"RE-PRESENTATIONS"[1] OF SOUTHERN SAN[2] ROCK ART ON DROSTDY WARE POTTERY FROM THE 1950S

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Abstract

South African commercial and production pottery is a highly neglected field of research. In this article I focus on reproductions of San rock paintings on domestic crockery produced by Grahamstown Pottery's Drostdy Ware in the 1950s. At first glance, Drostdy's *Bushman* wares appear to resemble clichéd copies of Helen Tongue's (1909) reproductions. It is argued that Drostdy's *Bushman* wares offer a partial reflection into the complex, evolving and frequently contradictory public sentiment of the 1950s regarding the provenance of San rock art; its *raison d'etre*; its public profile in the media, literature, popular fiction, scientific literature, the arts, festivals and exhibitions. This article contends that Drostdy's *Bushman* wares both espoused and contested contemporary realities. The interstitial agency of Drostdy's *Bushman* wares was asserted via the triangulation of textual markings on their bases; iconography and design; and compounded by their relative quantitative "weight". These wares challenge the political neutrality or complicity of much contemporary South African art and craft production.

Key terms:

San art, Grahamstown Pottery, Drostdy Ware, Bushman rock painting, interstitial agency

In the 1950s, various South African ceramic studios and factories, including the Cullinan Refractory's Linnware, Drostdy Ware, Boksburg East Potteries, National Ceramic Industries, Globe Potteries, the Kalahari Studio, the Bosh Studio, Zaalberg Potterij and Crescent Potteries manufactured ceramic wares that were decorated with images derived from reproductions of Southern San rock paintings. These re-presentations cannot be isolated from the socio-political and historical context, as well as the complex network of contemporary cultural conventions of white South Africans in the early years of the apartheid regime. These cultural conventions, which were at times contradictory, are reflected in the depictions of San parietal art by the paintresses[3] of Drostdy Ware.

This article locates the activities of the Drostdy paintresses with a broader investigation of the understanding and appreciation of Southern San rock painting in early twentieth century South Africa. A brief historical overview of perceptions of the San in terms of western revisionist scholarship, including the debate concerning the origins of San Art, c.1900-1950 will introduce the subject. This will be followed by a brief analysis of the transcription of Southern San parietal art by pioneer researchers (c.1900-1950). Thus accuracy of these transcriptions of Southern San parietal art by pioneer researchers will be considered before invoking some local festivals and exhibitions which displayed Bushmen

people and Southern San parietal art (1936-1952). Prior to a brief historical introduction to the Drostdy Ware division of Grahamstown Pottery, the appropriation of Southern San motifs by early twentieth-century (white) South African artists will be examined.

This article focuses on contextualising and analysing these wares within their historical, cultural and political milieu. In additional to scholarly reference texts, the author has drawn on an archival database of historical newspaper clippings on San parietal art in the holdings of the Iziko SA National Gallery Library in Cape Town, and conducted a series of interviews with some of the few remaining Drostdy ware paintresses and management staff. Ideological, ethical and philosophical debates concerning identity politics and cross-cultural borrowing and appropriation, while pertinent, are beyond the scope of this essay.

Brief historical overview

The art, language, mythology and material cultures of Southern San people (who were, and are still referred to as the Bushmen by key researchers) have been a source of interest since it was first recorded in 1779 by Robert J Gordon. The San have been publicly exhibited as a source of sexual fascination (Abrahams 1996; 1998; Morris 1996; Gordon 1988), systematically exterminated (Landau 1996) and eloquently admired for their supposedly superior aesthetic abilities by artists such as Walter Battiss (1939; 1948; 1958), and more recently by Pippa Skotnes (Groenewald 2008). Their art was extensively copied, researched and displayed in a variety of exhibitions and festivals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Witz 1993; Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996). Ethnographic writing (Glenn 1996:41-51), visual images (Arnold 1997:23-30; Huntley 1992:58; Godby 1996:115-126; Landau 1996:129-143; Buntman 1998; 1996a & b), attitudes (Lewis-Williams 1996:306-314; Wilmsen 1996: 185-189) and actions, such as the collection of trophy skulls for museum and private collections (Farini 1886; Penn 1996:81-91; Guenther 1996:225-238; Morris 1996: 67-79), attest to an ensemble of pejorative and racist views of the San.

The western perception of the Bushmen,[4] like other indigenous Southern African groups, has not remained static over time, and, no doubt, will continue to evolve. The adoption of Southern San motifs by studio ceramists in the early 1950s arguably reflected a contemporary surge of interest in the Bushmen and in San parietal art. In the 1950s, numerous role-players engaged in the construction and manipulation of largely derisive narratives regarding the San people and their art. These role-players included the newly elected Nationalist Government of the Union of South Africa; the press; writers of popular fiction (Maughan-Brown 1983); novelists[5] and a host of travel writers.[6] These role-players proffered a wide variety of messages concerning the San, some of which were contradictory. For example, reference texts on San parietal art in the 1950s and 1960s, which were poorly researched, relatively cheap and widely disseminated, essentially operated within a liberal salvage paradigm (Lewis-Williams 1996:308-312). These texts often reproduced pejorative views of the Bushmen and trivialised their art (Lewis-Williams 1996: 308-312). Similarly, many travel writers and authors, like Laurens van der Post, while ultimately disempowering, were often well-intentioned (Ouzman 2012). Conversely, the Nationalist government used the San as a convenient "target" for liberal imaginings of a golden past that allowed the government to ignore and deny the history of black South Africans (Ouzman 2012). This liberal romanticism was used to extend the ongoing politically disempowerment and disenfranchisement of the San and other indigenous people and salve imperial and colonial consciences (Ouzman 2012).

The debate concerning the provenance and *raison d'être* of San rock paintings, c.1900-1950

The debate concerning the origins of San rock paintings needs to be viewed within a greater framework of early Southern African research into indigenous material culture, ruins and monuments. In the period under consideration, various early researchers fraudulently postulated that the ruins at Great Zimbabwe were made by the ancient Sabaeans of South Arabia and their Phoenician ancestors or the Queen of Sheba, among other exotic candidates (Smith 1977). In South Africa, Bleek and Lloyd realised the religious and symbolic importance of Bushman rock art in the 1870s, but this insight was lost for almost 100 years. Populist evolutionist interpretations prevailed in the early twentieth century and the categorisation of forms led to South African rock art – especially geometric engravings – being interpreted as the idle doodlings of a primitive people (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004) or caricatures (Bahn 1998:62-63)). Some Europeans considered art beyond the scope of the San, and alternative provenances were attributed to visiting Caucasians and other exotic foreigners. For example, from the 1930s to the 1950s, Arabians or Phoenicians were believed to have authored the bulk of Bushman rock-art – with the *White Lady* of the Brandberg (South West Africa/Namibia), so named by Breuil in 1917, being the most (in)famous example of proposed Mediterranean origins (Bahn 1998:62-63).

Early researchers investigating the *raison d'être* of San art proposed hunting magic, art-for-art's sake and aesthetic approaches. However, these hypotheses were all found wanting. In the 1970s and 1980s, researchers including Janette Deacon, David Lewis-Williams and Patricia Vinnicombe re-discovered the Bleek and Lloyd archive at the University of Cape Town. The now commonly-accepted revisionist theory is that much, if not most, of Bushman rock art relates to the shamanistic and symbolic experiences of the Bushmen (Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1989).

The transcription of Southern San parietal art by pioneer researchers, c.1900-1950

Publications containing reproductions of San parietal art were produced from the late nineteenth century by researchers including M Bartels (1896), GA Farini (1886), G Fritsch (1872), E Holub, (1882) and A Hübner (1871). Other important students of San art were Thomas Baines (1849), Conolly Orpen (1876) and his brother Joseph Millard Orpen (Ouzman 2010:8-11). George William Stow (1822-1882) was one of the earliest and most significant researchers of Southern San parietal paintings. However, his mid-nineteenth century copies of San parietal art went unappreciated by the public for many generations, his research being posthumously published by Dorothea Bleek in 1930 (Stow 1930). In 1874, Wilhelm HI Bleek (1827-1975), the pioneer researcher of San oral history, religion and language, applauded Stow's copies of San parietal art, claiming that:

> A collection of faithful copies of Bushman paintings is … only second in importance to a collection of their folklore in their own language (cited in University of the Witwatersrand, Rock Art Unit 1998:4).

In the early twentieth century, local and international interest in Southern San parietal art grew steadily with the publication of numerous monographs on the subject. Early monographs on San art included Helen Tongue (1909), Otto Moszeik (1910), Reenen J van Reenen (1920),[7] Neville Jones (1926; 1949), Miles C Burkitt (1928), H Obermaier and H Kuhn (1930), Dorothea F Bleek

(Bleek 1930; Rosenthal & Goodwin 1953),[8] the Van der Riet sisters (Weintroub 2009), George Stow (1930), EJ Dunn (1931), Maria Wilman (1933), Leo Frobenius (1873-1938) (Frobenius & Fox 1937),[9] Walter W Battiss (1939; 1948; 1958; Duffey 2006a), the Abbé Breuil (Abbe [*sic*] Breuil describes centuries of cave art 1952; Breuil 1955) and M Willcox (1956). Other important scholars worked in the field in the 1950s, included Bert Woodhouse (1919-2011) and Patricia Vinnicombe (1932-2003). It is worth noting that the bulk of these copyists were passionate amateurs, and not professional archaeologists.

The accuracy of transcriptions of Southern San parietal art by pioneer researchers

The work of many early researchers of San parietal art is criticised and considered somewhat amateur by contemporary standards, which decree almost absolute accuracy and use sophisticated methods and tools to record images (Dowson, Lewis-Williams & Lewis-Williams 1994: 210-223; Smith *et al.* 1997). However, this criticism needs to be tempered by an acknowledgement that many contemporary researchers are very invested in their recording techniques, and cast especially harsh judgments on their predecessors, using rather ahistorical criteria in judging their copies (Ouzman 2012). Furthermore, as Skotnes (1996:236) notes, contemporary acetate tracings, using fine black lines, 'has rendered all [an rock] paintings equal, stylistically similarly and visually bland'. Furthermore, this method of copying fails to account for the rich diversity of styles and iconography (Skotnes 1996:236). Most archaeologists recognise that early copies of rock art are products of their time. These early studies have become objects of study and are considered significant artifacts (Ouzman 2012).

Some South African festivals and exhibitions which displayed Bushmen people and Southern San parietal art, 1936-1952

The Bushmen people have been exhibited in Europe since 1810, when Sarah 'Saartjie' Bartman (ca.1790-1815) was taken to England and France.[10] In the 1940s and 1950s, Percival Kirby, a Scottish musicologist based in South Africa, wrote a series of critical articles on Bartman. His research was appropriated and popularised in contemporary poetry, theatre, and visual arts which 'powerfully depicted the terrible display of the Hottentot Venus in Europe as the moniker of everything wrong with Western civilisation: Enlightenment science, racism, the abuse and exploitation of women, the travesties of colonialism, and the exoticisation of non-Western peoples – the so-called *Other*' (Crais & Scully 2008:3). Despite Kirby's writings, popular festivals, exhibitions and touring troupes of 'wild Bushmen' were displayed during this period in Europe and the United States of America (Dubow 1995:24). Many of these events have received scholarly attention in recent years (Morris 1996; Gordon 1997).[11]

It is alleged that South African artists, curators and art historians were apathetic towards San art and that few exhibitions of it were undertaken in South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s (Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994:318). It is further claimed that exhibitions of San art were 'almost all arranged or instigated' by Walter Battiss (Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994:318). However, my research indicates that there were indeed various significant exhibitions during this period. A list of festivals and exhibitions in South Africa from the late-1930s to the mid-1950s, which were likely to have shaped the perceptions of local artists, including Drostdy's paintresses, is included in Table 1.

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Table 1. South African festivals and exhibitions of the Busmen and their art, from the late-1930s to the mid-1950s.

The chronological outline that follows gives, where available, contextual information:

1936 Empire Exhibition, Milner Park, Johannesburg, and also Cape Town. A Bushman camp was displayed at these exhibitions (Morris 1996:68).

1948 'Prehistoric Art in Southern Africa', South African Association of the Arts, Cape Town. The exhibition was held in conjunction with the South African Archaeological Society (Johannesburg Art Gallery 1988:62, 139). The exhibition included Breuil's 'original copies' of the 'White Lady' Cave in the Brandberg, South West Africa (City to see cave of rock paintings 1948).

1949 Bushman rock paintings and engravings, Atrium, South African National Gallery, Cape Town. In his opening address, John Paris, the Gallery Director declared '… pre-historic Bushman paintings and engravings are of immense importance in the history of art. They are something which only South Africa can give [to] the world' (Bushman art for National Gallery? 1949). The installation of rock art in the National Gallery signified a radical shift in their meaning, from exotic 'Old Master' status to that of the 'Modern Master'. The exhibition of San parietal paintings and engravings replaced a display of plaster casts of Greek busts. The removal of the Greek busts was perceived as scandalous by certain visitors, and was vigorously debated in the local press (Montreal 1949; Bushman art for National Gallery? 1949). The furor was most certainly also linked to the implicit challenge posed by Paris, in his firm denial of the 'exotic foreigner' hypothesis for the provenance of San rock art.

1952 The Van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival, Cape Town. 'Live wild' Bushmen viewed by 165 000 Festival spectators (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:259). They were labelled 'the world's most primitive people' and commodified to an audience eager to experience this exotic spectacle. The Bushmen were trapped in a 'primordial timelessness and perpetual primitiveness, [which resulted in the] casting [of] doubt over their humanity' (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:259). The festival was an attempt by the Nationalist Government to appropriate public interest in the 'other' and to forge English and Afrikaner unity through the notion of progress (Rassool & Witz 1993; Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:255-269; van der Watt 1996:41-44). Gordon argued that the festival 'was an exercise in classification and, as a "classifying house", it became an institution of knowledge and technology of power' (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:261). It formed part of an emergent larger project that aimed to' … package, market and distribute evolutionary racism on a hitherto unimagined scale' (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:265).

The appropriation of Southern San motifs by early twentieth century South African artists

From the early 1920s, various prominent white South African artists, crafters and interior decorators displayed an interest in San parietal art, including Jacob H Pierneef (1886-1957)[12] and Erich Mayer (1876-1960).[13] In the late 1920s or early 1930s, the artists Terence McCaw (1913-1978) and Walter Battiss used 'Bushman' motifs on textiles (Duffey 2006a:41; Schoonraad 1985:41). The application of San motifs onto textiles continued in the 1930s in the carpets and weavings of the Lady Clarendon Spinning and Weaving School, coordinated by Marga J Mayer-Gutter.[14]

In the 1930s, Battiss explored San parietal motifs, producing and exhibiting wood-cuts, lino-cuts and wood-engravings that resembled petroglyphs (Schoonraad 1985:43; Duffey 2006a). In the 1940s and 1950s, the *oeuvres* of artists including Reginald Turvey (1883-1968), Otto Klar, Coert Steynberg and his spouse Betsie Steynberg[15] reflected an interest in San parietal art (Berman 1996:458, Heymans 1997; Lichtenberg 1998). The Anglo-Oriental studio potter, Chaim (known as Hym or Hyme) Rabinowitz (1920-2009)[16] co-authored *Rock paintings in the South-West Cape* (Johnson, Sieff & Rabinowitz 1959). Rabinowitz, however, never incorporated direct references of San rock paintings, as he believed they were depictions of San spiritual life (Rabinowitz 2011).[17]

In the early 1950s, numerous artists – both amateur and professional – engaged with representations of San Art. For example, the Cape Town artist, Ivor Roberts, copied San parietal paintings onto slate (Stonemason artist 1953; Brokensha 1957). Roberts argued that as the slate onto which he painted was quarried near the caves from which he derived his imagery, his images were 'even more authentic' (Brokensha 1957). Similarly, the artists Jan Buys and Albert Newall were commissioned to paint what was 'believed to be the biggest single mural in South Africa' (Marais 1953). They decorated a restaurant, *The Bushman Cellar*, Johannesburg, with 'weird vivacious figures [that] cavort and leap across the underground walls' (Brokensha 1957). A large mural of San parietal art was painted on the terrace wall of Donald Pilcher's luxury home in Linden, Johannesburg (Holme & Frost 1955:53). Similarly, a mural that depicted Bushmen hunting was painted on the outside walls of the Creel's Kenridge home, Cape Town (Griffin 1958). During this period, the South African Tourist Corporation, SAA (South African Airways) and SAR&H (South African Railways and Harbours) marketed South Africa via the use of images of "tribal exoticism", including Bushman motifs.[18] In the 1950s, the incorporation of motifs from San parietal art into various aspects of material culture was not limited to South Africa. For example, in the United States of America, Laverne International produced and sold fabrics sporting San motifs. Their *Fun to Run* range depicted Bushman figures being chased by airborne arrows (Horn 1985:117).

This populist translation of San parietal art into both public and private spheres appears to indicate that it had become a prominent theme in the constantly shifting constellation of domestic decoration trends. If we draw parallels with economic anthropology, San parietal art became a form of social currency. Furthermore, its value is not merely derived from its abstract value in a system of exchange, but also from its distinctive properties associated with either an exotic, foreign Caucasian predecessor, or the nearly extinct, infantine yellow people.

Historical overview of Grahamstown Pottery, Drostdy Ware

Grahamstown Pottery was established by Professor Frederick William Armstrong (1875-1969) and his wife Ruth Beatrice Armstrong in 1922. In 1948, Norman Steele-Gray purchased the company and established two ranges – Drostdy Ware and Cookery Nook Kitchenware. Drostdy Ware primarily produced decorative and fancy wares including decorative masks, chargers, vases, promotional[19] and commemorative wares,[20] "native" figurines, tiles,[21] ornaments and hand decorated crockery. Cookery Nook Kitchenware manufactured inexpensive monochrome functional "oven-to-table" crockery including coffee and early morning tea sets, soup and hors-d'oeuvres sets, mugs and jugs (Gers 2000:38-47; Gers 1998; Nilant 1963:44-45).

Drostdy Ware embraced numerous different decoration techniques including chalk pastels, hand painted motifs, *sgrafitto* and hand coloured-transfers. The pottery is marked with various different markings.[22] Senior staff included France Marot, the Chief Designer and Hester Locke, the Superintendent of the Art Department. Over the years, Drostdy employed numerous white women as paintresses, including Kay Cope-Christy, Jane Krone, Margaret Scott, Leila P Simpson (1931-1959) and Annette Southey (Gers 2000:38-47; Gers 1998). Financial insolvency resulted in the acquisition of Grahamstown Potteries by Continental China, which operated the company between 1968 and 1985 (Gers 1998).

Representations of Southern San parietal art on Drostdy Ware's Bushman range: quantitative analysis

It is worth briefly reflecting on the quantitative significance of Drostdy's *Bushman* wares. As a domestic commodity, these wares were produced in relatively large quantities. It may thus be argued that they had a more significant or broader impact than a single "original" art work, as produced, for example, by Klar, Pierneef, Mayer or Battiss, even if the *Bushman* wares were not viewed as a reified art object in the 1950s.

Qualitative analysis – Iconography

In contrast with some other contemporary ceramic studios, including Zaalberg Potterij and National Ceramics Industries, the designers and paintresses of Drostdy Ware strove for 'high quality, accurate and authentic-looking' reproductions of San parietal art (Marot & 1998; Steele-Gray 1998; Locke 1996). Drostdy staff claim that in order to maximise "authenticity"[23] the paintresses and designers used reference books as the source for their images (Marot & 1998; Steele-Gray 1998; Locke 1996). Helen Tongue's seminal text of 1909, entitled *Bushman paintings*, has been traced as the source of almost all the images of San parietal art that were reproduced on Drostdy Ware's *Bushman* range.[24] It is interesting to note that designers of Linnware[25] and the Kalahari Studio also used Tongue's monograph as a reference source for many of their images of San parietal paintings.

In some instances, the Drostdy paintresses accurately transcribed Tongue's imagery, in other instances they

edited, simplified and re-arranged images and aspects of Tongue's images to fit various ceramic forms such as a palette, triangle and circle or a goblet-platter set. For example, the image on Figure 1 is derived from Tongue's plate 16, image number 26. Tongue's "original" image depicts five eland and one hartebeest, while Drostdy's image only depicts two eland. Drostdy's palette-shaped platter could have accommodated the entire image, but the designer has elected to exclude the other animals; economic reasons or compositional considerations are likely motives. A third possible reason for the exclusion of two eland and one hartebeest from Drostdy's image may be their insufficiently conventional or "elegant" profiles. In Tongue's "original" image the head of the largest eland is turned away from the spectator, while another eland looks across its body and the hartebeest appears to be jumping. Ironically, it is precisely this 'freedom from the limitation to delineation in profile which characterizes for the most part the drawings of [San] peoples …' which Balfour praises and regards as 'civilized' and sophisticated (Tongue 1909:9). Tongue's "original" image contained a nervous energy, derived from the various anxious poses of the animals, that is entirely lacking from the Drostdy reproduction.

In Figure 1, the Drostdy studio has rotated the image of the two eland, so that one of the eland (which is grazing in the foreground) appears to be standing on a plane parallel to the ground of the spectator. The branches on which the eland are chewing are exaggerated in the Drostdy reproduction. This modification promotes an impression of natural abundance, which may be viewed as an attempt to convey an idyllic image of abundance, tranquility and harmony in the animal kingdom that was falsely attributed to San parietal art.

The elands' tails are extended horizontally in Figure 1, while in Tongue's "original" image the tails of the eland

Figure 1: Grahamstown Pottery, Drostdy Ware, Palette-shaped platter. Slip-cast white earthenware, hand decorated. 167mm x 162mm x 20mm. Inscription on base: Bushman rock painting. JW. Hand painted Reproduction. Drostdy Ware. Private collection. The imagery is based on Tongue's copy from camp Siding, Eastern Cape (Ouzman 2012).

were prostrate. This modification by Drostdy's paintresses was probably a compositional device aimed at balancing the composition in the absence of other elements from Tongue's "original" image. Tongue's image of the seated eland included the joints of the forequarters and hindquarters of the animal. The Drostdy Ware version has edited the articulations of the seated eland's limbs. This editing may also have been undertaken as a time-saving device.

Some of Drostdy's *Bushman* images appear to be invented, or partly invented. For example, Figure 2 appears be a re-working of Stow's "blue ostriches" with some additional human figures (Ouzman 2012). However, originality was not the aim of these wares. The intention of the Drostdy paintresses and designers was stated on relatively lengthy hand-written labels on the underside of many of their wares, which claimed that the item was a 'Hand painted reproduction' of 'Bushman Rock

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Figure 2: Grahamstown Pottery, Drostdy Ware, Small bowl with handle. Slip-cast white earthenware, hand decorated. 150mm x 115mm x 45mm. Inscription on base: Bushman rock painting. Made in South Africa. Drostdy. 79B. Collection Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg. The ostrich image recalls the 'Blue Ostriches'. The artist subsequently added the human figures – which really do not resemble rock paintings, or accurate copies thereof (Ouzman 2012).

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Figure 3: Grahamstown Pottery, Drostdy Ware, Kidney shaped platter. Slip-cast white earthenware, decorated with transfer. 125mm x 175mm x 25mm.Inscription on base: Drostdy Ware. Made in South Africa. Collection Gordon Radowsky, Cape Town.

Painting' (Figure 1). In addition, the markings on most of these articles include the initials of the paintress.[26] Drostdy's consumers were thus encouraged to read the reconstructed images of San parietal art as copies of an "authentic" San tradition as well as reified, original, artistic craft objects. Alternatively, I believe the ceramics may have been "original" in that no other ceramic companies were producing full dinner services with such relatively "authentic" Bushman images.

The *Bushman* wares produced by the Drostdy studio are characterised by the extensive emphasis on eland images (Figures 1, 4 (plates 1, 2, 3)). This is very likely the result of Tongue's repetition of eland imagery.[27] The eland also has a prominent status as the largest member of the antelope family and is central to San cosmology, being one manifestation of the trickster-deity, */Kaggen*, and one of a finite set of repositories for supernatural potency (Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1989:13, 36).

The image of an ostrich and hunter in Figure 3 is also derived from Stow's controversial 'blue ostriches,' which is almost certainly a fraudulent copy of Moffat's drawing (Dowson, Tobias & Lewis-Williams 1994). While Stow's motivation is unknown, there are enough minor details that caution against applying today's standard of what was "fraudulent" to Stow who may, for example, have made up the copy as a parlour game (Ouzman 2012). While the Kalahari Studio produced various wares depicting multicoloured ostriches and similar colourful images derived from the sketch of the 'blue ostriches;' the paintresses of Drostdy Ware remained prudent of polemic concerning polychrome fantasies in parietal art that raged in the press in the late 1940s.[28] Drostdy's *Bushman* wares, in general, reflected the earthy tones associated with the mineral pigments and other natural material used historically in parietal art. It is, however, noted that there are some "blue" rock

Figure 4: Drostdy Ware. Group of plates decorated with images derived from illustrations of San parietal art.

From left front, First plate. 160mm x 160mm x 20mm. Pale yellow, transparent glaze on base. Impressed stamp, 'Drostdy'. Black glaze markings, 'Hand Painted, L.M.S. Reproduction. Bushman Rock Painting.' Black glaze stamp, 'Drostdy Ware, Made in South Africa'.

Second plate. 210mm x 240mm x 20mm. Pale yellow, transparent glaze on base. Impressed stamp, 'Drostdy'. Black glaze markings, 'Hand Painted Reproduction, G. de B. Bushman Rock Painting.' Black glaze stamp, 'Drostdy Ware in Suid-Afrika vervaardig'. This plates is derived from an illustrations of rock art from Burley listed, illustrated in Tongue (Ouzman 2012).

Third plate. 300mm x 280mm x 45mm. Pale yellow, transparent glaze on base. Impressed stamp, 'Drostdy'. Black glaze markings, 'Bushman Rock Painting. Hand Painted Reproduction, MP. Drostdy Ware Made in South Africa'.

Fourth plate. 210mm x 245mm x 20mm. Pale yellow, transparent glaze on base. Impressed stamp, 'Drostdy'. Black glaze markings, 'Hand Painted Reproduction, JF. 'Bushman Rock Painting. Drostdy Ware Made in South Africa'.

Fifth plate. 167mm x 163mm x 20mm. Pale yellow, transparent glaze on base. Black glaze markings, 'Hand Painted Reproduction G.B. Bushman Rock Painting. Drostdy Ware. Made in South Africa. E.' Collection Tatham Art Gallery (Accession Numbers: First plate. 2365/06; second plate 2367/06, third plate 2370/06, fourth plate 2369/06, fifth plate 2366/06).

paintings; these were probably originally white or black and have discoloured via an unknown chemical reaction or an organic colonisation (Ouzman 2012).

While the Drostdy paintresses refrained from engaging in this debate concerning polychrome parietal art, their wares reflect other popular misconceptions about San art. A sample of Drostdy's *Bushman* wares was surveyed and the results indicate that 73 per cent of Drostdy's *Bushman* wares represented hunting imagery (Gers 2000:205). This highlights concerns regarding the proliferation of ideologically charged hunting scenes in popular culture. Dowson (1996:318) argues that images of hunting scenes were not the most abundant genre produced by the Bushmen. Yet, as pioneer researchers perceived San parietal art to be concerned with hunting and illustration, they predominantly reproduced copies of rock art that reinforced their beliefs. Owing to the legacy of these pioneer researchers, reproductions of San motifs in South African material culture predominantly depicted hunting scenes. This constant repetition of hunting scenes by craftspeople reinforced 'popular and racist misconceptions about rock art and the societies within which it was produced' and essentially reflected 'male dominance in western society' (Dowson 1996:319).

Qualitative analysis – formal design

Drostdy Ware's *Bushman* range can be viewed as reflective of international trends regarding living and eating habits of the 1950s, which were in a state of flux. The public required greater flexibility with regard to tableware. The custom of buying large elaborate sets was disappearing, to be replaced by the practice of starting with basic articles and adding additional items over time. This trend was particularly evident among young couples with limited financial means (Hill 1993:101, 102). Certainly, the variety of hand-painted images on Drostdy's *Bushman* range supported this mix and match sensibility, and allowed the staggered purchase of crockery.

Drostdy's *Bushman* wares occupy an ambivalent place in the continuum between utility and decorative (art) ceramics. The images were often executed on palette, kidney or other asymmetrical "free form" shapes (Figures 1-4) that were characteristic of international trends in ceramic dinnerware designs of the 1950s, notably the Contemporary Style.[29] Like Drostdy's *African* series that depicted indigenous flora, people, landscapes and fauna, their *Bushman* wares were hand-labelled on their versos. However, unlike most of the initial wares, the *Bushman* wares did not have any hanging devices on their basal foot-rings. Drostdy's *Bushman* wares were clearly intended to be utility items. However, the shapes, sizes and depths of the triangular plates and platters,[30] the palette-shaped plates[31] and the small bowls known as "curry" bowls[32] deviate from "standard" contemporary South African dinner services, and are often impractical for dining purposes, frequently being either too large, small or shallow.

Why did the paintresses create this artistic dinner service whose non-standard forms (Figures 1-4) defy what appear to be normative conventions? Drostdy *Bushman* wares cannot merely be limited to an analysis of the translocation of international forms (i.e., the Contemporary Style) and hybridised local iconographic concerns. Indeed, they present an interesting triangulation of iconography, form and markings (signifiers). The exaggerated dimensions of the crockery is subversive as it forced most diners to have multiple servings (in the case of a too small bowl), or face a partially empty plate (in the case of the large dinner plates).[33] These *Bushman* wares thus propose a radical way of inviting (or forcing) the consumer to contemplate their dining

habits – on both a quantitative level, as well as on an intellectual level. Notions of the consumption of "others" cannot be ignored when one is forced to look at an oversized plate containing a serving of food which is "lost" in a scene of San parietal art, or when one is forced to have multiple servings because bowls are too small. It may be argued that this crockery challenged aspects of the diner's compliance with regard to the consumption of an imagined community and aspects of their culture, even if the imagery reproduced reinforced disempowering stereotypes. The capacity of the diner to have multiple servings highlighted the status of the diner as well-fed member of the middle and upper classes, whose means facilitated the purchase of a fashionable, hand-decorated dinner service.

Drostdy's *Bushman* wares thus represent a curiously fluid group of wares that are associated with the anxiety that accompanied contemporary debates regarding the contested provenance and *raison d'être* of San art. The question of provenance raises issues such as whether it is easier to "use" rock art if it was believed to be made by politically inconsequential "San" or by supposedly "advanced" exotic people like Caucasians, Phoenicians or Arabians. Furthermore, the status of San parietal art was in transition, shifting from exotic "Old Master" status to that of the "Modern Master".[34] These hybrid wares provide an interstitial agency that deploys the fractured culture from which they emerge to question 'versions of historic memory … that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside …' (Bhabha 1996:58). This outside of the inside could be seen as operating on three levels. On a local political level, the interstitial agency gave a voice to San history and questions of their invisibility in the political arena, and to notions of consumption of their rock paintings by western society. On another level, they articulate international political concerns, and should be viewed as being located in the broader contemporary socio-political milieu. They may be argued to correspond to desires to valorise and market South Africa's natural and cultural heritage in the face of the nation's imminent withdrawal from the Commonwealth. Finally, this agency operates on the level of the art/craft debate. Drostdy's *Bushman* wares are not merely utilitarian objects, or popular, banal reproduction; their subversive agency transforms that which is "outside of the inside" of craft. In other words, via their interstitial agency, these commodities migrate in terms of their classification from domestic crockery to critical craft or perhaps contemporary art.

Conclusion

Since the earliest European colonial settlement in Southern Africa, "westerners" have responded to the Bushmen and their art in a variety of contradictory manners, ranging from curiosity and admiration to revulsion. Public opinion was influenced and determined by contemporary popular culture, art, literature, quasi-scientific research and reproductions of San parietal art from the first half of the twentieth century. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the newly elected Nationalist Government of the Union of South Africa, the press, travel writers, crafters, interior decorators and artists engaged in complex, and at times contradictory, appropriation of imagery derived from Southern San parietal art.

In the 1950s, the status ascribed to San parietal art was in a state of flux that made it both vulnerable and attractive. I propose that the Drostdy paintresses of the 1950s represent a "cusp" generation – as white middle-class, educated and employed women they signify a small subset of a nation in the making, poised at a specific crossroad. This historic juncture facilitated a moment of reflection, a chance to metaphorically look

backward and forward. The paintresses were a part of a generation trying to make sense of the devastation wrought by the First and Second World Wars and facing the increasingly severe implementation of apartheid. While San parietal art offered formal Modernist possibilities in terms of its neo-modern iconography, it also offered the possibility of an extended reflection on San rock art and culture. Memory, history and memorialisation is the counter-project of evasion, forgetting and aporia. However, in the 1950s, with respect to San genocide and the contested reception of San parietal art, when all existing knowledge is at best second-hand, biased and misleading, how does one remember? Wakankar (2008:300), in her discussion of recovering the prehistory of the Indian Dalit caste (a subaltern group, like the San) asks:

> What then does it mean to restore disappearance to itself, as though one were countersigning a ghostly signature, placing parentheses around a blank space?

The question of placing a parenthesis around a decimated people and an apparently extinct art form is, I believe, central in this period. I argue that one of the best ways to remember or memorialise or restore a disappearance is via art. To me, the Drostdy *Bushman* wares may be seen to represent this act of remembrance and historical restoration. The transcription of a hybridised form of San parietal art by the Drostdy paintresses is an acknowledgement of local history, and a reiteration of the "non-absence" of this community in the greater social project that was being engineered by the apartheid authorities. Ironically, it is also an acknowledgement of the power to appropriate the imagery of a conquered people.

In an attempt to understand public sentiment of the 1950s as reflected in these reproductions of San parietal art on Drostdy Ware pottery, I would thus like to suggest a move from value judgments of accuracy and "authenticity", and rather view these representations of San parietal art as both a source of interstitial agency and a reflection on Meontology, the history of an absence.[35] With regard to notions of Meontology, as noted previously, the San were absent from the debate regarding the provenance of their art, which was raging in contemporary cultural history in the 1950s. The Drostdy paintresses refrained from reproductions of images that were used to argue Mediterranean or other exotic origins for San rock painting. In addition, their insistence on using elaborate hand-written inscription on bases to indicate that the ceramic item displayed a 'Bushman rock painting' and a 'Hand painted Reproduction', confirms this engaged ideological stance.

In conclusion, the Drostdy paintresses espoused and contested contemporary realities of the 1950s in South Africa, when the San and their art were riddled with contradictions. The San represented an Arcadian yet modern civilisation. San rock painting was in a state of flux – a Meontological no-man's land, yet slowly moving out of what was a scientific and literary "heart of darkness". The interstitial agency of Drostdy's *Bushman* wares, obtained via the triangulation of iconography, forms and textual markings, and compounded by their quantitative "weight"' may be viewed as a challenge to the political neutrality or complicity of much contemporary art and craft production in South Africa in the 1950s.

Acknowledgements

Some the primary research for this essay, notably the review of an archival database of newspaper clippings on San parietal art in the holdings of the Iziko SA National Gallery Library, and a series of interviews with some of the few remaining potters, was undertaken for my Master's thesis (Gers 2000). The analysis

and conclusion presented in this essay are new. I gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance of Dr Sven Ouzman, Curator of Pre-Colonial Archaeology, Social History Department, Iziko South African Museum, whose detailed critique enabled me to extend and refine this essay. I also acknowledge the contributions of two anonymous reviewers.

Notes

1 The term "re-presentations" has been consciously used to highlight the fact that many of the images recorded on the ceramic wares under investigation bear scant resemblance to their original sources. Furthermore, while I refer to Bushman paintings as "images", I note that in an emic understanding, the "images" were produced by and accompanied with thoughts, words and perhaps and rituals, many which are irretrievable. In addition, it seems very likely that San paintings were considered independent entities; actual beings that were called forth from within and beyond the rock wall (Ouzman 2012).

2 The terms "Southern San", "San" and "*Bushman*" are used interchangeably, and are not intended pejoratively. The terms describe hunter-gatherers whose engraved and painted images occur on rocks and in rock shelters throughout Southern Africa.

3 The term *paintress* is used historically to denote female decorators in industrial and production potteries. While appearing sexist to contemporary generations, it is still the term preferred by those who worked in the industry.

4 For example, the western perception of the Khoisan underwent a gradual transformation from the eighteenth century to the late twentieth century. They metamorphosed' from 'brutal savages' to a neo-Rousseauian 'harmless people' (Dubow 1995:24).

5 Novelists included William Golding (Morton 2010: 196).

6 Travel writers included Laurens van der Post (Barnard 1996), PJ Schoeman, Jan J van der Post (Gordon, Rassool & Witz 1996:261–262), Thomas V Bulpin and Lawrence G Green.

7 Reenen J Van Reenen was a close friend of both Pierneef and Battiss, and shared their common passion for San parietal art (Duffey 2006b).

8 Rosenthal and Goodwin (1953) published George Stow's forty-eight remaining completed drawings that were not published in the 1930 volume.

9 Frobenius studied African culture and the rock art of the Atlas, the Fezzan and Southern Africa. He published over 60 books on various related subjects.

10 From 1810 to 1815 the "Hottentot Venus" was shown in human circuses and freak shows to display her perceived extraordinary steatopygia and elongated labia (Abrahams 1996; 1998; Fausto-Sterling 1995; Gordon 1998; Gould 1985; Morris 1996; Qureshi 2004; Strother 1999; Willis 2010).

11 The most significant study in this regard is Gordon's (1997) review of the Denver Expedition, an American-sponsored photographic project of the San which is characterised by colonial paternalism.

12 Pierneef studied and copied San parietal art and designed tapestries based on these images in approximately the 1920s (Duffey 2002; Berman 1996: 365). Pierneef's earliest mural commission of 1922, which involved the painting of eight panels of the assembly hall of Ficksburg Hoërskool, was based on George Stow's copies of San parietal art (Coetzee 1991:3; Duffey 2002).

13 Mayer rallied for an indigenous aesthetic based on the integration of indigenous African and "Bushman" designs and forms to pottery made at the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein (Basson 2003; Hillebrand 1966).

14 The Lady Clarendon Spinning and Weaving School

was established as a project by a group of women who had the welfare of the growing number of unemployment of white women at heart. Founder members were Lady Clarendon, Mrs C Parker, M Posthumus, C van Warmeloo, L Solomon and I Hoogenhout (Anon 1937; Basson 2003; Eastern Province Society of the Arts and Crafts 1938). These handspun and hand-woven items were widely toured and displayed in galleries and arts associations, for example the Natal Society of the Arts, Durban in 1937 (Anon 1937) and the Eastern Province Society the Fine Arts, Port Elizabeth in 1938 (Eastern Province Society of the Arts and Crafts 1938).

15 According to Anneke Lichtenberg (1998), a former researcher at the Ditsong National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, Betsie Steynberg was particularly interested in Bushman art. Steynberg studied ceramics at the Johannesburg Technical College in the 1940s. Upon graduation she produced ceramic wares that were decorated with motifs derived from San parietal art. Three of these ceramic items are in the collection of the Ditsong Cultural History Museum (Lichtenberg 1998).

16 According to his widow Jenifer Rabinowitz (2100), for reasons of ease of pronunciation, most South Africans knew Rabinowitz as Hyme or Hyme. For further information on Rabinowitz, consult Cruise (1992:46) and Fransen (1982:339).

17 Jenifer Rabinowitz (2011) claimed 'what occupied his soul, was investing those sacred aspects [of San parietal art] into his work, every facet of what that entailed – how he dealt with his environment, his staff, his clay, his glazes, his throwing, his decorations, abstract and integral. There wasn't anything which wasn't sacred to him, including the very ether in which he worked – [Hym] didn't allow it to be corrupted by anything artificial … he surrounded himself with indigenous flora, including the very fan aloe – plicatalus, which was sacred to the bushman, that was his very incorporation of everything which those sacred San spaces and markings meant to him.'

18 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this information.

19 Grahamstown Pottery's largest corporate customers were the various independent Southern African beer breweries for whom they produced promotional wares such as tankards, jugs and ashtrays. Other promotional wares included a series of small plates entitled *Landmarks of Grahamstown Series*. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Drostdy produced ashtrays and bowls depicting landmark modern buildings in Port Elizabeth (Gers 2000:38-47; Gers 1998).

20 In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Drostdy Ware produced commemorative wares for various state and private institutions including Kruger National Park, Delta Motors, Potchefstroom University, the Ichthyology Department of Rhodes University and the German Settlers Centenary Committee (1858-1958).

21 Grahamstown Pottery manufactured decorative tiles bearing motifs derived from San parietal art, native studies, indigenous flora and African wildlife. Most of these tiles were commercial blanks manufactured by Pilkington (Gers 2000:38-47; Gers 1998).

22 These markings include: 'Grahamstown Drostdy Ware' 'Grahamstown Potteries, RSA,' 'Vervaardig in Suid-Afrika, Drosty Ware, Grahamstown Potteries Limited, Made in South Africa,' 'Drostdy Accessories, Co. [Pty.] Ltd. Grahamstown South Africa' and 'Drostdy Ware, Made in South Africa. Grahamstown Potteries Ltd.' Different methods were used to apply the name including an (impressed) stamp, raised cast markings, transfers, hand written text in glaze, incised into the base (*sgraffito*), via stickers and customised adhesive tape. On some wares, combinations of different marking methods were applied.

23 The concept of "authenticity" is extremely problematic, particularly when writing about representation of indigenous people. 'The ideal of "authenticity"

has been proven like so many others, [to be] relative and context bound' (Fee 1989:245). Notions of authenticity are interrogated by numerous authors in respect of African art (Griffiths 1995:237-245; Jules-Rosette 1984; Kasfir 2007; Kasfir 1994).

24 I gratefully acknowledge the kind assistance of the staff of the Rock Art Unit, Department of Archaeology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. After viewing numerous slides, they suggested Helen Tongue (1909) as the possible source of the imagery (Smith *et al*. 1997). Further research has confirmed that their suggestion was correct.

25 Two Linnware plates with images derived from Helen Tongue were viewed in the collection of the Roodepoort Museum, Gauteng. Both of these plates are impressed with the Linnware logo and signed 'Thelma van Schalkwyk, 1952'. There are also magnificent examples in the ceramics collection of the Ditsong National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria and at Sunlawns, the home of the Cullinans in Irene.

26 Initials of unidentified paintresses included L.M.S.; G. de B. and M.P.

27 It is interesting to note the repetition of eland imagery in other cultural sectors, for example in the designs by Erich Mayer that were used for carpets and weavings by the Lady Clarendon Spinning and Weaving School.

28 For example, in 1947 it was claimed that a San parietal painting depicting four blue gazelle and one brown gazelle was discovered in the Devil's Peak Estate in Cape Town (Rock paintings found on Devil's Peak. 1947). It is interesting to note that after the Devil's Peak Estate discovery, Burland (1947) prophetically speculated that blue came 'from the white men' and these works should be 'carefully check[ed]'.

29 The 1950s are recognised as a period of innovative design in the decorative, industrial and applied arts in the United States of America, England, and Europe. International design trends in the applied arts during the 1950s are frequently referred to as 'Organic Modernism', 'the New Look', 'Scandinavian Style' or the 'Contemporary Style' (Dormer 1993:29; Hannah 1986:77; Hopkins 1963:4; Jackson 1991:7). These terms are often used interchangeably.

30 A triangular-shaped plate measures 280 x 210 x 42 mm, this being quite large for a standard dinner plate, and too small for a standard serving plate. Furthermore, the triangular plates and platters and the palette-shaped plates are too shallow to allow for comfortable dining.

31 A palette-shaped plate measures 245 x 210 x 25 mm, this plate being impractical because of its shape which has a void which has a void near its centre. Furthermore, it is somewhat flat and lacks a pronounced rim.

32 The bowls are smaller than an average desert or cereal bowl, measuring 150 x 115 x 45 mm.

33 See Figure 4, where the central dinner plate measures 300 x 280 x 45 mm.

34 As evidenced by public controversy surrounding the 1949 installation of Bushman rock paintings and engravings in the South African National Gallery, Cape Town, listed in Table 1. For further information, see Gers (2000:124-128).

35 Rather the more contemporary focus on "nothingness", the term Meontology is used to refer to the opposite of being, existence or reality as such, as well as categories of being.

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