

CIVIL RIGHTS & CIVIL WRONGS: SOUTH AFRICA & US, 2015-2018



Section of Alisha Wormsley's installation, *the space I am in: CONJURING*, image by Tom Little

We do it *because* it is hard.

"This is not easy work. We do it because it is hard". These are the words from Tavia La Follette, director/curator of ArtUp and the *Sites of Passage* projects. She is sitting around the Mattress Factory (MF) Museum café table, speaking with members of the museum at an intimate gathering/coffee date, organized by the museum. The museum builds in opportunities to speak directly with the curator and get a behind the scenes tour of the show.

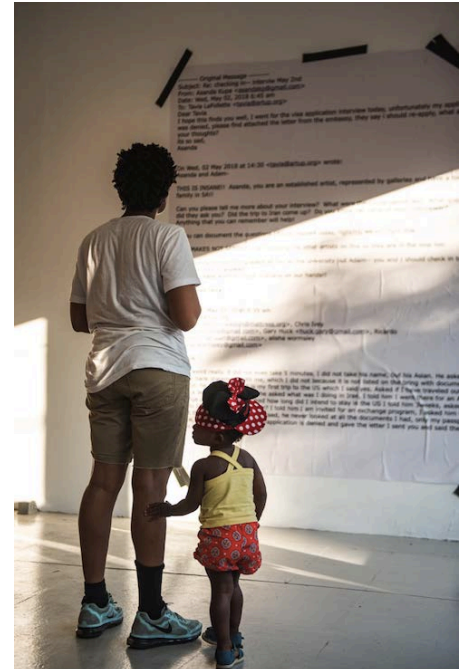
"We don't do these artistic dialogues with England. Although, reflecting on the recent events, maybe we will have to." The table bursts out into laughter, and the tension in the gravity of the work is lifted for a moment. La Follette is referring to the recent banning of Trump, that made his travel to the UK narrowed to Scotland, where he owns land and has familial ties.

La Follette is trying to ease spirits because she knows it will get heavy as they begin to discuss Israeli/Palestinian politics and the history of the Sites of Passage (SOP) projects. *Civil Right & Civil Wrongs* is the 3rd series. Humor is a tool she has become quite savvy with and will tell you she uses it as her survival method. La Follette explains to the group that the last project, *BORDERS, WALLS & CITIZENSHIP*, was a victim of social media censorship. For the first time in the history of the MF and ArtUp, and even though the art work was installed and the artists were present, they had to cancel the show. More information on that show can be found in the NEWS section of the SOP website: <https://www.sitesofpassage.org/news/if-a-tree-falls-in-the-woods>

...caring for each other outside of these capitalist structures.

"It's about black women freeing themselves from whatever societal norms are," says Wormsley. "And there's a lot of references to conjuring, and — I think a title the U.S. would use is witchcraft. But really, it's a connection to nature and healing, and using herbs and caring for each other outside of these capitalist structures." These are the words of Alisha B Wormsley as she is interviewed for the Pittsburgh City Paper. She is describing her installation, *the space I am in: CONJURING*, but she is also describing the history of her people, specifically women. Again, on Wormsley from the City Paper article by Carrie Mannino:

This project has pushed the artists to think globally and spiritually, and Wormsley considers her work an exploration of transcendence. “I’ve been thinking a lot about how black women could be erased when they’re the mothers of humanity, and so is it really erasure?” says Wormsley. “No, it’s more conjuring — it’s this ability to have the grace to transcend your form and be anywhere.”



Images by Anthony Barlich from *the space I am in: CONJURING*, with artist Alisha Wormsley; *Dreamland*, Henry Albertus & *DENIED*, Asanda Kupa

Grace is something that was on La Follette’s mind as a white woman, curating an all-black show. How could, she, as a white woman and direct descendant of colonizers, bring decency, opportunity or grace to this project? As curator, she chose artists who would focus on symbols, culture and repetitions in the human condition. Metaphor is often far more powerful than words but she tries by explaining...

“I am a white female artist who works in the academic and non-profit sector. Whether or not my privilege had influence on the position I sit in, I am still a white woman in a position of privilege and power. What does that whiteness mean to the work I do? For example, if I was doing a piece on misogyny, I wouldn’t want a man directing it. I wouldn’t want him in a position of power. By recognizing that position of power, I must strategize how to utilize it...or rather how to share it. The SOP projects are platforms for exchange. They are Horizontal—not Vertical. *Civil Right & Civil Wrongs* is not a one-time platform for black voices in white spaces but a call for courage (and responsibility) to step out of the white washed past, acknowledge class/race/environmental disparities and apply that history as research towards new long-standing mode of change.”

...the aim is to use art as a platform to expose and address environmental racism and corruption.

Civil Rights & Civil Wrongs probed the concept of the title through exhibition, social practice, community workshops, and performance. As with the other SOP projects, the work was built through a virtual (digitally exchanging materials via the website) and tangible laboratory (time on the ground, together in both countries) between artists in South Africa and artists in Pittsburgh.

Why Now?

As the U.S. moves past its 50th year of the Civil/Voters Rights Act and South Africa moves past its 20th year of democracy/post-apartheid, the project reflects on what we can learn from one

another. What is the difference between legal apartheid and economically driven apartheid? What have we done wrong and what have we done right? What has changed? How do our governments, communities and societies discern and apply our past to our present? Are environmental rights the same as human rights? What language do we use to talk about these issues? By meeting with civil rights activists, artist and historians from both countries, the aim is to use art as a platform to expose and address environmental racism and corruption.

Why These Artists?

All the artists confront racial politics via different mediums:

Pittsburgh: The project had a sound artist who archives the world around him, a filmmaker who addresses gentrification, and a multimedia artist who brings together myth and futurism to build a new present.

South Africa: The project had a choreographer who considers himself a community developer, a print maker/painter who captures the mining towns and uprisings, and a formerly incarcerated drug dealer turned art teacher who is a superhero and role model to the children in the township around him.

finally, we will have an easy visa process.



Asanda Kupa, standing with his rejection letter, part of the installation of his piece *DENIED*, where the act of painting over the denial letter becomes part of the art work.

La Follette will joke with you on this issue, although her mood changes quickly when she delves into the story. “You have to understand, that this is the nature of the work. The whole idea around Sites of Passage is to take a country that we (the US) are in conflict with, and take that dialogue away from the politicians and the media, who often have a very different agenda than we, the people do...and give it to the artists to chew on. Considering our last exchanges—Egypt, Israel and Palestine, I thought South Africa (!), finally, we have an easy visa process.”

Each project takes about 3 to 4 years to execute: research, travel to the county, and curate artist who would be appropriate to participate before one can even begin to think about what the show might look like. When the US artists traveled to South Africa two years ago, they left in January with one president in power and came back to a very different country.

Depending on when you visited Kupa’s Installation, would define what you saw. He was denied entry and was not able to be there for the opening of the exhibit. This is not a new scenario for La Follette, who tried to get Egyptian artists into the US in the middle of a revolution. And much like that project, La Follette refused to take “no” as an answer.

If you were at the MF opening night, as soon as you entered the 1414 or MF “annex”, you would find an enlarged rejection letter from the US government on one side of the space and Kupa and La Follette’s e-mailing back and forth which help to tell the story of *DENIED*.



Kupa at the Warhol Museum.



Kupa experiencing an American diner with Warhol shirt and Heinz Ketchup!

In April of 2018, when Kupa went to his US visa interview it only lasted a few minutes. They asked for his passport and once they saw that he had just returned from Iran, the agent immediately left the room and came back with the denial paperwork...which would eventually become part of the art installation. Kupa, who is a well-known and well represented artist, was invited to do a residency in Iran. Kupa also comes from a politically active family. His father, who was a mineworker and union organizer, was murdered when Kupa was just a boy. His paintings honor his father's work, depicting mass gatherings of people and the power of numbers. This politically charged aspect and his ability to seamlessly move from white glove galleries to the streets, is why La Follette asked Kupa to be a part of this project.

Although she knew it was a very unpleasant experience, La Follette asked if Kupa would be willing to go through the visa process one more time. The reasoning behind the rejection letter made no sense, claiming that Kupa was a flight risk because he had no family in South Africa. Kupa not only has family but a rich history of family in the labor movement. The letter said that he had no full-time job, which also made him a flight risk. But Kupa is an established artist, represented by the number of galleries. His art is his full-time job. And when did the Embassy glean all this information? During his 3-minute interview? The final rejection reason the embassy gave was that he did not bring a bank statement with him. "Bank statement" was not on the list of the items listed to bring, so Kupa did not bring it—nor did anyone ask him for it because the conversation never got that far...It was clear that the trip to Iran set off red flags and that this was a form denial letter.

It is expensive to apply for a US visa (around \$400 USD). That is the first US strategy to keep people out. It is an arduous process to get an appointment and if you have a criminal record, you have to jump through more hoops and red tape.



Henry Albertus' **Dreamland**, virtually installed from a township in South Africa



Malinga and Ivey connect at a coffee shop

La Follette questions the visitors during a curatorial tour, “Who here has never done anything illegal?” No hands rise. “That is what I thought”, she continues. I have done lots of illegal things that should have landed me in jail a number of times, which were purely driven by my own privilege and entertainment”.



Malinga, who knows Albertus’ work, helps guide the team as the MF installation staff e-mail pictures and drawing back and forth, US to Cape Town

La Follette continues, “Image if you had a family to provide for and you had limited options for income. I don’t have a record because I am white, not because I don’t break laws”.

Both Henry Albertus and Charlie Jansen have police records in South Africa. La Follette actually knew this when she curated them into the show. This is WHY she wanted them in the show. Their voices were the most important to have heard...because these are the voices we don’t hear.

After many payments of drug testing and expensive “Embassy Only Doctor” appointments, both Jansen and Albertus were denied entry. This was not because the expensive drug test came back positive. They didn’t. They were both negative. They were denied entry—because the embassy just gets to decide that, plus they glean an income from it. Again, another way to keep certain applications from even getting that far.

Luckily, Mbovu Malinga, had arrived early to work with the *Ancient Instincts* ensemble, soon to be performed and installed at the MF. This allowed him to help guide the MF staff and sometimes even translate as digital messages were sent back between Albertus and the installers.



Malinga watches a video of Albertus as he Describes his vision of *Dreamland*.



Malinga directs the *Ancient Instincts* ensemble in Blatimore before it gets performed/installed at the MF

The Exhibition!



Opening night at *Civil Rights & Civil Wrongs*- here you can still see Asand Kupa's rejection letter blown up and on the wall, before he was here to paint over the letter for **DENIED**

Before opening the show, the MF makes sure to document the show, interview all the artists for archival purposes, and educate the staff. This consists of a tour by the artists or curator if they can be there physically. The next two images are taken during this staff education period.



Iamuuri discusses *In The Res: Never Mine*



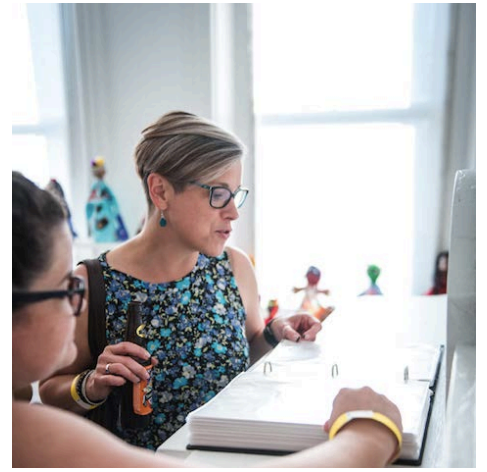
Ivey walks the staff through *WE ARE HERE: Finding Beauty in the Raw*

Although, Charlie Jansen was denied entry to the US, the Superhero workshops still happened and the show carried on in his name. Below are (left to right) Gwen's Girls, MF exhibit, and Baltimore City puppets.





Charlie Jansen's *The Superhero Project*



MF visitors flip thru the *Superhero* catalog



Opening night visitors fill the room to view *The Superhero Puppet Project*, Charlie Jansen



"Uncle Fred" installed, a term of endearment for Henry Albertus



La Follette leads tours through and give context to, Albertus' *Dreamland*



Dreamland image by Antony Barlich and Tom Little's image, featuring the witch doctor video, one of the many people in the Vryground interviews



Mbovu Malinga poses with the headphones that allow each audience member to experience a different sound track during the performance



The Baltimore performance of *Ancient Instincts* installed for the opening. To the right, the ensemble hears *Ancient Instincts* sound for the first time

Ancient Instincts was performed in Baltimore and the video was installed for the open at the MF. Malinga did not want the ensemble hearing the sound until after the performed it, the day after the opening. He didn't want the sound to impact their performance.

The journey to how we got here...



Image from the District Six Museum installation, depicting neighborhood play, is from one of the museums' community curated installations.

It is important for ArtUp to acknowledge, that none of this could have happened without The Pittsburgh Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, the Opportunity Fund and their directors and officers, who guided the organization along the way.

In January 2017, the US based artists traveled to South Africa to spend time on the ground with the South African artists as research for the *Civil Right & Civil Wrongs*. Because the project is about giving voice and space for the artists to tell their story, ArtUp begins the description of the journey, with the artists' words...



Asanda Kupa and Chris Ivey, SOP artists at Market Theatre



Chris Ivey with actor Sandi Dlangalala and daughter, Lula

CHRIS IVEY, Pittsburgh Filmmaker:

The first journey with ArtUp to Johannesburg and Cape Town in January 2017 served as a spiritual and mental awakening. One of the best experiences of my life that opened many doors within myself as an artist. As a filmmaker, I feel it is my duty to serve as a voice to the underserved in neglected communities. I am an artist but more so an African and human being first.

Within two days of arriving in Johannesburg, South Africa I knew that I have returned home. The connectivity between myself and others living there, the environment, the air, and so on. An overwhelming feeling of love filled me as I

interviewed strangers who openly shared their stories and history of the Black/African experience and how some were identical to my Black/American experiences. I loved the many looks of surprise as we talked about the issues of redevelopment, gentrification and reconnecting with our souls for the sake of generations to follow. We are living parallel lives and still learning so much from unknown experiences through our conversations and interactions.

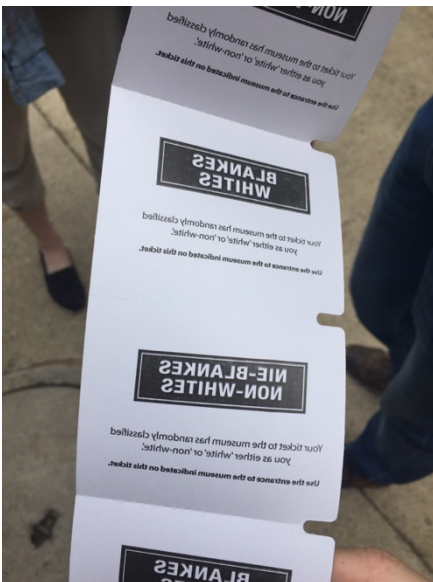


Market Theatre (or "Theatre of the Struggle"), Chris Ivey at end of row

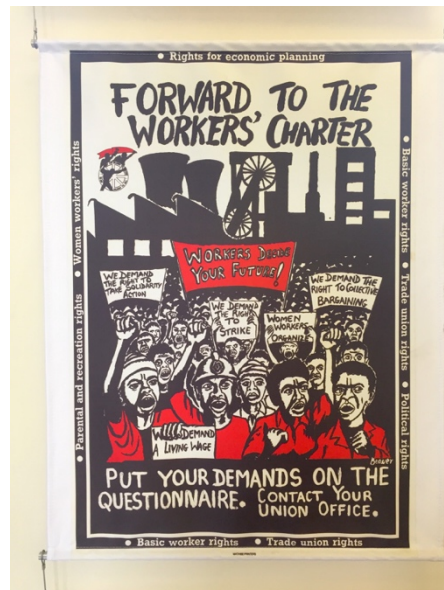


Talk back after opening of *When Swallows Cry*, playwright & director

It is essential that the lessons that I am learning in South Africa are brought back especially to the youth and adults I serve: essential lessons of learning, about healing, and rebuilding 20 some years past apartheid versus the over 50 years at home [in the US] of still not recognizing the multi-generational harm from segregation and hundreds of years of slavery. We are now living in uncertain and turbulent times in the United States and we must continue to live, love and education one another.



Ticket to Apartheid Museum, assigns each visitor a skin color, defining the path they take



Poster from Constitution Hill, fort turned prison, turned museum and Constitutional Court House



Cells where "the Robben Island of Johannesburg", collected activist like Mandela, Sobukwe and Ghandi

ALISHA WORMSLEY, Interdisciplinary artist:

"Children of Nan" is an ongoing film series that uses science fiction and historical fiction tropes as a metaphor for the survival of black women. Black women being the first humans. Where better to film than the origin of humanity? The southern tip of Africa! "Children of Nan" begins with the Middle Passage. This trip gave me the opportunity to include an origin.



Sterkfontein Caves, or “The Cradle of Humankind” is where the oldest humanoid skulls and Tools have been discovered (over 2 million years old)



Shep, Ricardo Iamuuri & Alisha Wormsley, fresh off the plane and ready to wander

The artists leave the inland jungle, caves, mines, theatre and museums of Johannesburg for the salty waters and windy beaches of Cape Town.



Jungle view from our Bed & Breakfast



Meal with cultural theatre attaché Malcolm Purkey (former artistic director of Market Theatre otherwise known as “the theatre of struggle”) and family

One of the US Artists first stops in Cape Town, was the District Six Museum (www.districtsix.co.za), where over 60,000 residents were forcibly removed during Apartheid—declaring it a “Whites Only” zone. Using the Group Areas Act, the government removed an entire neighborhood, jumpstarting the township communities. Once a neighborhood, now a place to study the geography of racism. Here, race was used to legally stream wealth (sound familiar?). Communities were forced to leave so that new, rich, white communities could move in.

The District Six Museum practices an ephemeral protest today by something they call, “salting the earth”. Through ritual activity, storytelling, walking the streets, engaging the site with graffiti and art, the community is occupying the space *and* the land.



Touring the art work of District 6. Table Mountain hiding behind the fog.



Mandy Sanger (in yellow) with SOP artists (left to right) Mbovu Malinga, SA artist with Ricardo Iamuuri & Alisha Wormsley

Mandy Sanger, is the brilliant and well-informed tour guide, whose family was forced to leave. She explains how the museum did not begin, nor is it run by academics—but rather by the people who lived in District Six. The stories are owned, collected and installed by the people, encouraging debate. Therefore, the museum is curated by the community.

ALISHA WORMSLEY, Interdisciplinary artist continued:

I made connections with women who would be "original women."

The landscape and mythology there will push the narrative to really create a powerful legacy for American Black Women and will show the startling similarities between the struggles of black women in South Africa and the United States.

Visiting cultural museums, sites, and even cuisine, the artists indulge in a meal by Nadia Agherdine in her Lansdowne Western Cape home. Nadia cooks her visitors Cape Malay foods and discusses her family experiences as a woman of color in South Africa. Similar to the US, the South Africans segregate humans by the color of their skin: White, Colored (or Brown in the US) and Black. But instead of political asylum and financially stimulated migration, much of the “colored” category was brought to South Africa (similar to the slavery in the States) as slaves from the West Indies—forced migration through slavery.



Nadia Agherdine explains the various foods and where they come from



Nadia Agherdine's kitchen

Ricardo Iamuuri Robinson, Sound Recordist Audio Visual Composer

I will explore the sonic journey of specific natural resources extracted from South African soil and the process they go through to become a product people will kill for.



Iamuuri records sound of Mandela's cell, Robben Island (image by Alisha Wormsley)



South Africa's National Gallery (image by Wormsley)

The journey is not all work- there is also play! It is hard not to go to the beach when you are staying so close it, especially if you come from Pittsburgh (PA) where there is snow on the ground in January!

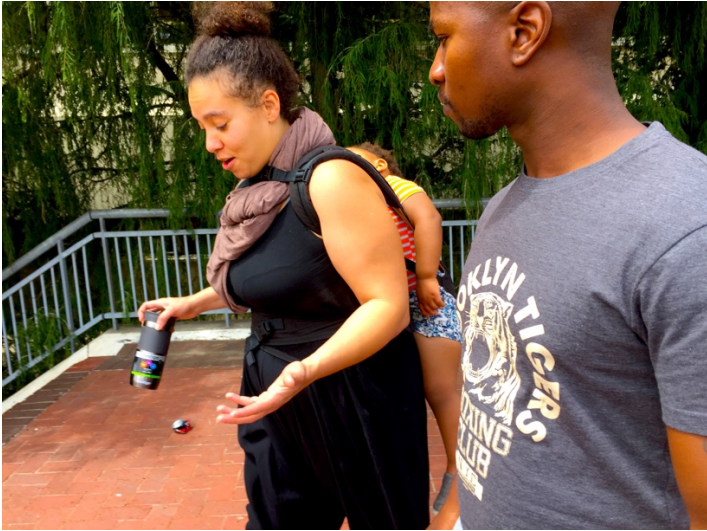


South Africa artist, Charlie Jansen, knows the best swimming holes and Chris Ivey captures Ricardo and Shep in his "babyboom" shot.



Charlie Jansen ran the Super Hero Puppet workshop while the artists were in Cape Town. The puppets that the kids made in South Africa came to the US to be installed. Sadly, Charlie was not allowed to join them and see the work in its final stage. The MF Education Program had arranged for Charlie to teach a workshop with

Pittsburgh kids too, Gwen's Girls on the North Side. The workshop went on without him but as stated earlier, after many expensive doctor and visa appointments, Jansen was denied access.



Wormsley and Mbouvu discuss the South African temperature of Mandela and his legacy in the current political landscape.



Charlie's mom cooks for us in the Vryground township and we get a lesson in Xhosa cooking and language

For the past four years Superhero Puppet workshops are run out of The Butterfly Art Project in the Vryground township, where Charlie grew up and works. Kids come to Vryground from all over Africa, migrating for many of the same reasons people migrate to the States. And just like in the States, besides battling racism and classism, they battle other similar inner-city struggles: violence and addiction. In the Superhero workshop, kids design their own superhero. They have to create a story of how each hero rose from the ashes to become the hero s/he is today. The Butterfly Art Project (<http://www.butterflyartproject.org>) is an art therapy NGO "encouraging creativity and healing through the arts". It is based out of the Capricorn School and the perfect home for Charlie and the Super Hero Puppet Project!



Capricorn School play area, Vryground Township, Cape



Superhero puppet sample 1

Charlie Jansen introduces the delegation to a neighbor who came to Vryground, the same time as his father did. Filmmaker Chris Ivey and director/curator, La Follette decided to bring him in as a 4th artist to the mix. "He is a South African Thaddeus Mosley!", claims Ivey, although Henry Albertus mainly works in corrugated

steel and found objects gathered from the junk yard. Interviews were taken and then embed in the architecture of the informal settlement (township), *Dreamland*, which was be the first installation MF guests walked through in order to enter the exhibit.



Charlie on the street named after his father



Charlie looking over Vryground



Henry Albertus showing us his second story view



Ivey documenting the architecture

Henry Albertus was one of the first settlers of *Vryground*, or, in Afrikaans, “free ground”. It is also known as the Capricorn Township. These informal settlements, or townships, are living structures set up on Council land. Because they are not designed for housing, water and electricity are not a part of the formula.

Traditionally the houses are one story units made from corrugated metal, plastics, glass and wood. However, Henry Albertus, who has spent his life reading and exploring various modes of the construction industry, has spent his life in Vryground breaking the traditional township house rules. By recycling rubbish from junkyards and recycling them into many-leveled sculptural castles, Albertus has built works which echo architecture from all over the world.

La Follette explains, “When we first entered Henry’s house, I could hear Amy Goodman on the radio: a familiar voice in a foreign place. As soon as we started talking with Henry, he too, made us feel right at home. A self-taught architect scavenger, Albertus personally hauled *by hand* all the building materials that he recycled from the Vryground dump, almost a mile away! He also collected items from various jobsites throughout the area where he also acquired carpentry and gardening skills over many decades.”



Ivey documenting Albertus



View from Albertus' deck

Once back in the States, the Pittsburgh and the COLD...artists get the opportunity to meet with The Mattress Factory Museum team to start thinking about space, place and materials.



From left to right, Chris Ivey, Adam Welsh, Alisha Wormsley, son Shepard and Ricardo Iamuuri in front of MF 14141, annex



Ivey with founder/director of MF, Barbara Luderowski



Shep with father/artist Ricardo Iamuuri