

Assemblage_outoftheCUBE Exhibition – curator’s statement

Louise Ross

Participating artists

Audrey Anderson, Bev Butkow, Michael Cheesman, Mandy Coppes-Martin, Yael Feldman, Rebecca Haysom, Renee Johannes, Mandy Johnston, Claire Jorgensen, Zwelethu Machepha, Lehlogonolo Mashaba, , Minenkulu Ngoyi, Bongani Njalo, Phumulani Ntuli, Leanne Shakenovsky, Ross Passmoor, Anthea Pokroy, Louise Ross, Susan White, Isaac Zavale

Assemblage is a non-profit organisation for artists founded in 2010. The overall objective of Assemblage is encapsulated in our Mission Statement below:

Assemblage is a non-profit organisation which intends for the visual arts community of Johannesburg to connect, to share ideas, information and advice and to collaborate. It provides an inclusive forum where visual art students, graduates and professionals can network. Assemblage encourages production, participation, professionalism and the sharing of resources, knowledge and skills. Through an informative website, peer mentoring groups, workshops, group exhibitions, artist studios and other collaborative projects, it hopes to contribute and promote artistic innovation, collaboration and a proactive vibrancy within Johannesburg.

Curator’s comment

In April 2012 [Assemblage](#) opened the Assemblage Studios in Newtown, Johannesburg, with the aim of creating an artist-run initiative that supports the visual arts community of Johannesburg, benefits the industry and gives artists the space to fulfil their potential.

Assemblage encourages the artists within the Assemblage Studios to pursue art making as a full-time career thereby cultivating entrepreneurs and employment, which is imperative in the South African context. The broader Johannesburg visual arts community, as well as the general public have access to the space through regular art events including exhibitions, open studio events and art talks. It is a physical hub for activity, creation and discourse.

This selection of works is some of what has been produced by artists using the space over the last two years and speaks to the huge potential that exists within Johannesburg and South Africa. The works are diverse and varied but rich in subject matter and technique. We believe that the visual arts in South Africa should be given more attention and that artists should be encouraged to do more of what they do best, that is, make work!

When we opened the Assemblage Studios in 2012 it felt like a big experiment, we had convinced a landlord to try out our dream and had taken a loan in order to put a deposit down to secure the space. We advertised the idea to our network and had quite a few artists showed interest really quickly. We moved in, with interested artists in tow. Two years on we have learnt a huge amount. Some of those initial artists are still working in the space while others have moved on. We launched the space with an exhibition curated by Mika Conradie titled 'Or As With'. The exhibition spoke to the in between spaces, spaces we were trying to occupy. We had hundreds of people at the launch and were really excited about the response we received to our idea and what we were doing.

Artists have come and gone but we haven't advertised for a year and a half - as one artist leaves another appears. We have fundraised and fundraised and received some support. In 2013 we received a year grant from [The African Arts Trust](#) - this allowed us to do two things, firstly to offer partially subsidised studios to deserving artists and secondly to expand our space. We started with seven studios and a workshop space. We now have an additional four studios and a printmaking studio. We have on average 20 artists in residence at any given time and the community is thriving.

We have learnt that encouraging responsibility has been crucial to keeping our space going. Artists pay their rent and they mostly pay it on time, but they are also expected to participate in the community, clean up after themselves and contribute to open studios and events. This has led to a sense of ownership of the space amongst the artists using the space and many collaborations - this is exciting for us to see! Assemblage encourages and exists because of collaboration and sharing and to see others beginning to understand our vision is encouraging.

Some of these collaborations can be seen in this exhibition, such as Phumulani Ntuli and Bongani Njalo's collaboration as part of our 2013 exhibition 'Diptych' or Isaac Zavale and Minenkulu Ngoyi's ongoing collaboration as the collection [Alphabet Zoo](#). There is also a richness seen in the way that artists are working, they continually bounce ideas off each other and many parallels can be seen in works produced in the space. Just a quick overview of works on this exhibition and parallel themes and ideas can be identified, such as Ross Passmoor and Yael Feldman's explorations of city spaces.

Other small things but moments that show a community spirit include the Assemblage studios garden, several of the studio artists decided it would be a good idea to grow some plants on the studio balcony. They approached the project with gusto and now the studios has a lovely studio garden, other artists at the studio have continued to care for and monitor the garden.

The success of the artists using the space has also been amazing to see, the list of exhibitions participated in and conceptualised is long and include group and solo exhibitions. This in itself is extremely encouraging and hopeful and speaks to the necessity of artists having a space to work within and how a communal space can lead to more exhibition opportunities. There is also often a spirit of competition which seems to drive many of the artists using the space to pursue what their neighbours are achieving.

This project is still very young but we are certain of several things, a space such this is needed in Johannesburg and should continue, when given the freedom artists can begin to do amazing things and without the support of the visual arts community of Johannesburg Assemblage could not have got to this point.