



About Me

My name is Tarik Elmoutawakil, and I am a creative producer and independent artist, creator of [Brownton Abbey](#) and co-founder and Artist Director at [The Marlborough Theatre](#), in Brighton. In October 2019, I travelled to South Africa and then Botswana, on The British Council funded scheme “Art Connects Us”. I have travelled to South Africa previously, to attend the [Pan African Creative Exchange](#) and Vrystaat Festival in 2018.

My work has for the last 10 years largely been focussed on making creatively engaging spaces that centre marginalised people. Whether that’s through intersectionally mindful programming at The Marlborough Theatre, producing and delivering an un-conference (‘[The Black Joy Sessions](#)’) or curating, staging and hosting the Afrofuturistic Performance party, Brownton Abbey. It is with this ‘hat’ on that I applied for the Art Connects Us fund.

I have two disabilities that can impact my ability to work, and I wanted to make sure I was able to make the most of this opportunity. Fortunately, I was able to request access support in the form of a travel partner/assistant. I chose to bring a close friend and collaborator, [Melanie Kalay](#), who is experienced with supporting my access needs and is a creative powerhouse in their own right. Without this additional support from British Council, I am certain the research trip would have at times been much more stressful, less impactful for myself and the artists I met with, and put simply much less would have been achieved. I mention this here, to encourage other people with disabilities to ask for the support that they need in order to do the work that they are tasked with doing.

Motivation for The Trip

As a queer artist with mixed/black heritage, I am personally and professionally invested in the diversity of lived experiences of queer Black and brown people across the globe.

I largely chose South Africa as a destination for this research because this was the only African country that had decriminalised homosexuality at the time. A successful application to the British Council travel grant '[Arts Connects Us](#)', which supports research trips to Sub Saharan African countries, allowed me to make a two week trip. The purpose and intention that I set for this trip was to connect with queer South African artists, or other queer African heritage artists resident in SA. I chose to visit Cape Town, (where I'd visited before) and Johannesburg, a city that would be new to me.

Shortly before my departure to SA, I was contacted by British Council representatives with the offer of extending my trip by several days to include a visit to neighbouring Botswana, which had only [several months previously also decriminalised homosexuality](#), which I knew was too important an opportunity to miss.

The wide scope of the brief (to connect with artists and to share networks) allowed me to work in ways that are natural and beneficial to me as a creative neurodiverse person, allowing for informal meetings with individuals or groups in relaxed settings. This informality made it possible to have intimate transnational exchanges that gave me a deeper knowledge of the local and national contexts that would likely not have otherwise been possible.

Connections with artists/organisers

I met artists from across various artforms, from visual arts to live/performing arts to textile design and fashion, as well as writers and also community/event organisers. If I had to draw a common thread that ran through the artists/organisers messages in their work, it would be one of uplifting and empowering messages for marginalised people (through race, sexuality, gender and gender expression), exposing injustices and signposting ways to navigate them.

Meetings took place in cafes/restaurants, artist's studios, on foot, and in homes. The conversations that ensued were hugely enlightening, nuanced and multi-layered, and a summary of individual discussions couldn't do the dialogues justice. What I hope to be a more useful documentation therefore is a list of the artists I met, with links to their professional websites and social media pages plus some bullet snapshots on the subjects that we touched upon.

The Artists

SOUTH AFRICA

Robyn Pretorius / [@robynpretoriusart](https://www.robynpretoriusart/) / <https://www.robynpretoriusart/>

Robyn is a young and accomplished portrait artist whose work combines photo realism, and romanticism with a contemporary flair. The subjects of her portraits are often 'coloured' people, a term used in South Africa to describe the racial identity of people who have generations of black or asian and white ancestry, a classification created during South African Apartheid. We talked about her the power of portraiture to uplift dispossessed people, and her intentions to cast a warm and generous light on her subjects in her portraiture.



Oneismo Bam / [@oneiam](https://africainowmag.com/state-of-flow) / africainowmag.com/state-of-flow

Fashion designer **Oneismo** describes his work to me as “a projection of emotion into the fabric of the kimono”. His long standing love for Japan comes in part from similarities that he sees between aesthetics in Japanese and African design. We met for coffee and talked about his nonlinear journey into art, design and fashion. Oneismo, like other artists that I met on this trip, talked of the inaccessibly high cost of higher education and the high dropout rate for poorer (usually black/coloured) students that reflects the high cost. Oneismo credits his ability to continue to create and pursue a career in clothes design and production to the support of a creative community of (mostly black/coloured LGBTQ+) friends and associates in Cape Town



Ele Radebe / [@eleazerradebe](#) / [@byele_lifestyle](#)

Ele creates designs with the intention of showing a positive representation of Africa, one that shows the endless possibility and variety. He wants to educate that 'African print is not actually African print' ([most cloth considered to be African print](#), is made by the Dutch, in The Netherlands, and exported to Africa) . Having previously taken up the study of interior design, Ele eventually found himself stepping into fashion design, originally creating clothes for himself to wear. His contemporary african style caught the ideas of friends, artists and soon to be clients.



Sethembile Msezane / [@sthemse](#) /

www.omenkaonline.com/author/news I was fortunate to meet Sethembile on a previous trip to South Africa at [PACE](#), and am grateful to have had an opportunity to reconnect. Sethembile is immediately recognisable to many who followed the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, an image of her 'performance intervention' as the Cecil Rhodes statue was finally removed, is utilized frequently to illustrate the tensions around the statue and the decolonisation of the education system. Sethembile described how she has come to understand her work which previously she might have described as 'performance art' to be more accurately understood as a form of 'spiritual embodiment practice', and part of her growing work as a medium.



Saadiq Soeker @shiraz.the.alien/

Saadiq is a photographer and performance artist from and based in Cape Town. Saadiq found their creative voice via the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, looking for a way to express themselves as a non-academic, picking up a camera and not looking back (except maybe to great a well framed shot!). Saadiq captures magnificent and mundane beauty of the queer people of colour in his city. Saadiq is also stepping out into the world of performance art and creative public interventions.



Purity /@_purely_/

<https://soundcloud.com/purity-zinhle-mkhize/sets/vocal-alchemy>

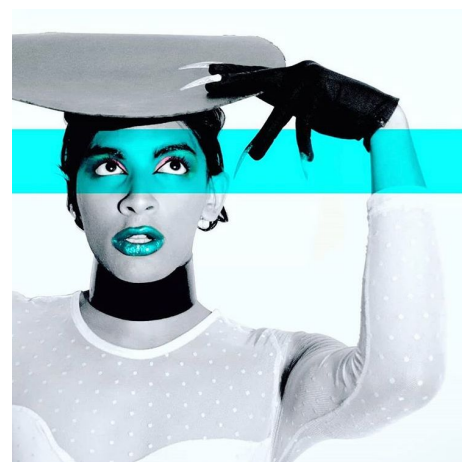
An artist that had been on my radar for Brownston Abbey, as it was clear we spoke a similar visual language, which made meeting her extra special. Purity, originally from Durban, made waves in Joburg in a punk band, tearing up a scene that did not expect to see young black women on a scene dominated by white men. We spoke about being deemed too black and/or too 'weird', and the power of ultimately embracing difference.



Tazmé @iamtasme / [Death of Glitter](#)

Live artist based in CT, founder of Death of Glitter, a queer CT based performance art party. Huge rave with long artist line up, plus smaller 'sister' events.

Conversations covered: parties as movements (rather than places to get wasted), challenges of finding accessible spaces, reconciling queerness with cultural heritage, and submission as a form of power.



Unknown Union [@unknownunion](https://www.instagram.com/unknownunion) / www.unknownunion.com

Independent retail shop, gallery and recording studio, centring the work of black/coloured South Africans. Collective of artists, fashion design, portraiture, graphic design. Founded by Jason Storey, Unknown Union is a hub and a hang out spot for young african creatives, and a destination point for many international artists of the african diaspora. A creative business that has indigenous african philosophy and belief, literally woven into the fabric of its products.



Chix Phetoe [@chix_phetoe](https://www.instagram.com/chix_phetoe)

Chix is a young designer, stylist and entrepreneur, from Soweto and often seen in the market places and fashionable parts of Johannesburg. We met Chix whilst visiting a market in JoBurg, attracted by Chix's stylish appearance and inviting personality, selling a line of fashion accessories that he had designed, fabricated from recycled/repurposed materials, such as frames and lenses of glasses, zips and wire. A well known personality in Maboneng, Chix has graced the covers of fashion publications, and dressed notable and up-and-coming music artists/creatives in Maboneng. Chix also took us on a tour of Joburg, including a visit to Soweto.



Centre For The Less Good Idea [@lessgoodidea](https://www.instagram.com/lessgoodidea) / www.lessgoodidea.com

Arts venue in trendy Maboneng, with a central philosophy of utilising our 'less good ideas' the ones that form to address challenges presented from our 'initial god idea'. Met with AD, discussed potential producing/presenting partners, and areas of international arts funding that could be tapped into, as well as SA based artists with disabilities for me to connect with.



BubbleGum Club [@bubblegumclubb](https://twitter.com/bubblegumclubb)

www.bubblegumclub.co.za

I met with both the founder and AD of the online cultural magazine/cultural intelligence agency, which was initially set up to help corporate clients interpret and connect with SA youth culture. Bubblegum Club is a leading online publication, documenting, promoting and critiquing the incredible richness

of a young pan-African creative sector, and also acknowledges the lack of self-confidence that these same artists have in relation to their place in the global cultural conversation. We spoke about creating networks, currencies of access, and about becoming self sustaining.



BOTSWANA

In Botswana, I was put in contact with Kat via British Council, who was to be our local expert in the field, and our fixer.

Katlego Kai Kolkes [@katkaikolkes](https://twitter.com/katkaikolkes)

<https://kkolkes.wixsite.com/kkolkes>

Katlego is an ARTivist and a Human Right Practitioner (as well as many other accolades to their name TED Fellow, Mandela Washington Fellow, Creative Director of The Queer Short Shoqcase Festival in Botswana). Kat arranged a cultural tour of the city, delivering an intersectional historical narrative and context as we went. Her shared knowledge was a key element in us being able to gain some relevant geographical perspective of the arts and cultural scene and beyond in Botswana.



On the second day of our 48 hour Botswana trip, Kat arranged a dinner, inviting active creative members of the LGBTQ+ community, who bring the conversation into their professional and creative work. Invitees were in essence, instigators and facilitators of the current queer revolution in Botswana, which recently decriminalised homosexuality.

During this dinner-meet, I had 10-15 minute conversations with the guests, as an attempt to get a snapshot of their lives, and their ARTivism.

Over dinner I met with:

Tanlume [@setabane](#) [@Tanlume](#)

www.bananaemoji.com/2018/04/11/tan-fest/

Film maker, blogger writer, activist, LGBTQ+ community organiser

Creator of www.bananaemoji.com an online blog discussing queerness, blackness, arts and culture and mental-health and well-being. Over lunch we talked about how they have moved their online conversation into a real-world one, with the creation of [Banana Club](#). The conversations that come about at Banana Club inform the online newsletter, raising awareness and creating discourse.



Sade Shoalane [@batho.ba.ngewdi](#) [@sade_shoalane](#)

Multidisciplinary experimental and artist, self taught, performance artist, often working with fabrics.



Donald Moldosi [@donaldmoldosi](#) [@actordonald](#)

Actor and filmmaker, creator of '2064', Botswana's first ever queer film, which is afrofuturist in style. Recently shown at the Hong Kong LGBT Film Festival.



Letlhogonolo Godsave [@eminentgrey](#)

A lawyer specialising in the creative sector and specifically intellectual property. Queer activist and founder of [QueerPrideBotswana](#), PR and Brand strategist, narrative builder (aka storyteller).



Aobakwe Molosiwa [@gilded sands](#)

Fashion designer, found their way into industry via a government funded study program, having originally gone down a route of studying science before switching career paths to their passion rather than what was expected of them.



Kutlwano Magashula [@kutlwanomagashula](#)

Lawyer, masters in Sexual Reproductive Rights of Africa, founder of BlackQueerDocX, a grassroots collective of black & queer feminists working towards development of inclusive and just communities in Botswana.



Peach Kereamang [Youtube](#)

Singer song writer, uses indigenous ancestral language, of the Khoi San, in their music. Also a Digital TV and Broadcasting Assistant Director, working with young people to diversify arts industry and leadership.



Neo Jasmine Mokyosi [@faithinajar](#)

Photographer, creator of instagram page @faithinajar, which was originally a personal repository for uplifting images that were helpful in dealing with depression, and became a personal way to share. Started with taking photos of poets, and is now moving into making short films. Neo works regularly in collaboration with other artists.



Shanti Lo [Youtube](#)

I felt especially blessed to meet this singer/artist who in their own way has championed and advocated for LGBTQ+ rights in Botswana, by simply being their unapologetic self whilst in the public eye. Shanti Lo is famous throughout Botswana and beyond, having recently being performed) at Stockholm Pride, Shanti Lo has become so synonymous with being queer in Botswana, that many of the LGBTQ+ folks that I met in Botswana talked about how in their formative years people would refer to them as a “Shanti”. We spoke about our ancestors, and the importance of knowing your history.

