, that are useful at the same time. It would be most interesting to establish how this approach, which essentially reconnects to the African tradition of art as craft, is received by local citizens.

Nevertheless, some murals are obviously tremendously successful. Given that mural art in South Africa is a strongly developing sector of visual art practice which has on occasion been utilised to convey important educational messages – such as creating AIDS awareness – it would be very beneficial to conduct more research into the effectiveness of different types of murals. The responses obtained at the 'Umlazi Station' murals suggest that mural art can have immense potential in educating and influencing largely illiterate masses. On the other hand, mural art should not lapse into the position of becoming a mere educational instrument, which, of course, can then also be abused for ideological manipulation. But even within the art establishment in South Africa, community mural art has not been given much serious attention, neither with regard to its imagery nor its impact. In a country in transformation like South Africa, mural art has the potential to make a valuable contribution to building communities.

### Notes

1. The author is currently working on this task, as well as attending to the critical need for systematic and proper documentation of mural art.

2. The author is very grateful to Terry-anne Stevenson, Ilse Mikula, Thami Jali, Leoni Hall and Lesley Pecker (as well as the participating artists mentioned in note 14) for crucial information obtained from them regarding the mural movement in Durban and Johannesburg.
3. Community murals are here defined in opposition to muralised advertisement and murals conceptualised and/or painted by a single artist. Community murals are murals painted in a collaborative effort with strong or some involvement of the local community.
4. Joko Tea (Unifood) has been sponsoring Community Mural Projects to paint murals in Pietersburg, Rustenburg, Vanderbijlpark, Bloemfontein, Umtata, and Kimberley.
5. 'Studio 849' was an old corrugated iron church building in North Coast Road, refurbished and converted into a community arts centre. Unfortunately, the arts centre was recently forced to vacate the building and is currently looking for new premises.
6. The term 'state-arts' is here used in accordance with van Robbroeck's (1991:11) definition: "'state arts" is practiced in and prompted by state institutions such as universities, galleries, museums and schools'.
7. As an example the Natal Society of Arts (NSA)'s various outreach programmes can be mentioned, which include painting murals with street children in Durban.
8. It is interesting to note that when Durban's very first public mural was painted by Natal Technikon and University of Natal students in 1981, newspaper reports apparently felt it necessary to reassure local citizens that murals are a reputable form of art in Europe (Anonymous, 'Durban's coat of many colours', *Daily New Tonight*, April 16, 1982).
9. 'The Bat Centre offers a perfect example of Official Graffiti. It eschews decorative harmony, defies any attempt at either narrative or conceptual cohesion and is successful in negating the architectural integrity of the building' (Chandler 1996). Dan Cook recently called the BAT Centre murals 'hideous' in an article in *KZN Newsart* (Cook 1998).
10. The only work he specifically mentions to be a 'mural' is the AIDS mural on Alice Street, painted by Apt Artworks from Johannesburg.
11. 'The significance of the murals lies first of all in what they have done for the people of the neighborhoods, union locals, schools, and social-service centers where they have been painted. But their importance lies also in the far-reaching example they and their communities have set for the rest of us. The murals are in fact mirrors that show us what we are, what we could be, and how. They have indicted the racism, sexism, and economic exploitation of our society and helped bring people together to overcome them. Furthermore, the murals have begun to reconnect art, ordinary work, and community' (Barnett 1984:17).

12. Barnett (1984:388ff) suggests a method of evaluation of the murals on four different levels: 1) purpose, 2) process, 3) form, and 4) quality. For example, under *purpose* he poses a number of questions, such as: 'Does the work serve and strengthen the community? Does it [...] help young people gain pride in their heritage and identify with their community? Does a street mural speak to the urgent public concerns of local people...? Does it derive from where people are and not try to impose ideas? Or beginning from local values and interests, does it challenge its viewers and not merely reproduce their ideas? Does it deepen residents' understanding, generate discussion, even controversy that is necessary to develop informed opinion? Does the mural debunk stereotypes? Does it help people to examine their assumptions...? Does it bring people together with common humane interests rather than set the races, the sexes, workers, and professionals against each other? Does it suggest solutions and not only arouse anger? In short, does the painting help people change their lives individually and collectively?' Similar questions are developed for the other three categories of evaluation. They mostly revolve around the articulation of the subject matter, ie whether the 'message' is conveyed clearly and effectively. However, these questions are not all applicable to South African murals. A similar, but locally more appropriate catalogue of questions should be developed for South African murals.
13. The latter point was made by Bongani Ntuli: 'Ah, it is very good to paint because it creates jobs and the people who are touring, they can see that our city of Durban is beautiful and it can attract them so that it can put more money in the city' (Smart 1997).
14. The following artists were interviewed: Mandla Blose, Thami Jali, Joseph Manana, Lucien Mathurine, Lalelani Mbhele, Khele Ngobese, Themba Nkosi, Avi Sooful and Thobani Sixtus.
15. Ilse Mikula (IM), co-manager of Community Mural Projects responds to the question of whether artists working for Community Mural Projects get paid: 'Yes. Employment for artists has always been one of the most important things for our project and we've actually encouraged artists to also co-ordinate their own projects because we wanted this project to filter out and have people actually go out and create their own jobs'.

Caroline Smart (CS): 'And has it done that?'

IM: 'It has. Particularly, well Khulekani who worked with us on the first project at the Valley Trust. Subsequent to that, he went out to the hills and started painting murals in shebeens and took his portfolio round with him and actually got further on with that'.

'Various artists, way back from the early days, have maintained a living or been able to kind of maintain a living through creating murals and getting jobs like that' (Smart 1997).

16. For example, Lucien Mathurine reports that he received a commission to paint a mural in a private home, because somebody noticed him painting the mural at Effingham bridge and then passed the word on.
17. Community Mural Projects has in the meantime taken a decision, not to allow artists to sign individual sections in order to emphasise the collaborative nature of the project.
18. Terry-anne Stevenson has recorded a large number of responses from passers-by who expressed their delight about the wall paintings.
19. See page 91.
20. 'And what was so amazing from this thing, there was an older lady that had never painted before and she found herself a wonderful expression – this ability to convey a message through painting. Likewise Khulekani [Mncube] who painted the dentist, he then discovered that he had this talent' (Stevenson in Smart 1997). Similarly, Nkosinathi Jali (NJ), talks about the benefit of painting murals in schools: '... it's a learning project, you know, so it helps mostly the students who have never had a chance to buy some paints and who don't understand how to mix colours so that in the mural project that's where they get their first experience with colours'. Caroline Smart: 'And do they enjoy it?' NJ: 'Very well. Sometimes we find it hard to leave the wall, we paint until dusk' (Smart 1997).
21. Khulekani Mncube (KM): 'Actually, I didn't even know I was drawing myself here. It happened automatically, I don't know!'  
Caroline Smart (CS): 'Now have you ever painted before?'  
KM: 'Actually this was my first time to paint a mural.'  
CS: 'And you discovered that you had some talent?'  
KM: 'I realised that I can paint'  
CS: 'What are you doing now?'  
KM: 'Now I am at ML Sultan Technikon doing graphic design.'  
CS: 'What do you like doing best – drawing?'  
KM: 'Yes, I like painting and drawing, too, yes.'  
CS: 'How much have you done?'  
KM: 'Actually, a lot – even if I can show you. I have done a lot.'  
CS: 'Where are they?'  
KM: 'Some of them are at home, and the murals even in shebeens when all that you can find murals there.'  
CS: 'So have you started doing your own work now, working with the project. Have you started doing your own stuff?'  
KM: 'Yes'

## A Critical Investigation into the Impact of Community Mural Art

CS: 'What do you do, you just go to people and say 'I want to paint your wall'?'

KM: 'Sometimes people come to me.'

CS: 'Can you tell me about that.'

KM: 'Yes. I do murals. I go to people and ask for work but sometimes those who know me, they just contact me and I work for them.'

CS: 'Are people happy with the idea, do they think it's a good idea?'

KM: 'I don't think so. Mostly our community, the blacks, they don't really understand, ja, but there are those who can understand. But it's not easy.'

CS: 'Do people pay for your work?'

KM: 'Yes.'

CS: 'So it has been a good project in giving you a job?'

KM: 'Yes, that's how I get money for transport and to go to school.' (Smart 1997).

22. Examples are the mural on the south-facing wall of the Snake Park building, depicting a large scale lizard. Others are located on the Natal Technikon campus.
23. He reports having raised this point with Community Mural Projects and suggested providing some basic training before painting the wall. One of his key arguments is that the 'message' of the mural would become more clearly understood, if the overall quality was more professional and the mural was more attractive.
24. For some individuals the reason could be of a rather mundane, practical nature in the sense that they do not like to attend a workshop without being paid. Leoni Hall does assist artists with money for transport, though.
25. An exception is Solomon Mkhize, interviewed in the above mentioned TV broadcast about the 'Seven-headed River Snake' mural, who sees the importance of painting traditional folk legends as a way of teaching them to the younger generation (Smart 1997).
26. The author is currently investigating whether similar impact studies have been done in other countries, particularly the United States, one of the world's largest centres of mural art, but it must be remembered that the situation of the mural movement in South Africa as well as the specific characteristics of the target audience are unique and not easily comparable to other countries.
27. Q: But you never took your time to understand?  
A: I tried to look at one part trying to understand, standing there.  
Q: But did you come to a point where you understood?  
A: I never understood, I just looked at it wondering what is this, but it's very nice.

28. Q: When you look at that big mama, what do you think about her?

A: Ag! That thing, I see her like a devil, she looks like she is dominating everything here. It doesn't look like a very nice thing. She looks like an evil spirit dominating everything.

Q: Do you like the drawing?

A: Other things I quite like, but I do not want that woman on top.

29. A young African woman, selling fruit said the painting is important because it 'speaks about business and hand works which you can do yourself'. The woman from the previous note responded to the question of what the mural depicts, 'I usually look at the people selling fruits and point at them saying that's me, and next to me is my friend selling.'
30. The responses generally revealed a great level of ignorance about the disease and its transmission. Many respondents did not believe that AIDS exists or that it is fatal. One rather angry respondent suggested the mural should be replaced with one that would inform people about *sangomas* who can cure AIDS or mix medicines that prevent the disease.
31. Other murals that belong in this category are the paintings at Kwa Mnyandu Station in Umlazi, painted by Community Mural Projects in 1993 and the murals at Kwa Mashu and Thembalihle Station, the latter containing imagery with a more traditional slant. Khehla Ngobese explains that at Thembalihle the very conservative community of workers from the nearby hostels feels strongly attracted to this type of imagery. Most recently, the mural at Maydon Wharf (co-ordinated by Leoni Hall), draws on images from the surrounding harbour context and includes actual portraits of local workers.
32. For example, the first respondent said 'To me this painting says people should do their best and to excel in the work they are doing. Just as you see in the drawing where they are building houses, they show that we should build to improve our place. [...] There is also that drawing of a teacher with the students, it means we should take our children to school, even if you can't manage financially, but you should try, because that's the child's future.' The respondent continues in this vein. The second person similarly related individual paintings to local peoples' experience and then talked about the importance of the mural in general: 'To me it is very important, it has a lot it tells me, and I think it does the same to people that see it. It tells me there is no work that one should look down upon, and also not to wait till you go to whites to find work, but to be able to begin on your own is very important.' Another respondent said: '[the mural] is about business, just like this programme, masakhane, telling us more about how to uplift trade in our societies. Just as you see the people with their tables selling. It also shows ways of making life easy as you see the trains helping with easy transportation.' Another person also went into great detail, speaking about individual scenes and the lesson to be learnt from them, for example,

saying 'Then I also see people trading, they also show me that in these tough times its important for one to have something to do to earn some money to support his/her family.'

33. Printmaker Malcom Christian was involved in assisting project leader Stembiso Sibisi in setting up a proposal, accessing funding, etc, but the actual co-ordination on site, as well as all the sketches were done by Sibisi.
34. For example, the man repairing shoes in front of the 'Community against Crime' mural obviously takes advantage of the painting's visual appeal to attract customers and at the 'Nomkhubulwana' mural, local women traders were – until recently – selling chicken in front of the painted wall, appropriating Community Mural Projects' well-known painted logo of 'two chicken on a mission' (Stevenson) for their own advertisement. At the workers' facility at Maydon Wharf, observation and anecdotal evidence suggests that the incorporated portraits of local workers facilitate a high level of identification with the mural among the portrayed workers themselves as well as their colleagues. Workers often point at their painted colleagues on the wall and laugh; one of the portrayed workers regularly 'greets' his painted counterface when passing by.

## References

- Agier, M and A Ricard (1997) 'Les Arts de la Rue', *Orstom* 52.
- Africus '95*, Catalogue for the Johannesburg Biennale 1995.
- Anonymous (1997) 'Murals in the urban landscape', *Parks and Grounds*, April/May.
- Barnett, A W (1984) *Community Murals – The People's Art*. New York and London: Cornwall Books.
- Barthelmeh, V (1982) *Street Murals*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.
- Changuion, P (1989) *The African Mural*. Text by Tom Matthews and Annice Changuion. Cape Town: Struik.
- Cockcroft, E, J Weber and J Cockcroft (1977) *Toward a People's Art, The Contemporary Mural Movement*. New York: Dutton and Co.
- Cook, D (1998) 'Curio City', *Newsart KZN* 2(1), August.
- Cooper, M and J Sciorra (1994) *R.I.P. – New York Spraycan Memorials*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Deliry-Antheaume, E (1997) 'L'art des rues. Murs peint en Afrique du Sud', *AUTREPART: Les Arts de la rue dans les societes de Sud*, (ed) Michel Agier et Alain Ricard, *Orstom*:I-XVI.
- Enwezor, O (1997) 'Reframing the black subject, ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African representation', *Third Text* 40.

- Felgine, O (1997) 'L'art s'installe dans les townships', *L'Autre Afrique* 5.
- Loubser, A (1991) 'Contemporary mural art: urban dislocation and indifference', *Staffrider* 9(4).
- Nicholls, L (1996) 'Paint the town', *Vuka SA*, March.
- Rankin, E (1997) 'Mediated memories: art production at the !Xu and Khwe cultural project, Schmidtsdrift', *Proceedings of the 13th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*, Stellenbosch.
- van Robbroeck, L (1991) 'The Ideology and Practice of Community Arts in South Africa, with particular reference to Katlehong and Alexandra Arts Centres', MA Dissertation, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- Rochfort, D (1993) *Mexican Muralists*. Singapore: Laurence King.
- Slessor, C (1995) 'Delight', *Architectural Review*, March.
- Smart, C (1997) 3 minutes TV Footage for *KZN Tonight* and interviews, produced in February 1997.
- Trade Routes*, Catalogue for the Johannesburg Biennale 1997.
- White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (1996) Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Pretoria.
- Williamson, S and A Jamal (1996) *Art in South Africa – the future present*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Young, S (1988) *The Big Picture – murals in Los Angeles*. London: Thames and Hudson.