



**LOST LIBRARIES,  
BURNT ARCHIVES**

edited by  
Sindi-Leigh McBride  
& Julia Rensing

# Lost Libraries, Burnt Archives

A creative publication

© 2023

Editors:

Sindi-Leigh McBride and Julia Rensing

Contributors: Danielle Bowler, Nicola Brandt, Sophie Cope, Dag Henrichsen, Duane Jethro, Atiyah Khan, Bongani Kona, Lerato Maduna, Portia Malatjie, Sindi-Leigh McBride, Nisha Merit, Santu Mofokeng, Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, Jade Nair, Masande Ntshanga, Koleka Putuma, Julia Rensing, Lorena Rizzo, Ruth Sacks, Niren Tolsi, Eugene van der Merwe, Laura Windvogel, Carine Zaayman

Cover artwork:

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Design and layout:

Keenan Oliver

Proofreading:

Keely Shinnars

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# *Introduction*

Sindi-Leigh McBride & Julia Rensing



Salvaged card catalogue at the Jagger Library (2022) 35mm film.  
Photograph by Sindi-Leigh McBride

*Lost Libraries, Burnt Archives* contemplates what surfaces when a library is burnt, an archive lost, and what emerges from the ashes and ruins. As African Studies scholars attuned to the gravitas of the University of Cape Town's Special Collections, we were horrified by the loss of the Jagger Library to wildfire on 18 April 2021. Constructed in the 1930s, the Jagger Library originally served as the main library of the University of Cape Town but, at the time of the fire, was home to the Special Collections department which included the significant African Studies collections of published monographs and pamphlets, as well as a rare book collection, several specialist collections, and one of the largest African film collections in the world. We watched the blaze online from Basel, Switzerland, aggrieved for the implications of this loss, not only for the university and its community but for African Studies in general. As professor of International Economic Relations Adebayo Olukoshi succinctly puts it, "African Studies outside Africa has generally enjoyed better resource endowments than African Studies in Africa itself."<sup>1</sup> For an African institution to no longer hold the wealth of knowledge resources that UCT Libraries Special Collections represented is both epistemically and politically devastating.

We later discovered that Duane Jethro and Jade Nair would be curating a commemorative exhibition and were really interested in learning more about their work through an active and inclusive learning approach that involved others. *Of Smoke and Ash: The Jagger Library Memorial Exhibition* is a collaborative project between the Centre for Curating the Archive, Michaelis Galleries, and the University of Cape Town Libraries. The public exhibition aimed to simultaneously memorialise the loss of the UCT Jagger Library building and its archive and celebrate UCT librarians and volunteers who participated in the salvage operations that followed. In their curatorial statement, Jethro and Nair explain: "We pay homage to the grief by creating a curatorial space evocative of the smoky, chaotic textures of the disaster. The exhibition is itself a salvage project."<sup>2</sup> At the Michaelis Galleries, situated on UCT's Hiddingh campus, a faintly singed smell permeated the materials gathered by the curators. Charred books and other found objects from the Jagger Library site were presented together with images and texts contributed by volunteers, artworks created by graduate students from the Michaelis School of Fine Art, and UCT's own documentary record of the Salvage Process.

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1 Adebayo Olukoshi, 'African Scholars and African Studies', *Development in Practice* 16, no. 6 (November 2006): 540.

2 Duane Jethro and Jade Nair, 'Curatorial Statement: *Of Smoke and Ash: The Jagger Library Memorial Exhibition*', University of Cape Town, accessed 8 January 2023, <https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/of-smoke-and-ash/page/curatorial-statement>

This publication takes its cue from how Jethro and Nair used exhibition-making as a medium to make sense of the tragedy, not only to mourn what is lost and celebrate the salvage efforts but also to expand how the event was understood. In our own work, we have been similarly interested in thinking about avenues to broaden approaches to knowledge production in African Studies. Like Jethro and Nair, we are committed to pursuing, in professor of Literary and Cultural Studies Pumla Dineo Gqola's words, "new ways in which meaning might be further harnessed by placing the creative and the explicitly critical alongside one another."<sup>3</sup> In that spirit, we reached out to the curators, designed a workshop for collective engagement with the exhibition, and invited a group of artists and academics interested in archives, art history, and other related topics.

The workshop took place in April 2022, exactly a year after the tragedy, and began with a guided tour of the gutted interior of the Jagger Library, led by Geographic Information Systems (GIS) specialist Thomas Slingsby that proved to be both informative and emotional.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by an exhibition walkthrough by the curators and a deep listening session by DJ and writer Atiyah Khan. She reflects on this in her essay, 'Lamentations of Fire', which includes a QR code that links to her impeccable set and can be listened to as a powerful sonic accompaniment while reading the book.

The perspectives presented emerge from an array of practices – photography, fiction, curatorship, and fine arts – as well as from different academic disciplines. In varied ways, contributors explore the complex layers of meaning connected to the fire at the Jagger Library. Jethro and Nair offer personal and professional reflections on the experience of engaging with the process of making sense of the destruction. In an interview, photographer Lerato Maduna shares insights into the emotional aspects of documenting the aftermath of the disaster and how this deepened her own artistic practice.

In many of the contributions, the issue of loss is evocatively explored without descending into gloom, for example, in Sophie Cope's pairing of personal musings on loss and damaged astronomical charts salvaged from the Jagger Library. In her interview with artist Lady Skollie, who contributed the striking cover art for this publication, Danielle Bowler asks the questions, "How do you quantify loss?" and, "What is it, precisely, that

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3 Pumla Dineo Gqola, 'Whirling worlds? Women's poetry, feminist imagination and contemporary South African publics', *scrutiny* 2 16, no. 2 (2011): 5.

4 A panorama tour of the Jagger Reading Room after the fire is accessible online at <https://ibalimanifest.uct.ac.za/jagger/>

has been lost?” Short stories by Sindi-Leigh McBride and Masande Ntshanga respond to these questions and “construct an archaeology of absences”, reminding us of the potential and limits of what may be gained from absent presences.<sup>5</sup> Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja, meanwhile, prompts a shift in attention to the regenerative opportunities of queer fire – understood as “an expression that moves queer bodies to make themselves and their labour visible” – in his reading of a performance by artist Qondiswa James, *The Fire This Time* (2022).

Reflective essays by Lorena Rizzo and Julia Rensing explore what remains after destruction, what we believe to be ‘saving’ from ruins, and how these questions relate to the concept of the archive. Carine Zaayman also reflects on the ashes left behind and what they tell us about “the hierarchies instantiated by archives”, while Portia Malatjie turns to South African artistic practices “to account for different forms of knowledge-production, conservation and dissemination.”

Transferring these considerations to other fires and other libraries, Nisha Merit interviews artist Ofri Cnaani about her work in response to the 2018 fire at Brazil’s National Museum, while Dag Henrichsen offers an epistolary perspective on the 2000 fire at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Basel, Switzerland. The more daunting dimensions of fire as an elemental force are evoked in the photo-essays by Eugene van der Merwe and Nicola Brandt who simultaneously engage complex ecocritical questions that arise when fires blaze at sites of colonial conquest. Ruth Sacks similarly reflects on the material and visual legacies surfacing from archives that speak to the violent reverberations of colonial projects.

There are contributions that urge thinking beyond the fire, the university, the archive: Bongani Kona shares a nuanced mediation on memory, while Niren Tolsi braves both the “fires of rage” and the horrors of lives lost to the ever-burning flames of global xenophobia. A smouldering poem by Koleka Putuma reminds us that, though “we have been intimate with fires for too long”, we remain in need of new ways of reading fires, libraries, and archives, which resonates strongly with Zanele Muholi’s important

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5 Martin Hall, ‘People in a Changing Urban Landscape: Excavating Cape Town’, Inaugural Lecture, University of Cape Town, 25 March 1992. Cited in Gabeba Baderoon, ‘Oblique figures: representations of Islam in South African media and culture’, PhD dissertation (University of Cape Town, 2004), <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/7965>

assertion that “the archive means we are counted in history.”<sup>6</sup> Iconic photographs by Santu Mofokeng are proof of just how true this statement is. For us, this creative publication is an attempt to expand knowledge production practices in African Studies, questioning not only who is included in libraries and archives but also how the ‘knowledge’ of these realities and related epistemic injustices emerge.

Akin to how the curators salvaged and commemorated, the contributions gathered here similarly parse through the old and assemble myriad new ways of knowing. In a way, this book, emerging from the ashes of many other books, is a response to a lost archive and a contribution to a new one in the making.

Finally, on the practicalities of book development: a limited print run inadvertently resulted in a forced intentionality about how this book is distributed, bringing to head the injustice of limited access to creative publications in South Africa. As such, the book was not made available for sale and instead distributed throughout and beyond university environments to public libraries, research institutions, and specialised archives throughout the country and beyond.

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6        Muholi quoted in Suyin Haynes, “‘The Archive Means We Are Counted in History.’ Zanele Muholi on Documenting Black, Queer Life in South Africa,” *Time*, 3 December 2020, <https://time.com/5917436/zanele-muholi/>



# *Lerato Maduna: Photography & The Art of Archiving*

**Lost Libraries,  
Burnt Archives**

**Date: February 2023**

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## *Lerato Maduna*

I was born and raised in Soweto, Johannesburg, and I am currently based in Cape Town. I am mother, sister, and daughter; I am invested in healing my childhood traumas. I am currently enrolled in the MFA programme at Michaelis School of Fine Art at UCT. I also hold a BTech in Photography and Diploma in Television and Film Studies from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). I am also an alumna of the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg. For over a decade, I have worked as a photojournalist and documentary photographer for a broad range of print publications and online platforms and worked as a creative researcher in the film industry. I am also a senior photographer in the Communications and Marketing department at UCT.

Sindi-Leigh McBride & Julia Rensing

*“The photograph is able to speak of multiple and simultaneous deaths; it is a text of – and between – deaths. It is particularly well suited as an aide-mémoire and contributes to a different and constantly changing form of knowledge.”*

– Siona O’Connell<sup>1</sup>

*“All photography is a record of a lost past. Photography does not share music’s ability to be fully remade each time it is presented, nor does it have film’s durational quality, in which the illusion of a present continuous tense is conjured. A photograph shows what was, and is no more [...] in this sense, every photograph is a time-lapse image, and photography is necessarily an archival art.”*

– Teju Cole<sup>2</sup>

From the moment the fire hit the slopes of Devil’s Peak on 18 April 2021, a vast photographic archive emerged, visually documenting the disaster in real time. But also, interestingly, the aftermath of the fire is just as extensively captured: photographs of the Jagger Library Special Collections in ruins abound; these images of blackened shelves and destroyed books accompany the reports and blog posts shared by both the University of Cape Town and local and international news media reporting on the tragic loss of the library.

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1 Siona O’Connell, ‘The Aftermath of Oppression: In Search of Resolution through Family Photographs of the Forcibly Removed of District Six, Cape Town’, *Social Dynamics* 40, no. 3 (September 2012): 591.

2 Teju Cole, ‘Disappearing Shanghai’, *The New Inquiry*, 30 September 2012, <https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/disappearing-shanghai/>





Gebhard

The RETURN TO EQUITY  
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Most of these visual documents were created by Lerato Maduna, Senior Photographer at the Communications and Marketing Department of the University of Cape Town. Meaning that, much of what we have seen of both the destruction and of what remains, has been seen through her eyes, with her camera lens. From the ashes of one archive, Maduna has built a new one – chronicling flames, ashes, debris, destruction and archival agency.

We spoke with her about the experience of professionally documenting the transformation of the Jagger Library in the aftermath of the blaze, and how this influenced her own insights into and perceptions of what an archive is and what an archive does. At the time of the fire, Maduna was not able to access the area because of security concerns on site; she only began photographing the smouldering scene the following day. Since then, she has returned multiple times to bear witness to the changing space. She described her initial impressions of grave sadness, “walking through that building, seeing books toasted and water everywhere on the different levels [of the library]”, remembering also how she noticed a lost and scorched warning sign, signalling and instructing on what to do ‘in case of a fire’.



And yet, she returned again and again, spending many hours in the desolate now-defunct organs of the building, motivated by an impulse to keep pushing the continued documentation. This ethic of persistence was representative of her unit at the university:

“We have always been encouraged to think ahead, to ask ourselves, ‘Okay, a year from now, what are we going to show? What are we working towards?’ And one of the things we were thinking about was the commemoration. So that was something to consider, to kind of counter any regret [of not documenting].”

Spending so much time meticulously documenting the ruin, the archival remnants, the salvage project and the changes of the place inadvertently led Maduna to contemplate the agency of archives and our illusion that we have any control over them. Put differently, she was forced to confront the widely held myth that libraries and archives are safe storage spaces:

“One could say that UCT libraries likely felt like they had it under control, that they had it on lock-down, that they had created this whole infrastructure around protecting and preserving certain things. And then what happened?”

The preservation of this particular archive was undone by the fire, and with it, any illusion that these spaces are designed for perpetuity:

“In as much as we might feel like we have control over archives or we dictate what happens to archives, [...] I believe that archives and visual works actually have lives of their own and that they have purposes that they have to play. In a sense, when an archive surfaces or disappears, that is part of the archive doing its work.”

Maduna’s intuition is in fact reflected in the science of archive management. Caroline Williams explains that two concepts used by archivists when considering how to manage records and archives are those of the life cycle and the continuum:



“The life-cycle concept is based on the notion that any record has a life, and that like an organic being once it has been generated it has an active life in maturity, a less active life in old age, and in the end is discarded (it ‘dies’) and either destroyed (hell) or transferred to the archives (heaven). (The process of deciding on its long-term future has sometimes been described as purgatory.) We can think of it as the lifespan or time period from the creation or receipt of a record through its useful life to its final disposition. Most records do progress from being current, to semi-current, to non-current (or -active if you prefer).”<sup>3</sup>

But what happens when we take seriously the agency of an archive? Or consider that the ‘death’ of the Jagger Library (as it used to be) might actually be a manifestation of the archive claiming its existential rights, presence, and even perhaps its wilful absence. To paraphrase Maduna: perhaps the destruction of April 2021 was an instance of an archive “liberating itself from a certain cycle”? Taking seriously the archives’ claim to a life of their own is crucial to her photographic practice of “documenting our time” through photography. She does not lay any personal claim to these photographs, many of which have been used across different media platforms, shared on social media, and reproduced and re-contextualised in all kinds of formats. For Maduna, this is part of ‘letting go’ of the work, to afford agency to both the lost archive and the new digital photographic documentation of that loss:

“I don’t feel like I have control over what happens to the works that I have helped to manifest [...] and sometimes I don’t feel like I even want to have control. Those works also don’t belong to me. They are collaborative efforts between myself and other people, and between situations that involve other people.”

Rather than be precious about the photographs that she has taken, Maduna is instead concerned with how the digital realm is replete with images that circulate constantly, endlessly competing for viewers’ attention. Contemplating the consequences, she explains:

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3 Caroline M. Williams, *Managing Archives: Foundations, Principles and Practice* (Chandos Information Professional Series) (Oxford: Chandos, 2006), 3.





jagger

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“So much gets lost and loses meaning in this machine that just turns out so much content and so much visual material on a daily basis. Are we documenting or just adding to the noise, the digital noise?”

Perhaps it is this mindfulness, this awareness of a personal contribution to a collective, universal archive that lends a solemnity to Maduna’s photos. Perhaps this is because there is something both intensely personal and affective about constructing, caring for, and feeding photographic archives. Even those tracing tragedies. In this sense, Maduna’s photography truly emerges, as Teju Cole has aptly put it, “an archival art.”<sup>4</sup>

In her own work as an artist and academic, Maduna is concerned with how photographic family archives surface, and she works with her own family archive as an example of this. When she first encountered the photographic archives of her mother and grandmother, it struck her that the women in her family chose the medium of photography to express themselves and document their lives to tell stories of their time, long before it became her own chosen mode of expression. During the political unrest of South Africa in the 1970s, Maduna’s mother took photographs of herself and her loved ones, often posing in their school uniforms, and in doing so created photographic repositories that portrayed the self in a different light to the reality of extreme disruption and despair of the time. Maduna reads this as an act of performance, as a “work of art” that does not mirror the lived experience of that particular time, but instead creates a new, self-chosen visual representation of time and self:

“There is a tension between history and performance and how our grandmothers and mothers put on a show for us to see them in a different light from what history portrayed them as.”

Working with these family archives granted Maduna a window into her foremothers’ past, and she is now especially appreciative of how they began the family tradition of archiving through photography:

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4 Teju Cole, ‘Disappearing Shanghai.’

“I always saw myself as the photographer in the family; but then, when my great-aunt, my grandmother and my mother’s archives surfaced, I realized that I am, in fact, not the first, but this is an inherited thing. My foremothers communicated their situations and their feelings through photography, and they were even doing it more interestingly [...] They were more creative.”

A shared impulse seems to resonate here: the urge to create for the future. To document for future generations to see, envision, and contemplate on certain eras and places through the visual world of photography. And yet, while it is her chosen medium of expression, Maduna, reminiscing about her encounters with the smoke, debris, and ash at the Jagger ruin, remains aware of the more embodied dimensions of the scenes and moment she photographs – or, in the case of the Jagger Library, of the experience in this particular archive. She calls attention not only to what can and must be captured but also to what is left uncaptured, unarchived, and incommunicable:

“That burnt smell. You can only imagine when you see the images. But that smell? Not even motion-picture could communicate that to the viewer. That’s the kind of thing you experience by being there. Everyone who went there can somehow always be returned to that sensorial memory. I just documented glimpses of what happened, but there were so many other sensations of being in that space that could not be archived.”



All photographs by Lerato Maduna

# Acts of Language, Acts of Image

**Lost Libraries,  
Burnt Archives**

**Date: February 2023**

*Danielle Bowler* is a writer, editor and musician based in Johannesburg. With bylines in multiple publications including *Dazed*, *Wanted Magazine*, *Imbiza Journal of African Writing*, *New Frame*, *Africa is a Country*, and *Moya*, her work focuses on reading, understanding, and theorising art and culture through a Black feminist lens. Danielle is a PhD fellow and researcher at The Centre for Race, Gender, and Class at the University of Johannesburg and an associate of the SARChI Chair in African Feminist Imagination.

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*Lady Skollie* is the moniker of artist Laura Windvogel (b. 1987, Cape Town, South Africa), 'skollie' being a derogatory term used to describe a 'hooligan' or 'petty criminal' in the Afrikaans language. The oxymoron is significant, as Lady Skollie's provocative use of stereotypes demand her audience engage with this duality. Working primarily on paper, Lady Skollie combines her training in printmaking with her signature use of wax crayon and ink. Her practice is immediate in its mark-making and rich in colour and detail. Using symbols and imagery from Khoi San oral history and ancient rock paintings, Lady Skollie speaks about the history of her community and their status as a marginalised segment of South African society, reflecting global issues around ethnic minorities both historically and today. Lady Skollie also addresses the "politics of lust" through questioning both existing and imaginary power structures. In 2020, Lady Skollie was announced as the 10th recipient of the esteemed FNB Art Prize and, in 2022, she won the prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art.

Danielle Bowler

With hard hats on and torches in hand, we wander through what remains of the Jagger Library's Reading Room, seeking to illuminate shadows. Now a labyrinth, boarded up, beams exposed and unstable in parts, recognition has been made an act of language: we hear what has been – “there was a cabinet holding maps here”, “a film archive there”, “water reached this height” and other signposts – as we traverse the weighted darkness. Journeying up staircases, down into the basement and around corners, we map the site of the disaster at the University of Cape Town, now made to imagine what had once been tangible.

In another act of language, as a group of writers, scholars, photographers, poets, and artists gathered to create this volume, we speak through our diverse and intersecting responses to the fire that took place on the 18th April 2021. It is now a year later, and we are attempting to find words for a vast set of feelings and ideas that arise, coalescing around the expansive question: how do you quantify loss? In doing so, we invoke its philosophical echo, too: what is it, precisely, that has been lost?

Our questions call for more than cataloguing: looking for and at the spaces in-between and reaching beyond an inventory. And as we talk, they become a reflective surface: we are speaking of this country and continent, of its histories, of institutions and, ultimately, of ourselves too. African Studies. For how do we even begin to make sense of the loss of part of a collection that includes “printed and audio-visual material on African studies and a wide array of other specialised subjects”; “more than 1 300 sub-collections of unique manuscripts and personal papers”; books and pamphlets [exceeding] “85 000 items on African studies alone”; and over 3 000 [African] films?<sup>1</sup>

Art, it often feels, offers what language cannot: a synthesis, reflection, and distillation of what is too vast, too difficult or complex to express in a single work. Or perhaps, it simply provides a place to begin – an opening, a gesture. As our words filled the room, ricocheted and riffed on each other, themes of knowledge, creativity, pain, identity, trauma, access, loss, history, recovery, and violence filled the space between question and answer. And among us was an artist whose body of work has consistently navigated these thematic pathways, often through fluid references to fire: Lady Skollie.

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1 Niemah Davids, ‘Devastation as historical UCT buildings gutted by runaway fire’, *University of Cape Town*, 19 April 2021, <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2021-04-19-devastation-as-historic-uct-buildings-gutted-by-runaway-fire>

An alumna of Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town, Laura Windvogel – who works under the moniker Lady Skollie – has crafted a practice that deftly works with subversion, humour, bright and compelling colour palettes, and pointed captions to confront contemporary realities head-on – aiming her arrow dead-centre with uncompromising critique.

“Fire has always been part of my practice”, she explains as we discuss her contribution to this volume over a Zoom call.<sup>2</sup> In the artist’s considerations of gendered violence, coloured identity and culture, enduring legacies of colonialism, slavery and apartheid, and more, her paintings and lithographs speak of fire in multiplicity, often as metaphor and symbol. At her hand, it becomes a source of rebirth, togetherness, catharsis, retaliation, and ritual to speak to the present, as she grounds her use of fire in storytelling, mythology, spirituality, religion, and indigenous traditions – particularly of the Khoi and San peoples.

*Fire with Fire* – Lady Skollie’s solo show with Tyburn Gallery at FNB Joburg Art Fair in 2017 – was a reference, direct challenge, and response to the idea that “you can’t fight fire with fire”. The work within it speaks to “catharsis, revenge, violence and being a woman in South Africa”.<sup>3</sup> One of the paintings from that exhibition appears here: *JUMP: Escape from the Burning Tower* (2017). On Instagram, the artist states that the painting “depicts a woman jumping out of the top of a burning tower pursued by men.”<sup>4</sup> Her post further sets forth:

“She throws herself into the consuming fire instead of getting caught by the throng of men behind her. In SA we are made to sacrifice ourselves, over and over choosing the fire just before getting caught.”<sup>5</sup>

In *Good & Evil*, her 2020 show at Circa Gallery in Johannesburg, another work, *Burning Bush, Shield Your Eyes, The Truth is Ugly and Bright* (2020), draws on the Bible, referencing God appearing to Moses as a burning bush and instructing him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and to a land of “milk and honey”. The painting is its own revelation alight, speaking to our slave histories and the foundational realities of sexual violence in South Africa – as Pumla

2 Laura Windvogel, pers. comm., 28 September 2022.

3 Lady Skollie (@ladyskollie), ‘In 2017 I opened a show titled FIRE WITH FIRE’, Instagram, 5 September 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B2CnSnplLBi/>

4 Lady Skollie (@ladyskollie), ‘In 2017 I opened a show titled FIRE WITH FIRE’.

5 Lady Skollie (@ladyskollie), ‘In 2017 I opened a show titled FIRE WITH FIRE’.



Artwork: *Sunrises Sunsets* (2022)



Dineo Gqola's work shows – as its figures turn away from the truth before them.<sup>6</sup> As the artist said in a walkabout of the show, cited by Zaza Hlalethwa, “I want this show to be a burning bush to you all.”<sup>7</sup> This is the heart of what her work aims for: to reveal and speak to contemporary South African realities by researching and thinking through what has come to be accepted as ‘History’ and ‘The Archive’, indigenous traditions lost and echoes, and considering how identity is made and shaped.

*Flaming Mountain* (2018), one of the works that appears in this publication, “sees fire more as a centre”, she tells me, observing that this is made visible:<sup>8</sup>

“even [in] the way those people rally together, you know, to restore and to work together to recuperate everything and get everything out [...] fire's been a thing that draws people together.”<sup>9</sup>

The painting's reference to indigenous traditions and rituals also radiates a sense of hope, as its figures, in the heart of a blaze, gaze into the starry night sky. The work most directly speaks to the fire that “ragged across the slopes of Table Mountain” and the collective salvaging efforts of library staff and over 2 000 volunteers, removing material in thousands of crates.<sup>10</sup>

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6 See, for example, Pumla Dineo Gqola, *Rape: A South African Nightmare!* (Johannesburg: MF Books, 2015); Pumla Dineo Gqola, *Female Fear Factory: Unravelling Patriarchy's Cultures of Violence* (Abuja: Cassava Republic, 2022).

7 Lady Skollie quotes by Zaza Hlalethwa, ‘Lady Skollie: A pussy power prophet delivers us from Good and Evil’, Mail & Guardian, 17 June 2019, <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-06-17-00-pussy-power-prophet-delivers-us-from-good-and-evil/>

8 Laura Windvogel, pers. comm., 28 September 2022.

9 Laura Windvogel, pers. comm., 28 September 2022.

10 ‘Jagger Library Fire: A Timeline of Developments’, *Ibali Digital Collections UCT*, accessed 5 October 2022, <https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/jagger/page/timeline>



*JUMP: Escape from the Burning Tower* (2017)

Walking into the Michaelis Gallery at Hiddings Campus, a tiny fraction of these charred materials appears in green crates gathered in the centre of the room. Large-scale images of volunteers at the library point to their provenance, as burned bookshelves take on a sculptural form, mounted on the wall. Attached to a grate, also mounted, is a piece of paper bearing the words: “The telling of alternative historical perspectives through preservation.” On cabinets of architectural drawings salvaged from the library, a prompt urges: “Write a response to the given question and take a corresponding print.” One question asks: “How would you heal this wound?”

*Of Smoke and Ash: The Jagger Library Memorial Exhibition*, curated by Jade Nair and Dr. Duane Jethro, documents salvage and recovery, while also acknowledging all that might remain unrecovered. In their curatorial statement, the curators note:



Lady Skollie, *Flaming Mountain* (2018)

“Questions about Jagger Library’s colonial heritage, the histories and politics that inform its collections and historic rights of access to the archive remain unresolved. After the fire, Jagger Library remains a site of vigorous, unfinished debate.”<sup>11</sup>

In our conversation, we ponder this debate, what remains lost and where the library might be going. For the artist:

“Even the concept of recuperating what was lost [...] how does it work? Who now has access to it? Is it [the library] a different place? Is it going to be the same type of place and trying to get the same things back?”<sup>12</sup>

Her questions and reckoning are critical in the wake of controversies around the processes and ideas being imagined for the library’s future.<sup>13</sup>

For, in Lady Skollie’s acts of image, she leans into questioning and into fire – unafraid to deal with difficulties head on and to pose radical critique in paint. In *Invisible Arrows, All Destroyed* (2021), she paints a compelling portrait of self-determination, as the central figure’s leans her head into the fire, seeking its cleansing power, while destroying all the poisonous arrows – opinions and ideas – that have been aimed at her across time and experience.

And in *Burning Suns*, multiple suns rise, their rays ablaze – both rising and setting at the same time. The painting, she says, speaks to “the fire in itself as a symbol [...] of a new dawn for the library, or what it represents”, even with and through immeasurable, unquantifiable loss and in the entangled complexities of what it means to map the pathways of its future.<sup>14</sup> Her work with fire, in its range, reach, and reckoning, is ultimately a reminder that in imagining a future for the library, we are simultaneously imagining our own.

All artworks by Lady Skollie.

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11 Duane Jethro and Jade Nair, ‘Curatorial Statement: *Of Smoke and Ash: The Jagger Library Memorial Exhibition, Ibali Digital Collections UCT*, April 2022, <https://ibali.uct.ac.za/s/of-smoke-and-ash/page/curatorial-statement>

12 Laura Windvogel, pers. comm., 28 September 2022.

13 Nadia Krige, ‘Reimagining the Jagger Library – together’, University of Cape Town, 1 August 2022, <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2022-08-01-reimagining-the-jagger-library-together>; Rebecca Davis, ‘Dark days: Accusations of capture and governance instability rock UCT’, *Davily Maverick*, 3 October 2022, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-10-03-dark-days-accusations-of-capture-and-governance-instability-rock-uct/>

14 Laura Windvogel, pers. comm., 28 September 2022.



Lady Skollie, *Invisible Arrows, All Destroyed* (2021)

What surfaces when a library is burnt, an archive lost?  
What emerges from the ashes and ruins?

Danielle Bowler  
Nicola Brandt  
Sophie Cope  
Dag Henrichsen  
Duane Jethro  
Atiyah Khan  
Bongani Kona  
Lerato Maduna  
Portia Malatjie  
Sindi-Leigh McBride  
Nisha Merit  
Santu Mofokeng  
Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja  
Jade Nair  
Masande Ntshanga  
Koleka Putuma  
Julia Rensing  
Lorena Rizzo  
Ruth Sacks  
Niren Tolsi  
Eugene van der Merwe  
Laura Windvogel  
Carine Zaayman