



McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

# The pasts and presence of art in South Africa

Technologies, ontologies and agents

Edited by Chris Wingfield, John Gibling & Rachel King



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Edited by Chris Wingfield, John Giblin  
& Rachel King

*with contributions from*

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Chris Wingfield  
John Giblin  
Rachel King



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## Chapter 6

# To paint, to see, to copy: rock art as a site of enchantment

Justine Wintjes & Laura de Harde

### Rock art as technology of enchantment

A central component of Alfred Gell's understanding of technology and enchantment, is the idea that 'art is inherently social in a way in which the merely beautiful or mysterious object is not', as 'a physical entity which mediates between two beings, and therefore creates a social relation between them, which in turn provides a channel for further social relations and influences' (Gell 1992, 52). David Lewis-Williams & David Pearce (2004, 200) have applied this idea to the production of the rock art attributed to San (Bushman) hunter-gatherers:

*When San of southern Africa made rock art images they intended to accomplish certain ends, and those ends, amongst others, entailed other peoples' acquiescence in specific kinds of constructed social relationships. As we shall see, San image-making was, in Gell's phrase, 'enchanted'.*

Through an analysis of the painted imagery at site MK1 (Free State Province, South Africa), they suggest that the rock art was a visual device 'for securing the acquiescence of individuals in the network of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed' (Gell 1992, 43, cited in Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004, 200). Individual artists made images related to rain control that 'embodied and projected both supernatural potency and social influence' (2004, 200). By making 'real' aspects of the 'non-real' spirit world, the art did not merely reflect, but was actively constitutive of, social relations (2004, 224). Although Gell considers this to be a fundamental dimension of art's enchanting nature, he also points out that it 'brings us no closer to the art object as such'; in an attempt to understand levels of enchantment linked to materiality, he examines art as part of a 'technical

system' which functions through a recursive dynamic between technology and enchantment (1992, 44).

Researchers working on rock art have recognized that beyond the general emphasis on the social and spiritual context, there remain opportunities to integrate 'the extraordinary reality of art with the mundane realities of production' (Solomon 1995, 52). In this situation, Gell's technology/enchantment framework has potential to enable closer attention to be paid to rock art's technological, creative and aesthetic aspects, which would also have the effect of bringing it more firmly into the realm of 'art', while at the same time taking up Gell's prompt to work towards art's 'dissolution' as one of the forms under which human experience is presented to the socialized mind, alongside religion, politics and economics, which he sees as the ultimate aim of anthropology more generally (1992, 41). We summarize several key points of Gell's framework and suggest some ways in which connections could be developed further in relation to rock painting. We go on to explore historical copies as another arena in which to consider art's enchanting nature.

Gell begins by drawing analogies between the anthropological study of art and that of religion, which he sees as having taken a separate path of development, the former having largely fallen away alongside an increased interest in the latter. He attributes this to an ability on the part of anthropologists to study religion effectively without needing to accept as truths the religious beliefs on which it is founded, but conversely an inability to let go of an (ethnocentrically framed) faith in the superior aesthetic realm of art (1992, 40–2).

A similar issue may be present in the study of rock art. As rock art started to become the subject of scholarly inquiry in the late nineteenth century, as a living practice it was fast disappearing, with hunter-gatherer communities assimilated, marginalized or exterminated through the violent changes to society



**Figure 6.1.** Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter.

brought about during the colonial era. Drawing from hints in the documentary record, rock art researchers have developed an elaborate ethnographically informed shamanistic framework of understanding, an example of the successes of ‘methodological atheism’ (Berger 1967, 107, cited in Gell 1992, 41), where religion ‘becomes an emergent property of the relations between the various elements in the social system, derivable, not from the condition that genuine religious truths exist, but solely from the condition that societies exist’ (Gell 1992, 41).

On the other hand, relatively few studies have been produced from within an ‘art’ paradigm. Pippa Skotnes (1994, 316) has suggested an almost total neglect of rock art by art historians, and a lack of attention paid to its formal dimensions by archaeologists. Attempts to examine rock art imagery as ‘art’ frequently meet with warnings about the dangers of such an enterprise, because of concerns around the interference of seemingly overwhelming ‘western’ ideas of what art is, linked to difficulties surrounding the definition of art more generally. And so scholars return to the worldview that informed its production, and therefore back to a centrally religious context (e.g. Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2009, 42). But it may be possible to approach the ‘artness’ of rock art through a kind of ‘methodological

philistinism’, which approaches art as ‘a vast and often unrecognized technical system, essential to the reproduction of human societies’ (Gell 1992, 42–3). This necessitates finding ways to ‘illuminate the specific objective characteristics of the art object as an object, rather than as a vehicle for extraneous social and symbolic messages, without succumbing to the fascination which all well-made art objects exert on the mind attuned to their aesthetic properties’ (1992, 43; see also King & McGranaghan this volume for their ontological approach to the art’s depictive aspects). This is a realm of enchantment that is complementary to that geared towards social consequences, and operates at a more intimate and materialistic level:

*The power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody: the technology of enchantment is founded on the enchantment of technology. The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form (Gell 1992, 44; italics in the original).*

The many existing studies of rock art suggest various ways in which the art might usefully be approached as

a technology of enchantment. Biochemical studies are starting to shed some light onto the complex processes of making the paint materials (Williamson 2000; Prinsloo *et al.* 2013; Bonneau *et al.* 2017). Over and above its social role in making tangible the intangible, rock art clearly embodied impressive levels of technical difficulty, where panels, and whole sites, might be understood as ‘enchanted vessels of magical power’:

*not dazzling [merely] as a physical object, but as a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms, something which has been produced by magical means. It is the way an art object is construed as having come into the world which is the source of the power such objects have over us – their becoming rather than their being* (Gell 1992, 46).

Gell argues that technology is enchanted when the ‘ordinary technical means employed [...] point inexorably towards magic, and also towards art, in that art is the idealized form of production’ (1992, 62–3). The ‘magical’ aspects of the production of southern African rock art are more elusive than those of Trobriand ‘garden magic’ (one of Gell’s examples), but there is enough to suggest that the imagery wasn’t simply a ‘representation’ of something in the world in any straightforward sense. Rather, the artistic process itself would have embodied a radical transubstantiation of different ingredients into figurative expressions, produced through apparently magical means. Implicated in the realm of social relations would have been an enchantment involving the *actual* technology of painting, which ‘in converging towards the magical ideal, adumbrate[d] this ideal in the real world’ (Gell 1992, 62).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deepen an exploration of the enchantedness of rock art in its original context, but we invoke Gell’s framework because of its potential to enable greater acknowledgment of the technical skill mobilized by San artists. Each rock art panel is a ‘concrete product of human ingenuity’ (Gell 1992, 42), resulting from the manipulation of physical materials into a visual presentation whose technical means of production weren’t necessarily obvious to the viewer, and so formed a site of enchantment. That this enchantment operated through a technical system is evident because something of the technique, skill and creativity was transmitted through the art as material manifestation. Even when unaccompanied by any explanation, due to the absence of living practitioners, rock artworks have inspired numerous creative responses outside of the indigenous context.

### The art of copying

The vast oeuvre of highly colourful figurative rock paintings across the southern African landscape, attributed to San communities, is by far the most studied rock art tradition in the region. Its finesse and naturalism appealed to European aesthetic sensibilities from early on (Nettleton 1984, 67), and it has continued to attract far more attention than abstract or engraved traditions. The naturalism of San rock painting, with its use of perspective and shading to create pictorial effects verging at times on illusionism, makes it distinctly different from many other traditional southern African expressive forms.

Rock paintings have been the site of an enchantment hinging on this perception of advanced painterly skill, inspiring numerous artists trained in western traditions of art-making to create copies, prior to the achievement of ethnographically informed understandings of the semantics of the art’s symbolic constituents. In this way the art has transcended its first context, generating acts of painting by artists working on paper, expressions of a technological encounter between two different traditions of image-making. Early copyists were frequently painters re-enacting gestures of painting, and so understood something of the visual power of the imagery, and its coming into being through the manipulation of coloured substances on a receptive surface. Skotnes (1994, 316) proposes that rather than ‘a process of description’, these observers were engaged in ‘an artistic exploration’, a realm of knowledge production that proceeds through looking and making, and working with materials to produce forms. Premised on the idea that the visual is itself a ‘site of meaning’, Skotnes proposes that ‘the experience of praxis (by artists) [should] form part of the tradition of scholarship surrounding the study of San parietal art’, and calls for attempts to ‘be made to assess this experience and translate it in some way so as to make its insights accessible’ (1994, 321).

The role of enchantment in this realm of knowledge production is discernible in the ways in which the art, as the objective embodiment of a technical process, as well as an enchanted form of expression produced by an artist working in an earlier context, motivates a copyist to respond creatively, activating the ‘involution’ that Gell proposes is specific to art, carrying further the enchantment ‘immanent in all kinds of technical activity’ (1992, 44). The close study of copying practices may also be a way to heed the call for an adapted aesthetic approach, reducing the risk of the potentially distorting interference of enchantment on the part of the researcher (1992, 43), because the object under examination is a trace of another person

in an ‘enchanted’ relationship with an artwork. This strategy creates a degree of remove in relation to the enchanting original; it opens the dynamic of enchantment itself up for investigation.

### Elizabeth Goodall

We turn now to an exploration of these ideas through an examination of the work of the rock art researcher Elizabeth Goodall, née Mannsfeld (1891–1971), who was employed as an artist on a German expedition led by Leo Frobenius to southern Africa (1928–1930).<sup>1</sup> Over the course of some 20 months, the German team travelled to hundreds of rock art sites and other locales in what were then the countries of Basutoland, South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Mozambique and South West Africa.<sup>2</sup> Frobenius employed several artists and dedicated many resources to the collection of visual materials, giving the archive a uniquely pictorial character. The artists were formally trained and highly skilled, and were sometimes considered fine artists in their own right. Frobenius felt that the process of producing copies by an artist’s hand was essential to address the challenges of recording rock artworks, due to their texture and erosive qualities, and to capture the aesthetic ‘spirit’ embodied within them; whereas a scientist would generally seek to reconstruct a work as it existed within the context in which it was produced, an artist ‘paints what is there’, ‘copying not merely a picture but a document in stone, a cultural document of which the chips, cracks and weathering are an historical part’ (Frobenius 1972 [1937], 18–9). This position characterized the ‘school of thought and action’ represented by his expeditions, and presented a technically challenging task that he felt the artists working under him were increasingly adept at tackling (Frobenius 1972 [1937], 19).

In late 1929, slightly ahead of the official end of the expedition, Mannsfeld went back to Germany to process the collected materials, and in 1931 returned to Southern Rhodesia where she married Leslie Goodall and settled permanently (Raath 1971, 1). She soon resumed her recording activities and in 1934 began an association with the Queen Victoria Museum in Salisbury (now the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences, Harare), where she was later employed (Raath 1971, 1; Whyte 1973, 319). She left behind a substantial archive of rock art records, compiled over some four decades, including a large collection of copies that survive in different institutions. Over and above the field copies produced in the context of the 1928–30 expedition, now preserved at the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt, her earliest copies also include a set of watercolours bequeathed to the South African

Museum in Cape Town shortly after the expedition (Keene 2011). This generation of secondary (or ‘beta’) copies was produced largely by her, by hand, from the original field copies created by the various artists on the expedition (Richard Kuba pers. comm. 2018). She was also involved in compiling the catalogue of copies produced on the expedition (Frobenius & Mannsfeld 1930). Over the course of her career in Southern Rhodesia, she gathered an extensive archive of sites that went far beyond those recorded by the Frobenius expedition, and it was her practice as a copyist that formed the basis of her employment at the museum. Display copies featuring in several other national museums around Zimbabwe also derive from her work, for example the Diana’s Vow and Nyambavu panels on display at the Mutare Museum, Ziwa Site Museum and the Domboshava Interpretive Centre (Munyaradzi Elton Sagiya pers. comm. 2018). When Goodall first began working at the *Forschungsinstitut für Kulturmorphologie* under Frobenius in 1925, southern African rock paintings would have been an unfamiliar form of expression to her, but by the end of her life they were a body of visual materials with which she was intimately acquainted. Although representing a substantial investment of labour and resources, this total archive can be described as a quiet legacy, largely unengaged by researchers (De Harde 2019).

Peter Garlake described the fact that Mannsfeld ‘met and fell in love with a local policeman’ as ‘the most significant result’ of the Frobenius expedition to Rhodesia (Garlake 1993, 15), recognizing her as one of ‘the two great authorities’ in rock art studies in Southern Rhodesia before 1970 alongside Cran Cooke (1993, 1). But he also commented that Goodall and Cooke spent ‘much of their time, energy and enthusiasm in recording more and more material, but doing little to advance the plot’ (Garlake 1993, 1), observing that:

*To an academic, [Goodall’s] work is almost entirely unsystematic and unanalytical. She developed no theoretical framework or specific research intentions. She remained throughout her life entirely loyal to Frobenius’ ideas but did little to develop, expand or adjust them to the new material she was collecting (Garlake 1993, 17).*

In their memorial papers, Cran Cooke and Michael Raath described her as a scientist who published papers in reputable journals and belonged to several learned societies (Cooke 1971, 8; Raath 1971, 6). Indeed Goodall produced a number of publications on archaeological topics over the course of her career (the rock art publications include Goodall 1946a, 1946b, 1947, 1949, 1957a,

1957b, 1959, 1962a, 1962b, 1962c, 1970). But when she has been cited by other scholars, it is generally with reference to her identifications and descriptions of particular motifs, rather than for interpretive insights as such (Garlake 1966, 113; Huffman 1983; Manhire *et al.* 1986, 22; Dowson 1988, 117; Solomon 1995; Mguni 2004, 193; 2005, 34, 36; 2009, 140). Several commentators observe a lack of historical or anthropological substantiation of her ideas, which involved guesswork and superficial parallels drawn from an eclectic range of elements of European, Classical or Indian history (Lewis-Williams 1986, 174–5; Manhire *et al.* 1986, 25; Garlake 1993, 17; 1995, 35; Solomon 1995, 36, 38; 1998, 277), what Siyakha Mguni describes as an expression of ‘dubious ethno-history’ (2004, 185). Garlake argued that ‘[b]ecause she was completely loyal to her “master”, Frobenius, in a country where he was belittled or ignored, because she felt alienated by the arguments and entrenched positions that have always characterized southern African prehistoric studies... she wrote very little about the paintings’ (Garlake 1995, 35). And yet, ‘despite her loyalties, she did nothing to tease out the essence of Frobenius’ most important contribution to the study of the art as the symbols of a coherent body of beliefs’ (Garlake 1993, 17). Moreover, her career unfolded entirely before the marked acceleration of rock art research from the 1970s onwards (Lewis-Williams 1972, 1974, 1977, 1981; Pager 1971, 1975; Vinnicombe 1972a, 1972b, 1976, followed by many others).

Her copies, too, have been subject to some critical scrutiny. In an unpublished report on the rock art of the Harrismith area (Free State Province, South Africa), Lewis-Williams assesses a copy produced by Mannsfeld at Aberdeen I. He does not identify her by name, but as ‘Frobenius’s inexperienced worker’, who missed a number of key figures, and was ultimately ‘unable to decipher the jumble of paintings’ (Lewis-Williams 1985, 27–8). Pointing also to the problem of selective copying, Anne Solomon (1995, 39) warns that in her experience Goodall’s copies are ‘not particularly reliable’ by present-day standards. Yet most published reproductions derived from Goodall’s work are highly selective monochrome redrawings of individual motifs or clusters (Summers 1959, 95; Huffman 1983, 50; Lewis-Williams 1986, 175; Manhire *et al.* 1986, 23–4; Solomon 1995, 21), and don’t reflect anything of the colourful abundance of the field copies, or the close observations they embody.

Garlake (1993, 3) felt her copies were comparatively accurate, and, considering the context in which she worked where rock paintings were considered of little interest or consequence to the Rhodesian public, successful in their ability to attract positive attention

to the art, particularly with regards to their painterly qualities:

*[Goodall] felt that the best way she could share her enthusiasm for the art was by making paintings widely accessible through copies. Her main concern was to reproduce their aesthetic qualities. She was happy to adjust compositions to strengthen their effect and to transpose the thick, dry, opaque pigments of the artist into the much more fluid and transparent medium of watercolour. Despite the primitive materials she had to use in tracing and the techniques these imposed on her, her copies succeed in capturing the character of the art in a different medium while retaining accuracy, precision and detail more successfully than any other copyist, copying system or photography (Garlake 1993, 15).*

Although acknowledging that no copy is entirely accurate, Garlake (1995, 35) recognized the ‘skill’ and ‘care’ of her copying practice, but he did not see her as a fully-fledged scholar, describing her work as ‘a celebration, and not an analysis, of the art’.

Her career is interesting to compare with one of her near contemporaries, and someone she corresponded with on matters relating to rock art and copying, Walter Battiss (1906–1982).<sup>3</sup> Goodall collected newspaper articles by and about Battiss, and appears to have closely followed his achievements as an artist working with rock art.<sup>4</sup> Early on in his career, beginning in the 1930s, Battiss engaged in close observation of rock art through fieldwork (Battiss 1939, 1945, 1948, c. 1950; Skotnes 1994; Wintjes 2012, 124), part of his broader study of indigenous art forms (Battiss 1942, 1958). He is well known for taking inspiration from his first-hand experiences of rock art into an autonomous realm of creative work, seeing himself as the first artist trained in the western tradition to use southern African rock art as a direct reference (Schoonraad 1976, 11). Skotnes (1994, 319) describes him as the ‘most important of South African artists to mediate and interpret the images of the San through creative exploration’. Although he became one of the most iconic South African artists of the twentieth century, in a neighbouring country Goodall was at work on a more substantial and systematic archive of rock art copies, but earned little recognition as a rock art researcher, and even less as an artist in her own right. And yet she too developed her own distinctly recognizable style, which arose from a meaningful engagement over many years with the visual and aesthetic character of the art in ways that haven’t yet been the subject of close analysis (but see De Harde 2019).



**Figure 6.2.** Repeat photography sequence of the main panel at Diana's Vow: a) 1928 photograph by the Frobenius expedition (negative 13 × 18 cm, FoA-09-12489). Photograph courtesy and copyright Frobenius-Institut an der Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main; b and c) Digital photography and enhancement by Justine Wintjes/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (2016).

### Diana's Vow

One of the sites Goodall had a particular interest in was Diana's Vow (Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe), located in a prominent granite outcrop approximately 25 km north-east of Rusape in an agriculturally rich area of the Zimbabwean highveld plateau. This landscape formed an easily navigable terrain, favoured by colonial settlers as can be seen in the particular concentration of colonial-era roads, towns, mission stations and farms.

Diana's Vow was declared a national monument in 1950 and remains one of the most famous rock art sites in Zimbabwe, well sign-posted and easily accessible (Fothergill 1953, 62–3; ZimFieldGuide 2018). The Frobenius expedition gave it the label,



‘Hauptmonument B’ (‘principal monument B’), one of a constellation of sites to which they attributed a prominence and royal status, in the Rusape, Marandellas and Charter districts (Frobenius & Mannsfeld 1930, 97; district boundaries and names have since changed but this area falls across the highlands to the south-east of Harare). Diana’s Vow is still currently open to the public, and a custodian linked to the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe by the name of Elisha Tsoka was stationed there when we visited in 2015 and 2016. The paintings on the main panel are well preserved, as can be seen in a comparison between the Frobenius expedition photograph from 1928 with 2016 photographs (Fig. 6.2).

Most of the painted figures are concentrated on a panel on one side of a large mushroom-shaped boulder, which is part of a ring of boulders interspersed with trees that encloses a grassy clearing. This configuration forms a secluded area around the imagery. The figures are arranged into a vertically oblong, roughly oval composition measuring approximately 1 × 2.5 m, often recorded in portrait-oriented formats. Goodall (1959, 98) described this panel as ‘the most complicated and detailed single scene found in Southern Africa’. The composition is dominated by a large reclining figure towards the top, often referred to as a ‘king’, specifically a ‘dead’ or ‘dying king’ in early references (Schofield 1949, 100; Goodall 1959, 98). This trope can be tracked back to Frobenius (1930; 1931(I), 27), who pronounced an affinity with the royal burial practices of Ancient Egypt and suggested this figure represented a kind of ‘prehistoric Tutankhamen’, and the smaller reclining figure nearby as his ‘queen’.

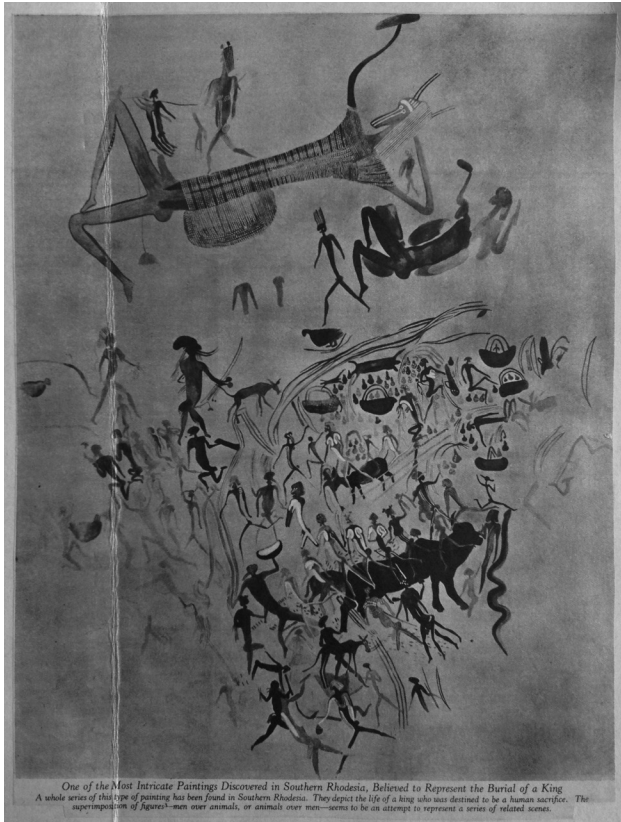
Cooke cites Goodall as the author of the ‘first known copy of the frieze’ (Cooke 1979, 115). He may be referring to the secondary copy produced by her c. 1930 (Fig. 6.3), which actually derives from a slightly earlier copy produced following a visit to the site by Joachim Lutz in 1928 (Frobenius 1931, Tafel 10). These copies are highly similar, with Goodall (then still Mannsfeld) replicating the framing of the copy as well as its style. The reclining figure anchors the composition and dominates the upper half, causing figures along the bottom and sides to be cropped. The style has an exaggerated clarity, a kind of figural crispness, which is characteristic of Lutz’s style of copying more broadly, probably influenced by his practice of working in the medium of wood-cut engraving (Wintjes 2017, 40).

Despite the existence of these two detailed copies by Lutz (located in Frankfurt) and Mannsfeld-after-Lutz (located in Cape Town), Goodall produced several subsequent copies at different times. We have been unable to find the originals of these copies in Harare, but two were published (Figs. 6.4 & 6.5). The

framing of these copies is broadly like the earlier copies by and after Lutz (Fig. 6.3) but they encompass a wider view to capture more of the panel. Their texture is messier and style more tentative. Whereas Lutz’s copying style demonstrates a tendency to ‘repair’ incomplete or broken figures, Goodall captured more accurately the fragmentariness of the original (Figs. 6.4 & 6.5). She copied the smudges and blemishes, for example the wide streak down the right-hand side of the panel, interrupting the torso of the smaller reclining figure. These qualities are consistent with Frobenius’ approach to copying quoted above, guided by a concern for ‘what is there’, treating the rock art as a historical object located in the time in which the copyist is working.



**Figure 6.3.** *The Mannsfeld-after-Lutz copy, c. 1930 (watercolour on paper, 65 × 100 cm). Image courtesy and copyright Iziko Museums of Cape Town Social History Collections Department, South Africa. [www.sarada.co.za](http://www.sarada.co.za), University of the Witwatersrand. South African Rock Art Digital Archive Ref No. IZI-LVF-01-360HC.*

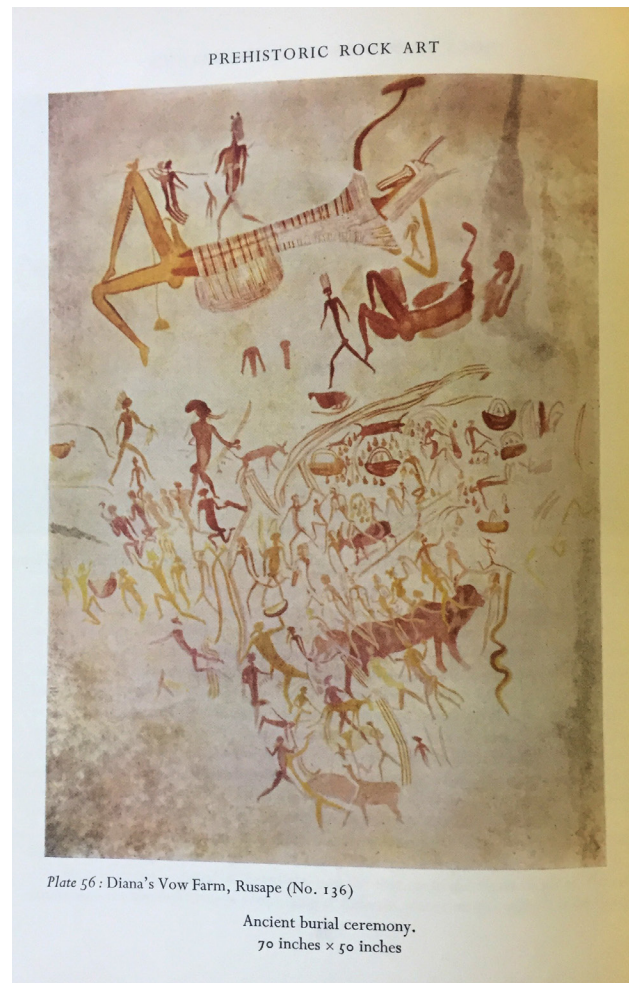


**Figure 6.4.** Illustration in an article by Richard Carline (1945) of an undated copy of the main panel at Diana's Vow by Elizabeth Goodall (whereabouts of the original copy unknown).

Although colour is a fundamental property of the rock paintings as well as the copies (see Hayden this volume), it is difficult to assess in this case due to the inherent challenges involved in its recording in the field. These include subjective acuity, variable light conditions, aging of the pigment, and the colour-related properties of the recording medium. Further exacerbating the difficulty is the instability of colour in the copies, which can also change over time, and colour shifts from other processes of translation the imagery may undergo (through different kinds of reproduction, including digitization). Moreover, one of the published versions was reproduced in black and white (Fig. 6.4). It is however possible to make several observations.

Lutz's copy appears generally darker and less colourful, but close inspection reveals that he mixed an impressive range of subtly different hues of paint, evidence that he paid attention to the chromatic complexity of the rock imagery. The Goodall copy published in colour (Fig. 6.5) appears brighter with

more saturated tones than the Lutz copy, and uses different techniques to modulate colour. For the figures, she used two basic hues, a red and a yellow, with some blending, and grading towards the transparent. The use of transparency highlights the figures' locatedness on a surface other than the paper, a surface whose presence is evoked by a pale greyish blotchy texture. The overall effect is that the figures are 'grounded', embedded into a material matrix. This technique is similar to that of Battiss, implying 'a continuous unframed space' behind the figures, recalling also the idea of a palimpsest through a 'sgraffito-like process of drawing into wet paint revealing colour beneath' (Skotnes 1994, 319). By contrast, Lutz's style



**Figure 6.5.** Illustration in Elizabeth Goodall's section of the book, *Prehistoric rock art of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (1959: plate 56) of an undated copy of the main panel at Diana's Vow by Goodall (also reproduced on the back cover of Cooke 1972; whereabouts of the original copy unknown).

exaggerates the contrast between the figures and the background, and the smoothness and solidness of the figures, making them look as though they have been peeled off the rock.

A final point of comparison is the general orientational scheme of the figures. In the field, the rock is curved and there are figures painted to either side of the main cluster, so the viewing experience implicates movement of one's body. The figures shift significantly in orientation depending on the viewer's position (Fig. 6.6). There is also a large rock lying just below the panel that can interfere with close inspection from a fully frontal position, which might explain the oblique orientation of the photographs (Fig. 6.2). The Lutz copies embody a tendency to orientate figures into alignment with an imagined orthogonal grid, with the reclining figures depicted almost horizontally, and other figures also rotated in this way. This is suggestive of the influence of understandings of the art as a kind of picture-writing discernible in other early copies, where figures are re-arranged into text-like registers (Wintjes 2011, 29; Wintjes 2016, 166–9). It is also consistent with established representational conventions associated with canvas painting, where pictorial space is constructed in relation to a horizontal plane that extends into an orthogonal three-dimensional framework. Goodall's copies maintain a diagonal

orientation, which is a compositional organization that might seem disorienting to a viewer unfamiliar with the kind of pictorial space elaborated in San rock paintings.

Goodall learned a particular copying philosophy and set of skills working under Frobenius, which she developed further on her own during the many hours spent in the presence of the art. Similar to Battiss' 'engagement with some of the formal devices that characterize San painting', which came to influence the formal arrangement of his own work (Skotnes 1994, 319), she was receptive to particular cues contained in the art, and used these to organize the composition of her copies. She developed her own style, which is distinguished by a certain painterly tentativeness, respect for the incompleteness of the figures and representation of the rock surface.

There is a clear disjuncture between Goodall's textual interpretations of this art, which contained a number of misapprehensions and seemed to remain underdeveloped over the course of her career, and her more enlightened (and enchanted) practice as a copyist, in which she developed a subtle understanding of the pictorial functioning of the imagery. Her writing entirely overshadowed and yet never came close to matching the nuance and complexity of her visual explorations.



**Figure 6.6.** *Different views of the main panel showing how the orientation of the figures changes as the viewer moves around the boulder, 2015. Photographs Laura de Harde/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.*

## Nyambavu

The archival trail linked to another rock art site hints further at the level of entanglement of rock art in Goodall's personal life. The site is located about 40 km west of Diana's Vow (20 km north-west of Rusape). It too enters the documentary domain after the visit by the Frobenius expedition in 1929. They labelled it 'Hauptmonument A', on a farm recorded as 'Fishervall-Springs' (Frobenius & Mannsfeld 1930, 97). Today the farm and site are known by the name Nyambavu.

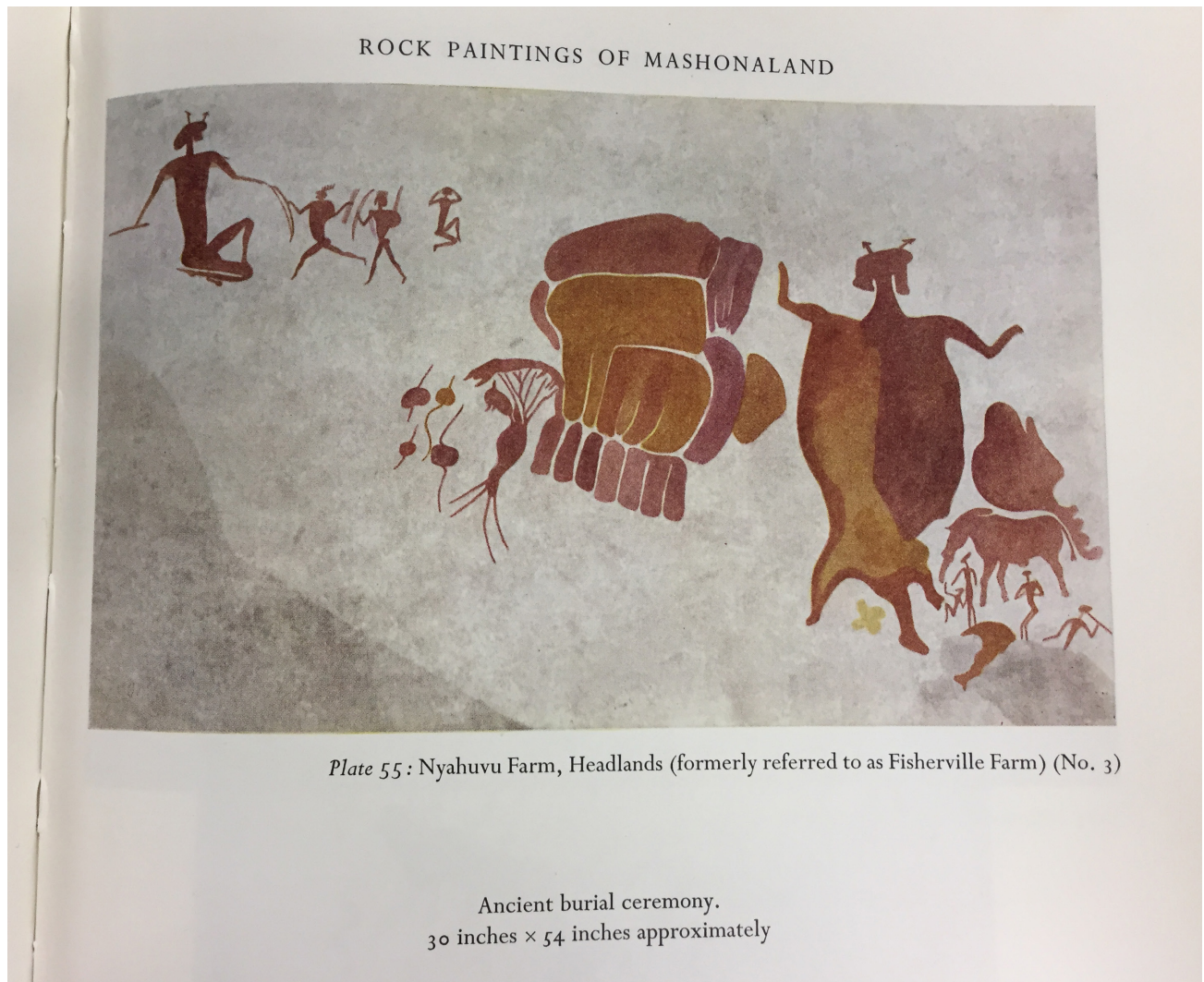
This site doesn't appear on any of the maps we have seen, and was never declared a national monument. It is nestled in the same prime agricultural area that was reserved for white ownership under the colonial government, and became an intense area of focus for resettlement by members of the War Veterans Association, among other landless stakeholders, at various points during Robert Mugabe's post-independence regime. This formed part of a complex process of land reform fraught with tensions and contradictions, the meanings and outcomes of which have been highly contested (Mamdani 2009). Whereas at Diana's Vow a custodian is stationed quasi permanently, the heritage status of the land on which Nyambavu is located is ambiguous, with no signage or established

arrangement for outside visitors to gain access to the rock art. Private homesteads that are currently occupied lie in close proximity, with a clear line of sight between the painted panel and these domestic spaces. Rather than a cave or a rock-shelter, this site comprises essentially a single painted panel on the side of a free-standing rock, located near a dirt track, not far from a tar road. The painted imagery is located on a smooth vertical panel protected by a narrow overhanging horizontal ledge. The panel comprises figures in red and orange-yellow, including humans in a variety of postures, botanical motifs and an elephant, arranged to either side of the two largest motifs: a tall figure with a wide and particularly long body, reaching its hand into a natural fault in the rock, and a more abstract type of motif often referred to as a 'formling'.

The word 'formling' is a term coined by Frobenius (meaning 'moulding' or 'shape' in German), and is one of the only categories of motif identified by him that has continued to hold some validity in rock art research. As Siyakha Mguni explains, formlings are composite and diverse, but carry a particular graphic unity and constancy and are easily recognized, comprising 'vertically or horizontally compartmentalised stacks of oval, oblong or tubular cores' (Mguni 2015, 15). Frobenius suggested they might be landscape features such as



**Figure 6.7.** The 1928 copy by Joachim Lutz and Maria Weyersberg of the panel at Nyambavu (watercolour on paper, 242 × 133 cm, FBA-D3 01621). Image courtesy and copyright Frobenius-Institut an der Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main.



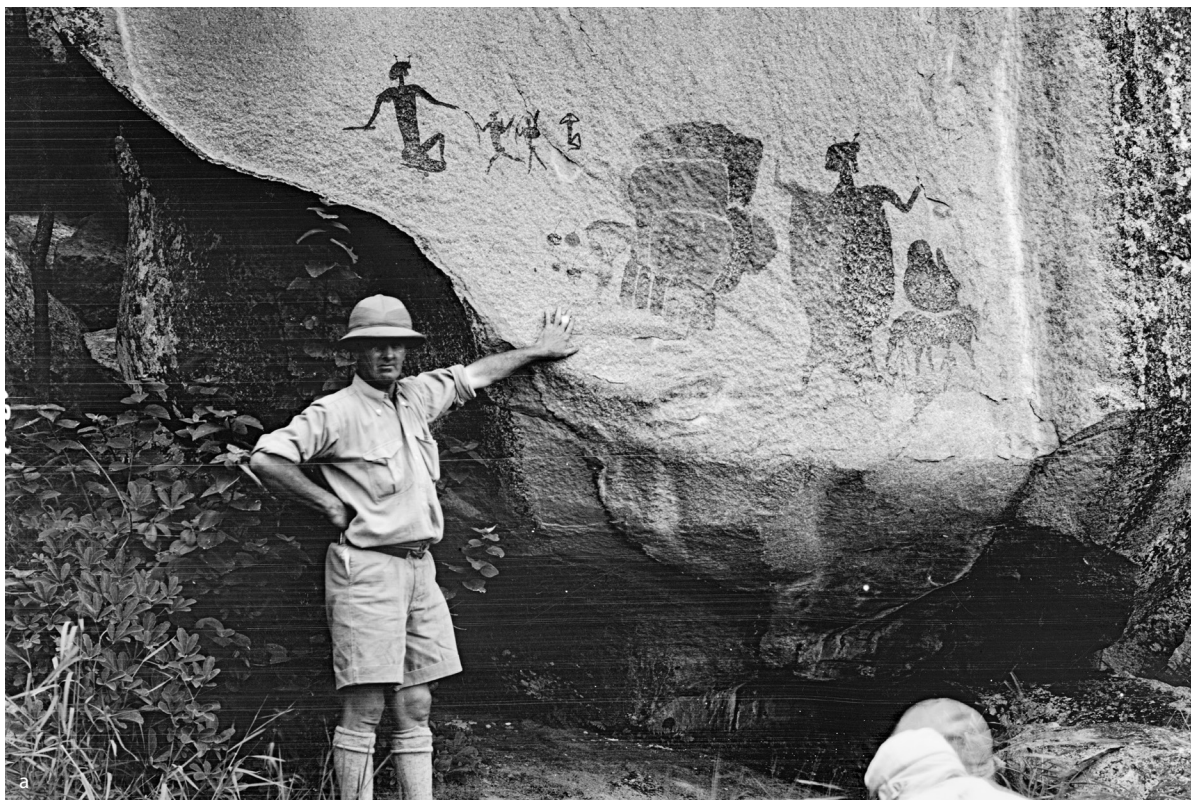
**Figure 6.8.** *Illustration in Goodall's section of the book, Prehistoric rock art of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1959: plate 55) of an undated copy of the main panel at Nyambavu by Elizabeth Goodall (whereabouts of the original copy unknown).*

granite boulders or hills (1929, 333; Pager 1962, 40), and other identifications succeeded this one, guided for the most part purely by visual resemblance (Mguni 2006, 586). Based on interpretations that rely on more than one line of evidence, they are currently considered to allude to different kinds of structures in the world at different scales, such as termite mounds, bees' nests or honeycombs, or the distended fatty bodies of queen termites, needing also always to be considered 'polysemic symbols with several layers of meaning' (Mguni 2015, 26).

This panel as a whole has a high degree of visual coherence, with the same colours and patina across the rock surface. The panel's design also embodies a

particular repleteness, in terms of its internal composition, but also when viewed in its geological context, in relation to the larger rock formation on which it appears. The cluster of painted motifs is echoed by the vertical reddish-orange streaks of the sandstone and lichens that occur on the exposed rock surface visible to the right (Fig. 6.9b).

The Frobenius expedition produced a painted copy of this panel, attributed to Lutz and Weyersberg (Fig. 6.7). The clustering of figures on the rock lends itself to a landscape-oriented format and this copy captures almost the entire composition. Goodall produced a copy at some later point (Fig. 6.8; we were also unable to find the original at the ZMHS, but a display



**Figure 6.9.** The panel at Nyambavu: a) 1928 photograph by the Frobenius expedition (photographic negative 13 × 18 cm, FoA-09-12479). Reproduced with permission, copyright Frobenius-Institut an der Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main; b) Recent image of the same panel, 2016. Photograph Justine Wintjes/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

copy is visible in the exhibits of the Mutare Museum). About this panel Goodall wrote:

*At the height of the 'classical' period of art, records of happening were painted in the most dignified style and with powerful expression. The art was concerned with the death of high personages. [...] The main figure is the massive, roundish form, with a human head and arms visible; it is the dead king partly wrapped in oxhide, in preparation for the burial, which will take place within a mass of rocks, depicted in the centre, semi-naturalistically rendered. Nearby is a tree, the pods especially shown, as possibly they provide the oil for embalming. Further to the right, blood issues from the mouth of an animal, the sacrificial one necessary for the burial ceremony. The form above may be the mummified body in its final wrappings. To the left is the seated, dignified and well-poised figure of the new rule, receiving the insignia of kingship (Goodall 1959, 98).*

With its undertones of cultural ontogeny, exaggerated interest in kingship and allusions to the burial practices of ancient Egypt, this interpretation is heavily influenced

by Frobenius' writings, and if we were to reinterpret the panel today through the appropriate ethnographic references we would reach a substantially different account. By contrast, the visual copy has several distinct qualities. Like the Diana's Vow copy discussed above, it includes a wider view, which pulls additional content into the lower right-hand corner, including a figure broken by the edge of an exfoliated patch. Goodall also depicted the texture of the rock and included some indication of the topography of the rock canvas.

Because of the apparent infrequency with which people have visited Nyambavu, its state of preservation is virtually unchanged since it was recorded in 1929 (Fig. 6.9). Goodall worked as a Commissioner for the Historical Monuments Commission from 1956 (Raath 1971, 4) until the end of her life, and was involved in declaring sites to become national monuments. But even though Nyambavu is arguably as beautiful, intact and accessible as Diana's Vow, it was never declared a monument. Diana's Vow served as the public face for rock art in this region. By contrast, an intimate relationship evidently existed between Goodall and Nyambavu.<sup>5</sup> A single motif borrowed from the site adorns the Goodalls' grave at Warren Hills Cemetery in Harare (Fig. 6.10; Leslie Goodall was buried in the



**Figure 6.10.** The Goodalls' grave at Warren Hills Cemetery, 2016. Photograph Justine Wintjes/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

same spot in 1974). The Goodall gravestone is unusual.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the rectilinear forms of the surrounding gravestones, theirs is a wedge of unworked granite. The Nyambavu motif is engraved into it and painted white against the mottled pink-grey colour of the stone. Borrowed from the edge of a panel of a lesser-known site, the motif is a single seated human figure viewed in profile, its legs folded to form a triangular base, the breadth of its shoulders extended by outstretched arms. It is elegantly poised and grounded, etched into a rock that evokes the elusive, unshapeable aspects of the land.

### Being and becoming

Goodall worked tirelessly in her role as curator of rock art until the day before her death (Raath 1971, 3). The art was intimately entangled in her life, as her life was creatively entangled with the art. She figures among a number of copyists engaged in a dedicated practice of close looking and creative translation, in what can be described as an enchanted relationship. Her copies embody an immersive and repetitive practice of close looking at what is there, how it was composed, and how it has changed over time, through the technical challenge of reaching towards a faithful translation in a fundamentally different medium.

Compatible with Gell's notion that artworks operate through enchantment, WJT Mitchell (2005, 47) proposes that pictures want something from us, and prompts us to think about them as much more than a by-product of social reality, but as actively constitutive of it, participating in a dynamic, recursive relationship of 'visual reciprocity'. Similarly, Keith Moxey calls for a widening of the time of the artwork beyond the horizon of its creation, in order to allow 'its status as an agent in the creation of its own reception, its *anachronic* power, [to shine] through', allowing for the "'presence" of the work of art – its ontological existence, the ways it both escapes meaning yet repeatedly provokes and determines its own interpretation – [to come] to the fore' (2013, 3; italics in the original).

Goodall's oeuvre provides powerful examples of rock art panels acting as focal points in the landscape, and as sites of visual reciprocity between people and things, capable of inserting themselves into different times. Goodall was receptive to their visual power, despite the fundamental differences between her practice as an artist and the earlier painting practices she sought to emulate, many aspects of which remained for her deeply elusive.

Our examination of Goodall's work might appear to be primarily about histories of research rather than helping, in the first instance, to deepen understandings of the work in the moment in which it was created.

Nevertheless, it points to the tangible agency that southern African rock paintings possess to influence their own destiny, to enchant observers of different generations and to inspire further creative acts, whether these take the form of pictorial replication, ethnographic interpretation or creative re-interpretation. This enchantment is something that has surely been at the heart of the art's power since its earliest manifestations.

### Notes

1. The copies discussed in this paper and Goodall's wider body of work are dealt with in greater detail in De Harde's doctoral research (2019).
2. The rock art archive at the Frobenius Institute counts some 8500 copies, of which around 1193 were created in southern Africa (Schöler 2011: 105).
3. De Harde examines their relationship and respective archives in greater detail in her doctoral research (2019).
4. As shown in various documents she collected, filed unnumbered in boxes labelled, 'Goodall Papers' and 'Rock Paintings & Engravings', rock art archives of the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences, Harare.
5. We benefitted from discussions with Jonathan Waters on these points.
6. We gratefully acknowledge Edward Matenga's recommendation to visit the gravestone.

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## The pasts and presence of art in South Africa

In 2015, #RhodesMustFall generated the largest student protests in South Africa since the end of apartheid, subsequently inspiring protests and acts of decolonial iconoclasm across the globe. The performances that emerged in, through and around #RhodesMustFall make it clear how analytically fruitful Alfred Gell's notion that art is 'a system of social action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it' can be, even when attempting to account for South Africa's very recent history.

What light can this approach shed on the region's far longer history of artistic practices? Can we use any resulting insights to explore art's role in the very long history of human life in the land now called South Africa? Can we find a common way of talking about 'art' that makes sense across South Africa's long span of human history, whether considering engraved ochre, painted rock shelters or contemporary performance art?

This collection of essays has its origins in a conference with the same title, arranged to mark the opening of the British Museum's major temporary exhibition *South Africa: the art of a nation* in October 2016. The volume represents an important step in developing a framework for engaging with South Africa's artistic traditions that begins to transcend nineteenth-century frameworks associated with colonial power.

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