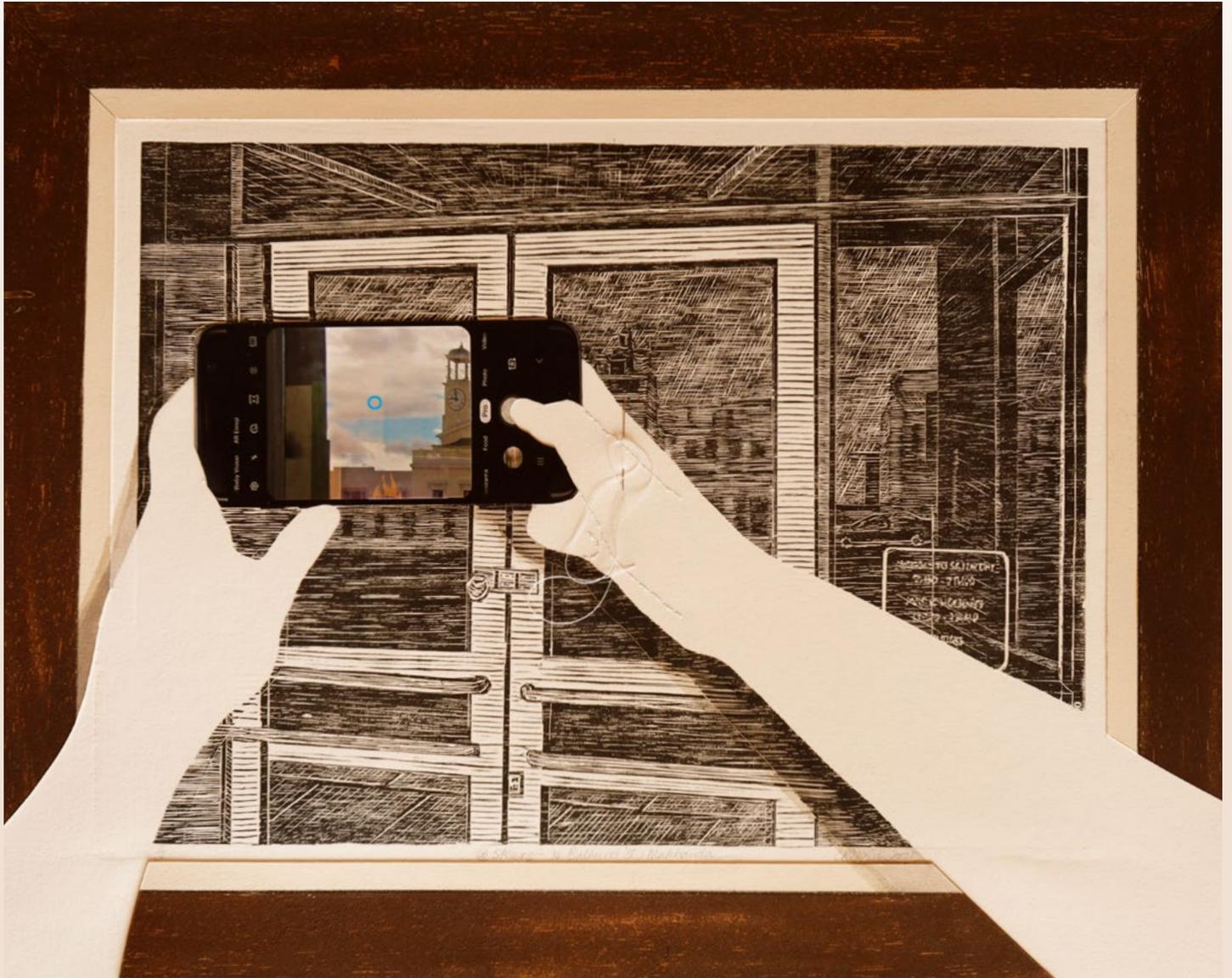


Snapping to Attention

Vernacular photographs as sources and subject matter in the visual arts



Whether through collage, montage, printmaking, painting, sculpture, installation or video, amongst other techniques, vernacular photographs are invoked or referred to in numerous works of art. While frequently enabling artists to engage with social, political or personal concerns, and/or the complexities of specific histories, they have also led to works in which artists explore vernacular photography itself – its conventions or characteristics. In this conference, we examine how vernacular photographs of any type have served as sources or subject matter for works of art made during the second half of the twentieth century or the twenty-first century.

19–22 NOVEMBER 2025

CONFERENCE VENUE: The **Offices of the SARChi Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture**, 33 Twickenham Avenue, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, South Africa.

IMAGE CREDIT: Christine Dixie,
@Steers, 14 Bathurst St., Makhandla (2021),
woodcut, collage, needle and thread,
46.5 x 55 cm. photo courtesy the artist.



science, technology
& innovation
Department:
Science, Technology and Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National
Research
Foundation



20
2005
2025
YEARS

Snapping to Attention

Vernacular photographs as sources and subject matter in the visual arts



The MOMA website explains that “Snapshots capturing everyday life and subjects are a major form of vernacular photography”. Broad in its range, “vernacular photography” is an “umbrella term used to distinguish fine art photographs from those made for a huge range of purposes, including commercial, scientific, forensic, governmental, and personal” (<https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/vernacular-photography>). Unlike fine art photography and documentary photography, which recognise photographers as creative individuals, vernacular photography is normally by unidentified makers.

Nonetheless, while distinct from photographs classified as “fine art”, vernacular photographs have been, and continue to be, of significant value to visual artists. Whether through collage, montage, printmaking, painting, sculpture, installation or video, amongst other techniques, vernacular photographs are invoked or referred to in numerous works of art. While frequently enabling artists to engage with social, political or personal concerns, and/or the complexities of specific histories, they have also led to works in which artists explore vernacular photography itself – its conventions or characteristics.

In this conference, we examine how vernacular photographs of any type have informed or been invoked in works of art made during the second half of the twentieth century or the twenty-first century, and the significance of these references.

CONVENORS: This conference is convened by Brenda Schmahmann, Professor and the SARChI Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture, and Irene Bronner, Associate Professor with the SARChI Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: This conference is made possible through generous funding, support and facilities afforded the SARChI Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture. This chair is funded by the Department of Science and Innovation, managed by the National Research Foundation and hosted by the University of Johannesburg.

PROGRAMME

19 November 2025

- 14:15 – 14:45 **Registration** and tea/coffee at 33 Twickenham Avenue, Auckland Park
14:45 **Welcome** by Federico Freschi, Executive Dean of the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg

PANEL 1

The Languages of Vernacular Photography

- 15:00 – 15:45 **Landi Raubenheimer**, Johannesburg re-imagined in artworks using vernacular photography: the work of Lebohang Kganye and Phumulani Ntuli
15:45 – 16:30 **Shonisani Netshia**, Reimagining history through Mashudu Nevhutalu's Vernacular Photography
16:30 – 17:15 **Rina de Klerk**, Reframing distance and intimacy in Fiona Pole's *Snapshots* print series
17:15 – 17:45 Reception in the Gallery at 33 Twickenham where Luyanda Zindela's *20 Crowndale Mews* is on exhibition
17:45 – 18:15 **Luyanda Zindela**, onsite engagement with *20 Crowndale Mews*
18:15 Dinner at 33 Twickenham Avenue

20 November 2025

PANEL 1 (cont.)

- 09:00 – 09:45 **Shreya Mukherjee**, The World Within a Dew Drop: Photography, Materiality, and the Everyday
09:45 – 10:30 **Roxy do Rego**, A Hard Look at Consent: Unsolicited 'Dick Pics' and Online Dating Culture in Frances Goodman's *Tinder Dick Picks* (2014) series
10:30 – 11:00 Tea/coffee break

PANEL 2

Family Photographs in Garments and Fabric

- 11:00 – 11:45 **Khaya Mchunu**, Family Photographs, and Family Stories in Thebe Magugu's Genealogy Collection (Spring/Summer 2022)
11:45 – 12:30 **Irene Bronner**, Vernacular Photography and the Art of Mourning in the Textile Work of Amita Makan
12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

PANEL 3

Vernacular Photography, Histories and National Identities

- 13:30 – 14:15 **Marta Ziętkiewicz**, "*Speak the Unspeakable*": Vernacular Photography and the Repressed Memories of the Polish Experience of the Holocaust
14:15 – 15:00 **Valéria Kršiaková**, "*There is no need to undress Slovakia from its folk costume.*" The Surviving Image of Slovak Land and People as a Rural Idyll
15:00 – 15:30 Tea/coffee break

KEYNOTE

- 15:30 – 16:30 **Annie van den Oever**, William Kentridge's *Black Box / Chambre Noire* and the resensitizing of researchers to the material, sensorial, expressive and performative potential of past media

WORKSHOP

- 16:30 – 18:00 This workshop is run by media archaeologists and photography experts Bongani Khoza, Landi Raubenheimer and Annie van den Oever and offers participants a chance to engage hands-on with cameras from the FADA Experimental Media Archaeology studio. The intention is to enable one to glean a sense of historical media enactments, the experiences they offered and how these shaped or informed images.
18:30 Dinner at Bellagio, Illovo

21 November 2025

PANEL 4

Reflections by Artists on Vernacular Photographs in Their Own Work

- 08:30 – 09:15 **Kate'Lyn Chetty**, Pour some sugar on me: Vernacular photographs, sugarcane and South African Indian histories in the works of Zaeneca Singh and Kate'Lyn Chetty
- 09:15 – 10:00 **Karin Preller**, Unsettling the referent: Barthes' punctum, amnesic spectrality and the work of mourning
- 10:00 – 10:30 Tea/coffee break

PANEL 5

(Re)Constructing Black Lives and Histories

- 10:30 – 11:15 **Sophie Lynch**, Performing Stillness, Looking Back: The Afterlives of a Daguerreotype in Christopher Harris's *A Willing Suspension of Disbelief + Photography and Fetish*
- 11:15 – 12:00 **Pelumi Odubanjo**, Walls of Memory and Refusal: Rosana Paulino's Vernacular Imaginaries
- 12:00 – 12:45 **Stefanie Jason**, After Militarism: Reframing the 32 Battalion archive in Helena Uambembe's art
- 12.:45 – 13:45 Lunch

PANEL 6

Repurposing Found Photographs

- 13:45 – 14:30 **Witold Kanicki**, Jerzy Lewczyński's photographic fossils
- 14:30 – 15:15 **Emma Colombi**, Marco Lanza's Riconoscimento: between endless narratives and reflection on authorship and image culture in contemporary society
- 15:15 – 16:00 **Isabelle Lynch**, Mold in the Archive: Photography, Agency, and Funghi
- 16:00 – 16:30 Tea/coffee break

PANEL 7

Vernacular Photography and Histories of the Eastern Cape

- 16:30 – 17:15 **Brenda Schmahmann**, From the Camera Obscura to the Snapshot on a Mobile Phone: Photography and settler histories in Christine Dixie's *@Bathurst Street*
- 17:15 – 18:00 **Avuzwa Noko**, Bridging the Gap: Unveiling the Integration of Railways into Societal Discourse through Creative Fine Art Photography in the Eastern Cape
- 18:30 Dinner at Thava, Norwood

22 November

PANEL 8

Digital Storytelling

- 09:00 – 09:45 **Bongani Khoza** and **Nthabiseng Mabale**, Memory and Identity through the works of Alexia Webster: Vernacular Photography in Art, Education and Digital Storytelling.
- 09:45 – 10:30 **Everjoy Magwegwe**, Whose Voice, Whose Risk? Vernacular Storytelling and Digital Inequalities in Zimbabwe's GBV Prevention
- 10:30 – 11:00 Tea/coffee break
- 11:00 – 11:45 **Carla Kessler**, The Corrupted Archive: Walter De Maria's *Earth Room and Broken Kilometer* (1977-present)
- 11:45 – 12:00 Concluding remarks
- 12:00 – 13:00 Lunch
- 13:00 – 13:30 Travel to MTN collection
- 13:30 – 15:30 Post-conference visit to MTN collection