

Memory Embroidered: Craft Art as Intermedial Space of Expression

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Introduction

The Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation (MCADF), consisting of women only, was founded in 1994 by Elbé Coetsee.¹ MCADF is situated between the Blouberg mountain and the Mogalakwena river in the remote northern part of the Limpopo Province in South Africa. The exclusive aim of the Foundation is to promote art and craft inherent in a Northern Sotho community, to restore the intrinsic craft skills of the people, and to enable more members of the community to become self-sufficient and less dependent on unemployment government grants. Today, more than twenty craft artists are employed on a full-time basis and another ten on a part time basis by the Foundation.² During 2000 the Foundation started to concentrate on the documentation of various aspects of Northern Sotho daily life through the medium of embroidery. The embroidery, which is often in craft art literature referred to as story cloths,³ covers a wide range of imagery related to everyday subject matter within the local communities. Embroidery has never been a 'tradition'⁴ amongst the above mentioned

¹ I would like to thank Elbé Coetsee for allowing me permission to do research on the fascinating craft art produced at the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation. I benefited greatly from her insights, her inspiration and stimulating comments significantly enriched my thinking and added pleasantness and personal academic depth to this task. My heartfelt gratitude to the Mogalakwena craft artists for sharing their lives in so many ways with me and for assisting me with the interpretation of the pictorial panels.

² <http://www.researchlimpop.com/anthropology.html> (26.01.2009).

³ For discussions on the story cloths of Bali and the Hmong see <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Feb06/Bali.Exhibit.fac.html> (20.03.2009) and http://www.smm.org/buzz/museum/object/2004_08_hmong_story_cloth (20.03.2009).

⁴ The term 'tradition' has many different meanings. It can, in the words of Finnegan, be used "to refer to 'culture' as a whole; any established way of doing things whether or not of any antiquity; the process of handing down practices, ideas or values; the products so

communities. Their stories and traditions were not transferred through the medium of cloth, but orally, by word of mouth, from generation to generation.

MCADF was a joint winner of the Nedbank/Mail&Guardian Cultural Project of the Year Award in 2003. Apart from local and international commissions, MCADF has been included in a number of exhibitions such as the Decorex Exhibition at Gallagher Estate in Johannesburg, the Cultural History Museum in Potchefstroom, the South African National Gallery, the Import Shop in Berlin, and the International Folk Art Festival in Sante Fe. Works by the Foundation also feature in the collections of local and international corporations and art collectors – conveying a strong message that ‘high art’ can be created in any medium, including embroidery (cf. Schmahmann 2006: 40). Coetsee explains this notion by pointing out that “particularly in the Western world, craft was essentially perceived as functional, while art was ‘contemplated’ and therefore considered to be superior to craft”. She is however of the opinion that craft artists in Africa “have always placed the concepts of functionality and aestheticism on an equal footing” (2002: 8).

The focus of this article will be on the pictorial embroideries of the MCADF as intermedial space of expression, and their use of visual language/ iconic signs in the communication, inference and transmission of culture.⁵

handed down, sometimes with the connotation of being ‘old’ or having arisen in some ‘natural’ and non-polemic way” (1996: 7). In this article the use of ‘tradition’ will focus on the process of handing down practices, ideas or values and the products resulting from that.

⁵ In this article the term ‘culture’ is understood as it is defined by Ember and Ember (1999: 17) as “the set of learned behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideals that are characteristic of a particular society or population”. Also see their discussion on the defining features of culture (1999: 17–19).

Documentation process⁶

The vast majority of the craft artists at MCADF is still illiterate and did not attend school at all, and only a small number completed primary school. The documentation process of the embroideries usually starts out with an oral discussion amongst women, based on their collective memory. Discussions vary from everyday life situations such as marriage, childrearing, traditional homemaking, food collection and preparation to rituals and rites of passage such as cleansing rituals, religion, magic, healing, burial, initiation and performance and song.⁷ Artists will get together in groups of two or more and continue the discussion on a specific topic. A composition for a pictorial panel is then decided upon. One of the artists will start the drawing process on cloth with the constant input of other artists. After the drawing process is completed, one artist starts with the embroidering process. In the event of an artist becoming ill or being absent it is permissible for any other artist who was part of the communal discussion to continue the embroidering process. The group involved in the production of a pictorial panel can change, the only requirement being that one artist in the group remains constant. The artists' understanding of 'pictorial language' seems to be a communally shared discourse rather than an individual intercession, since they often discuss with other artists, copy from each other, or include motifs used previously by others.

After the completion of a pictorial panel an oral re-telling of the event depicted on the panel takes place. A person in the group with basic literacy skills will then start out to write down the event that is represented on the panel in Northern Sotho. In order for this 'scribability' process to take place, the artists always work together in groups consisting of at least three people, with one writing, and the others commenting. The 'scribe' will often make changes or corrections depending on advice from the rest of the

⁶ Personal communication with Mogalakwena craft artists at MCADF, 1–2 September 2008; personal communication with Elbé Coetsee at the head office of MCADF in Cape Town, 29 December 2008.

⁷ Other craft art projects such as the Mapula Embroidery Project in Winterveld make use of illustrations found in books, contemporary newspapers, magazines, brochures and television broadcasts, rather than working from life. See Schmahmann (2006: 38).

group. After completion, the Northern Sotho text (*ekphrasis*,⁸ words or cryptic annotations) will be handed to another group that will take care of translating the text into English. A prerequisite is that one artist from the original group remains part of this process as well. The written texts are then embroidered on an adjacent cloth, making it part of the final craft art product.

When the documentation process started in 2000 the artists did not include their names or dates on the panels, a true reflection of a communal participation process. They have however since 2005 started to indicate names and a date. The names often reflect the person(s) who made the drawing and the person(s) who participated in the embroidering process or even the person(s) who was (were) responsible for the written text (*ekphrasis*).⁹ The name Mogalakwena or MCADF often appears on the panels. According to Coetsee these 'labels' play an important role as the women identify themselves thereby as part of the group, distinguishing them from other embroidering groups in South Africa. It also creates a community feeling amongst the artists and reflects the women's pride and commitment towards their work and the project.¹⁰

The increased contact with the urbanized world is reflected by new motifs within the embroidery. The immanent synthesis of cultures can be observed in the embroideries produced at MCADF – offering a fascinating glimpse into the oral traditions of a community now displayed in an embroidered pictorial form. The craft art can be described as pictorial panels, representing daily life in the villages where indigenous knowledge, orality and tradition is as vibrant as the aspiration for modernity.¹¹

Craft art in South Africa has become part of the global phenomenon of art and tourism, and as such, has the ability to link cultural communities around the world. The booming market in, and the quality of craft art

⁸ Scholars have defined and used the term *ekphrasis* in numerous ways, depending on the particular rationale to be employed. Heffernan (1991: 299) defines *ekphrasis* as "the verbal representation of graphic representation". For a discussion about *ekphrasis* and interpretation see Carrier (1987).

⁹ A similar notion is observed by Schmahmann (2006: 41) at the Mapula Embroidery Project.

¹⁰ E-mail communication with Elbé Coetsee, 18 February 2009.

¹¹ See information panel at MCADF head quarters in Church Street, Cape Town.

demands new ways of viewing this art – an understanding that is not limited to predetermined attitudes and imposed boundaries.

From performance event¹² (oral art) to pictorial panel (craft art)¹³

The pictorial panels embroidered at MCADF can be regarded as iconographic representations, or ‘encoded signs’ of oral performance events. The embroideries are produced in a communal manner through the communal memory of artists, pertaining to culturally specific events. The craft artists use the ‘multiple language’ of iconic and arbitrary signs as their mode of communication. They create a paradoxical ‘performance event’ by staging a live event in a silent visual form – providing it with *ekphrasis* in order to give, directly or indirectly, ‘voice’ to the embroidered pictures. These dramatic visual creations are imitations of an oral discourse already known to the craft artists.

Performance should be distinguished from other artistic works and material objects because of the great number of signs that are operative in a performance event. Each performance event joins different elements from various artistic forms, e.g. music, dance, magic formulas, tales, poetry. Each one of these forms of art brings along its own signs into the performance arena. Combinations of these different signs may bring forth ‘new’ signs, which acquire new meaning.

In order to understand the transitional process that takes place from oral art (performance) to craft art it becomes essential to know how the pictorial ‘textmaking’ process takes place. Transforming a live performance event into a pictorial panel for viewing seems to be a very difficult task because of the two different semiotic sign systems that are operative. The tension for the craft artists lies mainly between the sign system of performance and the sign system of pictures, and to a lesser extent the sign system of language as

¹² The term ‘performance event’ conveys a dual sense, namely *action* – the doing of oral art – and *event* – the situation or place of performance (Bauman 1975: 290). I use the term performance event to refer to all symbolic forms or actions in a community which can also be regarded as ‘oral art’ and which have their essential existence in the action of people and their roots in social and cultural life.

¹³ This discussion draws on my study of the “the nature of textualising performance”. See Joubert (2004a: 106–130).

used in the accompanying *ekphrasis*. The success of the craft art panels to translate performance events into pictures seems to lie in the capacity of the 'pictorial text' (iconotext)¹⁴ in enabling viewers to understand the form, content and intention of the original performance message.

We find, in this inter-semiotic transition, a difference between the source media and the receptor medium. The source contains a live performance event, consisting of multi-channeled media that are able to transmit information through all the senses, for example, visual, aural, tactile and olfactory. The receptor medium, on the other hand, pertains to pictures (iconic signs), and to a lesser degree to writing (arbitrary signs), consisting of a single-channeled medium that transmits information only through a visual channel. In order to gain a better understanding of the interrelationship between the source and the receptor media in the transformation process of oral art to craft art, it becomes imperative to examine the channels and signals transmitted through these two sources. A short overview will be given of the primary channels used in the source media of performance, followed by the primary channels used in the receptor medium namely embroidered pictorial panels.

Where performance can regulate movement, sound, time and even space in a three-dimensional way, pictures and writing have limited channel capacity because they can transmit information only through visual means. In the following discussion we will be looking at the signs used by the craft artist when performance features are transformed and encoded on cloth in the form of pictorial panels.

The artists' first step in the creation of their pictorial panels is to create *iconic signs* in the form of drawings that resemble their referents in some way, and which assist them in the representation of the paralinguistic and kinesic features of performance events. The pictorial panels are often accompanied by short descriptions (*ekphrasis*) embroidered in the *arbitrary signs* of natural language. The artists use ordinary alphabetic writing to describe kinesic actions, artifactual and proxemic features, or to supply the viewer with background information and more details regarding the aesthetic field of the performance event.¹⁵ Only the visual channel is used in the representation of both the *iconic* and the *arbitrary signs*.

¹⁴ See Wagner (1996: 15–17) for the different definitions of the term iconotext.

¹⁵ See Fine (1984: 141–144) for a discussion on alphabetic and analphabetic notation systems.

Although the influence of performance on the making of pictorial panels is indisputable, there remains a huge difference in as far as the communicative process of these two forms of art is concerned. Performance employs various channels such as the aural, visual, tactile and olfactory to communicate the various signs operative, whereas pictorial panels, on the other hand, only communicate through the visual channel in the depiction of pictures and writing.

Craft art as intermedial space of cultural expression

Contemporary interdisciplinary research has noted the ongoing process of the “shifting of the domains of literature and the other arts” and the changing structure of the artistic landscape.¹⁶ I understand ‘intermedial space’ as a space where conventional boundaries are blurred, a space ‘in-between’ where different forms of media and realities come together, in other words the presence of one medium in another medium – the transgression of medial boundaries.¹⁷ These transgressions are also observable in oral art and craft art as these two mediums grow towards each other, transmuting into a product of intermedial hybridity. Although the pictorial panels end up being the ‘prime texts’ for aesthetic enjoyment and interpretation, these works of art are caught up in an intermedial space where oral art, visual art and writing meet – culminating in a new and innovative form of ‘oral craft art’. The outcome of this vibrant form of art is a semiotically mixed category of embroidered ‘oral craft art’ consisting of visual signs that are embedded in an inseparable totality of cultural specificity, variability and emergence.

It becomes clear that the visual aspect of oral performance is always two-sided. On the one hand it will include the characteristics of visual systems used by the performer in the performance event, and observed by the audience who can be members of the community or outsiders. On the other hand it will also encompass the characteristics of the craft artist’s own visual

¹⁶Wolf (2002: 15) calls it an “intermedial turn” and remarks: “Never before have there been such important and far-reaching blendings and interactions of originally separate media”.

¹⁷ See Wolf (2002: 21) and Wagner (1996: 17–18) for more definitions on intermediality by various scholars such as Hansen-Löve, Zander, Fowler, Plett, Pfister and Steinberg.

representation systems, which refer to the way meaning is created and constructed in the embroideries, and how it is eventually interpreted by the viewer who can vary from insiders such as the craft artists themselves and community members, to outsiders like craft art collectors or tourists.¹⁸ Wagner points out that fictional texts and visual art offer “a field of interpretive possibilities, a configuration of substantially indeterminate stimuli which the recipient employs for his ‘readings’” (1996: 38).

It should be pointed out at this point that the addition of *ekphrasis* to the embroideries was only a later development, one that could be explained in terms of the high level of illiteracy amongst the craft artists, on the one hand, and ascribed to the surrender to Western culture on the other, where the power of visual representation has always been limited “[...] through an exegetical and, indeed, ekphrastic tradition which translates the pictorial into the readable, thus controlling and encircling it with words” (Wagner 1996: 31). *Ekphrasis*, according to Fort (1996: 58), is “[...] primarily an art of make believe and it fosters illusions both at the semiotic and at the representational level. It pretends that the signs with which language operates, namely instituted and arbitrary signs, can easily substitute for the ‘natural’ signs of visual art”. Although my understanding of *ekphrasis* is in agreement with that of Peter Wagner (1996: 14) who wants to extend the use of the term to all verbal commentary in order “to encompass ‘verbal representation’ in its widest sense, including critical writing”, my appropriation of the term in this article falls back on its original Greek meaning namely “to tell, declare or to give a full or vivid description” (Wagner 1996: 12). The *ekphrasis* accompanying the embroideries forms part of the total work of art, but does not invade the pictorial images since it is usually embroidered ‘outside’ the pictorial panel on an adjacent piece of cloth.¹⁹ The *ekphrasis* is used cryptically, and has a mediating function between two semiotic sign systems in so far as it tries to ‘tell’ or to explain the performance event in words rather than substituting it with arbitrary signs. These works of art seem to take up the qualities of iconotexts, a term applied by Wagner to pictures showing words or writing, but also, as in our case to ‘oral’ texts that work with images (1996: 16–17).

¹⁸ See Joubert (2004a: 156–159) for a discussion on the documentation of oral art.

¹⁹ In the Mapula embroidery, words often invade images. In these cases we are dealing with embroideries that literally demand ‘to be read’ as well as seen. See Figure 60, page 58–59, and Figure 53 on page 78 in Schmahmann (2006).

Understanding the pictorial embroideries becomes a complex intermedial venture between different semiotic sign systems, where the transference of multiple signs from the source medium (performance) takes place to the receptor medium (craft art). The works of art demand the decoding of their richly embroidered rhetoric fabric where the 'viewer/reader' is urged to make sense of the iconic signs of pictures as well as the arbitrary signs of language simultaneously (Wagner 1996: 16). The dramatic scenes represented in the embroideries rely, for sufficient interpretation and understanding, on the knowledge of oral art (performance) and all the sources lying behind it.²⁰ In other words, the craft art embroideries are grounded in culturally embedded oral texts in endless ways (Wagner 1996: 2).

Viewing and reading Mogalakwena's pictorial panels (craft art)

The Mogalakwena craft art panels operate merely as representations of something, and every craft art panel is a construction of meaning by the artist(s) who made it (Heffernan 2002: 36). The difference, however, between the embroidered pictures and the explanatory texts is, to put it in the words of Heffernan (2002: 36) "that words are arbitrary and pictures natural, that words represent things by convention alone while pictures represent them by natural resemblance". The craft art panels do not give us unmediated access to what they represent. As 'viewers/readers' we need to interpret them as semiotic signs and cultural constructions of meaning,²¹ and in order to 'see/read' the panels accurately, we must be acquainted with the culture that these panels represent. Yet, most 'viewers/readers' are able to recognize, to a certain extent, what the panels represent without full knowledge of the cultural background that frame them. Gombrich (1981) ascribes this ability to an inborn capacity to read pictures – a pictorial competence. The effect of resemblance or the illusion of reality that we get from pictures, he says, "is created by visual clues corresponding to the bits of information we seek from natural objects in order to know what they are" (Gombrich as quoted by Heffernan 2002: 44). According to him the images in a painting are "not replicas of natural objects but signals that must be

²⁰ See Wagner (1996: 9–10) on the understanding of Melville's text *Moby-Dick*.

²¹ See Heffernan (2002: 39).

decoded before their meaning as representations can be understood" (2002: 44). We can in the same way not 'see/read' the craft art panels by 'instinct' alone. Heffernan (2002: 45) warns that "representation as such requires a consciousness of the *difference* between painted objects and real ones, between signifier and signified". Our two-dimensional pictorial panels are therefore pictures of depiction – pictures of the way in which oral art is commonly understood and represented by the Mogalakwena craft artists. These craft art panels can be regarded as representational art, embedded in oral culture – *demanding* decoding.²² They 'show/tell', in pictorial terms, the culture and lives of the community. In order to 'see' or 'hear' the panels, we need knowledge of both the oral and the iconographical lore operative within these communities.

The colorfully embroidered images often challenge the 'viewer/reader', as the factual meaning depicted by the objects is not so easily recognizable. In 'viewing/reading' the craft art panels I will trace the works of art back to the collective memories of oral tradition. I will, however, unify performance, picture and writing in the words of Wagner, under the "common banner of representation" for an intermedial exploration of oral, pictorial and linguistic signs in one medium.²³ In my 'viewing/reading' I will heed Heffernan's warning "that we cannot 'recognize' the meaning of pictures unless and until we are willing to interpret their signs, which largely depend on the cultural contexts and conventions within which they are framed" (2002: 35).

When analyzing the accompanying *ekphrasis*, one must keep in mind that this part of the art work consists of a codified literary mode and for that reason it "obeys first and foremost the laws and conventions of its genre, selecting in the visual representation those features which can be most aptly glossed upon in the critic's prevalent literary system" (Fort 1996: 59). Since the literary skills of the craft artists are of a very low level, the *ekphrasis* does not always offer a satisfactory description of the embroidered panels, but rather a living response to the works of art, which seems perceptual rather than neutrally descriptive. One can indeed ask how arbitrarily the *ekphrasis*

²² See Panovsky (1982: 28–31) for his theory on pictorial meaning, and the three layers of meaning: factual, conventional and symbolic meaning.

²³ For further reflection on this point, see Wagner (1996: 36–37) on the unity of the sister arts and their common rhetorical structure.

selects the detail, and how well can it make the distant 'viewer/reader' see, read, or understand the craft art panel?²⁴

In my analysis of the embroideries, I will be looking at intermediality firstly in a narrow sense where it constitutes the existence and reference of another medium, in this case oral art (performance), in the signification of craft art (pictorial panels). In a broader sense, I will examine the intermedial transposition of 'translating' the pictorial images (iconic signs) into writing/*ekphrasis* (arbitrary signs) – where this relation is not essential for the signification of the craft art.²⁵

Songs reflected in pictorial panels

As a viewer, operating in a context of interpretative presupposition, I argue that the pictorial panels and their constitutive elements are dialogically related to contexts that motivate them and to which they respond.²⁶ The imagery used in the panels is bound up with the lived experiences of the artists. The women's acts of creation seem to be motivated and interconnected with the cultural and oral traditions that have moulded them and influenced their daily lives, and for which they have profound resonance. The themes of the first three panels deal with the genre of traditional Northern Sotho songs, called *mokankanyane* and *dinaka*, usually performed by women and men respectively.

Discussions with the Mogalakwena craft artists confirmed that the *mokankanyane* songs, accompanied by music and dance steps are known by all members in the community, and audience participation is usually very spontaneous.²⁷ This could be explained by the fact that the lines and sequence of songs are in general much more fixed than other performance events such as the oral narrative (folktale) and chanting (praise poetry) where the performer can improvise in unlimited ways through the choice of words and style. The similar and repetitive imagery used by different craft

²⁴ See Fort (1996: 60) for a discussion on Diderot's commentary of Fragonard's painting in the *Salon of 1765*.

²⁵ See Wolf (2002: 18) for a discussion on intermediality in the narrow and broader sense.

²⁶ See Wolf (2002: 16) for a discussion on functional analysis.

²⁷ Personal communication with Mogalakwena craft artists, 1–2 September 2008.

artists in the pictorial panels confirms the communal knowledge held by artists pertaining to this oral genre.

Songs can be classified according to the number of participant(s), the manner of performance, themes or their emerging social circumstances.²⁸ The focus of our discussion will be on the genre 'entertainment songs' *dikoša tša boithabišo* which include beer songs *dikoša tša bjalwa* and other traditional songs *dikoša tša setšo/mmino wa setšo*. Entertainment songs are used visibly to show enjoyment and to celebrate festive occasions. Our three pictorial panels represent the second category, traditional songs, which are often referred to as *kiba*,²⁹ denoting the original or traditional way of Northern Sotho dance performance *mmino wa Sesotho*.³⁰ *Kiba* songs can be sung and danced by women or men. Although the songs refer to the same musical genre, they are named differently according to ethnic groups, geographical areas and particular dialects. Women's songs are named as followed in the different Northern Sotho dialects: *mokankanyane* (Hananwa), *kiba ya basadi* (Pedi), *sekgapa*, *mararankodi*, *mantšehegele* (Tlokwa), and *goša* (Lobedu). Men's songs are called *dinaka* (Hananwa), *kiba ya banna* (Pedi) and *goša* (Lobedu). Some of the most important keys in the Northern Sotho dance tradition are the words *kiba*, *mokankanyane* and *dinaka* which in themselves serve as signs to refer to traditional dance performances performed by women and men.

The main purpose of *kiba* performances was purely for entertainment as this musical style was usually performed in rural areas at social occasions such as wedding celebrations, cleansing rituals, the closing celebrations of initiation or during competitions between neighbouring villages. A shift has however taken place, and the purpose today is to earn money. In order to give flair to party events, and to attract more guests, the host will invite a *kiba* group to perform. The host will pay the dance group, and the guests will buy beer, food, or cake prepared by the host while watching the performance event. This arrangement assures both the dance group and the

²⁸ See Joubert (2004a: 269–274) for a comprehensive discussion on the classification of songs.

²⁹ Huskisson (1958: 104) explains the term *kiba* as 'beat', a term known by most dance ensembles, and probably referring to the rhythmic beating of the drums. James (1992: 9) clarifies the term *khiba* as referring to a pinafore (kind of dress), which might allude to the style in which the women performers dress. Note the different ways of spelling: *kiba/khiba*.

³⁰ The adjective *Sesotho* refers in this sense to original or traditional Sotho ways or customs, in other words to 'authentic' Sotho-ness.

host of an extra income. The payment is influenced by different factors such as the size of the group, the location of the performance, the event itself and the duration.

Mokankanyane: panel 1 (a & b)



panel 1a

MOKANKANYANE
 Ba ke basadi ba dithakga bao
 baipshinago ka go bina mmimo wa
 Segagabo bona. Mino wo oye gopotša
 se gologolo. ba ke bahananwa ba
 mmatshwene a le bule. Mogaye ga
 basadi bao, gonale banna baba
 Yayo. yo asweyeng thokanaye šweu
 ke malokwane wa koša yeo. yo wago
 apara dinaka ke malose ke yo mong
 we wago bina le bona. Mokotama ye
 na ke mophe pedi

panel 1b

Panel 1 (a & b) was embroidered by Elisa Mangka on a white cotton background. The time of production is unknown since no date is indicated on the panel.³¹ An embroidered headline in capital letters MOKANKANYANE is included in both the pictorial panel and the accompanying Northern Sotho *ekphrasis*, clearly indicating the theme dealt with in this panel. When reading the *ekphrasis*, the identity of the dance group is revealed as being Hananwa's – positioning them inevitably in a certain geographical area, being speakers of the Hananwa dialect, and having the baboon as their totem animal:

Ba ke basadi ba dithakga bao baipshinago (sic) ka go bina mmino wa segagabo bona. Mino (sic) wo o re gopotša segologolo. ba (sic) ke bahananwa (sic) ba mmatshwene (sic) a lebule (sic). – *These are talented women those who enjoy themselves by dancing their traditional songs. These songs remind us of our old traditional ways. These are Hananwa people of Mmatšhwene³² of Lebule.* (My own translation)

Only the visual signals mentioned in the *ekphrasis* could be represented in the pictorial panel, namely the performers' gestures and movements (*kinesics*), the objects (*artifactual*) used during their dance performance, and their use of space (*proxemics*). The rest of the information acts as background information to the 'viewer/reader' and becomes known only through the arbitrary signs of language.

The ten figures portrayed in panel 1 are all dressed in a certain dress code with overtones of black and maroon, creating the impression that they belong to the same dance group. The women are dressed in maroon garments up to the knee, called *dihela* in Hananwa. Underneath these garments they wear gaily-coloured cloths in blue and pink with black insertions in the middle, hanging down to their ankles. The decorations (in white) on their dresses are called *meroka*, a noun derived from the verb *go roka*, meaning 'to sow on' or *dipheta*, beads. All women's heads are covered with blue-pink headscarves that are folded in the same fashion, and they all

³¹ Elisa Mangka passed away in 2007.

³² *Mmatšhwene* literally means mother-of-the-baboon and refers to the totem animal of the Hananwa people, the baboon.

wear white sport shoes (tekkies).³³ Decorations include three traditional grass bangles *maseka* usually covered with small beads in colours of light blue and yellow around each upper arm. The men are all dressed in black trousers, maroon shirts, yellow belts and white sport shoes (tekkies). As there are usually a number of dance groups present in a community, the groups demonstrate a strong sense of self-representation and identity by using symbols of identity such as names, distinct garments and decorations. A sense of community is gained in this way through the group's ability to make a statement about the group to others.

The proxemic arrangement of the performance event includes five women and three men, spaced in a circular formation around two women drummers, one in a standing position and the other one seated. The proxemic position of the standing woman in the middle of the circle is important, since she is playing the large leading drum *moropa* or *kiba*. The drum must be at least one meter in height in order to reach her waist since she plays it while standing.³⁴ The woman sitting to her left is playing on a smaller drum *komana* or *thopane*. The large drum produces deep sonorous tones, while the smaller drum has a higher pitched tone. The drums are usually struck with either a wooden stick or the palm or fingers of the hand to exert pressure on the drumheads. In our panel both drummers use their hands. Drums are important instruments in the *mokankanyane* performance since they are used as accompaniments to the dancing. Eight of the performers perform the singing and kinetic movements, and of those, six are holding rattles *dithokana* raised above their heads. During live performance events the performers usually raise the rattles or staffs, lower them again, or move them from side to side to accentuate the movements of their arms and to keep the rhythm. It should be pointed out that body movement (gestures) in these kind of performances can be categorised as 'pointing gesture', since the initial gesture by the lead singer points to the referents (dancers) in the immediate performance arena, indicating to them the direction and location of their movements. The instructions also serve as signs to keep the attention of the audience. These kinesthetic movements

³³ This is a new development. The craft artists told me that in former times the performers danced bare feet. Personal communication with Mogalakwena craft artists, 1–2 September 2008.

³⁴ The *moropa* or *kiba* is the most universally played instrument among the Hananwa, and is mostly relegated to women.

lose their fluidity and become frozen when transferred into static embroidered images on cloth. The roles of the three men will be explained in the remainder of the *ekphrasis*:

Mogare ga basadi bao go na le banna baba (sic) raro. yo (sic) a swereng thokanaye (sic) Šweu (sic) ke malokwane wa koša yeo. yo (sic) wago (sic) apara dinaka ke malose ke yo mong we (sic) wa go bina le bona. Mokotama ye na (sic) ke mophepedi (sic) – *In the middle of those women are three men. The one that is holding the white rattle is the leader of that song. The one who is wearing the horns is Malose, another one dancing with them. Mokotama is the one who renders splendour to the performance through his special dance technique.* (My own translation)

Although the *mokankanyane* is mainly performed by women, the craft artists explained that men are allowed to join the dancing on condition that they remain in the minority.³⁵ The man appearing on the far left in the panel is identified as the leader *malokwane*³⁶ of the dance since he is giving instructions with the white rattle *thokana* he is holding up. The man foregrounded in the center front, is named Malose. His head is decorated with the horns of a goat, and he is dancing with a stick that bears resemblance to a snake. The ‘mock’ snake has a double function: it is used to frighten children, preventing them from entering the performance arena and disturbing the dancers, but it is also brought into play by the dancers when they perform acrobatic stunts in order to impress their audience. Other props such as rattles and horns are used as decorations, adding additional flair to the performance event. The third man appears in the top right corner of the panel. He is called Mokotama, and is being identified as the *mophepedi* of the performance, a noun derived from the verb *go phephela* which means ‘to be joyful’, ‘to dance with a broom in one’s hand’, or ‘to side-step while dancing’. Mokotama’s flamboyant dance steps display the

³⁵ Telephonic communication with Elbé Coetsee and Louisa Seabi (Mogalakwena craft artist), 2 April 2009.

³⁶ The role of the leader is not only to lead the performance event, but also to call the group together for practices, to discipline latecomers and performers who do not adhere to the dress code of the group (Joubert 2004a: 276).

necessary ostentation, and create an unforgettable impression in the minds of the audience.

Mokankanyane: panel 2



panel 2

Panel 2 serves as an additional example to the song genre *mokankanyane*. This panel was embroidered in 2008 by two artists, Paulina and Esther, on a beige cotton background. They have also included the abbreviation M.C.A.F. (Mogalakwena Craft Art Foundation) on the panel. The same headline MOKANKANYANE names this panel, but no *ekphrasis* accompanies it. The panel only portrays women. A total of eight women appear in a circular formation. Three of them are dressed in maroon garments *dihlele*, two in green ones, and the other three in blue ones. The decorations *meroka* on their garments appear in the colours yellow and maroon. Underneath these garments they wear cloths that combine the colours blue-yellow, blue-green, blue-maroon, green-yellow, green-maroon and yellow-maroon. An intriguing observation is that the cloths appearing underneath the garments *dihlele* represent the colours of all the garments and their decorations. At first sight, and according to the proxemic spacing of the performers, one might get the impression that two dance groups are represented. At closer look one realizes the intricate use of colour in this

pictorial panel. The artists used the women's headscarves *dituku* and grass bangles *maseka* as signifiers of unity. Women in blue garments wear maroon-green headscarves; women in maroon garments wear blue-maroon or yellow-maroon ones, and women in green garments wear blue-maroon or green-maroon headscarves. All the performers wear mixed bangles in the above mentioned colours. The cross-use of colour in the performers' dress code creates unity and represents them as being members of one and the same group. All women are wearing white sport shoes (tekkies), another unifying factor. These symbols also serve as markers of group pride and a newly obtained identity amongst the members of a dance group. Enniger (1992: 219) is of the opinion that the signaling system of clothing, like language, forms part of the acquired knowledge shared by members of a community and can be made up of different varieties, for example cultural varieties (African versus European clothing), regional varieties (Hananwa versus Pedi women's dresses), functional varieties (ceremonial versus entertainment), gender varieties (female versus male) etc. Clothing and objects can also signal information about the participants, for example the woman appearing on the top left is probably the leader *malokwane*, since she is the only one holding a staff *mosasa* in her hand with which she can give directions to the rest of the dancers. The three drummers occupy important positions in the performance arena and are, as in panel 1, grouped in terms of proximity in the middle of the circle. One woman is portrayed in a seated position, playing the big drum *moropa* with her hands, while the two smaller drums *dikomana* or *dithopane* are played with sticks by one woman kneeling, and the other one sitting.³⁷

There are certain cultural conventions that key the *mokankanyane* as performance event, for example: the participation is usually restricted to women; a specific framed context (festive celebrations) exists within which the performance event should be interpreted, and its traditional character is acquired through the dance regalia, performance style and songs. The performance contexts create a feeling of equality and cohesion among the women. These bonds of sisterly solidarity are strengthened through the close bonds that exist between members of the group by means of kinship

³⁷ A set of drums usually consists of five drums and is called a herd. The drums are known by the following names: *Moradu* (the big cow) which is the largest drum in the set, and beaten only with the fists, *Poo* (the bull), *Maditsi*, *Todiane* and *Bo-pampane*. The last four drums are beaten with sticks (Huskisson 1958: 42).

ties, totem animals, marriage, age-groups and their attendance in the same initiation regiment *mphato* (Joubert 2004a: 276). Women have, over the years, developed interesting links between the past and the present through this style of performance by blending fragments of older song lyrics with new ones, creating new and challenging themes that abound in both traditional and modern societies (Levin 2005: 147). The *mokankanyane* as song genre plays an important role as it presents women with culturally defined spaces in which they can communicate their feelings, or give commentary on community matters and social experiences (Joubert 2004b: 44).

Dinaka: panel 3



panel 3

The men's dance panel was embroidered in 2008 by two craft artists, Paulina and Selina P. The panel is named DINAKA, and is presented with an accompanying *ekphrasis*. The naming of the panel signifies the male version of *kiba* performances namely *dinaka*.³⁸ It is therefore no surprise that

³⁸ The origin of the *kiba* style performance is unclear. It was apparently imported from the Venda people and adopted by the Northern Sotho speaking communities who changed the Venda seven-note scale to a five-note scale. A significant difference between the two

all seven of the figures represented in this dance performance are men. As in the case of the women in the *mokankanyane* performances, the men are grouped in a circle around the main drummer. No English translation exists for this panel.

Dinaka performances usually take place over weekends as some groups make a living out of their music and dancing skills by performing at special occasions, or even participating in competitions with the prospects of winning. The performance is accompanied by flutes, drums and rattles. In the past the flutes were made of reed, but today steel pipes of various lengths are used. During the performance the low sounding pipes are grouped together as are the lighter sounding pipes. The tunes that are played normally consist of three to five notes. A great amount of air is needed to fill the pipes and to produce a given note. To perform the *dinaka* thus demands a great deal of physical exertion. The information in the *ekphrasis* sheds some light on the performance event depicted in panel 3:

Ga mmampšana (sic) ke motse wo otletseng (sic) ka batho ba gorata (sic) go bina dinaka (sic) Mafelelong (sic) a beke banna ba kopana go dira mošo mo (sic) wa bona (sic) Lesiba ye na (sic) ke moletsi (sic) wamoropa (sic). – *At Mmampšana's village it is crowded with people who want to dance the dinaka. At the end of the week the men gather to do their work. Lesiba is the player of the moropa drum.* (My own translation)

The many mistakes marked in the Northern Sotho *ekphrasis* is an indication of the low level of literacy amongst the craft artists. In many instances full stops were left out, words were broken up at wrong syllables, diacritic signs (š) were left out, or the disjunctive writing style of Northern Sotho was not adhered to. The expression “[...] the men gather to do their work” should not be interpreted as ordinary work, it refers to the exhausting *kiba* performance, which, according to Tracey (2004), is an incredible web of

forms of music was that the Venda reed-pipe music was inextricably connected with political power, whereas the Northern Sotho's appropriation of this musical form is purely for entertainment (Levin 2005: 144). According to craft artist Louisa Seabi women are not allowed to join the *dinaka* performance in a formal way just as men had to remain in the background in the case of panel 1 with the *mokankanyane*; telephonic conversation, 2 April 2009.

coordination of sound and body, legs and voices, drums and rattles. The person sitting in the middle becomes personalized, as the name *Lesiba* is assigned to him. He could be regarded as the main drummer since he plays the *moropa* drum, which takes the main position in proxemic terms; he is also dressed slightly differently from the rest, with elaborate head decorations and no skirt. He is joined by two other drummers who are dressed in the same way as the dancers. The dancer appearing to the far right of the panel is probably the lead dancer since he is the only one among them performing with staffs *mesasa* in both hands, objects that act as signifiers of instructions, in this case the instructions to be followed by the rest of the dancers.

The men's elaborate and decorative dress code adds to the flair and entertainment level of the performance. They are all dressed in white short-sleeve shirts, decorated with red, blue and white piping at the seams. They wear short skirts in colours of red, blue and white, with black boxer shorts with green trimmings underneath it. Levin (2005: 145) points out that the wearing of skirts can be traced back to the migrant labour context of the 1940s and 1950s when *dinaka* performers saw Scottish kilts for the first time.³⁹ Levin (2005: 145) describes the act of a *kiba* performance as follows: "The men developed the characteristic sway or swinging movement where they toss the kilt from side to side over the hips and buttocks. The kilt provides an element of humour, when performers purposely lift it with a pelvic flick to expose their boxer shorts underneath". The adoption of skirts can be regarded as a practical adaptation especially within the dance's newly acquired context of fierce challenge and competition.

According to Kaeppler (1992: 196) dance is "a complex form of communication that combines the visual, kinesthetic, and aesthetic aspects of human movement with (usually) the aural dimensions of musical sounds and sometimes poetry". Although the ostensible imagery used by the craft

³⁹ One of the most popular movements performed by *kiba* dancers is called *monti*. This dance has reference to post-war celebrations where warriors used to dance their way into the royal kraal of their ruler after defeating their enemies. James (1995: 13) explains the present-day referents of the *monti* dance as follows: "The kilts (worn over white boxer shorts in contrast to the famed Scottish practice), were imitated from the Transvaal Scottish regiment during the 1950s. The regimented and co-ordinated movement of the rank- and-file members, known as *masole* (soldiers), harks back to Pedi men's experience as part of the Allied forces in World War II, and the *monti* is thought to derive from that of Montgomery of Alamein".

artists creates a convivial atmosphere, the communicative phenomena of the performance events are lost when reduced to images on cloth. The continual assessment of the interaction between extra-pictorial and intra-pictorial information is essential. By 'viewing/reading' the pictorial panels with all the information at our disposal, we realize that these panels do activate new worlds of experiences that bridge the gap between intra-pictorial and extra-pictorial information, between pictures on cloth and live performance events of celebration, and between the articulation of social and communal issues in the past and in the present.

Ritual expressed through embroidery

Schoemaker (1990: 61) defines *ritual* as "a category of symbolic behavior occasionally associated but not necessarily dependent on religious myth". Understanding the meaning of rituals is difficult and often impenetrable because of the use of culture-specific symbols. According to La Fontaine (1972: xvii) ritual expresses cultural values because "it 'says' something and therefore has meaning as part of a non-verbal system of communication". Our last pictorial panel represents a *cleansing ritual*. In the 'viewing/reading' of the panel I will try to elucidate the symbolism of ritual behaviour as a statement, underlying cultural elements within this community.

Death among the Northern Sotho communities is associated with impurity *ditšhila* that can contaminate everyone who comes into contact with the body. Warning signs such as the placing of a stick *lepheko* across the entrance of the deceased's hut are usually employed to protect family members and visitors. The mortuary customs adhered to within Northern Sotho communities emphasize the severe implications of death for the remaining relatives of the deceased. Mönning (1967: 138) explains it as follows: "The correct rituals have to be observed to ensure for the deceased the orderly transition from his previous life to the new existence, and to readjust the altered relationships of the relatives". Death affects relatives differently, depending on whether the deceased is a woman or a man. Wives are for example expected to mourn and bewail the deceased spouse for a much longer period than husbands are expected to do.

All relatives of a deceased person are considered to be in a state of darkness *lefifi* which demands a period of abstention.⁴⁰ The longest period of abstention is observed for chiefs and widows, namely one year, whereas a period of six months is usually observed for husbands, brothers, sisters and children. Mönnig (1967: 141) explains the implication of this period for widows as follows: “The period of abstention for the widows, who can produce an heir for the deceased, is longer and stricter than for any other relative. The condition of a widow is considered to be not only one of darkness, but also of ritual impurity – *ditšhila* – which can contaminate others with the disease *makgoma*”. No activities such as the building and repairing of houses, or the participation in feasts are allowed during this period.

The beginning of the abstention period is marked by the shaving off of the hair of all relatives. The hair of men and boys are shaved off completely, but that of women and girls only partly on the top of the head. In the case of widows only a strip of half an inch is left around the sides and back of the head. Medicine is prepared and each relative is supposed to drink of this mixture for purification. Widows are specially treated in that their faces, hands and feet are blackened with a mixture of soot, made partly from the burnt hair of all the relatives, mixed with blood or fat (Mönnig 1967: 141–142). Widows also have to dress in a special way, usually with a black goat skin fastened to their backs, and little bags *sebebana* with protective medicine around their necks. They have to remain clothed in this way for the whole period of abstention.

Widows also have to move and behave in a certain way. When walking, they have to hold a stick in their left hand in order to be recognizable from a distance – clearly operating as symbol of transition. They are not allowed to enter the courtyard of anybody without having washed their hands with water fetched from the main hut. They are not allowed to cook for guests or to eat with the same utensils as the rest of the family. They are obliged to sleep in their own huts at nights, and have to abstain from all sexual intercourse in order to prevent men from contracting the *makgoma* disease.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The Northern Sotho word referring to the period of abstention is *hlologatšha* and is derived from the noun *mohlologadi* which means widow. See Mönnig (1967: 138–142) for an informative discussion on death and burial amongst the Pedi.

⁴¹ The noun *makgoma* is derived from the Northern Sotho verb *go kgoma* which means ‘to touch’ or ‘to cling to’, a verb that hints at the act of intercourse. Symptoms of the disease

At the end of the period of abstinence a feast *go boola* is held. This feast is also called *setšhila* or *go ntšha setšhila*, literally meaning 'to take out the dirt'.⁴² As all belongings are considered to be unclean, men usually bring along their assegais and women their hoes to be purified at the ritual. In the case of a widow, a ritual washing or cleansing takes place. The ritual serves to release the deceased of his/her responsibility towards the next of kin. During the ritual the widow will throw the dividing bones. The magus will interpret them, and in this way establish the name of the ancestor who has received the deceased. Prescriptions and plans from the ancestors are also given to the widow through the magus. Purification rituals are symbolic actions whereby the next of kin of the deceased are purified of the uncleanness that befell them when their relative passed away. The hair of the next of kin which has not been shorn for a full year is also shorn in the name of the ancestor. Thereafter the feet, legs and faces of the next of kin are anointed with special medicine. An amulet is then usually given to the widow, the black goatskin which was tied to her back is removed and she is presented with new clothes. These acts symbolize her purification and the fact that she is welcomed back into the community. She and the other next of kin are now once again regarded as members of the community in the full sense of the word. A cheerful feast with an abundance of food and beer follows the ritual ceremony in order to signify that the equilibrium has been restored again. The widow can now offer the first gourd of beer *legwahla* to the man she prefers to have a relationship with in future. In the past, this was preferably a younger brother of the deceased, but these days it could also be somebody else. The relatives of the deceased husband retain their guardianship over the widow and she will remain living in her hut in the patrilocal group, and any future children will remain members of that group (Mönnig 1967: 142).

Most of the sensory channels are used in the *setšhila* ritual, for example the *aural* of the verbal utterances made by the magus, who establishes the name

are high fever and excessive sweating – often compared to malaria fever. The fever is caused by the 'heat' of the deceased that is still present in the body of the widow. During the act of intercourse the heat of the deceased enters the body of the person with whom the widow has intercourse. Personal communication with Mogalakwena craft artists at MCADF, 1–2 September 2008.

⁴² Personal communication with Hananwa speakers on the summit of the Blouberg mountain during the attendance of a purification ritual, 6 October 1994.

of the ancestor who has received the deceased; the *visual* sight of the vestments, artifacts and relics, as in the throwing of the bones, the amulet and black goat skin given to the widow; the *smell* of special medicine or burnt hair; *touching*, when the hair of the next of kin is shorn and the feet, legs and faces are anointed with the medicine; the *taste* of food and beer prepared for the ritual.

Setšhila: panel 4



panel 4

This *setšhila* panel was embroidered in 2008 by Paulina and Elisabeth, bearing the abbreviation MCADF. The panel is named SETSHILA, and has an accompanying Northern Sotho *ekphrasis* with an English translation. The name of the panel frames it as being a representation of a purification ritual. Eight people appear in this panel, two men and six women. All the women are dressed in skirts or dresses and the men in long trousers. The viewer's attention is immediately focused on the centre of the panel by the bright brown shirt of a man who is holding a white animal tied by a black rope and lying on its back. The second man is assisting the first man by holding the animal by its head. The 'uninformed' viewer needs more information in order to decode the dramatic event portrayed in this panel. The accompanying *ekphrasis* supplies us with fractions of important information:

Moraku orile (sic) go nyala Nkele a fetša mengwa ga (sic) emene (sic) a lwala bolwetši bja pelo. ahlokofala (sic) papa gagweobolaya (sic) kgomoya (sic) se šebo (sic) Nkele o kgopetše baka (sic) lapeng gomofa (sic) molekane.⁴³

Mareku (sic) married Nkele and after four years he passed away with heart a tack (sic). His father kill (sic) a cow to make relish for guest (sic). Nkele ask her family inlaw (sic) to give her another husband.

Moraku married Nkele. He then became sick for four years with a heart disease. He then died. His father kills a beast (cow/ox) for relish. Nkele asked the people of the household (her family in law) to give her a suitable partner. (My own translation)

The craft artists' narrative about the lives of Moraku and Nkele, helps to contextualize the represented pictorial scene for the 'viewer/reader' who is not familiar with its live source. The passage is written in the past tense (with three phrases in the consecutive mood). By doing so the artists shift time backwards as they postulate a series of events that took place four years ago, namely the marriage of the couple, Moraku's illness over a period of four years with a heart disease, and his death. By reconstructing these events, the artists change the co-existing frozen scene into a successive narration (Fort 1996: 71) instead of sticking to a description of the actions and figures on the pictorial panel. The last two sentences in the English text 'jump' back to the pictorial panel, and describe the events that are represented. According to the *ekphrasis*, Moraku's father must be one of the men involved in the killing of the beast (cow/ox) in order to provide relish at the feast. The identity of Nkele (who is asking her in-laws for a husband) can only be determined with the necessary background information. When taking our discussion regarding purification rituals into account, it becomes evident that panel 4 portrays a purification ritual. The ritual event is taking place at the family household of the late Moraku. Preparations are in progress for the feast as we can see two big pots in the foreground with fires burning underneath them, and a woman attending to the cooking with a

⁴³ The name *molekane* is derived from the verb *go lekana*, meaning 'to be equal', 'to fit' or 'to be suitable'. She is therefore asking her in-laws to give her a suitable partner.

spoon in her hand. Two other women seem to be assisting her with the cooking. In the middle of the panel a dramatic scene is playing off as Moraku's father and a helper are slaughtering a beast for the feast. Nkele is portrayed in a seated position in the middle at the back. She is dressed in a maroon skirt, blue blouse and a black goat skin tied to her back, signifying her state of impurity *ditšhila*. A woman dressed in black and white is standing in front of her presenting her with a pair of black shoes. Some clothing is spread out in front of her – signifying gifts in the form of new clothes to be put on by the widow after her ritual cleansing. A third woman is approaching the scene in the distance carrying bags in both hands, probably more gifts for the widow and the family of the deceased.

A striking observation regarding the *ekphrasis* shows many more mistakes in the Northern Sotho text than in the English one. This could be due to the fact that the craft artists ask for assistance with the English translation, or that they made use of English dictionaries in the writing process. The name of the deceased *Moraku* changes in the English text to *Mareku*, something that can create confusion regarding the identity of the deceased for a 'viewer/reader' that can also read the Northern Sotho text. The English translation supplies more information than what is written in the original Northern Sotho text and could be regarded as an 'interpretative translation' by the craft artists. The translation draws on extra-textual information that could assist an uninformed 'viewer/reader' more than my own translation that is based only on the information supplied in the Northern Sotho text.

Purification rituals do not only signify an action, but also perform an action through all the sensory channels. The referential function signified by the actions or objects used during the purification ritual is closely linked to the performative functions. The ritual is, as Fischer-Lichte (2003: 237) explains it "able to achieve the desired effect to which the symbols (objects and/or actions) allude – as cleansing the community, healing an individual, transforming a group of individuals, and so on – only because it is performed in a particular way".

Conclusion

Our craft art panels on the genre of dance *mokankanyane/dinaka* and purification ritual *setšhila* confirmed in various ways that every performance event has its own interacting variables such as physical setting (circle formations of dance groups), psychological ambience (formality of purification ritual), cultural theme (religion, entertainment, initiation), the type of participants present (all male/female, family members), and special interactional patterns (leaders lead, dancers/singers follow). The interacting variables form the ground rules that govern a live performance event. The nature of some of these interacting variables does not allow for their translation into pictures.

Performance, as 'intermedial' part of craft art, creates a defined interpretive context or frame within which the messages being communicated in the live performance or in the pictorial representation are to be understood. We have to reckon with multiple meanings of proxemic spaces, figures, gestures, objects, motives and iconographic lore. The craft artists, as members of the local communities, are familiar with the performance tradition. It is unproblematic for them to comprehend the form, content and context of any performance event, and to represent it again in another medium. It is also clear that the lack of familiarity with the performance tradition causes us, the 'viewers/readers' some difficulty, since our capacity is too narrow to receive and decode the original performance events as depicted in the pictorial panels with ease. According to Heffernan (2002: 57) we have to recognize not only the moment represented, but also the temporal process of representation itself, which starts in our case with oral art (performance) and ends up in craft art (pictorial panel). As 'viewers/readers', we need to draw on extra-pictorial contexts of tradition in order to fill the gaps of intermediality in the interpretation and understanding of the web of 'oral-pictorial' intercommunication.

This 'picturisation' of performance can be shown to be embedded in a larger cultural context of a non-literate community, where the traditional features of oral art achieve a new valorization and gain an importance that contributes to the bridging of the intermedial space between oral art and its Other, craft art (Wolf 2002: 25).

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