global dis :connect

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Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect

Barnabas Ticha Muvhuti

Back and forth like an oscillating pendulum: traces of a regional/ transnational artistic lineage across Southern Africa.

The problem

Job Kekana (1916-1995), his mentee Barnabas Ndudzo (1945-2012), and his son and mentee Shepherd Ndudzo (b. 1978) lived and worked in Gaborone as an intergenerational lineage with a distinct sculpting style that spread through Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe in the first half of the 20th century. Across Africa, such artistic lineages are understudied, and this project invites attention to this area of study.

Core interest

What motivated Kekana to leave South Africa at the dawn of apartheid for an equally oppressive 'independent' colony of Rhodesia? Likewise, why would Barnabas Ndudzo leave a liberated Zimbabwe, 'trekking' across the Limpopo to settle in apartheid South Africa, sacrificing his newly won freedom? I'm also trying to understand why he would eventually leave South Africa for Botswana. Central to this research are the questions why artists migrate and how migration affects their careers. This investigation juxtaposes detours with the determination to build sovereignties.

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Art historians have examined and retraced the stories of African modernists who moved from various parts of the continent to the cultural capitals of Europe and the United States in the 20th century. But few stories of those who migrated within Africa have been explored. Although this project overlaps with the present, it grapples with dis:connected experiences in the abandoned versus the new environments as artists build networks, while gaining and losing so much else.

Preliminary results

Research on migrating African artists tends to focus on movement outside the continent, yet artists have been moving from one centre to another within the continent and within individual countries. Each move is punctuated by some form of negotiation, defined by relational gains and losses.