



CPBS (COMMUNITY PUNCHING BAGS)

Cape Town 2011 - 2012

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Community Punching Bags or CPBs

An artwork by Johann van der Schijff in collaboration
with art teachers and learners from Cape Town

This exhibition is dedicated to all the Art and Design
schoolteachers in South Africa

Studio and portrait photography by Vanessa Cowling

Materials and dimensions of artworks

12 x Upside down “speed” balls: aluminium, stainless steel, plywood, tanned leather, basketball, stuffing. 70cm wide x 90cm high x 88cm deep

4 x Hanging balls: aluminium, stainless steel, tanned leather, elastic rubber, stuffing. 30cm wide x 50cm high x 30cm deep

16 x Cut-out designs/Collages: pencil drawing outlines, assortment of coloured paper, watercolour paper, cold glue. 107cm wide x 39cm high x 3cm deep

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The Power of Art

Johann van der Schijff

Introduction

The 'Community Punching Bags' or 'CPBs' exhibition is an artwork by myself in collaboration with art teachers and high school learners from and around Cape Town (during 2011 and 2012). The collaborating art teachers and Grade 10 learners are from Livingstone High School (Claremont), Camps Bay High School, Heideveld Senior Secondary School, Fish Hoek High School, and Isilimela High School (Langa).

The exhibition presents a satirical commentary on South Africa's obsession with racial classification and underlying xenophobia. Inspired by artwork in which the community plays a central part in its realisation, this project aims to show that issues often not spoken about openly – such as those that deal with violence, 'the other', stereotyping, discrimination, racism, xenophobia and human rights – can be addressed in a collaborative and creative way through the making of art.

Overview

The overall project consisted of five phases: Phase 1 involved high school art teachers from the greater Cape Town area and consisted of Saturday morning workshop sessions to develop cut-out designs/collages with the art teachers; in Phase 2 of the project, local leather artisans crafted the cut-out designs/collages into actual punching bags; Phases 3 and 4 replicated Phases 1 and 2, but with the teachers passing their CPBs workshop skills on to the schoolchildren.

Phase 5 is the exhibition this catalogue accompanies, consisting of the drawings, paper cut-outs/collages and punch bag sculptures that emanated from the workshops.

Focusing on art teachers from different schools in Cape Town via the Frank Joubert Art Centre's (FJAC) network made it easier for this group to talk about their shared experiences. Some of them already knew each other via their own teacher networks. Being involved in tertiary art education myself, I felt intellectually drawn towards collaborating specifically with art teachers and schoolchildren. This in turn also assisted me to be transparent in what I was trying to achieve with the project and to ask their advice.

Before embarking on the teacher workshops I went to see Prof. Crain Soudien to discuss the project and asked him to become involved. With his experience in the area of transformation and social responsiveness he would, first and foremost, take on the role of the 'conscience' of the project. With a background in education he would also be involved in the workshop sessions and be required to contextualise the project in the exhibition catalogue. In turn, Crain suggested we involve Francois Botha of the Discrimination and Harassment Office at UCT. Francois subsequently gave an introductory talk during the first workshop of Phase 1 about his experience in dealing with these matters within the UCT community, but also during his years as a magistrate working in areas affected by violence around Cape Town. Francois' talk set the tone for the

rest of the project and was crucial in opening up discussions within the group.

It became clear from the initial one-day workshop in 2010 that it was important to keep the focus on the core questions I wanted to unpack with this project, such as those that deal with violence, 'the other', stereotyping, discrimination, racism, xenophobia and human rights. As a result, Kathy Coates played an important role in helping me to structure the crucial introduction workshop in 2011. Her creative writing session, directly after Francois' presentation, further unlocked discussion by helping the art teachers talk about emotional experiences.

The Teachers' Stories

Some of the teachers whose experiences are described below did not complete all the workshops and were therefore not included in the exhibition. The contributing teachers specifically pointed out that the unspoken issues the project talks to are some of the major challenges they, and in turn the communities they teach in, face on a daily basis. One teacher noted that there had recently been a traumatic stabbing incident at his school.

Another teacher told us that malnutrition is a big issue at her school and that the children are teased when going to get lunch packs – they would rather go hungry than deal directly with the situation. It also became apparent that it was specifically the girls who were targeted. The teacher countered this problem by forming the 'Super Girls', who joined her at her class and walked over in a group to pick up their lunch packs. What moved me particularly about this story, as well as the ones that follow, is how the art classroom became a space of refuge and shelter within the school.

Gender abuse and violence is a big

issue at another school and eventually the learners there were asked to write about their experiences; what came out was both shocking and very disturbing. In an emotional testimony, a teacher at the school related how the headmaster had angrily read these accounts out during assembly. In her opinion, this did more harm than good.

One teacher told us that at her very first teaching post after completing her teacher's training, she was the only 'outsider' teacher in the school. While enthusiastically putting art and design related pictures and posters up in her class and getting her classroom to look attractive for the start of the school year, one of the schoolchildren asked her why she was putting in all that effort when they didn't want her there. The next day when she arrived at the classroom all the pictures had been pulled from the walls and the classroom vandalised. She felt as if she had been physically abused.

Because of the many years of combined teaching experience between the collaborators and myself, not to mention the target group of art teachers themselves, it was easy to channel their responses towards more in-depth discussion around the core issues and designs. The process is not unlike the Michaelis student discussions I attend on a weekly basis in order to develop concepts for art projects; a process that plays itself out daily in the teachers' classrooms.

The Learners

I was less involved with the learners' projects, as I trusted the teachers to apply their CPBs workshop skills within their own classrooms. I also felt that it would not have been appropriate for me as an 'outsider' to work too closely with the learners. What I did do was go to the schools and introduce my own artwork, working methodology and the CPB project, in the form of a PowerPoint

presentation with supportive images and video clips. In most instances the teachers had already started the project as part of the grade 10 art curriculum and the learners had started with their preliminary concept drawings.

I became more involved with one of the schools when we bussed the children to the FJAC to do their project. Once again the written component of the workshop gave incredible insights into the learners' lives. In this particular school's case, gangsterism came out as the biggest single issue affecting the daily lives of the learners. Most of the writing dealt with incidents in which gangsters had either killed their friends, attacked them personally or tried to lure them into joining a gang. It was thus an emotive testimony when one of the girls in the class told us how her brother had become a gangster. She told of the disruptive effect this had had on their family and how it almost came as a relief when he committed suicide.

In choosing the final learner designs for the exhibition I was guided by the teachers, based on the particular learner's enthusiasm for the project and their track record in completing projects – once their drawings were selected they still had to do the cut-out designs/collages. I selected works that speak specifically to the themes of the exhibition; artistic and design merit also played an important role.

Legacy and Funding

I believe this project will leave a legacy at the schools via the transfer of practical art and craft skills such as drawing, cutting, design and three-dimensional visualisation. It will transfer conceptual skills to help develop and process ideas around given themes or issues, as well as provide exposure to the curatorial processes required to put together a major

exhibition. As such it could provide a way to identify and nurture potential candidates for the fine art academy. Especially important to me is that the art teachers also receive public recognition for their own creative output.

The CPBs project involves a broad range of institutional contributors. It started off unsuccessfully in 2008, after I was invited by The Bronx Museum of the Arts' (NYC) International Residency Program to put forward a proposal for a new project because of my participation in Dak'Art 2008ⁱ. Several subsequent funding applications failed. The National Research Foundation, via my own research activities at the University of Cape Town (UCT), provided seed funding for the project. Finally, in 2011 significant funding from the Prince Claus Fund in the Netherlandsⁱⁱ enabled me to roll out the project at the participating schools in Cape Town. The participating schools had responded to an open invitation via The Frank Joubert Art Centre, who also provided the premises for most of the workshops and contributed to workshop facilitation. Iziko Museums of Cape Town's Education and Public Programmes contributed to the design and facilitation of the workshops as well as leading walkabouts and a workshop during the exhibition.

Taking it Further

When I went to speak to Crain about the CPBs he remarked that the project would also change me. I brushed it off at the time as a remark, expected from a professor in education. However, as the project unfolded, Crain's words kept coming back to me. I read somewhere the other day that writing has been around for 8 000 years but that people have been making art for 30 000 years! The CPBs project illustrated the 'Power of Art' (to use the title of Simon Sharma's popular

DVD series) to me in very practical terms. At a time in South Africa when there is so much educational emphasis on the development of maths, sciences and business skills – in my opinion to the detriment of subjects in the humanities – this project proved to me how important ‘soft skills’, and particularly fine art, are in transforming our communities. Although the writing sessions and the accompanying written pieces to the artwork in this catalogue provide tremendous insight, for me it is the collages and actual punching bags that really start to ‘sing’. They are powerful visual testimonies of how we engage with each other in South Africa.

My own instinct regarding the potential uptake of the project was reinforced by school groups’ interaction with my original punch bag sculptures during my *Power Play* solo showⁱⁱⁱ in Cape Town, as well as by viewer participation at the Dakar Biennale. Feedback received from school groups visiting the exhibition in Berlin^{iv} was also very positive. Interest shown during my two month artist-in-residency in Arnhem^v and my presentation of the project during the Venice Biennale^{vi} convinced me that the project might have appeal further afield than Cape Town. Once the exhibition has come to an end, the catalogue and media coverage gained may be used as a vehicle to promote the project to exhibition venues elsewhere in South Africa, Europe and the rest of the world. It would also be fantastic if a CPBs project could be staged in its entirety in a different city, such as Johannesburg, Rotterdam or the Bronx, NYC.

In Conclusion

It is important to note that the Community Punching Bags project is intended to be viewed as an artwork and as such was inspired by other artworks in which the

community plays a central part in its realization, e.g. Ai Weiwei’s *Fairytale* and Christo & Jeanne-Claude’s *Running Fence*. My own iconography draws on art that relies on viewer participation, chance and the absurd. The project – at its core involving participation from both the makers and the viewers – is therefore an unpredictable process open to chance and serendipity that reveals itself as it unfolds. It is neither a scientific nor a pedagogical exercise, but is a conceptual artwork – it does not aim to provide definite answers to the questions it poses, but remains open to interpretation.

Endnotes:

i. *DAK’ART 2008*, International Exhibition of the Biennale of African Contemporary Art, Théodore Monod Museum (IFAN), Dakar, Senegal, 9 May – 9 June 2008. Prizewinner of two main awards: European Union Award and Zuloga Corporation Award.

ii. Prince Claus Fund’s website: www.princeclausfund.org

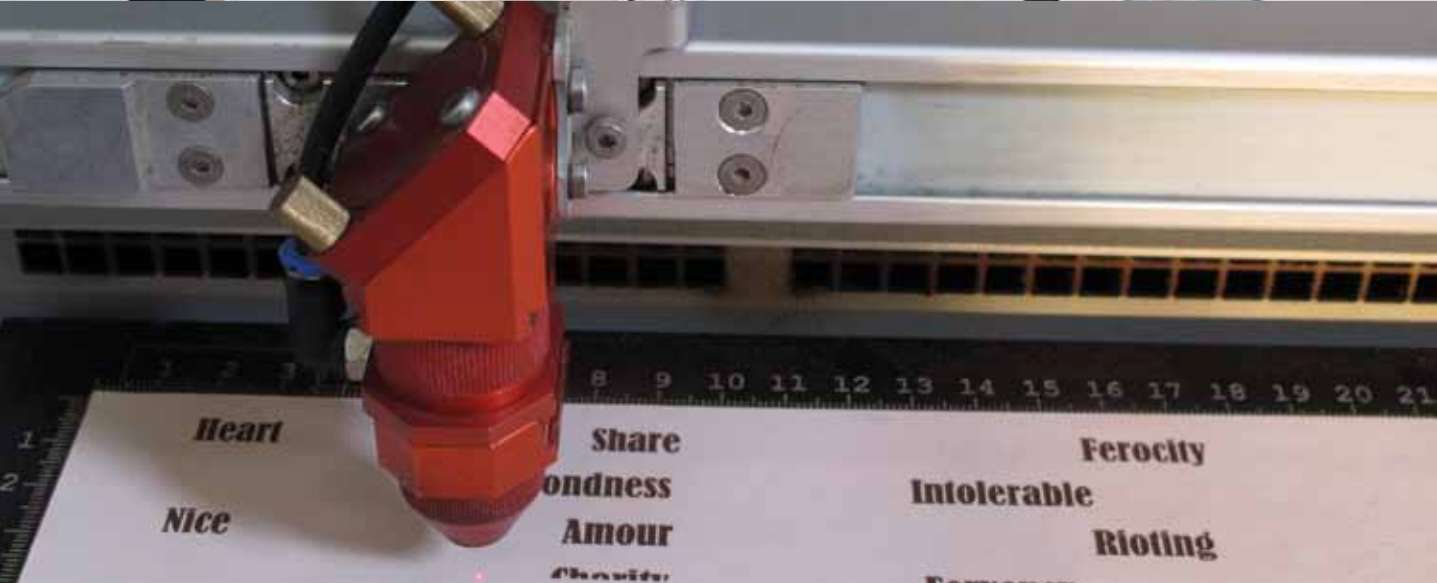
iii. *Power Play*, solo exhibition, Bell-Roberts Gallery, Cape Town, 25 April – 20 May 2006.

iv. *Spot on... DAK’ART*, The Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations), ifa-Gallery, Berlin, Germany, 3 April – 21 June 2009 & ifa-Gallery, Stuttgart, Germany, 15 October – 3 January 2010.

v. *Spier Contemporary 2010*, Artist-in-Residency award, Thamdigi Studio Foundation, Arnhem, Netherlands, 18 April – 22 June 2011.

vi. Community Punching Bags, as part of a round table discussion titled *What are the components needed to create a good platform for intercultural dialogue and art?* Oslo Platform, 54th Venice Biennale, Italy. June 2 2011.

For a more extensive selection of images of my artistic work and additional supportive video clips and text, please refer to www.johannvds.com.



The Aesthetics of Violence: Possibilities for New Masculinities in South Africa

Crain Soudien

Introduction

The discussion of violence in South Africa is understandably underpinned by intense public and personal anxiety. Justification for this anxiety is not hard to find. Just a little provocation in the company of friends (or even strangers, actually) is guaranteed to release a deluge of stories of assaults of one extreme or another on our persons or our dignities. There are now also any number of studies which *prove* the point about the violent nature of our society. Notable amongst these, for example, is the work of Leoschut & Burton. In a large-scale study conducted in 2005 amongst 5,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 22 in 333 areas across the country they found that a significant number of them had personal experience of some form of violence (Leoschut & Burton 2006 and Yutar 2006: 5). The most important index of this experience was that more than two-fifths (41.4%) said that they had gone through some form of victimization in just the year preceding the administration of the survey. Up to 16.5% reported that they had been physically assaulted, 9.4% that they had been robbed and 4.2% that they had been sexually assaulted. Leoschut and Burton found, moreover, that 20% of their sample of 5000 young people reported that they had thought of committing a crime, while 10% had actually done so: "That translates into approximately one million youths who are quite open about acknowledging that they had committed a crime," said Patrick Burton (Yutar, 2006: 5).

Troubling about the victimisation rates were that they were almost double those of adult South Africans (Leoschut & Burton, 2006: 45).

Disconcerting as all this evidence is, we need to be clear about *how* we make sense of it. In assessing the phenomenon of violence in South Africa it is important to be aware of how we attribute cause, to whom we apportion blame and the analytic frameworks we invoke. Particularly important in finding this clarity is managing our panic and understanding how much this panic is leading us down cul-de-sacs. In getting at what we are going through we need to confront how difficult it has become to avoid the tendentiousness of our historical meaning-making mechanisms and stratagems in the country. Coming face-to-face with violence we need to become much more aware of the near-ubiquitous ways in which we narrate or carry narrations of violence through the familiar discourses of race, class and gender. Illustrating this, perhaps even exemplifying it, is a widespread obsession with the figure of the 'black man'. The 'danger' that the 'black man' represents in our consciousness is extraordinary. Presented as it is in a teleology of visceral excess we need to be taking ourselves through a major process of recovery, if not acknowledgement, of how much our difficulties of making sense are wrapped up in our pasts, in the foundational myths we have been brought up on how we 'found' each other and the tales of treachery and deceit that have come to characterize our first engagements with each other.

In taking this historical route we necessarily confront our constructions of each other and how these have come to operate in our collective consciousness. Central in this process is recognising how much our discursive strategies are artefacts of our times – our ideological baggage. This baggage is replete with what we might think of as ‘certainties’, things that are incontrovertible. Certainties or incontrovertible realities begin with a description of reality and then work up explanations of how the social dynamics internal to that reality function, and then generate catalogues of pathologies unique to those social dynamics. Their purpose is to provide us with ways of maintaining sense and order. They give us the frameworks for holding uncertainty at bay. Whatever happens in relation to it we can, with reasonable confidence, come up with an explanation.

What claims of certainty are pertinent here? Two are crucial. The first is that of patriarchy (white and black) and the second that of white supremacy. Much of the South African discussion is dependent on the universe of claims embodied within these certainties. Coming into the discussion of violence we must not be naïve. We need to recognise how easily our ‘certainties’ of patriarchy and white supremacy kick-in in our everyday management of ourselves and of our relationships with each other and become the default positions from which we step off. Both, significantly, depend on the certainty of blood – the blood of a man and the blood of a white person. Within these certainties run the narratives of natural superiority, a superiority that allows, indeed authorizes in the face of disorder, the imposition of order.

Why is it necessary to draw attention to the certainties of patriarchy and white supremacy? Offended as we might be when this certainty of blood is articulated in the crude essentialisms of the everyday – the

mindless repetitiveness of our racial instincts – we need to be much more conscious of how this certainty continues to over-determine our ‘better understanding’ in other settings. We now do have a better understanding of how society works and how the individuals within it are able to manage the social structures that surround them and their own agency. We know, to deal with both the claims of male dominance and racial supremacy, that our biologies do have an influence on how we behave. There is evidence to show how aggression comes to be concentrated amongst particular men in particular communities, but not, it needs to be said, in what might be thought of as racial ways. Our behaviour, however, the choices we make, the decisions we arrive at about ourselves and about others around us, are much more socially determined. In relation to gender, Judith Butler (1993: 1) explains that consciousness, how we understand the world, ourselves and our relationships, are processes involving forces and effects. They are not fixed in our natures. Exactly the same point can and indeed should be made about race. Despite what anybody says, despite the strength of socially constructed thoughts on the matter – and yes, these do have consequences – there is no objective thing such as race. When we make the error of reading into our bodies forces of nature – men can’t help being aggressive or blacks can’t swim – we commit a particular kind of surrender. It is how we choose to act within the constraints of our social context and biology that is crucial, Butler argues. Through expressing our agency, we encode our body in certain ways, but always from within a certain set of circumstances. Thus, as Butler (1993: 2) states, no self or body has some ‘abiding’ nature, it is always contingent on situation.

The key point to make in this discussion

is that we now have ‘better knowledge’ about our bodies. There is no evidence for the claim that the ‘black man’ is intrinsically violent, neither on account of his maleness nor the colour of his skin. In his genetic structure he is no different – no better or worse – than the rest of humanity. His masculinity and his blackness don’t predispose him to anything. It is this ‘better knowledge’ that must govern how we proceed in the discussion of violence. Until we learn otherwise, such as, for example, that our bodies, god forbid, do determine our natures, we have to depend on our ‘better knowledge’ and to be vigilant against the seductions of our historical ‘certainties’ which lie there in the back of our consciousnesses as not-so-dormant viruses that spring to life under the least provocation and then come to over-determine our ‘better knowledge’. We need to know when we are being recruited into our older discourses. When the question is posed, for example, of whether South Africa is more or less violent than it had been under apartheid, or whether violence is a normative condition or not, we need to be alert to what it is that we are being called to become party to.

How we then proceed in the discussion is a deeply important question.

Learnt Aesthetics

The most important insight to work with in the discussion is that our behaviour is learnt. We learn violence. We are habituated into its aesthetics. In this habituation we are left believing, Zizek says, that the everyday features of the worlds in which we live and particularly our attitudes and norms come to us as fully formed natural attributes: ‘they appear to be neutral, non-ideological, natural, commonsensical. We designate as ideology that which stands out from this background: extreme religious zeal or dedication to a

particular political orientation’ (Zizek, 2008: 36). The power of this process of neutralization reveals the intensity of our habituation and, in the end, what Butler describes above as our ‘surrender’. We ingest the gendered and racialized ideology surrounding us and so, coming to depend on it for making sense of our worlds, give away our power to control it. The consequences of surrender, however, are fatal. They permit the construction of a normed world in which an implicit belief of what our supposed differences stand for comes to order how we make meaning and our actual behavior. To preserve this order of things we will go to any lengths. Violence, as a consequence, is a perfectly logical reaction to disorder. It is what one is expected to turn to when things go wrong. It becomes the life-force: ‘It is deeply symptomatic that our Western societies, which display such sensitivity to different forms of harassment, are at the same time able to mobilise a multitude of mechanisms destined to render us insensitive to the most brutal forms of violence’ (Zizek, 2008: 207).

Dire as this reading of the everyday is, we need to become aware of how surrender to the insensitivity it authorizes is actually a betrayal. It is a betrayal of the most significant commitments that all the world’s most important civilizations have made: that which we have come to think of as European, and all the other manifestations including those of the marginalized world – Africa, Asia, Latin America and everywhere else – where human beings have developed capacities for discernment, the ability to make distinctions between what is good and what is bad and, critically, to transcend their narrow histories. Deeply embedded, as a binding thread, in all these civilizational forms is a commitment to a sense of what it means to be human beyond a closed and ethnocentric sense of human belonging. This embeddedness is evident

in the concept of *Ubuntu* and its radical inclusiveness (see Oliphant, 2008: 227). It is evident in the Vedic idea that the *Ultimate Principle* is a *person* ‘transcend[ing] our small world of cultural relativities’ (Prabhupada, 1970: v). It is there in the Buddhist sense of *dharma*, and it is powerfully evident in the European Enlightenment. But, and this is the most important point to take away from this discussion, we come to this abiding sense of a larger sense of belonging not by accident. We learn it. Our civilizational obligation, in all its accents and registers, is our capacity to learn our humanity. This is what the Buddhist version of *dharma* requires. Our civilizations bequeath to us not fully formed and complete manifestoes for living, but the wisdom that beauty is to be attained through the effort of deep thought – thinking. We don’t just inherit our humanity. We learn it. ‘There is a way between the opposites of things,’ Taoist teaching says, ‘[it is] a delicate balance of ... learning and unlearning ...’ (Grigg, 1989: 37). This civilizational imperative is best captured in the thinking of St Vincent de Hugo who said:

It is therefore, a source of great virtue for the practise mind to *learn*, bit by bit, first to change about invisible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is his native soil is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his. (Said, 1994: 407)

Working with this injunction, Zizek asks almost 800 years later, how do we ‘repudiate violence when struggle and aggression are

part of life?’ (Zizek, 2008: 63). His response is to pick up the civilizational injunction of St Vincent de Hugo. It is, he says, paraphrasing Lenin, to ‘learn, learn, learn’ (Zizek, 2008: 8). He argues that we have been seduced by hypocritical moral outrage which says to us that ‘a woman is raped every six seconds in this country’, or ‘in the time it takes you to read this paragraph, ten children will die of hunger’ and which has urged upon us a false sense of urgency (Zizek, 2008: 6). There is a fundamental anti-theoretical gloss to this urgency. It seeks us not to think. And this is what is most critically required right now. We need to be making a critical analysis of our current situation in the world. This requires a level of courage in which each of us takes full responsibility. To exercise this responsibility what is necessary is that we need ‘to “learn, learn and learn” what causes this violence’ (Zizek, 2008: 8). We need to step back, he urges, ‘[t]he truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw’ (Zizek, 2008: 217) from our complicity in the ways of the everyday.

Stepping Back

So how do we ‘step back’? How do we learn? We learn, of course, in a multiplicity of kinds of ways.

We can learn by accident. We can learn as a young man I encountered in one of my studies did. For purposes of anonymity we can call him Andile. When Andile was born his father handed him over to his grandmother as a gift. His grandmother, however, did not like him and treated him harshly. It struck him one day that when she was really angry she would shout at him in a language which he discovered was English. When he was six he made the decision that he should learn this strange language of invective, and so deliberately set about teaching himself to

read it. This he did when he was six. It was not something that he had planned to do.

We can learn through force of circumstances. Another of my subjects, whom we can call Yekiso, was committed to prison for life for having killed another man. The killing happened in the familiar swirl of township life. Yekiso had repeatedly had thrown in his face the taunt of having been cuckolded. His tormentor would not stop until Yekiso could take it no longer, and so in a fit of passion he stabbed him. It was while he was in prison that he had the opportunity to deconstruct and come to understand in fine detail what had happened in the depths of his moment of anger:

What I learnt in prison is that, you know, just to use force... it doesn't work. You have to use your mind. So I have resolved some situations, you know... in prison where I know that maybe fights could have started, you know... but by just using the mind, you know I have resolved those situations... resolved conflicts. The mind is... powerful.... Remember... what brought me to prison. I could have walked away but I allowed my pride... You know every man has got his pride... but I allowed my pride to take over me... my emotions... I could have walked away at the time, but I didn't have the skill... I lacked the ability. So when I came into prison and I started doing the social workers' programmes I realised that sometimes you can walk away from a situation... you know, so when I started learning that.... even in prison when I got into a, you know... a conflict, then I would just walk away... or say, I am sorry my friend... but it is difficult, to be quite honest.

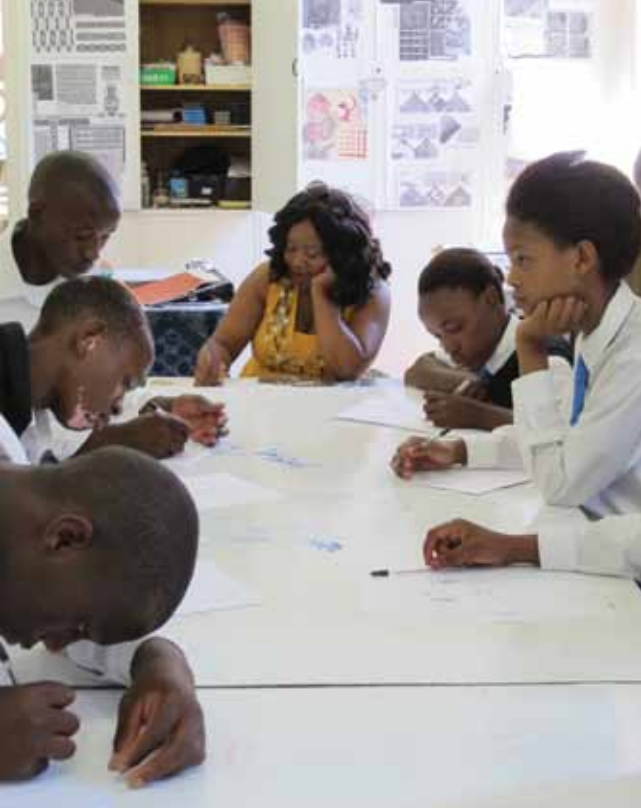
We can also learn deliberately. We can learn simply because we can. It is what makes

us distinctively human. In the Gandhian way we learn deliberately as an act of self-sacrifice. In the *Gita* he tells us: '... desire is insatiable like fire, and taking possession of man's senses, mind and intellect, knocks him down. Therefore first control your senses, and then conquer the mind. When you have done this, the intellect will also obey your orders' (Gandhi, 1968: 279). Or we can learn because we must. It is this deliberate way that Zizek (2008: 8) talks to when he recounts how Lenin deliberately presented himself to his family and associates when he needed to be by himself, I have to 'learn, learn, learn', he said.

It is this deliberate way that we are seeing in the work that Johann van der Schijff is undertaking in this exhibition. It is intended to use the creation of punching bags by learners to open up in a participatory way questions not spoken about openly: violence, 'the other', stereotyping, discrimination and human rights. The deliberateness is about how a punching bag as an object of violence becomes the site for the deconstruction and the historicization of our feelings, both as agents and as sufferers, of hurting and being hurt. Amukelo Bapse Ngobeni in this exhibition describes his Janus-faced punching bag with a wealth-giving snake on its front and a brown-scaled and black-eyed dragon on its back as a deliberate question to one's prejudices and moral judgements and urges his viewers to come to the awareness that 'things can be what you want them to be, a dragon can be something we fear or we can admire the power and mystery attached to it.'

It is this deliberate way that we must all cultivate. We are, as Amukelo says, 'responsible for our own behaviour and attitude towards other people.' We can come to this learning by chance, by force of circumstance or deliberately so. It is

an extraordinary thing in our lives when we have learning experiences of chance or circumstance. But the fact of the matter is that these are not phenomena over which we have control. We do have control over what we learn and how we learn. And so we must use it. We must use it as if it matters, because it does matter. The seriousness which we devote to it is one of the most profound commitments we can make to our humanness. We are now, as Bruno Latour (2005) is asking us to acknowledge, having to engage with the proposition that agency is possible outside of our definition of what it means to be human, but it still is in our capacity to think our way through the seductions of time and space that we demonstrate our deepest attributes of respect for the sanctity of each other's lives and of what we are capable of doing. We confront who and what we are beyond the superficial vocabularies and comforts of blood, of place, of time and make our way into the wonderful realm of possibility.



Daredevil

Andrew Lamprecht

In the movie version of *Daredevil* the young boy Matt Murdoch, recently blinded by radioactive chemicals being sprayed into his eyes, stands on the roof of his Hell's Kitchen apartment block, from where he used to survey New York City. He fumbles towards the area where his father, a boxer, would work out and jabs into the air, hitting a punch bag set up for training. Suddenly he realises that he can sense the vibrations emanating from the moving object and hits again and again, never missing his target and punching more accurately and better than when he was sighted. Thus begins his transformation into 'Daredevil', the crime-fighting superhero of Marvel Comics fame ('Daredevil', 2003).

Superhero comics (and these days more frequently media such as movies and television in which they star) have a special attraction for young people. At an age when one's body is undergoing changes and doesn't always seem to work as it should, when one has sharp shifts in emotion and bursts of anger, learning to control these, master them, and channel energy positively are important and exemplified by the fictional and fantastic world of Batman, Spider-Man and the like.

Visually, the punch bags created by learners as part of Johann van der Schijff's *Community Punching Bags (CPBs)* project seem to owe a lot to the iconography of the costumed superhero. Van der Schijff's work, unsurprisingly, is predicated on allowing young people to channel their energy into a defined goal, allowing fantasy, humour and the imagination to take full flight in so doing.

As an artwork, the collaborative aspect of CPBs cannot be underestimated. The history of art is replete with examples of an artist with apprentices who use his or her production model and working methods to fashion their own creations within the ambit of the studio and learn their craft. From the time of Marcel Duchamp, the relation between the 'fabricator' and the commissioning artist who allows greater or lesser freedom for expression in the making of work under their aegis has become increasingly complex and prevalent (Petry, 2011).

Rebecca Scott's *Imperial Size Blanket for the Developing Countries* (1992) was made up of dozens of woollen squares knitted by a group of Scottish women who were given a choice of images of male genitalia to interpret as they liked for their square, which when sewn together made a large blanket that covered three beds and was placed on display at an exhibition at the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital in Greenwich, London – historically the place where sailors who had contracted venereal diseases while abroad were treated. The specificity of the location and the gender of collaborators are central to Scott's overall work. The variety of expressions that the different participating women brought to the work gave it a richness that would have been impossible had the artist knitted each square herself. This sort of active collaboration and incorporation of different voices – views perhaps inaccessible to the artist – is an important methodology in contemporary art practice (Petry, 2011: 122).

Artists as diverse as Antony Gormley, Patricia Piccinini and Ai Wei Wei regularly utilise creative components from participants in the creation of a larger project that they direct (see Putnam, 2001 for other examples), but in the case of the *CPBs* the learners who work with van der Schijff play a distinct creative role. Jane Kinsman has noted, in relation to one of the most collaborative of art practices – that between the artist and the master printmaker – that printmaker ‘[Tatyana] Grosman was not interested in the notion of collaboration between the artist and the printer. It was up to the printer to solve problems’ (Kinsman, 2002: 4). Nothing could be further from the aims of the *CPBs* project: the space established was one of educational development and the artist and his collaborators worked together, creatively feeding each other and sharing ideas, thereby solving problems to create a unified body of work in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

And such it is with a superhero’s powers. Supersensitivity in other senses in the absence of that of sight makes the young Matt Murdoch a more powerful human being. Discovering that his skills in one area free him from the constraints that could hold him back in another takes him to new realms in his imagination, in which he may, indeed, dare the devil and the hand that fate has dealt him.







Amukelo Bapse Ngobeni 17 – Gugulethu
Heideveld Senior Secondary School



The front of my punching bag depicts a red, green and brown wealth-giving snake called a Fortune snake or uMamlambo. The snake has a brown cross on its forehead that runs down the middle of the face, in between the eyes, and branches out to become the nostrils, which also resemble a scorpion's pincers. In the tribal mythology of South Africa's Xhosa people, the mamlambo is a giant river snake that 'brings good fortune to he who owns it', and is used by witch doctors to get revenge on their enemies. The back of my punching bag depicts a 2012 dragon in flowing dark green, light green 'velle' with brown scales hanging down and red eyes resembling sunglasses.

My design symbolises the way in which socio-economic changes affect not only the material world but also one's perceptions of the indigenous spirit world. Moral judgement is passed on individuals based on stereotyping and discrimination. In society people judge each other unjustly on the grounds of race, sex, age, religion, skin colour, nationality,

gender or language. I see myself as a fortune snake, bringing prosperity and good luck to Gugulethu by being a symbol of hope and success. Through my artwork I wish to highlight the fact that 'We are responsible for our own behaviour and attitude towards other people' and that we should focus on how to turn our fears into opportunities and success stories. Things can be what you want them to be, a dragon can be something we fear or we can admire the power and mystery attached to it. Life is about choices. Empower yourself so that you can make informed decisions and not let your ignorance blind you and be a stumbling block. Respect the beliefs of others even though it seems ridiculous and remember when you dream, dream big.

Reference:
Wood, F. 2005









Shireen Ahmed 40 – Strand / Athlone
Heideveld Senior Secondary School



One side of my bag depicts society's discrimination against people because of who they are and what they have. I looked at discrimination at my school and at the nutrition programme's slogan "You can't teach a hungry child". I chose images like spoons, forks, knives and bowls – as the main ingredient in our nutritional meals is fish, also associated with brain food, I used a fish bone in my design of the head. Prison bars replaced the mouth to show how the words of others and our own fears hold us back. The H is ambiguous – Hunger and Hopelessness at Heideveld High transforms to Help and Hope by the Hopefuls. Eyes and nose are created by two spoons. The other side of the bag depicts the emotions of those who experience discrimination – anger, despair, frustration, shock. I used warm colours as I am an optimist who believes that we have the power to change things, but sometimes lack the desire. The vortex-like mouth is made of different-sized spoons, as words can be constructive and destructive. The knife can

be dangerous in the wrong hands, but can be useful in the hands of an artist, thus it is reflective to show its dual purpose. The eyes are an amoeboid version of a fork, changing shape, as people see what they want to see.

My bag represents individuals who are discriminated against yet still meet life's challenges head on because they practise perseverance, tolerance and forgiveness: the keystones to success. My bag was inspired by my work on my school's nutrition committee and by learners' requests to eat in the classroom to avoid being 'taxed' (pay a protection fee or have things taken). Although we fed about 200 learners daily, less than 1% of them were girls. I discovered that learners were victimised for being hungry and not privileged. This was quite shocking, as the main bullies *and* victims were girls.

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are endless."

– Mother Teresa









Shaakira Ajam 16 – Mitchells Plain
Livingstone High School



My punchbag resembles the design of an Egyptian cat and incorporates tribal patterns as well. For both sides I've used the colours cream, dark brown and red. The face has a lot of details. On the 'happy' side the eyebrows are faced upwards and a sort of blank expression is shown. On the 'sad' side, the eyebrows are faced downwards and cream tears are streaming down its cheeks. Both sides share the two long Persian cat-like ears, one of them pierced with three gold sleeper earrings through the side.

Cats aren't able to show emotion on their faces. People hide their emotions, but the cats are able to sense the emotions of their owners. I tried to be different and viewed the issue of violence on an emotional level from an animal's point of view. On the one side of the punchbag, an emotionless face is shown. On the opposite side, a sad crying face is shown. The significance of the Egyptian theme is that, in the days of the Egyptians and pyramids, cats were very important. They were treated like royalty

and respected. So why is it nowadays that people can't respect and treat one another like Egyptian cats were respected and treated back then? Animals have more dignity than people have for one another.









Andrea Barnes 17 – Mitchells Plain
Livingstone High School



My punching bag represents two emotions. One side of my punching bag is a light colour and the shape of the eyes and mouth show a happy emotion, but also gives the feeling that the emotion is not genuine due to the amount of stripes in the eyes and over-exaggerated smile. On the other side of the punching bag it is a dark brown colour and displays a sad emotion, but it feels more real as there are less stripes on the eyes, and because of the shape of the eyes and the dark colour.

My idea for the punching bag came from the effects of emotional and physical bullying. When a child is bullied or abused they are scared to show their emotion, they pretend to be happy. My punching bag shows both sides, the fake and genuine feelings of abuse. Children should not be scared to show their emotions and say how they really feel.









Kevin Kock 15 – Plumstead
Livingstone High School



The one side of my punching bag shows a happy face in blue and white. The other side of the punching bag shows an angry face in the shape of a mask in green and brown. I got the idea of the happy face's nose, eyes and eyebrows while watching a cartoon program on television. The shape of the smile on the face I got from a picture of a clown in a magazine. I used blue and white because the colours match well together. The other side of the punching bag's idea I got from the internet while looking at masks and statues. This side of the punching bag shows a slightly serious face. The colours I chose came from a statue which I blended in with the trees on the picture. The ideas of the bells I got from an example Johann displayed to my class. The brown strips below the mask were added to create more detail.

The punchbag I designed relates to my personality and how I act in society. It shows that people do not always have to be serious about certain issues and can look at the better

things in life. The same sound of each bell describes that everyone is equal and that we all have the same rights.









Aneesah Firfirey 15 – Landsdowne
Livingstone High School



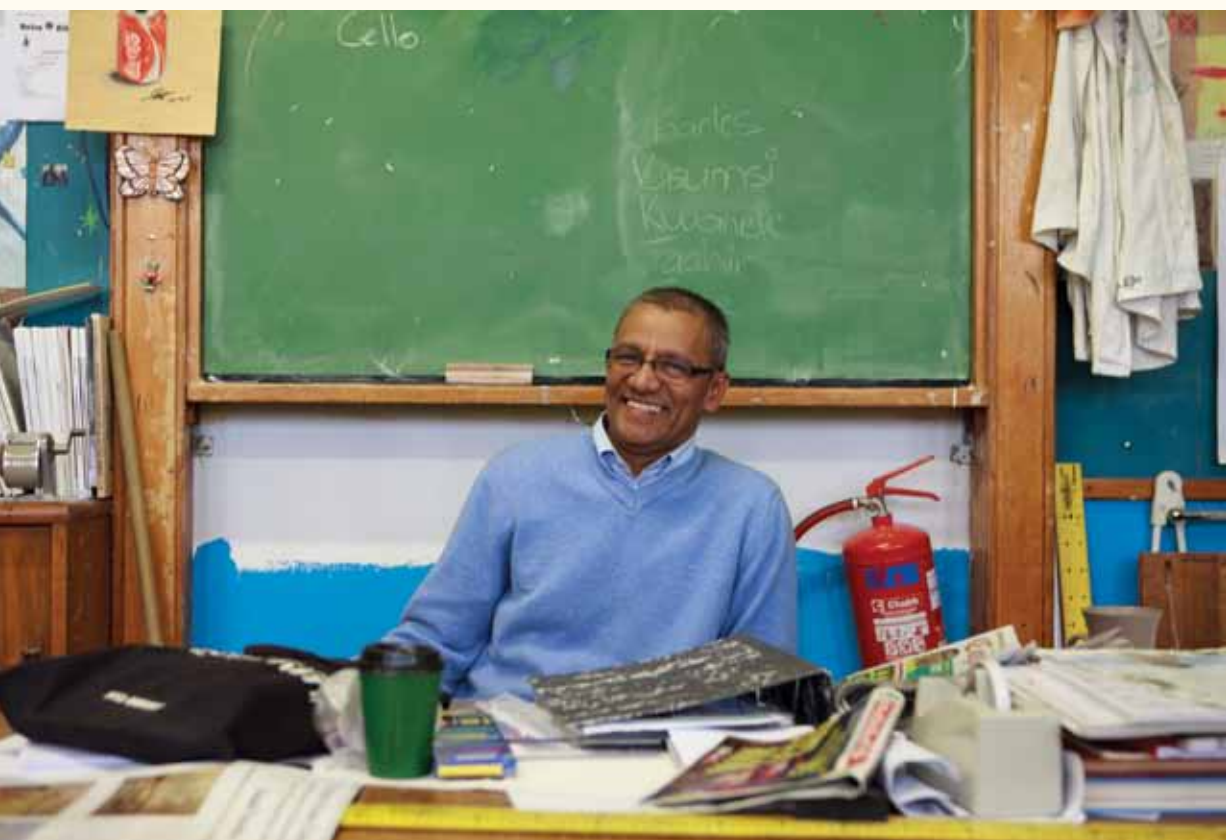
The first side is white with black lips, blue eyes, a thick black outline around the eyes and long black triangle shapes above and below the eyes. This idea came from a mask worn by Joey Jordison, the drummer of a heavy metal band called Slipknot. I have changed a few details. Although the character seems bored or displays no emotions, the long black triangle shapes below the eyes represent tears of its smudged make-up that most musicians in rock bands wear. The opposite side is black, with red which was used to make the mouth in a zig-zag pattern and the outline of the eyes and eyebrows, and purple for the pupil of the eyes. This idea came from my dad. He rides motorbikes and while looking for a few of his helmets, I noticed the odd shapes on them. When I put these shapes together they formed this face. It seemed to be angry with its black and red, the lowered eyebrows and zig-zag shapes of the teeth. I added the purple to give the character a more mysterious feel even though it looked like a Transformer.

I wanted this punching bag to represent who I am and the music I listen to, even though it is different to what other people would listen to. Music plays a big role in my life. This is what makes me an artist and what makes me different. Music carries a deep message and most of the time affects people in what they do, think and how they see the world. Everyone is unique and I tried to show it through this punching bag. My intentions were that if people saw this punching bag they would be reminded about something that would make them sad or angry and take out their frustration on the punching bag instead of someone else.









Mogamat Shirage Davids 53 – Montevideo
Livingstone High School



The punching bag shows two distinct personalities. One side of the bag depicts the face of a stern knight. The other side of the bag is a face which has a uniquely African feel. The colours on both sides are exactly the same, using a burnt sienna and a cream, symbolising that all humanity stems from the Earth and that our roots are all similar, despite our lives, cultures and beliefs being so different.

The image of the knight represents the aggressive and violent nature of humanity. It also represents a masculine mentality, but one which is essential for humanity's survival. The African image represents the softer and gentler aspects of human nature. It represents a feminine approach to life: gentle, compromising and nurturing. Neither image is good and neither is evil. They show the duality of humanity, both of which we have within us.

The bag itself deals with conflict and aggression. It addresses the volatility of conflict and the way in which small incidents

can explode and often become physical by nature. It also deals with communication, and the lack thereof, and how this is the cause of much conflict.

When we look at a microcosm of the greater society, such as a school, we see that conflict is an issue that needs to be carefully managed. Much like a pressure-cooker, pressure in an isolated system can build up quickly and often a violent reaction can occur. However, in the same way in which a pressure-cooker can be devastating, if channelled and controlled, it can also be extremely productive.









Lena Weir 16 – Gardens
Camps Bay High School



The one side of my punching bag depicts the word Love, which is surrounded by an assortment of smaller words related to the word 'love'. This side is green, referring to the word 'go' on a traffic light. The other side of my punching bag depicts the word Hate, which is surrounded by an assortment of smaller words related to the word 'hate'. This side is red, referring to the word 'stop' on a traffic light. The initial idea was sparked by tattoos of LOVE and HATE that people put on their fists, which was commonly done by prisoners. The play of a fist on a punching bag influenced the idea of reflecting words from the centre as if from the impact of a punch. I was influenced by the work of Robert Indiana, especially by his famous LOVE sculpture and his graphic representations.

The given theme of violence, bullying and cyber-bullying got me thinking about the hitting power of words and the powerful impact that they can make – words hit home, they are so much stronger than any physical impact. The use of words on a punching bag

gives them much more meaning than if they were just written on a piece of paper. I have depicted two strongly opposing words, namely love and hate, on opposing sides of a punching bag – although they are seen as complete opposites, the one cannot exist without the other.

Reference:
Arnason, H. 1977







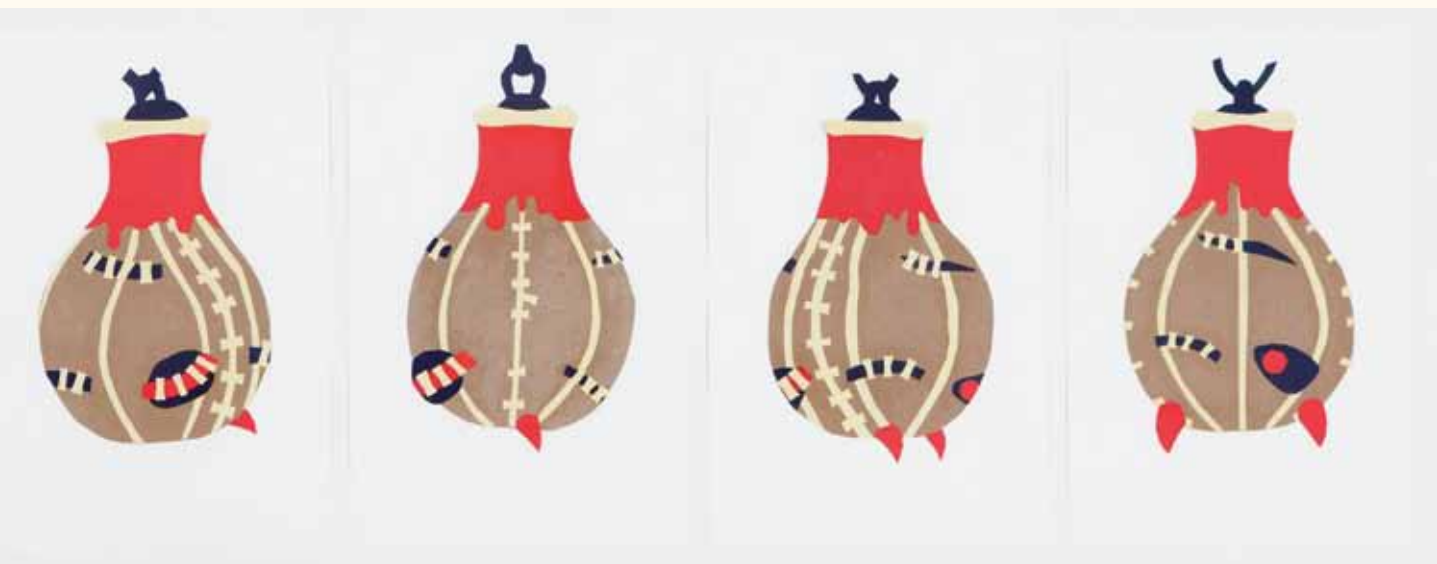


Alex Rassloff 16 – Hout Bay
Camps Bay High School



The one side of my punching bag consists of a simple frowning face made with dark lines. Its eyes are both sealed with 'stitching' and one eye is badly bruised. The other side consists of a similar face, only grinning and with an evil expression. Half of this face is also stitched shut. From the chain of the punching bag we see thick crimson 'blood' snaking down to eventually conceal both faces. All of this came naturally and I focused mainly on a specific concept and looked at the best way to portray the specific subject.

I experienced a ton of bullying in primary school and I wanted to portray the message: every time a person mentally or physically harms another, he/she damages a part of themselves as well. The 'blood' symbolizes the eventual consumption of both individuals and the 'stitches' show the binding of the person close to the point where they are oblivious to good.









Lauren Kate Schofield 30 – Vredehoek
Camps Bay High School



My punchbag has a visual yin-yang effect where each side is an inversion of the other. This duality represents the interconnectedness of the victor and the victim; the aggressor is vulnerable and the wounded can turn violent. When viewed right side up, the mouths depict a reversal in emotion and so there is further ambiguity in the symbolism. The crown of the punch bag references the astrological symbol for Aries – ruled by the fiery planet Mars, the god of war, and the force of man asserting his ego on the environment and others. The colours used represent nationalism due to the high frequency of red, white and blue used in colonial flags. To evoke a feeling of brutality, horror and fear, inspiration was found in a book on mythological beasts and monsters. The fangs hint at poison and the flames become morphed into tears.

The punch bag itself looks mask-like and hints at the transformative powers that facial shields may yield. There is a loss of self and so obvious human qualities have been

omitted, such as the eyes. As humans, we need to come to terms with the beast within each of us. South Africa has a shadow side that is cloaked in a metaphor of suffering. Inequality and damaged mindsets can infiltrate our schools. Emotionally charged situations bubble to the surface and as we work through these encounters, we can only hope that the outcome will be a change in perspective. Upside down is, after all, the right way up when you stand on your head.

References:
Oken, A. 1988
Parker, D & J. 1976









Jessica Michaels 16 – Fish Hoek
Fish Hoek High School



The 'front' of the punchbag depicts a stylization of the top layer of muscles in a human face. These muscles are predominantly red with black stitching to emphasize the 'muscular' quality and are individual pieces over a white base. The 'back' depicts four slash marks (red with black stitching like the 'muscles' to depict flesh) with a frilly black edge on white. This muscle idea stems from one of my early concepts for the project, which was a customizable 'realistic' face to recreate (and subsequently punch) your enemy. This concept needed a base design, and the base of a human face is the muscle underneath. When I designed the base, it turned into something that really reflected what I was going through at that time. I thought that the result was strong enough (both visually and symbolically) to stand on its own. The back design was designed primarily for visual impact rather than meaning, although when I finished the design it related perfectly to my state of mind.

At the time of design, I was, like most

teens, dealing with issues that affected my self-esteem and the way I saw the world. I felt extremely vulnerable and victimized (which was all psychological rather than the result of other people's actions). The raw muscle of the face represents being forced into the eyes of others unprotected and susceptible to being hurt by others. The back design represents someone scratching at your 'safety layer'. This someone could be another person, or, more personally, yourself. (At the time I was my own worst critic and constantly brought myself down.) This concept in relation to the punchbag is a way to overcome personal demons (i.e. punching the part of you that brings you down). The project brought my subconscious issues to light and helped me make sense of it all – a therapeutic experience. For that it truly is an honour to be selected for this opportunity.









Abi Gildenhuys 17 – Kommetjie
Fish Hoek High School



The one side of my punching bag is a face that has been injured; it is wrapped up in bandages. Its mouth is zipped closed: it has no voice and no say in what happens to and around it. This side of my punching bag represents the victim of the two. On the opposite side is a face as well, covered not by bandages but rather by a gas mask and helmet. He depicts a sort of soldier in a war. He has hollow eyes and is unpleasant looking.

I wanted to create something that simply represented good and bad. The soldier represents the degradation in society. It represents the bad things or even the bad people in a community. The theme of the mask and helmet came from the idea that people are 'masking' themselves behind a hard outer shell and that the bad habits are starting to be seen as the norm. People that are doing bad things are hiding behind a group; the same as a group of soldiers would – their army uniform and masks make them think that the killing they are taking part in is justified. The other side, the victim,

represents the parts of society that are affected by the 'soldier'. They have no say in what happens. The zipped closed mouth signifies a person who is perhaps a victim of violence, but cannot voice this, generally due to threats or fear. Therefore the circumstances cannot change, and as the violence escalates one must just keep quiet and bear it.









Debby Saporetti 45+ – Oakridge
Fish Hoek High School



One side of my punchbag depicts a face of a cat-like creature in pink colours, with pointed ears and whiskers, originally sourced from my drawings of my own Burmese cats of which I have been a breeder for a number of years. I decided to change the face from a specific cat to a generalised one depicting elements of a cat-like creature. My chosen colours are a parody of the cliché “pink is for girls and blue is for boys” and that teenagers are generally fashion driven.

The opposite side of the bag depicts the face of a blue and brown dog-like creature with a muzzle, (almost ready to attack) and simplified ears set wide across the face. The ‘cat’ side represents the female adolescent and the ‘dog’ side the male adolescent. The images were also inspired by the *lucha libre* boxing masks of South America.

My concept was sparked by a series of incidents that transpired at school involving aggression on the part of the boys towards the girls. I then progressed from specifics to working with the theme of adolescent

relational aggression and how it manifests differently amongst teenage girls and boys. During the years of my teaching experience I have noticed that aggression amongst some girls is far more covert and complex than amongst boys. They employ indirect social and verbal methods of aggression, such as eye rolling, facial expressions, cyber-bullying and deliberately ignoring the other girl. They use manipulation and gossip amongst their followers to victimise other girls for power and to gain control of social relationships. Friendships or cliques around relational aggressive girls tend to be based on exclusivity, jealousy and intimacy. Some boys on the other hand are more openly and impulsively aggressive and engage in physical violence, almost expected of them by society. They tend to fight and become friends again far quicker than girls, who take much longer to reconcile their friendships.

References:

Kotze, L. 2007
Meichenbaum, D. 2006.









Ncoko Mabanga 15 – Langa
Isilimela High School



One side of my punching bag is very black due to the darkness of the story, it's a story about me when I was robbed. It was me and my friend on our way to the swimming pool.

When we were just about 20 metres from the pool there came a guy who wanted to take our money that we were going to pay at the pool for entrance. My design of the punching bag is actually telling that story.

The sad black face was very ugly and scary with a red hat.

I have never been so scared in my life thinking about so many things, like dying, being stabbed to death, the worst thing ever was for me to be helpless and I couldn't defend myself at all.

Every time when I think about that day I still feel broken inside and the money we lost that day, my friend and I, was a lot of money. The guy who robbed us was enjoying himself and just wanted to create chaos and violence.

When I had time to tell somebody about

what happened, funny enough I laughed out loud thinking that I could have lost my life due to people who are not used to happiness and laughter, people who are not happy to see others leading a normal life.

The reference to my story comes from my daily life, where people get robbed every day, but the difference is that we normally hear stories like these from other people – now when it happens to you, it becomes something real, not a story.









Ayabonga Ntshongwana 16 – Langa
Isilimela High School



One side of my punchbag depicts a gang face with scars and his gang name written on his face. The gang face is yellow, a colour that represents silly or someone who thinks he is better than the others.

The opposite side carries the face of a dead man (my friend) in blue, which represents cold. I made his eyes closed so that it really shows a dead man and his mouth is facing downward as a sad face.

For me this punching bag represents my dead friend who was stabbed by one of the two gangs. My friend was on his way home and he was smoking a cigarette, and there appeared two gangs asking for a smoke and he said they must wait he has not finished yet, and that's what caused his death. They started stabbing him. As usual, police came very late, even the person who could identify the killer was already gone. Later after some months the investigation was made and the killer was found, he was taken to jail but the

most interesting and sad thing is that before we knew it he was out of jail and as we speak may be doing the very same thing to others.









Johann van der Schijff 43 – Claremont
Michaelis School of Fine Art



One side of my punchbag depicts a Jester face in blue and yellow colours with a tongue sticking out and bells at the end of his cape. The opposite side depicts the face of a Shaman or 'Witch Doctor' in shades of brown with a grinning mouth and white teeth. The Jester design came from my memory of seeing drawings in children's storybooks as well as the Joker figure in playing cards and Batman comics and movies. I was excited about including the bells as I anticipated it would add an ornate sound in contrast to the muffled sound of the bag being punched, striking the wooden disk with a thump. The inspiration of the Shaman design came from a photograph of a Bafu-Fondony wooden mask from Cameroon I found while paging through a book on masks of the world. The grinning mouth with buckteeth sets up a counterpart to the uncanny red tongue of the Jester, acting as focus points on both sides.

For me this punchbag represents the artist and his/her role in society, and as such is also a self-portrait. I see the role of the

artist as that of contemporary court jester and/or witch doctor, especially in South Africa and Africa where freedom of speech seems perpetually to be under threat. George Orwell stated that 'If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear'. The Jester and its Shaman counterpart (the artist) play the very important role in society of taking on the State and its organs of control to tell it what it does not want to hear. Contemporary examples in South Africa and Africa are the cartoonist Zapiro and the Senegalese rap group Y'en a marre (French slang for 'enough is enough'). In the case of the CPBs project, this role extends further to tell each other what we as ordinary citizens might not want to hear about each other, e.g. our deep-rooted suspicion of each other or generalisations about each other's cultures and religions.

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Gregos, K. 2011











Leather artisans:

Hennie Henrico

Leathertech

Salie Rasdien, Deon Page,
Karen Green, Michelle
Page and Ntombovuyo
Mziwakhe

Hot Choclat

Hadley and Gail Craig

Hadley Original



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High school learners participating in the final exhibition

Alex Rassloff and Lena Weir – Camps Bay High School | Abi Gildenhuys and Jessica Michaels – Fish Hoek High School | Amukelo Bapse Ngobeni – Heideveld Senior Secondary School | Ncoko Mabanga and Ayabonga Ntshongwana – Isilimela High School | Shaakira Ajam, Andrea Barnes, Aneesah Firfirey and Kevin Kock – Livingstone High School

High school learners participating in workshops

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Contributors

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