

Self-representation in the works of Busisiwe Nzama: An analysis of the Frida ‘little travellers’ and more

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Abstract

The focus of this article is on ‘little travellers’, a form of figure making associated with Woza Moya, an arts and craft project based in Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal. This article tracks and analyses the creation of two variations of the Frida ‘little traveller’ created by a Woza Moya bead artist, Busisiwe Nzama, in partnership with the Director of the project, Paula Thomson. My data-gathering process was conducted over an eleven-month period of observations interspersed with conversations, photographing and interviews with the objective of deepening an understanding of the co-design and co-creation process between a stakeholder from the arts and craft non-governmental sector and societal practice partners. The study conducted found that an analysis of this process of partnership allows a deepened understanding of the historical realities of an individual expressed through beadworks. Some ‘little travellers’ by Nzama take their inspiration from the work of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. As with Kahlo, much of Nzama’s work is concerned with self-representation. While Nzama and Kahlo treat the subject of self-representation differently, both artists indicate ways in which the self becomes infused in a work of art. This aspect of the ‘little travellers’ conceptualisation enables me to explore the similarities between Nzama and Kahlo’s bodies of work.

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Introduction to the Hillcrest Aids Centre Trust and Woza Moya

Woza Moya, which translates to 'come winds of change', is a socially engaged arts and craft project that was established in the late 1990s. It is located in Hillcrest in the outer western part of Durban. It is one of two projects under the economic empowerment focus area of the Hillcrest Aids Centre Trust (HACT), an organisation founded in 1990. The HACT adopts a holistic, family-centric and asset-based approach¹ to tackling illness while striving at all times to deliver practical, sustainable and community-led projects and services (Hillcrest Aids Centre Trust 2019). Addressing hospice and palliative care for the HACT requires an approach that involves the participation of different stakeholders. Embedded in medicine and nursing practice, a holistic health care approach is described as 'not a different medical or treatment method, but rather a different philosophy on how to approach health' (Papathanasiou, Sklavou & Kourkout 2013:1; also defined similarly by Morse & Chung 2003). It is different in the sense that this approach aims at unifying the bio-psycho-social aspects of an individual through regarding the human being as a whole (Papathanasiou *et al.* 2013:1; Kress *et al.* 2015:1744).

During the initial years of the HACT, HIV presented unforeseen complexities for the nurses and doctors. The Director and head nurse recounted during a conversation with me that a patient would seek care and be assisted with healthcare. The patient would then be in a better state and would return to their homes. However, a week later the same patient would be back at the hospice requiring healthcare once again. Reflecting on this unfortunate and unsustainable occurrence, the nurse, amongst others at the centre, realised that illness in this context was more than a health issue, since it traversed and impacted many facets of a person's existence negatively. For the HACT, it was insufficient to address illness alone without addressing other problems, such as unemployment, which was considerably high in the area.

In this regard, I understand the way in which the HACT addressed illness through the concept of a 'wicked problem', a term coined by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber (1973). The authors' thesis posits that social problems cannot be addressed through scientific solutions solely, since problems do not have a straightforward answer. Instead, the authors propound the approach of 'learning to see social processes as the links tying open systems into large and interconnected networks of systems, such that outputs from one becomes inputs to others' (Rittel & Webber 1973:159). True to the nature of wicked problems is the task of 'identifying the actions that might effectively narrow the gap between what-is and what-ought-to-be [as] we seek to improve the effectiveness of actions in pursuit of valued outcomes' (Rittel & Webber 1973:159). Likewise, the

intervention strategy at the HACT required dealing with the fuzzy issues of the problem and acting differently by going beyond the initial practices of addressing health solely, but also through embarking on a holistic approach such as the interaction between health and the arts. The creation of beadwork at Woza Moya is led by a process of interaction and co-creation between the HACT stakeholders, including Paula Thomson, who is a trained fine artist, and societal practice partners such as bead artists, most of whom learnt the technique from older female relatives and have been creating beadwork before Woza Moya was established. Since it is developed as an income generating project of the HACT, Woza Moya started as a way to enable patients who sought help from the hospice and were identified by nurses and the counselling department as needing, to earn an income (Thomson [sa]).² Over many years of experimenting with various forms of beaded products, Thomson (2019a) mentioned in a personal interview that they experimented with various techniques and eventually came up with patterns which are now known as the Woza beadwork style.

Background to the Woza beadwork style

The name Woza beadwork style derives from Woza Moya and started in the early 2000s. This style may be regarded as the type situated under the aegis of contemporary beadwork practices. It is also a name coined by Thompson, who is the Director of the project, as a tribute to the custom of naming beadwork styles from KwaZulu-Natal province. As discussed in scholarly texts, the Woza style follows the way other styles were developed and named. These beadwork styles are named for the locales in which they are created, for example, the Eshowe style, Ndwedwe style, Drakensberg style and Msinga style, are all named after areas in the province (Jolles 1993; van Wyk 2003; Boram-Hays 2005; Gatfield 2019). There is also the iNanda style associated with the *iBandla lamaNazareth* church and named so as a result of the church headquarters site being in iNanda (Leeb-du Toit 2015). Scholars such as Bronwyn Brottem and Ann Lang (1973), Frank Jolles (1993), Jean Morris and Eleanor Preston-Whyte (1994), Robert Papini (2004), Carol Boram-Hays (2005), N.G. Biyela (2013) and Anitra Nettleton (2014) all focus on the making of beadwork through the combination of certain colours and patterns for each style.

There are various characteristics and qualities designated as representing the Woza style. Amongst these are the three-dimensional beading techniques expressed as fruits or flowers, as well as what is called the *chashaza*, which directly translates to 'pop'. *Chashaza* at Woza Moya means a combination of various colours in a given work. Out of the many colours, an accent colour is incorporated to stand out, that is, to "pop". The focus of the article, however, is on another quality associated with Woza Moya, called the 'little travellers', which is a particular form of figure making. Although there are

a large number of characters within the 'little traveller' range, the work presented in this article tracks and analyses the creation of two variations of the Frida 'little travellers' created by a Woza Moya bead artist, Busisiwe Nzama (Figure 1). While associated with her, the designing process itself is a collaboration between her and Thomson. This article tracks the co-design and co-creation process between the two. My data gathering process took place over an eleven-month period and entailed interacting with the bead artist as well as with the Director. Although Thomson is the Director, she is also involved in the early stages of the design process for most beaded items. The data gathering process involved observations, conversations and photographing, as well as two sets of formal interviews. The aim of this endeavour was to understand the collaborative beadmaking process between Thomson and Nzama.³



FIGURE **Nº 1**



The two Frida 'little travellers' created by B. Nzama. Photo: P. Thomson. Used with permission.

Nzama's work, and to some extent her journey as an individual, seem to parallel certain aspects of Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo, who is the subject of Nzama's current work. This claim is made because during fieldwork, I discovered past 'little travellers' by the bead artist in which the theme of self-representation was evident. As it will be shown in this article, these items by Nzama indicate ways in which she expresses herself, the beader, as a mother, a spiritual being and as an artist who constantly expands her catalogue of characters. These layers of Nzama's identity are understood as the multiplicities of Africana womanism, a concept coined and developed by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1998) to denote continental Africans and Africans in the diaspora. Hudson-Weems (1998:24) explains that womanism 'focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women'. Furthermore, the author conceptualises and associates the Africana womanist with being a self-namer and self-definer, and a family-centred, strong, whole, spiritual, mothering and nurturing woman, amongst other things (Hudson-Weems 1998). For these reasons, this article demonstrates that when doing an analysis of the design and creation process, certain aspects of historical realities, which are expressed through beadwork, are unearthed by the investigator.

While some works of Nzama and Kahlo parallel each other for their shared theme of self-representation, their take on the subject is also quite different. Through the 'little travellers' series, Nzama presents, on the one hand, an affirmative, optimistic and positive representation of self. Kahlo's portraits, on the other hand, are often about her mental and physical suffering. In the South African context, a comparative genre of women depicting suffering through works of art are the women from *Amazwi abesifazane* (Voices of women). This embroidery project started as a reaction to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with the aim of collecting stories of memory and reflection completed on embroidered cloth. These blocks of fabric on which an individual's reflection and memory are inscribed are called memory cloths. Carol Becker (2004:118) explains that the embroidered works 'focus [on] the often-undocumented lives of [...] women, many of whom are from the rural areas and townships that suffered extreme acts of violence during the decades of apartheid'. Murder, illness and sexual abuse are some subjects visited in these memory cloths. Therefore, the rationale for associating Nzama's work with Kahlo's is to show that though representing the self can adopt a different mood and tone, it forms an imperative element that is infused in a body of work. In Kahlo's case, it is in her paintings that she explores the self, while Nzama uses the 'little travellers' series to invoke the self.

The beginning of the 'little travellers' project

Since 'little travellers' are figures, it is important that some aspects of the history of figure- and doll-mak-ing in the South African context is considered ahead of looking

at the practice specific to Woza Moya. According to Morris and Preston-Whyte (1994:54), certain types of figures formed part of entertainment for young girls while others, made by young women of marriageable age, were offered to lovers who sometimes hung them over their shoulders on beaded strings. Once facial features were incorporated in the design of the figures, the meaning changed to no longer signal an interest in a lover, but rather to attract a tourist market (Morris & Preston-Whyte 1994; Jolles 1994). Frank Jolles (1994) further states that a traceable period for the trade of these types of dolls in Natal goes as far back as the 1930s. The use of the word “dolls” as an all-encompassing term has, however, attracted debate for its infantilising implications. One such debate is by Elizabeth Dell (1998).

In her introductory essay to *Evocations of the Child*, Dell (1998:11) discusses the importance of interrogating and distinguishing between figures made for play and sale, and those used within the context of courtship and marriage. Dell (1998:11) indicates that the term “dolls” ‘allowed them to be dismissed as lightweight, the plaything of the child’. For this reason, the word “doll” is used when referring to figures created for play, while the phrase “child figures” is applied when referring to fecundity. While it is unclear what the purchaser does with ‘little travellers’, their design is finished off with brooch pins, implying that they are designed for a purpose other than play. In addition, the ‘little travellers’ that are discussed later in the article were created by Nzama to self-represent, and not for play. It is for these reasons that the word “doll” is insufficient and “figures” is a more appropriate term for purposes of this article.

Morris and Preston-Whyte (1994:54) assert that figure-making in KwaZulu-Natal was practiced mainly in the Msinga region. According to Jolles (1994; 1998) there are two methods of the making process. In his studies, Jolles (1994:58; 1998:105) uses KwaLatha as a location and explains that:

The first category may be subdivided into figures of clay and figures created from corncobs and cloth. Clay figures are made by both boys and girls. The clay, found in only a few places in the valleys, is generally sandy and fairly coarse [...] After being moulded into shape and allowed to dry completely, the figures are placed on a bed of dry grass in a shallow hole in the ground and covered with a large quantity of dry cow dung, which is set alight [...] The slow firing makes possible the incorporation of glass beads for features such as eyes and mouth.⁴

The second category stated by Jolles (1994) is also explained by Carol Boram-Hays (2000:342) as figures ‘made of a core of fibrous material covered in cloth and beadwork. The cloth was gathered at the neck so that the form consisted of a round head and a tubular body. The face was outlined with beads sewn into a circle on the front of the round top, but facial features were never added’. Some of these forms and figures within the fertility realm were found by myself in the collections of the Durban-based *Phansi*

Museum (Figures 2 and 3). The patterning and colour combination of the beads on these figures resembled the regional beading style associated with the geographical location of Msinga.



FIGURE N° 2



Fertility figure. Artist and date unrecorded. Phansi Museum. Photo: K. Mchunu.

Beaded figures made by women that fall under the contemporary style category were sold on the roadsides or, at times, in curio shops. It is recorded that the selling of these beaded figures on the roadside started around the mid-1960s (Boram-Hays 2000:342). Preston-Whyte (1991) focuses on the work of two Mchunu clans – the Mchunu of Sithumba and the Mchunu of Ndwedwe. Thembi Mchunu, a creator of beaded figures, is credited with having spearheaded the development of these contemporary styles. While Mchunu eventually began incorporating animals as part of her works for sale, she initially started with human figures that included, as Preston-Whyte (1991:67) puts it, ‘an array of figures, some big and some small, and each dressed in [different outfits] that the creator herself would wear.’ Some of her work was presented in the *tableau vivant* style, which draws on the activities and locales of the artists. When presented in this style, the works invite viewers into aspects of the bead artist’s life. Considering this history, the ‘little travellers’ range of figures should be regarded as building on the practice of using figure-making as an inscription of aspects of one’s life.



FIGURE **Nº 3**



Fertility figure. Artist and date unrecorded. Phansi Museum. Photo: K. Mchunu.

Formerly called the 'little travellers' HIV/Aids project, the initiative was started in 2002 and these character figurines were created for flea markets, conferences and schools. At the time of fieldwork, the 'little travellers' that I found ranged between about 4cm to 14.5cm in height. The underlying construction of 'little travellers' entails a piece of cloth that gets twisted and filled with batting to construct a human form. This is then covered

and shaped with differently coloured beads to depict a character associated with its specific beadworker. The figure is finished off with either a brooch pin or safety pin at the back. The technique of using beads to cover a filler suggests that the *gongqoloza* method is employed. According to Sandra Klopper (1992) and Boram-Hays (2000), this technique dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century in Zululand and Natal.

The choice of the name 'little travellers' was explained by Thomson (2019b) in an email communication: 'The initial name was 'little friends' and while the artist was selling them at a flea market, one customer returned on a weekly basis to purchase a new one to wear as an accessory. While wearing the 'little friends', the customer encountered other people who, out of curiosity, would ask about them. After hearing the story about the 'little friends' creation, they would be desperate to have one themselves, to the point of taking the one the owner would be wearing.' This had a ripple effect, as the next person would experience the same, which led to the circulation of these beaded figures. This became, as Thomson (2019b) put it a case of 'these 'little friends' hitch-hiking and travelling from person to person and to different parts of the world.' Woza Moya then formally changed the name to 'little travellers'. A passport was designed on which each 'little traveller' gets placed as part of the packaging.⁵ As noted earlier, while it is not known what happens to the 'little travellers' after an individual has bought them from the craft hub, Woza Moya makes an effort to track the different parts of the world where these figures have landed. For example, Figure 4 shows the 'little travellers' in Washington. Figures 5 and 6 are photographs included on their Instagram page and shows the 'little travellers' in Greece and Rome.⁶

The inspiration for the 'little travellers' is drawn from a range of sources. There are, amongst others, Rastafarians, *izangoma*, surfers, mermaids, witches, *doek*-wearing women and ballerinas included in the repertoire. Commission requests also determine the identity of these figures. One of the biggest commissions was placed in the early 2000s when Woza Moya showcased at an exhibition in Cape Town. The work on show attracted world-renowned Japanese fashion designer, Issey Miyake, who commissioned Woza Moya to recreate some miniature look-alikes drawn from his fashion collection at that time. There is also evidence of what seems to be subjects drawn from the personal lives of the makers, captured in the names of some 'little travellers' found at the Woza Moya craft hub. These works were given personalised titles, such as Bongji Rasta Girl, Mzi the Gardener, Joyce the Sangoma, Siphon the Groom and Zondikile *gogo* and baby (Figures 7 to 12). The discovery of these specifically named 'little travellers' suggests ways in which this form of making at Woza Moya became a way through which the bead artists invited viewers to aspects of their lives by creating 'beaded portraits' of people with whom they shared personal relationships.



FIGURE **Nº 4**



Superman and Batman 'little travellers' by Nzama in Washington. Photographer unknown. Shared by P. Thomson and used with permission.

This form of beadmaking, that is, the kind that invites viewers into aspects of one's life, is considered in this article through the lens of self-representation, which, in the words of Liza Blakewell (1993:167), shows an 'understanding of contemporary constructions of self'. While her current work does not use personal subjects, Nzama's past work moves in tandem with one of her current subjects, Frida Kahlo. Ahead of discussing Nzama's work it is pertinent to give some background and context to Kahlo. Given the myriads of writings about Kahlo, this article does not focus on the artist comprehensively, but rather gives context to some of her works in order to cement the concept of self-representation through works of art.



16 likes

woza_moya #littletravellerturns15
#travellerfar
#spreadlove
#Greece
#London
#Capetown

10 May 2017

FIGURE N° 5



'Little traveller' in Greece. Photographer unknown. Sourced from the Woza Moya Instagram account. Used with permission.



29 likes

woza_moya It's always so exciting when we receive pictures from customers showing us all the exotic places that our Travellers have visited.

#Rome
#travelfar
#spreadlove
#littletravellerturns15

10 May 2017

FIGURE **N° 6**



'Little traveller' in Rome. Photographer unknown. Sourced from the Woza Moya Instagram account. Used with permission.



FIGURE **N° 7**



'Bongji Rasta girl 'little traveller'. Photo: Q. Dladla. Used with permission.



FIGURE **N° 8**



Mzi the gardener 'little traveller'. Photo: Q. Dladla. Used with permission.



FIGURE **N° 9**



Joyce the Sangoma 'little traveller'. Photo: Q. Dladla. Used with permission.



FIGURE **N° 10**



Siphon the groom 'little traveller'. Photo: Q. Dladla. Used with permission.



FIGURE **Nº 11**



Mbali the flower 'little traveller'. Photo: Q. Dladla. Used with permission.



FIGURE **Nº 12**



Zondikile gogo and baby 'little traveller'. Photo: Q. Dladla. Used with permission.

Frida Kahlo and her paintings

Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderon was born to a German immigrant father, Guillermo Kahlo, and a Mexican mestiza mother, Matilde Calderon y Gonzalez, as the third of four daughters of the couple (Dosamantes-Beaudry 2001:6) in Coyoacán, Mexico on 6 July 1907 (Herrera 1983; Blakewell 1993; Dosamantes-Beaudry 2001; Pankl & Blake 2012).⁷ Guillermo however, had two other daughters from a previous marriage. Kahlo's father was christened with the name Wilhelm Kahl, and on arrival to Mexico changed it to Guillermo Kahlo. Guillermo worked as a photographer and owned a photography studio in Mexico City (Herrera 1983). Before the outbreak of the Mexican revolution, Kahlo worked as her father's assistant on some photographic projects commissioned by the government (Dosamantes-Beaudry 2001:8).

Kahlo's relationship with her father and his influence on her art is a well-documented subject (Herrera 1983; Dosamantes-Beaudry 2001; Lent 2007). In the biography by Hayden Herrera (1983), Guillermo is said to have stimulated Kahlo's intellectual adventurousness, which included reading books and going to nearby parks to collect pebbles, insects and rare plants. Additionally, her role as Guillermo's assistant during photographic projects also played an influential role on Kahlo's style of portraiture, such as the tiny brush strokes which are a prominent feature in her oeuvre and a style for which she is well-known. The manner in which Guillermo retouched photographs in his projects and the stiff formality of his portraits are singled out by Herrera (1983) as some of the influences that can be seen in Kahlo's own portraits.

For the purpose of this article, and to explore self-representation in the works of Nzama, attention is paid to similar auto-biographical aspects in some works by Kahlo. In the following paintings by Kahlo, aspects of gender, class, ethnicity and national identity are presented as intrinsic to the presentation of the self. While portraiture plays a role, it is not an essential aspect and in some works, Kahlo's physical presence is absent. However, through iconological allegory she maintains aspects of representation and identity in the work. One example is the painting, *My Grandparents, My Parents and I* (1936). Stylistically, the work is structured along the family tree concept in which her paternal and maternal grandparents, parents, child and foetus (both possibly Kahlo) are depicted and linked together by a red ribbon that visually resembles the umbilical cord tying the foetus to the mother. In the analysis of the work, Joann Latimer (2009:46) explains that it embodies the complexities and multiplicities of Kahlo's inheritance in terms of gender, class and ethnicity.

Another painting that addresses the subject of identity is *The Two Fridas* (1939) which shows two adult Fridas holding hands. There is the Mexican Frida who wears Tehuana

clothes and the European colonial Frida who wears a high-necked blouse. Irma Dosamantes-Beaudry (2001:10) observes that the European Frida is unable to stop her haemorrhaging heart from bleeding and may be drawing blood from the Mexican Frida. The subject of the bleeding heart is linked to the period during which the work was completed, a time when her husband, the artist Diego Rivera, initiated divorce proceedings against Kahlo. It is well documented that she used her German, Spanish and Mexican ethnic identities in her work and the differing clothes that the two Fridas wear in this painting is one such example. The infusion of the Tehuana dress, which is known as Kahlo's signature look, appears in many other works such as *Frida and Diego Rivera* (1931a), *My Dress Hangs There* (1933) *Memory, the Heart* (1937a) and *Itzcuintli Dog with Me* (1938). *My Dress Hangs There* forms the unit of analysis in the article by Alba Aragón (2015). Kahlo also created portraits of those close to her. This can be seen in her early paintings of the 1920s, continuing until the early 1950s. Examples include portraits of Cristina Kahlo y Calderón (1928a), Alejandro Gómez Arias (1928b), Eva Frederick (1931b), Dr Leo Eloesser (1931c) and Diego Rivera (1937b). These are paintings of her sister, boyfriend at the time, a close friend, a doctor who treated her for a persistent pain in her right leg and her husband respectively. Portraits from the later period include *Portrait of Mrs. Natasha Gelman* (1943) and *Portrait of My Father* (1951).

Nzama and Kahlo have also created works commissioned by government and large companies. For example, the Mexican diplomat, Eduardo Morillo commissioned Kahlo to paint portraits of some of his family members, including the well-known portrait of his mother Doña Rosita Morillo (1944). Likewise, Nzama participated in a project commissioned by Toyota Corolla for Woza Moya to create a 12m x 9m beaded billboard inspired by *ucu* (commonly known as the Zulu love letter). Although their commissioned works can be understood as another parallel between both women, the focus of this article is limited to the examples in which self-representation is evident.

Description and analysis of Nzama's Frida 'little traveller' and others

Busisiwe Nzama was born and raised in KwaNyuswa and now resides in Inchanga with her children and grandchildren. Before joining Woza Moya in 2006, she was affiliated with the Clothing Scheme, which is another economic empowerment project of the HACT. In the Clothing Scheme, individuals purchase a bag of second-hand clothes for a fee, determine their own selling price, and re-sell the clothes to generate an income (Hillcrest Aids Centre Trust 2019). While a member of the Clothing Scheme, Nzama encountered a woman who was affiliated with Woza Moya. The project was completing a large order of beaded Aids ribbons. She became curious and asked to participate, and the beaded ribbon became her first product and her entry into Woza Moya. Nzama

(2019a) revealed in a personal interview that through being associated with Woza Moya, she joined the 'little traveller' project and this is how the creation of her figures started.

The creation of the 'little travellers' series is informed by Thomson who responds to customer suggestions and does her own research before proposing the idea to a beadworker. There are instances when Thomson sketches designs from the beginning and discusses it with an identified beadworker. Thomson (2019c) said in a personal interview that:

I take what happens in the shop and I am able to communicate that to the crafters [...] it is like a constant flow of what is needed, what is wanted and passing on that information onto the crafters and fulfilling that. And it goes into the shop, and then something else is needed, wanted and it flows back.

When asked what she does after the idea for a 'little traveller' has been proposed, Nzama (2019a) responded that 'I start by Googling. At times I get told to Google a certain thing and see if I am able to create it. If I am able to do it then it becomes my order'. The implications of Thomson's involvement in the creative process means that the works of beadworkers align with customer demands, which maximises the potential of renewing and growing the library of products in the Woza Moya catalogue. Additionally, although Nzama has creative freedom in her process, before a product can be sold at the craft hub, she consults with Thomson, who gives regular feedback on a product. The feedback includes comments on the quality of the work as well as the combination of colours, amongst other things.

The images of Frida were started when I began fieldwork in February 2019. These images were printed out by Thomson, and Nzama also downloaded and saved a few on her cellular phone device. There is a level of heterogeneity in the creative process that sees the involvement of the customer in idea suggestion, Thomson relaying and generating the idea, and together with Nzama, executing and creating the customer-suggested idea. At the creative inception of the Kahlo 'little traveller' design, Thomson, who is a trained artist, introduced the grid technique which is widely used in fine art and graphic design. This sees intersecting vertical and horizontal lines drawn over the downloaded images of Frida Kahlo (Figure 13) which becomes a helpful guide for Nzama to organise bead and colour placement for the creation of the 'little travellers'.

Their 'co-creative partnership', a term used by Ingrid Mulder (2018), has thus far resulted in two versions of Frida Kahlo, the first being the painting *Self-portrait dedicated to Leon Trotsky* (1937c). This self-portrait shows Kahlo wearing an orange or salmon-coloured dress edged with a pleated white panel, a shawl over her shoulders, and holding a piece of paper and a bouquet of flowers. Nzama then transforms this image into a 5cm x 5cm



FIGURE N^o 13



The downloaded images of Frida Kahlo with the grid technique lines. Photo: K. Mchunu.

'little traveller' that combines various beadwork techniques such as the *umgoqgoloza*, dotting and bead fabric methods (Figure 1). Obtaining the source of the image for the second 'little traveller' proved challenging, however, it is probable that this was a photograph taken by fashion photographer, Nickolas Muray, with whom Kahlo had a brief relationship between the years 1938 and 1939 when she separated from Rivera (Soutar 2011:175). The beaded version by Nzama, as informed by the image, shows Kahlo's signature style of a full *falda* skirt in blue and black huipil blouse with spots of multi-coloured beads that represent the embroidery associated with these Mexican blouses. Multi-coloured beads dotted against a black field is a style associated with the Ndwedwe region in the Valley of a Thousand Hills and also the *isinyolovane* beading style of the Msinga region (Figure 1). Thomson (2019c) reflected on the creation process of this item, explaining that products emerge through Nzama's artistic agency. She notes that 'I just gave [Nzama] a little picture of Frida or three photos' and she combined 'elements from all three to make one'. The second Frida 'little traveller' is Nzama's own version, created through combining different elements of the various visual imagery she received from Thomson and downloaded by herself.

Woza Moya runs four stores located in the Hillcrest, Kloof, Embo and Durban areas and adopts what is called a “basket approach”. The impetus for establishing this approach was based on the reality that attaining orders on a monthly basis is unguaranteed. Using this approach, the beadworkers continue to generate an income by producing stock for these different stores when there are minimal customer orders. Used as a way to impart ownership of a product, the “basket approach” means that each beadworker is responsible for a particular design in the store and this is regarded as internal intellectual property. The “baskets” may be literally filled with ‘little travellers’, which are actually presented in a basket, or this can be a conceptual notion in instances where the products are presented on a rail. Thompson (2019) explained: ‘When a crafter makes something that is new, they have ownership of that design, so they will be responsible for the production of that item’. Nzama has established herself at Woza Moya as a creator of popular figures through the ‘little traveller’ approach. Her other subjects include Superman, Superwoman, Xavier, Hulk, Batman, Desmond Tutu, as well as the Dalai Lama. An earlier work also used the 2010 World Cup as inspiration when she created miniature versions of some Bafana Bafana soccer players. Therefore, the evolution of the Frida ‘little travellers’ series means that these products have been added to Nzama’s “basket” and are a unique example of her proliferating artistry.

According to Blakewell (1993:171), the consideration of Kahlo and her self-portraits are understood as Kahlo offering viewers of her work a small window into her world. This implies how the life and works of Kahlo contribute to our understanding of contemporary construction of self (Blakewell 1993:167). Pankl and Blake (2012:1) and Aragón (2015:520) examine the geographical and historical context of Kahlo, stating that the *Fridamania*, *Fridolatry* or *Kahloism*, which are terms that speak to how during the 1990s onwards (even from 1980s to some extent) she has been incorporated as a subject in fashion, film, feminist discourse and art, ‘continues to multiply at an astonishing pace in the current milieu’. Although Nzama uses Kahlo as a subject, she also uses herself and those around her as subjects. This self-referential process is undoubtedly evident in earlier works of Nzama, which similarly invite viewers to her world through her own construction of self.

While observing the creation of the Frida ‘little travellers’, Thomson unveiled a treasured box that archived what appeared to be indexes into the lives of some earlier Woza Moya beadworkers (Figure 14). These archived figures included self-portraits of the beadworkers when read singularly, but when considered collectively, they represented a form of a family album told through beaded figures. Although in form and proportion these earlier pieces were not as polished as the current ones, they are nonetheless predecessors to the current depiction of people who are meaningful to the creators of ‘little travellers’ and a small access into the world of the early experimenters as well as the multiplicities and rich tapestries of the individuals who created them.



FIGURE N^o 14



The 'little travellers' found in archives. Photo: K. Mchunu.

In these archived 'little travellers', Nzama's earlier work was also included, and when asked about the process of creating them, she explained that she was involved in a product development project that included using cameras to capture subjects as inspiration that would eventually be created into 'little travellers' (Figure 15). The first of three depictions that were discovered in the archives was a figure of a young woman wearing an orange dress, accessorised with an orange and black bag, orange hairband and black shoes. This was Nzama's daughter. Nzama (2019b) explained that,

I created this one, my child, the one who is here [at Woza Moya]. She once came home wearing this outfit, I decided to create her wearing that outfit. She had an orange dress and an orange jersey. She used to wear this and I decided to create her exactly like this.

In an earlier interview, Nzama (2019a) explained the reason that she joined Woza Moya:

I had a problem when I joined. My child was sick and the child needed help and I did not know what was wrong with her. So, I went to a certain person in Nchanga who is also a community helper as you find here. The woman could not help with giving me huge orders but thought the help she could give was to write me a letter to bring here at Woza Moya which I did. When I got here, because my

child needed to be watched all the time and I couldn't be here all the time, before making beadwork I started with selling second-hand clothing.

The daughter depicted in the orange dress was the reason that Nzama went to the HACT and eventually joined Woza Moya as a bead artist. While initially in an ill state, Nzama depicted her daughter in a healthy state as a 'little traveller'. When considering the purpose of the camera project, which was to capture meaningful subjects as inspiration for works, with the inclusion and subsequent depiction of her daughter as she did, it is interpreted that the relationship Nzama shares with her daughter is an important and meaningful one.



FIGURE **Nº 15**



Nzama's archived 'little travellers'. Daughter and two Nzama 'little travellers'. Photo: K. Mchunu.

Additionally, during the same interview, she also mentioned a missing 'little traveller', which was the depiction of her sons in his karate training gear. She explained that she photographed her two sons and those of her neighbours in their karate gear. Nzama (2019b) explained further that karate classes were meaningful activities in her community since these classes keep children engaged in a form of exercise. This is another important aspect she preferred sharing with others about her community. Using her children as subjects in her creation process – in particular within the frame of representing aspects

of self – is an inscription of Nzama the bead artist as mother. The relationship of mother and child also features in the works of Kahlo, such as *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932a) and *My Birth* (1932b). While Kahlo's tone in these works is understandably sombre as it deals with a miscarriage – something she had to deal with on multiple occasions – Nzama's tone leans more towards a brighter and hopeful message. Through the 'little travellers', she replaces illness with health, as explained with the 'little traveller' of her daughter. Nzama also settles for an activity she regards as healthy for her son and for the rest of her community.

A second 'little traveller' found in the archived work was a woman in church uniform attire – a black skirt, white blouse with a red collar, and a white hat. This figure was a depiction of a congregant of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. When asked about this 'little traveller', Nzama (2019b) explained that this was herself in her own church uniform and that she chose to depict herself in this way because faith and spirituality are important and meaningful aspects of her identity. A third 'little traveller' was a woman in red pants paired with a black top which had trimmings in gold and red along the hem. The centre of the black top included the same gold and red beads as embellishment created through the dotting technique. The 'little traveller' carried a black bag and, like the 'little traveller' in the orange dress, she also wore a hairband in black, red and gold beads. This, as the bead artist revealed, was a depiction of herself donning her fancier and favourite attire at the time; it was an important attire and described as something of a confidence booster. This outfit was described in these terms, since whenever she wore it, people would praise her on how good she looked. Moreover, she mentioned that this outfit still exists, however, does not fit her as well as it did before. As a result, it has now been passed down to her daughter, the one depicted in the orange attire.

While these were depicted as once experimental 'little travellers', the inclusion of clothing and what they mean to Nzama is paralleled with the Tehauna dress and the meaning it held for Kahlo. Dress as a sign of self is a point made by Aragón (2015:522) in her analysis of *My Dress Hangs There* (1933). The author also notes the changing meanings that cultural objects, such as Kahlo's dress, accrue as they circulate across geographies and symbolic systems. In this study, the meaning that Nzama's favourite outfit holds for its current owner, her daughter, may not have been determined. However, it has circulated to a new generation, with the potential to take on a different symbolic meaning to the one it held for its original owner, Nzama.

When using the notion of constructing and presenting self, it is evident that these earlier pieces of Nzama's process are inscriptions of different layers of herself. Creating her children showed the bead artist as a mother and possibly as a nurturer. Nzama also communicated the bead artist as a spiritual and religious individual who uses dress as

an expression. Amongst all these layers of identities, the bead artist was also constructed as a confident individual. Nzama's work and the co-creative partnership with Thomson, and the relationship between herself, her family and her community, indicate for me the relevance of Hudson-Weems' (1998) theory and concept of womanism embedded in the practice and creation of beaded figures. When applied in particular ways, beadwork shows how it plays a role in understanding some realities and multiplicities of bead artists. The 'little travellers' in Nzama's range have increased exponentially, with the inclusion of comic book characters drawn from the DC Comics series such as Xavier, Superman, Superwoman and Batman, as well as Hulk, a character from the Marvel comic publications.⁸ In addition to this, national figures who have been used as subjects to create new 'little travellers' include Nelson Mandela and Siya Kolisi. Though this indicates the expansion of Nzama's "basket", it also indicates the strengthening and growing collaboration and partnership between Thomson and Nzama. The growth of the range also indicates Thomson's important and influential role as an individual who informs the creative process in the 'little traveller' project.

Conclusion

In this article, the Woza style was presented as a contemporary form of beadwork, established as a way to address a 'wicked problem' through implementing a holistic, family-centric and asset-based approach to hospice and palliative health care. This approach resulted in the incorporation of the creation and sale of beaded items to establish income generation in a community context. Over many years of experimenting, the 'little traveller' project emerged, and considering the context in which it operates, that is in KwaZulu-Natal, 'little travellers' extend the figure-making practice as it has come to be known through the works of beaded figures sculptors such as Thembi Mchunu. The 'little traveller' series continues to show the relevance of beaded figures as vehicles through which viewers are invited into other layers of bead artists' lives.

There is a large number of individuals responsible for creating 'little travellers' at Woza Moya, but the focus of this article centred on Busisiwe Nzama, whose signature style uses images of popular figures such as Siya Kolisi, Hulk, Superman and Superwoman. However, one of her most popular source characters, Frida Kahlo, invited an association and comparison of the work and life of the Mexican artist with that of the bead artist. Through selected portraiture, Kahlo is shown to present herself and her multi-layered ethnicity, but also the relationship she shares with family and friends. Likewise, Nzama's archived work demonstrates her own relationship with her children and other layers of herself. Her ways of representing self showed some building blocks of Hudson-Weems' (1998) concept of womanism in which the bead artist emerges and is seen as a woman, as a mother, as a spiritual being and as a nurturer. Though this was one

example of the Woza Moya bead artist, the works by other creators of 'little travellers' offer and may expand art and design discourse by renewing ways in which figure-making can be understood as a tool through which a community talks about itself in this part of contemporary South Africa.

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Notes

1. An asset-based approach uses the capabilities, abilities, gifts, skills and social resources of the people and the community for community development endeavours (Myende & Chikoko 2014:251).
2. Although it was started to assist income generation for those who sought healthcare, contemporarily, Woza Moya is open to every individual who seeks to earn an income through the sales of arts and craft. Further to this, while the name of the organisation suggests the illness as HIV, it is not limited to providing hospice and palliative care only to those who are HIV-positive.
3. In previous studies on dollmaking, the title given to individuals from arts and craft centres, like that given to Thomson, and the role that they play in product development is that of a 'culture broker' (Preston-Whyte 1991; Jolles 1994). Drawn from the work of Bennetta Jules-Rosette (1984), amongst the many roles given to the culture broker is 'transforming traditional craft skills to meet new circumstances, particularly to meet the expectations of both the art world and the tourist trade' (Preston-Whyte 1991:75). Since Woza Moya was started as a community-led and community-centric project of the HACT with an identified social change intent, the phrase 'co-creative partnership' is more befitting for this article (Mulder 2018).
4. Though Jolles (1994) focused on the production of clay dolls in KwaLatha, some individuals have shared oral accounts of practising this form of dollmaking as far as Ladysmith, which is over 200km away from Hillcrest.
5. The conversation about the 'little travellers' happened on email on 3 May 2019.
6. While the photographer is unknown, Thomson gave me permission to use these photographs in this article.
7. Kahlo is known to have altered her date of birth to 7 July 1910 which, according to Lis Pankl and Kevin Blake (2012:3), was done to correspond to the date of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.
8. Detective (DC) Comics is an American comic book publisher founded in 1934. Further reading on it is available on the link: <https://www.dccomics.com/>. Marvel comics is also an American comic publication, started after DC Comics. Further reading in it is available on the link: <https://www.marvel.com/>

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