THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE ‘INDIGENE’ IN MARY STAINBANK’S SCULPTURE c1920 – 1940

by

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NOVEMBER 2001
I declare that this thesis, entitled *The iconography of the indigene in Mary Stainbank's sculpture c1920-1940*, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

**SIGNATURE**
(MRS E J LIEBENBERG-BARKHUIZEN)
Title:
The iconography of the indigene in Mary Stainbank’s sculpture c1920-1940.

Summary:
This research critically examines, from a post-colonial perspective, the representation of the indigenous personage by the Natal-born sculptor Mary Agnes Stainbank (1899-1996). Specific sculptures from the period c1920-1940 which reflect the artist’s concern with the South African indigene as subject matter were selected for scrutiny. Stainbank’s representations of indigenous personages from the 1920s are analysed against the background of the then prevailing conservatism in art in Natal, as informed by Victorian and academic norms for art production, and according to historically established canons of art. The development of her work is traced from this initial naturalism, acquired while she was a student in Durban (1917-1921), to a more experimental idiom which she adopted and developed as a student at the Royal College of Art in London (1922-1926). Stainbank’s opposition to the notion of “primitivism” in British art of the period is considered seminal to the formulation of her aesthetic aims and is regarded as the incentive for the development of her stylistic concerns. The effects on Stainbank of work by artists involved in the establishing of a British definition of modernism are examined against the general background of an emerging modernism and primitivism in British art and within the context of the academic ethos of the Royal College of Art. The investigation of Stainbank’s work proceeds through an examination of selected examples of sculpture which were executed from 1927 to 1938, a period in which her style resolved into an idiosyncratic form of representation combined with modernist form.

List of key terms:
Stainbank (Mary); South African sculpture; art in Natal; the Natal Society of Artists; the Native Study; representation of the black person; primitivism; modernism; Empire exhibition 1936; architectural decoration.
PREFACE

The focus of this thesis was formulated during 1996 while research was conducted into Stainbank’s work as integral to a broader study of South African women artists. The unprocessed contents of Stainbank’s studio were housed at KwaZulu Natal Museum Services in Pietermaritzburg, while the sculptures could be viewed by appointment at the Legislature, also in Pietermaritzburg. It became clear that Stainbank’s contribution to South African art history lacked in-depth research and critical assessment of it, and that neither sculptures and drawings nor correspondence had been documented. Contextualising Stainbank’s sculpture within early twentieth century art production in South Africa, it emerged that her representations of the South African indigene differ, in many respects significantly, from the realistic and stylised versions by other South African artists of the time. As a result of research following the Retrospective Exhibition (1987), mainly by Andries Botha, Elizabeth Rankin and Melanie Hillebrand, the importance and contribution of Stainbank to the history of sculpture in South Africa, as well as the progressive nature of her work, emerged. Such research was recognised as crucial because introductory, thereby opening up the field for further investigation.

This thesis is based in primary research. Information was obtained primarily, and supplemented by secondary sources cited, from the contents of Stainbank’s studio while documents such as correspondence, newspaper cuttings and preparatory drawings were being cleaned, repaired, and documented, to be absorbed into the Stainbank Archives. The appointment of the candidate writing this thesis as curator of The Mary Stainbank Sculpture Collection and Archive is hence considered fortuitous, as this facilitated and encouraged research. The process of establishing a functioning archive exposed sculptures and drawings by the artist which are not generally known and which intensified the necessity for research. As the
Stainbank Archive is now established, opportunities for future research are opened up.

Research is presented here in the form of a written thesis supported by visual images illustrating the sculptures, paintings and drawings referred to. These illustrations appear at the end of the text, following the Bibliography. Reference to illustrations is made in the text by means of the abbreviation "(fig)". All illustrated sculptures and drawings by Stainbank, except for Baya huba (1933), are housed in the Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg as part of The Mary Stainbank Sculpture Collection and Archive. Photographs of destroyed works also form part of this Collection. Paintings and sculptures which have not been illustrated here have been recorded in an endnote.

The Harvard Method of reference was followed in the text, and content notes are presented as endnotes appearing at the close of each chapter. Where an author is mentioned in the text for the first time, a first name is included. Thereafter, only the surname is used. Similarly, the first time an artist is referred to, a first name as well as the artist’s dates are included. This was also applied, as far as possible, to any mention of historians, politicians, scientists, writers etc. Annexures are inserted between the Conclusion and the Bibliography.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance provided by the Centre for Science Development. Opinions expressed in this thesis and conclusions arrived at, are my own and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development. I am indebted to my promoter Prof Estelle Maré for her assistance and guidance, and I thank Dr Melanie Hillebrand, joint promoter, for her contribution. I also thank the Trustees of the Mary Stainbank Sculpture Collection and Archive in particular Mrs Elizabeth Keith, niece of the artist, and her husband James, as well as Valerie Leigh, previously of KwaZulu Natal Museum Services, for their assistance, co-
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INTRODUCTION

Despite the availability throughout South Africa of examples of sculptures by the Durban-born sculptor Mary Agnes Stainbank (1899-1996), she has until recently been relatively unknown in this country. Stainbank was born on the farm Coedmore near Durban and after completing her schooling in 1916 at St Anne's College in Hilton, near Pietermaritzburg, she entered the Durban School of Art in 1917 to study sculpture until 1921. In 1922 she enrolled at the Royal College of Art in London, where she continued her studies in sculpture until 1926, the year she returned to South Africa. She established the Ezayo Studio¹ at Coedmore where she worked on a variety of projects and commissions for the remainder of her long career as a sculptor.

After her return from London, Stainbank exhibited regularly at the annual exhibitions of the Natal Society of Artists, held in Durban. She also received numerous commissions from the Public Works Department for architectural decorations on government buildings throughout South Africa² and her œuvre includes a large body of portrait busts, executed either as private works (eg the portrait of her husband the Rev AF Cox, entitled The padre (1931) [fig 1]), or by personal or public commission.³ In addition, Stainbank executed a large body of sculptures, mostly carved in stone, depicting the image of the indigenous South African personage. These sculptures are of an experimental nature, as no restrictions had been imposed by a patron, allowing her the liberty to carve "as I wished, when and where I wished" (Webb 1985: 4). Stainbank extended her interest in the indigene to ceramic figurines, bookends and other popular cultural items, which she had cast at the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein,⁴ probably as a means to supplement her income.

Yet a prolific output did not protect the artist from relative obscurity. Elizabeth Rankin (1988a: 225) addressed the neglect of Stainbank's

It is disconcerting to the art world and especially to the art historian that this could have happened. The exhibition demonstrates that it was a considerable oversight, for many works are significant pieces that should not have been overlooked. Stainbank had an acceptable professional training at the Durban School of Art (1916-1921) and at the Royal College of Art in London (1922-1926). Back in South Africa, she exhibited fairly regularly in the earlier 1930s, mostly with the Natal Society of Arts, and was represented on national exhibitions up to 1966; she also had a number of public commissions. Why then should her sculpture be so little known?

Both Rankin (1988a, 1988b, 1989a and 1989b) and Melanie Hillebrand (1986, 1987a, 1987b and 1993) undertook extensive research into art production in Natal during the early twentieth century and included Stainbank’s sculpture as part of their research. They offer acceptable answers to Rankin's question: Stainbank's isolation while living and working on the family farm; the fact that as a woman she indulged in a career considered undesirable for a woman; and the fact that the Nationalist Government would rather ensure that public commissions be granted to men than to an English woman. However, since the *Retrospective exhibition*, which travelled the country during the 1980s, the problem of Stainbank’s relative anonymity has been, at least partially, addressed. The recent move of the entire contents of the artist’s studio, which includes her correspondence, library, drawings, reference materials, photographs and so on, to the Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg, has contributed to publicising the artist’s work.5

Reference has frequently been made by the few researchers who have published their investigations into aspects of Stainbank’s sculpture, to this artist’s interest in the black South African personage.6 The so-called “private” sculptures by Stainbank7 are characterised by a predominantly African subject matter: the Zulu and Bhaca woman, mother with her infant,
and child. The frequency with which the *indigene* occurs in Stainbank's sculpture and drawing has been ascribed by some researchers to a variety of factors: as an outflow from an interest in the *indigene* as subject matter which the artist allegedly acquired while following the European *avant-garde* whilst studying in Britain (Botha 1987b); as residing in her unsentimental attitude to the Zulu personage (Hillebrand 1986); and more popularly to Stainbank's search for the "spirit of Africa" as the central concern in her sculpture (Botha 1989a and 1989b, and Adderley 1990). However, research and publications by Rankin (1989a and 1989b) and Hillebrand (1987a, 1987b and 1993), in which they discuss Stainbank’s sculpture as representing an African idiom or an indigenous subject matter, raised a number of questions, thereby opening up the area of Stainbank's African iconography for further research.

The first of these questions centres on the depiction of the *indigene* by Stainbank, compared to sculptures with a similar theme by some of her South African predecessors and peers. Most artists working in South Africa during the first two decades or so of the twentieth century received, as did Stainbank, an academic and conservative art education, which, in itself, was quite acceptable according to the aesthetic demands of the period. Art production in Natal was particularly conservative whilst upholding Victorian norms and criteria for art. What then would the iconographic and stylistic bases be for Stainbank's representations of indigenous personages? How would these compare with representations of the *indigene* by some of her peers, given a similar training and sociopolitical context? Did her relative isolation at Coedmore encourage experimentation in the absence of much contact with, and support from, those artists practising more conservative styles?

Secondly, and related to the above, there is the question surrounding the viability of combining a representational image with an essentially abstract and modernist form. Does the metaphor, as reflected in the titles of many
of Stainbank’s sculptures depicting the *indigene*, offer a literary solution to an essentially visual and formal problem?

Thirdly, could a post-colonial framework offer any insight into Stainbank’s representations of the indigenous people of Natal? Stainbank was a member of a colonial family and she lived during the spillover of the Victorian era into the twentieth century. A post-colonial reading of her sculpture appears appropriate in that she chose to represent that which post-colonial theory defines as “other”.

Lastly, how do Stainbank’s sculptures with an African theme fit into a European or *avant-garde* definition of primitivism? (see page 44) This question immediately elicits a consideration of paintings by European artists such as the French Post-Impressionist Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) and the South African painter Irma Stern (1894-1966).

In an attempt to answer at least some of the above questions, it is the intention of this research to critically examine and investigate the iconography of the *indigene* and its related stylistic characteristics in select examples of Stainbank’s sculptures dating to the period between the two world wars. The purpose of this research is to contribute to, and expand on, the existing body of knowledge, albeit scant, which is available on Stainbank’s sculptural representations of *indigenes*. The research will adopt a post-colonial stance and will contextualise these sculptures within a primitivist tendency in early twentieth century art in Britain and in South Africa. While a chronological and narrative approach will be adopted, this investigation does not aim at a complete survey of the artist’s work, neither does it intend to provide a full comparative study between Stainbank’s images and other South African artists, both black and white, who represented indigenous personages in their sculptures.

While Stainbank had been occupied with the theme of the Natal *indigene* since her childhood, carving and modelling figures of people she knew on
the family farm, this research focuses on the period 1920 to 1940. This period was selected as it includes the formative years the artist spent at the Durban School of Art as well as the years she spent at the Royal College of Art, during which time she re-appraised and re-assessed those conventions acquired at the Durban School of Art. The researcher believes that this period consolidated Stainbank’s concern with the *indigene* as iconography, and that it contains the roots of the formal structure she employed to represent these figures. The period includes the early years of her mature style, and ends in 1940, the year Stainbank was called up for military service in Pretoria. It also appears that most of Stainbank’s sculptures representing the *indigene* were created during this period. After her return to the farm Coedmore at the close of the War, her visual idioms altered, offering scope for future research.

Examples of sculptures to be examined in this thesis, have been stringently selected to prevent repetition and digression from the central focus of this research. These sculptures represent, exclusively, in some manner or other, the South African *indigene* as theme, and belong to the large body of work, consisting of some 35 sculptures, which Stainbank considered “private”. Unlike commissioned projects, which had to conform to prescribed conventions and tastes, Stainbank’s “private” sculptures offered her the scope to experiment with subject matter, form and expression. She had been preoccupied since childhood with the themes of animals and *indigenes*, which she represented in clay and wood. For the remainder of her career, Stainbank used the *indigene* as subject matter for experimental representations.10 *Miserable Elizabeth* (1921)(fig 2) and *Sigcathiya* (1920-1921)(fig 3) were selected from the period when she studied at the Durban School of Art. These two portraits act as early examples of Stainbank’s images of *indigenes* and reflect the conservative and academic nature of the art education she had received. From the period 1922 to 1926, *Native head* (1924)(fig 4) and *Umhlobogazi* (1925-1926) (fig 5) have been selected. These sculptures continued Stainbank’s preoccupation with the *indigene* as subject matter, and are included in this
thesis as they were seminal in creating a new approach to form and subject matter. Reference will also be made in the text to relief panels, drawings and designs executed during this period. Although Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) was begun at the Royal College of Art, Stainbank completed this carving upon her return to South Africa, rendering it an important transition between two phases of her output. Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6), Enigma (1930)(fig 7), Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) and Medusa (1938)(fig 9) have been selected for analysis as examples in which Stainbank combined an indigenous iconography with a modernist formal structure. These sculptures, specifically Medusa (1938), indicate a direct borrowing of stylistic elements from continental sources. Mamatheka (sa)\textsuperscript{11} was excluded, along with Native study (sa),\textsuperscript{12} as the dating of these carvings is uncertain, and because the style in which they have been executed suggests that they might belong to a small body of carvings produced immediately upon Stainbank’s return from war service. A selection of popular cultural artefacts, which Stainbank produced through the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein, will also be discussed as belonging to the body of “private” sculptures. These artefacts continue the iconography of the indigene and reflect similar formal and stylistic concerns to the “private” sculptures. Examples selected for analysis are the bookends (fig 68), ornaments representing the Zulu mother and child (fig 69) and ashtrays (fig 70).

Reference will also be made to supportive drawings and studies made at the time by the artist. Reference to commissions Stainbank received for the decorations of Public Buildings will only be made where she used the image of the indigene as integral to the design. Here, Fate (1937)(fig 10) will be referred to as an example of a design, intended for a public building, which includes the identity of the indigene. This large carving is particularly significant iconographically, as it indicates the artist’s personal identification with the indigene as marginalised woman.
The examples of sculptures by Stainbank, selected for scrutiny in this study, will be examined in respect of subject matter and form. It is inevitable that reference will be made to sculptures as well as drawings by Stainbank which were not selected for examination in this research. Analyses of sculptures will occur within the broader context of Stainbank's oeuvre and where necessary, reference will be made to the South African art context as well as to examples of similar representations from the broader history of South African art. While some comparisons are necessary, this research does not centre on a complete comparative study between Stainbank's images and similar representations in South African art. Such comparison can only be executed meaningfully once an in-depth study of the indigene in Stainbank's entire oeuvre has been undertaken. Instead, this research focuses on Stainbank's representations of the indigene, and on those devices and idioms she employed to represent her visions and conceptualisations of the indigene. It is furthermore imperative to consider sculptures by relevant British, European and South African artists which Stainbank might have seen or studied, and which affected her perceptions stylistically or thematically.

Stainbank's use of the indigene as subject matter, coupled with its rendering in a European aesthetic idiom, invites an interpretation from a post-colonial perspective, as these representations generate considerations of cultural and ethnic difference. Post-colonial theory offers a structure from which to meaningfully examine the construction of identity in Stainbank's sculpture. It would be presumptuous to attempt a full explication of post-colonial theory in this thesis. Suffice it to say that the term post-colonial is used here to describe the resulting interaction between imperialist culture and an indigenous cultural practice. As is the case with the notion of the post-modern, there are various theories, attitudes and perspectives on the post-colonial phenomenon. An in-depth examination of these disputes is considered peripheral to this research. In addition, many texts not only on post-colonial theory, but also on the ambivalences contained with the various stances within this theory, have
been thoroughly formulated and are readily available. The attitudes and perspectives presented mainly by Homi Bhabha were considered useful as a basis from which to examine the construction of the identity of the "other" in selected examples of Stainbank's sculpture. Bhabha's definition of cultural difference as a process of signification is particularly apt, as it entails the notion of ambivalence by accepting shifting positions of "self" and "other".

Stainbank's colonial context, in conjunction with her adherence to the canons of art-making in the Western world, equates her position as artist with a position as a coloniser also of vision and of imagery. This identity of the artist as coloniser has historically been ascribed to the white male artist who colonises the object of his vision: the often nude female figure. The fact that Stainbank was a woman, however, requires a reinterpretation of this position and identity of the artist. In addition, Stainbank's studies in London meant a continuation of her colonial identity away from her home country, albeit from the point of view of the Empire. A post-colonial understanding of sculpture produced during this period is equally applicable.

Stainbank's identity as a woman invites and requires a feminist approach to her sculpture. While such an approach is self-evident, this research focuses, because centred on the "self":"other" configuration in ethnic rather than in gender terms, on a post-colonial stance while acknowledging, firstly, that neither feminism nor post-colonialism is necessarily the more important. Secondly, the two discourses are not mutually exclusive but do intersect at various points. Also, because this research examines Stainbank's representations of the indigene or "other" in cultural terms, the discourse established by post-colonial theory between centre and margin, "self" and "other" and so on provides a valuable scheme for analysis. A consideration of South African women sculptors might be tempting, but falls outside the intention of this research. Likewise, representations of
indigenes by black South African artists, deviate from the focus of this thesis, but should nevertheless be considered for future research.

In order to examine Stainbank's position of "self" in relation to the indigenous "other", this research will consider the identification of ethnic and personal identities depicted by the artist in the examples selected for study; the formal "language" developed by the artist to depict the above; metaphors Stainbank employed; her problematic relationship with primitivism; and a critical evaluation of her sculpture within the broader, relevant art contexts. For the purpose of this research, it is crucial to distinguish between representations in which the indigene is used as subject matter, and representations which suggest a generic construct of the appearance of an African figure. The latter concerns matters of style and would be more appropriately approached from a primitivist, and not a post-colonial, perspective.

This research will also probe some of the visual sources used by the artist. It is imperative to examine these sources as credible determinants of the artist's mature style and iconography, in particular those encountered during her formative years as a student at the Durban School of Art and later at the Royal College of Art in London. The general milieu of British modernism cannot be ignored and where necessary, reference will be made to relevant theories, styles, paintings and sculptures.

Information for this research was gained firstly from scrutinising correspondence, newspaper cuttings, photographs, reference materials, books and other documents in the artist's possession.¹³ The Archives at the Royal College of Art and its Library provided important information, as did the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, the British Museum and the National Gallery in London. Material obtained will be assessed against the background appropriate for the period concerned, ie Natal and British art, and the Royal College of Art during the 1920s and 1930s. Also, the correspondence of, and journal compiled by Wilgeforde Agnes Vann-Hall
(1895-1981), were examined in detail. Stainbank did not keep a journal and wrote extremely little on her intentions for, and perceptions of, art. Vann-Hall on the other hand referred often in her writings to her own opinions and perceptions of art, also of Stainbank’s sculpture. These writings are significant in that they reflect Vann-Hall’s admiration for Stainbank’s interest in the _indigene_ as well as for her sculpture. These writings offer, in the absence of written evidence from Stainbank herself, the possibility that Vann-Hall’s perceptions were not only her own, but also reflections of Stainbank’s beliefs and attitudes.

In addition to the sources cited above, books, journal articles, exhibition catalogues and newspaper cuttings dealing with a variety of topics related to Stainbank’s sculpture, or to the contexts in which she worked, were consulted. An interview was conducted with two of Stainbank’s students.

Significant research on art and architecture in Natal, including the sculptural work by Stainbank in general, has been undertaken by Hillebrand (1986, 1987a and 1993) and Rankin (1988a and 1989b), which has provided valuable contextual information. The unpublished Masters dissertations by Brendan Bell (1988) and Rhoda Krut (1983) furnished valuable information on the art and educational contexts of the period. Informative interviews with Stainbank were conducted by Andries Botha (assisted by Valerie Leigh) (1989a and 1989b),14 and Claire Adderley (1990).15 Adderley’s text drew attention to Vann-Hall’s diaries, an invaluable aid in the study of Stainbank’s years spent at the Royal College of Art. Stainbank’s Retrospective Exhibition toured South Africa during the 1980s and drew much attention to the artist’s work. The subsequent inclusion of Stainbank’s sculpture in texts such as Rankin’s _Images of wood_ (1989a) and Marion Arnold’s _Women and art in South Africa_ (1996) contributed to a growing awareness of her significance for, and place within, South African art history. Rankin’s studies of Stainbank’s sculpture must be seen within the context of a broader interest in aspects of South
African sculpture, leaving scope for specific investigation into the work of Stainbank.

In addition, relevant texts in the Stainbank Archives, which belonged to Stainbank and Vann-Hall, were consulted. Of prime importance are the text by Ezra Pound (1885-1972) titled *Gaudier-Brzeska: a memoir* (1916); Eric Gill's (1882-1940) hand made book on sculpture (1918); Sir William Rothenstein's (1872-1945) text *Men and memories* (1932) and Jacob Epstein's (1880-1959) *The sculptor speaks* (1931). Stainbank's library also includes a collection of exhibition catalogues, which contain reproductions of artists' work which she might have found significant.

The large collection of reference material, which Stainbank obtained mainly from journals and magazines, reveals the artist's interest in a wide array of topics. The files labelled "Sculpture" contain several articles on, and images of sculptures by, artists such as Gill, Epstein, Maurice Lambert (1901-1964), Frank Dobson (1886-963), and Henry Moore (1898-1986). A file labelled "African People" contains cuttings from, mostly, the *Illustrated London News* and a magazine titled *Life*, which recorded, through detailed photographs, various cultural identities of the world.

This thesis is divided into five Chapters to cover the topic of this research. Chapter 1 provides a general background for Stainbank's representations of the South African *indigene*. The historical context, in which key aspects of the representation of the "other" during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is addressed, is outlined and presented in this chapter in three sections. This chapter serves as a general introduction to Stainbank's representations of black personages through its focus on some of the images of black people generated by colonial culture. Here, Stainbank's representations of *indigenes* made whilst she was a student at the Durban School of Art are briefly considered against the background of some Victorian stereotypical imagery accepted at the time in Natal as the cultural norm for such images.
Chapter 2 considers factors which determined the formulation of a formalist approach by Stainbank during the period she studied at the Royal College of Art. The re-emergence of carving as a viable process for sculpture is considered in conjunction with an awareness of primitive art and related modernist form.

Chapter 3 examines the image of the *indigene*, as represented by Stainbank while a student at the Royal College of Art, against the background of a growing primitivism as apparent in the sculptural work of fellow students Moore and Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975), as well as in the sculpture of European and British artists such as Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), Dobson, Gill and Epstein. The emergence in Stainbank’s sculpture of a tension between a representational idiom and a formalist approach is introduced and examined.

Chapter 4 examines selected sculptures by Stainbank created since her return to South Africa in 1926, in which the image of the *indigene* prevails. These sculptures are examined against the background of the essentially conservative art production in Natal of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Simultaneously, the modernist idiom, which emerged increasingly in South African art of the period, will be considered where appropriate. The social context, in which attitudes towards indigenous people continued to be biased toward late Victorian and colonial conceptions, will be regarded as of much importance in a study of Stainbank’s sculpture. Also, from a post-colonial stance, such attitudes were pervasive. Stainbank’s continued interest in the South African *indigene*, most notably the Natal Zulu, can be confirmed through numerous references in her correspondence with colleagues, friends and acquaintances. Her use of the metaphor in sculpture is introduced as a means of combining a modernist visual language with representational form.
Chapter 5 introduces Stainbank's popular cultural artefacts made through the Ceramic Studio, and examines them as extensions of the stylistic and aesthetic concerns she developed in her large scale sculptures.

The Conclusion contains observations and findings from the above five chapters.
ENDNOTES: INTRODUCTION

1 Stainbank established a friendship at the Royal College of Art with Wilgeforde Agnes Vann-Hall (1895-1981), a student from Liverpool who was studying Painting and Stained Glass painting. Vann-Hall returned to South Africa with Stainbank in 1926 and together the two women established the Ezayo Studio where they lived and worked together for most of their lives.

2 Some of the most well known examples are the decorations on the exterior of the Law Courts in Port Elizabeth, the Government Offices in Durban and some fountains and relief panels for the Addington Children’s Hospital, also in Durban.

3 These include portraits of her mother Ethel and Natal personalities such as George Cato, mayor of Durban (1854-1856), and a few members of the Campbell family. The Campbell family was a prominent Durban family who made significant contributions in the fields of education, medicine, wildlife conservation, politics and agriculture. They collected Africana and oral histories (Tatham 2000). Currently the family home Muckleneuk in Durban holds the Campbell Collections of Africana. The bust of Killie Campbell’s brother William, by Stainbank, is on the verandah at Muckleneuk.

4 Gladys Short and Joan Methley established this studio near Pretoria in 1925. Stainbank had many objects cast and fired at this studio, including the decorations for the Addington Children’s Hospital and the roundels for the Johannesburg Public Library.

5 The entire contents of the artist’s studio were entrusted, during the late 1980s, to the Province of KwaZulu Natal (KZN) by the Stainbank family. It was the wish of the artist that this collection be utilised for educational purposes in the province, and Valerie Leigh, Human Scientist at the time at KZN Museum Services, and the sculptor Andries Botha, had laboured extensively in seeing to this request. After some deliberation, Leigh found space to exhibit the sculptures in the KZN Legislative Building, alongside work by other South African artists from the province. Here the work could be viewed by appointment only. The remainder of the artist’s work such as her drawings and designs, as well as her correspondence, library, photographs, newspaper cuttings, etc. was placed in storage at KZN Museum Services in Pietermaritzburg.

After the 1994 elections, security measures at the Legislative Building had to be increased, as the building became fully operational again. This rendered the entire art collection housed in this building inaccessible to the public. The safety of the Stainbank Collection was also questioned. At this time, the Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg had taken the decision, in the spirit of transformation, to change its identity from a theme museum to a multi-cultural institution. The old Longmarket Girls’ School had been purchased and refurbished and Leigh took it upon herself to negotiate with the Voortrekker Museum on displaying Stainbank’s work in this building. The mezzanine floor in this building was secured as a permanent locale for the collection of sculptures and for the accompanying archive. The contents of this archive was largely unprocessed and therefore also unresearched, and paper items had to be cleaned, repaired and a system to access material had to be established. This collection is now known as The Mary Stainbank Sculpture Collection.
and Archive (MSSCA) and was officially entrusted to the Voortrekker Museum on 5 April 2001.

Hereafter referred to as the indigene.

Stainbank considered her experimental sculptures, which she made for herself and not for a patron, "private" (Webb 1985:4 and 5). These sculptures are characterised by their African subject matter.

"Natal" refers in this research to the Colony of Natal and the province of Natal. However, as the province’s name changed in 1994 to KwaZulu Natal, this new term will be used where appropriate and will be abbreviated as KZN.

It is a characteristic of Stainbank’s sculpture that her “private” sculptures of the period c 1920-1940 reflect, with a few exceptions, exclusively an indigenous subject matter. Although the Stainbank Archives contain some drawings and designs for public commissions, in which the image of the indigene was used, very few of these commissions were accepted. The researcher cannot state with certainty that the “private” sculptures the artist made after 1945 overtly refer to the identity of the South African indigene. There are a few undated carvings representing the indigenous woman, which might have been produced during the war, but no closure has been reached on these.

The sculptor Coert Steynberg (1905-1982) also reserved the image of the indigene for sculptures of an experimental nature, but these date to the period after the Second World War. It is unlikely that Stainbank was aware of his work during the period under discussion, as he entered the Royal College of Art in 1928 and returned to South Africa in 1934 (Steynberg 1982: 19).


Mary Stainbank, Native study (sa). Ficksburg stone and bronze, 420 x 190. MSSCA.

These sources are now housed in the Stainbank Archives at the Voortrekker Museum.

These interviews are housed in tape-recorded form at KZN Museum Services in Pietermaritzburg.

Adderley’s unpublished study was discovered belatedly, after the topic for this research was formulated during 1996, and after much primary and independent research was already at an advanced stage. Adderley’s study is important in that it provides a general overview of Stainbank’s oeuvre, but the nature of her study rendered it largely uncritical. A few relevant contextualisations were useful, and the interview Adderley conducted with the artist was particularly significant as this researcher never had the opportunity to meet Ms Stainbank.
CHAPTER 1

The Victorian-colonial background to Stainbank's sculpture

Stainbank grew up in a period shaped by a typical Victorian-colonial mindset. To provide an adequate background from which to analyse her representations of indigenes, this chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, aspects of Victorian-colonial representations of the indigene or "other" in South Africa but more specifically in Natal will be outlined in general to provide the necessary context from which to introduce and examine similar representations by Stainbank. The second section will outline the general characteristics of art in Natal towards the end of the Victorian era¹ and will examine those conventions for representation, specifically of portrait busts, taught to Stainbank at the Durban School of Art. These conventions reflect the conservative and academic nature of art teaching in Natal at the time and Stainbank applied these conventions to represent the seemingly unimportant indigene on the farm Coedmore, near Durban, where she was born and grew up. The last section will introduce Stainbank's sculptures of the period and will discuss these against the conventions associated at the time with art making.

The representation of the black person or indigene is not restricted to art either in South Africa generally, or in Natal specifically. The genre is also not new, having a history which dates as far back as ancient Roman times. It appears however, that in general, colonisation increased the frequency of occurrence of images of indigenes in the visual production of the nineteenth century. The relationship between the colonial "self" and the indigenous "other" found expression during the nineteenth century in a variety of visual forms, such as engravings, water-colour studies, cartoons, photographs, and so on made by travellers, explorers and itinerant artists. Images produced in colonial Natal, as was the case in colonies elsewhere in Africa, were often taken to the mother country for circulation or exhibition, as documentary records of the appearance of the "other", or to
indicate the exotic character of the new foreign country and its indigenous inhabitants. Likewise, in the mother country, images, usually in the form of engravings were also produced as fantasies or projections of life in the colony, eg *Emigration: detailing the progress and vicissitudes of an emigrant* (sa) (fig 11).3

Since the British occupation of Natal in 1843, various settler groups arrived in the province from about 1848 onwards4 probably as a result of an advertising campaign in which Natal was presented as the ideal colony. Alan Hattersley (1949: 1) recorded that Natal was advertised in Britain as a "field for colonisation ...", having already described it in an earlier text as the "fashionable new colony ..." (Hattersley 1940: 11). The result was the presence in Natal of various cultural groups towards the second half of the century: British, Yorkshire, Scottish, and Dutch/Afrikaner in addition to the indigenous Zulu groups.

Not only did these settlers in Natal represent a strong Victorian presence which prevailed well into the twentieth century – they also brought with them a particular way of looking and observing, based in the history of conventions for representing the human form. This slanted perception, applied to the South African *indigene*, was characteristically based in a position of colonialist power. According to Patrick Brantlinger (1986: 185) there was, for the Victorian, only one civilisation with one truth and one religion, constituting all else as anarchy. Hence, culture, being European and therefore superior and elevated, was equated with power and thus became a tool for differentiation (Brantlinger 1986: 186), also in the production of visual images.

In keeping with the colonial spirit, a fascination developed during the nineteenth century among artists, travellers, missionaries and colonists with the unknown "other". Missionaries in particular played an important role in the documenting of indigenous groups (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 16). Artists and travellers recorded their perceptions and experiences of
the "other" either in written or visual form, or both, for example William John Burchell (1781-1869) in his *Travels in the interior of South Africa* (Fransen 1981: 127). The British Percy Dixon (1862-1924) recorded the exotic character of the South African landscape to be shown and sold in London (Hillebrand 1986: 31) and the explorer artist George French Angas (1822-1886) exhibited the drawings he made on his journeys throughout the world including Natal, once he returned to Britain (Huntley 1992: 59).

Research into the history of representation of the South African *indigene* (see Barker 1985; Brantlinger 1986; Coombes 1985; Klopper 1983 and Pieterse 1992) has shown that a tenuous relationship existed until recently, between the "other" as historical subject, and the "other" as colonial object. The discourse of colonialism is hence, according to Homi Bhabha (1986: 152), "twice inscribed". Angas' representations of Zulu personages in *The kafirs illustrated* (1849) reveal how the artist's quest for realism and detail created images which were nevertheless not accurate in presenting historical and anthropological fact (see Klopper 1983). It appears that many of the representations of black personages made in the colonies by travellers and visiting artists during the close of the nineteenth century and during the first few decades of the twentieth century, were firstly, the outflow of similar images construed in Victorian Britain and probably known to many colonists; and secondly, these representations were often based on European/Western conventions for representing the human form in general. From this point of view, the image itself, while in the making, as well as the creator's perception of reality, were mediated by preconceived notions of appearance and identity. Bhabha (1986: 156) explained that colonial power "produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once the 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" and that it "employs a system of representation ... that is structurally similar to realism". The central question of colonial discourse focuses therefore not so much on the identity of the colonised or "other", but instead, according to Bhabha (1986: 151), on the "mode of representation of otherness".
Depictions of the “other” which were in circulation in Britain and in the colonies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were used to illustrate the appearance and life style of the colonial subject. Such illustrations equally reflected social attitudes to and beliefs about black people, characterised by the same dichotomies between appearance and existence. Debates were generated during the middle of the nineteenth century on issues such as “race”, “difference” and “civilisation” and much research was conducted on the identity of the black person (see Biddiss 1979, Bolt 1971, Pieterse 1992 and Walvin 1973). In this climate, Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) stated in February 1849, in the House of Commons that “Race implies difference, difference implies superiority, and superiority leads to predominance” (Bolt 1971: 16).

The self-justification of perceptions like these was often directed at the definition of the colonialist “self” and the construction of the colonist’s own social and political position as hegemonic rather than at attempting to understand the culture and identity of the “other”. Also, during the nineteenth century, ethnography as a discipline studied non-literate cultures, viewing these as “uncivilised” and “primitive”. In an attempt to define the “self”, the “other” was perceived in oppositional terms. Patricia Davison (1990: 39) defined the ethology used during the mid-nineteenth century as “a field of study that, at the time, related more to the European quest for understanding their own past than it did to objective anthropological interest”. Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882) theory of evolution was hence very popular.

White colonial superiority was summed up by Jan Niederveen Pieterse (1992: 88) as being “a political and psychological necessity to enable a tiny minority of foreigners to control the local majority”. This imperialist psychological position was only possible once nineteenth century attitudes towards blacks shifted from one of fear, which viewed the black as the enemy because “savage” (Pieterse 1992: 78 and 88), to a later mythology of the black as political subject.
Also, white supremacy justified colonial intervention in Africa, as the belief prevailed that black people were innately inferior (Bolt 1971: ix). The history of black-white relationships reflects this belief in an innate inferiority while white superiority was justified through ascribing greater intelligence and civilisation to the white man (Biddiss 1979: 21). Pieterse (1992: 41) found that many arguments and debates on the issue of black inferiority can be traced to the period of the British slave trade, as reflected in writings by Samuel Estwick and Edward Long and continued by Darwin during the nineteenth century. Annie Coombes (1985: 453) concluded that, because the African black person was perceived as incapable, the duty of the coloniser was to exploit the colony’s natural resources, thereby “to disseminate light and civilisation ...”. Colonial discourse therefore aimed to construct the “other” as inferior and degenerate, not only by comparison to the culture of the “self”, but also supported by the belief that the racial origins of the “other” were questionable. Through this “otherness”, colonial discourse could “justify conquest and ... establish systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha 1986: 154).

The ascribed inabilitys and inferiorities of black cultures were justified during the nineteenth century through research largely in Britain, into various aspects of human behaviour and make-up. Craniometry was used, for example, as a method to determine and examine intelligence. Inevitably, the black person was considered to be of a lesser intelligence (Bolt 1971: 15), as evidenced by the belief in his or her inability to think in abstract terms and to develop an alphabet and a numerical system (Bolt 1971: 14). Also, these deductions were made from comparisons between the actual cranial capacity of the head of the black person, with that of the European, and with the behaviour of the white person (Bolt 1971:19 and Encyclopaedia Britannica 1929: 640 and 641). These perceptions of black difference and otherness not only led to the creation of a number of stereotypes, circulated in the form of cartoons in the media – journals, magazines and newspapers – but to a number of exhibitions, known as colonial exhibitions, in Britain and Europe towards the end of the
nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The actual people were put on display at these exhibitions.

These colonial exhibitions turned the colonised into an object of knowledge. To illustrate the belief in an evolutionary ladder, the colonial or imperial and the missionary exhibitions\(^9\) became propaganda outlets for national self-evaluation (Pieterse 1992: 96). Coombes (1985: 456-457) analysed ways in which the African was posed as a live spectacle, as "more animal than human ...," as child-like, and as a curiosity. So-called "primitive" people were also objectified, by being considered as the "trophies of victory ..." (Pieterse 1992: 95). The story of Sara Baartman (Arnold 1996: 25-26, Kirby 1949 and Pieterse 1992: 181-182) is but one reflection, in the long history of putting foreigners on display in Europe,\(^{10}\) of the extent to which the identity of the black person was reduced to physical appearance as an oddity. Similarly, during 1803, so-called "Hottentot" men and women were put on display at the home of the naturalist Sir Joseph Banks (Honour 1989b: 52); and Zulu and San exhibitions were regularly held in Britain during the close of the nineteenth century, arranged by William Leonard Hunt (1838-1929) (Peacock 1999: 81-106). The Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg in 1936, likewise, displayed actual "Bushmen" as curiosities and as museum objects (Gordon 1999: 269).

Similarly, in 1873 Frederick Portal’s book on colour symbolism, *Des couleurs symboliques dans l'antiquité le moyen age, et le temp modernes* (Boime 1990: 2) presented the colour black as having negative associations. According to this text, black is said to be the symbol of evil and falsity, black is not a color, but rather the negative of all nuances and what they represent. Thus red represents divine love; but united to black it represents infernal love, egotism, hatred and all the passions of degraded man (Boime 1990: 2).
Boime further observed that these studies of colour lead to symbolic readings of black and white, for example white can be associated with divinity, light, harmony and perfection while black represents evil, the demonic, darkness, ugliness, vice, moral degradation and so on. Such symbolic interpretation of colour, particularly in its binary configuration and due to its pertinent occurrence in the Bible, was given credence by nineteenth century colonialism as a justifiable basis for difference (see Dietrich 1993).

The image of the black person was generally viewed during the Victorian-colonial period from a position of power: as slave, as depraved and as idle. According to Pieterse (1992: 97) humour was integral to the culture of domination since humour added an edge of contempt. The perception of the black person as incapable was also used by colonialism to justify colonial intervention in “primitive” societies as legitimate (Pieterse 1992: 91). British-Victorian attitudes towards black people as inferior, and generally as problematic in behaviour, were also affected, justified and informed by various historical events such as the Indian Mutiny (1865), the American Civil War (1861-5), the second Maori War (1860-70) and so on (Biddiss 1979: 21). Victorian Britain also produced much research, as well as cartoons, drawings and other images of black people, in which their identities were explored as “other” because different in many ways. These depictions of black people range in general from degrading images to exotic and over-romanticised representations. Once the coloniser accepted that the threat posed by the savage disappeared, the black person was seen from a decorative point of view (Pieterse 1992: 95), hence as exotic. Pieterse (1992: 95) also pointed out that the enjoyment of the decorative and the exotic can be seen as yet another manifestation of exploitation. Enjoyment in this sense demanded overlooking the identity of the indigene and instead inscribing a characteristic which the coloniser required.
Stainbank was almost certainly familiar with some of the representations of black people in the colonies, and in the history of art. She certainly was familiar with some cartoons depicting black people in negative contexts, such as the popular *Life in Philadelphia* series (fig 12). This series by Edward Williams Clay was made between 1828 and 1830 and consists of 14 coloured etchings (Honour 1989b: 58). The artist here used black personages as vehicles to ridicule contemporary clothing fashions by constructing these personages as clumsy and awkward and clothing them in such fashions. These prints were imitated in New York and eventually, by the 1830s, had found their way to Britain (Honour 1989b: 60). Negative and stereotypical images of black people were perpetuated and widely disseminated through print portfolios of this kind.

Stainbank also had in her collection of reference materials a portfolio of lithographs and engravings published in London during the 1820s, of the various black cultural groups of southern Africa (fig 13). These engravings were intended as topographically "correct" and hence can be seen as transmitting "information" on the "other". The Stainbank Archives also contain a large collection of articles from magazines and journals such as the *Illustrated London News* on the customs, habits and cultural practices of various African and Aboriginal cultural groups (fig 14), indicating Stainbank's intense interest in cultural differences and "otherness".

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Victorian and colonial attitudes towards "race", "civilisation" and "difference" informed the representation of indigenous people in Natal. Since many artists had direct contact with the Natal *indigene*, their representations were often based on direct observation, but were informed and mediated by prevailing Victorian conventions for art making and for depicting the human form. When Stainbank began in earnest in the 1920s to make images of African people she saw and knew, audiences in both Natal and Britain were ambivalent in their attitudes towards representations of the "Native" or "Negroid" form in the visual arts. The strong influence of
African and other tribal artefacts on the development of modernism in Europe had also contributed to it being branded as "decadent".¹³

Nevertheless, despite a negative reception during the nineteenth century of images of "others" in painting and sculpture in South Africa, an increasing number of researchers, academics, museologists et al became interested in the indigenous people of this country. Alfred Duggan-Cronin (1874-1954) managed to establish in 1925 at Kamfersdam near Kimberley, the first so-called Bantu gallery in South Africa (Humphreys 1961: 73). He had been collecting artefacts and photographs of the various indigenous cultural groups of the country in order to document and reflect those cultures whose perpetuation he felt was under threat from Westernisation. By the time this gallery had been established, Anthropology, defined as the study of "human cultural diversity" (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 16), had been introduced at university level in South Africa as a credible, legitimate field of study, first in 1921 at the University of Cape Town (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 16) and then in 1923 at the University of the Witwatersrand (Hammond-Tooke 1997: 34).¹⁴ The "other" also manifested itself later, positively, in a variety of visual forms such as those found on ceramic ware, in interior decorating, in fabric design and so on.

Art in Natal at the end of the Victorian era

Esmé Berman (1983: 1) has expressed the opinion that, even though most of the colonists during the middle of the nineteenth century were hobbyists, and produced good water-colour paintings and sketches, "they had no indigenous tradition to call upon and certainly were unaware of or unimpressed by the wealth of prehistoric art with which the country was so liberally endowed". These mostly amateur artists hence looked to Europe, and particularly to Britain, for leadership in aesthetic matters. It is therefore not surprising that, before the formation of the Union of South
Africa in 1910, determinants of styles, fashions and trends in art in Natal came from London. Most of Natal's white population was English speaking (Hillebrand 1986: 10) either because they were British by birth, or were of British descent (Krut 1983: 160). The view of Britain as "home" ensured the perpetuation of British culture through communication between Natal and Britain, facilitated by Durban being a harbour town (Bell 1988: 15). Local newspapers also paid much attention to British art (Bell 1988: 15), which was sought-after.

In art circles in Natal, the Royal Academy in London was considered the ideal, as evident from the strong Victorian character of the Natal Society of Artists, established in 1907 by Cathcart William Methven (1849-1925) (Hillebrand 1986: 10). Art Schools in South Africa during the first few decades of the twentieth century were generally shaped by academic traditions from Britain. Likewise, the Durban Art Gallery had "the most comprehensive collection of British art in South Africa ..." (Hillebrand 1986:16), and it celebrated its opening in 1911 with a collection of paintings which were largely Victorian in character.

Methven certainly exerted a strong influence on art in Natal at the time. According to Hillebrand (1986: 24) he subscribed to Victorian norms for painting. Since white Natalians upheld British culture in the absence of their own South African cultural identity, these norms for art, which were promoted by Methven prevailed, and acted as guides for the making and appreciation of art. Typically, these norms involved a direct, "worthy" subject matter such as the Natal landscape; a polished finish; accurate draughtsmanship; detailed observation; realistic renderings ie the observation and representation of volumes in space; and a carefully planned composition (Hillebrand 1986: 18). Methven was interested in landscape painting, focusing on Natal scenery from Durban to the Natal Midlands and the Drakensberg. Hillebrand (1986: 27) tells of his belief that painting should be "ennobling" and should reflect grandeur and "breadth of vision". His painting Durban bay from Claremont (1891) was
exhibited at the Natal Society of Artist's exhibition in 1910, and was considered the painting of the year (Hillebrand 1986: 26). It is therefore not surprising to learn that Methven rejected Post Impressionism on the grounds of its lack of realism (Hillebrand 1986: 29).

The annual exhibition of the Natal Society of Artists, known as the July Exhibition, seemed to be dominated by the few artists who had some form of art education from the Academy itself: aside from Methven, Wallace Paton (1874-1948) and Gwelo Goodman (1871-1939) had also set the norm. These July exhibitions were designed to coincide with the influx of holiday makers and visitors to Durban (Bell 1988: 16) and, because artists from the whole country could participate, it soon became the show piece of South African art (Berman 1983: 296).

A deliberately Victorian input was further extended into the twentieth century by Leo François (1870-1938), especially after his election as chairman of the Natal Society of Artists in 1918 (Berman 1983: 177). He deliberately set out to model the Society on the Royal Academy, thereby perpetuating conservatism in art production. This conservatism must have included a negative attitude to the representation of black personages in art, judging from the kinds of genres it promoted. As the July exhibition was intended to be the South African equivalent of the Royal Academy's summer exhibition (Hillebrand 1986: 40), the subject matter and visual form expounded by this conservatism probably appeared to many artists as the ideal. However, the positive aspect of this bias was that the focus on draughtsmanship and composition provided many artists with a sound basis for their work. Yet François' agenda was to unify white South African artists into a single South African identity – a patriotic quest he had already attempted in 1910 while in the Cape (Bell 1988: 84). It also seems that, for François, this identity was to be found in landscape painting since "very essentially an art of isolation from Europe, must perforce develop on its own distinctive lines ... above all demonstrative of the peculiar characteristics of the country and its people" (Bell 1988: 85). François,
who wrote on art under the pseudonym “Vermilion” in the local press, mainly *The Natal Mercury*, made his preference for landscape painting, a preference shared by Methven, known, as well as his belief that Hugo Naude (1869-1941), Goodman and Jan Ernst Abraham Volschenk (1853-1936) were the three great South African painters. François also attached importance to an overseas training in art as he felt this would provide many solutions to some problems in South African art (Hillebrand 1986: 54). In *The Natal Mercury* he (Vermilion 1930a) explained that “figure painting and figure composition is by no means the forte of South African artists in spite of their early College training ... “.

It was in this Victorian-colonial context that Stainbank, aged 17, entered the Durban School of Art in 1916 to study sculpture (Webb 1985: 51). The School was conservative and steeped in Victorian values. According to Webb (1985: 51) “[t]here were no facilities for modelling or carving or sculpture but students were taught painting and were taken on sketching expeditions”. Stainbank stated that prior to her arrival at the Royal College of Art, she “never had a sculptor teaching [her]” (Adderley 1990: 99). John Adams, the British pottery instructor at the Royal College of Art in London, took over the headship of the Art School from William Tottendell Venner in 1915 and allowed Stainbank to work on sculpture in the attic of the building (Webb 1985: 51).

Like Venner, Adams studied art in London at the Royal College of Art (Rees 1957: 17), and based his teaching of art on the South Kensington model (Bell 1988: 17). He was appointed as the pottery teacher at the Durban College (Rees 1957: 89) and envisaged developing the art school at the College in such a manner that it educated not only artists but also art teachers. The College would also provide overseas scholarships (Rees 1957: 90), presumably to study at the Royal College of Art as this was his *alma mater*. 
While Adams was more progressive in his teaching than Venner (Bell 1988:18), his teaching was no doubt still academic and conservative due to his British education. Stainbank’s biographer and step-daughter Mary Webb (1985: 51) recorded that

\[\text{[t]he Life Class was an amusing affair. The models were chastely swathed in muslin and students were not encouraged to draw too realistically … … So Mary learnt her anatomy from a medical book she bought … …} \]

In his conservatism, Adams hence contributed to the perpetuation of Victorian norms and tastes in art in Natal as reflected in his intentions to "lay good foundations for the future prosperity of this Art School, as well as for the future of art in Natal" (Rees 1957: 90 and 91).

Adams, as well as Alfred Martin (1874-1939), who also studied art in London, were Stainbank’s teachers at the Durban School of Art. Even though Martin was the Painting instructor, who had studied in Britain under Augustus John (1878-1961), he taught Stainbank to cast in plaster of Paris (Webb 1985: 52). They imparted the necessary skills in drawing, carving and casting to Stainbank. Through these two teachers, the British School had its impact on Stainbank’s work, notably the idea of "truth to materials" (Hillebrand 1993: 29). Stainbank was praised for her artistic ability and was encouraged, on the grounds of works such as Miserable Elizabeth (1921) (fig 2), to study at the Royal College of Art in London. The Royal College, together with the Royal Academy, also in London, formed the role models for the conservative aesthetic norms prevalent in Natal, thereby being considered by many artists and art students as the ideal institutions for further study.

Despite this rigid training, Stainbank herself appeared fearless at applying the techniques and conventions, traditionally reserved for depicting portrait busts of important historical figures, to represent the identity of the indigenous people with whom she grew up on the farm in Durban. The
portrait busts Stainbank made while studying at the Durban School of Art followed the convention which has been historically set for portrait busts: a naturalistic rendering of the full head of the sitter in which an accurate representation of the features is of prime concern. Also, the portrait bust could not be treated in an overtly gestural manner, as this would interfere with the likeness of the sitter. Even though the European avant-garde had by the 1920s reacted against most of the fundamental art institutions and had posed aesthetic alternatives, the prevailing conservatism in South Africa did not accommodate such alternatives. *Miserable Elizabeth* (1921)(fig 2) exemplifies the conventions prescribed for portraiture which Stainbank adhered to: a naturalistic rendering, adhering to verisimilitude. The portrait is based in the careful observation of the facial features of the sitter. The work is representational and life-like and contains the various idiosyncrasies of a naturalistic portrait study: the sagging skin around the mouth and the heavy eyelids. The work is now painted, although a newspaper article dated to 1921, reporting on the work done at the Durban School of Art, indicates, from the accompanying photograph, an unpainted head.

Recent feminist scholarship (Nochlin 1977 and Broude & Garrard 1982) has revealed that the history of art in the West had been presented as "universal" ie as representative of Western culture in totality, despite the fact that artists had traditionally been men, to the exclusion of women. The visual conventions developed since earliest times, but particularly since the Renaissance, to depict objects in space can hence equally be considered man-made. When Stainbank acquired the methods and techniques for representation while an art student at the Durban School of Art, and embarked on the process of formulating her own visual language, her studies were, implicitly and probably uncritically too, based in such man-made conventions as these had been perpetuated by her lecturers, who were exclusively men.
Yet, despite this academic training, Stainbank subverted the convention of the portrait bust in *Miserable Elizabeth* (1921)(fig 2).20 The genre of the portrait bust was developed and devised by artists (who were male) and who usually reserved it for the heroic or the important, to commemorate the person and/or the deed. The form used for portrait busts has developed since Roman times into a convention which demanded that the portrait be somewhat idealised, detailed and realistic, and executed in a technique in which the gesture of the artist is underplayed in favour of a focus on the appearance of the sitter. Stainbank used this convention to represent a marginalised identity, namely that of a woman who is also colonised. Elizabeth was not an important person – she was a black woman working as a domestic servant on a colonial farm in Natal (Webb 1985: 15 and 41). Not only did Stainbank here subvert convention but she also addressed the authority of that convention: the male Creative Genius presented the “self” as in control of his subject, and according to a visual structure formulated to glorify the achievements of its own (man-made) history. Yet Stainbank as a woman represented another woman who, because unknown, was historically not significant.

A colonial construct rendered Elizabeth insignificant because she was “other”. Stainbank herself was, likewise, marginalised by being the female “other” to male history, culture and conventions. Inevitably the relationship between Stainbank as an artist and Elizabeth as sitter invites a feminist discourse to intervene. Instead of the usual coloniser (male):colonised (female) relationship in operation when the male artist represented the female model, Stainbank as artist (who is the “coloniser” of vision) is marginalised by the identical convention she employed to represent Elizabeth as cultural or colonial “other”. Stainbank’s position as artist is therefore complex: she simultaneously represented Elizabeth as “other” through using a process of representation and a visual “language” which the Empire, as authority, employed (truth to nature, verisimilitude, “finish” etc.). Yet, Stainbank subverted that authority and its history by choosing as subject matter the portrait of a seemingly insignificant “other”.

30
This subversion of an existing order to dismantle stereotypes and to create new meanings recalls Luce Irigaray’s critique of Jacques Lacan’s Symbolic Order (see Lacan 1977 and Irigaray 1985).21

The way in which Stainbank observed the female model can hence not be likened to the “male gaze” (see Berger 1972 and Nead 1992),22 a way of looking in which the female body becomes objectified. By not positioning herself as the artist in control of vision/perception and by implication also of the subject matter, Stainbank constituted herself as the subjective observer of the woman who is, like herself, woman; hence the “same”. Stainbank observed (rather than gazed) from the point of view of her experience of her subject, rather than looking in order to colonise. In this manner, Stainbank avoided stereotypical views of the indigene. Elizabeth is different in terms of her own cultural construct as well as of her adopted social position.23 It is important to note that Stainbank’s life on a colonial farm, living and working alongside indigenous people in a mutually supportive relationship, contributed to her representations as in sympathy with, and identifying with, the indigene. Her intimate knowledge of indigenous life prevented her from creating stereotypical representations and from objectifying the indigene. The ambivalent positions of Stainbank as “self” but simultaneously as “other” confirms Bhabha’s attitudes to fixed polarities in colonial discourse as problematic (see Bhabha 1984a and 1986).

Stainbank did not find it necessary to idealise Elizabeth even though she was no dignitary. Instead, she presented Elizabeth as dignified per se. Elizabeth wears her turban and, with her eyes slightly lowered and without a hint of a smile, creates the appearance of a person in control of herself. In comparison to work by her contemporaries such as Coert Steynberg (1905-1982), Stainbank reduced the potential reading of her own position as artist as being empowered, and in “control” of the subject. She achieved this through focusing on the appearance and personality of the sitter, rather than attempting to make a portrait bust in which the
idealisation of the sitter lent importance to the success of the sculpture. Instead, Stainbank identified with Elizabeth as sitter/subject and represented her image from the subjective position of experience and sympathy. By contrast, Anton van Wouw (1962-1945) created in sculptures such as *The kapu player* (1907)(fig 15) and *Kruger reading the Bible* (1907)(fig 16) the illusion of "truth" through detailed, accurate description of the person. The impression is created that the idealisation of the kapu player is as credible as the dignity with which the President was represented. A questionable sense of reality is hence created. The idealisation of the one image, and the dignity in the other, reflect the extent and nature of the control which the artist had over his subject matter. The realistic idiom employed to render both portraits creates a sense of reality, which does not necessarily reflect the ascribed attribute of the sitters. The truth-value does, however, reside in the ability of the artist to construct and create.

Stainbank also created a sense of truth in *Miserable Elizabeth* (1921)(fig 2). Through adding descriptive colour, she did not aim to impose a status onto the sitter, but rather to construct the identity of the sitter as individualised, yet essentially different. In comparison, *Native study* (sa)(fig 17) is a sensitive portrait of a black youth. His eyes are lowered in a gesture of respect, customary among Zulu people when faced by a superior. In this portrait, Stainbank also represented the head realistically, but unlike Van Wouw's *The kapu player* (1907)(fig 15), she did not present an idealised version of the sitter. Instead, the head is coloured a rich sienna brown, which serves to increase the verisimilitude of the work. Simultaneously, Stainbank inscribed difference through the use of colour, rather than through psychologically elevating the image or through a romanticised understanding of the sitter. This head is also different from that of *Child's head* (sa)(fig 18), which is painted a pale grey-green. In comparison, the technique used in *Native study* (sa)(fig 17) appears more robust and gestural than the gentler approach to both *Child's head* (sa)(fig
18) and *The artist’s mother* (s.a.). Likewise, the portrait of the artist’s
mother is also painted a pale grey-green.

The formal and technical differences between portraits such as these, can
be considered the beginning, in Stainbank’s career, of an awareness of
various technical and formal treatments to assist in the construction of
ethnic *difference* in visual terms. This approach to formality as a device to
aid *difference* came to fruition in Stainbank’s sculpture only after she came
into contact with more progressive visual idioms in London. The use of
colour in Stainbank’s work can be considered as upholding the notion of
ethnicity, while raising the question whether its use to inscribe *difference* is
due to Stainbank’s personal perceptions of the “other”; or, alternatively, is
*difference* here the result of her working with a convention which
constructs “truth” through naturalism and verisimilitude as dominant and
dominating over the subject depicted?

Whereas Van Wouw made use of bronze as the medium for *The kapu
player* (1907)(fig 15) Stainbank cast the heads of black personages which
she made before the 1930s in plaster of Paris. Bronze has traditionally
been a medium for sculpture, and during the nineteenth century it was
increasingly used for portrait heads and monuments. Being a lasting
medium, the portrait cast in bronze gains an implied value and
significance. *Sigcathiya* (1920-1921)(fig 3), also known as *Afana Wenkosi
or Son of God*, however, is cast in plaster of Paris, but is painted in such a
manner as to resemble bronze with a dark patina on the surface. The
sitter’s name, *Sigcathiya*, is inscribed on the base of the work. The
identity of the sitter is not clear: he resembles a photograph of a Zulu male
servant on the farm Coedmore. However, the eastern character of the
letters spelling his name, as well as the short ponytail at the back of his
head indicate that he could have been of eastern descent. There is also a
possibility that he could have been a descendant of the slaves imported
from Madagascar during the colonial period.
While it is unknown whether Stainbank saw the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska’s (1891-1915) portrait bust Horace Brodzky (1913)(fig 19), Sigcathiya (1920-1921)(fig 3) bears a similarity with this portrait. Both artists treated the upper body of the sitter as part of the base: Gaudier-Brzeska placed his bust directly onto its pedestal, without the conventional base, whereas Stainbank developed the upper body of her sitter into a geometric structure which is then placed onto its pedestal. Even more striking are the eastern type scribbles\(^{26}\) on the lower back of Gaudier-Brzeska’s bust. These scribbles resemble an Arabic or middle-eastern type of lettering whereas Stainbank’s lettering on the front of her sculpture is clearly Western but decorated with an eastern-type curvilinearity. Further similarities between these two portraits are the dark colours of the heads and the dignified airs of both sitters. Stainbank’s sculpture is, in comparison, more detailed, whereas Gaudier-Brzeska’s is more planar and faceted, tending towards the abstract. Stainbank’s concern lies with verisimilitude, whereas Gaudier-Brzeska considers likekess as well as abstract form.

Sigcathiya (1920-1921)(fig 3) illustrates the extent to which Stainbank adhered to verisimilitude without subscribing to ways of exerting control and power over her sitter. Sigcathiya’s posture suggests one of leadership, as is evident from some of the photographs in the Stainbank Archive of Zulu warriors and men on the Stainbank farm. The possibility that he was of slave descent contains the inherent suggestion that he was subjected to control, which is essentially different from the control an artist has over his/her subject matter.

These early sculptures by Stainbank are important insofar as they establish a sense of her future iconography: that of the South African, but more specifically the Natal indigene. These portraits also reflect the conservatism of Stainbank’s Durban art education, and contrast strongly with images of indigenes which she made later at the Royal College of Art in London. In an article published in *The Natal Advertiser*, a local
newspaper, dated 20 June 1922, the Head Master of the Durban School of Art reported of Stainbank’s work that “it is a pleasing feature of her work, that, unlike a good many artists, she is developing local subjects”. Webb (1985: 70) also recorded that, as a senior student at the Art School, Stainbank’s sculpture had an unusual scope and dimension and all her work had an African theme but still she felt she was searching for some means of expression that was eluding her. The time had obviously come for her to seek more advanced training so her tutors advised her to enter the Royal College of Art in London.

The extent to which the portraits by Stainbank mentioned thus far resemble the actual personages with whom she had had contact on the Stainbank farm, is not clear. There is no documentation available on the actual persons she represented, aside from a few biographic entries in her biography (see Webb 1985). There are in the Stainbank Archives many photographs of, and postcards depicting, the indigenous people of the area. These images, some of which were taken at the house at Coedmore (fig 20), probably by Stainbank herself,³⁰ support the belief that her visual interest in the indigenous people on the farm predates her studies at the Royal College of Art. Some drawings and water-colour studies Stainbank had done at the Durban School of Art also reflect a keen interest in the married Zulu woman and the Zulu warrior, e.g. Zulu warrior (c1917)(fig 21) and Studies of a Zulu woman (c1916)(fig 22). These drawings focus on accuracy of ethnographic details such as clothing and decoration, and the figures are closely observed and realistically drawn, indicating immediate contact with these models.

Stainbank and the “Native Study”

When Stainbank left the country in 1922 to continue her studies in sculpture at the Royal College of Art in London, representations of the “Native” in art in Natal were not all that well received. François, then
President of the Natal Society of Artists, published his annual report in *The Natal Mercury* of 29 September 1925 (Hillebrand 1986: 156) and remarked about works of art which reflected an African theme: "It is a well-known fact that purely Native subjects in pictures is [sic] anathema with a large number of the public in South Africa ... ". Mitra Tabrizian (Farr 1995: 25) offered a possible explanation: "Meaning only exists through differentiation — yet with uncertainty. In terms of power relations, white patriarchal society wants to make sure that meanings are fixed in order to maintain the status quo". In this sense, representations of "Native" subjects according to the visual criteria of the time, notably adhering to the dictum of "truth to nature", might have created an implication that the person depicted was elevated to the same status and owned the same significance as the genres of landscape and portraiture. While a concern with the "Native" was questioned in art, such a concern was experienced as positive in other fields of study, for example in anthropology.

During the year 1926, the German industrialist Karl Gundelfinger, who opened his office in Durban in 1900, seemed to share in Duggan-Cronin's sentiment regarding the disappearance of indigenous cultural practice in South Africa. Gundelfinger provided an annual prize of 20 guineas for "the best painting of Native life ... " (Hillebrand 1986: 129) to be awarded at the Natal Society of Artists' July exhibition. This award was designed to "induce artists to go out into the kraals to study Native life and find the inspiration that will distinguish South African work" (Vermilion 1931). In this same article in *The Natal Mercury*, Vermilion reminded artists that Gundelfinger's original intention was geared towards improving figure painting because

he was struck by the absence of figure work in the great annual show and the lack of a distinctive South African atmosphere. It is wrong to assume that he aimed at a photographic chronicling of the tribal customs and domestic habits of the aboriginal races, but he felt that we have among us people who in their kraal life and general deportment presented features which could not fail to
inspire the artist in giving something that would break away from the ordinary rut of the usual pictorial subjects.

Somehow, since the president of the Natal Society of Artists’ report in 1925, attitudes towards the representation of black personages in art seemed to have changed. The focus the Gundelfinger Prize placed on the indigenous image, together with the increased awareness of Anthropology and its quest for knowledge about the “other”, might have contributed to a raised status of the genre. Hillebrand (1986: 120-128) proposed that another reason for this might have resided in the belief that the representation of the human figure was seen by many artists as the ultimate achievement in art. Furthermore, it contained the potential of shifting the focus of art in Natal from the landscape to the figure. Gundelfinger’s intentions to conserve, through pictorial representations, tribal Zulu life, which he felt was rapidly disappearing due to Westernisation (Hillebrand 1986: 132), also meant the perpetuation of tribalism and difference.

For François, this prize meant an opportunity to establish a national identity in South African art (Hillebrand 1986: 128). In *The Natal Mercury* (10 January 1928), he explained:

> When we speak of “national” art, we do not mean “national” in its political sense at all. By it is implied an art that is distinctive, an art that is recognisable as typical of this country, either in its conception or execution, or an expression of the country’s people, their modes and habits, of life, and if such an art reaches the desired standard, it is found to be acclaimed as universal.

The first award of the Gundelfinger Prize in Natal preceded Stainbank’s return to the province from abroad by a few months. Since art in Natal had been focusing mainly on landscape painting. François, who ran a column called *Art Causerie* in *The Natal Mercury*, saw the “Native Study” as a means of breaking away from this genre. Various debates ensued among artists and critics as to what constituted the best “type” of “Native” to
represent and which “type” would be more acceptable to the public and least offensive to the *indigene*. Alfred Palmer (1877-1951), an English artist who travelled South Africa during the late 1920s to paint and draw the various indigenous peoples (Berman 1983: 319), was very specific about how he felt the *indigene* ought to be represented. François explained Palmer’s ideas in *The Natal Mercury* of 5 May 1926 (Hillebrand 1986: 130):

He does not in his delineation of native types seek the common negroid type with big flat nose and thick lips, but rather that finer cast of feature which he claims is typical of the pure-bred Bantu ....

Palmer, for whom “accuracy of draughtsmanship” (Berman 1983: 319) was of paramount importance, explained that there are in Zululand many pure-bred Zulus with features showing strong Arab characteristics — the slender high-bridged nose and thin lips. .... I don’t go after the common type. .... That is the trouble. Many people look at my pictures and say I have idealised the Natives, but I go for the finer type ... why should I take the coarse, animal, brutal negroid type when I can find a higher, finer type? (Hillebrand 1986: 130 and 131)

When one considers attitudes towards the “Native” or “Negroid” form in art simultaneously in Natal and in London during the mid-1920s, it is clear that Stainbank began her career at a time when disputes about the acceptability of representations of the “other” in art were rife. The extent to which she had been familiar with developments and disputes in Natal while she was a student at the Royal College of Art appears to be negligible. By the time Stainbank reached the Royal College of Art, there were quite a few artists in South Africa who had represented the *indigene*, for example Van Wouw, Pieter Wenning (1873-1921), and Stern.

Despite a growing interest in indigenous subjects during the 1920s, both in South Africa and abroad, Stainbank’s representations of the African
person apparently caused the Royal College of Art’s exhibition of the entries for the 1926 *Prix de Rome* to collapse in chaos (Webb 1985: 92). Later in the same year, Stainbank returned to South Africa, having graduated from the Royal College of Art with distinction but without permission to advertise this fact, presumably on the grounds that she was female. According to Vann-Hall’s journal (s.a: 335), in which Stainbank is referred to as “Elizabeth”, the situation is described as follows:

It was a peculiarity of the College that, on several occasions, it allowed distinctions to be awarded and then denied us the right to claim them as an augmentation of our Diploma. Elizabeth had been awarded [sic] Distinction for her Diploma work in the Sculpture School, had even been sent for by the examining committee and congratulated and thanked for the pleasure her splendid effort had afforded them – yet no mention of it was allowed to appear on her Diploma.

We were pleased to leave the College.

Ironically, Stainbank was also never formally accepted into the Royal College of Art on the grounds of a policy that women students were no longer permitted to study Sculpture at the College (Webb 1985: 74). She also forfeited a scholarship, which was given to another student, because her parents were not living in the Borough of London, a pre-condition of this scholarship (Webb 1985:74).34

The sculptures depicting an African theme, which Stainbank executed at the Royal College of Art, will be discussed in the next chapter. It is significant that Stainbank continued working with the theme of the South African *indigene* whilst fulfilling the requirements of the Sculpture course at the Royal College of Art by rendering modelled figures and portraits in clay, according to the projects set by her lecturers.
ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 1

1 It must be noted that, while the Victorian era came to a close during the first year or so of the twentieth century, its aftermath continued particularly in the colonies, where Victorian norms and lifestyles were upheld for a period beyond the close of the era in Britain.

2 Stainbank owned a photo album, now in the Stainbank Archives at the Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg, given to her by her uncle Robert as a Christmas gift in 1923. This album contains reproductions of photographs taken in the colonies in Africa and India.

3 Stainbank was given a book entitled Caricatures by her mother. This book consists of engravings taken from various portfolios dealing with a variety of topics, including the well-known Life in Philadelphia. While no publication details are available, most of the engravings date to the 1830s.

4 Byrne’s emigration offices date to this period. See Hattersley (1940 and 1949).

5 The term “race” was problematic during this period. See Bolt (1971) for this debate.

6 In a pamphlet entitled Considerations on the negro cause Estwick argued that Negroes belong to a different species from whites (Pieterse 1992: 41).

7 Long adopted Estwick’s arguments and published these in a pamphlet titled Candid reflections upon the negro. He divided the genus homo into 3 categories: Europeans and other humans, blacks, and orangutans (Pieterse 1992: 41).

8 Craniometry is the systematic measuring of the human skull. According to these measurements, intelligence can allegedly be deduced. The study was pioneered in Europe by Blumenbach, Camper, Morton et.al. See Gould (1981) and the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1929) vol 6.

9 Coombes (1985) draws a subtle distinction between the colonial and the missionary exhibition. While both turned the African into a spectacle, the missionary exhibition posed missionary societies as “...the more humanitarian and philanthropic in the face of colonialism” (Coombes 1985: 453).

10 See Lindfors (1999) for an account of this history.

11 See footnote no 3.

12 While the term “Native” was used to refer to the local black person, either in reality or in representations of such a person, the term “Negroid” was used in Britain to refer to art or culture of an African origin. It is also significant that the term “Negroid” was more readily associated with America as well as with primitivism, than with South Africa.

13 See the phrase “Degenerate Art” or entartete Kunst as used during the 1930s by Adolf Hitler (Harrison & Wood 1992: 423-426).
14 This acknowledgement occurred much earlier in Britain. The British Association for the Advancement of Science recognised, in 1848, ethnology as a discipline (Bolt 1971:1). This was followed a decade later by the formation of the Anthropological Society of London.

15 Berman (1983: 296) dates the formation of the NSA to 1905.


17 Goodman distinguished himself in Britain where he regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy. In Natal he was a respected artist who knew John Singer Sargeant (1856-1925) and Wilson Steer (1890-1942). His painting was popular with the public and he held a very successful exhibition in the Durban Town Hall in 1916 (Bell 1988:36).

18 According to Ogilvie (1988: 704) Venner's dates are not available. The Durban School of Art was formed, in 1907, by Venner, as part of the Natal Technical Institute (Rees 1957: 51). Venner was trained in the South Kensington method, a British method and system for teaching art, which was used in the colonies as the official teaching method for art (Krut 1983:25). Venner was of the opinion that there were no suitable subjects to paint in Durban (Hillebrand 1986:30-31), and therefore trained his students to paint and draw from copying postcards (Rees 1957:51). When Venner was transferred by the Education Department, the College Council approached Augustus Spencer (1860-1924), then head of the Royal College of Art in London, to provide a suitable art master for the art school (Rees 1957:89). Spencer was of the opinion that John Adams, who had had an outstanding career at the Royal College, was a suitable candidate (Rees 1957:89). The Durban School of Art is now the Department of Fine Art at the Technikon Natal.

19 This article is kept in the Stainbank Archives at the Voortrekker Museum. The date is written in pencil on the actual cutting, but the source of the cutting is not known.

20 There is no specific documentary evidence available in the Stainbank Archives that this was a deliberate act on Stainbank's behalf. However, there are instances in her career which indicate unequivocally that she resented the feeling of being bound by convention, and often rejected such convention. One such example is the manner in which she replaced the prescribed swags of fruit and tassels for the exterior decoration on the Public Offices in Durban in 1929. Instead, she presented grotesque heads hanging from chains. Another such instance is a reply to a questionnaire in the Campbell Collections in Durban. Here, Stainbank stated that her family was not well disposed to her studying art as they thought it was a useless career. Despite this attitude, she continued studying sculpture.

21 According to Jacques Lacan (see his essays entitled "The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud", in *Jacques Lacan Ecrits*, translated by A Sheridan [pp146-178] and "The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis" [pp 70-113]), the
unconscious is structured like a language. The infant grows up, passing through various stages to internalise, through learning a language, the Symbolic Order, which is made up of those signs, symbols, rituals etc. which regulate society. For Lacan, the position of women was problematic within this configuration, on the grounds of the difference in their anatomy and their unresolved Oedipal complex. Women, therefore, cannot be comfortably included in the Symbolic Order. Irigaray (1985: 76) explained that a solution lay in mimicry, thus miming the mimes imposed by men onto women:

"One must assume the female role [of mimicry] deliberately which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it" and added that "to play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it".

22 Whilst a feminist reading of the representation of women as "other" and as objectified is relevant, the focus of this research does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the so-called "male gaze".

23 The identity of Miserable Elizabeth as domestic servant opens up a field for further research, namely that of the representation of the servant in South African art, both in painting and in sculpture. Dorothy Kay's paintings of her servant Annie Mavata, and more recently Penny Siopis's Patience on a monument are examples of the existence of this theme.

24 It is not clear whether Stainbank knew Van Wouw, but there is a strong possibility that she was familiar with some of his sculptures.

25 Although the manner of the painting of Miserable Elizabeth appears crude, causing one to believe that Stainbank did not herself paint the work, there is no evidence to the contrary. The colour blotches at the base of the work indicate a search for the "correct" skin tones. Stainbank was aware of skin colour, as reflected in correspondence with Gladys Short (letter 5/08/1936), in which she instructed the Ceramic Studio to use specific colours for the African figurines she had cast at the Ceramic Studio.


27 According to the official translator of the Voortrekker Museum, Sinothi Thabethe, the name Sigcatyiya bears connotations of the act of frying corn. This translation remains unexplained.

28 The Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, UK, in its pamphlet accompanying the exhibition Return to life: a new look at the portrait bust held at the Leeds City Art Gallery from November 2000 to January 2001, at which Gaudier-Brzeska's portrait was exhibited, refers to these scribbles as "incised doodles".

29 Stainbank's mother indicated in an inscription she wrote at the top of the article that it was written by Alfred Martin.

30 Stainbank was a member of the Durban Camera Club and the Photographic Institute, indicating an interest in the medium. The records of her membership, however, date only to the 1930s. This
does not preclude an interest in, or her practice of, photography prior to the 1930s.

31 This information was provided by the Natal who's who of 1903.

32 See Hillebrand (1986) for a full account of Palmer's views.

33 No reference is made by Vann-Hall in her available diaries to knowledge of the "Native Study" in South Africa at the time; neither can any reference be found to this in Stainbank's correspondence. There are, however, newspaper cuttings reporting on the Gundelfinger Prize which date to the period after Stainbank's return to South Africa.

34 It is not clear whether this scholarship, awarded in 1925, was the scholarship given to Henry Moore, or to Rothenstein's daughter. Stainbank sometimes referred to the scholarship as being given to Moore, but negated this in an interview with Botha (1989b) in which she implied Rothenstein's daughter was the recipient. Moore's parents were also not residents of the Borough of London as they lived in Leeds.
CHAPTER 2

Stainbank at the Royal College of Art: modernism and primitivism

The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the changes which occurred in Stainbank's representations of the *indigene* during the four years she studied at the Royal College of Art in London (1922-1926). During this period, her depictions of the Natal Zulu altered, changing from the strictly naturalistic images executed while she was a student at the Durban School of Art to more expressive images in a variety of materials, including stone. The focus of this chapter will hence fall on aspects of sculpture made by Stainbank at the Royal College of Art in which the South African *indigene* was the subject matter; on possible sources of a modernist visual form she encountered and adopted whilst studying in London; and on related information contained in personal records belonging to Vann-Hall as first hand accounts of some of Stainbank's considerations for sculptural work. However, the absence of sufficient records requires deductions to be made about Stainbank's sculpture which, although they might appear to be speculative, are informed by data available in the Stainbank Archives and found in texts cited on the Royal College of Art and art production in Britain of the period. Such informed speculation is integral to the narrative approach adopted in this research, and is useful in the interpretation of primary sources.

During the period when Stainbank studied in London, a modernist formalistic awareness emerged in her sculpture and drawing due to the contact she had with examples of sculptures by artists usually associated with modernism in Britain. The beginnings of this awareness will be examined in this chapter. As the use of this, at the time, current visual idiom to represent the South African *indigene* appears unresolved, the relationship between modernism and representation in selected examples of Stainbank's sculptures of the period will be introduced and examined. It will be argued that Stainbank made use of some of the formal
characteristics of modernism not to subvert representation through 
expressive means but to enable her, paradoxically, to achieve a more 
"accurate" representation of her perceptions of the indigene, particularly 
within the foreign context of British art and related attitudes to "other" 
cultures she might have found equally foreign. Inevitably, this aim was not 
achieved instantly. The onset of a peculiar relationship between modernist 
form and naturalistic representation stems from the period of Stainbank's 
student years at the Royal College of Art and progressed once she was 
back in Natal. The decorative aspects of beads and dress, customary 
among South African indigenes, and the design orientation of the Royal 
College of Art suggested a way to Stainbank in which to combine the 
seemingly contradictory and anachronistic aims of modernism and 
representation.

One of the immediate reasons for the change which is evident in 
Stainbank's representations of the South African indigene can be ascribed 
to the fact that she was no longer in South Africa and began to work from 
memory. Her interest in the indigene had already been established when 
she was a student, as discussed in the previous chapter, and it is evident 
from her oeuvre that her focus on the indigene as subject matter continued 
at the Royal College of Art. Whether the postcards (fig 23) illustrating 
indigenous peoples of South Africa, sent by her mother, encouraged and 
sustained this interest in the local identity, or acted merely as gestures of 
consolation for homesickness, is not clear. However, the possibility that 
these images contributed positively towards Stainbank's interest in the 
South African indigene cannot be excluded, particularly as she stated in 
an interview (Adderley 1990: 115) that by the time she had arrived in 
London, she had "more or less my ideas formed, not all together, but I had 
them beginning".

The comparative absence of live black models at the Royal College of Art, 
in contrast to the abundance of such models at Coedmore, led Stainbank 
to work from memory. This process lent a conceptual dimension to her
sculpture, which inevitably allowed certain liberties to be taken in the rendering of form and proportion. It appears, however, that these changes were due not so much to distortion as a result of working from memory, but to the contact Stainbank had with current British attitudes to marginalised cultures. Aside from images of black people as depicted in popular culture such as cartoons and advertisements, Stainbank saw artefacts in the British and Victoria and Albert Museums produced by colonially marginalised cultures such as African and ancient Mexican cultures. The presence in her library of Vision and design by Roger Fry (1866-1934), as well as references to him in the correspondence between Stainbank and Vann-Hall during the early 1930s, strongly suggest that Stainbank was familiar with some of his theories related to "other" cultures, which were in circulation and popular at the time. In addition, Stainbank had contact at the Royal College of Art with the so-called "Leeds Group", a group of students who came from Leeds and included ia Moore, Hepworth, Edna Ginesi (b 1902) and Raymond Coxon (b 1896). Their discussions frequently revolved around notions of the "primitive" and related issues of carving as a "revived" technique for sculpture (Frayling 1987: 95). There is no evidence that Stainbank actively participated in these discussions. Webb (1985: 95) recorded that Stainbank was eager "to learn all she could about subjects related to sculpture" while she was abroad, and that she attended evening classes in a variety of art-related subjects. This indicates that Stainbank was certainly at least aware of the content of some of these discussions and that the access she had to contemporary British and European painting and sculpture further contributed to her awareness of the use of the "other" in art. However, the writings of Vann-Hall reveal that there were deeper-lying motivations for the changes evident in Stainbank's sculpture. These will also be examined in this chapter.

It will be shown that Stainbank's sculptures made at the Royal College of Art, which represent the South African indigene, were not only oppositional to her South African art education in Durban, but also to the prevailing
conservatism at the Royal College of Art. Reacting to conservative tastes and practices in London implied a reaction also to South African art, as the only two significant art teachers Stainbank had at the Durban School of Art, had both been trained in Britain. Simultaneously, Stainbank was also opposed to the currently growing tendency to primitivism in which carvings by Brancusi, Modigliani and Moore were probably amongst the first she had had direct contact with. What she objected to in these sculptures was not their formal disposition, but rather the fact that African art as a referent was viewed as emblematic for knowledge of African people. Stainbank felt that knowledge about the African people was a prerequisite for understanding African form.

Integral to an examination of a modernist formal “language” in Stainbank’s sculpture is a consideration of the nature and extent of the effect of primitivism on her work while she was studying and living in London. The primitivist/modernist impetus is central to a study of Stainbank’s sculpture, as these phenomena affected her representations of the South African *indigene* from this period onwards. The relationship between selected sculptures by Stainbank and some modernist and primitivist paintings and sculptures will also be considered.

The London art context which Stainbank entered in 1922 was a context affected by the immediately preceding First World War and shaped by the two post-Impressionist exhibitions arranged by Fry at the Grafton Gallery in London in 1910 and 1912 (Osborne 1981: 80). While detailed histories of the art produced during this period are readily available and will hence not be repeated here (see Farr 1978; Harrison 1981; Osborne 1970 and Spalding 1986), it is nevertheless necessary to mention sculptures, paintings, theories and events which affected Stainbank’s thinking as well as her visual idioms. It is important to note that modernist ideas from Europe were disseminated in Britain through exhibitions mostly of paintings and sculptures exemplifying these ideas.
By the time Stainbank arrived at the Royal College of Art, Rothenstein had already been principal of the school for two years (Frayling 1987: 88). Christopher Frayling (1987: 89) noted that Rothenstein had distanced himself from the "art for art's sake" theory of the previous century and instead focussed more on the communal and social accountability of art. Despite Rothenstein's conservative tastes in art, as evident from his writing and the series of portrait studies in his publication Men and memories (1932), he nevertheless did not agree with the previous aim of the College as merely the training of art teachers, and instilled a sense of creativity into the School (Russell 1968: 23). According to Hilary Cunliffe-Charlesworth (1991: 181), Rothenstein's aim was to educate students through the arts. Moore recalled: "But Rothenstein brought an entirely new outlook into the College. He'd known Degas and he'd known Rodin, and he didn't regard the College primarily as a teacher's training college" (James 1966: 34). According to Frayling (1987: 84), Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) visited the Royal College of Art in 1913. Rothenstein also introduced the idea of "visiting teachers" and invited Gill and Epstein onto the staff, although opposition to Epstein's appointment caused a delay until he finally took up the post as late as 1955 (Frayling 1987: 91). These invitations were probably motivated by Rothenstein's conviction that the teaching of art should be undertaken by artists and not by graduates from teachers' training courses (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 17).

Under Augustus Spencer, the previous principal, the Royal College of Art underwent some radical changes too, but these appeared directed at the structure of the school and the courses it offered, rather than at addressing the conservative identity resulting from the rigid, academic slant of the teaching at the College. Under Spencer's regime, students were expected to undertake a stricter entrance examination which lasted about six days and which tested their abilities in architecture, painting, sculpture, design and ornament (Frayling 1987: 66). Entrance to the College could hence occur either through the Board of Education or through the College's own examinations and interviews (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 492).
From the requirements of this examination, it is clear that the values of the Royal College of Art remained steeped in academic principles: copying a clay version of the mouth of Michelangelo’s *David* (1501-1504),

9 drawing an architectural object found in the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington; drawing from memory, and a charcoal drawing from life of a head, hand and foot (Frayling 1987: 69). An article on student art at the Royal College in *Studio* (vol LXXXVII and VIII: 200-203) written by a certain SBW notes that “there is a tendency at South Kensington, as in other schools, to impress certain fixed academic conventions on the students’ minds rather than coax into coherent expression any latent creative force they may possess”. Renewed emphasis was placed on design, as the head of the Design School, William Lethaby (1857-1931), felt that only once students had learnt basic design principles could they proceed to produce good works of art (Frayling 1987: 70). This emphasis on design accounts, even if only partially, for the strong sense of design and of the decorative which began emerging in Stainbank’s sculpture and drawing, particularly after her return to South Africa in 1926.

Immediately prior to Stainbank’s arrival at the Royal College of Art, the Sculpture School had also been “transformed” under the leadership of a Professor Lantèri (1848-1917). Frayling (1987: 84) quoted a student who felt Lantèri’s contribution could be found in his having turned the sculpture studio into the “cradle of the ‘new’ sculpture” from its previous identity, which had resided in “plaster casts, young gentlemen from the provinces, and retired military officers”. From this description it is clear that Lantèri’s teaching was still promoting strict academic principles based in the studying of selected sculptures from Graeco-Roman antiquity, as well as of some High Renaissance models such as Michelangelo’s *David* (1501-1504). Despite this conservatism, Cunliffe-Charlesworth (1991: 160) recorded that the Sculpture School was described as “the most important centre of social life of the College”.

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Sculpture at the Royal College of Art was also considered to be three-dimensional design achieved through modelling and not carving (Frayling 1987: 84). Within the context of a developing modernism in Europe and its impact on art in Britain, albeit delayed, the use of selected Renaissance models as prototypes reveals an attitude to sculpture, prevalent at the Royal College of Art, in which the focus was placed on narrative, verismilitude and the conventions for ideal and perfect form. When Stainbank arrived at the Royal College of Art, Lantèri had been followed by Derwent Wood (1871-1926) in 1918, but Stainbank only studied under Wood for one year, as he left the College in 1923 (Frayling 1987: 87). Wood apparently produced some decorative work and Frayling (1987: 87) explained that his Monument to the fallen of the Machine Gunners Corps (1921-1925)(fig 24) was "merely an example of how to convert 'the new sculpture' into a formula that was ultimately empty". Herbert Read (1965: 35) recalled that Wood was so engrossed in commissions for war memorials that he did very little teaching. Frances Spalding (1986: 91) expressed the opinion that these memorials generally made little if any contribution to the development of sculpture in Britain during the 1920s. Spalding's observation certainly rings true in that these memorials perpetuated a visual form which went unchallenged by similar works within the same genre. The focus of this memorial, as is the case with memorials generally, is not the creation of an autonomous object in which form overrides a reading of the subject. Instead, the aim of these monuments was primarily of a commemorative nature and hence required to be representational and naturalistic.

Rothenstein (1932: 88) was certainly aware of the difference between the art of the younger generation as represented by the sculpture of Epstein, and that of artists representing established norms: "For two centuries at least sculptors in England had been saying what they didn't mean with such skill that mere empty gesture had crystallised into tradition". His attitude to sculpture, as was the case with painting, was comparatively
conservative and academic. In *Men and memories* (1932: 225) Rothenstein stated that

the influence of continental artists, of Matisse and Picasso especially, has seduced English painters from their old dependence. Only a few among the young painters have kept their birthright, notably Stanley and Gilbert Spencer.

Rothenstein (1932: 214) further disliked Matisse’s sculpture because the artist aimed at “messiness and significance of form” whereas the sculptures of Aristide Maillol (1861-944) appealed to him (Rothenstein 1932: 86). Yet Stainbank’s view of Rothenstein was that he “respected anyone who had the courage to stand up to him” (Webb 1985: 93), indicating that he was more open-minded and receptive to new ideas than his predecessors and some of his colleagues.

Webb (1985: 93) told of Rothenstein’s expecting students to draw with well-sharpened pencils while the students preferred the “soft thick pencil[s]” which were introduced by a visiting teacher to the Royal College, Leon Underwood (1890-1975). He was much admired by the students because he allowed them more freedom in technique and materials, “as long as they achieved the right effect. Mary approved of Underwood’s ideas as they suited her” (Webb 1985: 93).

When one considers Stainbank’s student work from the Durban School of Art, executed under Adams and Martin, it is clear why Adams encouraged her to continue her interest in sculpture at the Royal College of Art. She did not favour the idea of following a career in teaching (Webb 1985: 144) and followed the advice and encouragement of her teacher. Adams aspired to the academic bent of the Royal College of Art and similarly aimed at the training of art teachers, thereby perpetuating the aims of Spencer in South Africa. Stainbank excelled in her academic training, mastering the skills of acute observation and accurate drawing of forms and volumes in space, as traditionally taught in academic institutions.
Drawings done in sepia of Michelangelo’s *David* as well as some studies of drapes and hands, e.g. *Draped man with hands* (c1920)(fig 25), reveal Stainbank’s ability to construct the illusion of three-dimensional volumes in space, as required by the academic institution. From photographs of her sculpture done at the Royal College of Art, in conjunction with these drawings from the Durban School of Art, it is clear that Stainbank had much ability and was successful in rendering the human figure and portrait busts according to this academic norm. For her entrance examination to the Royal College of Art, Stainbank had to model a head from life as well as “an anatomical panel showing bones, muscles, etc.” (Webb 1985: 73).

It is evident from Vann-Hall’s writings that once Stainbank had settled at the Royal College, she took up an oppositional stance to the academic nature of her training, yet simultaneously disagreed with the “new” tendency emerging, considering this to be like “marching down a narrow path” (Vann-Hall sa: 315). It is not clear exactly what this “new” tendency entailed. Texts dealing with the development of work by sculptors such as Moore and Hepworth, who were both fellow students of Stainbank’s, indicate that this might have had something to do with the opposition to and dissent from Academia brought about by *avant-garde* ideas from Europe through sculptors such as Brancusi, Gaudier-Brzeska, Epstein *et al.* Vann-Hall (sa: 312-313) expressed her opinion on Stainbank’s predicament:

The younger set brought up in the dubious atmosphere of artistic appreciation had not the same virgin mind for the seed to fall on, they were choked up with preconceived ideas of “art” and rather self-consciously aware of their own presence in an exciting time – I thought that they had the showman spirit rather than the pure love of doing and making. I thought my own friend was the only unspoiled genius in the school – there was no lack of great talent but that was a different matter.

Elsen (1974: 155) presented another perspective:
While the Academy respected individuality the new sculptors wanted more: self-expression and creation rather than the imitation of art and nature. They wanted originality and the right to redefine sculpture from their own experience or rediscover what it has been at its origins, before classical antiquity and apart from Western society. Some were led thereby to examine the art of tribal cultures, which they viewed as a natural group expression uncontaminated by the naturalism and idealism of European civilisation and formed by imagination and feeling. Tribal art presented paradoxes to be bent on originality and interest in it was symptomatic rather than causal of change in early modern sculpture.

Vann-Hall (sa: 313) further recorded that Stainbank was not affected by the fashions of the time as she was "an essentially unfashionably minded person". Most importantly, Vann-Hall continued that "[i]n the revolt from representational sculpture the revolutionaries began to set up a convention of their own making – that was just as likely to become hide bound as the old".

Several texts on twentieth century sculpture provide valuable information on student attitudes and influences of the period (Elsen 1979 and Hammacher 1987). Hammacher (1987: 15) recorded the influence of Epstein's "simple, stylish and tense" forms on the sculpture of students such as Moore. Epstein's sculpture also provided certain features "to which the younger artists of the day, restless and discontented with the walls of the Royal College of Art, themselves aspired" (Hammacher 1987:15). Students probably considered the process of working from a model in a representational fashion as the display of mere technical skill whereas, for them, imaginative and abstract forms signified "creativity". Stainbank admitted to Adderley (1990: 100) that one of her teachers at the Royal College of Art "didn't want us to create anything; and of course that is exactly what I wanted to do ... to create my own shapes. I wasn't keen to copy things ... ".

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The fact that 170 students from the Royal College of Art signed the petition issued to retain Epstein's *Rima* (1925)(fig 26) in Hyde Park, London (Buckle 1963: 136), supports the view that for them, "creative" work excluded strictly representational and illusionistic working methods and approaches, and favoured exaggerated, distorted and stylised form as the bearers of "expression". A review in *Studio* (vol LXXXVII: 200) of student work from the Royal College described the exhibition as consisting of "a mass of dull, uninspired work, in some measure redeemed by an occasional glimmer of original thought or evidence of a creative instinct struggling for expression".

Yet both Moore and Hepworth agreed with Rothenstein's belief in a good academic background as the basis for experimentation (Frayling 1987: 95). Both artists had participated in discussions among the Leeds Group about carving and pre-Renaissance art, which was then generally considered to be "primitive" (Frayling 1987: 95). Gaudier-Brzeska and Epstein had earlier viewed direct carving as a means of dissociating themselves and their art making from the work of Rodin and the "impurities of Impressionism with which Rodin was associated by contemporaries" (Tillyard 1988:156). They also viewed carving as "difficult, and therefore beyond the scope of the dilettante" (Tillyard 1988:156). The interest of this generation of Royal College of Art students in the "primitive" was probably supported by Underwood, their drawing teacher. According to Hammacher (1987:14) Underwood also had a "fervent interest in, and thorough knowledge of, African plastic art".

While Stainbank diligently executed the sculpture projects set at the Royal College of Art, she continued to initiate and execute projects independent of the curriculum, in which the theme of the *indigene* prevailed. She also introduced an African theme into Royal College projects where appropriate. One of these "independent" sculptures was *Native head* (1924)(fig 4). This small head represents the face of a married Zulu woman in which Stainbank exaggerated the *isicholo*, a form of headdress
worn by married Zulu women. It is unlikely that Stainbank would have had access to Zulu models, leading one to the conclusion that this sculpture, as was the case with other sculptures depicting the indigene done while at the Royal College of Art, was made from memory, and from the remembered experiences of growing up on a farm in Natal. However, Stainbank did have in her possession photographs and postcards of images depicting either Zulu people at Coedmore, or other indigenous South African groups. These postcards were sent to Stainbank mainly by her mother, Ethel Stainbank. Stainbank, of course, also grew up with Zulu people, and had a first hand knowledge of their appearance and lifestyle.

In Native head (1924)(fig 4) Stainbank not only exaggerated the isicholo but also the earrings worn by the woman. These have a distinctly Egyptian appearance. During the 1920s the discovery of Tutankamen’s tombs was well advertised in the London press, and Stainbank kept an article from the Times dated 3 September 1925 (p14) titled “Statues of the Heretic Pharaoh”. Egyptian style and art might have dictated the stylisation of the earrings. The face of the woman also reflects distinctly oriental characteristics and Stainbank’s focus on a head with a pronounced headdress is reminiscent also of Egyptian portraits. As is the case with Sigcathiya (1920-1921)(fig 3) the eastern reference appears unclear and predates possible contact with eastern peoples whilst studying in London. Many artists associated with modernism in Europe and America were interested in oriental culture as a source for their art.

A notebook (fig 27) in the Stainbank Archives indicates unambiguously that Native head (1924)(fig 4) was made with the intention of learning the technique of bronze casting. Stainbank was under the impression that she would have had to take care of her own bronze casting once back in South Africa, hence her quest to learn the technique. In an interview with Andries Botha (1989a), she described the experience:
I did it from the very beginning ... modelling it, casting it ... . And I'll tell you exactly how I cast it in bronze. We threw just odd bits of maybe parts of handles, brass handles, and a bit of this and a bit of that. He didn't mind what we chucked into the furnace. And then we got a crucible and lifted the stuff out and buried this in a mixture of plaster and sand in the ground.

In the notebook mentioned (fig 27), Stainbank recorded in detail how the sculpture was cast and painstakingly illustrated her explanations. Despite the fact that this sculpture might have been a "test" piece (Hillebrand [1986: 139] refers to it as "experimental"), it nevertheless opens itself to criticism due to its subject matter, size and form. Rankin (1988a: 226) expressed the opinion that

[...]his work demonstrated the dangers inherent in exotic subjects, which can readily fall into the trap of descriptiveness, merely exaggerating the characteristics of otherness, as in the facial features and elongated head that give this work a slightly caricatural quality, not unlike works popular in curio shops.

It is, however, possible that Rankin's reference to curios was informed and suggested by the many figurines Stainbank made and had cast at the Olifantsfontein Studio once she was back in South Africa.

A relief panel called Lamentation (c1924)(fig 28), which possibly dates to the latter part of her studies at the Royal College together with its preparatory drawing (fig 29), reflect the extent to which Stainbank worked from memory and from a conceptual basis. In this panel, the Christ figure bearing the Cross reclines across the foreground space, whilst African women are placed in a row behind the figure, parallel to the picture surface. The mouths of these women are wide open, as if in the process of singing, which idea is supported by the rhythmic placement of the figures laterally across the background plane. The S-curve of the figures further supports the suggestion that the scene is accompanied by music, as would occur in many rituals of South African indigenous peoples. Here,
Stainbank was evidently seeking visual equivalents for a remembered experience.

As is the case with *Native head* (1924)(fig 4), the fact that Stainbank worked from memory adds a conceptual dimension also to *Lamentation* (c1924)(fig 28), despite the implications of caricature which Rankin referred to. Subsequent to this panel, the exaggerated *isicholo* became, through repeated use and decorative stylisation, an emblem for the female *indigene* in Stainbank’s sculptures and drawings. A drawing by Stainbank, dated 1925, of a Cape Dutch gabled house (fig 30), not only reflects two standing African figures on the pediment (see *Two standing figures* [1925] [fig 37]); the gateway is also topped on either side with the figure of a crouching Zulu woman, characterised by the elongated, over-stylised *isicholo*. This figure, which also appears as a plaster of Paris sculpture in a photograph of Stainbank’s final exhibition at the Royal College of Art (fig 31), is labelled on a glass negative in the artist’s collection, marked “RCA work”, as being titled *Gulliver (sa)* (fig 32). This work recalls Gaudier-Brzeska’s *Crouching figure* (1913-1914) in that this figure, as does *Gulliver (sa)* (fig 32), is folding in on itself. Gaudier-Brzeska’s figure is organic, whereas Stainbank’s figure is geometric, yet the European artist’s sculpture could have provided Stainbank with a visual solution to a formal and technical problem. Despite Gaudier-Brzeska’s figure carrying no reference to an African identity, Stainbank realised the potential the crouching figure held for her sculpture. It enabled her to extend the *isicholo* along the entire length of the back, thereby creating a form which is compact and monumental, and without having to consider the technical difficulties of how to support such an elongated, protruding form. The “independent” projects, such as *Gulliver (sa)* (fig 32), which Stainbank executed at the Royal College of Art, reflect her concern with an African iconography at a time when South African audiences rejected such representations, and when British art was beginning to show an awareness of European primitivism.
By the time Stainbank began carving in stone, probably during 1924-1925, Hepworth, as did Moore, had already carved some stone sculptures at the Royal College of Art, which Stainbank most probably saw. It is significant to note that, by this time in her career, carving as a method of sculpting was not new to Stainbank: as a child she carved figures and animals from soft wood found in the bush near the house (Webb 1985: 13), and she carved decorations on furniture and picture frames (Webb 1985: 15). Stainbank’s contact with Moore and Hepworth’s carvings probably confirmed her interest in the technique and acted as encouragement to continue carving as a technique for projects which had not been set by her teachers. The experimental and progressive implications which carving held at the Royal College of Art, must have appealed to Stainbank and allowed her to freely refer to her favourite subject matter.

It is possible, however, that Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6), begun at the Royal College and completed in South Africa, was Stainbank’s first carving in stone. Throughout her biography on Stainbank, Webb (1985) recorded that the artist was *au fait* with the techniques of carving in wood before she went to London. In Stainbank’s library are a few texts on carving techniques which she signed and dated “Coedmore 1919”. These texts are David Denning’s *Woodcarving for amateurs* and George Jack’s text *Woodcarving; design and workmanship*.

Frayling (1987: 95) recorded that by 1921, Hepworth began experimenting “from within” (rather than from influences at the College) with “direct carving” - a technique not taught at the time at the Royal College of Art. Modelling and not carving was considered in academic circles to be the best introduction to learn about sculpture (Hammacher 1987: 15). In this vein the example set by Rodin was considered to be the preservation and continuation of this Renaissance tradition (Hammacher 1987: 15). Charles Harrison (1981: 209) considered Brancusi’s pre-war reductivist carvings as having posed a challenge to Rodin’s modelling, implying that, by the time
Hepworth and Moore had reintroduced carving at the Royal College, a precedent in carved sculpture had already existed in Britain. In Studio (vol LXXXIX: 313) a photograph of a carved war memorial by a certain Vernon Blacke is described as a “direct carving”. The accompanying review talks of Blacke’s method of carving as permissible: “it is rugged, forcible and direct”, indicating an acceptance of carving as a technique in sculpture.23 The stonemason Gill also carved works in wood or stone, which were displayed before the 1920s, and Gaudier-Brzeska exhibited carvings in stone at the Grafton Gallery in 1914.24 By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, the presence of sculptors who had worked and exhibited in Britain, such as Gaudier-Brzeska, even though only until his death during the First World War, Gill and Epstein, must have had a positive effect on the re-emergence of carving as a specifically modernist method of making sculpture.

One of the first sculptors to exhibit carvings in London after the First World War was Dobson. During November of 1921 he held a one-person exhibition at the Leicester Galleries and included The man child25 (Spalding 1986:93). Epstein had also by then made use of carving for his more expressive sculptures, whereas he reserved modelling for his more conservative figurative and portrait studies. His focus on modelling, however, separated him, particularly after the war, from the younger generation who used carving as a means to oppose the older generation’s conservatism. It is possible that Stainbank viewed the occurrence of carving among the younger generation of British sculptors as an incentive for making her own carvings, and that she therefore came to associate modelling with conservatism in art. Sculpture in Natal during the first two decades of the twentieth century was largely absent, and the few sculptors present, such as Alfred Martin, preferred modelled images.

Hammacher (1987: 22) concurred with Frayling that the impetus for carving at the Royal College came from “within”: 59
there can be no doubt that the impulse to embark upon the dialogue with stone carving came from within. It was taught by no professor, prescribed by no critic. It was a new physical and psychological experiment, an experiment rich in promise and warranted by examples from the ancient civilizations.

Contrary to these opinions, Spalding (1986: 74) considered the work of Gill to be responsible for heading a return to carving during the second decade of the twentieth century.

At Westminster Cathedral, Gill carved the Stations of the cross (1914-1919).26 Stainbank was undoubtedly familiar with this work, as in 1923-1924 she traced Gill’s working drawings for this work. These she found in the Drill Room at the Victoria and Albert Museum.27 It is also important to note that Moore and Hepworth came from Leeds to study at the Royal College of Art a few years prior to Stainbank’s arrival. While it is highly unlikely that Stainbank would have seen any of either Gill or Epstein’s sculptures while she was still in South Africa, it is likely that the two artists from Leeds had either seen some of these sculptures or reproductions thereof. In the nearby Bradford, Gill carved St Anthony of Padua (1919-1920)28 for St Cuthbert’s Church, as well as some gravestones for Mrs Bertha Rothenstein (1912) in the Jewish Cemetery (Carey 1998:12). Stainbank did meet Gill during the time she was in London, but the impact of his style only emerged much later in her career.

Prior to their arrival at the Royal College of Art, Moore and Hepworth probably had contact with avant-garde works and theories through newspaper reviews, art journals and magazines in circulation at the time. In South Africa at the time, Stainbank was at a comparative disadvantage as she had restricted, if any, access to such information, except that which was passed on to her by her teachers. Stainbank said in an interview that “I didn’t see anything ‘till I got to the art school. I didn’t know of Rembrandt or anybody” (Adderley 1990: 95). The American collector John Quinn had been collecting modern sculpture, particularly Vorticist works, and took
most of Epstein’s work in his collection to the United States before 1920 (Harrison 1981: 210), making it unlikely that either Stainbank, Moore or Hepworth would have seen many actual examples of Epstein’s sculpture. Stainbank did, however, refer in an interview with Adderley (1990: 110) to an exhibition Epstein had while she was an art student in London. She was invited, as was customary at the time, along with art students from other schools, to attend the private viewing of the work.29 When asked whether anything in particular impressed her at this exhibition, she replied: “Well you know I had my own ideas” (Adderley 1990:110). This statement indicates that Stainbank considered her working methods as independent of avant-garde ideas, and that her conviction of her subject matter and her own perceptions was, for her, resolved.

Irrespective of who was responsible for the return to the tradition of carving, it is nevertheless important that, at this time in the history of sculpture in Britain, carving was seen as containing expressive potential, and as referring to a “primitive” or primeval source. Carving was also seen as oppositional to the canons of the Academy and as more in keeping with modernistic trends. Gill contributed significantly to the debate between modelling and carving. He received his education at the Westminster Technical Institute and not at an art school (Harrison 1981: 212). His refusal to accept the modernist division between carving and modelling, together with his strong Christian iconography, separated him from a developing British avant-garde because it prevented him from considering himself a sculptor (Harrison 1981: 213). This separation was probably further underlined by his belief in the importance of craft as expressed by John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1986)(Spalding 1986: 74).

The immediate effect of Gill’s carvings on Stainbank is difficult to assess. She owned a copy of his handmade book Sculpture. An essay in stone cutting with a preface about God, (1918) 30 in which he lucidly expressed
an opinion in which sculpture can be defined according to the act of carving:

The cutting of stone is the type of craft of the sculptor. The modelling of clay is for him merely the means of making preliminary sketches and great facility in it is not a necessity. It is not desirable to make exact models in clay, because the sort of thing which can be easily and suitably constructed in clay may not be, and generally is not, suitable for stone carving (Gill 1918: 26).

Gill also elucidated the point that the "modern mind" considered modelling as an activity to be taught in art schools, whereas carving was considered to be a technique sidelined to a technical institute (Harrison 1981: 216). He opposed this notion by attempting to unify art and craft in his quest for modern sculpture, thereby opposing the mainstream view that carving was a subordinate activity (Harrison 1981: 216). These ideas must have impressed Stainbank, as she had been carving since an early age. Stainbank also admitted that she preferred carving to modelling (Webb 1985: 4).

The notion of "truth to materials", according to Hillebrand (1993: 29), was instilled in Stainbank prior to her arrival at the Royal College of Art, by her teachers at the Durban School of Art. Her encounter with the same idea in London hence acted as affirmation of, rather than as opposition to, her own work and knowledge. In an interview with Botha (1989b), Stainbank said about her attitude to materials:

You must not fight against your material. Because you start with an idea and you'll find that it's fighting you all the time and it will go its way with you just guiding it into shapes. But actually especially with stone. You get a piece of stone, a big chunk of stone that looks just like a piece of stone. And you think, "well, what will I do with it now? I want to do so-and-so ....". But nine out of ten cases you'll find that you guide it at quite a different way altogether. It has a spirit of its own .... Well, it's all alive, you must remember.
Nevertheless, Gill’s explanations of “truth to materials" became the slogan in Britain of the younger generation of the 1920s (Harrison 1981: 213). The quality of the final carving, according to him, resided in the material of the sculpture, as the sculptor accepts this quality as integral to the work. According to Sydney Tillyard (1988: 154) “truth to materials” was associated in sculpture with direct carving in stone, metal and wood (though wood was the least applicable). Tillyard (1988: 154) considered the dictum of “truth to materials” to have had “the effects of defining early Modernist sculpture as the practice of carving in these media. This represented a contraction of the boundaries established by apologists for the New Sculpture”. Pound (1916: 130) also felt that sculpture had to consider the nature of the medium, of both the tools and the matter. Cultures considered by early twentieth century standards as “primitive”, were therefore highly regarded amongst sculptors of the period, due to this attitude to carving and its materials. Also, carving is more demanding than modelling, but is aesthetically more rewarding (Farr 1978: 253). The doctrine of “truth to materials” also implies that carving was considered a purer form of art and Dennis Farr (1978: 253) stated that in Mediterranean areas, carving was considered to be the “highest form of art”. Hence, “truth to materials”, carving and modernism/primitivism went hand in hand.

During the early twentieth century carving became, in Britain as in Europe, a means of opposing the prevalent conservative definition and conception of “art". Because the renewed focus on carving was generated by an interest in the “primitive", as well as by a reconsideration of archaic Greek sculpture and of any sculpture from a culture or period considered to be “primitive", it is not surprising that the new generation of sculptors in Britain rejected classical Greek and Roman sculpture and its Renaissance applications despite these being mostly carved. The most durable artefacts remaining from ancient cultures are generally carvings and these were also considered the result of "honest labour" (Spalding 1986: 97). The “primitive", often regarded as dating to an earlier, primeval time, signified a return to an “original state" or beginning, and by making use of
carving instead of modelling, the modern sculptor instilled a sense of renewal and perpetuation by making use of a sculptural form unhampered by convention. As "primitive" works were usually carved and non-naturalistic, hence anti-classical, so the modernist sculptor viewed this direction as an avenue worthwhile to pursue. Carving took priority as the main technique of modernism due to its connection with the "primitive".

In the light of a growing awareness of the influence of primitivism in British art and aesthetics, it is significant that academic classicism considered the art of so-called "primitive" cultures as essentially lacking in content and in serious narrative discourse. Hence it was important to study Renaissance sculptures, as these works provided prototypes of technique and ideal subject matter (Connelly 1989: 187). Academic standards also upheld criteria for sculpture as found in rational thought, whereas primitive sculpture was perceived as distorted because allegedly irrational. These values persisted despite changes in attitude towards "primitive" art brought about at the turn of the century by an emerging avant-garde who viewed the non-classical nature of "primitive" art as anti-classical. This oppositional identity of primitive art was used by the avant-garde to feed their dissent with the institution (Connelly 1989: 248).

To ascertain, in the absence of sufficient records, the effect of these ideas about carving and the "primitive" on Stainbank’s sculpture, as well as the impact on Stainbank of work by the sculptors involved, is difficult. Vann-Hall’s writings (sa: 311) indicate that the sculpture studio at the Royal College of Art had undergone a radical change during the period she and Stainbank were studying there: “In the stone carving room they were cutting out heads like eggs, shaping the germ of their idea from the parent idiosyncrasies of the chance-brought stone”. Firstly, it is significant that Vann-Hall spoke of a “stone carving room”. The Archives at the Royal College of Art indicate that “direct carving” was not taught as part of the syllabus during 1921 and 1922, implying that the Royal College had recently reconsidered its attitude towards sculpture to accommodate
current trends from the Continent. It is not clear whether art school authorities decided to accept carving as part of the regular student output and set aside a room for the activity, or whether they decided to include carving in the syllabus. Secondly, Vann-Hall was probably referring to those sculptures by Moore and Hepworth which followed the reductivist example set by Brancusi and Modigliani. Modigliani’s Head (1913) (fig 33) was on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum from 1922 and as the Royal College was then housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum’s buildings (Hammacher 1987: 21), most students, including Stainbank, would have seen this carving. The Sculpture School, however, was housed in the nearby Queens Gate (Cunliffe-Charlesworth 1991: 160 and Webb 1985: 73). Brancusi’s working methods in stone became known in Britain through the work of Modigliani, and also through an essay Pound wrote on Brancusi in 1921 in which he linked the name of Gaudier-Brzeska with that of Brancusi (Spalding 1986: 99).

Vann-Hall (s.a. 312) pondered the way in which the new form of teaching and new ideas affected Stainbank:

> how she turned out freely the results of longhoarded [sic] ideas, implanted and germinating through a childhood and young studentship that was so free of the hampering training that most older students had suffered.

Moore and Hepworth, along with students from the Royal College of Art in general, visited the nearby Victoria and Albert Museum, as well as the British Museum. As Stainbank spent much time drawing in the British Museum, it is not clear whether her interest in a “primitive” idiom was sustained by any specific source beyond her existing knowledge and experience of, and her interest in, the South African indigene. What is significant however, is that Stainbank’s interest in an African subject matter was already established before she arrived in London. In a conversation with Botha (1987a) Stainbank claimed that, with regard to the
use of African imagery in the sculpture of the period in Britain, "I was doing it before they were doing it".

Stainbank's interest in an African iconography was probably confirmed by the paintings of Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956), whose one-person exhibition in Queen's Gate was held in 1924. It is most likely that, because the exhibition was held in the same street as the Sculpture School, Stainbank would therefore have seen Brangwyn's exhibition. Even if she were not aware of this exhibition, she certainly knew Brangwyn's work, as there are reproductions of some of his paintings amongst her reference materials in the Stainbank Archives (fig 34). There are similarities between Brangwyn's paintings and drawings, and the drawings Stainbank made during the period, notably the use of a buff paper for drawing with black and white crayon; the acceptance of the picture plane as flat and the arrangement of objects within the implied field; the iconography of the colony, Empire and its produce; the outlining of forms; and a general approach to the work as decorative. The full effect of Brangwyn's decorative approach appears to have found its way into Stainbank's designs only after her return to South Africa, eg the designs she submitted for a tender for the decoration for the South African Museum in Cape Town in 1933 (fig 35).

The relief-like approach to two-dimensional work, which Stainbank adopted while a student in London, could also have been the result of her interpretation of Andrea Mantegna's (c1431-1506) The introduction of the cult of Cybele at Rome (1500) which hung in the National Gallery during the entire period Stainbank was a student at the Royal College. In this work Mantegna used a flat, marble-like background plane, which is parallel to the picture surface, as a backdrop for the narrative. The figures are rendered illusionistically in front of this plane, creating the illusion of space projecting out from the picture surface into the space of the viewer. This implied space is a device which probably appealed to Stainbank, as it contained the potential for three-dimensional form. The decorative
qualities of Brangwyn’s paintings were hence combined by Stainbank with Mantegna’s pictorial and spatial structure as a means through which she could achieve a decorative, as well as sculptural, description of her subject matter.

Immediately after the First World War, African art was on display at the British and Horniman Museums in London, even though it was generally not considered to be “art” (Spalding 1986: 96). Spalding also noted two further exhibitions of African art held at the Chelsea Book Club in 1920, and another at the Goupil Gallery in 1921. These exhibitions changed opinions about the identity of African art as “art”, possibly also due to the various essays written at the time by Fry, on the artefacts of “marginalised” cultures such as African, “Bushmen”, Mesopotamian cultures, etc. An interest in artefacts considered “primitive” increased in Britain and it is important to note that the art journal Studio included articles on artefacts and art from non-Western cultures, eg Chinese silk design, Korean porcelain, etc. Significantly, during the early 1920s, articles in this journal on African art were negligible.

The period after the First World War also saw the introduction in Britain of playful fashions such as Afro-American culture; the Art Deco movement; and the development of the Omega Workshop whose designs derived from “African” Negro art (Farr 1978: 231). These styles and trends, together with the presence in Britain of sculptors from Europe, fostered a more flexible attitude towards art, and probably also instilled a tolerance for, and interest in, the artefacts of marginalised cultures. Reference to the “primitive” in art and music of the early twentieth century was, according to Sieglinde Lemke (1998: 146), considered oppositional to old value systems, yet it aided a refashioning of the identity of “self”. Jazz music was seen as negative in that it could, according to popular opinion of the period, as cited by Lemke (1998: 62 and 63), “stimulate brutality and sensuality and can cause the brain to atrophise in spheres of concept formation”. Hillebrand (1993: 30) also noted that the abhorrence of
“Negroid” imagery was then probably due to the decadence which British society associated with jazz music and singers, and an American lifestyle, which was unacceptable to British post-war conservatism. Jazz music was imported from America during 1918 (Farr 1978: 231), as an outflow from Afro-American folk music, which British society also associated with permissiveness after the War. This was seen to cause moral deterioration in society.

Another possible motivation for the use of a “primitive” reference for Stainbank came from Moore, who was criticised by the architecture Professor at the Royal College of Art, Beresford Pite (Frayling 1987: 98), for showing Etruscan influences in a drawing. Moore had carved African masks as a result of Fry’s influence (Russell 1968: 29), yet he appeared more interested in Mexican art. The fact that Rothenstein apologised on behalf of Pite for his colleague’s criticism (Russell 1968: 25) supports the view that Rothenstein was open to new developments. In addition, Moore was affected by artists such as Gaudier-Brzeska and Epstein, whose sculptures were also accessible to Stainbank, either through exhibitions or through reproductions.

There were other teachers at the Royal College of Art besides Rothenstein and Underwood, who actively encouraged students in the “new” trends. Webb (1985: 93) tells of Stainbank’s recollection of a popular teacher at the Royal College: a certain Professor Cole. He took up Wood’s place and allowed the students to express their ideas in their own way and Mary felt she was fortunate indeed to have had the chance of being at the College during his time as Professor. He liked her work and although she was the only female student, she was allowed to join the men students in all their classes.

But Stainbank did not readily accept all that she encountered at the Royal College. Vann-Hall (sa: 282-283) explained her position:
She was something quite different from the other students, for one thing she came from a “black country” — and Negro sculpture had captured the imaginations of most forward-thinking students. She was almost as full of contempt for the plagiarists as for the revilers of the negro influence … she had a unique store of naturally acquired visual standards by which she judged the thin pretensions of those who “took up” the “new” culture as a means of enriching their own poor content. They were going the wrong way about it she declared with much vigour and not little scorn; one wanted to watch the natives themselves, their wonderful carriage, the differently built bodies, quite different from the white race, - the freely used limbs that the light slipped over so easily, unbroken by the trivial differences that occurred in the form of a European; she could not put into words the exact meaning she had in mind, but negro form was the outward showing of a “different” life and growth — not merely a foreign one or a simpler one - … .

The fact that Stainbank reacted against some of the current tendencies at the Royal College of Art may be an indication that her interest in the “primitive” was a direct outflow from her life and experience in South Africa. When Botha (1987a) asked her to explain her interest in an African subject matter, she replied that it was a “sort of spirit” that fascinated her, which was due to there being “no nonsense about them. They were just earthy and natural and it appealed to me, with the African. I based my work on the Africans”. The impetus found in the British Museum and the general ethos of the Royal College of Art at the time hence supplemented and sustained this preoccupation.

Vann-Hall’s writings reveal that Stainbank was not in favour of these “primitivising” influences as she felt that works showing such sources had no idea of what “African” meant. Vann-Hall’s writings and recollections of Stainbank’s attitudes to African imagery and the so-called “primitivism” are the only known available written records elucidating the sculptor’s views. It does become clear from these diaries that Stainbank did not approve of the “primitive” as fashionable — a tendency prevailing at the Royal College at the time — and that she reacted against the conventional dictates of the
school. The panels entitled Deposition of Christ (1922-1926)(fig 36) and Lamentation (c 1924)(fig 28) together with Two standing figures (1925) (fig 37) and African couple (Sa)\(^37\) are, in addition to the sculptures already mentioned, clear indications of Stainbank's choice of an African theme. Importantly, it appears that, unlike Picasso and other modernists who used African art as a means to experiment with expressive or distorted forms which violated the norms of academicism and classicism, Stainbank's interest in the African centred on the appearance of the people as well as on the significance of this appearance as a determinant of her own identity. Through a focus on the people as subject matter, as well as identity through association, Stainbank nevertheless achieved a subjective position in the presence of her subject matter as intended by the modernists.

The next chapter will examine selected sculptures by Stainbank in which the subject matter of the indigenous South African personage was prominent. The effect on Stainbank of carving as a viable technique for sculpture will be considered and discussed against the background of an emergent primitivism in British art.
ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 2

1 Colin Rhodes (1994: 7) defined primitivism as a twentieth century phenomenon, as the reaction of artists to the idea of the primitive; the use of "primitive" artefacts as models for works of art; and an interest also in the "primitive mind". Further, according to Rhodes (1994: 8): "Primitive describes a Western event and does not imply any direct dialogue between the West and its 'Others'" since it merely points to the interest non-Western cultural groups held for the Western mind, and the manner in which the West viewed and developed attitudes towards the "primitive". Western culture considered itself until the nineteenth century as superior to all "primitive" societies and cultures. Due to the nineteenth century belief in the innate inferiority of the "other", particularly of black people (Bolt 1971: xx), colonial intervention in these countries and cultures was thus justified (Bolt 1971 and Biddiss 1979: 23).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, artists associated with primitivism began questioning these assumptions and, according to Rhodes (1994: 13), began using such assumptions as a means of subverting aspects of Western culture. This focus did not accentuate the relationship between "self" and "other" as an oppositional situation. Instead, the "other" provided a tool to subvert the cultural identity of the generic "self". Picasso, by making reference to African and Iberian sculpture in his paintings during the first decade of the twentieth century, made use of that which his own, Western culture considered to be "primitive" in order firstly to subvert his own culture of the "self". Secondly, he did not wish to represent African or Iberian culture per se through depicting the artefacts produced by these cultures. Such artefacts provided formal solutions which served to undermine the cultural position of the "self" and through which new, more adequate means for alternative and progressive expression could be sought. In this manner, artists generally associated with primitivism co-opted African art to justify social and cultural change (Rhodes 1994: 13).

The construction of the "other" as "primitive" by colonial discourse has already been discussed. Yet, artists found in this "other" a source for inspiration while seeking alternatives to restrictive Western academic norms. The "other" hence offered opportunities for, ironically, renewal and progress, as an alternative to Western norms. Rhodes (1994:74) explained: "... their aim was instead to present the primitive as a mirror to their notion of modernity, that is, to reinvigorate, rather than destroy Western society by confronting it with its deepest memories".

According to Rhodes (1994: 107), "stylistic primitivism", ie styles of visual representation which were invented to represent "primitive types", had an important effect on the development of modernism. Since its inception, modernist artists had been drawn, particularly during the latter part of the nineteenth century, to artefacts from "other" cultures such as from China and Japan during the Impressionist period. The attraction other cultures held for artists probably lay in an alternative definition of creativity, which artists might have considered to have made the creative impulse more accessible. A renewed attitude towards the nature of the creative impulse was probably seen as a feasible alternative to the stifling realism promoted and demanded by the Academy.
The perception of a "primitive" form of creation as a suitable alternative to academic classicism, was considered to be based in the intuitive and the mythic. Gaudier-Brzeska (Pound 1916: 35) explained that:

"The modern sculptor is a man [sic] who works with instinct as his inspiring force ... His work is emotional. That this sculpture has no relation to classic Greek, but that it is continuing the tradition of the barbaric people of the earth (for whom we have sympathy and admiration) I hope to have made clear".

The "primitive" suggested new visual forms and new approaches to form and space. In opposition to academic sculpture which we have come to associate with taste, perfection, finish and so on, "primitive" sculpture is not gracefully proportioned but instead distorted and caricatured (Connelly 1989: 248). Carl Einstein explained that African carved figures are oriented not towards the viewer, but towards the self and by implication hence also to society (Rhodes 1994: 117). Here, the Kantian notion of das Ding an Sich makes its way into the attitude towards the modernist work as an autonomous entity. See also the *Encyclopaedia of world art* (1958) vol XI: 706-711.

2 These images include representations of Zulu warriors and women involved in a variety of domestic activities, and were executed in watercolours, pencil and crayon on paper. Stainbank also made images of Zulu personages in clay and cast some of these in Plaster of Paris, as discussed in Chapter 1.

3 This accuracy also involves a degree of anthropological “correctness” as evident from the long debate in the press with regard to *Baya huba* (1933) to be discussed in Chapter 4.

4 Vann-Hall wrote an autobiography in the form of a novel. This manuscript, which Adderley mentioned in a conversation with the candidate, was handwritten in commercially produced diaries. These cannot be found. However, there is a typed version in the form of a novel in the Stainbank Archive. Here, Vann-Hall gives a detailed account of the days spent at the Royal College.

5 Stainbank’s numerous drawings and water-colour sketches of Zulu warriors and women were rendered in a realistic, detailed manner, in keeping with the academic aspirations of her teachers at the Durban School of Art.

6 Frayling is currently principal of the Royal College of Art. His text *The Royal College of Art. One hundred and fifty years of art and design*, published in 1987 by Barrie and Jenkins in London, provided valuable information on the general background and history of the College. While such information is relevant to this research, the scope of the present research allows only for inclusion of aspects directly related to Stainbank’s studies at the Royal College of Art.

7 Rothenstein exhibited regularly in London, as recorded in *Studio* magazine. With regard to his exhibition at the Leicester Galleries, reviewed in *Studio* vol LXXXIX: 175, Rothenstein’s drawings were described as "...as usual, rather dry and pedantic in manner ...".
Stainbank was aware of these portrait studies by Rothenstein. There are in her collection of reference materials articles amply illustrated with these drawings. She also owned a copy of Rothenstein's book *Men and memories* (1932).


Stainbank did, eventually, accept the position of Sculpture Lecturer at the Natal Technical College immediately after the Second World War.

Stainbank was awarded two prizes in book form in 1920: one for Modelling, and one for Modelling from Life. One book was on the work of Michelangelo and the other a book on Renaissance painting. Both these texts are in the Stainbank Archives.

While Moore was influenced by Fry's essay on African art, Hepworth's interest in non-European art appears negligible (Hammacher 1957: 15).

According to an interview Stainbank had with Botha, this work was done in 1923 (Botha 1989a: 14). However, the note book in which Stainbank recorded the bronze casting of this work is dated 1924, indicating that the work was probably cast and completed in 1924.

According to Eileen Krige (1950: 134), a Zulu woman is ordered by her father to put her hair into a knot or *keha* once consent for marriage has been given. Such a woman also wove her hair into a bun-type shape called *isicholo*, which indicated that she was ready for marriage and that the wedding would take place soon. According to Yvonne Winters from the Campbell Collections (interview 19 November 1997), this style of hair, which is similar to *inkeke*, dates to the period 1890-1910 and developed into a bulbous shape. Stainbank's interest in this form of headdress is evident early in her career as an artist, appearing for this first time in drawings done whilst studying at the Durban School of Art, prior to her departure for London in 1922.

In the Stainbank Archive is a postcard addressed to Stainbank from her mother, dated 23 February 1926. The inscription reads: "Cheer up, dear. I feel quite cheerful today because we have had such a nice rain. Love ES" (fig 23b). The image represented on this postcard is that of a Zulu male. Another postcard contains the image of a Zulu woman with an *isicholo* and was sent, also by Ethel Stainbank to her daughter, on 25 September 1926 (fig 23a).

In the Stainbank Archive is a postcard album given to Stainbank by her uncle Robert in 1924 that contains black and white postcards depicting the art, artefacts and architecture of ancient cultures such as Egypt, Greece and Rome.

No information is available on this work.

According to Adderley (1990: 16) Barry Hart taught students at the Royal College of Art the techniques of stone carving and he taught Stainbank to "hold the chisel" (Adderley 1990: 128).

In the dining room at Coedmore there are carved wooden picture frames which Mrs Elizabeth Keith, Stainbank's niece, acknowledged as carved by the artist at a young age. The Stainbank Archives also holds a wooden carved panel representing leaves and fruit. It is not clear whether this panel was carved by Stainbank or Vann-Hall, and whether this panel is the one referred to by Webb (1985: 95).

D. Denning's text was the 3rd edition of the book and was published in London.

This text was published in 1913 by John Hogg in London.

Here, the proviso for acceptance probably lay in the subject matter and purpose of the work, ie a war-related image intended for a memorial.

It is not the aim of this study to prove or disprove any aspects of the history of sculpture in Britain during the early 20th century. As will be pointed out in this chapter, this information is important insofar as Stainbank's knowledge and practice of carving is concerned.


These drawings are in the Stainbank Archives and are labelled in Stainbank's hand "Stations of the Cross. Tracings of Eric Gill's working drawings in the Drill Room, V+A."


It is not clear whether Epstein had an exhibition at that time, or whether the students were invited to view *Rima* (1925).

An inscription in the front cover of the book states "Gift from WWH, London 1934."

The question of distortion in African sculpture opens up an aesthetic debate which falls outside the scope of this research.

The copying of master works was part of the syllabus at the Royal College of Art. In the Stainbank Archives is a collection of drawings by Stainbank in pencil and wash of some of the so-called "primitive", pre-Renaissance work then on display at the British Museum, eg Greek vases, Etruscan art, etc.

Brangwyn visited South Africa during the 1880s. *Studio* also reproduced some of his paintings during the early 1920s, and often
referred to those on exhibition in the UK. In the Stainbank Archives are some of these reproductions cut, presumably, from the magazine.


35 According to Maria Hellman, Information Officer at the National Gallery, this work by Mantegna was on display during the entire period when Stainbank was a student in London.

36 It appears that an interest in African and "other" cultures flourished in Britain during the 1920s, eg the Omega Workshop expressed a clear interest, various exhibitions were held, and texts written etc.

CHAPTER 3

Stainbank in London: Early images of the indigene

Within the context of changing attitudes to sculpture and seeking new idioms in opposition to those promoted by the institution, as discussed in the previous chapter, Stainbank began to carve in stone.¹ This chapter will examine her sculptures which were created while she was in London, and will refer to those by artists that affected her perceptions. In addition, sculptures representing the South African indigene made whilst she was a student at the Royal College of Art, will be examined as instrumental in the defining of a visual form in Stainbank’s work which is simultaneously modernist and representational. In addition, Stainbank’s interest in “the primitive” will be investigated against the general background of British art production as well as against aspects of South African sculpture. Reference will also be made to the relevant theories of “significant form” by Clive Bell (1881-1964) and Fry.

Vann-Hall (sa: 318) described the creation by Stainbank of a figure, presumably Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6):

A figure was begun in Rhodesian red sandstone, a native woman, carrying a child on her back in the native manner. It was the beginning of her slowly evolving personal vision, a tree like growth of thought and form, shaping itself painfully from the unwilling stone . . .

Conscious striving for the material benefits of well disposed forms, and the exercise of spiritual power that strove to express itself through the inanimate material, all make firm the strong will to make things as she would have them made and not according to any recipe, however new and interesting.

It was like watching a natural force slowly, undeniably making its way through the meagre difficulties of a chance world eating them up, or pushing them aside as they were large or small.

She was unconsciously doing things differently from other people, though consciously worrying through the practical problems that were always cropping up in the
handling of a stubborn material which is being compelled
into the presentment of thought.

This carving represents a woman standing firmly on both feet carrying a
sleeping infant on her back in the manner typical of South African
indigenous peoples, and familiar to Stainbank. The photograph of
Stainbank’s final exhibition at the Royal College of Art, taken probably in
1926 (fig 31), shows Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) in an unfinished state. In an
interview with Botha (1989a) Stainbank said about this work: “I have never
really quite finished it. It’s rough”. The theme of this carving is also not
new: throughout the history of art in the West, the theme of mother and
child has often occurred in various disciplines. As Stainbank followed
courses in History of Art at the Durban School of Art, and was continuing
her studies in the subject at the Royal College of Art, it is likely that she
was familiar with examples of work by British and European artists
depicting this theme. It is also very likely that she saw Moore’s carving
Mother and child (1924-1925)(fig 38) in Hornton stone, as well as Mother
and child (1922)(fig 39) and Two heads (1924-1925)² of the same period,
and Epstein’s Maternity (1913)(fig 40). The theme of mother and child
occupied Stainbank throughout her career.

In support of the possibility that Stainbank worked from memory, or from a
mental construct of the “African woman”, it is important to record that the
Stainbank Archives holds a photograph of a Zulu woman (fig 41),
reminiscent of Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6): a woman standing erect with
beads dangling from her neck, and her body draped in a cloth. In addition,
the Stainbank Archives holds another photograph, reproduced in an
unknown magazine, of a Zulu woman with a fully developed isicholo, titled
Dignity (fig 42). The concept of dignity can loosely be translated into Zulu
as “ozazisayo”. Dudley Kidd’s text The essential kafir (1904), of which
Stainbank owned a copy, contains a photograph of a Pondo woman with
an infant on her back (fig 43). A drawing of a figure was made in pencil,
presumably by Stainbank, on the same page. This photograph is
remarkably similar to the woman depicted in Stainbank's sculpture, making it very possible that this photograph was a direct source for Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6). It appears more likely that Stainbank would have worked from her own experience and memories than that she would have followed the example set by someone she felt had no experience of Africa. Unlike Moore, she gave her sculptures metaphoric instead of descriptive titles, indicating that her concerns moved beyond the literal representation of her subject matter. Instead, she aimed at an understanding of the identity she was representing.

Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) is iconographically important from two points of view: firstly, its reception in South Africa, after Stainbank's return to the country in 1926 as a representation of the South African indigene, and secondly, it simultaneously opened up a modernist and primitivist avenue for Stainbank to follow. The art public in Natal was not aware of the formal innovations in this sculpture, hence rejected it as "gross" and "exaggerated". The conceptual nature of the image provided Stainbank with the scope to exaggerate certain aspects of the figure, such as the feet. These exaggerations led during the later months of 1927 to criticism in the local Durban press following the opening of the South African Art Institute's exhibition, of the work as caricature-like. This view is in keeping with the observation that many South African male sculptors made use of the black female figure as a vehicle for formal experimentation and expression: Steynberg, in his copper and bronze sculptures depicting stylised female figures such as Enkelringe (1948)(fig 44), not only exaggerated aspects of the figure, he also denied the figure a specific cultural and personal identity through over-simplifying and schematising facial features. Like Stainbank, he also referred to the indigene in his experimental sculptures. An essential difference though, between the two artists' representations, is that Stainbank's study centred firstly on a specific ethnic identity which she conveyed through a representational idiom. In Enkelringe (1948) and Boesmanmeidjie (1947), Steynberg, constructs the image of a woman synthetically. This image resembles the
appearance of a generalised female who adopts an African identity either through the addition of decoration (bangles on the ankles and wrists) or through the title of the sculpture. Steynberg’s sculptures therefore lend themselves more suitably to a primitivist interpretation than to a post-colonial construct of ethnic difference, as the “African” dimension of the imagery resides in form and not in ethnic characteristics. In comparison to Steynberg’s depictions of his own family such as his wife and daughter, which are rendered in a detailed and realistic manner, the formal aspects of images such as Enkelringe (1948)(fig 44) are emphasised at the expense of verisimilitude.

Stainbank’s Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6), on the other hand, is the representation of a figure with the same gender as Stainbank. Similar considerations as with Miserable Elizabeth (1921)(fig 2) apply: Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) reflects Stainbank’s experience of a woman with a child on her back, rather than the objectification of the theme.5 It is also significant to note that, at the time when Stainbank began this carving, Moore was also beginning to make sculptures using a “primitivist” source as a reference, such as Mexican sculpture, to depict the theme of mother and child. Similar to Moore’s Mother and child (1924-1925)(fig 38), Stainbank’s figure also retains the block-like structure of the stone. This acknowledgement of the medium was, upon her return to South Africa, recognised as one of the outstanding qualities of her sculpture because her material never loses its individuality. No matter how vivid may be her figures carved in stone, the result is always stone. Rodin had this amazing quality. The shape of the original stone determines her conception to great extent. The result is something primitive and at the same time civilised. It is the primitive seen through Western eyes. Miss Stainbank conceives an interest in a rough piece of stone and builds her conception into it (Vermilion 1933a).

While Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) shares a similarity with Moore’s carving in the faceting of the figure, Stainbank introduced a curvilinear movement to
lead the eye around the form, thereby enhancing its organic identity. Like the Greek Kore figure, which she was most likely familiar with,⁶ Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) stands firmly on both feet. It is possible that Stainbank was aware of the Kore type of figure, as it is represented in a book she owned, entitled The art of the Greeks by HB Walters.⁷ This text contains black and white reproductions of Kore type figures from Naxos and Samos. Moore also made a few figures during 1924 in which the reference to the Kore type is obvious, eg Standing woman (1924),⁸ a carving which Stainbank probably saw.

Whereas the Greeks introduced the device of contrapposto to animate and activate a standing figure, Stainbank achieved the same effect but through using opposite means. Instead of sacrificing the stability of the figure, which the archaic Greek sculptor achieved through posing the figure as standing on both feet with the legs straight, Stainbank retained this stability but twisted the shoulders and pelvis into opposite directions, horizontally from front to back, and vice versa. This enabled her to animate the figure whilst retaining its stability, and thereby to establish metaphorically a link between figure and earth. In this manner, a reference to “primitive” form, untainted by Western conventions and refinements, could be retained without sacrificing the meaning of “African woman”. Likewise, this device allowed Stainbank to retain the block- and stone-like rigidity of Archaic sculpture without surrendering to the anatomically correct, illusionistic and refined forms of the ensuing Classical period.

It is important to note that the decoration on Stainbank’s stone figure is in keeping with the clothes and hairstyle worn by Bhaca women on the farm Coedmore. It is also significant to note that, while Stainbank observed details such as cloth, beads and hairstyle, these were not necessarily consistently applied in this figure⁹ as her intention was not the documentation of indigenous life. Yet the figure reflects acute observation, including the face of the baby on the mother’s back¹⁰ - certainly, in terms of Moore’s “primitivism”, a foreign image. In comparison
to Moore's *Mother and child* (1922)(fig 39), the faces of both baby and mother by Moore are stylised and generalised, relying on a synthetic working method rather than on the observation of the specific. Stainbank's depiction of the baby, even though carved from memory, reflects an intense observation of the face pressed against the mother's back while holding a finger in its mouth. Both sculptures are carved and both artists juxtapose large smooth surfaces with clusters of smaller, broken planes. Moore's mother-figure has a more planar and geometric appearance, whereas Stainbank's figure appears more organic in the articulation of the body. Stainbank allows the arm of the mother-figure to move behind her waist to support the child, thereby using it as a device to guide the eye around the figure. Moore introduced this device into his sculpture at a later date in his career. These two carvings also share a robust approach to the medium, and a refusal to deny the material its own identity by allowing the natural texture and colour of the stone to become part of the image. A marked difference however, is that Stainbank's image retains the ethnic identity of the figure, whereas Moore considers the formal implications of his figures as priority.

*Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6) acts as an example to justify Stainbank's use of the female figure as not being merely a formalistic investigation into the human form, in order to show opposition to the conservatism of the Royal College of Art or as an attempt at renewing an age-old narrative. *The blue nude* (1907)11 by Henri Matisse (1869-1954) as well as the reclining women depicted by Expressionists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), continued the iconography of the reclining figure such as was established in Renaissance works by Giorgione (c1476-1510), Raphael (1483-1520), Velasquez (1599-1660) *et al.* Dissent is evident in the painting of the younger artists through an expressive use of brush marks, distorting the figure, and exaggerating non-naturalistic colour to negate Renaissance ideals of perfection and rationality.
Stainbank's Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) on the contrary is life-like in the observation of detail such as beads, hairstyle, cloth etc. Also, Stainbank's woman is not represented according to Western, patriarchal conventions devised to render women as submissive, such as reclining or in *contrapposto*. The enlarged shapes of the heads of both mother and child, and the exaggeration of the hands and feet of the mother might have been due to Stainbank's knowledge about modernist sculptural form, or the newfound freedom associated with the "new" sculpture. On the other hand, the image itself might have suggested its emphasis: a Zulu mother with her child, identified with the earth/country. British modernism appears to be lacking in this regard since the primitivist exercise dealt more with stylisation and dissent rather than with identification and suggestion.

It is significant that Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) was begun while Stainbank was in London, as the sculpture indicates the onset of a potential tension between a developing modernist idiom and a focus on a subject matter which centred on the *indigene* in Natal. *Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6) can therefore be considered the harbinger of a dichotomy in Stainbank's sculpture between the representation, in the full sense of the term, of the South African *indigene* and contemporary European conceptions of form, beauty and composition, including the definition of the modernist work of art as "autonomous". A decorative characteristic in Stainbank's sculpture offers a potential solution to the combining of what appear at first to be two mutually exclusive approaches: representation and abstraction. Stainbank amplified this binary nature of Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) through the use of metaphoric and mythic terms, implying a literary bent to the work. Importantly, *Studio* notes (unidentified article p. 271) that the "attainment of a certain decorative quality is of the chief essential in all artistic production". The decorative is here opposed to naturalism, a quality which Stainbank used for her regular, modelled projects at the Royal College of Art, and which contrasted pronouncedly with her images of *indigenes*.
Stainbank's *Nude study* (c1924),\(^{13}\) contrasts strongly with *Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6). This plaster of Paris cast of a modelled standing female typifies accepted official work from the College, and continues the realism found in earlier portraits such as *Sigcathiya* (1920-1921)(fig 3). The numerous drawings for *Nude study* (c1924) reveal a careful anatomical investigation as well as a concern for the structure and proportion of the human form. From a comparison between *Nude study* (c1924) and *Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6) it is clearly evident that Stainbank had the necessary skill to render the image of the *indigene* in sufficiently realistic terms to conform to Royal College expectations. Yet, she chose a medium and approach for her images of *indigenes*, which were directly oppositional to these expectations. There are drawings for *Nude study* (c1924) which are, contrary to the final sculpture, gestural and expressive, and in which the structure of the figure takes precedence over detail of muscles and bone. The distinction between a realistic idiom to render figures and portraits for Royal College projects, and a formalistic approach to depict the *indigene*, was hence established while Stainbank was a student in London, and continued throughout her career. It is important to note that, in preparatory drawings for figures of *indigenes*, Stainbank paid the same attention to structure, form and proportion as she did for more conventional sculptures. This leads to the understanding that Stainbank’s representations of indigenous personages are based in representation and not in abstraction.

Stainbank’s major piece *Umhlobogazi* (1925-1926)(fig 5) was presented at her final exhibition in 1926. All four aspects of the sculpture were recorded on glass negatives currently in the Stainbank Archives. While *Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6) was begun in London and completed in South Africa, *Umhlobogazi* (1925-1926) was completed in London, though never cast in a lasting material. This sculpture is a recollection in clay of M’hlopekazi, the son of M’swazi, king of Swaziland (Haggard 1951: 55). Umslopogaas, as he was known, accompanied Sir Theophilus Shepstone along with Rider Haggard to the Transvaal in 1877 to prepare for British annexation.
Haggard included the character in his book *Allan Quatermain*. Stainbank was familiar with Haggard's stories (Botha 1987a) and must have seen the accompanying illustrations. However, in conversation with Botha (1987a), she referred to the character Umslopogaas as the mythical figure, revealing that she was unaware of his actual existence.

While Haggard (1926: 74 and 75) described Umslopogaas in his autobiography as tall and thin with a fierce face and a "hole above the left temple over which the skin pulsated", always having his battle axe by his side, Stainbank represented him as short, squat and thick-set. She placed him on top of a pedestal, in a monument-like presentation, with a shield in one outstretched arm to protect a mass of figures behind him. His axe is in his other hand. On the plinth supporting the group is his name inscribed below the description "Owenza izimangalico ezweni lakubo" which roughly translates as "The one who did wonders in his fatherland".

*Umhlobogazi* (1925-1926)(fig 5) was made in terms of Rothenstein's quest for a sculpture project in which students were expected to design monuments as an independent study. Stainbank stated that the aim of the project was to design a monument to a national hero (Botha 1987a). Frayling (1987: 93) explained Rothenstein's expectation of students as follows: "instead of spending the final year preparing to become teachers, the students should be involved in real world projects for public places". Seen in the light of what Rothenstein considered to be the poor aesthetic quality of war memorials after the First World War, this project was formulated by him probably as an attempt to create an awareness of, and improve on, this current situation.

*Umhlobogazi* (1925-1926)(fig 5) indicates Stainbank's concern with iconography as running concurrently with her interest in a modernist formal idiom. She did not render the figure accurately according to his real-life appearance, as for her, the literary character of Umslopogaas constituted a metaphor for protection. The titles of some of her sculptures of the
period indicate that Stainbank wished to instill a metaphoric dimension into her depictions of figures of an African origin, for example Ozazisayo (1927) (fig 6). In this manner she favoured a conceptual as well as a literary understanding of her subject's identity, rather than representing only immediate visual appearance. Umhlobogazi (1925-1926) (fig 5) is therefore significant in that the tension introduced in Ozazisayo (1927) (fig 6) between subject matter and aesthetic form is amplified through iconography: the person Umslopogaas carries a literary meaning beyond his appearance, namely that of protector and hero. Stainbank did not create a likeness of Umslopogaas, but constructed his physique to formally enhance and reflect the tension between representation and visual form. In the Preparatory drawing for Umhlobogazi (1925) (fig 45) Stainbank attempted to retain the block-like nature of a monument's pedestal through adapting the proportions of the figures to reflect the rectangle of the pedestal. Also, by turning the image of the (allegedly mythic) hero into a monument, Stainbank celebrated the "myth of Africa", not because she considered Africa as mythical, but because it contained, for her, the reality of her South African context. It is hence also her own, African identity which Stainbank inscribed in the monument.

The difference between Stainbank's representations of the South African indigene and the modernist artist's use of a "primitive" subject matter is that her African imagery is accurate insofar as human figure, iconography, and often proportion is concerned. She was familiar with African myths, histories and stories such as that concerning Umslopogaas; she knew the beads and other decorations used by the peoples of Coedmore; she spoke the language; and photographs from her family album indicate the abundant presence of such personages on the farm where she lived. Stainbank did not employ the abstract elements of the primitivist idiom as used by Picasso in order to escape representation whilst aiming at retaining naturalism. She adopted aspects of form associated with modernism which developed in Britain as a result of various subjectivist and African impulses, but without sacrificing iconographic accuracy and
detail. It is difficult to accurately assess Umhlobogazi (1925-1926)(fig 5) from photographs. Nevertheless, it can be concluded from a comparison between Umhlobogazi (1925-1926) and Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) that Stainbank's simultaneous use of representation and stylisation resulted in an image, which is iconographically an accurate reflection of the appearance of the figure, whereas its stylisation creates a decorative and, at times, exaggerated form, thereby enhancing the dichotomy between form and subject matter.

Various drawings by Stainbank dating to 1923 and 1924 verify the argument that she wished to retain the basic proportion of the human figure whilst bearing in mind the potential for abstraction which the figure contained. These drawings also offer an explanation of Stainbank's approach and attitude to human form in works such as Umhlobogazi (1925-1926)(fig 5) and Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6). These drawings have the appearance of being conglomerate works: representation and abstraction occur simultaneously. In Drawing of the figure (1923)(fig 46) Stainbank began with a delicate pencil drawing of a female nude. She superimposed abstracted forms in harsh outline onto this figure whilst adhering to the proportions of the figure. Whether these drawings were intended as studies for sculpture, or simply as exercises in abstraction, is not clear. What is important, though, is that Stainbank began her abstraction with an accurate rendering of the human form, which suggested shapes and the appearance of distortions and exaggerations. The proportions of the figure are respected, indicating that Stainbank did not wish to distort as such: instead, the suggestion of abstraction and simplification, which she imposed onto the older drawing, creates the sense of abstraction as growing out of the figure, hence to be considered as a refinement or even a completion of the original drawing. A text on anatomy,\textsuperscript{14} obtained by Stainbank during 1921, contains diagrams of faintly drawn, standing human bodies onto which construction lines have been superimposed (fig 47). These diagrams are similar to the drawing discussed in which abstract lines were drawn onto an existing drawing, indicating the
possibility that this working method was informed by these diagrams. Stainbank's statement that her idea in sculpture was "simplification of the representational" (Adderley 1990: 111) supports this point.

In comparison to figurative work by some modernist artists, a degree of anatomical "correctness" prevails in these early drawings by Stainbank. The modernist artist often imposed abstract forms and distortion onto the human form, or even conceived of these figures as distorted. Stainbank did not disregard the basic integrity of the human figure as a prerequisite for creating a modern sculpture, as evident in Standing female figure (1923)(fig 48). Likewise, abstraction imposed onto the figure was for Stainbank not necessary in order to convey abstract ideas or form. Picasso, in this regard, made use of African and Iberian masks to displace the human figure, thereby creating art out of art, not art from reality. It appears that working in the manner described was the only avenue open to Stainbank to retain the identity of the indigene, whilst approaching the form from a modernist perspective. This approach also allowed Stainbank the benefit of choice: her sculptures could be as representational or as abstract as she wished without having to give one idiom preference. The advantage of this is that each idiom also enhances, through contrast, the visual impact of the other.

At the time when Stainbank was experimenting with her version of abstraction, Fry observed a return in the painting of the period to the construction of recessive and well-designed compositions – a view Farr (1978: 233) recounted as "a general tendency away from any form of abstraction during the 1920s – the human figure regains its traditional pre-eminence". The works of sculptors present in Britain at the time, such as Epstein, Gill and Dobson, support this view. Although these sculptors made figurative images, their interest in the "primitive", as well as the effects thereof on their work had, by that time, already established itself in their sculptures. Dobson's polished and stylised portrait of Sir Osbert Sitwell (1923)(fig 49) not only reflects the influence of Brancusi, but its
mask-like quality also suggests Dobson’s interest in African and Egyptian art. From 1923, this work was on loan to the Tate Gallery in London, where it was on display (Henry Moore Institute 2000) and probably seen by Stainbank.

The first public account of Stainbank’s sculpture, aside from the publication of *Miserable Elizabeth* (1921) in a local newspaper in Durban, was a severe criticism in the London press of the two projects she submitted for the *Prix de Rome* competition in 1926. Vann-Hall (sa: 316) recalled:

> Both were outré I suppose to eyes unaccustomed to the rather palavering efforts of former years. The stark truths of native-acquired vision, staring out through a model of European form was [sic] too much for the pure-minded Committee. It seems fantastic that one student of pronounced personality could work such havoc of apprehension in a Committee’s mind, that the final tests were declared off, because they were afraid to countenance rebellion by even judging it.

According to Vann-Hall’s journals (sa: 316), these perceptions also generated a response at the time in the press:

> A certain famous gentleman wrote to the newspaper in the agony of apprehension lest the artistic youth of the country should be contemplating the logical (to him) follow-up of their interest in the principles underlying Negro art, by marrying in the body as they had in the mind with Negro form. With ridiculous logic the old gentleman asked where would the purity of the race be, if this sort of thing were allowed to go on.

The degree of opposition from students at the Royal College of Art towards academic norms is perhaps best found in the newspaper review of the *Prix de Rome* exhibition in 1926,¹⁵ probably the one referred to by Vann-Hall above. Here, the British art critic John Collier spoke of a “deliberate cult of ugliness” prevailing at the exhibition, which seems to have been generated by the representation of a “Negroid” form or model.
which was considered "ugly". A judgment of this nature generates a debate about the relationship between "beauty" and the representation of the (ugly) object.

What is important is that Collier made a specific reference to a "negroid female dwarf – very squat and very fat with exaggerated characteristics" and ascribed the "selection of unworthy types" to students who did not "think for themselves" and hence got "carried away by the modern craze of abnormality ... they outvie one another in the pursuit of ugliness and distortion". Collier's views on art are essentially conservative and in keeping with the Royal Academy's tenets of beauty and representation. He also spoke of a "fine ideal of human beauty" which, if not honoured, will eventually lead to decadence and "will go far to ruin England". In a certain manner, these convictions about the function of art reflect many of the debates found in newspaper articles in South Africa of the period, generated particularly by Palmer in Natal. Collier's statement must also be read in light of the long history of the problematic presence of black slaves in England (see Lemke 1998, Pieterse 1992 and Walvin 1973). His response indicates the extent to which the "new" ideas in art created a schism with established norms. Clearly, this opposition was not observed in, or deduced from visual form, but was based in a host of moral and ethical issues believed to reside in form.

The sculpture Collier referred to could easily be Stainbank's Umhlobogazi (1925-1926)(fig 5), judging from photographs taken presumably, shortly before the exhibition. 1926 was the last year Stainbank spent at the Royal College of Art and she was asked, along with two male students, to represent the College at this prestigious exhibition. The sculpture she exhibited is described in her biography as "a primitive African study in her own dynamic style" whereas "[l]he two men modelled figures that were anatomically correct and academic in their approach" (Webb 1985: 92). Stainbank is quoted in a pamphlet, housed in the Campbell Collections to advertise the Retrospective Exhibition held in 1987, as having said about
this: “I did a Negroid panel, which was judged the best work at the Slade School of Art. Yet, it was rejected by the Royal Academy”. Stainbank’s sculpture caused an outcry because it did not conform to the academic and traditional styles and standards of execution and “finish” preferred by the judges. Rothenstein explained: “they won’t send anyone to Rome unless their work conforms to their traditional style. They reject anything in the modern idiom, certainly anything that shows a trace of ‘negroid’ influence” (Webb 1985: 92). It seems that it was not only the “negroid” form and subject matter which was found offensive, but also the distortion of the figures as well as the expressive handling of the clay. Stainbank did not “finish” the work according to academic norms but left the surface comparatively textured and rough. Connelly (1989: 248) indirectly confirmed this view, noting that academic classicism, being rationally-based, failed to see primitive sculpture as originating in the imagination. Instead, the “primitive” was associated with passion and superstition, both of which are not reasonable or controllable.16

In reaction to the “primitivist” impulse, Stainbank studied the foundations of formalism in sculpture according to the work of Gill and Epstein. Webb (1985: 95) recorded that Stainbank also had contact with Hepworth, by attending classes which the older woman presented in her flat. By this stage, Hepworth’s sculpture had already shown distinct “primitivist” tendencies but Webb omitted any reference to the effect Hepworth’s sculpture might have had on Stainbank. From comparisons between some carvings by Hepworth and those by Stainbank, it emerged that Hepworth’s perforated and abstracted organic shapes affected Stainbank’s carvings in wood. Most of these carvings were made after the Second World War, leading to the conclusion that Stainbank was too preoccupied with the idea of representation and difference during and immediately following her studies at the Royal College of Art, and that she only began to realise the value of Hepworth’s abstractions only later in her career, and once she herself began to make three-dimensional abstract forms in wood.
Webb (1985: 96) recalled that the panel *Lamentation* (c1924) (fig 28), made by Stainbank and shown in her absence to Gill, who was the critic at the Royal College's Sculpture School for the day, was "carried out in her own style and included African figures in the group". The fact that Webb found it necessary to refer specifically to the African subject matter, indicates that the subject matter, particularly in exhibitions such as for the *Prix de Rome*, was either problematic or unusual. On the one hand, the contemporary interest in the "primitive" as reflected in some of the sculptures by Moore and Hepworth was considered unconventional and therefore oppositional to the norms of the Academy. On the other hand, the accuracy with which Stainbank had, until this time, rendered the African theme was not from a non-representational or abstract viewpoint, thereby upholding a degree of "truth" as demanded by the same Academy. By paying attention to the features of the persons she was portraying, as well as to cultural detail such as dress, decoration and posture or stance, Stainbank constructed an identity which, because *different*, was unacceptable and her method of execution furthermore enhanced its offensive nature. She also acknowledged this "other", "not-self" as having, like herself, a specific identity as *different*. Stainbank did not colonise the "other" as Picasso had done in his analytic Cubist phase by absorbing the appearance of African artefacts such as masks into his painting. Instead, Stainbank referred to the "other" as a separate yet known (to herself) identity in order to assert and establish "self".

It appears that Stainbank's growing modernism was not, as was the case with the European modernists, the outcome only of a subjective projection and exploration. She might have stylised the figures she represented and emphasised form, proportion and surface, but she did so as a means to present and describe a specific indigenous identity with which she identified.

Insofar as the "primitive" aspect of modernism is concerned, Fry's essay on African art was of paramount importance to younger artists in Britain,
such as Moore. Spalding (1986: 62) stated that so-called "primitive" art, ie Negro, "Bushman" and Native American art, "contributed to the move occurring in Britain and elsewhere, away from the hegemony of the Graeco-Roman tradition" and that Fry's book Vision and design, which appeared in 1923\(^{17}\) after its first publication in 1920, contributed greatly to this interest. However, Spalding (1986: 62) expressed the opinion that Fry's text assisted its readers to understand the aesthetic implications of anthropological culture. It is important to note that African art had been available in France since before the First World War, but the inclination to import and collect such objects, and to consider these a viable alternative cultural expression, had passed the United Kingdom by.

Fry certainly contributed much to bringing European modernism to Britain. Vann-Hall wrote in the letter to Stainbank dated 29 November (presumably 1934 as this was the year Vann-Hall went to Britain to publish her novel) that Fry "was a wonderful help to the Modern group while he was alive". According to Farr (1978: 200), Fry attempted to "lift English art out of its besetting provincialism" by drawing attention to avant-garde experiments in Europe and trying to create an awareness of "primitive" art. Aside from the two Post-impressionist exhibitions Fry arranged in Britain, his interest in "other" cultures drew attention to "primitive" art and brought an understanding of it to artists and critics in Britain.

Fry shared the idea of African art as non-classical with theorists such as Franz Boas and Carl Einstein, as well as the notion that African artefacts can be classified as "art" due to their three-dimensionality (Goldwater 1986:36). Epstein (1931:89) also expressed the same belief:

> in looking at negro sculpture one must realise that it is not something absolutely and entirely apart, cut off from all other art. It is governed by the same considerations that govern all sculpture.
The opinion that three-dimensional form qualifies an artefact or object as sculpture, appears in retrospect insufficient as a valid argument at the time. One must, however, bear in mind that when Fry was writing his text, sculptural form was defined according to the doctrine of “truth to nature”, excluding much else as sculpture. Defining sculpture as essentially three-dimensional, opened up the possibility of acknowledging that artefacts not usually considered art, did to qualify as such. This included, of course, artefacts from marginalised cultures. Also, the three-dimensionality of African art implied the creation of a reality per se as opposed to the reality achieved through imitation.

Fry’s investigations into the art of “other” cultures echo the modernist desire to return to an “origin” as a means of escaping the narrative and mimetic nature of the Graeco-Roman and classicist hold over academic art. Hence, Fry supported the return to carving and the doctrine of “truth to materials”. It seems that coupled with the return to carving was the introduction and development of a formal approach which was not reliant upon representation, but autonomous as visual structure, simplified and moreover, expressive. According to Tillyard (1988: 156) modernist sculptors and arts and crafts theorists agreed that self-expression is the basis of art. While the notion of self-expression is logically problematic, this must be seen in light of the development of sculpture away from trompe l’oeil effects in favour of form which is not mimetic and which carries emotive or subjective meaning. The basis of much modernist painting and sculpture can hence be considered “expressive” as it centres on this emotive, expressive potential contained in forms and combination of forms, textures, colours and so on. Gaudier-Brzeska’s concept of the relationship between the artist and his feeling was shared with Fry, namely that the work of the artist “is nothing more nor less than the abstraction of his intense feeling” (Tillyard 1988: 157).

According to Goldwater (1986: 244) the “primitive” embodied for modernist sculptors certain basic characteristics which, despite being fundamental,
were nevertheless not restrictive but allowed for "true freedom of expression". Harrison (1981: 209) supported the stance that the younger generation committed themselves to working directly in their quest for an overt, unmediated expression, which separated them from their conservative and academic seniors. This notion of "expression" is probably best illustrated through reference to the theory of "significant form", a term invented by Bell in 1913 (Bullock 1988: 777).

"Significant form" refers to the aesthetic experience or emotion resulting from the perception of forms and the relationship between forms and colours irrespective of the subject matter of the work. Fry (1961: 236) explained significant form as "something other than agreeable arrangements of form, harmonious patterns, and the like. We feel that a work which possessed it is the outcome of an endeavour to express an idea rather than to create a pleasing object". According to Fry (Farr 1978: 200) forms and combinations of forms "could be isolated from the emotional response with which they were traditionally associated". Stainbank's attitude to sculptural form, assessed according to the theories of Fry and Bell, is idiosyncratic. In sculptures such as Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6), form can be regarded as independent of representation, but Stainbank's insistence on naturalistic detail prevents this from occurring in full. The emotive significance for Stainbank, of the subject matter, probably lies at the basis of this dilemma.

Goldwater (1986: 51) presented a definition of primitivism, which places Stainbank's work directly in a precarious relationship with the phenomenon: "Primitivism presupposes the primitive, and an interest in arts that are in some sense considered primitive". Inevitably, the term primitivism is generally assumed to imply an interest in, and reference to, the art and culture of African and/or Oceanic societies, but can also include reference to the art of children and of the mentally challenged (Rhodes 1994: 23). In the United Kingdom during the 1920s, the term
“Negroid” was generally used to refer to people or cultures of, mostly, an African origin (Hillebrand 1986:158).

While Stainbank recalled the event at which she carved a Zulu headrest (Adderley 1990: 92), her interest in the African personage\textsuperscript{18} appears more firmly based in the recording of the visual appearance of the people she encountered on the farm Coedmore, than in adopting aspects of their artefacts for her own art. Although Stainbank made use of this appearance as a means of expression, her intention was to convey the African identity \textit{per se} rather than to take up a reactionary stand towards classicism and academicism. In the interview with Adderley (1990: 115), Stainbank lucidly expressed her search for an African spirit. A sketch book in the Stainbank Archives which contains drawings she made dating to the years she spent at the Royal College of Art, illustrates this point. In these sketches, Stainbank placed stylised Zulu women, with well-developed \textit{isicholo} hairstyles, within luscious garden-like contexts reflecting the environment of her home at Coedmore. These drawings are reminiscent of the exotic associations generated by the paintings of Stern.

Stainbank adopted some of the formal inventions developed by modernist sculptors from their knowledge of African art such as stylisation, simplification of forms and volumes, angularity, exaggeration and an expressive attitude to the medium. From Epstein, it seems that she adopted exaggerated and disproportioned legs and feet, as eg in Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6), a habit which Epstein supposedly acquired through studying Sudanese and Congolese wooden sculpture, and which modernist sculptors found attractive (Goldwater 1986:242). Epstein (1931: 90) explained that

\begin{quote}
the chief features of negro art [are], its simplification and directness in the union of naturalism and design, and its striking architectural qualities ... . In much of the work there is great anatomic truth to be found, extremely simplified, and often expressed architecturally.
\end{quote}
The large feet of the mother in *Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6) were severely criticised when it was exhibited in South Africa in 1927. In *Rima* (1925)(fig 26) Epstein exaggerated the hands and arms of the figure. Stainbank was familiar with this relief, and most likely with other carvings by him, probably *Mother and child* (1913). This is confirmed in a letter to Stainbank, dated 29 November (presumably 1934), in which Vann-Hall told her of an exhibition of Walter Sickert's paintings which she saw in London and added: "It was just as thrilling to me as an Epstein exhibition would be to you". In *Mother and child* (1913), the heads of both figures are severely simplified into rounded shapes and form a sharp contrast with the enlarged, geometric hand holding the child.

An unidentified newspaper article in the Stainbank Archives acknowledged the presence of elements from Epstein's style in Stainbank's sculpture:

> If she has not studied under Epstein there is a distinct Epstein influence in one remarkable study chiseled out of a block of solid yellow sandstone. Miss Stainbank calls it "Dignity". A Native mother stands with her baby on her back. The modeling of the baby’s head and of the arm is perfect – but there the convention ceases and the line of the arm continues down in a curve that refuses to conform to stereotypical conventions. The woman’s feet are short and splayed – a mere pedestal for the figure ....

The recognition of aspects of Epstein's sculptural form in Stainbank's sculpture generated many references to her in newspaper reviews as South Africa's Epstein (The Idler 1936) or as "inspired" by Epstein: "Mary Stainbank, who one feels is in some measure inspired by the genius of Epstein" (Vermilion 1933b). The similarities between the two artists' sculptures were only superficially referred to in the press. However, the actual effect of Epstein's sculpture on Stainbank penetrated more deeply, particularly in the use of an exaggerated if not crude form to describe the human figure. In Epstein's sculpture, this resulted in grotesque images, for which he was often severely criticised. In *Sun goddess, crouching*
Epstein alludes to the frontality of much African carving. The feet and hands are presented as geometric elements setting up a pattern in space, and the elongated legs underline a sense of crouching. The block-like nature of the figure reflects adherence to "truth to materials" and the only detail appears in the face and hair. A contrast is established between large, uninterrupted surfaces and the textured areas representing hair. This contrast is also evident in Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6).

Together with Modigliani and Brancusi, Epstein made an important contribution to the transformation of the technical aspects of sculpture as well as to the "formal repertoire" (Harrison 1981: 208) of pre-war sculpture. Despite this contribution, he also admired the modelled work of Rodin, and, together with his decision to truncate The rock drill (1913), thereby ridding the image of its radical avant-garde implications, signified to the younger generation a return to a classical idiom which they could not associate themselves with (Nairne & Serota 1981: 73).

While it is not certain which and how many of Modigliani and Brancusi's sculptures Stainbank actually saw in London, their carvings supported her interest in the use of material for its own sake. Both these artists show strong similarities in their sculptures with African carvings, resulting in images which are simplified yet representational (see Rubin [1985] for a full account of this aspect of their work). The clean shapes and surfaces which Gaudier-Brzeska achieved in carvings like Hieratic head of Ezra Pound (1914), are similar to the large, well defined planes in Stainbank's sculpture of the period.

Stainbank's allegiance to Moore's sculpture is not as easily defined as with Epstein. She shared Moore's ideas regarding "truth to materials", not because they were Moore's ideas, but because they were prominent at the time. Moore explained that he acquired his attitude to materials from the ethnographic collection in the British Museum:
Truth to material ... one of the first principles of art so clearly seen in primitive work ... . The artist shows an instinctive understanding of his materials, its right use and possibilities (Goldwater 1986: 234).

Moore further explained that

When I first began doing sculpture about 1922 or so, I often worked direct in a piece of stone or wood, which might have been not a geometric shape but just an odd random block of stone that one found cheaply in some stone mason's yard, or a log of wood which was a natural shape, and then I'd make a sculpture, trying to get as big a sculpture out of that bit of material as I could, and therefore one would wait until the material suggested the idea (James 1966: 141).

Moore also acquired a copy of Pound's book on Gaudier-Brzeska ca 1922, and thereby reminded the younger sculptors of Gaudier-Brzeska's contribution to the development of sculpture in Britain during the early twentieth century (Harrison 1981: 210). Stainbank also owned a copy of this text, which she probably obtained second hand while she was living and studying in London.

What Stainbank objected to in the modernist use of an African idiom, was the fact that a primitivist focus emphasised the subjective stance of the artist as independent and divorced from the actual subject he referred to. In this configuration the artist was free to impose onto the subject idealisations and emotions, which may have been true to the artist's experience, but ignored the identity of the subject. Here, the image of the indigene, including the perceptions and projections of the observer or artist, becomes a vehicle for the artist's self-expression, which does not relate in any manner to the actual identity of that specific indigenous personage involved. Stainbank viewed the indigene holistically: person and place create a spirit she identified with and aimed at expressing. Her many sketches, as mentioned above, reflect this forcibly.
The paintings Gauguin made during his Tahitian period illustrate, for example, the manner in which the primitivist made use, firstly, of a subject matter which was, by western turn of the century definitions, of “primitive” origin, and secondly, of a style (cloissonisme, simplification and so on) to escape the dictates of academic classicism. According to Kirk Varnedoe (1990: 187), the French Primitif denotes underdevelopment and a return to the basic. Similarly, Gauguin’s paintings have a “primitivist” appearance in that he synthetised a “primitive” subject matter, borrowings from other works of art (see Varnedoe 1990:187-194) and a simplified, decorative style into a single coherent image. In this, Stainbank’s work aligns itself more comfortably with the European avant-garde than with that of her South African contemporaries such as Steynberg and Van Wouw whose works were steeped in the conventions of realism and representation. Moreover, the attitudes of these South African sculptors to the indigene, albeit idealised, create an impression of the artist in control, who, like Gauguin, is at liberty to conceptually manipulate the identity of the sitter.

The choice of a “primitive” subject matter, however, is not sufficient to qualify the work of art as “primitivist”. Gauguin’s paintings and sculptures depicting Tahitian culture are diametrically opposed to Van Wouw’s sculptures representing South African indigenes. Despite the focus in both artists’ work on a culture considered to be “primitive”, Gauguin made use of a form and style descriptive of, and in keeping with, his own perceptions and experiences of Tahitian people and their culture.

Van Wouw on the other hand, through his choice of an idealised and detailed approach to the figure, created a false sense of the identity of the sitter. Objectification occurs through the imposition of characteristics onto the sitter which are not in keeping with its own identity. Here, the “other” becomes acceptable to the coloniser’s “self” because it is construed to resemble those idealised perceptions and conceptions which the “self” valued. This belief in that which is perceived as “real” is aided by the highly realistic and naturalistic description of the sitter. Gauguin,
conversely, had painted the Virgin Mary in a Tahitian landscape, thereby making a conceptual leap across time and culture in order to align his perceptions of two cultures which are essentially different. Paradoxically, the incorrectly ascribed idealism of Van Wouw’s *The kapu player* (1907)(fig 15) is also subjective and inappropriate to the identity of the South African *indigene*, although from an opposite position.

Yet, even though Goldwater (1986: 28) considered Gauguin’s synthetist images as progressive, these paintings focus essentially on Gauguin’s own, personal experiences and perceptions of the Tahitian people. These depictions uphold the perspective of the artist as Creative Genius who is in control of his perceptions, subject matter and medium, and who is at liberty to create. The suggestion that the primitivist input, coupled to modernism, implied progress, is problematic as it is simultaneously retrospective and eclectic. Stainbank’s African subject matter appears now, with hindsight, to be more in keeping with Gauguin’s quest for a return to, and a search for, a “primitive” origin and life, than with the work of her South African contemporaries, indicating the extent of her own progressiveness.

However, the essential difference between Stainbank’s sculpture and the paintings of Gauguin is that Gauguin went outside of the border of his own, physical context in search of the “other”. In South Africa, Stern likewise searched for the “other”. Arnold (1996: 83) quoted Stern from her journals: “Searching, I roamed the world – to arrive at the origin – at beauty – at truth – away from the lies of everyday - ... – then the darkness opened up and I stood at the source of the Beginning: - Paradise – ”. Stainbank did not, on the contrary, search – the identity of the “other” already formed part of, and was integral to, her immediate South African context, surroundings and identity. Once she arrived in London, the memory of this context supported and sustained an awareness of her own “foreignness”, hence also her perception of “self” as “other”. Gauguin’s work, being largely two-dimensional (although he did make some three-
dimensional objects), allowed for subjective projection through the visual dislocation of contexts. Like Gauguin, Stern's painting elicits the subjective and exotic through rich colour combinations and a gestural, painterly technique. However, due to its three-dimensional identity, a sculpture is always object-bound, a characteristic that can retard similar interpretations of sculptures, and which can be taken as an explanation for Stainbank's expressive and gestural portrayal of Umslopogaas. The sculpted object may carry implicit exotic associations irrespective of its location, whereas the painted image (figure) remains dependent on its environment (ground).

Like Gauguin and Stern, Stainbank worked with the indigenous people of a specific area. She also aimed at the synthesis of an African subject matter with a linear, decorative, stylised and simplified form. Herein lies an essentially problematic understanding of Stainbank's work: whilst primitivism dealt with expression, dissent and innovation, her representations deal with the construction of cultural difference and identity. Palmer's paintings of the indigene speak of this: he wanted the indigene to have a Caucasian appearance and found the excuse of painting only "refined" types. Stainbank's representations, on the other hand, referred to the indigene as she experienced and perceived him or her.

Primitivism's aim was not the representation per se of the "other". Instead, it focused on "self", using "other" to assess, ascertain and criticise the position, context and culture of the "self". Primitivism hence projected the "self" onto the painting or sculpture, irrespective of the identity of the "other" as culturally different. The Tahitian women depicted by Gauguin therefore became the bearers of his own "self"-expression. Within this experience, "other" is used to describe, ascertain, assess and criticise the culture of the "self". Picasso's paintings based on African masks were not intended as representations of African culture, but instead as subversions of aspects of the culture of his "self" such as the academy, the position the
academy assumed as authority, and the restrictive visual form demanded by the academy. The re-appropriation of African culture in primitivism may very well be seen to focus on ideas of colonisation and ownership of vision (the viewer as powerful), as already established during the Renaissance (see Berger 1972). Susan Hiller (1991: 2) explained that primitivism is "party to the erasure of the self-representations of colonised people in favour of Western representations of their realities".

Nevertheless, one can consider this claiming of appearances as being directed at the quest for alternative visual idioms and expressive means. Here, the subjective "self" becomes the focus of the work as this "self" projects, via "primitive" form, its own (subjective) stance. Stainbank's images of the South African indigene differ essentially from Gauguin's Tahitian paintings in that Stainbank perceived the indigene as integral to her own identity. Gauguin on the other hand was searching for an identity — and chose that of the Noble Savage (Rhodes 1994: 24). Gauguin's concerns focused, not on the people as such, but rather on a way of life, which to him signified the "primitive". William Rubin (1984: 7) explained this focus as "a mimetic re-enactment of the 'myth of the primitive'".

Important in this regard is that Stainbank did not study African artefacts - instead, her reference library contains numerous newspaper and journal articles on peoples of "other" cultures such as African "tribes" and cultures considered "primitive". These include journal articles on sculptures by artists such as Malvinia Hofmann (fig 50) and Marguerite Milward (fig 51) who represented cultural "types", as well as a few incomplete portfolios of nineteenth century lithographs depicting African cultural groups. These records support the conviction that it was the people as different and as "other" that Stainbank wished to convey. Important in this regard is that it is possible that Ivan Mitford-Barberton23 who was a fellow student of Stainbank's at the Royal College of Art saw these representations by Hofmann and Milward. His modelled and carved figures of indigenes form a sharp contrast with Stainbank's representations in that he too, like
Milward and Hofmann, and Palmer in South Africa, focussed on "type". Stainbank avoided "types" in her sculptures through combining representational form with the aesthetic innovations brought about by the renewed interest in carving as a legitimate, contemporary alternative to modelled form.

Rhodes (1994: 117) explained the implications the "primitive" held for the re-discovery of carving during the early twentieth century as an alternative process for sculpture:

> The intimacy of the dialogue between artists and their materials implied by the process of direct carving further emphasizes the myth of "authentic" and "pure" creation often used to describe both tribal works and hieratic sculptures in stone and wood by modern Europeans such as Brancusi and his protégé Amedeo Modigliani.

It appears that the geometric stylisation of sculptural form, as employed by artists associated with the cubist movement such as Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973), Henri Laurens (1885-1954) and Gaudier-Brzeska, offered prototypes to Stainbank through which she could combine a "new" aesthetic form with an iconography which contemporary academic art circles frowned upon. Webb (1985: 95) referred to the term "the modern style" as the term used at the Royal College of Art at the time to describe work with an African subject matter. Stainbank approached her subject matter in a manner similar to sculptors associated with cubism – planar, stylised and tending at times towards the decorative, simplified and, in works executed once she was back in South Africa, exaggerated.

A discrepancy exists between Stainbank’s "modernist" works, and those by artists normally associated with modernism: Stainbank’s subject matter is the personage who is responsible for creating the cultural artefacts which Picasso et al used as basic reference points in their sculptures and paintings. Essentially, Stainbank’s iconography is the indigene, unmediated through theories and attitudes, which opens up a discourse
not about the "primitivist" impulse, but of difference: the "self" is seen in relation to an "other" which is same but different according to cultural circumstance and definition. "Self" in this discourse did not, for Stainbank, support the use of the "other" as a vehicle for subjective projection. The form Stainbank employed to represent or depict "otherness" or difference is in keeping with that developed by modernism during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Even though her sculptures are representational in the sense that a figure or personage is being depicted, Stainbank used the anti-classical forms suggested by African art such as stylisation, simplification and exaggeration, to formulate and define this representation. Many modernist paintings and sculptures can be seen as presentations and not representations in that the subject matter of the work is the subjective experience of the artist in favour of the depiction of a known, actual figure in space. Stainbank's sculptures of indigenes oscillate between representation (the depiction of the figure) and presentation (the formal disposition of this figure).

Webb (1985: 95) reported that Stainbank certainly came into contact with some of the ideas on primitivism circulating at the time: "Mary felt she must seize every opportunity to learn all she could about subjects related to sculpture ...". In the evening classes in architectural decoration conducted by Sir Bannister Fletcher which Stainbank attended, as well as bronze casting workshops presented at the Central School and wood carving classes at South Kensington School (Webb 1985: 95), it is unlikely that no-one would have initiated a discussion about the "primitive" at the time, even if only from an oppositional perspective. According to her students Maureen Quin and Marianne Frank, Stainbank's art was also simultaneously strongly based in convention: observation, drawing, and structure, aspects of the creative process which she enforced in her teaching.

From a study of her sculptural projects, it emerged that it was not a primitivist form Stainbank was seeking, but the representation of a spirit
which is "primitive" and which she was familiar with. When Adderley (1990: 102) questioned Stainbank on the possibility of an African "influence" in her work, she responded:

Ah, not really, not latterly. I was more interested ... in doing what I wanted you know ... I thought well, if I copied of course they gave us books to look at Rembrandt and different people, I didn't take particular notice of their ... style of work. Because it was all representational ... and it was not what I was out for ... I was out to... design my own shapes.

Stainbank did not make use of "primitive" modes of perception or creation to release forms or evoke associations. Even Vitalism as such did not seem to affect her work. Instead, Stainbank worked from the actual people as her subject matter. Her representations of indigenes therefore have more to do with the cultural identity of the indigene as different: with appearance and lifestyle, rather than with finding visual equivalents through which to express the "self". According to Frank (Quin and Frank interview 1999), Stainbank felt the indigene was decorative due to the abundance of beadwork as part of his or her usual attire. The exotic associations of decorative African form led Stainbank to make drawings in which, like Stern and Laubser, she placed figures in luscious garden-type contexts, and depicted them according to an expressive and gestural idiom.

The rift between modernist form and representation as content, as present in Ozazisay (1927)(fig 6) and Umhlobogazi (1925-1926)(fig 5) is extended in Adam and Eve (1922-1926)(fig 52). Here, the iconographic shift from Adam and Eve as Biblical figures, to Adam and Eve as metaphors, is exemplified through form: organic bodies are stylised into geometric pattern; and an ancient subject matter is interpreted according to contemporary visual idioms. This metaphoric tension and iconographic duality between two polarities may have been a prelude to Two standing figures (1925)(fig 37). It is also important to note that the growing interest
in African art, not only in Britain but also in Europe, might also have drawn attention to representations of the relationship between the male and the female. Carvings from many African cultures boast examples of this theme: works in which the male and female are either two separate objects, or where maleness and femaleness are combined into one work. Fertility, as embodied in the union of the male and female, is therefore a motif of much modernist art. Likewise, the theme of mother and child held great attraction for the modernist painter and sculptor. *Adam and Eve* (1922-1926) (Fig 52) was probably Stainbank’s first endeavour to represent this contemporary preoccupation with the theme of male and female combined. Her interest in Epstein’s sculpture could have pre-empted her choice of this theme for her own three-dimensional work.

A relief panel bearing as theme this relationship between the male and female, is *Two standing figures* (1925) (fig 37). Iconographically, the panel appears similar to Maillol’s *Desire* (1906-1908) (fig 53) in that Stainbank incorporated what appear to be a Zulu man and woman in a specific relationship with one another within a single, framed, spatial situation. The *Preparatory drawing: two standing figures* (fig 54) also reveals a deliberate combination of the male and female. Maillol’s relief, in its architectonic form, evoked Greek *metopes* (Elsen 1974: 138), which Stainbank most certainly saw in the British Museum and possibly also in the Plaster Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Relief sculpture is not only typical of the archaic and classical periods in Greek art, it can also be seen as a prototype for modernist sculpture. Gauguin too, in a relief panel *Be in love and you will be happy* (1888) referred to a “primitive” culture as subject matter, and, as is the case with much African sculpture, expressed the relationship between male and female.

Stainbank’s simultaneous use of a modernist formal “language” and representation might superficially appear to be resolved. Vermilion (14 July 1930) verbalised this distinction in Stainbank’s sculpture. He observed, at the July exhibition of 1930, that there was, by Stainbank, a sculpture of a
frog as well as the torso of a young girl. These works, he stated, “show her great ability to conform to the demands of traditional sculpture ... . It is in the other exhibits we discover a mind full of vitality and individualism, which she essays to demonstrate in *Enigma*. Yet, closer consideration reveals that these two approaches are ontologically irreconcilable: modernism, as it developed in Europe and reached Britain, centred on the subjective experience of the artist as authentic; also, on this experience as oppositional to the established art institutions, notably those perpetuated and promoted by the Academy; on the autonomy of the artist as the Creative Genius and of his creation; and finally modernism was antithetical to the canons of representation and illusion. The representational, in its strictest definition, aims at a likeness of the objective world, hence the painting or sculpture has to be “true to nature”. This polarity is problematic insofar as sculpture is concerned: abstraction vs the object. The material, tangible three-dimensionality of the work will always override any abstract characteristics it may have in favour of a consideration of the work as object, because it is a three-dimensional fact.

Stainbank was aware of her choice of the subjective and metaphoric as a function of her sculpture. Speaking of *John Ross* (1972-1974),\(^{28}\) which was one of the last sculptures the artist completed, she expressed frustration with the representational intention inherent in the commission: “They wanted it to represent John Ross, well I couldn’t go and make my own John Ross” (Adderley 1990: 110). The next chapter will examine the metaphors used by Stainbank as an extension of the visual “language” she acquired and developed at the Royal College of Art.
ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 3

1 Webb (1985) often referred in her biography of Stainbank to the
   carvings the artist had done before her departure for London. These
   were presumably in wood.

2 Henry Moore, Two heads (1924-1925). Mansfield stone, 13.5
   inches. Mrs Irina Moore. (Illustration: Russell 1968: 41, plate 10;
   data :Russell 1968: 285.)

3 See Vann-Hall’s description of Stainbank’s reaction to “Negroid”
   references at the Royal College (Vann-Hall Sa: 282-283).

4 Coert Steynberg, Boesmanmeidje (1947). Wonderstone, 51 cm
   height. (Illustration: Steynberg 1982.)

5 There are numerous drawings in the Stainbank Archives, which
   represent Zulu infants, children and mothers with babes. It is clear
   from these drawings that Stainbank responded to the theme of mother
   and child. She stated in an interview with Botha (1989b) that “the
   strongest thing is a mother’s love for her child”.

6 According to Lesley Fitton of the Greek and Roman Department at
   the British Museum in London, this Museum does not, and did not at
   the time when Stainbank was in London, have in its holdings any
   complete Kore type figure, only fragments and small Etruscan
   examples of this type of female figure. Fitton confirmed that Moore
   worked in this Museum and Moore acknowledged referring to these
   Etruscan figurines.

7 Published by Methven and Co. London 1906. The book is signed
   by Stainbank and dated 27 May 1920, which indicates her 21st
   birthday, and predates her departure for London.

8 Henry Moore, Standing woman (1924). Portland stone, height 22
   inches. Mrs M Garrould, Burnham-on-Crouch. (Illustration: Sylvester,

9 According to Dieter Reusch, anthropologist at KZN Museum
   Services, the hairstyle of this woman is typical of the style worn by
   married Bhaca women. The cloth, which the woman is wearing
   around her body, is also not typically Zulu. The possibility exists that,
   as a result of the 1913 Native Lands Act, the influx of people from
   rural areas to urban centres brought a variety of cultural dress and
   style to Coedmore which Stainbank observed and combined in her
   sculpture.

10 The Stainbank Sculpture Collection and Archive houses a number
   of drawings by both Stainbank and Vann-Hall of babes on their
   mothers’ backs. These drawings are undated, but according to the
   facility of execution, these works probably date to the period
   immediately following their return to South Africa in 1926. The
   distinction between Vann-Hall’s drawings and those by Stainbank is
   not always clear.

11 Henri Matisse, The blue nude (1907). Oil on canvas, 36 x 55
   inches. Cone Collection, Baltimore Museum of Art. (Illustration:

12 See Berger (1972) for an explanation of the conventions used to represent the female figure.

13 Mary Stainbank, Nude study (c1924) Painted plaster of Paris 82 x 22.5 x 24. MSSCA. CAT 22.

14 Dunlop, JM. (1918) Anatomical diagrams for the use of art students, Bell and Sons: 29.

15 Collier, J. Bad Modern Art. The Evening News 22 March 1926. A cutting of this article was found among the newspaper articles on art kept by Stainbank and is now in the Stainbank Archives in the Voortrekker Museum.

16 Beliefs such as these continued at the Royal Academy until the 1920s, when a more creative and imaginative output was encouraged.

17 This second version of Fry’s text was a cheaper and hence more accessible version of the earlier one (Spalding 1986: 62).

18 During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Victorian beliefs in black people as “primitive” continued, and it is unlikely that the Stainbank family was unaware of these perceptions. However, from Webb’s (1985) biography of Stainbank, it is evident that the Stainbank family lived in peaceful co-existence with the Zulu and Indian people of the area. The family was much respected among all their neighbours, including other colonial families. Stainbank herself earned, as a young child, a nickname from the Zulu people: Ndlovu, meaning “elephant”. This term is usually reserved for Zulu royalty as it indicates strength.


20 Jacob Epstein, Sun goddess, crouching (c1910). Limestone, 36 x 11 x 13. Castle Museum, Nottingham. (Illustration: Compton 1986 plate 54; data: 410.)

21 Jacob Epstein, The rock drill (1913-1914). Bronze, 70.5 x 58.4 x 44.5. Tate Gallery, London. (Illustration: Compton 1986 plate 57; data: 410.)

22 Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Hieratic head of Ezra Pound (1914). Marble, 91.5 x 48.3 x 42. Private Collection. (Illustration: Compton 1986 plate 58; data: 410.)

23 Mitford-Barberton’s name appears on the graduation programme of the Royal College of Art (1926) alongside Stainbank’s name. The only other reference to his work in the Stainbank Archives is an article, presumably from Studio, in which his representations of indigenes are illustrated.

24 Interview conducted with both artists on 27 August 1999 at the Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg.
Many of Epstein's works, especially his drawings and two-dimensional work, contain overtly the union of the male and female.

The plaster cast of the panel was probably brought back by the artist from London. This panel appears as a small decoration on the gable in a design for a gabled Cape Dutch house. Malay craftsmen at the Cape usually included a decoration on the gable below the date indicating the year the house was built. This design, referred to in the previous chapter, appears to have been a project set at the Royal College of Art during 1925.


CHAPTER 4

Stainbank and the Ezayo Studio 1927-1939

The previous chapter focused on the beginnings of an idiosyncratic form of primitivism and its related modernist idiom in Stainbank’s sculpture. After her return to South Africa in 1926, she continued to use and refine these idioms in her “private” sculptures as well as in some publicly commissioned architectural decorations, albeit to a lesser extent in the latter. This chapter will examine examples of Stainbank’s “private” sculptures as expressions of her interest in the Natal indigene, and her use of the indigene as metaphor. Reference will be made to public commissions in which the artist continued depicting the indigene in colonial situations. Stainbank’s sculpture will further be contextualised within the changing attitudes towards the “Native Study” in art in Natal at the time.

The relative isolation of living and working on the family farm prevented developments in South African art in general from affecting Stainbank’s work to any great extent. During the first few years after her return from London, she received a number of commissions from the Public Works Department in which she was forced to consider public taste and the requirements stipulated for these commissions as overruling her own visions and ideas. Yet, she held firm opinions on the nature of art and was clear about her intentions in art, as evident from Vann-Hall’s writings. Simultaneously, she continued with her own, experimental “private” sculptural work. It is possible that this division between the demands of a public patron and her own perspectives on art further enhanced the conflict in her sculpture between a representational image and a more experimental one. Stainbank produced sculptural decorations for many Public Offices throughout South Africa, in which the conservative and conventional taste for the decorative, such as swags with fruit, ribbons, berries and so on, was prescribed by the authorities involved. Often,
these commissions demanded that she employ a representational and at times a symbolic idiom.

While working on these commissions, the Ezayo Studio contained examples of Stainbank’s experimental sculptures from the period when she had studied in London as well as ones she had already completed, and those in the making. This means the artist was continually working with two aims in mind: her own, experimental intentions, and the prescribed representational and conventional identity of commissioned work. The effect of the two approaches on each other in Stainbank’s work is difficult to determine. However, the decorative association of the indigene found echoes in some of Stainbank’s public commissions. These tensions will also be examined in this chapter.

The “Native Study” and modernism in Stainbank's sculpture from 1927 to 1939.

The first so-called “private” sculpture which Stainbank exhibited upon her return to South Africa was Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6). This sculpture was first exhibited in 1927, alongside work by Martin at the inaugural exhibition of the newly established South African Institute of Art. During 1927, the Natal Society of Artists agreed to sacrifice its usual annual July exhibition for the year in order to allow the South African Institute of Art to exhibit at the Woolmart instead. The aim of the Institute was “merely to demonstrate from year to year the progress that had been made in all branches of art in South Africa” (unidentified newspaper article, Stainbank Archives). In addition, according to the same article, the Institute aimed at becoming involved in art education in South Africa, and to offer employment prospects for art graduates. This article also acknowledged that South African art was in its infancy and that the Institute wished to have, amongst others, annual exhibitions. These exhibitions were intended to function as
the salon where all might see what had been accomplished, but with an ultimate view of raising Art to a cultural level of real importance in the national life of this Dominion.

This unidentified review, written by Vermilion, gives an indication of the state of art in South Africa at the time: Sénèque's paintings of Shongweni Dam were hailed as "successful" and as having "few equals in South Africa today". When Vermilion described Palmer's work (fig 55), his criteria were somewhat clearer: "a fine sense of composition, riotous colour schemes, the gorgeous light on the flesh tints of his figures ... ". Furthermore, Roworth's work (fig 56) is mentioned favourably and it is clear that landscape painting dominated. Significantly, in the light of Stainbank's involvement in popular cultural production, the exhibition also included a craft section in which Vann-Hall's stained glass panels were discussed where they were exhibited alongside embroidery: "They are designed on big lines, fine colour schemes, and executed in exquisite taste".

The decision by Stainbank to display Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) at this first exhibition of the Institute meant, perhaps unbeknown to her, entering the sculpture into the debate prevalent in art circles at the time with regard to "types" in the representation of the indigene. Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) attracted attention at this exhibition as "it was in the more modern manner and had very thick, solid legs" (RVG 1933b: 2), radically deviating from the usual, well-proportioned figures executed according to academic criteria. A carving by Moses Kottler (1896-1978) which dates to 1934, namely Nude, is, like Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6), exaggerated in the depiction of the legs. The hands and feet are enlarged and block-like, and the figure's thighs and ankles create a solidity which appears, like Stainbank's stone figure, earthy and crude. The only indication Kottler gave of his figure as an indigene, is a stylised kopdoek with a knot low in the neck. It is only by comparison with Kottler's portraits of his family and friends, that Nude (1934) gives an indication of difference: the emphasis
on cubist-derived, stylised form instead of naturalistic description. Kottler's figure, as is the case with Steynberg's abstracted figures, approaches a primitivist interpretation as the focus lies on style and not on iconography. By comparison, Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) contains specific, albeit conglomerate, reference to ethnic identity, which Stainbank combined with modernist form. It is also significant that Stainbank's Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) predates these "primitivist" sculptures by both Kottler and Steynberg.

The identity of the woman in Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) as Bhaca, may be stated to be the reason why public response to the sculpture, once exhibited in Natal, was not all that positive. Vermilion, in The Natal Mercury (1927a) referred to Ozazisayo (1927):

This small statue in stone is by no means perfect; it is not beautiful in the accepted sense of the term, because it is said there are really fine types of Native women who would have represented the object in view, namely, 'Dignity', far more adequately. But how do we know whether the young artist was satisfied to see beauty in a Venus de Milo type of woman?

Vermilion saw the sculpture as a literal representation of the concept of "dignity", but acknowledged the subjective stance of the artist with regard to beauty. He described this first exhibition of the Institute in the newspaper article mentioned as "a fair representation of the work of contemporary artists, displaying a variety of schools of thought and outlook ... ". He further reported that the photographic focus of much art production of the period appeared to be subsiding and was "gradually giving way to a broader view which endeavour[ed] to convey the emotional side, thus making the appeal more to the inner self of the spectator than his outward vision". The only example of a painting or sculpture mentioned in the article which reflected an emotional interpretation, was Stainbank's Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6). This quest for an emotive content not only echoed the similar quest for self-expression Stainbank experienced in
London, it also announced the onset of a tolerance in South African art for experimentation with form.

It was within this context of a changing idiom in South African art that Vermilion situated his discussion of Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6). In the same breath he referred to a slightly earlier article in which he discussed the idea of beauty. His attempt to educate the audience to understand beauty as not being merely a pleasing of the eye, or as constituting perfect form, is obvious. Paradoxically, he praised works such as Martin's Native warrior: a call to arms and a "tiny, thin oil sketch of Durban North" by Paton.

"Brush" (1927), whose review of the exhibition was printed alongside Vermilion's, was obviously satisfied with Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6). He described it as

a group containing character in every line. The feeling and conception of the whole is an indication of the mind of an artist who has a good knowledge of form and what is most important, has something to express.

It is clear that Vermilion was setting the stage for discussing Stainbank's sculpture as anti-establishment and in order to qualify his term "beauty". In the article "What is beauty?" he (Vermilion 1927c) posed a view of art in which an understanding of beauty was considered as different from the public's sense of beauty, and importantly as inaccessible to the uneducated:

the profitable contemplation of pictures in national groups and series is only possible to men who have leisure for much study and facilities for travel, whose minds are well regulated by education to make the most of accidental advantages.
This view of modern art as elitist is further emphasised when Vermilion quoted, in the same article, an unnamed president of the Royal Academy whose reply to the question "What is beauty?" was that "the ideal beauty must be the White man's. The Hottentot Venus has no charms for us, nor the tattooed [sic] Maori". Here, beauty as found in art is effortlessly applied to a non-art object, offering an explanation for the misunderstanding that a painting or sculpture can only be beautiful if its subject matter is beautiful. Vermilion (1927c) accepted that beauty does not reside in the physical aspects of an object and acknowledged that "objects which we usually considered ugly in themselves are capable of translation into beauty by pictorial art". Also, "pictorial beauty is not inherent in physical objects, that it has nothing to do with usefulness, nor good in the moral or the ethical sense".

Having argued his point according to examples of paintings and events such as the notorious 1863 Salon's rejection of Manet's work, as well as in terms of theories by writers such as Bernard Berenson and Vernon Lee, Vermilion discussed Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6). He stated that some had called it "the gorilla", and it might have appeared "unbeautiful" to the lay mind. Yet he expressed the opinion that the sculpture was commendable because

there are elements in the lines and the general conception of this remarkable work which make one pause. The merely conventional [sic] of beauty in art, I know, is still making its appeal; it will do so for some time to come, but I predict an awakening that will allow for a wider and a greater vision that will recognise beauty in a different sense from accepted material form.

When one considers Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) against works which had won the Gundelfinger Prize for the "Native Study", or which were commended in the press, such as the paintings by Palmer, one notices that the latter still adhered largely to idealisation and the focus on "type". By comparison, Stainbank's carving showed stylistic characteristics foreign to
most South African artists, such as a faceting of the surface and enlarged features. This "foreign" identity earned simultaneous scorn and praise in the local press. Stainbank acknowledged that the South African art world did not respond "at all" to her work once she had returned from London (Botha 1987a). Exhibition reviews by Vermilion usually praised her sculpture, but letters from the public, printed in the local press, reflect an ignorance in aesthetic matters which must have created the impression, to Stainbank, of outright rejection.

In 1930, Vermilion (1930a) mentioned that subscribers to the Gundelfinger Prize paid much attention to the donor's wishes, resulting in works which were of a higher standard, yet which still suffered from a lack of knowledge of the human figure as "in many instances Native subjects are still anathema to those who aspire to the more elevating side of art expression". This statement was probably intended as encouragement, since two years earlier, in 1928, the theme of the "Native Study" was beginning to lose its negative associations in Natal, and a number of artists ventured into depictions of the "Native”. Vermilion also remarked in The Natal Mercury (8 June 1928): "[w]hatever opinion may have been in the past regarding the aesthetic merit of Native subjects, a saner attitude is now becoming apparent". However at this time, ideas regarding "type" were still rife and Jan Smuts stated at the Rhodes memorial lecture in Oxford in 1929 that

"[t]he Negro and the Negroid Bantu form a distinct human type. It has largely remained a child type, with a child psychology and outlook. .... A child human cannot be a bad human, for are we not in spiritual matters to be like unto children? (Pieterse 1992:104)

This view of the *indigene* as a child-type is in keeping with observations by nineteenth century writers that the *indigene* had not reached the same level of "maturity" or "civilisation" as maintained in the Empire and could hence only be redeemed through colonial interference. This child-type also gave rise to stereotypical representations of black people as playful
and also as associated with the playful character of animals such as monkeys and baboons (Pieterse 1992: 42, 98 and 99). It is therefore possible that the description of Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) as a gorilla is an indication that viewers made stereotypical associations with the personage portrayed, rather than observing the characteristic in the sculpture.

Vermilion (1927c) attempted to educate the public through the medium of The Natal Mercury. He informed them that “meaning is conveyed not only by matter, but also by the form”. He continued:

A picture tells us much more of what the painter wished to tell. ... A picture has a strange revealing power of its own outside, above, and uncontrolled by the painter.

This statement typifies Vermilion’s conception of modernism and reveals critical aspects in agreement with its European definition, specifically the point that his criticism was based on a fundamental modernist principle, namely a focus on design, colour relationships and light irrespective of subject matter. Simultaneously, Vermilion pointed to the problematic inclusion in the July exhibitions of so-called “craft work” for which he stipulated clear criteria. Yet the art produced at the time was largely representational, centring on landscape paintings, still lifes, figure studies, portraits and seascapes. The Gundelfinger Prize, of course, also attracted some entries, such as paintings by Perla Siedle Gibson (fig 57) and Martin (fig 58). In an unidentified newspaper review of the Art Institute’s exhibition in 1927, Vermilion continued his educational approach to the work on show:

Of course, it is inevitable that there are people who recognise in art only their own particular attitude in its approach, and who somewhat short-sighted, I think, are only too ready to condemn, what to them is either unconventional or is striving towards a new aspect in the contemplation of beauty. The merely photographic side of art which has held sway for many years, is gradually giving way to a broader view which endeavours to convey the emotional side, thus making the appeal more to the
inner self of the spectator than his outward vision. It is a matter of opinion in how far some of the ultra-moderns were justified in their analysis of mere form, seeing in the portrayal of essentials all that is necessary to convey their meaning.

Vermilion quoted as a case in point the fact that Tinus de Jong (1885-1942), a landscape painter from South Africa, would acknowledge, despite the nature of his own art, the power in Stainbank’s Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6). Vermilion also coupled the idea of “beauty” to this new, “unconventional” approach to art making. He addressed the problem that, for some, that which pleases the eye, or which “is perfect in form” can be considered as beautiful. He acknowledged that the problem of defining beauty is age-old and unresolved. However, it is clear that Vermilion was aiming at educating his public: “Art can never be reduced to mere science: if it were, it would no longer be art.”

The sheer size of the July exhibition, and most likely also of the first exhibition of the Institute of Art, implies strongly the high degree of indiscriminate accepting of work by its organisers. Stainbank’s borrowings from leading European sources were highly sophisticated, but too advanced and progressive for local tastes. As reflected in exhibition reviews of the period, the more subtle allusions of a stylistic and iconographic nature, to artists such as Dobson, Epstein and Gill, whose works were known to few in South Africa, were not mentioned. Considering that newspaper reviews were written by art authorities of the day, it can be deduced with some certainty that this omission implies more than such allusions merely not being noticed.

Sculptures by Stainbank in which she used the experience she gleaned in Britain of modernist definitions and criteria for making art, lent a primitivist flavour, in the presence of submissions for the Gundelfinger Prize, to the art of the period. However, within the colonial context of the July exhibitions, the extent of the prevailing conservatism as well as the degree
to which Stainbank's representations of indigenous personages were out of place, became self-evident. Her subject matter of the *indigene* in general was severely criticised by the public, most likely because she depicted the everyday, ordinary *indigene*. A further criticism was that she depicted her subjects not according to Palmer's "refined type", but according to her own experience and perception of the person. Stainbank's sculptural form was also considered "unrefined" in that she adopted aspects of the stylisations typical of those sculptures by contemporary European artists she saw in London. One such common stylisation in the sculptures by Modigliani and Gill is the use of an incised line to distinguish between two volumes or planes. This is a device frequently used by African carvers. Stainbank made use of this device to a lesser extent in the clothing of the mother in *Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6).

Her South African critics appeared unaware of these references and borrowings, and only acknowledged the influence of Epstein at the expense of Gill. In his *Deposition* (1924) Gill applied the same device in the rendering of the hand, hair and profile of the face. The figure is represented in a slab-like manner, which allowed the artist to carve into its surface rather than to sculpt in the round. Dobson also made use of this device, but to a lesser extent than Gill. The frequent occurrence of the device in sculpture from Europe indicates contact with African art but also a search for new ways in which the sculptor could honour modernist aesthetic ideas. Stainbank's use of the device appears restricted to her stone carvings, and to representations of indigenous identities.

Also, Stainbank adhered to the principle of "truth to materials" - a phenomenon not readily accepted in Natal at the time. The dictum "truth to nature" required stone to be manipulated into *trompe l'oeil* effects of drapery, flesh and bone at the expense of its natural inherent qualities. Stainbank's attitude towards her material, having encountered European examples of "truth to materials", rejected the photographic approach. The enlarged feet and hands of the woman in *Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6) can be considered evidence of Stainbank's rejection of a realistic image in favour
of a more expressive one. On the other hand, Stainbank represented the facial features of the woman accurately and with less of the exaggeration evident in the limbs, leading to a criticism of Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6) as unrefined. The directness with which Stainbank portrayed the face was of an unacceptable kind; not because the sculpture was representational, but because the choice of subject matter and its direct portrayal posed a visual and conceptual challenge to conventional and known modes of representation.

Hillebrand (1986:139) noted that Stainbank adopted “certain mannerisms such as the use of distorted limbs, sharp, angular forms and chiselled lines which were to reappear in much of her South African work of the thirties”. It is not clear from the actual sculptures whether these characteristics were really only mannerisms, or perhaps the result of stylistic borrowings from artists such as the Cubists Henry Laurens (1885-1954), Alexander Archipenko (1887-1964), Epstein and Lambert. The Stainbank Archives holds many newspaper cuttings and magazine clippings of sculptures by Lambert, an artist whose work she admired, and who also made use of cubist-like form in his sculptures. These “mannerisms” could also have been suggested by his sculptures, but were more likely the result of modernist formulations of representational form, which appealed to Stainbank.

Modernism in South Africa, as in Britain and Europe during the early twentieth century, was associated with primitivism due to its reference to African imagery. However, in South Africa, associations evoked by the “primitive” were ideologically tainted, rendering the indigene unfit for use as subject matter in a work then classified as fine art. The colonially-minded public in Natal, as well as some of the more conservative artists, could not cope with deviations from the academic norm. Hillebrand (1986:117-118) noted in this regard that modernism was not well received in Natal at the time of Stainbank’s return to the country, as Victorian notions and expectations in art still persisted. The dictum of “truth to
nature” certainly, according to Hillebrand (1986:126), remained a valued and admired quality in a painting or sculpture. From exhibition reviews of the period, specifically of the July exhibitions, it is clear that the works submitted reflected such tastes of the time not only in Natal but also throughout South Africa. Works considered “good” were mostly landscape paintings and to a lesser extent figure studies, all of which were rendered in an idiom largely representational and conforming to current aesthetic demands, conventions and tastes. The Gundelfinger Prize was regularly mentioned in these reviews, thus constantly drawing attention to the presence of the “Native Study” and to sculptures and paintings submitted for this category. These were, in general, positively mentioned, most likely due to their interpretation of an African theme according to the conservative and academic ideals of the period.

As was the case with the development of modernism in European art, so its emergence in South African art was coupled with labels of Bolshevism and decadence due to its strong opposition to and rejection of historically established and accepted aesthetic norms, models and conventions. Modernism was also frequently associated, because of its “primitive” links, appearance and distortion of form, with decadence and depravation. The irony involved is that the academic tradition based its criteria for perfect form on art production of ancient and classical models, whereas the modernist sculptor considered a reference to an “origin” and prehistory as the basis for art, albeit from a different perspective. Vermilion (1930b) headed his opinions on modernism, published in The Natal Mercury, “Bolshevism in Art”. Here, he addressed what he considered to be the essential aims of the avant-garde, and legitimised his perspectives and opinions through citing the occurrence of similar aesthetic phenomena in England, France and Germany:

Why this cult of ugliness? Why this scorn for craftsmanship and finish, such as we were accustomed to from the older school, which in itself amounted to genius
and justified their claim to be artists? Why this attitude of lofty superiority if they feel they are progressing?

Charles Jagger (1933) stated similarly that

The worship of ugliness today is the natural reaction from the sweetness and prettiness of yesterday, and it is my own conviction that out of this violent convulsion which has shaken the very foundations of art a finer and nobler school of sculpture will presently emerge. As in all forms of violent revolution, when old traditions are uprooted and swept aside, mob rule with its violence and lawlessness must for a time prevail.

The danger for Jagger lay in the fact that

once it is admitted (and rightly so) that the mere photographic reproduction of nature is not art, then the door is opened wide to the uncontrolled malformations of nature with which we are now so familiar.

Significantly, Jagger’s *Royal artillery memorial* (1921-1925)(fig 59) contains relief panels in which representational imagery is interpreted in a faceted and planar style. This treatment resembles a modernist approach to form more closely than a Victorian one.

Vermilion’s (1930b) “war against tradition”, lodged by the “younger school” who dismissed traditional works as “early Victorian”, foreshadowed, albeit obliquely so, Clement Greenberg’s (1973a: 4) descriptions of Alexandrianism, which he formulated in 1939 in an essay entitled “Avantgarde and Kitsch”. Here Greenberg defined Alexandrianism as

an academicism in which the really important issues are left untouched because they involve controversy, and in which creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of form, all larger questions being decided by the precedent of the old masters. The same themes are mechanically varied in a hundred different works, and yet nothing new is produced ....
Although Greenberg’s perspectives were published a decade later than Vermilion’s, his theories were based on European art production contemporary with Stainbank’s formative years, spent at the Royal College of Art. She was most likely not aware of Greenberg’s writing but he, on the contrary, was aware of the restrictive conservatism prevalent at the time, which the avant-garde in Europe opposed.

In his definition of Alexandrianism, Greenberg therefore saw academicism primarily as a visual and cultural cul-de-sac. Natal art, and much art in South Africa generally at the time, found itself to be in a similar situation: despite social changes and contact with “other” cultures, traditional standards and conventions were uncritically accepted and perpetuated (Greenberg 1973a:4 and 8). The avant-garde, on the other hand, Greenberg considered as the search “to go beyond Alexandrianism ...”.

According to Greenberg (1973a: 6) modernism was based in the creation of art objects in which “[c]ontent is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself”. In other words, the process according to which a painting or sculpture was made became the subject matter of that painting or sculpture. While Greenberg’s definitions of both the avant-garde and modernism had been built on a Eurocentric art history, similar issues were at stake in South African art, and also in Stainbank’s sculpture. For Stainbank, subject matter and medium could not be separated, upholding in this sense the belief in “truth to materials” and subscribing to modernism’s aesthetic foundations. Vermilion had, in his criticism, blatantly missed the point: the way out of a stifling academicism was not, as he saw it, the quest for greater realism and “truth”. Instead, the solution lay in the search for a different form of expression according to which one could convey the very same reality. Erroneously, Vermilion (1930b) stated that “[t]hese modernists are ... taking short cuts to reality instead of striking deep. ... There is nothing new, or very little, in this Bolshevik creed".

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Vermilion also stated that the new "school" consisted of revolutionaries who saw the beginning of the new era as coinciding with the 1920s. He acknowledged the idea of the tabula rasa as the source and origin of their self-expression. Despite accusing the younger generation of denying tradition, of arrogance and self-absorption, Vermilion (1930b) surprisingly stated that these attitudes could bring a “freshness of outlook upon every old problem”.

Despite this potential for renewal, modernism nevertheless contained, for some, the threat of destruction, in British and European society alike, of a worldview firmly based in religious and traditional values and norms. The alternative offered by modernism demanded a culture of individuality and subjective experience as preferable to the stability and security offered by convention (Bocola 1999: 370). The idea of modernism as the source for cultural Bolshevism was eventually formalised in 1933 with the closing of the Bauhaus in Berlin (Osborne 1981: 149), indicating that by that time, the association of the modern with opposition was already in the pipeline. However, the history of viewing opposition to traditional forms of expression as reactionary, anarchistic or Bolshevik predated Hitler’s formulations of entartete Kunst.8

The reaction to modernism in South Africa, judging by the various newspaper articles in circulation, was based on criteria appropriated from the Royal Academy in Britain. Reactions to, and criticism of, modernism by some English artists and critics during the 1920s (Harrison 1981: 206) were due, not to the formal disposition associated with the European avant-garde, but instead to the interpretation by modernists of subjects and themes which had been generally familiar. However, like the English artist who was criticised for his “ridiculous apings of foreign styles” (Harrison 1981: 206), the South African artist’s abstraction was construed by the critics and public as Bolshevik, and even as anti-religious, because it originated from the alleged misinterpretation of reality and misappropriation of nature. The reaction against Stainbank’s Ozazisayo
(1927)(fig 6) in the press recalls the criticism by Father Bernard Vaughn in *The Graphic* (14 February 1920), of Epstein’s *Risen Christ* (1920):

If Mr Epstein’s horror in bronze were to spring to life and appear in a room, I for one should fly from it in dread and disgust, lest perhaps he might pick my pockets, or worse, do some deed of violence in keeping with his Bolshevik appearance (Harrison 1981:206).

The issue of Bolshevism as associated with modernism was also touched on by the British critic Collier (1926) in his review of the *Prix de Rome* exhibition of 1926, where Stainbank’s sculpture caused a stir. Donald Thomas (1930), in a lengthy letter entitled “Is it progress?” to *The Natal Mercury*, underlined the incorrect likening of modern art to Bolshevism. He explained that critics such as Vermilion who did not sympathise with the aims of modernist artists incorrectly labelled all opposition in art, *ie* the refusal to subscribe to hackneyed conventions, Bolshevism. Thomas concluded in Greenbergian fashion:

For the artists whose work is grouped scathingly under the head of “Modernism” are essentially those who are applying close reason to the way in which the medium of their art, whether paint or stone, is to give expression to their understanding of life. ... . For art, which is all creative activity, is the field of too hard a conflict; the continual adjusting of the vigour of life to changing circumstance, in which “experiment is the condition of survival”.

In this regard, a certain M Penn, in an unidentified and undated letter to the press, presumably *The Natal Mercury*, put the sculptural work of Stainbank into perspective:

Miss Stainbank’s work is clever – conceived in a gross and exaggerated manner. Critics have pedestalled it because it strikes the birth of Futurism in this country. It speaks of the morbid relishing of the ungaily, but surely it is the artist’s duty to create beauty out of ugliness.
Here Penn has the last word on the naivety of the literalist sensibility: the erroneous consideration of the beauty of an object as the only suitable prerequisite for a painting or sculpture, which, by definition, also had to be beautiful. It is also important that Penn mentioned Futurism (which, as an avant-garde movement, had pronounced anarchistic intentions), particularly in light of Stainbank's contact with the work of Gaudier-Brzeska. It is clear, judging by the controversy in the press in Natal, that Bolshevism or revolution in art was considered a negative development, as critics and the public alike failed to see that art practice in Natal had reached the dead-end Greenberg described as "Alexandrianism". Moreover, they failed to recognise the significance of Stainbank's work as opening an avenue out of this situation. In spite of this negative reception, she continued to produce work in which her formal concerns and convictions were employed to represent an indigenous theme.

**Stainbank and the “spirit of Africa”**

In the various interviews conducted by both Adderley (1990) and Botha (1987a, 1989 a and 1989b), Stainbank often mentioned her concern with the expression of a “spirit of Africa”. From these interviews, it is evident that by “spirit of Africa” Stainbank meant the ethos or life force generated by the indigenous people of the country, and not the photographic representation of their appearance. The number of sculptures she executed between her return from London and the Second World War, in which she represented the indigene, is evidence of this recurrent quest. One of the first sculptures in which she explored the theme once she was back in South Africa, was *Enigma* (1930)(fig 7).

This carving in stone, representing the tilted head of a Zulu woman with her eyes shut, is one of the major sculptures which Stainbank produced after her return from London. While the sculpture can be regarded as a portrait of a married Zulu woman who holds a cluster of beads in her right
hand, which presses against her *isicholo*, its title leads attention away from its identity as a portrait study. The eyes of the woman are closed and the hand holding the beads is curled up against her head as though in a position of sleep. Even though this sculpture demands an approach from above in order to see the face clearly, it could easily, when placed sideways onto its right hand side, be seen as a woman sleeping on her right arm. Her left hand lies relaxed in front of her chin, and unlike the stylisation of the beads and headdress, the hand is represented naturalistically. The posture of the woman, as well as her closed eyes, is atypical of conventional portrait busts and supports a metaphoric rather than literal interpretation, as suggested by the title.

*Enigma* (1930)(fig 7) differs radically from the portrait busts Stainbank modelled on commission and for friends, eg *The padre* (1931)(fig 1). Firstly, *Enigma* is carved in stone, whereas Stainbank’s other portraits were modelled in clay, presumably in preparation for bronze casting. Carving, being a direct medium, held associations for Stainbank of a liberating and expressive, “primitive” activity, whereas modelling carried associations of the conventional and of public approval. A modelled portrait had to display a likeness of the sitter, and had to be naturalistically rendered in a subdued technique. *The padre* (1931)(fig 1) is an accurate, naturalistic rendering of the Rev. Cox, as is evident from photographs in the Stainbank Archives. Secondly, like *Miserable Elizabeth* (1921)(fig 2), *Enigma* (1927)(fig 7) holds the face of an unknown indigenous person. The immediate assumption is that the face of *Enigma* is, in the context of Stainbank’s other experimental sculptures, conceptual. However, the fact that this face resembles many young Zulu women in present-day KwaZulu Natal, indicates that Stainbank was also concerned with representational accuracy when sculpting the *indigene*. The hands and arms of *Enigma* are included - a deviation from most conventional portraits - and the eyes of the sitter are closed, as if in a state of sleep.
The association of the sculpture with sleep adds a further dimension to the title in that a reference to dreams becomes viable. Dreams and visions played an important role as iconography for some modernist artists, notably those associated with Surrealism, and in movements in which a spiritual dimension and the visionary formed its central focus. It is not important whether Stainbank was familiar with the paintings by these artists. What is significant, is that she acknowledged a subjective dimension as central to the making of sculpture, and that, through such subjective projection, instilled a meaning which is, despite the representational nature of the sculpture, abstract and unknowable.

In comparison with Enigma (1930)(fig 7), Gilbert Ledward’s Earth rests (1930) is remarkably similar. It is unlikely that Stainbank saw this specific sculpture while she was working on Enigma, yet the metaphoric title, the combination of verisimilitude and abstraction, the soft flesh on the inside of the knees of Ledward’s figure, and the smooth chest and decorative necklace, are similar features. Stainbank must have seen some of Ledward’s sculptures while she was in London and understood aspects of the way in which he utilised these features. Her interest in the decorative aspects of the indigene’s beadwork, in conjunction with an emphasis on the decorative at the Royal College of Art, might have caused her to respond positively to Ledward’s sculpture. Ledward also depicted a sleeping woman, with one hand above the head and her arm around her head, as did Gaudier-Brzeska in Seated woman (1914). Gaudier-Brzeska’s figure is seated, but, like Stainbank’s representation, rests its head with closed eyes against a raised arm.

Katharine Maltwood, an artist studying at the Slade School of Art prior to the First World War, also presented a female head with eyes closed and tilted backwards, in the monument Primeval Canada (c1913)(fig 60). It is not clear whether Stainbank saw Maltwood’s sculpture, but the similarity of these two female heads as well as the similarity between Stainbank’s
Adam and Eve (c1924)(fig 52) and Maltwood’s Archangel (sa) makes this a likely possibility. An article on Maltwood was published in Studio in 1924 and it is possible that Stainbank saw this article, if not the actual sculpture.

The likeness between these heads by the artists mentioned, forces one to consider whether there was a tendency or fashion during the 1920s in London to combine the decorative with naturalism. Certainly, the subject matter of a sleeping head was preceded by the various studies, by both Brancusi and Epstein, of sleeping or lying heads. In South Africa, Van Wouw also depicted the indigene as sleeping, as in Slapende Basoetu (1907). Stainbank’s head, which carries the appearance of the “other”, coupled with a title which is evocative, invites a consideration of the head not primarily and explicitly as a representation of the indigene, but instead as a consideration of the significance of these factors combined. Stainbank carved Enigma (1930)(fig 7) in stone, implying a degree of involvement with the medium as well as with the subject matter of the sculpture, especially since she expressed her dislike of modelling portrait heads in clay (Webb 1985: 4). Van Wouw’s head is tilted backwards, not to reflect sleep, but to present an image of the indigene as curiosity. In a condition of sleep, the coloniser becomes voyeur, thereby asserting power over the “other” through gazing at its face.

There is no evidence in the Stainbank Archives that Stainbank ever indulged in self-portraits, despite the portrait busts she made of members of her family and friends. Enigma (1930)(fig 7) raises the question whether this portrait can be considered an evocation of the artist through subjective projection. While she was studying in London, her depictions of the “other” meant establishing a connection with that which was for her, known and familiar, despite being different. For Stainbank, an interest in the “primitive” could not therefore signify the taking up of a stance in opposition to Western aesthetic ideologies. Instead, the “primitive” or “other” acted as self-affirmation and self-recognition for the artist in a foreign country. This might also explain the inclusion of naturalistic details
in *Enigma* (1930)(fig 7) such as the limp hand. Stainbank was working, by implication, from the known "self" as "other", thereby setting in motion a continuum in which "self" and "not-self" are not opposed to each other but merge into the same identity. A feminist interpretation of this position would argue that woman as "self" is here opposed instead to the phallocratic "other". According to Bhabha (1986: 149), this verifies that the identity of "self" and "other" cannot be fixed into a simple binary configuration.

In *The Natal Mercury* the Idler (1936) said of *Enigma* (1930)(fig 7): "This stone head of a native woman who holds a few beads in her hands expressed to me the very spirit of Africa", and "[e]very piece of work done by this South African Epstein has raised a storm of controversy". A concern with the metaphor has already been evident in some of Stainbank's sculptures done at the Royal College of Art. Also, Stainbank here represented the sleeping woman in a naturalistic way: the face and hand fulfil the demands of "truth to nature". Paradoxically, by "nature" Stainbank implied not the conservative, photographic image and narrative reading of a "worthy" subject matter demanded by a literally-minded audience. Instead, "nature" here refers to Stainbank's reality, which is, as explained above, the indigenous personage she identified with. The title, when read in conjunction with a representation of "otherness", is evocative not of sleep *per se*, but of the primal identity of the "other" which, during sleep, cannot be affected or altered by colonial constructions of identity and "self". Stainbank explained in an interview that *Enigma* (1930)(fig 7) expressed "an idea of African women", as did some of her other sculptures depicting the African woman, and that she felt "they had a deep feeling inside them which we couldn't understand" (Adderley 1990: 129). It is possible that this "feeling" constituted, for Stainbank, at least an aspect of that which she defined as the "spirit of Africa".

Stainbank's identification with the "other" as "self" was overtly expressed in a carved stone relief panel called *Fate* (1937)(fig 10). A drawing in the
Stainbank Archives (fig 61) indicates that this panel was designed as part of the decorations for the Public Offices in Aliwal North. The panel depicts a crouching African woman with her hands handcuffed behind her back. She is chained to a block-like structure on which the head of a judge, characterised by the wig he wears, rests. Her ochred hair strands swing around her face, due to the force with which she is pulling to free herself. On the side of the plinth is an inscription: "Is there no stoning save with flint and rock".16 Behind her, a standing black male is pushing a large wheel in the opposite direction in which she is pulling. The preparatory drawing (fig 61) reflects this situation as well as its mirror image, in which another female figure is represented as seated.

The correspondence with the Public Works Department (15 June 1935) reveals that they accepted the designs Stainbank submitted for pre-cast panels, but not this one which she intended to be a carving. Stainbank explained her intentions in this work to Botha (1989b):

Now that was done when I was feeling a bit sore about losing a job. And I felt: "Well, the men get all the jobs". Because the architect said to me "We liked your work but ... as you are a woman, we thought you’d fall down on the job". .... .... And here and there men tried to help; and that was the man in the background pushing the wheel off, you see. And I’m chained to that man in there, the head. It’s just symbolic you know, it’s nothing.

These words by the artist verify the observation made in the discussion of *Enigma* (1930)(fig 7) that the *indigene* became, for Stainbank, a metaphor for "self". She was loathe to acknowledge in the interviews with both Botha (1989a) and Adderley (1990) that the face of the judge was in fact that of the Rev Cox, whom she married much later, in 1961. She explained that she referred to his face as it was "a very nice sculpturesque head ... " (Botha 1989a) and that it signified man in general (Adderley 1990: 123).
Analyses of representations of indigenous personages in sculptures such as *Enigma* (1930)(fig 7) and *Fate* (1937)(fig 10) lead, in addition to the understanding that the *indigene* signified for Stainbank an identification with "other", to the internalising, through mimesis, of the generic "other" as "self". The rejection of *Fate* by the authorities parodies the rejection of the female *indigene* by colonial society and affirms the awkward social position of the woman sculptor in South Africa.

The re-definition of "nature" as "new", as implicit in *Enigma* (1930)(fig 7), can be considered the harbinger of a change in attitude towards the subject of "nature" by the generation of South African artists of the late 1930s, who became known as the New Group. According to Berman (1983: 13) South African artists began during this time to move away from landscape painting towards more individualised interpretations of their realities. In this spirit, Stainbank retrospectively made a statement of her intentions in a letter to Erik Laubser (b1927) and Neville Dubow, dated August 19, 1966:

> A short statement reflecting my own ideas and aims
> I am to express in simplified form, the essence or soul of the subjects. I feel that the artist must not only have the individual point of view, but he must also strive to express in a unique manner, the impact of life on his personal feelings. Following "fashion trends" in art is fatal to individual development. The artist's thinking must be done with his own mind.

This is one of very few written statements by Stainbank regarding her work (Annexure 1). It speaks of a refusal to adhere to conventions of whatever kind, but simultaneously also rejects the blind following of trends and fashions. Stainbank confirmed in this short text her commitment to her works as "honest" expressions of her own perceptions.

Berman (1983: 13) ascribed the change in South African art, from landscape painting to the creation of an "African Mystique", to an
awareness among South African artists of an inescapable “ethos of Africa”. This was reflected in a return to past traditions and cultures present in South Africa “not as the source of primitive forms but as a context of experience” (Berman 1983: 13). Berman based her conclusions largely on paintings by Walter Battiss (1906-1982) and Alexis Preller (1911-1975). Significantly, Stainbank had already by this time established this “ethos” for herself as a student at the Royal College of Art in London. This fact inverts the usual belief among artists and critics that modernism thrashed its formal and visual problems out in two-dimensional terms before it found reflection in sculptural form. Berman also did not mention Stainbank’s name in her discussion of portrait studies in South African sculpture.\(^{18}\) Through her exposure to British and European modernism during the early twentieth century, Stainbank can be considered an artist who, in South Africa, inverted this process. The immediate result was the negative reception of her sculpture; in the long term it probably contributed to the overlooking of her contribution to South African sculpture.

A carving by Stainbank, which generated much controversy and criticism in the local Durban press, was \textit{Baya huba} (1932)(fig 8).\(^{19}\) This sculpture was first exhibited at the annual Natal Society of Artists’ exhibition in Durban during July 1933 and later, during 1936, at the \textit{Empire exhibition} in Johannesburg.\(^{20}\) This carving in Warmbaths red sandstone consists of a representation of a Zulu mother with an infant on her back and a Zulu man, presumably the husband of the woman and father of the child. They are clapping their hands while their mouths are wide open as if in the act of singing, dancing and making music. The newspaper review announcing the opening of the exhibition stated that this exhibition would probably go down in history as the first exhibition at which the work of South Africa’s greatest artist first showed itself in full maturity and at which this artist first received full share of public recognition (RVG 1933a).
The artist referred to is of course Stainbank. The article hailed her as an outstanding artist and added: "it is extremely doubtful if she or any other South African has conveyed the essential spirit that is Africa with such telling force or such complete success before." Here the issue of representation re-enters the debate. Stainbank, coming from a white colonial family, represented the "other" firstly as cultural and secondly as stylistic "other", and not according to the idiom of naturalistic representation for which the Gundelfinger Prize three years earlier was given to Palmer. The newspaper article further stated that the work revealed an overpowering sense of strength and force in her conception of the heads and hands of the singing Natives. Her sculpture is in the very highest tradition for, despite its modernity of outlook, it has the one quality by which all sculpture must be judged. It is conceived in the round. From whatever angle the group is viewed it presents an arresting picture with amazing subtlety (RVG 1933a).

It is clear that the modernist character of the sculpture was identified but no discussion of these characteristics followed, except by comparison with Stern's work.²¹ The author of this newspaper article, RVG (1933a), drew a distinction between the "modern" sculpture of Stainbank, and the "modernity" of Stern's painting: "I feel that so-called 'modernism' is Miss Stern's greatest enemy for, in my opinion her work progresses inversely to the amount of 'modernity' it shows". The three-dimensionality of Stainbank's sculpture was of greater importance than its formal idiom. It was clearly not the form of the sculpture but its meaning which was weightily considered. The author of the above passage kept on referring back to the African spirit of the carving: it should be displayed in London at South Africa House, as it constituted one of, if not the greatest expression in art of the spirit of South Africa. Miss Stainbank has done more than carve the heads of two singing Natives. She has created the spirit of the Native people (RVG 1933a).
The suggestion to move the sculpture overseas was not well received. Vermilion (1933a), as president of the Natal Society of Artists, stated that the sculpture was of the highest genius and that it is “of particular significance to Natal, and for that reason I cannot agree to it going overseas to South Africa House except on loan for a definite period”. The suggested contextual displacement of the sculpture was questioned because it was seen to belong in Africa, despite the fact that its maker studied in London, came from a British family, and employed European-derived conventions of representation to depict the *indigene*. Ironically, the "spirit of Africa" was recognised only when expressed by the sensibility of the European-trained artists and according to the visual traditions of the western world, while locally made artefacts by black people were not considered as making any contribution to art in the country at all. The art:craft debate might have, at the time, contributed to this dichotomy, but it is more likely that it was the colonial understanding of the nature of “art” which excluded locally made artefacts, as these did not qualify as "art".

Martin, a lecturer from the Durban School of Art, supported the view that *Baya huba* (1932)(fig 8) transcended its parochial context. In a newspaper article in *The Natal Mercury* (Vermilion 1933b), entitled “Further Praise”, he said:

> It is not only a clever rendering of a man, a woman and a child in stone: that is commonplace. But it expresses the emotions and feelings of a whole race. A profound sense of that universal spirit which pervades all great art is conveyed to us through a consciousness particularly receptive and sensitive and able to render this message with force and vitality through an excellent technique and an understanding of the relation of lines and masses.

These perceptions and comments raise pertinent questions about the representation of, and the speaking on behalf of, the “other”. Although Stainbank stated retrospectively what her intentions were, namely that she
wanted to express Africa. One of my earliest pieces was *Baya Huba*, now in the Durban Art Gallery. The head of the Gallery thought it was too modern. Of course it’s old fashioned now but I felt I got something out of it, and I tried to get it in all my African studies ... a primitiveness, and yet they were coming into the Western world (Lewis 1991:46),

the question of speaking on behalf of the “other” remains unaddressed. Both Stainbank and Martin digressed from issues central to representation of the “other” to discussions of the use of formal “language” and intention.

With regard to the visual properties of the carving, Hillebrand (1986:143) observed that “there is a tendency to concentrate on surfaces and linear patterns to the detriment of form”, because she felt that Stainbank “appears to lack the ability to handle three-dimensional form in stone”. Hillebrand defended the sculpture on the grounds that Stainbank preferred carving as a sculptural activity to modelling. *Baya huba* (1932)(fig 8) consists of three heads arranged around a central axis. Even though the sculpture forms an integrated unit, each head can be viewed in isolation. Likewise, some sculptural works by Stainbank also have a “front” and “back” view, such as *Native study (sa)*23 and *Baleta* (1931)(fig 62), but this is most likely due to her honouring the shape of the materials. In *Baleta* (1931), the shape of the stone most obviously curbed the size and position of the mother’s head and reminds one strongly, of Moore’s *Mother and child* (1924)(fig 63). In carvings such as *Baleta* (1931)(fig 62), Stainbank introduced a twist in the body to assist the transition from the one view to another - a device also used by Moore, particularly in his later sculptures. In both *Baya huba* (1932)(fig 8) and *Baleta* (1931)(fig 62), Stainbank made use of incised lines to describe detail and subtle transitions from one plane to another. Yet, the structure of the faces reflects an acute awareness of three-dimensional form in space.

Despite the criticism lodged against Stainbank’s alleged inability to work with form in the round, the Idler (1936) stated that Rothenstein said of her that she was “one of the most outstanding students to have ever
graduated from the Royal College of Art ... ". This belief had already manifested itself among a few art critics at the time of the exhibition of *Baya huba* (1933)(fig 8). Roworth (1933), in "Fine tribute by Mr. Roworth" remarked as follows of this sculpture in *The Natal Mercury*:

I feel that there is meaning and emotion derived from reality and rendered into an enduring art form.

The forms and methods of a past generation no longer convey any definite thrill to our modern consciousness. The outward mould of art is refashioned with each cultural age and to-day we ask of the plastic arts that they shall be clear, definite and functional and that all trimmings and irrelevancies be discarded. We ask, in short, that the art of to-day shall be dynamic.

From such test Mary Stainbank's sculpture emerges triumphantly. It is a distinct addition to the modern spirit in art ...

Martin appears to have supported this view of Stainbank's work as being essentially of a "modern spirit". In *The Natal Mercury* of 7 July 1933 Vermilion (1933b) quoted him:

One outstanding characteristic of Miss Stainbank's work is that her material never loses its individuality. No matter how vivid may be her figures carved in stone, the result is always stone. Rodin had this amazing quality. Miss Stainbank conceives an interest in a rough piece of stone and builds her conception into it. The shape of the original stone determines her conception to a great extent. The result is something primitive and at the same time civilised. It is the primitive seen through Western eyes.

The mediated perception here of the "other" is noticeable: the relationship between observation and its rendering in visual terms is culture-specific despite a thorough knowledge of, and association with, the "other". The implication of this is an inevitable presence of a degree of bias. Significantly, Martin referred to Stainbank's adherence to "truth to materials" by explaining how she built her ideas into stone, thereby linking material to iconography.
The notion of representation raises problematic issues in the above quotations. Of course Stainbank's sculpture is the representation of the "primitive" seen through Western eyes. Important considerations in this regard are, firstly, that Stainbank's work deviated from the norm. She might have acquired all the skills needed to make a sculpture, but her perception of the subject was not based on the then current ideas about how the "other" ought to be represented, as suggested by, amongst others, Palmer. Instead, Stainbank represented the African personage as she experienced the person within his/her context, without conforming to current fashions or politically tainted motivations about how not to offend the black person by selecting the "elevated" type. This smacks more of a ploy devised by artists such as Palmer, to perpetuate modes of art making in Natal, than of any potential offence to anyone other than those upholding conventional and academic principles with regard to representations of the indigene. In fact, Palmer's representations of indigenous identities were not always well received. In a letter to Vann-Hall dated 14 May 1937, Short related the information about Palmer's tile panels, installed in the Post Office at Kokstad, that: "one of the reasons the Kokstad panels have been removed is the Natives objected to Palmer's drawings of them they [sic] said they 'were an insult to natives'!!"

Secondly, the making of a sculpture representing an indigenous subject via a modernist visual idiom implies that Stainbank was not attempting to speak on behalf of the "other". Instead, she was speaking for her own perception and subjective stance through reference to the "other". The sculpture is, in other words, not trying to give a clinical or objective account of the Zulu culture. Instead, Stainbank presented a subjective exploration of her own experience, knowledge and perceptions of that culture, whilst retaining its integrity as different. Vermilion (1933c) confirmed this perspective in a newspaper article in The Natal Mercury, entitled "More praise for Baya Huba". Here he observed that Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) is "definitely an expression as it appeals to her untuitive [sic] mind".
Vermilion (1933d) attempted to contextualise Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) in an article entitled “Can we honour genius?” in the same paper by stating that “the aim of any society advancing the arts must surely be to make possible an adequate expression of the vital feelings of a race in relation to its age”, and adding that Stainbank’s work is clearly not “European art transplanted to this Continent”. The implication is that Stainbank’s sculpture was approaching something of the “national identity” Vermilion was seeking. For him, this identity lay, first and foremost, in the subject matter of the indigene.

Critics and public alike simultaneously described Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) in the press positively and negatively. This debate, immediately following the exhibition of the sculpture in July, opened up the problematic question regarding the need for the title of a modernist work to correlate literally with the subject represented. In this sculpture, the reading of a theme/actuality within the paradigm of the artist’s intention, namely to capture the “spirit of Africa”, has to be considered.

The debate mentioned centred on the anthropologically “correct” title given to Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) and also on the appearance of the “Natives” depicted in this work. This debate continued until well into August of 1933. The focus of this debate did not reside in an interpretation of the sculpture itself as much as in the attitude of the public towards a modernist, “Negroid” work of art, which carried a problematic title. In The Natal Mercury, Vermillion (1933c) addressed the problem of the meaning of the title “Baya huba”, indicating that this meaning reaches beyond mere translation as “they are singing” or “they are chanting”. In an interview with Botha (1989b) Stainbank said that her intention in the sculpture was “to express a singing and dancing. You know how they all clap and dance and sing and make a noise. And I called it ‘Baya Huba’ and that means clapping and singing, you know”. Vermillion (1933c) further stated that the term means basically the equivalent of expressing joie de vivre as the “Bantu” person often expresses this through dancing which is
accompanied by the rhythmic stamping of feet, accompanied by singing and shrieking:

Naturally, in the full abandon of the moment, otherwise pleasant features are often distorted, either deliberately or subconsciously, and it is this particular aspect which Mary Stainbank, who one feels is in some measure inspired by the genius of Epstein, has selected for her remarkable group. To say that she has been prompted, as has been suggested, to perpetrate an offence against good taste, and likely to ridicule Natives of their customs, many of which are, alas, fast disappearing, is preposterous. She has applied her talent and artistic skill to illustrate in stone a phase of our Native life with feeling realism, . . . .

Vermilion is here confusing the distortion of the figures themselves with the distortion Stainbank used as a formal element to enhance the visual impact of the image.

The debate surrounding Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) gives rise to the possibility that Stainbank’s interest did not lie with the creation of accurate “types” or of ethnographic documentation. Instead, she focused on the “Native” or “other” as presence (Botha 1987a and 1989a). Of this she said to Botha (1987a) “They were just earthy and natural and it appealed to me, with the African. I based my work on the Africans”. This admission directs attention away from the representation of the “other” as ethnographic “type” or as accurate in Stainbank’s work, despite some visual clues in the sculpture indicating the contrary. Moreover, the debate about the sculpture increased to incorporate ideological stances reflecting the colonial atmosphere in which the sculpture was exhibited:

Is it fair to our Native friends, many of whom are commendably trying to raise themselves above the level of their ancestors, to expose among the public either here or overseas so exaggerated, grotesque and repulsive a caricature of our already oftentimes much maligned fellow inhabitants of South Africa?

For the sake of the very few who are capable of appreciating Art in its highest forms, is it right to add insult to injury by holding up to permanent ridicule, among those
who hold the Native in contempt, a representation of
features which is not true except perhaps in most unusual
cases?

Will such an exhibition tend to revive in the Native heart
that feeling of esteem and respect for the White man,
which many of us deplore as fast ebbing away? (Holt
1933a)

This debate generated an on-going response in *The Natal Mercury* on the
meaning of the sculpture. Ideas expressed in the press about the “correct”
form of representation of the *indigene* continued, and by implication so did
the belief in a specific “type”. The “correctness” of the image was
measured on the one hand against Western conventions for art-making,
and on the other hand against the political and ideological characteristics
ascribed to the “other”, given the political context in the South Africa of the
time. Perception as mediated by political or cultural knowledge certainly
appeared to be of central importance within any colonial construct,
including this case.24 The focus in the above quotation resided, again, not
so much on the representation of the *indigene* as on what the *indigene*’s
attitude would be towards the colonist who represented him in this
manner. The aim in this case, of “correct” representation, was to sustain
the respect the *indigene* held towards the colonist, hence to perpetuate
colonial power via a visual image. This is also indicative of the
continuation of expectations of art in Natal during the 1930s as
problematical: the reality of the subject matter must be reflected in the
realism of the representation and in its title. Coupled to this is the
seemingly false understanding that a dignified representation of the
*indigene* will imply social (colonial) acceptance.

R Muir Ferguson (1933)25 interpreted Stainbank’s sculptural group as a
“fearful travesty of humanity” and expressed the opinion that the faces of
the personages involved were those of devils. It is clear that in the public’s
eye, the sculpture and its title led to a literal interpretation of both - a
sentiment that perpetuated the Victorian notion of “truth to nature”. Here,
the fundamental paradox inherent in modernism and the aims of the
avant-garde is underlined: despite the aim of the avant-garde to reach a wider audience, this could not occur, as the increasingly abstract and subjective nature of particularly modernist painting alienated such work from society. The expressive nature of Stainbank’s sculpture, albeit strictly tied to a representational idiom, was likewise the cause of severe criticism. Baya huba (1933)(fig 8), while true to the subjects depicted, was not true to the “type” promoted by various artists and personalities. Oswald Fynney (1933) perpetuated this view:

to seek to give it any significance as being typical of a people, is as absurd as trying to convince oneself, or anyone else, that there is anything but sheer horror in the beastliness which “Modern Art” is trying to palm off on a “border-line” world as beauty.

In addition, from the “Native” point of view, Baya huba is a “thoughtless confession of indifference or ... an inability to portray the ‘better halves’ of a people who mean a great deal to Natal.” L (1933) responded with the pertinent question whether it mattered what the words meant in order to appreciate Stainbank’s sculpture. This question is of course more to the point but was largely ignored in the press at the time. A few letters appeared in which the faces of the protagonists in Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) were seen to be those of “baboons” (Simonides 1933; and Halle 1933) and in which Stainbank was accused of interpreting the occasion of huba as a "bacchanalian orgy" (Veritas 1933). Veritas also saw that the types portrayed here are exaggerated Negro types. The Natives of this part of Africa have features of Egyptian or even Caucasian type, and our Native women, almost without exception, have small slender hands, not large, thick fingered hands such as those given by Miss Stainbank to the woman in her sculpture. A glance at nearly all the Native portraits shown by other artists in this exhibition shows that they recognise that our Natives are of much finer physical type than Miss Stainbank has represented them to be.
The implication of these letters is that while the sculpture was described as “expressing the spirit of the time”, controversy and comparison later showed that the contrary was also possible. The letter by Veritas is awkward as it compared the allegedly faulty representation by Stainbank not with the actual person depicted, but with other more “tasteful” and acceptable representations, presumably those by Palmer. This reflects criteria not of verisimilitude, but of what was considered within a colonial construct as “tasteful”, hence acceptable. In this manner the identity of the indigene was denied while simultaneously affirming that of the colonist. A symbolic rendering of the indigene in acceptable or tasteful ways, implies that the indigene was made acceptable to the colonist, who had effectively “raised” or “lifted” him or her to the same level. Adimirer II (1933) presented another, more sober stance: “The uplift of the Native will never be affected one way or the other by a stone group, in any case”.

A certain PA Stuart (1933) expressed agreement in a letter to the paper that the title of Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) was questionable because it suggested a chanting not intended by Stainbank. Yet, he felt that the sculpture “laid bare the very soul of the unsophisticated Zulu” and because it was a “monument to reality”, it “should not be marred by an almost wholly inaccurate title”. G (1933) had the last word:

> The plain fact is that the general public knows nothing about art ... the present wilderness of Victorian futility at present in the Gallery might be leavened [by the purchase of Baya huba] so that generations to come might know what real art is. For there can be no doubt that "Baya Huba" is art.

From this controversy it is evident that an accurate understanding of the title of the sculpture was popularly considered as the overridingly important requirement to ensure an appropriate and “correct” interpretation. This reflects the extent to which the public was still literally minded, expecting the title of the sculpture to provide the all-important clue to the comprehension of the work. Also, the converse was felt to be necessary:
the verisimilitude reflected in paintings or sculptures would be echoed in
the literal interpretation of the title. In some of the letters generating the
controversy surrounding *Baya huba*, comparisons were made with the
lions outside South Africa House on Trafalgar Square in London. The
implication was that Stainbank’s work lacked “realism”. This quest, for the
representational in art (someone even suggested that Stainbank should
rather take up photography!) to be accurate, reflects, typically, a popular
position. What the public was unaware of was that Stainbank apparently
gave titles to her sculptures at the last minute, and probably had in mind
something other than what they wanted. A further option is of course the
modernist lack of interest in titles for paintings and sculptures, often
resorting to numbers for studies or to giving no title at all.

A few important issues had been raised by the above controversy in the
press, which might have contributed to the eventual neglect of Stainbank
as a sculptor in South Africa. Firstly, the disapproval by a Natal audience,
including artists and art critics, of modern art and the “distortions” it relied
on, must have implied to Stainbank the rejection of her work. Secondly,
the criticism of her selecting a “type” of “Native” which the white public
considered offensive, together with a title which was considered inaccurate
in comparison to the name given to the sculpture, was probably also
interpreted by Stainbank as dismissive. Veritas’s (1933) summary of the
problem, namely that it was “not merely a question of the interpretation of
the Zulu phrase, but a question as to whether this sculpture is a right
interpretation of Native life and thought and feelings” verifies in retrospect
the progressive nature of Stainbank’s sculpture. She was not, by these
standards, allowed her own, “right” subjective stance, typical of the
modernist’s *modus operandi*. *Baya huba* (1933)(fig 8) might not be
considered a modernist sculpture *per se*. However, due to its “primitivist”
subject matter and the use of some formal devices as employed by the
African sculptor, such as stylisation, exaggeration (of hands and feet), and
linear elements on the surface of the sculpture, this image fits more
comfortably into a modernist framework than into the literal idiom regarded
as “art” at the time in Natal. *Baya huba* (1933)(fig 8) is also a continuation of Stainbank's interest in the Natal *indigene*, an interest informed by her knowledge of a tendency in Britain and Europe to turn to African art as a source for art making. Stainbank consciously rejected this tendency (Botha 1987a), along with the concern for representing the “correct type” of *indigene*.

Considering *Baya huba* (1933)(fig 8) within the context of art practice in Natal during the 1930s; the genre of the Native Study and the Gundelfinger Prize; and Stainbank’s own studies in and contact with “primitivist” art in London, it is self-evident that she was not concerned with literal representation. Instead, this sculpture, like Stainbank’s other representations of the South African *indigene*, should be considered within the general framework of her intention as quoted above. It is also important to note that Stainbank’s Zulu titles are not always linguistically correct. This underlines a further problem which is involved when representing an “other”, namely that the cultural practices of the “other” could never have been fully accessible to the colonial “self”, undermining the notion that representation is always a speaking on behalf of the “other”. A further complication in this regard is that Stainbank, being a female artist who was trained in a genre and discipline which is made by males, could also not fully “speak” for herself.

*Baya huba* (1933)(fig 8) extends the habit Stainbank acquired in London of taking liberties in the abstraction of certain aspects of the body. It is therefore also possible that she took liberties with the Zulu title as well. Her tendency to exaggerate often led to the describing of her sculpture as caricature-like, as with *Baya huba*. The question raised by this criticism is whether such a reading is elicited through a “mis”-understanding of the essence of Stainbank’s “primitivism”: exaggeration for her did not derive from African sculpture as was the case with Epstein and even Picasso. Instead, exaggeration (see pp 86 and 87) was a device Stainbank observed in sculptures by European artists, and which she chose to
employ to achieve her aim, namely the expression of an African “spirit”. Through her version of exaggeration, attention is drawn to specific aspects of the figure, such as the feet, which link that figure with its “natural” context, thereby describing something of its identity.

Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) can, on one level, be considered to be a caricature: the combination of a realistic image coupled with a decorative yet exaggerated style and an approach to a three-dimensional object which focuses on three separate entities without any logical sculptural transition from one section to another, might have, at the time, led to the work being considered in literal terms. On another level, Baya huba (1933)(fig 8) can be viewed as a metaphor for a life and culture, which is integral to Stainbank’s life and her visual world. In addition, the dispute about the title also highlights Stainbank’s search for visual equivalents of what she considered to be the “spirit of Africa”. Her intention, as discussed, was not directed at the representation or documentation of Zulu culture, but instead focused on the impact of this culture and life-force on herself and her sculpture.

The expression of the “idea” in sculpture

While Stainbank was studying in Britain, the relationship between sculpture and architecture formed a prominent theme in the many drawings she made in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum of sculpted objects and their environments. In 1939, in an article “The architect and modern sculptor” published in the Natal Technical College’s journal The Common Room Magazine (Hillebrand 1987a), Stainbank presented her own case. Here, in her own words, she explained the basis of a sculpture which she considered typically modernist. She stated categorically that sculpture

is not an imitation or a photographic likeness of an object, in stone; but it is the resultant work which emerges when
any mass of formal matter is changed by human will into a
mass which has formal meaning. Fundamentally, true
sculpture is a piece of architecture or the building up of an
object in three dimensional forms with the intention that it
will be of use structurally and decoratively, and
occasionally didactically – when it also symbolises the
principle of life as expressed by the artist, and which he
feels impelled to present to his fellow men that may share
his experience.

In this article Stainbank also referred to the "new" vocabulary of the
modern sculptor, and the modern artist as a "liberator of ideas ...". It is this
identity of the artist as liberator, albeit in a cultural context, which
frequently gave rise to the association of modernism with oppositional
political ideologies. Furthermore, this identity found expression in an
emphasis on the conceptual rather than the perceptual aspect of
modernist art practice. The emphasis on the conceptual and the
subjective required that imitation and representation in the literal sense be
rejected in order for the sculpture to express the idea. A sculpture by
Stainbank, which possibly achieved this aim, is a small carving in
Wonderstone entitled Medusa (1938)(fig 9).

In this carving Stainbank combined her interest in the South African
indigene with overtly modernist formal principles and with a mythological
subject from ancient Greece. She described to Botha (1989a) how she
found a title for this sculpture: "Well that really I just did it as a shape and I
had to find a name for it. I really had Medusa at the back of my mind, the
old tale, you know, the myth about Medusa ... turned into stone ... ". The
mythological title of Medusa, supported by the presence of a stylised
snake and an African cultural identity, elicits a reading of the theme, not as
perceptually evocative of Greek mythology, but as conceptually
"Africanised".

In Medusa (1938)(fig 9), a Zulu woman, identified by a hair style similar to
that of the mother in Ozazisayo (1927)(fig 6), stands upright with a serpent
twisted around her legs. According to popular Greek mythology, serpents
emanate from the head of Medusa, one of the three sisters making up the three Gorgons. Medusa was the only mortal sister and was punished by Athena after a sexual encounter with Poseidon. Medusa’s punishment was that, though once beautiful, she became a terrifyingly ugly winged creature who would turn everyone she looked at into stone (Cotterell 1986: 160). According to Larrington (1992: 71), Medusa was a beautiful Libyan princess who was treacherously murdered during a battle against Perseus. He took her head to Argos where he buried it in the market square to ensure protection for his people. Whichever way the myth is read and understood, Stainbank combined the ancient tale with a modernist formal arrangement and a local indigenous identity, thereby parodying the intention of primitivism as a return to an original state in the quest for self-determination.

In an article in The Natal Mercury, RVG (1938) referred to Medusa (1938)(fig 9) as a "statuette in blue stone, which is certain to annoy the older school of artist, has a rhythm that is arresting and a surface texture more beautiful than velvet". The face of Stainbank’s Medusa is reminiscent of Brancusi’s Mademoiselle Pogany (1919) (Version II)(fig 64): the brow and nose, like the face in Brancusi’s sculpture, are reduced to a simple curve separating two adjacent planes. The hair is stylised according to the pattern of knotting as used by the Zulu and Bhaca groups. These strands replace the traditional snakes associated with Medusa’s head. The remainder of the figure’s body consists of largely inorganic and non-anatomical interlocking shapes, one of which reads as a leg severed from the body and twisted at an awkward angle to the body. These shapes are simplified and reminiscent of Archipenko and Laurens’ Cubist sculptures.

The impact of Archipenko’s blunt, cone-like and ovoid shapes, characteristic of his Boxing match (1913), is evident in Medusa (1938)(fig 9). Like Archipenko, Stainbank described the limbs of Medusa as abstract shapes in space, rather than as anatomically correct form. The final effect
is one of a synthetically constructed figurative form, which nevertheless contains details descriptive of an African identity, and supports a conceptual reading of the theme. The feet of Medusa are, like Laurens' figures, cube-like and proportional to the body, over-sized. The preparatory drawings for this carving indicate a geometric approach to the subject (fig 65).

This sculpture, together with Stainbank's competition submission for the unknown political prisoner, even though made almost two decades later, reflect most overtly her knowledge and skill in using a modernist formal idiom. Stainbank acknowledged, in a document in the Campbell Collections in Durban, the sculpture of Ossip Zadkine (1890-1967) and Gaudier-Brzeska as stylistic influences on her own sculpture, and evidently made use of examples of their sculptures for Medusa (1938)(fig 9). This carving forms a contrast with Stainbank's conventional figures modelled in clay at the Royal College of Art, as well as with the descriptive and representational forms she employed for public commissions in South Africa. It becomes clear that Stainbank approached her subject matter of the indigene differently to her commissioned projects, and that she employed a modernist form for these "private" sculptures.

Stainbank's skill in applying modernism's formal disposition as combined with a conceptual and subjective, even emotive basis, assisted her in not following and reflecting the European trend of the period, but rather in expressing a particular "idea" which is culturally context-bound. To achieve this, representational clues such as the hair and snake are used to locate the myth in a specific context whilst referring to another historic era and different geographic location. It is Stainbank's ability to combine the two seemingly oppositional and irreconcilable modes of modernism and representation, which rendered her sculptural vision as unique and, in retrospect, ahead of that of her South African peers. When Botha (1987a) discussed this issue with her, she responded: "I think that was true and I don't know why ... I think I was interested in the Africans. I have
been interested" and in a later interview: "I felt that I'd like to express the feeling of Africa and that was my aim at the beginning. I did African things" (Botha 1989b).

Stainbank's concern with the *indigene*, with "African things" as subject matter, is particularly evident from the drawings and sketches she made while in London and since her return to the family farm. She drew the people on the farm, specifically Zulu women with infants, figures and portraits. Most of these drawings appear to be investigative, acting as recordings of appearance. This approach to drawing is also supported in the smaller sketchbooks, some of which date to the period when she studied at the Royal College of Art. These sketchbooks also contain imaginative work, indicating that she also worked from memory. The medium used in her drawings, mostly pencil, is confidently handled, and the figures act as vehicles of Stainbank's perceptions: contours, the sculptural nature of form, and the architectonic structure of this form.

The extent to which images in sketchbooks were made from memory or with a specific commission or project in mind is also not clear. Some of these sketches appear to be visual recordings of the people on the farm and responses to situations observed and experienced. Other drawings were probably done in preparation for wall panels for the Empire Exhibition held in Johannesburg in 1936. The correspondence between Stainbank and the erstwhile Native Affairs Department during 1936 indicates that her tender for painted murals representing "indigenous life" was accepted. In comparison with the information provided by the Department, Stainbank's drawings contain headings which are more accurate in nomenclature: Zulu, Pondo, Shangaan etc., whereas the officer from the Department simply referred to "Natives from Natal, Transvaal and the Cape" (3 June 1936). Stainbank was hence acutely aware of cultural identity and of *difference*, confirming the earlier discussion of the metaphoric implications of the *indigene* for her.
Stainbank’s continued interest in the *indigene* is confirmed by a letter from Donald Thomas of the Worker’s Educational Association in Durban (3 February 1932):

> The natives here you would like to see, for their bodies are good; many of them splendid, from the heel upwards, and little hampered by sophisticated clothes. They vary, but we have seen some fine profiles – with noses! - and the women have a tricky way of doing their hair, - not like that sugar loaf of the Zulu ! – that shows the head rippingly. Thus, (somewhat!): - ...

And Thomas included a drawing of this head (Annexure 2).

Stainbank continued, until the close of the period under investigation in this research, a metaphoric interpretation of the *indigene*, also in the popular cultural objects she made during the 1930s, such as book ends, ash trays and figurines. After the Second World War, she immediately resumed making sculpture upon her return to Coedmore from Pretoria, where she had served in the South African Air Force. However, this post-war period introduced changes in her perceptions, leading to changes also in her choice and use of materials and techniques. New considerations were therefore beginning to govern the making of her sculpture. This later period in her oeuvre consequently falls outside of the scope of this research, as the frequency of occurrence of the image of the *indigene* decreased and Stainbank focussed largely on working on commissions. Much of her time was also spent on teaching at the Technical College in Durban. This post-war period remains open for intensive future research.

The next chapter will briefly examine images of the *indigene* in the ceramic ware Stainbank made through the Olifantsfontein Studio. These images, even though small and directed at the popular market, continue Stainbank’s formal and iconographic concerns as reflected in her larger, “private” sculptures discussed thus far.
ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 4

1 The article states that at this exhibition, François exhibited a river scene and a landscape; Wallace Paton a seascape; Sénèque the Shongweni dam; Martin a Zulu warrior; Roworth scenes of the South Coast and Palmer a painting of children at play.

2 Other sculptures exhibited by Stainbank, from the previous four years, mentioned in this article, are "a particularly sensitive and solid torso of a young girl; a frog carved in stone, her very controversial 'Effort' in marble, the superb 'Enigma' and a head of a native".

3 Moses Kottler, Nude (1934). Teak, 28" high. (Illustration: Bokhorst 1966.)

4 What is beauty? The Natal Mercury 31 July 1927.

5 Reference is made to this painting in the newspaper reviews of the July exhibition of that year, but no further details are available.

6 The intention here is not to analyse Vermillion’s theory of art but rather to examine Stainbank’s involvement in South African art via the idiom she acquired in London. The conservatism of Vermillion’s ideas is a stumbling block in selecting his writings as typical modernist theory in South African art.

7 Eric Gill, Deposition (1924) Black Hopton-wood stone, 75 x 25 x 15. King’s School, Canterbury. (Illustration: Compton 1986, plate 93; date: 410.)

8 While Hitler’s first speech on the topic of entartete Kunst occurred at Nuremberg in 1934, the history of modernism from the second half of the nineteenth century to the 1950s is fraught with references to anarchy, fascism and rebellion, according to the various manifestos written and issued by avant-garde movements.

9 Marc Chagall (1887-1985), Max Ernst (1891-1976) and Salvador Dali (b1904) employed dream images.

10 Vassily Kandinsky’s (1866-1944) visionary images are noteworthy in this respect.

11 Gilbert Ledward, Earth rests (1930), from Sculpture 1850 and 1950, Exhibition catalogue, Holland Park May-September 1957. This catalogue is in the Stainbank Archives.

12 The backward tilt of the head is also reminiscent of Alfred Janniot’s Les bas-reliefs du Musee des Colonies (sa) of which there is a reproduction from an unidentified magazine in the Stainbank Archives.


14 This sculpture was exhibited at the London Salon of 1913 (Studio 1924).

16 The origin of the quotation is not clear. Stainbank did state in an interview (Botha 1988b) that she thought it came from Wordsworth.

17 These two artists planned to take an exhibition of South African art to the USA and began sending out circulars during August 1966, announcing their intentions.

18 The criticism of the earlier editions of Berman’s text as problematic because these omitted South African sculptors remains, for me, valid and unresolved.

19 For a full account of the debate, the Stainbank Archives hold a journal into which Stainbank pasted the entire debate as cut from relevant issues of the newspaper.

20 The work was also on display at the Tate Gallery in London as part of an exhibition of South African art 1948-1949. The Durban Art Gallery acquired the work in 1944.

21 The paper states that a “picture of two Natives and The Hunchback” by Stern were on display.

22 Also see “Will the Council Assist?” from the same issue of the paper.

23 Mary Stainbank, *Native study* (sa). Ficksburg sandstone and bronze 42 x 19 x 8. MSSCA.

24 The sensitivity involved in the “correct” form of representation was often at stake in the correspondence of the 1930s between the Ceramic Studio and the Ezayo Studio. Short instructed Vann-Hall (letter dated 14/04/1937) not to include any dead black people in the tile panel Vann-Hall was designing for the Marseilles post office in the then Orange Free State. Short wrote: “They suddenly at this stage feel it is a pity to perpetuate an incident of shooting down natives, and yet the battle took place.” “They” probably refer to the Works Department who commissioned these panels, in this case, the battle between Cathcart and Mosjesj, paramount chief of the Basotho. Short intimated that no dead “natives” should be included because the area is on the border, hence politically in a precarious position.

25 This writer stated that far too much licence has been taken with the interpretation of the title of *Baya huba*. *Huba or tuba*, he quoted from Colenso’s dictionary, refers to a Zulu custom which includes dancing, and not as Vermillion indicated, going on a spree. Instead, Ferguson quoted AT Bryant, late director of Bantu Studies at the South African University in Johannesburg. He wrote a Zulu/English dictionary which stated that *huba* means to sing an *ihubo*, i.e., making soft, continuous rumbling sounds; and that each Zulu group has its own *ihubo*, or more than one. The *ihubo* is a song which demands a sacred respect, as it is sung on certain solemn occasions where pathos is needed. It is performed with gravity, shield held up, and no dancing occurs. This regimental *amahubo* has the character of marching songs, not dance songs. Ferguson also referred to RC Samuelson, who believed that *ihubo* was any sound which is expressed by the word *ihubo*, hence a
chorus or war song, dedicated to the dead and the brave. According to Dr Gerhard Griesel from the KZN Education Department, the title simply means, in today's terms, "they are singing".

26 Stuart's reasons for this perspective was that *ihubo* is chanted by men not women; it is a solemn situation; it is also not a solo or a duet, but a chorus sung by many; and the *ihubo* is never accompanied by the clapping of hands, whereas other musical events are.


28 The South African sculptor Ivan Milford-Barberton was a fellow student of Stainbank's at the Royal College of Art. The only evidence of this in the Stainbank Archives is that his name appears on the same graduation programme as Stainbank's, in 1926. There is also in the Archives a magazine article on his work, probably taken from *Studio* magazine. Barberton also worked with various indigenous cultural groups, but in a highly representational and decorative manner.
CHAPTER 5

Stainbank and the Ceramic Studio

The previous chapter examined sculptures by Stainbank in which the *indigene* is presented as metaphor. This chapter will focus firstly on a selection of the popular cultural artefacts Stainbank made on request from the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein. Secondly, reference will be made to some of Stainbank’s designs containing the image of the *indigene*, which she submitted as tenders for decorations on public buildings. The ceramic objects by Stainbank take the form of book rests, ashtrays and figurines and represent the *indigene* as ornamental or as servant. Other figurines depicting the white personage take the form of garden fountain figures, figurines for herb gardens, and figures of Voortrekkers, designed to coincide with the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek in 1938.¹ While the aim in this chapter is to examine the figurines representing *indigenes*, those figurines depicting white personages are considered important as they establish a contrast between “self” and “other” which can be examined in iconographic and stylistic terms.

This chapter will examine the extent to which Stainbank approached these figurines of *indigenes* according to the same visual and aesthetic criteria evident in her “private” sculptures. Stainbank’s perceptions of the decorative characteristics she associated with the *indigene* will be discussed as expanding the experimental nature of her “private” representations.² Due to her preoccupation with the formal and aesthetic implications of the appearance of the *indigene*, also in popular images she made, these small artefacts do not honour in general the ideological distinctions between “art” and “craft”. The making of African figurines was popular at the time, and Audrey Frank also made earthenware figurines³ (Hillebrand 1991: 23) which the Ceramic Studio considered “sidelines”. Stainbank’s figurines made through the Ceramic Studio must also be considered in conjunction with her earlier portrait heads of *Miserable*
Elizabeth (1921)(fig 2) and Sigcathiya (1920-1921)(fig 3) as these two heads represent, literally, the indigene as servant.

Due to South Africa’s colonial identity during the first few decades of the twentieth century, it is necessary to consider sculptures which reflect the indigene as servant, dating to the period. Kottler’s wooden carvings of female indigenes as representations of servitude offer a valuable comparison. His Meidjie (1926)(fig 66) contains a reference to an identity of the “other” as servant through the title of the carving. There is nothing about the figure itself that leads to an understanding that the person is in fact a servant. She is represented entirely naked, and there is nothing such as traditional beaded decorations to confirm an understanding of her as “other”.

The shape of the head is ambiguous, as the stylised hair cover could either represent a kopdoek or a traditional headdress. The stance of the young woman, with eyes lowered and hands clasped in a nervous manner, indicates a position of obedience, which leads to perceiving her as “other”. She holds a small fruit in her one hand. Her nakedness as indigene, when viewed in the context of the history of representations in the West of the female figure without her clothes, can be construed as nude, thereby rendering this aspect of the figure iconographically acceptable. On the contrary, this nudity, when considered in relation to the title of the sculpture, reflects on the co-existence of the figure as indigene, as colonial “other”, and possibly also as servant. Stainbank’s Miserable Elizabeth (1921)(fig 2) is, by comparison, overtly a servant due to her western shirt and her kopdoek.

While the theme of the representation of the indigene in South African art forms a topic for study in its own right, it is significant to note that images of indigenes as servants occur throughout the history of art also in the West, and occur abundantly in the material and visual culture of colonised countries. Stainbank was aware of these images, as her library contains reproductions of indigenes as servants and as colonial “others”.

It is possible that, when Stainbank began to make figurines to be sold through
local department stores, she turned to these representations for ideas regarding popular imagery and caricature. Such characteristics were important to consider when making artefacts of this nature, which were intended to be sold through venues other than art galleries, and might explain the strong characteristics of some of these small objects by Stainbank as caricatures. There is also a possibility that the decorative elements Stainbank gleaned from the Royal College of Art during the 1920s, as well as her friendship with Vann-Hall, who studied book illustration, might have contributed to the identity of these figurines as caricatures, as decorative and as ornamental. It is also possible that while she studied in London, Stainbank saw ceramic ornaments made by the potteries in Staffordshire. Such ornaments were also frequently reproduced in Studio, a journal Stainbank had access to in London and to which she subscribed once she was back in South Africa.

During the third decade of the twentieth century, interior decorating tendencies in the country began to favour images with an African appearance. The *indigene* emerged on fabric designs, wallpaper and so on, and it was within this context that Stainbank produced popular cultural artefacts carrying an indigenous theme. She did not, however, initiate the making of ceramic figurines of *indigenes* for mass production. The incentive came from Short, who requested Methley to contact Stainbank in this regard. It was customary for the Ceramic Studio to approach artists to design objects for mass production, or for specific commissions, received from private patrons and from the Public Works Department. In this manner, artists such as Erich Mayer and Palmer (Heymans 1989:5) executed designs for the Ceramic Studio.

In a letter to Stainbank dated 29 September 1931, Methley broached the subject, requesting designs from her and from Vann-Hall. Short reported in this letter that small figurines of *indigenes* were becoming popular in Cape Town. Both Methley and Short were fellow students of Stainbank's at the Durban School of Art, and both also trained at the Royal College of Art in
London. They approached Stainbank for assistance, probably because they understood the nature of the training she received, and understood that she and Vann-Hall were capable of producing quality designs, not only for small figurines, but for other projects as well. In this regard, Stainbank revealed in an interview (Heymans 1989: 36) that she herself never asked work to be passed to her from the Ceramic Studio, but that they always contacted her. She also stated in the interview that she was a sculptor, working in bronze, stone and wood, and that she had only modelled in clay

as a means to an end, such as works to be carried out in bronze, ceramics etc. When I did carry out work for the “Ceramic Studio” I supplied them with the plaster moulds, and they took the impressions from these moulds in their pottery clay (Heymans 1989:36).

According to Heymans (1989:52), the Ceramic Studio preferred indigenous and historical subjects and themes, as well as historical events. The extensive correspondence between the Ezayo Studio and the Ceramic Studio supports this observation. The Ceramic Studio also produced ceramic wall tiles for the Native Affairs building in Pretoria, which reflect a design with a pronounced rock art reference, whereas others depict images of indigenes in traditional dress in blue and yellow on maiolica. Heymans (1989: 54) records that such designs were very popular. These designs were also used in the Port Elizabeth Law Courts, in private homes and so on.

Stainbank responded positively to the invitation to make small figurines, as it is certain that the subject matter of the indigene proved to be attractive to her. The large collection of letters from Short and Methley requesting moulds from Stainbank for these figurines, reflect repeated requests for figures of indigenes. It is clear too, from the correspondence, that Stainbank was eager to embark on a project involving small, popular type images. The reasons for this are twofold: firstly, it secured additional
income, and secondly, it simultaneously offered Stainbank the opportunity to experiment with the decorative implications of the appearance of the indigene. By the time she began working on these figurines, she had already been working with the Ceramic Studio on the fountains and relief panels for the Children’s Hospital in Durban, thereby having paved the way for a healthy working relationship between the two studios.

Short expressed an interest to Methley in establishing an agency for selling popular artefacts in Cape Town (letter 29 September 1931), as small figurines of about "6” to 8” high” appeared very popular. The correspondence, which introduced the making of these objects to Stainbank clearly stipulated that this was a business transaction, in that Stainbank would design the figures, the Ceramic Studio would cast them, and that Stainbank would be granted a percentage of the proceeds of sales. There were however, certain aesthetic considerations at stake, such as the idea to issue only a small edition of these figurines. Stainbank’s reaction to this suggestion reflects a sober understanding of the visual naivety of the public at large:

There [sic] not the artistic type of people amongst the public out there to appreciate the limiting [sic] of works of art !! If we were working overseas I would say limit them, and charge a high price. For the people like to feel they are only a few in existence ...

In addition to these figurines, Short approached Stainbank to also design bookends (fig 68) to be sold at Ashley’s Galleries in Cape Town. These had to be ready at Christmas time, as Methley viewed Christmas as a psychologically suitable time for selling these artefacts. The owner of Ashley’s Gallery asked Short for objects representing specifically the South African indigene: “He particularly wants Native, or something typical of the country before the ... tourists arrive here from England” (undated postcard). Stainbank replied in a letter to Short dated 3 November 1931 that she would send some
casts of small native studies, (models) so far, but I hope to send them up very soon. I have two pairs of book ends, and two or three small [sic] ready, except for the making of the piece moulds, I will get these piece moulds of these done and send them off to you, while I get on with the others.

As ceramic objects can be glazed, opening up the possibility for adding colour, Stainbank requested from the Ceramic Studio:

... would you be able to leave the native figures in the biscuit, ... with just a glaze and perhaps a little colour here and there, or bead ornaments etc. All the brown colour I have ever seen on pottery I do not like. Would it be possible to carry out some of the smaller native figures in some of your stoneware [sic]?

It is clear from this extract that Stainbank was concerned with the visual appearance of the figures as aesthetic objects as well as with retaining a descriptive element. This extract also reminds one of the portrait busts of indigènes such as Miserable Elizabeth (1921)(fig 2) and Native study (sa)(fig 17), which she had made during the 1920s, and which she cast in plaster of Paris. She painted these casts using a water- or oil-based paint. It further underlines, by comparison, the difference in colouring used for plaster casts of commissioned portraits of prominent personages such as George Cato and Dr Standing.10 These plaster of Paris busts were coloured using tertiary colours ranging from a green-gray and terracotta pink to a pale lilac.

It is a characteristic of Stainbank’s commissioned portraits that they are naturalistic and representational, and it is significant that she paid careful attention to the small figurines also as naturalistic. This attitude is probably due to Stainbank’s eagerness to ensure that the figurines would, on the one hand, be commercially viable; but on the other hand, it reflects her attitude to the indigène as one of respecting cultural identity. The tourist orientation of these figurines underscores “otherness” as a
phenomenon which encouraged curiosity. Stainbank also considered the
colour of the bookends (fig 68) she had made on request:

  Couldn't you leave some of them in the biscuit stage and
  just touch up the head dress with also beads, and "muchi"
  with colour. I would like to see some in cream with the cut
  in parts in a darker cream. Try some in blue with other
  colours splashed in, also that nice greeny colour of yours
  (Letter to Short, 2 December 1931).

Using the image of the indigene in a decorative manner did not appear for
the first time in Stainbank's ceramic figurines. By this time, she had
already designed relief panels for the South African Museum in Cape
Town (1930)(fig 35), in which indigenes were represented alongside
colonists and according to the same, decorative treatment, to establish
patterns across a horizontal plane. These designs reveal Stainbank's
ability for decoration, while retaining the visual and formal integrity of the
design. Stainbank also ensured in these designs, an accurate
representation of details which characterise the indigene as "other", eg.
the isicholo.

Stainbank applied the method of combining three-dimensional form with
the decorative, which she acquired at the Royal College of Art, to the
designs submitted for the Native Affairs Building in Pretoria (1937)(fig 67).
This indicates that, even though she approached the indigene as
decorative, she was not prepared to sacrifice either verisimilitude or
principles of good design. The aesthetic aspects of these designs are as
well-considered and as prominent as they are in her large-scale
sculptures. Simultaneously, the function of the figures is decorative as the
intention with this building was to decorate it in such a manner that it
"would appeal to the natives and would distinguish the building for them"
(Heymans 1989:53). Stainbank's designs were not accepted in favour of
panels by Palmer, probably due to the overt presence of indigenes as
indigenes in her designs, and not indigenes as tempered by colonial
perceptions of indigenes as idealised and romanticised.
Stainbank's bookends (fig 68) represent Zulu women in different styles of traditional dress: one is married and wears an isicholo, whereas the other is unmarried, has short hair and wears a traditional beaded waistband. The figures press against a vertical element intended to support the books. The impression is created that it is the women who are supporting the stack. Their legs are outstretched in an exaggerated attempt to prevent the pile from toppling over. Similar considerations as with Stainbank's "private" sculptures containing anatomical exaggerations, apply. While the design of the bookends serves, by its nature, a decorative function, the figures fulfill simultaneously a structural and compositional role. This is very similar to aspects of her "private" sculptures, such as the figure of the woman in Fate (1937)(fig 10). The women in the bookends are placed at an angle to the vertical edge, introducing a dynamic twist in the composition. The colour of the bookends, as suggested in the quotation above, indicates a contradictory intention: non-descriptive colour. This is, paradoxically, in keeping with the non-descriptive colour of Stainbank's plaster of Paris casts of portrait busts. The choice of colours for these busts remains unexplained, considering the strong naturalism in which they had been depicted. The abstract tendency in the bookends justifies, to some extent, their non-descriptive colour.

Stainbank's preoccupation with colour, whether descriptive or not, indicates a concern on her behalf with the pertinent and prominent aesthetic aspects of these objects. Their identity as popular objects allowed her the liberty to experiment with colour and decoration such as beads, yet Stainbank did not sacrifice the identity of the figure or the appearance of the indigene as essentially different. Stainbank did, however, execute these objects in a manner which is more decorative and stylised, leading to a perception of these figures as visually different from the figurines of white children used for herb gardens, e.g Little girl with a basket. (1933). This figure, and the drawings for designs of children for garden fountains or for herb gardens, as well as for the Voortrekker figures, reflect a greater sense of descriptive and narrative detail, and less
stylisation and abstraction of aspects such as facial features and dress. *Little girl with a basket* (1933) is dressed in a pretty frock and she wears an embroidered bonnet which fastens below her chin in a bow. She holds a basket loaded with flowers in her one hand and watering can in the other. This figure elicits a response of sentimenality and sweetness, as opposed to the robust forms of *indigenes*, which generate an earthy association. The reasons for such discrepancy could reside in the fact that *Little Girl with a Basket* (1933) was designed specifically for a Mrs Hall,\(^{12}\) whereas the small representations of *indigenes* were Stainbank’s own designs, and therefore provided her the opportunity to experiment with form, texture and colour.

Stainbank’s attitude towards colour underwent a change towards the end of the 1930s. In a letter to Short (5 August 1936) regarding the colour of small figurines, she asked:

> Don’t you think it would be nice to carry them out in various colours, not the natural “nigger brown” colour. Vann-Hall saw some charming Italian figures while she was overseas, they were carried out in a variety of colours.

A more experimental approach governed the making of the figures referred to in this letter, than was the case with the slightly earlier book ends. Also, the quotation above indicates clearly that Stainbank’s immediate reaction to representations of an indigenous identity was dictated by verisimilitude. This was also the case with her larger “private” sculptures, such as *Ozazisayo* (1927)(fig 6). However, this letter also confirms that Stainbank’s use of colour to particularise *difference* was not consistently applied in her popular cultural objects. It is possible that the small scale of these works, and their inherent function as ornamental, led Stainbank to a decorative and stylised interpretation, which her larger sculptures could not accommodate as easily. As a result, immediate visual *difference* assumed a secondary position in these small scale objects,
whereas the inherent identity of these figures as different remained, for her, iconographically viable. Stainbank communicated this identity through hairstyle, beaded decorations and dress.

Through the Ceramic Studio, Stainbank also made ornamental figures of the Zulu mother and child (fig 69), and ashrays (fig 70) in the form of Zulu heads. The Stainbank Archives holds a newspaper cutting from The Natal Mercury (22 July 1937), which consists of a photograph of a small sculpture of a Zulu woman with her child on her back, and the head of a Zulu man. The inscription accompanying the photograph states that

> [t]he carefree spirit of the Zulu is seen in these decorative pottery accessories. Caricature runs riot in her ash tray [sic] at the right where huge lips are open to receive the ashes from your cigarette. There is dignity in the table ornament at the left, where the piccanin’s curly head rests on the shoulder of its parent. They are the work of a famous South African artist and they were caught by the Mercury cameraman during a shopping tow [sic].

Plaster of Paris casts of this ashray, of one representing the face of a Zulu woman wearing an inkehole or headdress similar to the isicholo, and of the head and shoulders of a mother with a child on her back along with other small heads of Bhaca women, were found in a shed at Coedmore. This find confirmed that these objects cited in The Natal Mercury were certainly made by Stainbank as the newspaper cutting does not identify the artist. It further confirms the continuation of an experimental approach by Stainbank.

The ornament representing the Zulu woman with elongated isicholo and a baby on her back, is remarkably similar to Martin’s Wonder (c1930). The backward tilt of the head of the woman in Martin’s sculpture is reminiscent of Enigma (1930)(fig 7), and the stylisation of the hair along the forehead of the woman in Wonder (c1930) is similar to that in Stainbank’s ornamental figure. These small ornaments and ashrays force a reconsideration of Native head (1924)(fig 3) by Stainbank as a precursor
to these objects. In this head, Stainbank had already considered the decorative as iconography (the use of earrings to adorn the face) and as style (the elongation of the earrings). At this early stage in her career, Stainbank had hence already been aware, even if subliminally so, of the potential of combining three-dimensional representational form with a decorative approach. This cast image of a Zulu woman probably provided her with visual solutions to the problem of avoiding descriptive and literal idioms, while retaining the representational.

In 1937 Stainbank set out to make her ashtrays, one in the form of a Zulu man’s face and one as a woman’s face. Stainbank provided the Ceramic Studio with meticulous descriptions of these ashtrays, and carefully instructed them (letter dated 5 August 1936) on how to handle the moulds: “Mould ‘C’ is an ash tray [sic] or ash container. The mouth will have to be hollowed out and left open and base [sic] of the neck filled in [sic] the cigarette is balanced in the nose!” A similar description of an ashtray in the form of a Zulu woman’s head followed in a letter of 26 September 1936. Here, the cigarette is supported by the woman’s headdress, which is hollow and which can therefore contain the ash.

These ashtrays reflect colonial attitudes, typical of the period, towards indigenous peoples. Given Stainbank’s relationship with the Zulu people on the family farm, it appears that she acted within the general atmosphere of colonial Natal, and probably did not realise the discriminatory tone of these objects. In light of her attitude to these small scale items as decorative, and probably finding confirmation of similar objects made by other artists, including black artists, she continued, uncritically, to make them. The act of painting plaster of Paris casts of these to resemble patinated bronze, can be regarded as a reflection of Stainbank’s attitude towards these objects as sculptures in their own right.

The making of these ashtrays must be studied in relation to advertisements at the time, for products such as tobacco and cigarettes.
Advertisements which appeared during the colonial period, not only in Britain but also in South Africa, often associated exotic and romantic perceptions of the *indigene* with a variety of products,\(^{16}\) including tobacco, thereby enhancing the desirability and exclusiveness of the product. The economic intention of the advertisements contained an inherent suggestion of power and control: the purchaser owned not only the objects, but also the personage portrayed in that object (see Berger 1972). Images of *indigenes* in such advertisements had to be non-threatening and socially acceptable, in order to render the product desirable. *Indigenes* were used in advertisements in roles in which they were generally considered as powerless, and as unthreatening: the labourer, slave, domestic servant, or with a painted face to indicate entertainment. These roles were usually reserved for black men (Pieterse 1992: 188), as such an acquired identity or function also served to de-sexualise the person, hence rendering him harmless. Stainbank's ashtrays similarly imply the rendering of a service to the coloniser, by receiving or accepting ash from his or her cigarette. The facial expressions of the personages portrayed in both ashtrays reflect a condition of bliss, as they both smile with enlarged lips, in a coquettish manner, contented with their roles as servants. These heads reflect a remarkable similarity with the heads of figures represented in the *Life in Philadelphia* (1828-1830)(fig 12) series, of which Stainbank owned an excerpt. Clay's figures are equally coquettish, and the enlarged lower jaw and small cranium reflect a caricatural attitude to the *indigene*, and similar to Stainbank's ashtrays.

The open, gaping mouth of a black man, usually a Moor, is an image which was frequently used since the beginning of the seventeenth century\(^ {17}\) in signposts to advertise an apothecary or a tobacconist. Stainbank's representations in the ashtrays of *indigenes* with open mouths, are therefore not new, and must be seen within the history of using the image of the Moor as a positive construct (see Pieterse 1992). However, within a colonial context, and given the identity of Stainbank's heads as caricatures, these objects appear now to present the *indigene* in
a stereotypical role usually ascribed to the *indigene* by colonial and Victorian attitudes. These heads are not the only images in which Stainbank inscribes caricature into the image of the *indigene*. The face of the black man in *Baya huba* (1933)(fig 8) similarly approaches caricature, and was severely criticised in the local press as outlined in Chapter 4.

The presence of elements of caricature in Stainbank’s sculpture may be ascribed to her attitude towards public taste in art. Often in her correspondence with Short, reference is made to “pretty’s” when Stainbank required more information on the type of object a private patron or the Public Works Department may expect from her. The term “pretty” denoted adhering to specific notions of taste, of which Stainbank was aware but did not necessarily approve of. Yet, comparison with the heads of Zulu men used in ashtrays and in *Baya huba* (1933)(fig 8) led to the possibility that Stainbank’s representations of *indigenes*, in her popular cultural artefacts, tended towards caricature. Stanbank’s designs for the Public Offices in Salisbury contain grotesque heads of masculine-like personages, which cannot be identified in cultural terms but which are nevertheless nearing a definition of caricature. On the contrary, the seated female *indigene* (fig 71) designed to hold up the crest for the same building wears an elegantly stylised *isicholo* and brightly coloured beads around her ankles. The possibility that Stainbank’s affinity for the theme of mother and child led her to have more experience with drawing and designing female rather than male heads, offers an explanation for the occurrence of male heads as caricature. Of the many portrait busts Stainbank executed for public or private commissions, most have been of males. The difference however, is that these heads had to be realistic and detailed, omitting any potential interpretation of the features as caricatures.

The solution to the issue of caricatures in Stainbank’s sculpture is not clear-cut. Another possibility for its emergence in her œuvre could be ascribed to the nature of art production at the Royal College of Art in London. The College offered courses in craft and applied arts. It is clear
from these functional and ornamental objects which Stainbank designed, that she was able to continue the theme of the *indigene* as carrying modernist formal characteristics, while simultaneously also exploring the decorative potential of the figure, an ability also most likely due to the nature of her art education in Britain. Current oppositions between “art” and “craft” were only implicit at the inaugural exhibition of the South African Institute of Art in 1927 in Durban. This exhibition included, as did many of the July exhibitions, a section on “craft”-based work. Vermilion stated in a newspaper review (Vermilion 1927) that

> [t]here is big scope for art craft in South Africa, but it should be understood that exhibition work must be of the highest order and complete in every way, paying attention to originality of design and careful execution; the commercial aspect should be of secondary consideration.

From the available interviews with Stainbank (Botha 1989a and 1989b) and Adderley (1991) no indications exist of Stainbank being aware of the dichotomy in either her sculpture or her popular artefacts between the abstract nature of modernist form and the representational. The non-descriptive use of colouring in popular items underlines and extends this dichotomy.

It is important to note that Stainbank was involved with making popular imagery whilst working on commissions and being involved with her experimental sculptures. She was able to shift easily between different media and techniques, but her eagerness to make popular objects reveals an intense preoccupation with the iconography of the *indigene*. It is also not surprising that she agreed to make these objects, as picturesque representations of *indiges* were in circulation at the time, and offered her the opportunity to expand and explore her visual interests. Her popular artefacts can be viewed as a comment on the nature of these representations as idealised and sentimental. As she had done in her stone carvings, so she was serious about making use of a situation in which she could express, covertly, her disagreement with popularly
accepted conventions and norms. The dissent against conventional modes of making art established itself as a peculiar characteristic of Stainbank's sculpture. This provided the impetus for her to create images, whether experimental or popular, which was both progressive and tendentious in subject matter and in form, until she entered war service in 1940.
ENDNOTES: CHAPTER 5

1 It is not certain whether these figures had been produced or not. There is a photograph in the Stainbank Archives of a clay model of a Voortrekker woman, and there are a number of drawings of Voortrekker men and women in their traditional dress. As yet, no evidence has been found of the casting of these figures at Olifantsfontein.

2 For this reason, these ceramic artefacts can be considered to belong to Stainbank’s “private” sculptures, as similar stylistic concerns are at stake.

3 These figures were 13cm tall and were made in 1931.

4 Stainbank’s Miserable Elizabeth (1921)(fig 2) had a string of beads around her neck, but these were removed while the work was on display at the Ubumba exhibition in Durban. These beads might have been added in the quest for greater verisimilitude, which prompted the painting of the head in naturalistic colours. There whereabouts of these beads, and the reason for them being placed around Elizabeth’s neck is not certain.

5 See Berger (1972) for the distinction between nudity and nakedness.

6 See Chapter 1.

7 The building is adjacent to the Kruger House in Pretoria and is currently vacant.

8 One of these tiles contains a drawing of a Zulu woman with an isicholo, and an infant on her back. The design resembles a drawing by Stainbank, but the drawing of the tile, because it is clumsily drawn and out of proportion, creates the impression that another artist copied Stainbank’s design. No finality has been reached on these drawings.

9 While the correspondence between Stainbank and Short reveals that these figures had been cast, no actual example of these figures has, as yet been located.

10 These portraits were cast in bronze. Yet it is significant that Stainbank felt compelled to colour the plaster of Paris casts.


12 See Stainbank’s correspondence with the Ceramic Studio.

13 The researcher discovered these heads when preparations were in progress for the reconstruction of Stainbank’s studio at the Voortrekker Museum.

According to Winters (interview, 19 November 1997) local black artists in Natal often made portraits of Zulu men, which they sold from door to door. These heads contain the "ring" characteristic of Zulu headdress for men, and probably suggested this form of ashtray to Stainbank.

An advertisement which regularly appeared in the Daily News towards the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, is one in which a black youth holds a fountain pen erect, standing next to an oversized ink well. The youth is clothed in khaki short and matching top, edged with a brightly coloured fabric (usually red or turquoise, although the advertisement appeared in black and white).

The Pipe Maker's Guild in 1619 made use of two Moors in skirts made of tobacco leaves as their crest (Meadows 1957: 38 and 40).

CONCLUSION

In an interview Botha (1987a) conducted with Stainbank, she expressed her perception of her contribution to South African sculpture as follows:

Stainbank: ... it was very difficult for a woman to get anywhere. Now Lever Brothers wanted a monument ... it was an open competition ... . So I did some children – they weren't very modern ... . The head man came to see me and he said I am afraid you didn't get it. Somebody in Johannesburg got it. But they liked your design and they liked your price but I said why didn’t they give it to me, and they [sic] said they thought you would not be able to carry it out because you’re a woman.

Botha: So what you’ve done is open the gate for women sculptors coming behind.

Stainbank: I was the one who opened the gate, really.

Even though Stainbank considered the significance of her efforts as a sculptor to be the opening of "the gate" for women sculptors, she also achieved this for artists in South Africa generally. Yet she only received prominence retrospectively, due to research conducted by Hillebrand (1987a and 1993) and Rankin (1988a and b; 1989a and b), and the efforts by Botha (1987a and b) to realise the retrospective exhibition and to safeguard the collection of sculptures and drawings belonging to the artist. This exhibition was decisive in promoting the artist’s work, and exposed anew its relevance to the study of South African sculpture. The full significance of Stainbank’s contribution to South African art history however, can only be assessed after more research has been conducted into all aspects of the artist's oeuvre. Nevertheless, not only did Stainbank set a precedent for women sculptors to follow; but she also pioneered, and was crucial to the establishing of a modernist idiom in South African sculpture.
Integral to Stainbank’s modernism, is her perception of the Natal *indigene* as formal, stylised and often decorative, which she combined with representational form. These representations were based on direct observation informed by her perception and understanding of the life and culture of a people generally considered “other”. Due to Stainbank’s refusal to conform to current normative prescriptions for such depictions, her images of indigenous personages were unlike similar images by a number of her South African peers, notably Van Wouw. Her representations of indigenous personages also differ essentially and significantly from those of other peers, such as Moses Kottler and Lippy Lipshitz (1903-1980), in that her depictions acknowledge the cultural identity of the person. Her opposition to academic and Victorian norms for art making, which she encountered at the Durban School of Art and at the Royal College of Art in London, led her to formulate a modernist-derived alternative to the visual form and conceptual “type” promoted by these institutions for representations of *difference* and “otherness”.

This research regards Stainbank’s reaction to these conventions as particularly significant, since her conviction about the relevance of her subject matter reinforced her idiosyncratic version of modernism. Stainbank’s interest in the indigenous person\(^1\) also prevented her from subscribing to primitivism, a phenomenon she encountered in London, yet she realised that representation *per se* was insufficient to achieve her aims. She opposed the use of artefacts produced by cultures considered “primitive” as a means of providing form or subject-matter for a work of art. Instead, she retained the appearance of the *indigene* as an immediate referent and combined this with the sculptural form and a process, *ie* carving, which was then deemed *progressive*. The re-introduction in Britain of carving as a viable technique for sculpture therefore formed a pertinent focus in this research.

Stainbank’s images of the “other” reflect an unbiased attitude through the acute observation of, and focusing upon, the essence of the subject rather
than on the objectification of “otherness”. From this point of view, Stainbank’s work pioneered the genre of the unmediated “native study” in Natal and headed the development of sculpture away from photographic and literal realism to modernist idioms and subjective projection. In this, Stainbank succeeded in creating a sculptural form which is peculiar to a South African vision. Stainbank made the practice of sculpture accessible to younger artists, including women, to explore and to experiment with. In her teaching at the Durban Technical College, she imparted her knowledge of sculptural techniques and her understanding of the human form to her students, unreservedly continuing her conviction in the function of sculpture in this country. Stainbank’s contribution to the history and development of sculpture in South Africa therefore lay in the demise of conservative and academic norms inappropriately applied to, inter alia, the South African indigene.

While research conducted by Rankin (1989a) addressed aspects of the marginalisation inherent in the recorded history of the development of sculpture in South Africa, exemplified by historians such as Berman (1983), this history is still in need of re-examination and rewriting. Consensus among some writers poses the arrival of Van Wouw in South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century as a ground-breaking event after the country had produced no significant sculptors since Anton Anreith (1754-1822). This stance did not take into consideration the sculpture produced by marginalised cultures, or of women such as Stainbank. On the contrary, the painter Maggie Laubser (1886-1973) is often credited as being responsible for initiating an expressionist tendency in South African painting. This acknowledgement has been readily made, as painting has traditionally been considered in South Africa as a suitable activity for women, whereas sculpture was viewed as a man’s domain. This phallocratic and patriarchal view of art has also been responsible for gender-based and culture-specific exclusions and marginalisations in South African art history.
The progressive nature of Stainbank's form and subject matter required an approach which could accommodate and acknowledge the distinguishing elements in her work. While a feminist approach remains significant and viable for future investigations into Stainbank's work,² approaching her work from a post-colonial perspective exposes its significance and appropriateness in art-historical as well as socio-historical contexts. Because she refused to subject her images to positive stereotypical forms, her sculpture reveals a politically untainted perception of, and attitude to, the South African indigene. Creating "positive" images would imply conforming to a Eurocentric (and phallocratic) tradition which, at least within a colonial context like Natal, allowed neither the close scrutiny of "the black" personage nor its accurate rendering without reflecting bias. The historical event of the celebration of the Union in 1910 also indicated a post-colonial perspective as the more immediately necessary approach. These celebrations signified the role of Imperial power at its height in South Africa. The salient presence, since the second decade of the twentieth century, of opposition movements such as the South African Native National Congress (later to become known as the African National Congress), meant that the process of colonisation was by no means complete in South Africa. The continued struggle between imperialist power and colonised subjects verifies a post-colonial framework for this research as appropriate and useful in which to examine the work of an artist who, coming from a colonial family and context, used aspects of her representation of the indigene to dismantle the then current conventions employed by imperialist discourse, to render the depiction of the indigene acceptable. The origins of Stainbank's interest in an indigenous appearance, stem from a period when the colonial project continued the historically established cultural, social and political marginalisation of peoples considered to be "primitive". Post-colonial theory is hence particularly useful as it does not in its discourse privilege either of the two polarities of "self" or "other", and is considered in keeping with the sensibility of an artist who, as a woman, was marginalised by the patriarchal bent of her own society.
An alternative approach to an artist whose work focuses on the *indigene* would have been via primitivism as established in Europe and associated with the twentieth century *avant-garde*. The complex construction of cultural identity through the representation of the "other" raised the question whether this approach would in fact be more applicable. Such an approach would be conceptually awkward, as it appears that the fundamental aims of primitivism were at odds with those of Stainbank. Like Gauguin, Stainbank represented the "other" through a "master narrative" of the West: art. Unlike Gauguin, she did not initiate a search for the "other" in a foreign country. The "other" formed, in a post-colonial as well as a feminist sense, an integral aspect of Stainbank's existence and identity in colonial Natal.

Also, a primitivist approach was rejected since Stainbank was not fascinated by the artefacts of the "other" as offering a way out of the cultural and visual *malaise* perceived by the European *avant-garde*. Stainbank's concern lay with the immediacy of the "other" as visual appearance and source, but also with cultural identity as *different*. The people she represented were people she knew and experienced within a context with which she closely identified. Primitivism, on the other hand, did not deal with the representation of the "other" as essentially *different*. From analyses in the text of work selected, it emerged that Stainbank's attitude and approach to her subject matter was from an opposite perspective to that of *avant-garde* movements such as German Expressionism: instead, Stainbank identified metaphorically with the *indigene*. From this point of view, her interest lay with the representation of the *indigene* and not in colonising the appearance of their artefacts to be used in her own visual formulations. The many references in her collection of journal and magazine articles support this view. Working from memory while studying in London allowed Stainbank to make conceptual leaps in time and place: *Native head* (1924)(fig 4) has Egyptian earrings and oriental features albeit underplayed, and *Adam and Eve* (c1924)(fig 52) is rendered in a contemporary stylistic idiom. Similar to Gauguin, this
allowed Stainbank to investigate more fully, not only the identity of the *indigene*, but the relationship of “self” to the *indigene*.

Another motivation for the use of a post-colonial discourse as a suitable approach to Stainbank’s sculpture, is that she represented the “other” as a polarity in her work, irrespective of her reactions towards man-made conventions for representation. A post-colonial approach to re-evaluate and reconsider Stainbank’s sculpture, offered a tolerance and an acceptance of the “other”, which the Victorian era could not accommodate. Instead, Victorian culture idealised, altered and inscribed meanings into the “other”, which were more telling of the identity of the coloniser than of the *indigene*. Stainbank did not conform to these manipulations of identity but chose to focus on her own reactions to and perceptions of the African people. In this respect it is concluded that in her portraits of indigenous personages produced before she left for London, Stainbank was sensitive to the character of the sitter and his or her visual appearance, also as *different*, but without subscribing to conventions for depicting the “other”. Comparisons made in the text between work by Stainbank and works readily described as primitivist, such as by Gauguin and Picasso, revealed that Stainbank did not visually *colonise* the “other” to assert the “self”; that primitivism is only obliquely a consideration in her work; and finally, that Stainbank’s historical position as colonialist and simultaneously her gender identity as woman, complicated her position in relation to both colonialism and primitivism.

The dissent against tradition, which characterised modernism in Europe, is evident in Stainbank’s attitude particularly towards commissioned work, and can also be regarded as the result of her own concept of what constitutes art. Her relative isolation on the farm Coedmore may account for the individualistic stance she took with regard to tendencies, trends and fashions in art as well as for her consequent definition of art. Within this definition, the implications of the identity of the “other” included, for Stainbank, the general appearance as decorative (beadwork, headdress
etc), resulting in a tension in her work between representation and abstraction. The outcome of this at times approached the decorative or caricature. This research hence problematises the notion of representation in the case of Stainbank’s indigenous imagery. Within a post-colonial context, the apparent straightforwardness of representation includes all the innuendos and nuances of such representation in visual as well as socio-political terms. Representation in Stainbank’s work can therefore be considered complex and idiosyncratic.

It is significant that this complexity was ushered in when Stainbank came into contact with European and British ideas with regard to modern art and form for form’s sake. In London, her contact with progressive ideas in circulation amongst students as well as in art circles, particularly of the “primitive” and “modern”, contributed to this. The source for Stainbank’s aesthetic idiom can hence be considered a combination of her colonial African background and modernist ideas regarding form as gained from contact with sculptures by artists such as Epstein, Lambert, Dobson, Gaudier-Brzeska and Gill. This idiom can broadly be described as stylised, simplified, tending towards the decorative and, to some degree, exaggerated. This style can also be circumscribed as representational while simultaneously steeped in form for forms’ sake.

Stainbank’s images of the *indigene* created after 1922, reflect a greater or lesser degree of abstraction: she focused either on that which is characteristically *different*, or exaggerated that which is characteristically *same*. Stainbank made carefully observed drawings of indigenous people, mostly women and children, as well as abstractions suggested by the figure of the *indigene*. These drawings reveal her capacity for verisimilitude and abstraction, yet her three-dimensional images of *indigenes* are never purely observational leading often to an interpretation of the sculpture beyond a literal interpretation. Stainbank’s approach to the human form, as evident from her conglomerate drawings discussed in this research, indicate that human form and proportion constituted the
basis of her studies. Derivations and deviations from the human form serve the function of emphasising the decorative and formal aspects of the sculpture which were, for Stainbank, essential factors in the representation of the indigene. The creation of a “positive” image therefore lay for Stainbank in the simile or metaphor, rather than in illusionistic representation or in the stereotypical. It is this association of the “self” with “other” through the metaphor which distinguishes Stainbank’s sculpture from that of her peers in South Africa, leading to the often-stated observation that in her sculpture she was “ahead of her time”. The progressive, modernist identity of her work was, at first, far too progressive and experimental for conservative and uninformed South African audiences. The reason why Stainbank’s sculpture has been overlooked by South African art history until recently can be found exactly in the above observation, but also in the fact that she was female and hence subjected to patriarchal views of the early twentieth century.

However, when modernist idioms were replaced during the 1960s by more progressive and avant-garde idioms in Europe and America, the younger generation South African artists followed suit. Stainbank’s work appeared no longer relevant to this new generation of sculptors in South Africa who rejected modernism and representational form, and who needed to experiment with alternative forms and materials. What presented itself as progressive during the early twentieth century in South African sculpture, was considered during the 1960s as dated, hence obstructing the opportunity for Stainbank’s work to be meaningfully absorbed in the history of South African sculpture. Now, retrospectively, Stainbank’s representations of indigenes emerge as pioneers of a direction in South African sculpture in which the representation of indigenous personages has been unaffected by established canons and conventions, giving rise to formal and subjective interpretation and experimentation. Stainbank’s images of indigenes are significant also as pioneering an awareness of “otherness” and difference in a South African cultural context, factors
which are of particular relevance and appropriateness in the current climate of cultural inter-dependence in South Africa.
ENDNOTES: CONCLUSION

1 The image of the *indigene* appears to have been ingrained in the artist already as a child when she made small figurines of the indigenous people on the farm where she grew up.

2 As feminism intersects at various levels with post-colonialism, it is believed that such an approach would have resulted in similar conclusions being drawn, albeit with a stronger gender focus.
To the Editor,
La Revue Moderne
88 Rue St. Denis,
Paris.

Dear Sir,

I regret this answer to your request for information of the personal and artistic tendencies of Miss Mary Stainbank, has been delayed. I hope (if it is not too late, to be of use to you) that the following will meet your requirements.

Mary Stainbank grew up on a S. African farm, in company with four elder brothers, which circumstance toughened and strengthened a naturally sturdy physical and mental make-up. She looks back on one of the healthiest and happiest childhoods that one could wish for; thus her outlook on Life and Art is straightforward, bold and well balanced, qualities that are reflected in her work.

The stones she carves seem to have emerged of themselves from their hiding-place, the ideas she formulates show no sign of the really hard thinking that precedes their execution. She has a very great sympathy for, and understanding of, the Native mind so it is most of her works show some aspect of the Zulu character, stress being laid on the psychological rather than the purely outward aspects. One can see this in the group of native heads called "Baya Huba" ("We are laughing and singing"); bought by the Durban Art Gallery; here we are shown not merely the appearance of happiness, but feel it evoked within ourselves at first glance, a closer inspection reveals a harmony of parts very cleverly and successfully contrived. A head entitled "Enigma" gives the very essence of Native woman's insensibility.

"Dignity", a red sandstone figure of a native mother with a child on her back is another of these monumental -psychological effects: "Why do you look down on me! Why be so proud of yourself, you are only a stone" - exclaimed an old native woman wrathfully, on seeing it for the first time.

Mary Stainbank has this power to evoke spontaneous feeling by the impact of her ideas, a somewhat rare gift, in a world beyond the mere excellence of her craftsmanship.
Contd.

She is an Associate of the Royal College of Art, London!

She is in charge of the Sculpture and Modelling departments at the Durban School of Arts and Crafts.

Five years war service was spent in the Headquarters Technical Drawing Office in the Directorate of Air Training, which made a big break in her art work.

The experience of doing nothing but highly technical mechanical drawing for so long, seems to have sharpened still more, her special gift for giving the stone image an inner reality, an existential power that reaches out to the spectator.

In a machine-ridden age this quality is all the more desirable by reason of its contrast with the prevailing trends in Sculpture.
ANNEXURE 2

G/2: H. O. Thomas,
"Kitumbe", P.O. KIPICHU,
Kenya Colony, East Africa.

February 3rd., 1932.

Dear Miss Stainbank:

When we got your letter, telling of your having gone after all to the Post Office, all prepared for the Native Club, we felt a little troubled with ourselves for your wasted time.

We got back from Zululand early on that same evening, but until then were not quite certain whether the show was to be on, or not; and went round to the place at about six o'clock, to make sure. Then, since I had not written to you, we reckoned that you would not be coming,-though I did think, even then, of telephoning, to make sure.

I'm so sorry that you missed everything, after all,-and when so prepared.

But, as that is almost three months ago, perhaps you have quite forgotten about it now...!

Travelling through Africa, we've discovered, is thoroughly a Good Thing. And now, after eleven weeks, we're settled for a while to collect ourselves. We're in the Highlands of Kenya,-westward, towards Lake Victoria,-and in a glorious spot of wide and distant hills.

The Natives here you would like to see, for their bodies are good; many of them splendid, from the heel upwards, and little hampered by sophisticated clothes. They vary, but we have seen some fine profiles,-with noses!,-and the women have a tricky way of doing their hair,-not like that sugar-loaf of the Zulu!-that shows the head rippling.

Thus,(somewhat!):-

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2.

At a baraza (indaba), away in the Bush near Kilimanjaro, that we went to with the District Officer, we felt almost as though in a city-council of Ancient Greece! -the gestures, the grace of standing, the cloak-like blanket, knotted on one shoulder, and hanging free... and those delicate profiles of the North, (for which Arabs or Nilotic people are responsible).

On the Zambesi, near the Falls, we found the Natives doing some marvellously good wood-carving.

I wonder how commissions go with you? I suppose that ridiculous Gold-standard is of no help a bit! Have the mascots turned-out usefully?

My sister in England is delighted with the little broach.

We have n't been blood-thirsty about Game, though have seen quite an interesting amount, -even Elephant! I'm hoping that the Natives about here will soon be about a Leopard-hunt, at which, with bows-and-arrows, they are fairly neat and swift: not that I want to slaughter a leopard, but to watch the cunning of the hunters... . . .

Good greetings from us both, and to you both; and we hope that your commissions will soon be uncountable!

Sincerely yours,

Donald Thomas.
CHRONOLOGY: Mary Agnes Stainbank (1899-1996)

1899: Mary Agnes Stainbank was born on 27 May at Bellair, Durban.
1914: Attended St Anne’s College in Hilton near Pietermaritzburg until 1916.
1916-1921: Studied sculpture at the Durban School of Art under John Adams and Alfred Martin.
1922: Carved the War Memorial for the All Saints Church, Bellair, Durban.
1922-1926: Studied sculpture at the Royal College of Art in London.
1926: Returned to South Africa and established the Ezayo studio together with Wilgeforde Agnes Vann-Hall. Stainbank began work for the decorations for the Addington Children’s Hospital in Durban. The Ezayo Studio established a working relationship with the Ceramic Studio at Olifantsfontein near Pretoria.
1927: Exhibited at the South African Institute for Art, Durban.
1929: Completed decorations for the Public Offices in Aliwal Street, Durban.
1920-1933: Exhibited annually with the Natal Society of Artists, Durban.
1933-1938: Completed the decorations on the exterior of the Law Courts in Port Elizabeth, as well as decorations for various similar offices throughout South Africa.
1934: Made ceramic roundels for the foyer of the Johannesburg Public Library.
1936: Exhibited at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg.
1938: Made plaques for the Clubhouse, Technical College, Durban.
1939: Commissioned to make a portrait bust of John Bews, principal of the University of Natal.
1939-1945: War service, Pretoria.
1945-1957: Taught sculpture at the Durban Technical College. During this period, and until the 1970s, Stainbank continued to execute commissions for sculptural decorations for public buildings, portrait busts of known personalities, and sculptural work for churches and cathedrals.
1953: Three centuries of South African Art, Rhodes Centenary Exhibition, Bulawayo, Rhodesia.
1958: Undertook a world cruise, accompanied by Vann-Hall.
1963: Art South Africa Today.
1970-1974: Completed the John Ross Memorial on the Esplanade in Durban.
1988: Retrospective exhibition touring South Africa.
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_____. Reference Files: “African peoples”; “Painting”; “Sculpture”.

_____. Research files: Andries Botha donation.

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Fig 1 Mary Stainbank, *The padre* (1931)
Fig 2  Mary Stainbank, *Miserable Elizabeth* (1921)
Fig 3 Mary Stainbank, *Sigcathiya* (1920-1921)
Fig 4 Mary Stainbank, *Native head* (1924)
Fig 5  Mary Stainbank, *Umhlobogazi* (1925-1926)
Fig 6  Mary Stainbank, Ozazisayo (1927)
Fig 7  Mary Stainbank, *Enigma* (1930)
Fig 8  Mary Stainbank, *Baya huba* (1933)
Fig 9  Mary Stainbank, *Medusa* (1938)
Fig 10  Mary Stainbank, *Fate* (1937)
Migration

Fig 11 Unknown, Emigration: detailing the progress and vicissitudes of an emigrant (sa)
Fig 12 Edward Williams Clay, *Life in Philadelphia* plate 6 (1828-1830)
Fig 13 Unknown, *South African peoples* (1828)
Fig 14  African peoples (sa)
Fig 15  Anton van Wouw, *The kapu player* (1907)
Fig 16 Anton van Wouw, *Kruger reading the Bible* (1907)
Fig 17  Mary Stainbank, Native study (sa)
Fig 18 Mary Stainbank, *Child's head* (sa)
Fig 19 Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Horace Brodzky* (1913)
Fig 20  Zulu women, Coedmore (sa)
Fig 22 Mary Stainbank, *Studies of a Zulu woman* (c1916)
Fig 23: Postcards: a) Zulu Beauty, b) Zulu Youth, c) Witch Doctor
Fig 24  Derwent Wood, *Monument to the fallen of the Machine Gunners Corps* (1921-1925)
Fig 25  Mary Stainbank, *Draped man with hands* (c1920)
model and place for standing
thought not from the model

Do not all runners on road
secure the model. You can be sure
that my highly capable model could
simply sit between the runners
and tell you money, the result being
when runner was at one corner it
came out to meet the foot. Then to
a lack at the corner in the corner,
and in some cases toward the inner curve
and ahead to one time.

Fig 27 Mary Stainbank, Notebook (1924)
Fig 28 Mary Stainbank, *Lamentation* (c 1924)
Fig 29 Mary Stainbank, *Drawing for Lamentation* (sa)
Fig 30  Mary Stainbank, *Design for a Cape homestead* (1925)
Fig 31 Mary Stainbank, *Final year exhibition, Royal College of Art* (1926)
Fig 32  Mary Stainbank, *Gulliver* (c. 1925)
Fig 33  Amedeo Modigliani, *Head* (1913)
Fig 34  Frank Brangwyn, *The British Empire panels* (sa)
Fig 35 Mary Stainbank, *Design for the South African Museum, Cape Town* (1930)
Fig 36 Mary Stainbank, *Deposition of Christ* (1922-1926)
Fig 37  Mary Stainbank, Two standing figures (1925)
Fig 38 Henry Moore, *Mother and child* (1924-1925)
Fig 39  Henry Moore, *Mother and child* (1922)
Fig 40 Jacob Epstein, *Maternity* (1913)
Fig 41 An indigenous woman, Coedmore (sa)
Fig 42  *Dignity* (sa)
Fig 43  *Pondo girl with a baby*, from Kidd, D *The essential kafir* (1904)
Fig 44  Coert Steynberg, *Enkelinge* (1948)
Fig 45 Mary Stainbank,
*Preparatory drawings for Umhlobogazi* (c 1925)
Fig 46  Mary Stainbank, *Drawing of the figure* (1923)
In the above diagrams, Fig. 1 shows the leading horizontal line, when the figure is standing upright and facing in a front view. In this position a line passing through the shoulders, and that drawn on the side, give the planes of the trunk in both sideward and right-angled to the vertical axis of the body.

In Fig. 2, the weight of the body is depicted as on one leg, and in this position the natural line of the trunk becomes a curve, but still the line drawn through the shoulders and that through the pelvis may be regarded as at right angles to the diagonal paper. Observe that the pelvis is higher on the side which supports the figure, and also that the hip makes a sharper angle on that side, and further, that the above is the standing line, with the general tendency for the balance of the figure.

The upper line of the body, which runs through the head, is given here as a line of double curvature, which is the next line to be drawn in opposing the first.

Fig. 47 Construction lines of the figure, from Dunlop, JM. (1918) Anatomical diagrams for the use of art students
Fig 48  Mary Stainbank, *Standing female figure* (1923)
Fig 49 Frank Dobson, *Sir Osbert Sitwell* (1923)
Fig 50 Malvinia Hofmann, *Sculptures from the Hall of Man*
Fig 51 Marguerite Milward, *Racial types in sculpture* (sa)
Fig 52 Mary Stainbank, *Adam and Eve* (c1924)
Fig 53 Aristide Maillol, *Desire* (1906-1908)
Fig 54 Mary Stainbank,
*Preparatory drawing: two standing figures* (1925)
Fig 55 Alfred Palmer, *The drift near the hostel* (sa)
Fig 56 Edward Roworth, *Landscape* (sa)
Fig 57  Perla Siedle Gibson, *Snake lilies* (sa)
Fig 58 Alfred Martin, *Untitled* (sa)
Fig 59 Charles Jagger, *Royal Artillery Monument* (1925)
Fig 60 Katharine Maltwood, *Primeval Canada* (1913)
Fig 61 Mary Stainbank, *Drawing for Fate* (1938)
Fig 62 Mary Stainbank, *Baleta* (1931)
Fig 63 Henry Moore, *Mother and Child* (1924)
Fig 64 Constantin Brancusi,
*Mademoiselle Pogany, version II* (1919-1920)
Fig 65 Mary Stainbank, *Preparatory drawing for Medusa* (1938)
Fig 66 Moses Kottler, *Meidjie* (1926)
Fig 67 Mary Stainbank, *Design for the Native Affairs Building* (1937)
Fig 68 Mary Stainbank, *Bookends* (c1933)
Fig 69 Mary Stainbank, *Mother and Child* (1937)
Fig 70 Mary Stainbank, Ashtray (1937)
Fig 71 Mary Stainbank, *Rough sketch no 5* (1932)