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Truth Games: Negotiating Power, Identity and the Spirit of Resistance in Contemporary South African Art

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Many authors – artists, curators and art historians alike – will often describe South Africa as a country dogged by its history. Delving into any critical study of the contemporary art and society of South Africa, one cannot avoid confronting the pivotal years of the early 1990s as crucial to identifying essential determinants of identity in South Africa. In spite of the general consensus which considered South Africa to be on the brink of breaking out into civil war, not only did the early 1990’s herald the end of the oppressive apartheid system, but on April 27, 1994, South Africa also held its first fully democratic election, selecting Nelson Mandela as its first black president and ultimately bringing South Africa to the attention of the rest of the world in a positive light.¹

Simultaneously, the end of apartheid had a substantial impact on South African art both on the international level and within the country itself. Prior to the early 1990s, geographical isolation and the international cultural boycott of South Africa (due to the human rights violations of the apartheid system) made it so that for nearly twenty-seven years, the art of South Africa was seldom seen or acknowledged by the rest of the global community.² This trend was broken when, in 1993, South Africa was invited to the Venice Biennale, where Johannesburg’s Director of Culture, Christopher Till, announced his own intentions for South Africa to host its own Biennale in two years time.³ Within the country itself, the advent of democracy was in many ways an intense, liminal phase of rebirth for South Africa. For artists in particular, this period of transformation called for them to think critically about their role in post-apartheid society and

³ Sue Williamson, and Jamal Ashraf, *Art in South Africa: The Future Present*, (Cape Town, South Africa: David Phillip, 1996), 8
ways in which their art might, or if it should, evolve from the so-called “resistance art” that had been at the forefront of the South African artistic scene since the mid-1970s.

One such artist dealing with the social, political, and conceptual repercussions of the end of apartheid was Sue Williamson. Indeed, much of her development as an artist stemmed from her activism during the struggle against apartheid in South Africa beginning in the late 1970’s and has evolved to include the contemporary issues that affect the articulation of South African identity. Williamson has come to hold an esteemed and influential role in the South African art world not only for her literary gifts as the author of several books about South African art (Resistance Art in South Africa; 1989, Art in South Africa: The Future Present; 1996 and South African Art Now; 2008), but also for her artwork’s ability to, “bring the marginalized into the mainstream consciousness of society, to make visible the unseen… [she] sheaves away layers of illusion to re-present reality in a fresh light”.4 Following the end of apartheid, Williamson continued drawing inspiration for her work from contemporary events effecting South African society, as she had during the “resistance art” phase of the late 1970’s and 1980’s.

In her 1998 series, *Truth Games*, Williamson reacts to the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which considered the straightforward acts of politically motivated violence (rather than broad structural violence) that took place between 1960 and 1993, at the hands of both the apartheid government and liberation movement.5 In her artist statement about the piece she asserts that the series, “attempts to consider the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the healing/not healing of post-apartheid South Africa through a series of

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5 Nicholas M. Dawes, "Sue Williamson and the Trauma of History," *Sue Williamson: Selected Works*, ed. Sue Williamson, Nicholas M. Dawes (Lansdowne: Double Storey, 2003), 9-10
interactive pieces”.\(^6\) The interactivity of the series comes from the transparent, movable horizontal slats containing phrases from transcript hearings imposed over appropriated images of the people involved in whatever particular case the piece is addressing. Combined, the myriad of conceptual and tactile elements of Sue Williamson’s *Truth Games* series not only allow for a thorough exploration of the intricacies of power, representation, and identity, particularly relevant forces in South Africa during the liminal post-apartheid period, but also of how art itself has the ability to articulate and exude power in a profound and impactful capacity.

Before addressing the intricacies of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and thus the *Truth Games* series, it is imperative to explore the system that necessitated its existence in the first place – apartheid. Though complex in its development as all systems of oppression are, colonial conquest, begun the late 1600’s is often identified as one of the significant roots of the twentieth century system of apartheid, as it planted the seeds for the racial intolerance that would prove to divide South Africa.\(^7\) In Afrikaans, the West Germanic language descended from seventeenth century Dutch that is spoken in South Africa, “apartheid” can be translated as “apartness”.\(^8\) Though racial segregation had been in place in South Africa for some time, the Afrikaner National Party’s (ANP) victory in the 1948 elections made segregation institutional, forcibly separating people with the support of a state apparatus to punish those who resisted.\(^9\) Of the many laws that bolstered the apartheid system conceptualized by National Party leaders D. F. Malan and Hendrik F. Verwoerd, some of the fundamentals included: the Population

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\(^6\) Sue Williamson, The Legacy Project, "Nkosinati Biko - false medical certificate - Dr. Benjamin Tucker (Truth Game Series)."


Registration Act (1950), which implemented the registration of people according to their racial identity, allowing the government to have a record of what racial group people belonged to and how they should be treated accordingly; The Group Areas Act (1950), which enforced the physical separation between races, removing people from urban areas and relocating them to townships where they could only rent property, as land could only be white owned; The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act (originally the Unlawful Organizations Bill), which allowed the banning or punishment of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) or any group/individual that intended to inspire political, economic, industrial, or social change through disorder, illegal acts, or by encouraging hostility between non-European or European races; and the Bantu Education Act (1953), which created an inferior education system for Africans, prevented them from freely attending “white” universities and weakened intellectual and cultural life through the censorship of books, movies, and radio and television.\textsuperscript{10} Despite the fact that the system was thorough and oppressive, there was resistance to the system from its inception, with the activism of groups like the African National Congress (ANC) gaining momentum starting in the 1960’s and continuing into the 1970’s, with the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), led by Steve Biko, spearheading political resistance.

It was during this turbulent period in South African history that Williamson’s life and art would combine with activism in a way that has undoubtedly informed the conceptual characteristics of her mature work. Not native to the country, Williamson was born in England in 1942 and came to live in Johannesburg, where her father worked for a construction company, in 1948.\textsuperscript{11} Though her professional goals throughout high school primarily centered on becoming a

\textsuperscript{10} South African History Online, "Liberation Struggle in South Africa: Apartheid and Reactions to it."

\textsuperscript{11} Betty LaDuke, and Elizabeth Catlett. \textit{Africa through the Eyes of Women Artists}. (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1991), 105
newspaper reporter and she worked at a major newspaper for a time after high school, Williamson has claimed that she was always interested in art, but that her interest did not become serious until 1964 when she married and moved to New York City with her new husband.\textsuperscript{12} By the time Williamson returned to South Africa with her husband and young daughter in 1969, she had studied at the Art Student’s League in New York and was continuing to pursue her education in a Cape Town art school, with her first exhibition in 1973 mostly consisting of landscape etchings.\textsuperscript{13} Williamson’s identity as an activist or cultural worker began in earnest when she joined the Women’s Movement for Peace (WMP), an organization “based on the simple idea that if women refused to be bound by apartheid, they could form friendships across color lines” which allowed her to gain valuable firsthand experience with the struggles that plagued her country.\textsuperscript{14} Though she did not complete much artwork during this time, she claims she had the opportunity to come to know the black townships as well as she knew the white suburbs.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to her involvement in the Women’s Movement for Peace, Williamson also cites the events in Soweto in June of 1976 as not only a “jagged faultline [that] cuts through recent South African history” but also claims that it, “melted the oppressive ice which had frozen South Africans, black and white, into apathy for so long”\textsuperscript{16} The events in Soweto, alternatively referred to as riots or a massacre or an uprising, came about due to a new policy from the National Party, at this point refining and strengthening its repressive legislation after thirty years in power. The Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 stated that Afrikaans, what many considered to be the language of their oppressors, was to be used to teach math, arithmetic and social sciences in all black schools beginning in seventh grade, no doubt building upon the earlier Bantu

\textsuperscript{12} LaDuke and Catlett. \textit{Africa through the Eyes of Women Artists}, 105 -106
\textsuperscript{13} LaDuke and Catlett. \textit{Africa through the Eyes of Women Artists}, 106
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Williamson, \textit{Resistance Art in South Africa}, 8
Education Act, which had already established unequal education for black South Africans.\(^{17}\) For years the resentment of the decree grew and on June 16, 1976, thousands of high school students from Soweto marched to Orlando Stadium to rally in protest of having to be taught in Afrikaans. While the majority of the students marched peacefully, some students were said to have thrown stones at the police and refused to disperse on order.\(^{18}\) The situation soon devolved into chaos, with the police throwing teargas and opening fire on the largely peaceful crowd. By the end of the day there were at least twenty-three people killed, though there have been estimates of upwards of a hundred, stemming from accusations that the police may have covered up the true death count.\(^{19}\)

For Williamson, Soweto was a defining moment for the emerging cultural expression, specifically resistance art, which directly addressed the socio-political problems that plagued the country. For the international community, the event sparked revulsion, while for the domestic population, “the false illusion of a stable country kept under control by the apartheid government was exposed as a sham”.\(^{20}\) Williamson argues that this heightened awareness in South African society was mirrored in the art scene. Prior to 1976, there was little to no South African art that overtly addressed the unpleasant or painful aspects of living under apartheid, the majority consisting of landscapes, abstraction, figure studies and so called “township art” that Williamson describes as “strangely divorced from reality”.\(^{21}\) Though most commercial galleries were accepting art by black South Africans like the Polly Street artists, during the apartheid era, the dependency on sales to a pre-dominantly white audience necessitated art of a sanitized variation.

\(^{17}\) Williamson, *South African Art Now*, 26  
\(^{18}\) Williamson, *South African Art Now*, 26  
\(^{20}\) Williamson, *South African Art Now*, 26  
\(^{21}\) Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa*, 8
that was not likely to upset the buyers.\textsuperscript{22} For white South African artists, Williamson theorized that the reluctance to address apartheid and its related issues stemmed either from being shielded from the reality of injustice due to their culture, a cultural reluctance to face the complications of being a member of the privileged sector of society or both, in an act not dissimilar to “head-burying”.\textsuperscript{23}

Speaking about her own race as a white South African in 1986, specifically concerning the purity of the motivation of white artists, Williamson referenced the Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko, who asked:

“How many white people fighting for their version of change in South Africa are really motivated by a genuine concern and not guilt... And what of the black artist from his disadvantaged position in our society? He has had not art training in school and in fact the white-directed school curriculum has discredited his culture. For him to choose art as a way of life requires an especially loving commitment to this craft. If the white artist cannot survive by art alone in a philistine society, how much harder is it for the black artist”?\textsuperscript{24}

Referencing this quote from Biko is particularly interesting in that it confirms that Williamson has consciously confronted the hurdles that lay in front of white South Africans wishing to become involved activists and artists – namely breaking through “thick, tinted glass screen that seemed to prevent most of them from seeing the reality of the apartheid society clearly and from reflecting that in their work”.\textsuperscript{25} She does not leap to defend her right to express herself as a white artist, but openly acknowledges the skepticism that her race can be met with in the relation to activism. Furthermore, she seems to recognize her own privilege, and does not equate her


\textsuperscript{23} Williamson, \textit{Resistance Art in South Africa}, 8

\textsuperscript{24} LaDuke and Catlett. \textit{Africa through the Eyes of Women Artists}, 114

\textsuperscript{25} Williamson, \textit{South African Art Now}, 26
experience to that of her fellow artists who happen to be black, but instead directs the query to highlighting the inequality that her fellow black South African artists were likely to face.

With the rise of resistance art, the question of the role of art and its relationship to identity and power became increasingly important. Williamson’s book, *Resistance Art of South Africa* (1989) has been recognized as one of the first to establish the discourse about resistance art, identifying it as an art form rooted in the vital role of popular culture resistance, removed from an elitist activity due to its insistence on being socially and politically conscious. In her writings, she also claimed that the development of resistance art was connected to the one of the governing principles of traditional African art – that art must have a function or a role in the community – though in the case of resistance art, the function (cultural resistance) could be the agent that brought change.

The end of apartheid did not halt this discussion of art, but in many ways complicated the matter, challenging the role that artists had taken during the later years of resistance and questioning where they would fit in the “new” South Africa. The rapid dissolution of the apartheid system that began in 1990 with the release of Nelson Mandela and the un-banning of groups like the African National Congress, culminated in a new constitution and democratic election after four years of intense negotiation. This drastic shift in the socio-political landscape made for a country that was literally making history while trying to reconcile and reconfigure its

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past to create a successful present and future. Some members of cultural organizations, like anti-apartheid activist and ANC constitutional advisor Albie Sachs, proposed that in this liminal period, where new constitutional guidelines were being created, South Africa also had to consider drawing up a new cultural and artistic vision. He argued that the role of artists as strictly cultural workers and art as a political weapon was too narrow, that focusing solely on the trauma of apartheid would impoverish both the struggle and South African art. Others, like artist Kendell Geers, called for an art that would evolve to include self-criticism, tackling apartheid, but also art itself. South African tradition and experience has an undeniable role as a “catalyst of revolution” and in many ways cannot help but be political, especially if you follow Geers’ definition, which claimed that all art was political if it, “challenge[d] the ideological and cultural prejudices of both the viewer and the artist”

Despite the variances in opinion of what art in post-apartheid Africa should be, the importance of the idea of the struggle lived on. As Colin Richards points out, with the end of the domination of apartheid vision, the counter-culture it created – resistance culture – is not dead, but instead is in the absence of apartheid, “shifting from the demands of combat to those of self-definition, from strategies of boycott and confrontation to those of critical engagement” Supporting the claim that art in itself can be profoundly powerful, especially in relation to identity, Sachs stated in a speech given to a Swedish audience in the late 1990’s that, “We South Africans fight again real consciousness… we know what we struggle against… but we don’t

29 D'Amato, "Beyond the Trauma: The Transition of the Resistance Aesthetic in Contemporary South African Art", 45
30 D'Amato, "Beyond the Trauma: The Transition of the Resistance Aesthetic in Contemporary South African Art", 45
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
know who we ourselves are. What does it mean to be a South African? The artist, more than anyone, can help us discover ourselves”.

In conjunction with the radical events of the early 1990’s, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which began its first sessions in April of 1996, has been said to be equally fundamental to understanding the “struggle” for a new culture – the rediscovery of identity for the new, post-apartheid South Africa. The commission, made up of seventeen members, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Chairperson) and Dr. Alex Boraine (Deputy Chairperson), was created in order to the best of their ability, begin to attempt making as complete a picture as possible of the human rights violations committed ranging the 1960’s to the end of apartheid. The mission of the TRC was carried out through three sub-committees: the Human Rights Violations (HRV) Committee, which investigated the human rights abuses of the aforementioned period; the Reparation and Rehabilitation (R&R) Committee, which was concerned with restoring dignity to the victims of the period and creating proposals for rehabilitation; and finally the Amnesty Committee (AC), which considered applications for amnesty, requiring the applicant to make full disclosure of the truth of the circumstances of the violation and to prove that their actions were politically motivated. At the conclusion of the two years in which the TRC held hearings in improvisational locations across the country, it had received at least 20,000 statements from victims and nearly 8,000 applications for amnesty from perpetrators. The perpetrators in question not only included those who had been involved with the government, which had been responsible for the institutionalization of apartheid but it also included members

34 Ibid.
35 Williamson, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: An Overview of South African Art", 34
37 Williamson, "Looking Back, Looking Forward: An Overview of South African Art", 34
of liberation movements, like the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress that had been banned and forced underground and oftentimes out of the country.  

That is not to say that popular opinion met the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with unanimous support. The skepticism leveled at the TRC varied from some believing it to be akin to a witch-hunt targeting former enemies to others not trusting that it would be anything more substantial than a “show of pomp” that would fail to fulfill its purpose. Furthermore, some like Rian Malan, author of “Mandela: The End of the Road”, claims that the TRC was established, “to distract blacks from the shortcomings of the ANC in government, to remind them of the enemy defeated and make them grateful for their salvation”.  

Williamson has also criticized the TRC, stating the process of the hearing is at its conception fundamentally flawed in that there were too many stories that still went unheard, victims who were able to testify that felt that justice had not been served, and amnesties granted that seemed questionable. However, despite its flaws she still insists that it was an absolutely crucial process for South Africa to transition into a post-apartheid age, especially for white South Africans. Due to the goal of the TRC – to reveal the truth of those horrific examples of torture, murder and arson (to name a few) – it was no longer possible for white South Africans who had chosen to turn away from reality to claim they were unaware. As Williamson put it, “the rotting grave has been broken open”. And with this grave open, and the criticism of the TRC revealing a staggering amount of violence that can be difficult for people to absorb, Williamson claims that

38 Koloane, "Postapartheid Expression and a New Voice", 19
39 Ibid.
40 Williamson, and Ashraf, Art in South Africa: The Future Present, 15
art can provide a distance and space for the contemplation of such events, while still retaining their sense of immediacy.  

For Williamson, who has described her work as a drawn-out process, the idea of responding to the TRC as an artist began when the proceedings of the hearings commenced in 1996. Her initial career in journalism seems to be evident not only in the final work’s integration of text and media sources, but its influence can also be seen in her approach to the *Truth Games* series, which began with Williamson researching, building up files, cutting out newspaper stories and photographs of cases she followed or was peripherally involved in, eventually deciding to create a series that addressed the TRC on a case by case basis – ending up with a dozen pieces in total. Though each panel is unique in the details that make it particular to the specific case, they all consist of appropriated newspaper photographs and selected text excerpts from the transcripts of the hearings of each individual case. They also possess a sense of uniformity in their composition, each divided into three vertical sections, each containing a photograph and nine horizontal slats that contain phrases taken from TRC transcripts. Each panel depicts an accuser on the left, a defender on the right and an image that reflects the crime in question in the center.

The photographs, though low quality, serve to strengthen the power of the pieces in multiple capacities. First, as popular media images, the photographs represent a sense of the familiar, which Williamson argues prepares viewers to engage with a work, not simply walk past it.  

Furthermore, by re-contextualizing these images, Williamson allows for the wider public to transcend the media hype and partiality that could mask the profound issues being addressed in

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44 Sue Williamson, *Sue Williamson: Selected Works*. (Lansdowne: Double Storey:, 2003), 44  
45 Gurney. "Sue Williamson."
the TRC hearings. Finally, the quality of the images does not mar their ability to convey the body language, particularly the gaze, which is usually either direct or averted.46

The horizontal slats of each piece not only embody the textual element of the work, synthesizing Williamson’s interest in writing and in art, but they also introduce a tactile quality to the series. In conceptualizing the slats, Williamson cites both the sliding of a name panel across an IN/OUT board in an office, as well as a 1950’s movie scene of an incident in a room glimpsed from the outside through venetian blinds as inspirations for the motif.47 The transcript texts that obscure sections ensure that at no time are all three images entirely visible.48 Rearranging the blocks of text across the surface of the piece has the ability to transform the visual and verbal clues by which the viewer would typically derive the story of the images, creating new versions of the events.49 Not only does this approach address the how perspective and partiality (akin to the techniques of the media) can significantly effect meaning but it also gives the viewer a sense of power, inviting them to question the testimonies of the TRC hearings – whether the truth was being spoken or if it still remains hidden. Revisiting the name of the series, perhaps this kind of give and take of perspective, assumptions and responsibility provided by the text and imagery, along with the interactive element of the slat may provide a rationale for the title, Truth Games. On the other hand, in his article, Sue Williamson and the Trauma of History, Nicholas Dawes proposes that the interactivity, and its invitation to play, is a ruse – that the real goal is to draw us in physically, right up to the faces where we meet the impossible object of Williamson’s work, “the implacable demand of an Other who speaks from behind us,

46 Williamson, Sue Williamson: Selected Works, 44
47 Ibid.
from no place that we can imagine… it brooks no resolution, no sacrifice of conscience that would deliver us whole and self-assured to our home”\textsuperscript{50}

Of the dozen pieces included in the series, there are two in particular that this study will focus on, representing the range and diversity of cases that \textit{Truth Games} addresses. The first piece, titled “Nkosinati Biko – false medical certificate – Dr. Benjamin Tucker”, presents the audience with a high profile case heard by the TRC – the questionable death of Black Consciousness Movement leader Steve Biko (Fig. 1). One of the more shocking deaths in detention, Biko was detained in August by the Port Elizabeth police and after suffering three massive blows to the head during a brutal interrogation was driven, naked and shackled, to a hospital in Pretoria where he died on September 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1977.\textsuperscript{51} At the time, inquests into Biko’s death generated a web of denials and misdirection, with then police minister Jimmy Kruger announcing that Biko had died of a hunger strike, completely unrelated to Biko’s documented injuries.\textsuperscript{52} While there were other hearings concerning Biko’s death, most notably those of the five ex-policemen who applied for and were denied amnesty for the “out of hand interrogation”, this particular piece deals with a medical doctor, Chief District Surgeon Dr. Benjamin Tucker, who signed the death certificate that claimed that Steve Biko had died of natural causes.\textsuperscript{53} On the left is the accuser – Biko’s son, Nkosinati, who was only six at the time of his father’s death, on the right is Dr. Tucker and in the center of the piece we see a representation of the un-presentable event in Steve Biko’s gravestone. While Nkosinati’s head is bowed and his gaze averted from the

\textsuperscript{50} Dawes, "Sue Williamson and the Trauma of History", 11
\textsuperscript{51} “BIKO’S FAMILY VOWS TO BRING POLICE KILLERS TO JUSTICE.” \textit{Sapa-AFP}, September 12, 1999. (\url{http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/media/1999/9909/p990912a.htm})
\textsuperscript{53} Williamson, The Legacy Project, "Nkosinati Biko - false medical certificate - Dr. Benjamin Tucker (Truth Game Series)."
viewer, perhaps instead connecting him to his murdered father, Dr. Tucker gazes out at the audience, his gaze perhaps inviting us to judge his complicity in the tragic end of Steve Biko’s life. In accordance with Williamson’s vision for the work, the blocks of text offer a dispassionate reading, in the sense that they are not particularly sensationalized phrases (“father’s brain hemorrhage”, “death in detention” “examined repeatedly”), but instead present both the banal and the traumatic – ample substance for reflection in a straightforward fashion.54

While the case of the second piece is similar to “Nkosinati Biko – false medical certificate – Dr. Benjamin Tucker” in that both the victim and the perpetrator were male, they differ in that this case is less high profile and that the accuser is a woman, specifically a mother. This second piece, “Joyce Mtikulu – to ash – Col. Nic van Rensburg” addresses the death of Joyce’s son, Siphiwo Mtikulu, a college student and anti-apartheid activist (Fig. 2). During a period of incarceration Siphiwo was tortured and without his knowledge was dosed with thallium, a poison that took effect when he returned home and resulted in prolonged psychological and physical deterioration.55 In failing health and forced in a wheelchair due to his illness, Siphiwo disappeared two weeks after filing a civil suit against the Minister of Law and Order.56 Though his car was “discovered” by the police near the border of South Africa, his body was not recovered, with the police leading the family to believe that they were pursuing his whereabouts outside of the country for the next fourteen years.57 During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Col. Van Rensburg confessed to the torture and murder of Siphiwo, claiming that he and other police officers, following the direct orders of the apartheid

54 Dawes, ”Sue Williamson and the Trauma of History”, 10
55 Kim Miller. ”Trauma, Testimony, and Truth: Contemporary South African Artists Speak.” (African Arts 38, no. 3 (2005)), 41
56 “COPS DENY POISONING BUT ADMIT MURDER IN AMNESTY BID.” Sapa-AFP , September 18, 1997. (http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/media\1997\9709\s970918a.htm)
57 Miller, ”Trauma, Testimony, and Truth: Contemporary South African Artists Speak”, 42.
government, murdered Siphiwo, burnt his body and disposed of the remains in a nearby river, all while a group officers were having a barbeque nearby.  

In choosing to represent the story of Joyce Mtimkulu, the mother of a victim of direct violence, Kim Miller, author of Trauma, Testimony and Truth: Contemporary South African Artists Speak, argues that Williamson highlights one of the TRC’s unexpected challenges of dealing with the, “vicarious trauma of survivors who felt the need to be identified as victims because of the pain they internalized from knowing the suffering of others”. Though many women were victimized during the years of apartheid, the majority of those who spoke in Commission hearings did so to regale the experiences of their male relatives – most often mothers speaking about their sons. To understand the nature of this vicarious trauma Miller suggests applying the Japanese concept of hibakusha, which acknowledges that trauma manifests itself differently in people’s minds and bodies – that one can occupy a liminal position in which one is both traumatized as a victim but empowered as a survivor – the criteria being that one has given voice to their story and has owned the identity of a victim/survivor. Picturing Joyce in this piece brings to mind the suffering of both Siphiwo’s and her own body, presenting her as a legitimate victim of apartheid violence. The piece shows Joyce on the left of the triptych, with Col. Rensburg on the right and an image of the Mtimkulu family gathered at the alleged scene of Siphiwo’s murder in the center. In this piece both the accuser’s and the perpetrators gaze is fixed outward. Where Col. Rensburg’s countenance comes across as cold and aloof, the representation of Joyce is full of animation. Her furrowed brow and accusatory hand gesture stand out in particular, echoing the sentiments of her testimony (“they are not sorry”, “still cannot believe

58 Ibid, 45.
59 Ibid, 43.
60 Ibid, 43 – 44.
61 Ibid, 46.
62 Miller, "Trauma, Testimony, and Truth: Contemporary South African Artists Speak", 44.
them”, “the terror of knowing”), fragments of which have been incorporated in the blocks of text.63

In the liminal period that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission occupied, commencing only two years after the official end of apartheid in South Africa, it can be argued that the Truth Games series mirrors the negotiation of identity and agency that the country and its art was undertaking at the time. For artists in particular, there was a questioning of the potency of the resistance narrative of their recent past, as well as critical pressure from both inside and outside the country to reflect the miracle of democratic freedom.64 Many artists responded to the shift by continuing to address social issues, for in a country where the bitter past was not far behind and the present is uncertain and full of challenges, it was and is imperative to maintain and encourage criticism. Sue Williamson’s Truth Games series embodies the idea that South African art, though certainly transformed, has still retained sense of the struggle, though the site of the struggle is now located in the process by which history and identity are constructed and reconstructed. Furthermore, its ability to not only articulate multiple manifestations of power in society, but also to exude its own power by interpreting reality and presenting alternative truths, it remains undoubtedly intertwined with the power of social change and the spirit of ubuntu, (a South African term for humanity – that ‘a person is a person through other people’) that Williamson claims, “pulled South Africa from the brink and… led many artists into… empowering an ever-widening circle of people through creative action”.65

61 Ibid, 45.
63 Williamson, and Ashraf, *Art in South Africa: The Future Present*, 7
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Illustrations

Figure 1: “Nkosinati Biko – false medical certificate – Dr. Benjamin Tucker”, Truth Games, 1998
Figure 2: “Joyce Mtimkulu – to ash – Col. Nic van Rensburg”, Truth Games, 1998