



Writing & Curatorial Portfolio

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Biography

Christa Dee is a freelance writer, researcher and emerging curator based in Johannesburg. Her focus is on arts practitioners and spaces in South Africa, and is currently working towards expanding her network more intimately across the globe. With an Honours degree with distinction in Social Anthropology, her previous research revolved around Instagram and its uses for re-thinking urban imaginaries and mapping practices within Johannesburg. She is currently working towards her MA in Contemporary Curatorial Practice at the University of the Witwatersrand. Expanding on her interest in how city-ness is constructed, her MA research seeks to explore the curatorial practices of small arts organisations in Johannesburg to unpack their value and role in city-making.



Christa held the position of Editor and Head Writer at the online magazine Bubblegum Club in 2017 and 2018, working to present alternative creative practices and build up emerging artists. She has also been involved in larger research- and content-based projects, such as interviewing and writing about Johannesburg's arts & culture practitioners for Stevenson Gallery and photographer Viviane Sassen. This work was published in the German publication Zeit Magazin in December 2017. In 2019 she worked for the Fak'ugesi African Digital Innovation Festival in the capacity of Content Manager and wrote specific reports related to gaming and digital practice connected to the festival.

She developed her first independent curatorial project through the UNDERLINE projects show in 2019. The exhibition titled *Prepossessing the Future*, demonstrated a desire to play with concepts related to the devices and languages people use to negotiate their identity within temporal and spatial entanglements.

As a writer, Christa focuses on art, digital cultures, speculative futures, identity politics, urbanity, and the relationship between these categories. She currently writes for a number of arts & culture publications, including Bubblegum Club, ArtThrob, ARTSKOP3437, FOAM Magazine, Contemporary And (C&).



Career Highlights

- Working in the position of Head Writer and Editor at the Johannesburg-based online magazine and content studio Bubblegum Club.
- Participating in the first edition of the [Lagos Biennial Curatorial Intensive](#) in 2019.
- Working with the heads of communications and arts programmes at cultural institutions such as British Council, Pro Helvetia, and Fak'ugesi Digital Innovation Festival to document their festivals and art programmes.
- Working on content for the first Afropunk festival in Johannesburg in 2017. This included documenting events leading up to the festival, interviewing Afropunk co-founder Matthew Morgan and documenting moments from the festival itself.
- Interviewing and writing about Johannesburg's arts & culture practitioners for Stevenson Gallery and photographer Viviane Sassen. This work was published in the German publication Zeit Magazin in December 2017.
- Organizing and producing the micro residency [Future 76](#) in 2017 and 2018 to assist young artists. This included building and conducting the residency workshops, organizing the exhibition and after party, as well as assisting with curatorial decisions for the exhibition.
- Participating in and documenting the [South Africa, What's Up? Residency](#) at ANTIGEL Festival in 2018.
- Working with Bubblegum Club Creative Director Jamal Nxedlana on a [research residency](#) in Zurich and Lausanne to investigate forms of cultural production and artistic practices.
- I was sent by the French Institute of South Africa to Paris to report on the art, fashion and music festival [Art'Press Yourself](#). While there I participated in a panel discussion with UK-based artist Ashley Straker about Afrofuturism.
- In 2018 I was invited by Cape Town-based design agency [Studio H](#) to present on cultural trends influencing design to the [Visi Magazine](#) team.
- Working with brands and institutions such as British Council, Adidas SA, Nike SA, Daily Paper, Street Food Festival, and Fak'ugesi Digital Innovation Festival to create written and visual content to be shared by the brands.
- Being invited to write a text on photographer Micha Serraf for Foam Magazine's [#55 Talent](#) published in 2020.

Curatorial Projects

Future 76 (2017 & 2018)

While in the position of Editor at Bubblegum Club I co-initiated the micro residency Future 76. The prompt for this came from a desire to create a more meaningful engagement with young cultural producers in response to annual Youth day celebrations. The [pilot programme in 2017](#) included the artists Jéad Stehr, Seth Pimentel, Cahil Sankar, Mariam Petros, and the artist duo Abi & Claire Meekel. In [2018 the programme](#) was expanded to include visits to important institutions and players within Johannesburg's art ecosystem. 2018 residents were [Natalie Paneng](#), [Jemma Rose](#), [Boipelo Khunou](#) and [Tash Brown](#).



Prepossessing the Future at UNDERLINE projects show (2019)

Exhibition description:

This exhibition takes as its starting point the use of personas or constructed figures as devices for interrogating the self in relation to time and collective identities. Audiences are invited into visual and auditory thought worlds that have been mapped out in a digitally constructed present. These constructed figures are gifted supernatural qualities as they conflate the past and present with fictional narratives to review history, and as a result, reconfigure

imaginings of our potential future. These figures are not simply reiterations of Marvel or DC characters, or copies resultant of Afrofuturistic methodologies. They are, instead, figures embedded in the South African political context, and provide an understanding of how the self and collective identities are understood in relation to the larger spatiotemporal landscape. The performative nature of these constructed figures grants the artists the ability to “prepossess their future and repossess this emergent present” (Coetzee 2016: 243). The show includes work by Lunga Ntila, Natalie Paneng and Zana Masombuka. Access more on the project [here](#).



Press:

[Underline // Curating the future -](#)

Exhibitionary Feels: Re-membering the FUBA Archive (2020)

I co-curated this online exhibition with my classmates from my Curating Exhibitions course. The exhibition was based on our explorations of the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) Archive housed at the Johannesburg Art Gallery.



Exhibition description:

This curatorial project began with the idea that an exhibition would be arranged in one of the Johannesburg Art Gallery rooms. The genesis of what would have been a physical and visceral exhibition, *Exhibitionary Feels: Re-membering the FUBA Archive*. The global disruption, or the cause for pause, of COVID-19 has engendered imaginings of new or alternative ways of being. The result of the pandemic is that the art world has been intimately involved in this forced reimagining of the digital space as evidenced through operational decisions made by art institutions across the globe. Additionally, through having limited engagement with the Archive, these ways of being are especially important in filling the gaps between what was accessed and what was not.

The title *Exhibitionary Feels: Re-membering the FUBA Archive* draws on Simon O'Sullivan's claim, "[y]ou cannot read affects, you can only experience them", this can be achieved by the intentional consideration that "distinct from the formulations of discourse, and beyond words, affect conveys a locus of sensation, ambiance, and synaesthetic cognition". In an unprecedented time, with people navigating new feelings and terrains around the global pandemic and the local lockdown, the exhibition title plays on feelings as well as incorporating our curiosity and experimental approach to affect as a central curatorial consideration. For this project, sound, textures and textual provocations become the main modes for thinking about affect, the exhibition and the online space. The significance of contemplations about affect relate to an attempt to translate our own experiences of being in the archive to the online space. It also offers the possibility of inviting immediate sensory responses as guides to connecting to the content present in the FUBA Archive.

Exhibitionary Feels, an online project born out of the global transitional moment brought on by COVID-19, aims to think through broader curatorial considerations regarding knowledge production as well as the participatory and process-focused nature of an evolving and

expanding online exhibition. It is put forward as a curatorial experiment in the possibilities of display and engagement with archival content.

While the examination period for this project is over, my classmates and I continue to set up interviews with those who were associated with FUBA and plan to work intermittently on its development. The project can be accessed [here](#).



Press:

[Exhibitionary Feels: Re-membering the FUBA Archive](#)



Writing


Article 1

Micha Serraf - *Stay Soft / Future of Gender*

We are each involved in a lifelong theatrical show. We each play multiple roles, constructing, interpreting and negotiating various social parameters. The end goal of this performance being the amalgamation of meaning-making, shared connection and belonging. Micha Serraf, in working through the writings of Judith Butler individually, and with conceptual partner Kneo Mokgopa, expands, unpicks and meditates over performativity, specifically in relation to gender. This reference point is coupled with interactions with other writings and artistic expressions, including psychologist Kopano Ratele's reflections on masculinities and the ways societies produce men to be agents of violence. Stories shared with the likes of visual artist Sitara Stodel – whose work grapples with notions of 'home' and the survival tactics we no longer need – take shape in the worlds that Micha builds. These reference points plug into his personal experiences as someone who was born in Zimbabwe, has lived in several places in southern Africa, and is currently based in South Africa.

In the mobility that has been a defining factor of his life, Micha has taken note of the behaviour of other foreign nationals in their navigation of post-apartheid South Africa. They display an acute awareness of what shape they need to take on in particular contexts. This fluid presentation of self, and the ability to be malleable are tactics used to access acceptance and safety. In this exposure to several ways of existing, Micha has experienced and observed a variety of gender norms, enactments and ideologies. The existence of these all add to the importance of recognising the unending spectrum of gender.

However, this spectrum is often expressed within a binary framework. Micha seeks to dissect and dismantle the understanding of gender within this configuration, demonstrating the evolutionary, contested and emotional entanglements related to the purpose, interpretations and enactments of genders. His compositional and conceptual choices are injections into one's consciousness, powered by the insurrection of subjugated modes of embodiment. The fluid, living formation of gender terms and practices is present in Micha's photographs. The use of the word practice here speaks to one of Micha's core conceptual starting points for creative and intellectual contemplation – the performative composition of gender. The projects *Stay Soft* and *Future of Gender* are visual extensions of these contemplations. They are the fleshy overlays that frame the structure Micha continuously builds through textual, conversational and experiential engagements. They are simultaneously interventionist and celebratory, offering narratives and evidence of non-binary identifications and practices, as well as embodiments of the intersectional building blocks of an ever diversifying gender spectrum.



Within the context of *Stay Soft* the gloves in the boxing scene go through a transformation in one's mind, from objects that inflict violence to representations of wanting to feel safe and protected. A form of self-preservation in being able to pass based on the prescriptions of heterosexual, patriarchal masculinity while delivering visual cues that point to the queering of this masculinity. The male boxers wear women's swimsuits, and have moments where they embrace one another. This is an attempt at reworking the projections on male bodies of affection and other seemingly feminine modes of engagement as being masculinity's opposite. The lack of an audience in the setting of the boxing scene may account for the open disruption of masculinity viewers are privy to, indicating how safe, intimate spaces can be the flowering beds where gender binaries are bent.

In *Future of Gender* some of the people photographed take on the quality of structural elements that mirror each other, and in others Mich captures a delicate intimacy. This speaks to how we all perform presentations of self-assurance and boxed in identities, and in some circumstances, assimilation. It also speaks to how we can move towards allowing ourselves to be open and vulnerable, swimming in the fluidity of identity constructions. The entire series works on the oscillations between these states of being, and the negotiations associated with each movement. It also highlights the gender lexicons that are often the foundation of these internal and external negotiations, turning again to the socially and contextually constructed, therefore performative, nature of gender.

The images in the series carry a relatable character. They allow viewers to connect through experiences of their own everyday intimacies and go on to become actors in their identity creation. The visual depictions of evolving gender understandings and signifiers present as the stretching of the spectrum and giving visibility to the gender formations that sit between existing configurations. These serve as evidence and celebratory references for the people, practices and ideologies that add colourful layers of nuance, aimed at meaning-making, common connection and shared belonging

(Link to published article: [Micha Serraf - Stay Soft / Future of Gender](#))



Article 2

Green Expectations: Jody Paulsen's 'Water Me'


'Water Me', Jody Paulsen's exhibition at SMAC Gallery, sees the artist extend his practice into a new direction. His last solo, 'Pushing Thirty' engaged with the pleasures and anxieties of aging. This show appears as desire by Paulsen for personal growth.

His medium, fuzzy felt, is a potent choice. It's a textile associated with children's playtime and early learning experiences, but when transferred into the contemporary art space and paired with Paulsen's thematic explorations it creates a tension between content and medium. Unlike previous work though, in this show the tension is less apparent, with the exploration of adult concerns, desires, and interpretations of life connecting easily to the child-like medium. The felt acts as a guide to learning about oneself and unpacking the different versions of self we inhabit as we get older.

The title for the show 'Water Me' plays on the strong presence of nature in the works, through floral still lifes, animals and figures surrounded by natural elements. It is a direct comparison between the artist and plants in their need to be nurtured in order to grow. This comes across powerfully in *Soul Cyclor* – a text-heavy piece that anchors the collection. A beautifully excessive paradise space is created, with renaissance-inspired Italian sculptures alongside palms trees and Bambi. These visual elements frame the textual references literally and figuratively, accentuating their meaning. In conversation with Paulsen he explains that the phrase 'Find Your Beach' is taken from both a Zadie Smith essay and a Corona campaign. The essay explores the life of people in living Manhattan now, with this embodied by Soul Cycling moms being fed mantras in classes about finding one's limit and pushing past it. This speaks to the artist's own aspirations to be limitless, and yet simultaneously acknowledging the humanness that places a border around the full achievement of this. The work also signals aspiration being used as a kind of marketing tool; a gateway to buying into a lifestyle, as can be evidenced by the Corona campaign reference. The desire to live beyond limits is one that is often connected to commercial agendas and requires a facade of perpetual productivity and faux peaks, although genuinely rooted in wanting to embrace one's full potential. The work points to the constant need to be working towards the next goal, catapulted by posts on social media. Paulsen highlights the sensitivity involved in this push and pull.

"You can never be at your beach. You have to keep going and have to embody potential in all moments. And I think that was something I feel within myself and within other people around me. It has become quite a normative space to exist within. Always the next thing and not really feeling here, present," Paulsen expresses.

And yet *Soul Cyclor* also communicates the idea that we are always enough in whatever moment of life we occupy.



Lonely in the Canyon, presenting a new scale and formalistic connection to painting, allows viewers into the intimacies of Paulsen's anxieties about the future. Inspired by his love for David Hockney and images of the artist in his garden in his later years, these are also images of a man alone. As the only work displaying a male figure, and with Paulsen confessing to the kind of loneliness that can come from being a solo artist working in a studio, it comes across as a Hockney-slash-potential-future-Paulsen. This act of projection is present in all our lives in some way, adding to the intimacy of the work.

More More More is a visual eruption that breaks away from the traditional still life, speaking to cravings about feeling alive and in the moment. Every part of the piece is worked, creating a densely vibrant image. The title, taken from the 70s disco track of the same name, calls to mind ideas around 70s excess. However, the work is less a reflection on excess and consumption as Paulsen has done with previous work, and is more about a living a full life charged with positive energy. This shift becomes apparent when connecting the work to the larger message of the show. The 'more' in this context can be seen as a kind of request to the universe for a showering of experience to contribute to this path of personal growth, as if unintentionally channeling the spirit of Josh Radnor's movie [Happy. Thank You. More. Please.](#) The individual letters shower the exploding bouquet, again signaling the overall intention behind the exhibition.

The female figures in works such as *Career Woman* and *Girl on Fire* symbolize versions of himself that Paulsen would like to embody. They point to a confident and deliberate personal evolution.

'Water Me' is another demonstration of how Paulsen's work goes beyond the formal qualities of collage, by merging seemingly chaotic and disconnected visual and text references to create new totalities that reflect on contemporary moods. This show speaks to a generational feeling connected to the pressure of having to continuously think about the next milestone, and the concerns associated with an extended young adulthood. In this, the overarching desire for personal growth is delivered with a playful potency.

(Link to published article: [Green Expectations: Jody Paulsen's 'Water Me'](#))

Theatrum Botanicum // the botanical world as a stage for politics


In a moment where debates about land are at their peak in South Africa, [Uriel Orlow's *Theatrum Botanicum*](#) on show at [POOL Space](#) in Johannesburg fertilizes ideas around the botanical world as a stage for politics through film, photography, installation and sound. This ongoing project follows the trajectory of most of his work; research-based contemplations with collaborative methodologies, focusing on specific locations and histories, combining various visual evocations with layered narratives.

The beginning of the project was inspired by an accidental visit to Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. Struck by the fact that most of the plant labels were in English and Latin, Orlow began to question what this means in South Africa where there are 11 official languages. This connects to a colonial history of exploration and conquest. Through this process botanists from Europe “discovered” new plants, and proceeded to name and classify them according to European systems of organisation. Through forcefully exporting this methodology for categorization and understanding, it displaced indigenous knowledge systems and views on the world. Orlow seeks to question this forced application of taxonomic methods, and in so doing unearths issues around assumed universality, colonialism and its legacies, plant migration, and how examining the botanical offers insight into labour, race relations, pleasures and sustenance within South Africa's history.

The significance of the work is twofold. Firstly, framing plants as databases, organic stores of information. Juicy, fleshy memory banks that can testify to South Africa's political past and present, and offer alternative entry points from which we can assess and think about history and politics. Secondly, Orlow's work ascribes plants a form of agency, presenting them as active participants in the link between nature and humans.

The project offers encounters and observations that are gateways to meditations on the above. *Grey, Green, Gold* forms part of *Theatrum Botanicum*, and is up in Gallery 1989 at [Market Photo Workshop](#). *The Fairest Heritage*, a single channel video piece within the exhibition, perfectly exemplifies the larger aims of the project. Here Orlow, through his extensive research in the library of the botanical garden, found films that were commissioned in 1963 to commemorate the anniversary of founding Kirstenbosch by documenting its history.

The film's main characters – scientists and visitors – are all white, with the only people of colour featured being those who worked on the gardens. Orlow collaborated with artist and performer Lindiwe Matshikiza, who inserts herself in front of these film, viscerally speaking back to their contents. A performative contestation to this archive, placing herself into the frame as a protagonist existing outside of the frameworks of passivity and labour for people of colour created within the archival footage. This work also highlights that plants are not neutral and passive, with flowers attached to ideas around nationhood, segregation and liberation.



To accompany the work, Orlow teamed up with editor [Shela Sheikh](#) on a book that catalogues the different works, but also connects with the research that is the seed from which the project continues to grow. Writers were invited to contribute essays that do not necessarily respond to the works directly, but contemplate the thematics that come to the fore through their presence. Other artists with work relating to art, nature and history were also invited to share their work in the book.

Both exhibition spaces are pollinated with works that share the entanglements between plants and us across time and space. Go inhale the fragrance of latent histories until 21 October at Gallery 1989, and 3 November at Pool Space.

(Link to published article: [Theatrum Botanicum // the botanical world as a stage for politics](#))



Article 4

Tabita Rezaire – Transforming the screen into a gateway for healing frequencies

Johannesburg-based* digital artist, intersectional activist and Kemetic yoga teacher Tabita Rezaire is spreading love and inviting healing through her screen-based artistic practice. Having moved to Johannesburg a few years ago from Paris, she has been continuing to work within the Internet's ecology to confront the legacies of colonialism and address our collective need for healing.


Tabita navigates her personal life and art embracing decoloniality – a theory and practice that involves a de-linking from the West and becoming one's own centre. She encourages us to unlearn and reboot as she tries to connect with herself, people and life with love and gratitude, and with the intention to heal herself and others around her.

Her work is geared towards a spiritual technology and thinking about how we can become spiritual humans beings again. Through her “digital healing activism” she challenges our cis-het-patriarchal-racist-capitalist system through the use of the screen as her medium. Bringing an awareness to African cosmologies and the sacred power of the womb, she presents a diagnostic of the pain felt by Trans/Queer/Black/Brown/Femme beings and proposes a strategy through decolonial technologies which can allow us to reconnect with ourselves, each other, the earth and our ancestors to bring about holistic healing and an outpouring of love.

Tabita's work transforms the screen into a gateway, inviting the viewer on a spiritual journey. The screen becomes an interface which allows access to therapeutic vibrations, healing frequencies and tools for working towards “soundness”.

The womb is a prominent symbol in her works. This is a push back against the demonizing, shaming and disposing of women's bodies and femme energies which has polluted our world through patriarchal structures. Tracing back to times when femme-ness was celebrated, Tabita is invested in restoring our relationship with the womb and reviving an understanding of its sacred, love- and life-giving power. For her, addressing this disconnection from the womb offers a door through which we can learn to love ourselves.

Her first solo exhibition, *Exotic Trade*, will be taking place at Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg on the 8th of April. As a continuation of her digital decolonizing and connecting to the power that has come before her, this exhibition celebrates alternative ways of sharing and accessing information through what Tabita has called the “cosmos database”. As she has done with previous work, Tabita threads together ecology, digital technology and spiritual communicative practices to address the history and architecture of modern technology. She unearths hidden narratives, as in one of her works which discusses the origin of computing sciences being found in African divination. Her exhibition will also delve into ancestral communicative interfaces: the womb, sound, plants, ancestors and water as 10 databases from which we can download



information. She investigates water as a signal carrier from the internet to memories about the traumatic history of colonial routes, the disruption of oceanic ecologies, as well as the healing potential that water offers. The show includes six video arrangements and a series of five prints, a lightbox, and helper metal structures. She will include earthy materials such as copper and bismuth as a symbol of her desire to re-connect and celebrate with the earth.

Analyzing the healing potentiality of sound, Tabita is also working collaboratively with FAKA, Hlasko, and Chi (Robert Machiri) to create a “healing soundscape” for the show. Her exhibition space will be used for a Kemeti yoga class on the 13th of April, followed by a conversation with Milisuthando Bongela from the Mail & Guardian. This transference of the experience from the screen and prints on display to an embodiment through physical movement speaks to Tabita’s emphasis sharing ancient wisdom in all areas of our lives.

*At the time the article was written Rezaire was living in Johannesburg.

(Link to published article: [Tabita Rezaire – Transforming the screen into a gateway for healing frequencies](#))