Sivivane sogogo!: An artistic reimagining beyond shadow and stone

Jessica Lindiwe Draper

Centre for Visual Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.
draperj@ukzn.ac.za (ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0623-0232)

Louise Hall

Centre for Visual Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.
halll1@ukzn.ac.za (ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8304-3033)

Justine Wintjes

Department of Human Sciences, KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, &
Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
jwintjes@nmsa.org.za (ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7591-6764)

ABSTRACT

In 2021, the Centre for Visual Arts (CVA) of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) initiated an artistic experiment with the KwaZulu-Natal Museum (KZNM). An artists' collective formed under the motif of isivivane (the Isivivane Collective) – the isiZulu word for a pile of stones, or cairn – as a physical phenomenon as well as a metaphor for collective achievement through individual gestures over time. The project culminated in 2023 with *Sivivane sogogo!*, a six-month-long installation. Working with stones from the KZNM's collections, including hand-axes, bored stones, grindstones, rock engravings, and morabaraba game boards spanning millennia of human/hominin history, the Collective produced an installation that deviated from the museum's conventional mode of display. Two seminal strategies emerged: a playful approach that prioritised curiosity and problem-solving, and the underpinning principles of receptiveness and collaboration. In a challenge to the hierarchical monopolisation of vision and the museum as purveyor of information, authority shifted to the audience, giving way to an open-ended, individualised interpretation. The co-creation extended to non-human actors as well. From our reflections on this project, we propose an alternative paradigm for sustainable change to modes of museum display that integrates diverse narratives within the constitution of new knowledge through interdisciplinarity and audience participation.

Keywords: archaeology, collections, display, isivivane, shadows, stones, KwaZulu-Natal Museum.

Dates:
Received: 2024-10-21
Accepted: 2025-04-24
Published: 2025-10-20

Published by

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2617-3255/2025/n39a14

Background

In 2021, the Centre for Visual Arts (CVA) of the University of KwaZulu-Natal initiated an artistic experiment with the KwaZulu-Natal Museum (KZNM), one of South Africa's historic museum institutions (Guest 2006). Artistic interventions in museums form a lineage as a kind of installation art, and can be an effective means to engage critically with the inheritances that museums embody. The current upsurge of uninvited activist interventions by artists in museum spaces worldwide speaks to the power inherent in museums through the gestures of disobedience they inspire. Artists can also opt to work in more overtly collaborative ways with museums, drawing from adjacent practices in the field of contemporary art. For example, in a seminal project titled *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992, Fred Wilson rearranged the museum's own objects to evoke suppressed and uncomfortable histories such as racial oppression and slavery, absent from the authorised narrative (Wilson 1994; Wilson *et al* 2017). Similar strategies have been explored elsewhere as a way to rethink traditional museum spaces. Mark Dion's *Collectors Collected* (2018) at the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin, inverted the gaze of science back towards itself by displaying researchers engaged in fieldwork. In *Dead Media*, Rat Western inserted lightboxes shaped as specimen jars into a gallery of the Albany Museum in Grahamstown to provoke questions about death, decay and representation. Freddy Tsimba's *Ombres* (2016) used light and shadow to introduce names of victims of colonisation in the Belgian Congo in a "haunting" of the memorial hall of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium. Strategies like these open up productive ways to rethink practices of collection and modes of display, and to shift the epistemic authority of the museum as well as the parameters of artistic practices that can take place within it.

We formed an artists' collective under the motif of isivivane (pl. izivivane), an isiZulu word that refers to a pile of stones or a cairn, and more figuratively, a coming together or gathering of people or things.[1] As a physical phenomenon as well as a metaphor, an isivivane stands for collective achievement through individual gestures over time. Globally, cairns usually mark places of spiritual or historical meaning, or serve as geographic markers indicating a place or direction. Passersby might add stones to these piles as they pass to bring good fortune. Many museums in post-apartheid South Africa have included cairns in their exhibits because of their potential as a 'cross-cultural symbol of intangible cultural and spiritual heritage' (Lange & Teer-Tomaselli 2024).

The isivivane project evolved over three years, gaining momentum through different combinations of contributors with an intervention/installation in the museum each year (2021, 2022, 2023–24). The Isivivane Collective comprised staff from the CVA and KZNM

(including, but not limited to, the authors of this paper) and postgraduate students (whom we have listed in the acknowledgements below).

At the outset, participants were uncertain about the nature of the interactions to come, or exactly how the collaboration might unfold, but the intention was to work in conversation with the space. Museums are governed by protocols informed by practical concerns relating to the collections they house, and the CVA wanted to engage in a productive, respectful and responsive way. These aspects became increasingly important parameters in shaping the creative processes and physical interventions as the work of the Collective proceeded and its members deepened their understanding of the workings of the museum.

Operating at an intersection between fields – museum practice (in particular, collections care and display) and fine art practice (which foregrounds the creative process) – a central motivation for the project has been to reimagine how we see, understand and engage with objects. Our working methods and approaches involved dismantling and synthesising mores peculiar to each field, in the areas of modes of display, research methodologies and heuristics. As an example of practice-led research, insights emerged through the production of installations over three years and from a theoretical standpoint of reflection alongside this unfolding practice. One overarching realisation was that the creative process was fundamentally collaborative and experimental, and not fully within our own control as members of the Collective and "curators" of the installations.

We touch briefly on the first two iterations of the project, which provide background for a more substantial consideration of the third iteration, *Sivivane sogogo!*. Here, the authors identify an alternative museum display paradigm, borne of interdisciplinarity and contingent on audience participation that embeds inclusive and diverse narratives in the constitution of new knowledge.

Isivivane (2021)

The first iteration took the form of a large isivivane created from objects chosen by each member of the Collective, carefully selected due to the embodied meanings and/or personal significance they carried. The gathered skeletons, books, sculptures, chicken wire, rocks, outsized ceramic beads, cotton-wrapped branches, dried plants and other items required careful vetting before being allowed into the museum. Over several days, we worked with, moved, arranged and rearranged these objects in the Mammal Hall, around the mounted skeleton of the last wild elephant in Natal, killed illegally in 1915. The installation was "completed" in a performance on the opening night, called *Izibongo zizinto* (In praise of inanimate things), convened in collaboration with Mohau Modisakeng,

CVA Andrew Mellon Artist-in-residence (Figure 1).[2] Objects associated with museum collections (such as petri dishes holding unexpected specimens) were arranged in a grid on the floor in front of the isivivane. A table at the opposite end of the room held additional objects. Members of the Collective invited the audience to participate in moving these objects to the grid, or adding them to the main isivivane. In this way, the movements and decisions of the "performers" determined the objects' placement using only intuitive associations. While individual intuitive decisions determined the final outcome, the audience was given clear parameters for their participation.

FIGURE Nº 1

The Isivivane Collective, *Isivivane*, 2021. Bones, books, ceramic, chicken wire, cotton, dried plants, paper, rocks, petri dishes and other mixed-media items, around the elephant skeleton in the Mammal Hall of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Installation approx. 4 m x 2 m x 20 m. Courtesy of the Collective (2021).

What the Collective set out to do was to change the way the space feels and to allow people to experience and engage with the space differently. Anecdotal evidence that this had been achieved was presented when Information Officer Thembinkosi (Jobe) Sithole relayed to a member of the Collective how meaningful the metaphor of isivivane was to him. He expressed his excitement at seeing plants he was familiar with included

in the installation,[3] and said he felt connected to and represented by the objects in a way that he had not experienced before. At this point, Moeketsi Mamane, a photographer from *The Witness* newspaper, arrived, and a conversation began about the cultural significance of these objects and objects in general. This group of strangers stood together discussing the importance of sharing their cultural heritage, knowledge systems, and differences. As researchers and artists, we do not often experience resolution and consolidation in such an immediate way. This moment proved that the space had been forever transformed for at least one person, perhaps even two.

The main insights from the first iteration were twofold. The first was pointed out by Information Officer, Samukelisiwe Ngubane, during a session for frontline staff on the installation and how to speak to visitors about it: the motif of isivivane reflects the mission of the museum as well – meaningful objects gathered over a period of time by individuals for a greater purpose. Thembeka Nxele, curator in the Department of Natural Sciences, suggested that isivivane was apt as a metaphor for the museum, as an accumulation of collections, exhibits, and knowledge over time. The second revelation was the importance of what is possible when people see themselves and their knowledge systems being represented, and thereby understood and validated as participants in making meaning within the context of the museum.

The intersections of embodied stories provided a rich opportunity to question existing narratives and to generate new ones. We came to understand that this installation was ultimately about stories, and remembering that history is made up of many narratives, both individual and collective. The goal was not to find the "right" story, but to understand that there are always multiple stories and multiple perspectives. By the end of the first iteration, we realised that the isivivane project could be deepened. This installation was not a full stop, but a semicolon – a resting point, with more iterations to follow.

Ukuphosa itshe esivivaneni (2022)

Taking into account the insights discussed above – the unfolding richness of the isivivane metaphor and the evocation of personal narratives – we shifted in the second year to extend ideas around storytelling and performance while continuing to honour the central values of izivivane – community, collectivity and commemoration. This entailed deeper thinking on the "making" of the isivivane, in particular the active and cumulative process of co-creating with others, and the importance of collective memory. We framed this iteration under the isiZulu proverb, 'ukuphosa itshe esivivaneni', which refers to the gesture of throwing one's stones on a pile – the making of a small individual contribution to a greater achievement.

Alongside our growing interest in metaphorical stones and stone metaphors, we turned our focus to individual stones as materials of izivivane in a more literal sense. Stones have played a central role in communities throughout the world. People have used them to make tools and artworks and build dwellings, walls, and monuments. Because of these (and other) associations of permanence, constancy and solidity, a stone becomes a witness, a guardian of narratives. Each artist once again offered their own symbolic interpretation of a stone. We prepared low white circular plinths to receive the "stones", co-opting an existing activity table in green (Figure 2). We placed a cluster of plinths in the Mammal Hall, with isolated plinths in other galleries on the ground floor.[4] The physical installation emerged again through a performance with the audience at the opening event.[5]

FIGURE **Nº 2**

The Isivivane Collective, *Ukuphosa itshe esivivaneni* (2022). Mixed-media "stones" of cardboard, ceramic, chicken wire, glass, paper, rock, wood and other materials, gathered on plinths in the Mammal Hall and other galleries of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Installation approx. 4 m x 0,5 m x 5 m (installation in the Mammal Hall) and 50 cm x 50 cm (isolated plinths in other galleries). Courtesy of the Collective (2022).

On reflection, what the Collective had actually created in both instances was a visual anthology whose disparate stories and materials intersected and entangled. The deliberately playful performance allowed participants/players to place objects intuitively, with the final installations becoming a residue left behind from this collective process, a record of artist-initiated actions with no clear-cut individual contributions.[6] Some of the major successes of the first iteration included that the audience was guided implicitly by the objects on offer, the possibility to physically engage with them, and the fact that the performance unfolded in a spontaneous and surprising manner. While attempting to recreate this playful spontaneity, too much practised play and guidance came to override the commemorative aspects, and the careful planning, rehearsal and timing of the engagement left the experience feeling contrived. This insight highlighted the importance of maintaining a fluid, process-driven approach that prioritised a loose, tacit understanding of some of the key issues to investigate.

Rather than bringing the project to a conclusion as we had expected, these experimental performances generated several additional unfolding discoveries, and we realised once again that these would need to be extended. The experience enriched the conceptual development of isivivane as a nexus of materials and metaphors, which informed the shape and direction of the third iteration.

Sivivane sogogo! (2023–24)

The third iteration was more substantial in terms of its exhibitionary expression and how it enabled reflection on the project as a whole. While the previous two iterations had lasted only a few weeks, the third had a longer lead-up time and duration over six months (October 2023 to March 2024), which allowed us a slower process and more space for contemplation. This year, the theme shifted towards the more permanent aspects of izivivane as monuments and commemorative structures that outlive individual people, connecting us to the land, and past (and future) generations. We pursued our work with stones, turning even more literally to actual stones and stone as a physical material. Rather than bringing objects into the museum, we opted to work with materials already present in the building. Therefore, *Sivivane sogogo!* focused more decisively on taking cues from museological practice and seeking ways of engaging further with audiences.

While still mindful of an isivivane as essentially an “accumulation” of stones, we incorporated a consideration of each stone’s specific history and contribution, and how stones individually and collectively connect us to the past and root us in the present. In doing so, we hoped to connect to a shared ancestry as one way to move through histories of conflict, but also by our differentiated bodies and biographies as individual participants. We

found a title in the words of Lunguza kaMpukane, interviewed in Pietermaritzburg by James Stuart in 1909. Lunguza remembered izivivane in the landscape of his childhood and described passersby spitting on a stone or tuft of grass, throwing it on the heap and saying, '*Sivivane so gogo!*' ('isivivane of our ancestors!'; Webb & Wright 1976:341).[7] This title also took inspiration from a letter written in 1920 to the *Ilanga lase Natal* newspaper in which Magema Magwaza Fuze called for a reimagining of an isivivane as a useful symbol of self-reliance for an African future.[8] He suggested that if black people came together and each made a small contribution, like a traveller adds a stone to the isivivane, the result would be a mountain, and a symbol of a community that demands recognition. Fuze thus frames izivivane as a form of empowered corrective nation (re)building.

Lunguza and Fuze evoke a longer ancestral memory, beyond the time of named, directly related, or specifically remembered ancestors. It inspired us to seek out stones of different ages, different temporalities. One set of materials that curators in the Department of Human Sciences (DHS) put forward for us to work with was the 'Teaching Collection', which is made up primarily of things that are not formally accessioned for various reasons, for example, artefacts that came into the museum without a context, curtailing their scientific usefulness. The Teaching Collection is used for various educational activities and can be freely touched, which lends itself well to the playful and participatory theme of the project. We were drawn to particular categories of artefacts due to their abundance and formal qualities as stones that are modified but still carry properties of natural, found stones, in particular hand-axes (and other Early Stone Age "tools" such as cleavers) and bored stones (mainly of a Later Stone Age date but can also date to the Middle Stone Age) (Figure 3).

Hand-axes represent the longest single tradition of making in human history. Produced over approximately 1.5 million years by hominins (not commonly by modern humans), they represent great morphological diversity within a standard design, and occur in vast numbers across African and Eurasian landscapes. Hand-axes seem to transcend any simple functionalism, and may be understandable as "pictures", or alternatively, abstractions of the human hand (Bredekamp 2020:28-29) or "faces" (as evoked in technical descriptions such as 'unifacial' and 'bifacial'). Debate around whether they result from an artistic or aesthetic impulse is constrained by terminology and time-distance, but as a genre of object that arose out of 'interplay between chance form and conscious intervention', they are powerfully suggestive (Bredekamp 2020:36).

Bored stones, roughly spherical with holes perforated through their centres, are another prolific object type occurring across sub-Saharan Africa. Although they are often surface finds (in other words, not from a secure archaeological context), examples from dated contexts go back 45,000 years. Used as weights for digging sticks in hunter-gatherer

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Cataloguing the Teaching Collection in preparation for *Sivivane sogogo!* (2023–24) in the storerooms of the Department of Human Sciences, KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Pictured are bored stones (lower right), and cleavers and hand-axes (lower left and upper right), variable dimensions. Courtesy of the Collective (2023).

communities and as weights for hoes in farming communities, modern perceptions of bored stones as ancestral things made long ago by first peoples, spirits or by "god" suggest they carry layered meanings related to deep time, and may similarly have acted as 'solid metaphors' embroiled in spiritual communication in the past (Lombard 2024).

Because the Collective wished to potentially co-opt many items from the Teaching Collection, DHS staff suggested we could help by cataloguing them to keep track of the ones being borrowed and exhibited. The cataloguing entailed setting up a "production line" with different stations: each stone was entered into a spreadsheet and issued with a unique number, which was then inscribed onto the stone, and then each stone was photographed, briefly described, and finally given a storage box location (Figure 3). Through our participation in this museological ritual, each one of us had the opportunity to hold and consider – and to "listen" to – each stone individually, before convening them in the gallery space.

Stone items were also co-opted from accessioned collections, including six rock engravings which had never been displayed before. Four of these depict stone-built settlements of African farmers of the past 400 years: large circular stock-pens surrounded by dots representing individual houses. The two other engravings depict morabaraba boards (Figure 4). Morabaraba (also known as mlabalaba, among other names) is a game of some antiquity, possibly introduced into southern Africa through the Indian Ocean trade network via East Africa (Townshend 1979; Huffman 2014:103). Morabaraba is a two-player strategy game traditionally associated with boys and men and related to male socialisation (Huffman 2014:123). The game pieces are small stones known as cows (ceramic figurines in the shape of cows are sometimes used instead of stones). The archaeologist overseeing their rescue from the Paris (Bivane) Dam site in 1988 observed several small stones still arranged on one of the boards, indicating it had been played very recently (KZNM archaeological site records). We also co-opted a Basotho morabaraba game board acquired in c. 1906, still complete with two sets of twelve stone pieces in two different colours (Figure 4). The morabaraba game would come to play a key role as a unifying motif that also introduced a playful, interactive dynamic.

Whereas the first two iterations had been temporary interventions centred in the Mammal Hall, in the third year, we sought a space for a more substantial exhibit over a longer period. We negotiated using an unoccupied gallery on the mezzanine level above the Mammal Hall. As one of the participating artists noted, we were now 'in the belly of the museum' and had the distinct feeling that we were being 'embraced by the museum' (Gush 2024). This gallery still went by the name of an earlier exhibition it had housed, *Sisonke* ('We are together'), curated in 1997 to represent multiple facets of contemporary Zulu identity to complement existing historical and anthropological displays (Dlamini 2008). *Sisonke* was dismantled in 2019, but the gallery had remained empty for operational reasons. Glass display cases run along two sides of the space with partition walls along the other two sides, creating a discrete rectangular space within a larger hall with a vaulted ceiling.

While we were not entirely sure what would emerge when we brought the "players" – stones and people – together through "performances" in this space, we had gathered a few clues along the way. In this instance, we understood the creative process to involve touching and holding; we understood stones to evoke a curiosity and memory response; we were engaging our own playfulness and hoped to inspire a playful response in others.

Once we had established the broad strokes of our materials and modus operandi, we had two weeks to create the installation. Given this time frame and the intention that our interventions would be temporary and fully reversible, instead of altering features of the

FIGURE Nº 4

Morabaraba game boards in the collections of the Department of Human Sciences, KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Board pictured at left approx. 61 cm x 6 cm x 43 cm and rock engraving at right approx. 47 cm x 32 cm x 29 cm. Courtesy of the Collective (2023).

space before we began, we responded to what was available. From there, curatorial decisions for *Sivivane sogogo!* evolved collaboratively and spontaneously as the installation took shape.

The gallery still carried the *Sisonke*-era colour scheme, a cobalt blue wall with pink trim, which we used as a kind of blackboard onto which we drew with white chalk and black charcoal (Figure 5). The mural drawing was done collectively over several days and was intended to introduce a sense of the tactility of working with museum stones during the preparatory phase. To create a morabaraba board that would be able to be played in the space, we used elementary and "outmoded" technology: an overhead projector with a simple line drawing on a transparency (perspective-corrected for the angle of projection) produced a rectangular game board in the centre of the gallery. We aligned the rectangle within a frame provided by the existing carpeting (which matched the colours of the walls), and left two piles of stones (one pink, one white) on the floor on this vast, shadow board game as an invitation for the audience to play the game (Figure 6).

Once the exhibition was open to visitors, we regularly encountered people, sometimes large school groups, across genders and ages, playing morabaraba (Figure 6). The overhead projector, which was left on for long periods, tended to switch off periodically to prevent overheating, and we rigged up a fan to keep the motor cool. However, even when the light switched off and the lines of the board game disappeared, the game often continued. Although simply a shadow on the floor, it arguably existed in the memory of

FIGURE **Nº 5**

The Isivivane Collective, *Sivivane sogogo!* (2023–24). Collaborative mural realised over several days to convey the tactility of working with stones, Sisonke Gallery, KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Installation approx. 10 m x 2 m x 7 m. Top photo: Paulo Menezes (2023), others courtesy of the Collective (2023).

FIGURE **Nº 6**

The Isivivane Collective, *Sivivane sogogo!* (2023–24). The shadow morabaraba game board, approx. 2 m x 3 m, Sisonke Gallery, KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Top photo: Paulo Menezes (2023), bottom courtesy of the Collective (2024).

FIGURE Nº 7

The Isivivane Collective, *Sivivane sogogo!* (2023–24). Interactive hand-axe display, approx. 70 cm x 50 cm x 25 cm, Sisonke Gallery, and an isivivane in the Mammal Hall of rock engravings and ceramic sculptures, approx. 3 m x 0,7 m x 3 m, Mammal Hall, KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Courtesy of Paulo Menezes (2023).

FIGURE Nº 8

The Isivivane Collective, *Sivivane sogogo!* (2023–24). A video by Michael Croeser of the cataloguing of the Teaching Collection projected into glass cabinets, and a small wooden morabaraba game board, variable dimensions, Sisonke Gallery, KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Photos: Paulo Menezes (2023).

the audience who chose to play it. This shadow invocation of the game, combined with actual stones, was sufficient for the audience to fully play the game using the particular rules they were familiar with. Here, the knowledge systems of audience were reflected, literally and figuratively, and validated, allowing participants to extend their experience of the game within the context of a fine art/museum installation: it allowed participants to make their own meaning from this experimental "museum display" – and incontrovertibly shifted the epistemic authority of the museum back to audience. In this sense, the engagement supports William Kentridge's (2017:73) view that 'Looking at shadows is always finding what we already know'.

Although we couldn't engineer exactly how and the extent to which the audience would engage, some aspects of these curatorial "invitations" were more fruitful than we imagined. The leitmotif of "shadow" proved to be a unifying and compelling element, especially in the form of the shadow morabaraba game board. As a graphic element, the game board formed another leitmotif across the installation: it featured among the rock engravings,

FIGURE **Nº 9**

The Isivivane Collective, *Sivivane sogogo!* (2023–24). Artefacts and artworks, variable dimensions, in the glass cabinets of the Sisonke Gallery, KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Courtesy of Paulo Menezes (2023).

FIGURE **Nº 10**

The Isivivane Collective, *Sivivane sogogo!* (2023–24). Archival documents and handwritten notes, an isivivane made of stones from the Early Iron Age site of Ntshekane, and the display of Magema Fuze's gourd, variable dimensions, in the gallery adjacent to the Sisonke Gallery, KwaZulu-Natal Museum. Courtesy of Paulo Menezes (2023).

which were displayed alongside ceramic artworks on trolleys clustered at the centre of the Mammal Hall, recalling the izivivane of the first two iterations (Figure 7). Two smaller, wooden game boards placed elsewhere "echoed" the giant game board upstairs, and visitors to the museum frequently played on these as well (Figure 8).

While the morabaraba game proved popular, another installation piece that invited the audience to touch it was a glass box containing three hand-axes designed with holes big enough for a person to reach in and hold them (but not large enough for these artefacts to be taken out of the box) (Figure 7). This artwork also disrupted the display mores of both the museum and the fine art contexts: audiences seldom directly access their haptic senses in interaction with a display, unless (more commonly in the fine art context), there is an invitation to do so.

Michael Croeser had filmed the process of cataloguing the Teaching Collection, and we projected an edited video of this footage into one of the glass display cases (Figure 8). We arranged our selection of stone artefacts in the cases, to which members of the Collective also contributed artworks they had made or repurposed in response to the project. Because the nature of this collaboration meant that individual elements were not specifically "authored", we consequently deemed it unnecessary to label the artworks. To ensure that we worked in a non-invasive way, we used string and wire to hang and hold many of the stones, and we wrote and drew with whiteboard markers on the glass – a calligraphic component that would emerge as an installation signature (Figures 8 and 9). Lines drawn in this manner overflowed to walls and two display cabinets adjacent to the Sisonke Gallery, which had also been allocated to the project (Figure 10). Along with the playful modes of display and presentation of information, this inscription unified the separate installation spaces.

The two adjacent cabinets carried traces of a former basketry display – empty wire holders and paint damage from the removal of posters. The wire holders proved sturdy enough to hold some of the stones, and we incorporated the damaged paint patches into further chalk and charcoal drawings. We propped up some of the larger stones in the display cabinets and drew their profiles on the glass panes, playing with a kind of inside/outside, "other" inference of shadow. We also placed in this area the most "textual" elements of the entire installation: excerpts from the two references used during the conceptualisation phase (Lunguza kaMpukane and Magema Magwaza Fuze, cited above). We included these as images from the archive, pasted onto the wall across from the display cabinets, with some handwritten notes below. The explanation of Fuze's words "overflowed" onto a nearby display created in 2022 of a beer gourd donated to the museum by Fuze in 1904, creating a link with the permanent displays in the same gallery.

Exchanging printed text, commonplace in museum display, for handwritten annotations to provide contextual information lent an informal and provisional element, and added another aspect to *Sivivane sogogo!*'s incorporation of the element of "touch". The handwritten information seemed to offer the audience a choice as to how much they

wanted to engage with it – highlighting by way of contrast, the conventionally didactic presentation of information in museum display and the dominance of text over artefacts. A curator in the Department of Human Sciences reflected on the effects of this choice:

> I think the handwritten text played a big role in my positive feelings towards the display. The handwritten text became part of the display and I felt I could read it if I wanted or just leave it to be enjoyed as part of the visual experience. With printed text I almost have a feeling of guilt when I do not read it all, but at the same time lots of text makes me just want to walk away and not read anything. Too much text which I feel I have to read also takes away time from the time looking at the display (Ghilraen Laue 2024).

A visiting doctoral student in archaeology, Kefilwe Rammutloa (2023), commented that the handwriting reduced the sense of authoritativeness of the display and made it instantly relatable and familiar. Thus, the handwritten component changed how people "read" the exhibition and how they viewed and experienced the materials on display, allowing for a more fluid, nuanced and self-directed viewing.

Laue and Rammutloa both remarked that the emphasis on the materiality of the objects created an anachronistic "ordering" that was at odds with, but also complementary to, their training as archaeologists. The juxtaposition of hand-axes and bored stones, two iconic items from two very different time periods, spanning centuries and millennia of human/hominin history, highlighted their aesthetic qualities, contrasting with more conventional archaeological display, which tends to emphasise technical or chronological aspects. Laue also noted that she looked at the objects differently afterwards, now appreciating them beyond simple markers of particular periods.

In a walkabout with KZNM staff, the Deputy Director, Sandile Miya, noted that for him the installation was 'a rest from words' and called for a more open-ended interpretation, in the same way that one might analyse a poem (Sandile Miya 2023). *Sivivane sogogo!*'s experimental and eclectic display seems to have gone some way to encourage individual responses, thereby sanctioning audience co-construction of meaning.

The aesthetic, material qualities and implicit histories of the stones that came to be foregrounded in this way added to the complex layering of perspectives. The responses also seemed to point to that the stones, in the context into which we had placed them, had become more active participants than we had initially realised or intended.

Listening to a stone: Materiality and New Materialism

The process of "listening" to the stones (alluded to above) first began with touch. As we handled and held the stones, we began to understand them and ourselves as rooted

in/to an unfathomably deep time. Therefore, touch was a key part of our method throughout the development of *Sivivane sogogo!*. Using touch to understand an object's complexity is central to the concept of material thinking in the fine art context, where the 'handling of materials' (Barrett & Bolt 2007) generates new (and deeper) thinking. Similar strategies are used in other fields, such as the haptico-visual observation and drawing methods (HVOD) in medical anatomy education.[9] Arguably, therefore, the process of learning through touch provided members of the Collective a complex understanding of the materiality of the artefacts from the beginning of the creative process. During the cataloguing of the Teaching Collection and throughout the installation, artefacts were carefully handled and selectively displayed – collective members' haptic engagement with these objects likely rendered material information beyond the peripheral.

If the principles of the theoretical framework of New Materialism, where matter is understood as having agency, and is vital, 'co-constitutive' and 'intra-active' (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010), are applied to *Sivivane sogogo!*, the entire installation may not be fairly attributed to the human "players" only. New Materialism effectively 'decenters humans as the subject' (Gherardi 2021, cited by Li *et al* 2025), and advocates a relational ontology, where humans, non-humans, and the material world are seen as intra-active, and thereby equally co-construct knowledge. New Materialism thus challenges traditional understandings of knowledge and knowing (Li *et al* 2025) as an exclusively human activity: knowledge and knowing are the outcome of dynamic intra-action of human and non-human entanglements (Barad 2007, cited by Li *et al* 2025). With respect to *Sivivane sogogo!*, the 'non-human' players, consisting of, inter alia, the Sisonke Gallery, the display cabinets and other furnishings and, very centrally, the stones from the Teaching Collection, as well as all those who made and held them and moved them around in the past, arguably all played a role in the final outcome of the installation.

As noted, objects without a secure provenance have limited research significance within an archaeological framework. Without context, their materiality becomes foregrounded, and perhaps also a sense of their extended social lives. The prime merit of Teaching Collection objects lies in their materiality, in that they can be touched and engaged with in ways outside conventional museum parameters. Through their participation in *Sivivane sogogo!*, the material value of the stones was extended, and by creating a catalogue of the Teaching Collection, we partly reintegrated them into the formal museum system. However, similar to the *Encounters with the (Im)material* exhibition at Wits Art Museum in 2023, *Sivivane sogogo!* activated a redefinition of the role of these artefacts: they occupied an emergent space that straddled the museum and fine art contexts, becoming simultaneously archaeological artefacts and artworks.

In stark contrast to the haptic materiality of the players (both human and non-human) mentioned above, an additional player in the emerging relational ontology was the aspect of shadow that gained an increasingly overwhelming presence (in its ironic absence). Shadow began to emerge as a powerful meaning-making tool by offering one way to engage with the building and the objects without leaving behind any physical trace or alterations. The light conditions were again a product of pre-existing fixtures (adjustable spotlights) and features we had introduced (shadow morabaraba game board, LED strips inside the display cabinets, video projection). Collectively, the light sources created a dim and intimate environment with a complex interplay of light and shadow. As players played, their own shadows fell on the game board, obscuring the lines and introducing an additional layer of animation to the game (Figure 6). Shadows alter and reveal the light by creating an absence of it, and form the juncture at which the material and the immaterial meet. They are proof that something exists, because the presence of the object/thing is blocking the light. Similar to the centrality of a haptic understanding, in *Sivivane sogogo!,* shadows came to exemplify the ghosts of the present that connect us to the past. The "actual" shadows in the space echoed the metaphorical shadows in the stones.

Shadows hold particular insights within many knowledge systems, often representing ancestors and/or spirit presences. In Zulu culture, amadlozi (isiZulu for ancestral shades) have particular clan and individual identities (often in the region of three generations of removal according to Mdanda 2010), and are usually gendered as male. In Lunguza's testimony, passersby throwing stones onto izivivane were not addressing their own direct ancestors, but a deeper ancestral time, and perhaps also the spirits of the land that came to haunt such places – the shadows. In this way, the izivivane in the installation, when read together with the shadows, move beyond amadlozi and reach back to those who existed in the distant past. The installation, therefore, becomes a monument or memorial to our shared history, beyond the particularisation of amadlozi as linked to individuals.

Conclusion

Sivivane sogogo! did not materialise as a typical museum display, nor did it follow the conventions of a discrete fine art installation. As an artists' collective, we had to work within, and be guided by, museum protocols, which meant that these protocols also became active participants in the process. Because of our collaborative, playful approach, which initially presented as a challenge, these boundaries ultimately assisted in developing a generative and more sustainable disruption that shifted how all parties saw, understood and engaged with objects, and ultimately, the museum. The extent to which, and manner in which, the audience responded to the installation, for example, the many people who

arrived and returned repeatedly to play morabaraba, the comments we received regarding the use of text as a provisional kind of notation, and the co-constructive agency bestowed to viewers, unsettled the idea of a museum as the purveyor of information. The anachronistic display of artefacts combined with artworks disrupted the museum's traditional mode of presenting factual and sequential displays, with printed text holding the upper hand in such displays' shape, direction and final interpretation. In *Sivivane sogogo!*, objects remained unlabelled and there was virtually no explanatory text as such; the text that was present was in the form of handwritten notes, gestural lines made by the hand of a person and in this sense materially similar to the objects on display. This nexus of new display "conventions" fostered a co-construction of multiple narratives and perspectives.

These key insights gathered during the project as a whole, and *Sivivane sogogo!* in particular, revealed that a new paradigm has begun to emerge through the application of exploratory methods that go further than the mere placement of artworks into a museum space, and that capitalise on the intersection of practices. In this context, the paradigmatic shift is visible in the multiple narratives that arose, the collaborations that ensued, the surprising ways things developed and the many creative forces that intersected to shape the outcome. The dialogue that was activated between the display and the audience enabled shadow and stone to combine beyond discrete mediums so that the momentum of the installation itself transcended the usual parameters of museum display.

Interventions by artists in museum spaces, in this way, have the potential to create challenges of dissonance for artists, museum curators and audiences. Reflecting on all three iterations, interventions like these destabilise both parties, museums and artists, as each is required to work in a way that is not familiar or conventional. Museums are being asked to be flexible and work with fluidity, and artists are asked to observe strict protocols and planning measures. It is in this space where our destabilisation meets, however, where our uncertainty begins to overlap, that opens up a corridor of slippage that can lead to a layered awareness, where creativity becomes potent, and which offers the opportunity to engage in a way that shifts just one thing, just a little, and effects meaningful change.

Acknowledgements

This project could not have taken place without the support of KZNM and CVA colleagues. Thanks firstly to staff at the KZNM: Director Luthando Maphasa and Deputy Director Sandile Miya, who put their trust in us and gave us the space to experiment; colleagues in the Department of Human Sciences, namely, Geoff Blundell, who welcomed the opportunity to collaborate, and Ghilraen Laue, Mudzunga Munzhedzi, Phumulani Madonda,

Dimakatso Tlhoaele and Nothando Shabalala, who helped in myriad ways; to Wesley Flanagan and staff in Exhibitions; Roshan Maharaj, Shane Rampersad, Mongezi Zulu and other staff in Technical; Sylvia Ntombela, Samukelisiwe Ngubane, Thembinkosi (Jobe) Sithole and other staff in Education; and Viranna Frank and Asanda Ntshingila in Marketing. We thank John Wright for guidance on the James Stuart Archive. Thanks to Hannah Lax, who assisted in the performative aspects of the project. For financial assistance, we thank the Rita Strong Foundation; the Andrew Mellon Foundation for their generous support of the Artist in Residence Programme in 2021 in the School of Arts (UKZN), which enabled the opportunity to collaborate with Mohau Modisakeng; SAVAH (South African Visual Art Historians) for sponsoring the opening event in 2022; Spier Wine Estate for their wine sponsorship of the opening in 2023.

Many thanks to the following participating artists and members of the Collective:
Ingrid Adams (2021, 2022)
Julia Arbuckle (2023)
Katherine Arbuckle (2022)
Caroline Birch (2021, 2022)
Khulekani Cele (2021, 2022)
Michael Croeser (2021, 2022, 2023)
Saskia Dorland (2023)
Jessica Draper (2021, 2022, 2023)
David Gush (2021, 2022, 2023)
Louise Hall (2021, 2022, 2023)
Camilla Kinnear (2021, 2022)
Naledi Maboee (2023)
Grace Mahogo (2021, 2022)
Tsholofelo Moche (2021, 2022, 2023)
Mohau Modisakeng (CVA Andrew Mellon Artist in Residence 2021)
Neith Moore (2021, 2022)
Mudzunga Munzhedzi (2023)
Asanda Ntshingila (2021, 2022, 2023)
Raja Oshi (2023)
Shane Rampersad (2023)
Justine Wintjes (2021, 2022, 2023)

Notes

1. We have chosen not to italicise isiZulu words (or any other non-English words) within the text, which is in line with contemporary modes of linguistic normalisation, specifically within multilingual contexts like South Africa. This also aligns with decolonial considerations in academic discourse, where avoiding italics acknowledges all languages as integral to scholarship rather than peripheral to it.

2. Modisakeng's contribution to the isivivane was a video titled *Ga Bose Gangwe* (2014) projected on a wall surface above the elephant for the duration of the installation. The video centres on the Setswana idiom, 'Phiri o rile gabose gangwe', which teaches the importance of preparing for tomorrow. The repetitive choreography refers to the idea of a collective performance derived from diverse contributions of individuals in marking the passage of time and personal history through the body.

3. The plants were part of Ingrid Adams's contribution, seeking to address the absence of indigenous plants in the KZNM's existing displays, and included medicinal species such as *Halleria lucida* (indomela or imbinza in isiZulu; tree fuchsia; Centre for Visual Arts 2021:22).

4. We also created an interactive isivivane on the street next to the museum's entrance. A selection of stones was arranged on the pavement for people to pick up and place into a gabion-like wire form. This was also intended as a signal to passersby that the isivivane was taking shape inside the museum.

5. The opening coincided with a day trip to Pietermaritzburg for delegates of the annual SAVAH (South African Visual Arts Historians) conference at the Durban University of Technology.

6. However, accompanying catalogues outlined the individual contributions of artists (Centre for Visual Arts 2021, 2022).

7. Lunguza's testimony features among documents from the James Stuart Archive curated on EMANDULO (http://emandulo.apc.uct.ac.za/metadata/Stuart/3648/3649/3733/3734/index.html).

8. This article features among documents related to Magema Fuze curated on EMANDULO (http://emandulo.apc.uct.ac.za/metadata/Fuze/4508/4824/4722/index.html).

9. Medical School staff at the University of Cape Town have developed a novel method of 'haptico-visual observation and drawing' (HVOD) for teaching anatomy to medical students. The incorporation of touch, that is, haptic senses, with drawing for anatomical understanding provides students with a "mental" picture of the object under study, resulting in "deep learning" and better memorisation of the object's complexity (Reid *et al* 2019).

References

Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the universe halfway.* Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Barrett, E & Bolt, B (eds). 2007. *Practice as research: Approaches to creative arts inquiry*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Boumeester, M. 2015. The bodiless shadow: Towards a meta-medial framework. *Drawing On: Journal of Architectural Research by Design* 1:49-60.

Bredekamp, H. 2020. Art history and prehistoric art: Rethinking their relationship in the light of new observations. *The 20th Horst Gerson Lecture*, 4 October 2019. Groningen: University of Groningen Press. https://doi.org/10.21827/5e454887851f1

Carton, B, Laband, J & Sithole, J (eds). 2008. *Zulu identities: Being Zulu, past and present.* Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal Press.

Centre for Visual Arts. 2021. *Isivivane: Performing materiality*. Electronic catalogue by the Collective in collaboration with Mohau Modisakeng.

Centre for Visual Arts. 2022. *Ukuphosa Itshe Esivivaneni: An art installation*. Electronic catalogue by the Collective.

Corrin, LG (ed). 1994. *Mining the museum: An installation by Fred Wilson.* Baltimore: The Contemporary/ New York: The New Press.

Dlamini, N. 2008. Failed experiment? Challenging homogenous 'Zuluisation' in South Africa's museums: The case of Sisonke in Natal, in *Zulu identities: Being Zulu, past and present,* edited by B Carton, J Laband and J Sithole. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal Press:476-481.

Ephirim-Donkor, A. 2016. *African personality and spirituality: The role of Abosom and human essence.* Lanham: Lexington. https://doi.org/10.5771/9781498521239

Fuze, MM. 1920. Ukuhlangana ku Amandhla – 'Ku Mhleli weLanga'. *Ilanga lase Natal* 18(7):13 February:2.

Gobbato, V. 2022. Collections emerge from the shadows: Exhibition design, or a multi-sensory approach to reinvesting in collections. *Museum International* 74(1-2):18-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/13500775.2022.2157554

Gobbato, V. 2021. On how lighting shaped museums. *Nuova Museologia* 45:24-36.

Guest, B. 2006. *A century of science and service: The Natal Museum in a changing South Africa 1904–2004*. Pietermaritzburg: Natal Museum.

Gush, D. (gush@futurenet.co.za). 2024/08/29. Email to isivivaneproject@gmail.com. Sent 29 August 2024 at 10:43 AM.

Huffman, TNH. 2014. Salvage excavations on Greefswald: Leokwe commoners and K2 cattle. *Southern African Humanities* 26:101-28.

Kentridge, W. 2017. In Praise of Shadows, *William Kentridge*, edited by RE Krauss. Cambridge: The MIT Press 73-79.

Krauss, RE (ed). 2017. *William Kentridge*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Lange, ME & Teer-Tomaselli, R. 2024. Visual community autoethnography and heritage: Selected cairns in South Africa. *Visual Anthropology* 37(2):126–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2024.2319019

Laue, G. (glaue@nmsa.org.za). 2024/03/27. Email to isivivaneproject@gmail.com. Sent 27 March 2024 at 8:35 AM.

Li, M, Holstein, J & Wedekind, V. 2025. Vital materiality and its constitution of knowing in craft practice. *Management Learning* (OnlineFirst). https://doi.org/10.1177/13505076251317965

Lombard, M. 2024. Bored stones–star stones–ancestral stones: a sub-Saharan perspective of the ritualised relationship between humans and perforated stones. *Arch* 20:239-276. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-024-09494-9

Maggs, T. 1988. Patterns and perceptions of stone-built settlements from the Thukela Valley Late Iron Age. *Annals of the Natal Museum* 29(2):417-432.

Mdanda, MG. 2010. The indigenous knowledge systems based on religion and healing as encapsulated in O.E.H.M. Nxumalo and L.B.Z. Buthelezi's poetry. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Miya, S. 2023. Conversation with the authors at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, [personal communication], 17 October 2023.

Peffer, J & Cameron, EL. 2013. *Portraiture and photography in Africa*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Rammutloa, K. (2023). Conversation with the authors at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, [personal communication], no date.

Rautio, P. 2013. Children who carry stones in their pockets: On autotelic material practices in everyday life. *Children's Geographies* 11(4):394-408. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.812278

Reid, S, Shapiro, L & Louw, G. 2019. How haptics and drawing enhance the learning of anatomy. *Anatomical Sciences Education* 12(2):164-172.

Schielke, T. 2019. Interpreting art with light: Museum lighting between objectivity and hyperrealism. *LEUKOS* 16(1):7–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/15502724.2018.1530123

Thwala, J, Mbele, B, Edwards, S & Makunga, N. 2009. The role of the ancestors in healing: Indigenous African healing practices. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 8(1):1-11.

Townshend, P. 1979. Mankala in eastern and southern Africa: A distributional analysis. *Azania* 14: 109-38.

Webb, C de B & Wright, JB (eds). 1976. *The James Stuart archive of recorded oral evidence relating to the history of the Zulu and neighbouring peoples*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Durban: Killie Campbell Africana Library.

Wilson, F. 1994. *Mining the museum: An installation by Fred Wilson*, edited by LG Corrin. Baltimore: The Contemporary/New York: The New Press.

Wilson, F, Sprecher, J & Elias, AJ. 2017. Objects and identities: An interview with Fred Wilson. *ASAP/Journal* 2 (1):3-28.