

# **The Proposal**

**The use of Traditional forms and processes in the design of a  
contemporary handbag range.**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Statement of Research Problem

Contemporary society has become stressed, fast and consumptive. These factors have caused many implications in society, cultures and the environment. Indigenous cultures were able to practise a lifestyle that was simple, harmonious and slow-paced. My aim is to design and create a range of contemporary handbags that are eco-friendly and that apply and reflect traditional forms and processes. My intentions are to bridge the present and future through "Slow Design" principles and our indigenous past.

## 1.2 Background to the Research Problem

I will be investigating the field of design and indigenous knowledge. By applying traditional Indigenous forms and processes alongside "Slow Design" principles in my personal context, of a Post- Modern ecological society, I will be contributing to the sustainable discourse through "Slow design", which is a moderately new field and way of life and design.

"Slow design" and Indigenous traditions and material culture, specifically the Xhosa, in the Eastern Cape, will be the base for my theoretical framework in order to show the link between the past and present, as well as Post-Modern Ecological's ideologies in terms of a lifestyle and philosophy of design, to emphasise the context that the theoretical framework will be placed in.

## 1.3 Clarification of Basic Terms and Concepts

1. **Culture:** The sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another (Farlex, 2010).
2. **Postmodern ecological society:** Postmodernist ideas in philosophy and the analysis of culture and society, which expanded the importance of critical theory and has been the point of departure for works of literature, architecture and design, as well as being visible in marketing/business and the interpretation of history, law and culture, starting in the late 20th century (Farlex, 2010).
3. **Slow Design:** "Slow" is a philosophy by Alastair Fuad-Luke to stimulate debate around the concept of 'slow design'. It links with existing thought clusters that perceive 'design' and

'slowness' as a positive influence towards more sustainable ways of living. It is an on-going dialogue; an open-ended project. (Fuad-Luke, 2003)

4. **Sustainable:** Capable of being continued with minimal long-term effect on the environment (Farlex, 2010).

## **1.4 Objectives of Research**

My practical research will reflect and signify the 'Slow Design' principles (Faud-Luke, 2003), a way of designing and a way of life, whilst adapting traditional lifestyles and material cultures to a Post-Modern ecological context. The range of handbags that I propose creating will reflect the understanding of my field research and my interpretation of a 'Slow' lifestyle through my experiences during this year.

## **1.5 Research Question**

How can diminishing indigenous cultures inspire a collection of handbags in a contemporary society?

### **Sub- Question 1**

1. What are the traditions and representations in indigenous cultures and do they still have relevance in a Post-Modern ecological society?

### **Sub- Question 2**

2. To what extent can these forms and processes be manifested into a marketable handbag range?

### **Sub- Question 3**

3. How can indigenous material culture be used to inform a collection of contemporary handbags?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

Two theories, namely 'Slow Design' and 'Post Modern ecological', will form the main focus for my theory. Both these theories connect well with my inspiration from our local indigenous cultures, specifically the Xhosa from the Eastern Cape, due to the common philosophies of using resources in close proximity of one's self, keeping a strong sense of community and respecting all living species and the environment.

In modern society, knowledge is linked with science. Science was seen as 'good' knowledge, and a narrative was looked down upon, and associated with women, children and primitives. Knowledge was gained through an education, to develop one into an educated person (Klages, 2003). In a Postmodern society, however, knowledge is functional; you learn things, not to know them, but to use apply the knowledge gained throughout life (Klages, 2003).

In Postmodern societies, more than in modern society, the introduction of computer technologies has revolutionized the way of knowledge production, distribution, and consumption (Klages, 2003). Postmodernism is closely associated with the emergence and consolidation of consumerism (Jameson, 2009). Fredric Jameson believes that it is postmodern features that convey the deeper logic of the social system. There is a distinct loss of a sense of history in our society (Jameson, 2009), the way in which it has slowly but surely begun to lose its ability to hold on to its own past, has commenced to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that is demolishing traditions, which social periods before have tried to protect (Jameson, 2009).

Due to the fact that Postmodern society has become consumer and technology driven, the fact is that now there are social, cultural issues but also with an environmental predicament, thus Postmodern movement has evolved into Postmodern ecological, to consolidate

environmental issues and methods to improve them. Ecological designer, Sim van Ryn says, "Sustainable design works at each of the contemporary levels where design is practised and through which users outline their understanding of design. There are few designers who practise a more traditional worldview, many who practise within a 20th century modernism and others who practise from a post-modern perspective. Sustainable design needs to cover elements, solutions and thinking from all these levels." (van der Ryn, 135, 2005).

Postmodern ecological views explore reinventing and reshaping for a society that has rapid environmental change and which needs dramatic rethinking but still holding onto past and current identities (Kearney, 1998: 177).

According to Alistair Fuad-Luke, a Slow Design theorist, "Slow Design encourages a reduction in economic, industrial and urban metabolisms and therefore decreases consumption. Encouraging designing for space to think, react, dream and muse. Designing for people first, commercialisation second, balancing the local and the social with the environmental." (Fuad- Luke, 2003). Slow design deals with themes such as tradition, local, experiential, evolved, slowness and eco- efficiency. By using these themes as a base for designers can we produce products that within the slow discourse have a positive effect or contribution to our society? Can traditional indigenous cultures within my context apply these themes of local, tradition and slowness? Through internalising 'Slow' principles and exploring indigenous cultural forms and processes and material cultures from the Xhosa, I aim to contribute to the sustainable discourse.

Slow design evolved as a tool to refocus on anthropocentric (individual and socio- cultural community) and the environment's best interests. It is an offset to the existing design paradigm that is fast and consumptive (Fuad- Luke, 2003). Designers need to discover a new way to contribute to society and a way of life. In order to do so they need to primarily re-examine the real needs of society and the environment (Fuad- Luke, 2003). This is what I aim to do through my practical research. By exploring local and traditional ways of life and applying the Slow philosophy throughout my research, from sourcing materials in close proximity to keep my carbon footprint low, to ensuring that my product has a longer life span to that of a mass produced product. I aim to internalise and apply these philosophies to my life and practical research.

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Approach**

The course and the end result that this dissertation will take, will be objective, and will strive to create an awareness and contribution. I want my product to manifest 'Slow design' principles; from the designing of the product to the selling, and to ensuring that its life span will last longer than a mass produced product. I want there to be a reflection of traditional forms and processes as they go hand in hand with the 'Slow' lifestyle in terms of why and what materials are used and their purpose.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

The inspiration for the practical part of my research will be gathering inspiration from local designers and organisations such as the Keiskamma Organasation, MoloMimi and Missibaba. All of these designers work with Xhosa women, eco- friendly materials and are inspiration for this research.

My main field work will be conducted in the Eastern Cape at the Keiskamma Organisation. The Eastern Cape is still rural and features some indigenous cultures like the Xhosa, that still practise traditional ways of living as such conducting certain rituals, dress, art to celebrate or mourn a rite of passage. I will conduct informal interviews as well as through observation data analysis at Keiskamma, to learn more about traditional forms and processes in everyday life, and apply it to my context.

I will be spending time with the Keiskamma team, who strive to tackle the challenges of poverty through holistic and creative programmes. Keiskamma is based in Hamburg, a rural part of the Eastern Cape. Local women from the traditional Xhosa culture create art pieces that use traditional skills and natural materials.

The Molo Mimi enterprise is also based in the Eastern Cape, and the founder Lisa Nettleton has a team of Xhosa women that create artwork from waste and recycled fabric through skills such as embroidery, crochet and traditional material skills.

Through spending time in the Eastern Cape, I will not only be drawing information and inspiration from the local and indigenous people but also from the vegetation and simple objects in nature that offer uses and are in a close proximity to oneself.

Missibaba is a Cape Town based leather accessory design business. The designer and founder is Chloe Townsend. Townsend mixes contemporary designs that still show influences from nature with classical materials such as leather, which becomes more beautiful with age and the stories that the product adapts during its lifespan. Townsend inspires me from the countless ways leather can be manipulated and used, to the deep colours and textures that are used in her accessories.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Having started my own leather accessory line called 'Pennypeculiar', I have formed a love for leather, its beauty and boundless ways in which it can be applied. This then had a ripple effect to the many things I want to do with leather such as the start of an eco- friendly range of handbags.

Through experimenting and manipulating natural materials, knowing where they are sourced from and preferably in close proximity to me to ensure a low carbon footprint. The materials I will be using for my collection are leather from our family farm in the Eastern Cape and hemp and cotton fabric from a source in Cape Town.

I want to create a bridge between 'Slow design' and local cultures in a Post- Modern ecological context, through my collection of handbags.

My handbag range is targeted predominantly at a middle niche market, namely women between the ages 23- 50 years. The materials that will be used are eco-friendly and I will try and follow best practise regarding sustainability discourse when creating my product by designing consciously.



## **4 Delineation of the Research**

The ten handbags I propose creating will vary in size and function, which will be determined according to the purpose and use of the bag. The earth tone colour palette for the range will stay the same throughout all ten handbags to represent indigenous cultures. This will contrast with the contemporary designs of the bags. The swing tickets that will be attached to my bags will have a brief background and who I worked with during the development of the project in my field work

## **5 Significance of the Research**

Every day seems to be passing us by at an ever increasing rate. There appears to be a constant need for more material objects, more money and the quicker one acquires these material things, the better. These aspects do not benefit our diminishing cultures, our quality of life or our carbon footprints, as products are being massed produced and imported, but the quality, carbon emissions and life span of these products are exceptionally poor. Modern lifestyles do not always allow us to be a hundred percent eco-friendly but, as a designer, I can encourage and allow others to have the choice to contribute to the sustainable discourse through a simple but everyday product, a handbag.

## **6 Expected outcomes, results and contributions of the research**

The main outcome, apart from the collection of handbags, is to create a link and form an awareness of the state of the environment and our indigenous cultures and how we can learn from them to help improve our lifestyles and the environments. I will encourage the buyer to take a moment to consider why I am designing and internalising this way of life and thereby encourage a more conscious lifestyle. This attitude may contribute to the Slow design philosophy and thinking about our traditions and local skills may have a positive effect on today's society through the ripple effect.

## **7 Summary**

The purpose and aim of this research is to develop a connection between indigenous cultural forms and processes through a contemporary handbag collection that signifies 'Slow' design. To create awareness in the buyer that one can learn from our diminishing

cultures and by internalising 'Slow' principles contribute to bettering our societies, cultures and environments, is another aim

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**Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology**

**The use of Traditional forms and processes in the design of a contemporary handbag range.**

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**Baccalaureus of Technology: Surface Design**

**in the Faculty of Informatics and Design**

**at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology**

**Supervisor:** Alettia Chisin

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**Cape Town**

November 2010

## Declaration

I, Ashleigh- Jayne Coetzer, declare that the contents of this dissertation represent my own unaided work, and that the dissertation has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.



Signed

22 October 2010

Date

## **Abstract**

This project looks at the union between the inspiration and the application from our indigenous cultures and the field work that took place at The Keiskamma Organisation with correlation of these to 'Slow Design'.

The inspirations drawn from aspects of these sources are to be implemented in a practical form. 'Slow Design' outlines how and why it is vital today to refer to our indigenous cultures in terms of forms and processes in their material culture, as well as their way of life. By doing so today's society and environment can improve.

This research has drawn upon all these aspects to inspire the establishment of a range of contemporary and eco- friendly handbags. This handbag range is inspired by the Xhosa cultures process of designing from nature and ones surroundings and producing by hand through a sustainable manner like 'slow design' encourages.

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## **Chapter 1**

# **Do diminishing indigenous cultures have relevance as inspiration for a collection of handbags in a contemporary society?**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to investigate and create a collection of contemporary handbags that are eco-friendly and that apply and reflect traditional forms and processes. My intentions are to bridge the present and future through "Slow Design" principles and with reference to indigenous cultures, namely the Xhosa. I will apply this knowledge and experience to my practical component in accordance with the principle of 'Slow design'. Through my product, I want to allow the consumer to contribute to the sustainable discourse, whilst creating an awareness of our indigenous cultures and the need to change our lifestyles to better the quality of life as well as benefit the environment.

The theoretical background of my research will be outlined in Chapter Two, which unpacks the Sub-Question 1. The theories relevant to this research are based on exploring and analysing indigenous cultures, specifically the Xhosa people and their forms, processes and lifestyle, how these can influence design and society and its link to the 'Slow design' and Postmodern ecological theories.

Two theories namely 'Slow Design' and 'Post Modern ecological' will form the main focus for my theory. Both these theories connect well with my inspiration from our local indigenous cultures, specifically the Xhosa, from the Eastern Cape and the Ndebele, due to the common philosophies of using resources in close proximity of one's self, keeping a strong sense of community and to respect all living species and the environment. This therefore has led to the great need for sustainable thinking and design. Ecological Designer, Sim van Ryn says, "Sustainable design works at each of the contemporary levels where

design is practised and through which users outline their understanding of design. There are few designers who practise a more traditional worldview, many who practise within a 20th century modernism and others who practise from a post-modern perspective. Sustainable design needs to cover elements, solutions and thinking from all these levels” (van der Ryn, 135, 2005). Postmodern ecological views explore reinventing and reshaping for a society that has rapid environmental change and which needs dramatic rethinking but still holding onto past and current identities (Kearney, 1998: 177).

According to Alistair Fuad-Luke, a Slow Design theorist, “Slow Design encourages a reduction in economic, industrial and urban metabolisms and therefore decreases consumption. Encouraging designing for space to think, react, dream and muse. Designing for people first, commercialisation second, balancing the local and the social with the environmental.” (Fuad- Luke, 2005). Slow design deals with themes such as tradition, local, experiential, evolved, slowness and eco- efficiency. Through internalising ‘Slow’ principles and exploring indigenous cultural forms and processes and material cultures from the Xhosa and Ndebele, I aim to contribute to the sustainable discourse. Slow design will be used as a tool to refocus on anthropocentric (individual and socio- cultural community) and the environments best interests. It is an offset to the existing design paradigm that is fast and consumptive (Fuad- Luke, 2005). Designers need to discover a new way to contribute to society and a way of life. In order to do so they need to primarily re-examine the real needs of society and the environment (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

Chapter three addresses sub-question two and Chapter four addresses sub-question three. The aim of my collection of handbags is to manifest ‘Slow design’ principles; from the designing of the product and to ensuring that its life span will last longer than a mass produced product. I want a strong sense and influence of traditional forms and processes to reflect in the collection of handbags, as they go hand in hand with the ‘Slow’ lifestyle in terms of why and what materials are used and their purpose.

A case study will be conducted with the Keiskamma Organisation and investigated in this chapter. Keiskamma is based in rural Hamburg in the Eastern Cape. The Keiskamma team strive to tackle the challenges of poverty through holistic and creative programmes. Local

women from the traditional Xhosa culture create art pieces that use traditional skills and materials.

Through informal interviews and through observation data analysis with the Xhosa women and in their indigenous environment, I will learn more about culture, forms and processes in everyday life, and apply it to my context. Not only will I be drawing information and inspiration from the local and indigenous people but also the vegetation and simple objects in nature that offer uses and are in a close proximity to oneself.

My design process and product development will emerge through my field work and case study and will be supported by my theory. By journaling my experiences and encounters through my research, it will evolve into sketches, samples and designs. Throughout this research theory, field work and practical are all linked and play a vital role in the development of an investigation and product. I aim to create an awareness of the state of the environment and our indigenous cultures and how we can learn from them to have a positive effect on today's society through the ripple effect.

My research question and sub-questions are as follows:

Do diminishing indigenous cultures have relevance as inspiration for a collection of handbags in a contemporary society?

### **Sub- Questions**

- 1 What are the traditions and representations in indigenous cultures and do they still have relevance in a Post- Modern ecological society?
- 2 To what extent can these forms and processes be manifested into a marketable handbag range?
- 3 How can indigenous material culture be used to inform a collection of contemporary handbags?

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Chapter 2

The purpose of this research is to determine if and how traditions and representations in indigenous cultures have relevance in today's society, through the investigation and application of the theories 'Slow Design' and 'Post-Modern ecological' position- with reference to the work of Alastair Fuad-Luke and Sim van Ryn.

Contemporary society has become stressed, fast and consumptive. These factors have caused many implications for society, cultures and the environment. Our indigenous cultures, specifically the Ndebele and Xhosa, were able to practise a lifestyle that was simple, harmonious and 'slow'. My aim is to consider whether the past can be recovered through Slow Design principles and learning how to live in a simple manner from our indigenous past.

'Slow design' and indigenous traditions, specifically forms and processes, will be the basis for the theoretical framework in order to establish a link with the past, as well as reflect Post-Modern ecological.

### 2.1. 'Slow design' and 'Post- Modern ecological'

In Postmodern society, more than in Modernistic society, the introduction of computer technologies has revolutionized the means of knowledge production, distribution, and consumption (Klages, 2003). Postmodernism is closely associated with the emergence and consolidation of consumerism. Fredric Jameson believes that Postmodern features in many ways convey the deeper logic of the social system. There is a distinct loss of a sense of history in our society the way in which it has slowly but surely begun to lose its ability to hold on to its own past, has commenced to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that is demolishing traditions, which social periods before have tried to protect (Jameson, 2009).

Due to the fact that Postmodern society has become consumer and technology driven, and there are social and cultural issues such as the constant battle to preserve traditional cultures that are diminishing at a rapid rate but also with an environmental predicament, thus Postmodernism has led to a Postmodern ecological offshoot, to consolidate environmental issues and methods to improve them.

Ecological Designer, Sim van Ryn says, *"Sustainable design works at each of the contemporary levels where design is practised and through which users outline their understanding of design. There are few designers who practise a more traditional worldview, many who practise within the 20th century modernism and others who practise from a post-modern perspective. Sustainable design needs to cover elements, solutions and thinking from all these level"* (van der Ryn, 135, 2005).

Post- Modern ecological views explore reinventing and reforming for society that has rapid environmental change and that needs dramatic reviewing, while still holding onto the past and current identities (Kearney, 1998: 177). Alastair Fuad-Luke's theory of 'Slow Design', too encourages a reduction in economic, industrial and urban metabolisms and therefore decreases consumption. *"Designing for a space to think, react, dream and muse. Designing for people first, commercialisation second, balancing the local and the social with the environmental"* (Fuad- Luke, 2005). Slow design deals with themes such as, tradition, local, experiential, evolved, slowness and eco- efficiency. By using these themes as a base for designers we can produce products that are within the slow discourse and have a positive effect or contribution to our society. Can traditional indigenous cultures within a postmodern context provide relevant inspiration? Through internalising 'Slow' principles and exploring forms and processes in indigenous cultures and material cultures (discussed in Chapter three), I hope to contribute to the sustainable discourse.

A design discourse has arisen to deal with today's challenges. Sustainability has developed and given design opportunities to grow and find new approaches and review the design philosophy (Fuad- Luke, 2005). A challenge that has emerged is the effort to reduce the



impact of mass production and mass consumption, which has led to green and eco-friendly design. In order for more development there needs to be a significant socio-cultural change in individuals and corporate behaviour to see results (Fuad- Luke, 2005). Design has been obedient of the technological, economical and political aspects of manufacturing and consumerism. The effect of this is billions of products that will have short life spans in order to replace production (Fuad- Luke, 2005). This then has had a domino effect resulting in short-term thinking and short-term product life, leading to a cultural sense of a world becoming faster and faster (Fuad- Luke, 2005). This is the design paradigm we are living in, which encourages designers to replicate the current status instead of solving today's needs and challenges through design. Trying to design under the sustainable discourse is not easy, we can reduce consumption through designing products that satisfy cultural norms of function, form and emotion by applying ideas of universal design, human design, and experimental design (Fuad- Luke, 2005). This shift signals a new ethical dialogue in design to re-examine the human-object interface, although these approaches take time and are not predictable in the counteracting of the 'fast' modern design paradigm (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

How does design respond to today's challenges of the economy, environment and social and to balance the local with the global, if design is a 'conscious effort to impose meaningful order' (Fuad- Luke, 2005)? Slow design evolved as a tool and 'way of life' to refocus on anthropocentric (individual and socio- culture community) (Fuad- Luke, 2005) and the environments best interests. It is an offset to an existing design paradigm that is fast and consumptive (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

It aims to reduce the environmental impacts by using natural materials, such as leather and natural fabrics, lower energy usage by incorporating handmade skills as the traditional forms and processes did, and consult life cycle analysis. All these factors are a collective in the handbag range and ensure that quality materials and handmade skills are vital in order for a multiple life span. The beauty of the classic leather handbag is that over decades and still today they are passed down to generations since leather becomes more and more appealing over time and use, it has life and its own story.

There are key aspects to 'Slow Design' namely that human well- being depends on the well-being of the environment as they work hand in hand. 'Slow design' encourages sustainable

design, ecological footprints and pollution control. 'Slow design' differs from previous design movements as it is not anthropocentric and consider humans as the essential component of the universe but regards humans as a component of a larger living system (Fuad- Luke, 2005). However 'Slow design' does consider the intricacy of humans and aims for growth of individuals and socio-cultural communities (Fuad- Luke, 2005). 'Slow design' bridges human development with the development of nature. 'Slow design' considers a meta-environment a combination of the natural and man-made for a sustainable future (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

'Slow design' embraces traditional design and its craft artefacts, vernacular architecture and all design that evolves from traditional form and function that has progressed over time (Fuad- Luke, 2005). An innate element of craft artefacts, such as the Xhosa's traditional bags, and vernacular architecture is the close link to local production and source of raw materials and the designers understanding of those materials and traditional methods (Fuad- Luke, 2005). Traditional design is essential to the society, culture and environment that it originates from thus can contribute to improvement of individuals, their communities and the local environment they situated in (Fuad- Luke, 2005). This often deals with a system that use hand methods that engage with origin and nature of the material (environmentally friendly) and has a sense of local or personal identity (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

The baby boom of the 1960's and 1970's resulted in a distinct "Me" generation that has a immediate gratification of desire due to the easy flow of cash and credit acts and a major increase in consumption (Fuad- Luke, 2005). The desire, experience and emotional high of an object are short-lived and lead to more consumer consumption. 'Slow design' embraces design over time and the interaction between designer and nature to ensure longer life spans and to create a personal journey and greater understanding that celebrates design, existing perceptions and environmental awareness (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

There is a need to discover a new way to contribute to society and improve the way of life. In order to do so, designers need to primarily re-examine the real needs of society and the

environment (Fuad- Luke, 2005). 'Slow design' recognizes the need to reduce consumption of infinite resources and 'slows' production of environmental destruction, pollution and the improvement of quality of life. We can reduce these aspects by use of fewer materials and linking individuals to their ecological footprint to have a sense and reason in reducing it and having a better quality of life (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

The indigenous cultures, specifically the Xhosa, are "pre-industrial" cultures who applied these principles and philosophy subconsciously through their traditional cultures.

## The Xhosa Traditions and Lifestyle

The reason for basing this research specifically on the Xhosa culture is that there is a relation to myself in terms of location, the context being South Africa and particularly the Eastern Cape, and the vegetation and surroundings in which we live in. The Xhosa culture live a simple, traditional lifestyle, which is in keeping with current eco- friendly, harmonious and 'slow' paced lifestyles.

The Xhosa people compose of South Africa's largest and best known bantu tribes (Elliot, 1970: 11). *Due to rapid development the Xhosa are slowly but surely moving into modern civilisation but there are still the very traditional and rural Xhosa people in the remote corners of the Eastern Cape, specifically East London, who are also known as the 'red blankets' (Elliot, 1970: 11). The Xhosa have a distinct way of life and highly multifaceted belief and customs' system.*

The Red Blanket Xhosa are sociable people who are a close knit community and always welcoming to others. They are very festive and the home is always open to many travellers and neighbours. The home is round to enable residents to take consideration of their surrounds and climate, which then allows them to move throughout the day as the sun rotates. It is made from their natural materials that are in easy access, such as mud and grass. *The hut is a simple structure made of wattles woven in a basket like form. The floor is made up of earth or antheap that is stamped down and then covered with a layer of mud and then smeared with cow dung (Elliot, 1970: 27). In areas where there is indigenous bush, Xhosa plaster the thatch with wild vine that grows over the rivers in East London, also known as 'monkey vine' (Elliot, 1970: 27). Some Xhosa tribes do not paint any colour or designs on their huts but others, such as the ones based in the Transkei, do practise mural art (Elliot, 1970: 27), which could be influenced by neighbouring tribes. Being sociable people, the Xhosa families build their homes close together.*

In the rural areas where the Xhosa tribes remain indigenous, one will see them in their traditional dress for everyday wear and certain attire for ceremonies or rites of passage. The basic conventional tribal dress of both the men and women are simple coverings made from

the hide of a cow (leather), which often incorporates material. A red blanket is also wrapped around themselves (Elliot, 1970: 27).

The material used by women is white cotton baize, which is hand-made by the yard. When dyeing blanket or material they dye with two methods. Either by using dry ochre powder on the material which is then folded and beaten with a stick or rock until the powder filters through, or ochre is mixed with water and used as a liquid dye (Elliot, 1970: 33). Motifs and patterns that are also used on the material are mimicked and a source of inspiration from their surroundings and nature. These are often dyed by a blue gum tree leaves and boiling water mixture (Elliot, 1970: 33).

The Xhosa wear beads and neckpieces for certain ceremonies. Cow hair, roots or bones are worn for protection and healing purposes (Elliot, 1970: 33). The beads of the Xhosa are a study within themselves as each colour and pattern has an individual meaning and symbolism that convey messages for the wearer (Elliot, 1970: 33). The women create the bead work while the men decorate their tobacco bags, as the Xhosa are known for being seen smoking pipes.

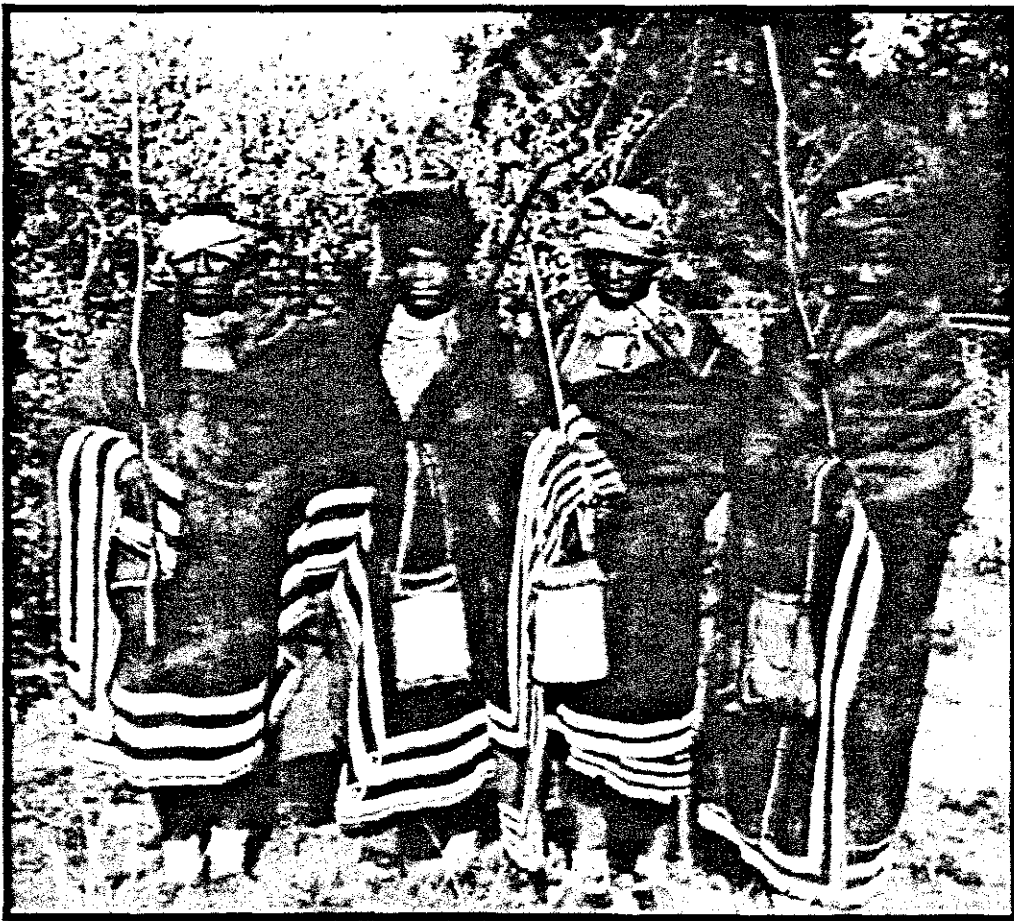
The women's traditional bag is a strap over bag that hangs at the hip on the opposite side. It is decorated with small patterns of beadwork, braided, weaving with tassels, cow hair or bones that dangle at the bottom (Elliot, 1970: 35). The man's bag is more masculine and is made from animal skin. The most popular shape for the men's bag is a tubular shape (Elliot, 1970: 35). The way in which they skin the animal is very intricate in order not to waste skin or the meat, as they were hunter gatherers and did not slaughter animals out of respect and as a need not a want (Elliot, 1970: 35). The skin is sun-dried and cured at a river whilst the hair is still on.

The Xhosa all used tobacco bags. Both men and women used tobacco bags that were made from white cotton baize and in early times were traditionally just made of hide. Bags were decorated with tassels and beadwork. Women carried home-grown tobacco leaves and a pipe in the bag. The tassels on the women's bags were always shorter than the tassels on the men's bags. Tobacco bags might be hung from a strap over the shoulder to rest on the hip or even over the chest. Although the women wore traditional dress more than the men, when the men wore traditional dress it was more extravagant than the women's. Men

would add a number of tobacco bags to add to the attire. The tobacco bag is made with skin turned inside out and the hair is on the inside of the bag (Elliot, 1970: 36). The male tobacco bags were called "ikhubalo". Men wore the tobacco bag with their garments as it confirmed their wealth status.

Figure 2.1

### "Red Blanket Valley"



Broster, Joan. Galerie Ezakwantu. *South African Tobacco Bags*. 2010  
(<http://www.ezakwantu.com/Gallery%20African%20Tobacco%20Bags.htm>)

Figure 2.2

**“Material Culture of Nguni”**



Broster, Joan. Galerie Ezakwantu. *South African Tobacco Bags*. 2010.  
(<http://www.ezakwantu.com/Gallery%20African%20Tobacco%20Bags.htm>)

Figure 2.3

**“Thembi at Qwathi”**



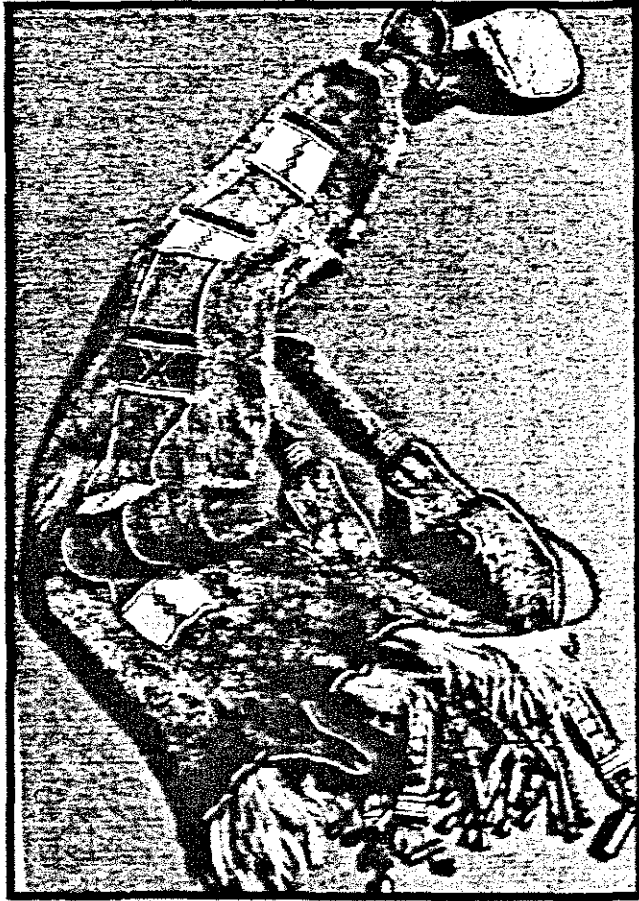
Broster, Joan. Galerie Ezakwantu. *South African Tobacco Bags*. 2010.

(<http://www.ezakwantu.com/Gallery%20African%20Tobacco%20Bags.htm>)



Figure 2.4

### The Tobacco Bag



(Elliot. A, 'A man's tobacco bag', 1970: 35)

Another type of man's bag that is popular is made from the skin of a Genet cat (Elliot, 1970: 27). The bag is flat and is in a shape of a spread out skin. It is made of two skins sewn down the edges with the seam turned inwards. The hair is on the outside with one of the tails left dangling as an ornament. The skin of the one head is used as a flap over the opening of the bag (Elliot, 1970: 27).

Figure 2.5

**The Genet Cat Bag**



(Elliot. A, 'The genet cat bag', 1970: 37)

## 2.3 Summary

*'We live in a world overflowing with our own productions, a world in which objects besiege us, suffocate us, and very often distance us from one another both physically and mentally.....they make us forget how to feel, to touch, to think. Accustomed to living in a uniform light, we have grown oblivious of the shadows and fearful of the dark' (Dona, 1988).*

If we alter our mind set and apply 'Slow' and 'Eco-logical' principles that are ingrained within indigenous cultures, there will be a positive ripple effect through design, socio-community and the environment. Principles such as reducing resource flows and our ecological footprint the way indigenous cultures did by simply using natural materials in a close proximity to them, which encouraged a longer life span for the object/product that could be passed down through generations. We can educate other designers and consumers of our past and the urgencies of practising a 'Slow' lifestyle.

To conclude this chapter it is evident that 'Slow' and 'Eco- logical' design is a must and not a want in today's society, as we face many challenges socially, culturally and environmentally. Our society is craving a sense of being, purpose and community. We can derive inspiration and knowledge from our indigenous cultures' forms and processes, like the Xhosa's way of life that was 'slow', had a sense of community and did not harm the well-being of the earth or humans with a gluttonous mindset associated with today's society. Understandably there will never be a complete change, but at least an awareness and contribution through my range can be made while learning about and honouring our indigenous cultures.

In the next chapter, forms and processes will be discussed and seen how they inspired and developed into a handbag range.

## Chapter Three

This chapter will discuss the principals of 'Slow design', the Xhosa's forms, processes, lifestyle and how they can be manifested into a marketable handbag range, whilst continuously implementing sustainability. Contemporary society is tense, fast and lacking meaning. Society needs to slow down and go back to the human and have a narrative that can inspire people, designers and have a positive impact on the environment. My aim is to design and create a range of contemporary handbags that are eco-friendly and that apply and reflect traditional forms and processes. My intentions are to bridge the present and future through "Slow Design" principles and our indigenous past.

Indigenous traditions and material culture, specifically the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape, will be the base for the link between the past and present. A case study is and will be conducted as part of my research. My field work will be conducted in the Eastern Cape at the Keiskamma Organisation. The Keiskamma Organisation is still very rural and is inhabited by a Xhosa community that still practises Xhosa traditions and ways of life. The organisation too incorporates art and crafts into their programme, consequently making it the ideal setting to derive inspiration and internalise my research.

## The Keiskamma Organisation

The inspiration for the practical part of my research will be from gathering inspiration from the Keiskamma Organisation. My main field work has and will be conducted in the Eastern Cape at the Keiskamma Organisation. The Eastern Cape is still pastoral and features some indigenous cultures like the Xhosa, which still practise traditional ways of living such as conducting certain rituals, dress, and art to celebrate a rite of passage of praise for their environment that they live in. My primary research is through conducting informal interviews as well as through observation (data analysis) at the Keiskamma site, to learn more about traditional forms and processes in everyday life, and then to apply it to my context.

I have and will be spending time with the Keiskamma team, who strive to tackle the challenges of poverty through holistic and creative programmes. Keiskamma is based in Hamburg, a rural part of the Eastern Cape. Local women from the traditional Xhosa culture create art pieces that use traditional skills and natural materials. Hamburg inspires the local women through its exquisite beauty and lush site for creativity. The landscape is a true inspiration for the local women to use their inherent talents and resourceful aspiration. These women weave their daily lives and stories of the past and present into Keiskamma Art Project. Their main focus is creating tapestries that portray their lives, their struggles and their remarkable culture. Their tapestries are sold to shops and large companies overseas, to hang in their premises. They too are sold at local art festivals like the Grahams Town art festival in the Eastern Cape.

Figure 3.1

### The view at Keiskamma



(Coetzer, 2010)

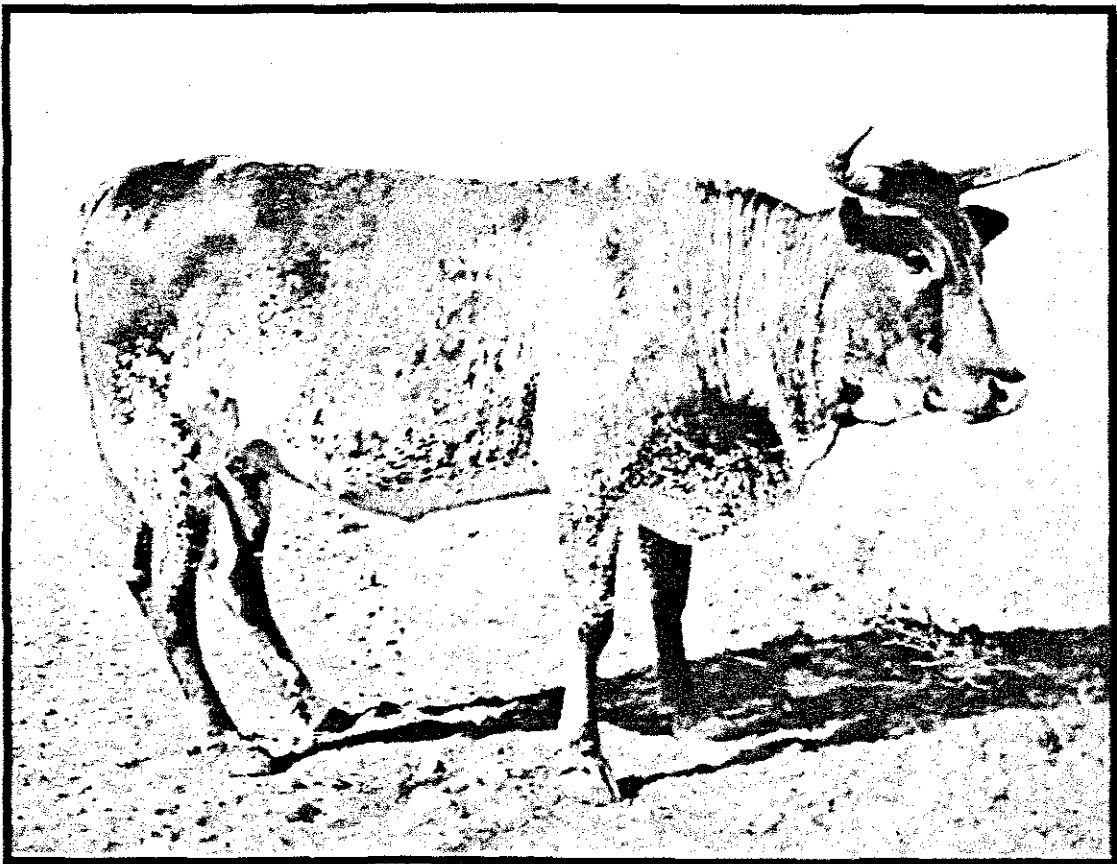
Specifically, the '*Keiskamma Tapestry*' reflects South Africa's history and the Keiskamma region's through 126 metres of embroidered panels. There is a combination of laid stitching and embroidery stem, in outlines and fill with a distinct component of traditional natural stitching and beading techniques, creating the final artwork. The women of the Keiskamma region portrayed their own traditional knowledge that had been orally engrained over decades and written historical records through the tapestry. The tapestry weaves a picture of a land originally filled with wildlife and barren of human influence. As the tapestry evolves there is a distinct indication of original nomadic Khoi and San inhabitants being displaced and replaced by rustic Xhosa tribe's dependent on their crops and cherished cattle. The majority of the artworks created by the Keiskamma women have a woven Nguni cow motif placed within it. The Nguni cow, prevalent to South Africa, is a symbol of wealth, strength and unity to many indigenous groups (Downs, 2008, 10). There is a remarkably

close relationship with the Xhosa and their livestock. They take immense pride in their herds as it symbolises status and acts a medium to the ancestors (Downs, 2008, 10).

Needlework as an art form practised throughout Africa. In the Eastern Cape there is still a distinct engagement and experimentation in the combination of needlework, appliqué and beadwork. As settlers and traders approached South Africa in the eighteenth century cotton was incorporated with leather (Downs, 2008, 5).

Figure 3.2

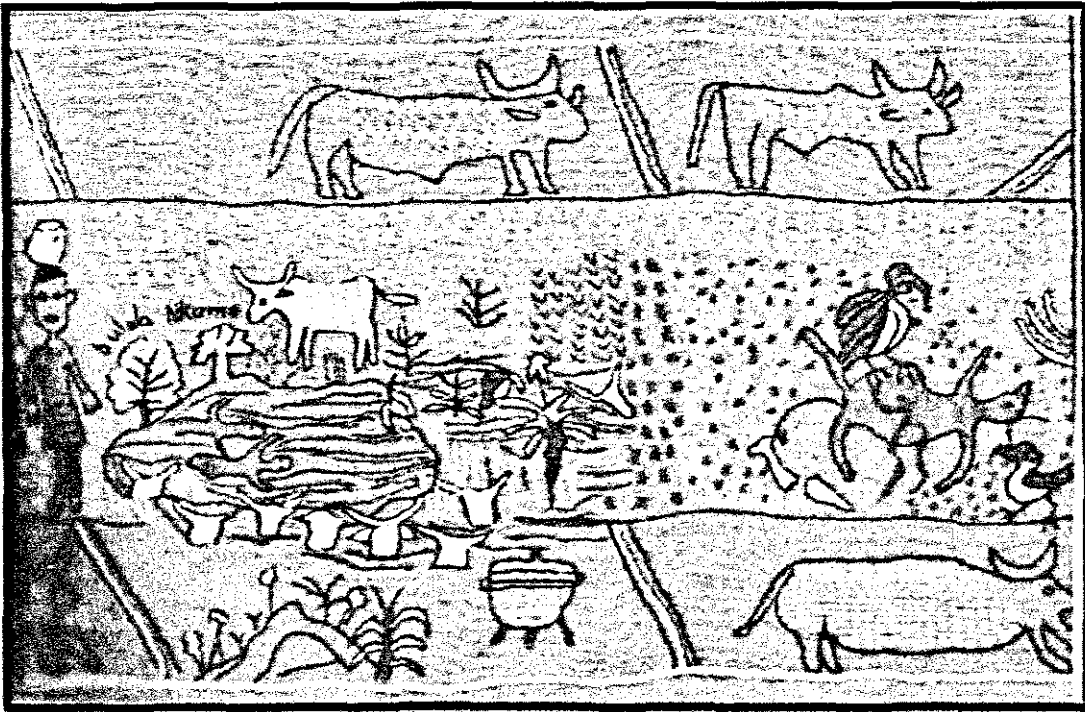
***“Crowned Plover”***



(Poland. M, Tooke. D, Voigt.L, 'Crowned Plover', 2003: 44)

Figure 3.3

### “The Keiskamma Tapestry”



(Downs, J. *The Keiskamma Art Project*. 2008: 11)

The first meeting with the Keiskamma Organisation was a fascinating and eye opening experience. As I was not familiar with the group and it was our first encounter and an observation data analysis was being conducted, I did not want to intimidate or stand out during my meeting. I had to take into account every aspect of myself from dress to use of language whilst with the group. I was working with a case study group that was not a mixed community and where all the women were Xhosa. Through data collection I could document



my stay. It was done through photographs and found objects such as seeds and shells. The main focus was on certain aspects specifically their way of life and material culture, such as methods and skills (sewing, designing) that are used to produce their art and craft works, their environment and how their culture shines through. In terms of their design aesthetics and essentials, it will be discussed in chapter four.

With an observation analysis one is purely there to observe and collect data, but, as I had never met the group, I had to use my intuition on arrival to not offend the women. When driving into Hamburg, I was astounded by the beauty of the area and how rural it still was. There are no shops, no petrol stations just a few little houses, kraals and a clinic, which is run by the founder Dr Carol Hofmeyer to help the poverty stricken community fight against the HIV virus.

Figure 3.4

### **Bodium Studio**



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 3.5

**Women working on embroidered cushion covers**



(Coetzer, 2010)

**Figure 36 Felt making in the garden**



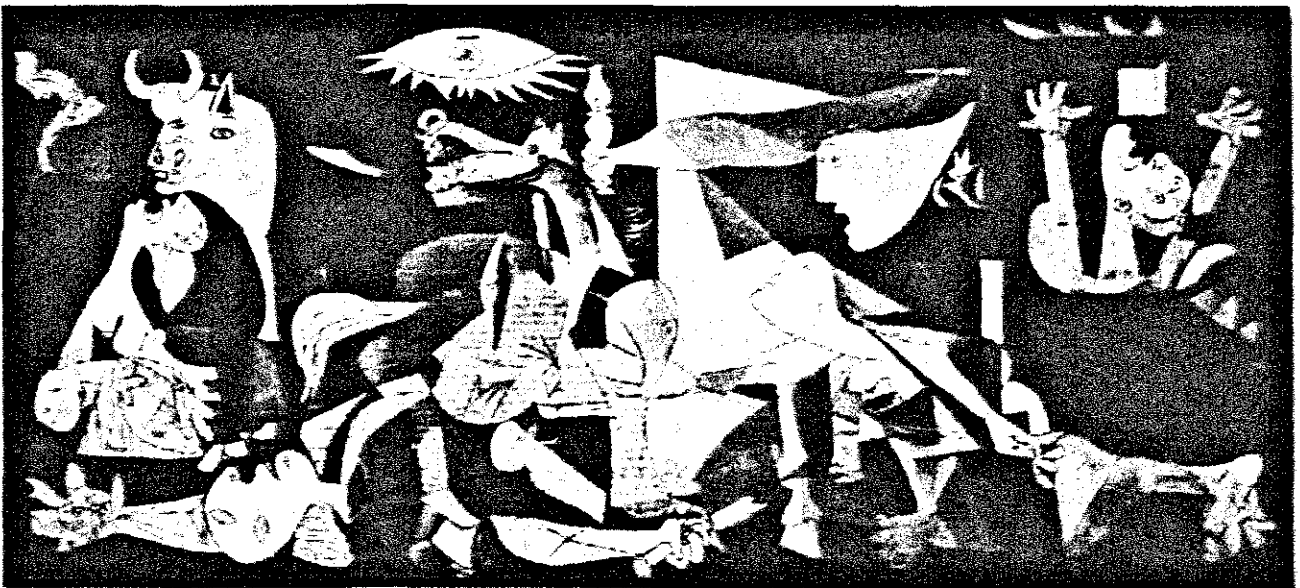
(Coetzer, 2010)

There are three bases where the women work. 'Bodium house' where the embroidery and drawings takes place, 'Keiskamma house' where there is a office and sewing of the panels

take place, 'Stamper' house and the 'Wedding' house. The 'Wedding' house is quaint and is placed on a hill just outside the village; this is where all the large embroidery works take place. The women at this base were extremely friendly. There was a major language barrier between the women and me. One of the women, Nomfusi, could speak English, and she was a tremendous help in explaining the tapestry that they were currently working on and how their designs were emerged. The Pablo Picasso inspired tapestry piece that they were working on during my visit was 3.9 meters by 3.5 metres. It consisted of materials that were in their availability. The materials used ranged from pieces of off cuts, leather, felt that was made at 'Stamper' house and old blankets. The women are encouraged to use traditional methods of hand sewing, embroidery and dying material using plants, clay or rusted objects. During my visit I found that there are distinct Western influences that are evident in terms of introducing the women to artists and historical events. The Picasso piece 'Guernica' is used as a base for design and colour scheme but interpreted in their context, the Eastern Cape, and shows their own personal struggles of poverty and fighting the HIV virus and the devastation that it has brought them, the land and the community.

Figure 3.7

*"Guernica"*



(Pablo Picasso, 'Guernica', 1937. Online. Available:

<http://tuxjunction.net/george/images/guernica.jpg> [20 May 2010])

Figure 3.8

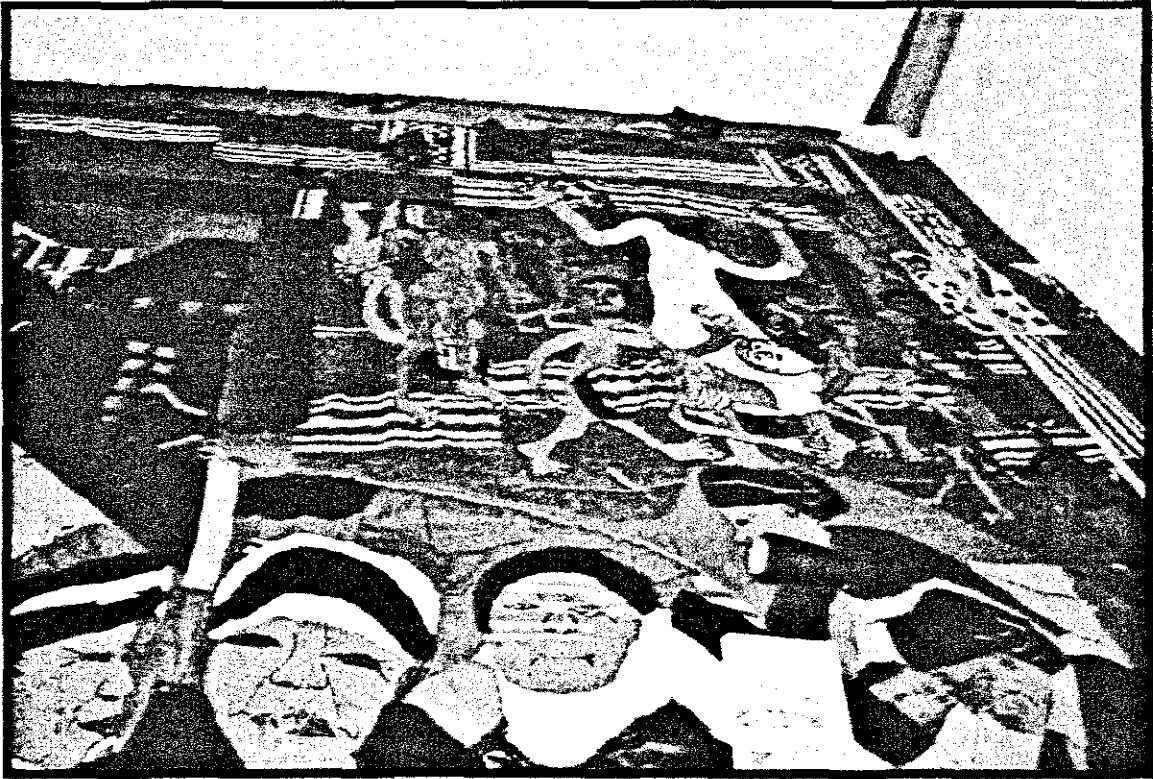
**"Tapestries inspired by Picasso's *Guernica*"**



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 3.9

**"Tapestries inspired by Picasso's *Guernica*"**



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 3.10

**“Women working on Picasso inspired tapestry”**



(Coetzer, 2010)



The Western influence on the women at the Keiskamma Organisation does not entirely have a negative impact on the Xhosa culture. The Western influence educates and encourages vanishing indigenous cultures to use skills and means of life from their past to uplift them from poverty, without being consumer driven, like western society. Resources are used within their availability and inspiration gathered from the natural world, especially aspects that have importance to their community like the Nguni cow and indigenous vegetation.

Figure 3.11

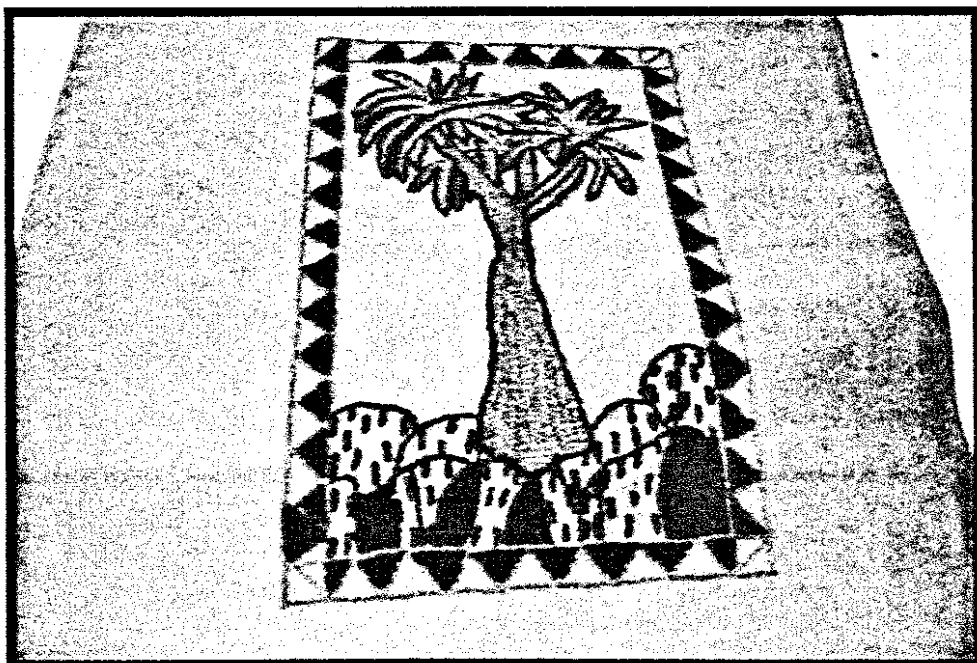
### “Story board at Keiskamma House”



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 3.12

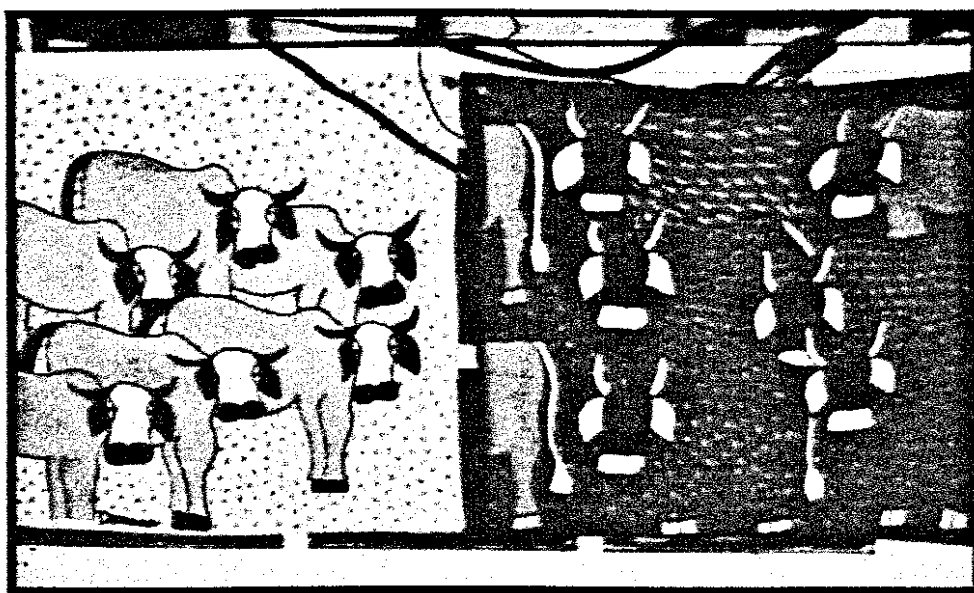
**Cushion cover inspired by local vegetation**



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 3.13

**Cushion cover with Nguni motif**



(Coetzer, 2010)



## **'Slow' design and Indigenous cultures adapted**

Despite the challenges that designers and society face to improve the quality of life and the environmental issues, as discussed in chapter two, it is promising, if designers review their philosophical stance of design. 'Slow' design not only encourages these aspects through the application of the 'Slow' principles and values to create solutions to make people aware of the need to better society on a socio- cultural and environmental level.

'Slow' design focuses on ideas of well-being (Fuad- Luke, 2005). The 'Slow' design principles suggests subtle and dramatic changes to everyday design practise in order to see an outcome that has a positive effect on society even if it is to simply create an awareness through an everyday product such as sustainable handbags. A sustainable handbag can be a means to inform the consumer about sustainability and tell a narrative on how the product evolved, through gaining inspiration and reflecting nature resembling how indigenous cultures designed, created and lived in harmony with the environment. 'Slow' design co-joins human development with the development of the natural world (Fuad- Luke, 2005), which reflects the Xhosa fortitude to constantly respect the natural world that ultimately led them to a sustainable lifestyle.

'Slow' design principles mirror the Xhosa cultures, forms and processes, which permits the connection, therefore manifesting both 'Slow' and indigenous cultures in a product by applying the guiding principles.

### **Principles considered throughout research**

- To encourage designers to satisfy real needs rather than momentary fashionable or market driven needs (Fuad- Luke, 2005).
- Reduce resource flows and ecological footprint.
- Create products that use materials that have a longer life cycle than a mass produced product and that can be recycled or reused at the end of a 'life' (Fuad- Luke, 2005).
- To prompt the maximum benefits of well-being to the intended viewer (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

- To educate the consumer and user by encouraging sustainable importance in today's society.
- To re- examine existing products and alter them so that there is a positive effect socially, culturally and environmentally (Fuad- Luke, 2005).
- To ensure physically, culturally, emotionally, mentally and spiritually durable products (Fuad- Luke, 2005).
- To permit sequential purchases, as needs and funds permit and to facilitate the repair and reuse to improve the functionality of the product (Fuad- Luke, 2005).
- To challenge the status quo neighbouring existing products (Fuad- Luke, 2005).
- To distribute sustainable designs to the public and for everyone's advantage, especially those designs which commerce will not manufacture (Fuad- Luke, 2005).
- To promote sustainable design that is an opportunity and not a threat to the status quo (Fuad- Luke, 2005).

Through spending time in the Eastern Cape I have and will not only be drawing information and inspiration from the local and indigenous people but also the vegetation and simple objects in nature. The 'findings' during my case study proved that 'Slow' principles and indigenous cultures' (Xhosa) processes and lifestyle go hand in hand and can be manifested in a contemporary design process for a handbag range. These processes of deriving inspiration and applying a slow lifestyle can be manifested into a handbag range that encourages sustainable literacy to the consumer, thus having a positive socio- cultural and environmental effect.

<b>Slow Design and Keiskamma's 'findings'</b>	<b>My offset of these 'findings'</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handmade.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handmade.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use materials within a close proximity and off cuts of materials thus giving second life to materials.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use leather from family farm, giving second life to 'waste' on the farm.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides an uplifting creative programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides awareness to the consumer through swing ticket on products.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No massed produced products.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No massed produced products.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces products that have a longer life span.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce handbags that will have longer life span due to handmade element and durability of materials.</li> <li>• Leather becomes more aesthetically pleasing with a longer life span.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work as a local community and share information and ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created a job and work closely together.</li> <li>• Share knowledge.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certain members of the community have specific jobs e.g. a designer, a seamstress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two specific jobs; I am the designer and source materials and trims; Local employee is the craftsman.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Derive inspiration from surroundings, vegetation and nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Derive inspiration from surroundings, vegetation and nature.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use eco friendly materials.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use eco friendly materials.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive effect on socio- cultural and environmental.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive effect on socio- cultural and environmental.</li> </ul>

Figure 3.14

### Donkey carting from Keiskamma house the Bodium Studio



(Coetzer, 2010)

The sustainable handbags manifest 'Slow design' principles; from the designing of the product to the selling and to ensuring that its life span will last longer than a mass produced product. There is a distinct reflection of traditional forms and processes as they go hand in hand with the 'Slow' lifestyle in terms of why and what materials are used and their purpose, as well as drawing inspiration from one's environment, which will be further discussed in chapter four.

The main outcome apart from the collection of handbags is to create a link and form an awareness of the state of the environment and our indigenous cultures and how we can learn from them to help improve our lifestyles and the environments. I will encourage the buyer to take a moment to consider why I am designing and internalising this way of life and thereby encourage a more conscious lifestyle. This attitude may contribute to the Slow

design philosophy and, thinking about our traditions and local skills, may have a positive effect on today's society through the ripple effect.

## **Current and local designers in the field**

Molo mimi has been created by Lisa Nettleton, who works from Port Alfred in the Eastern Cape Province. Lisa was born and educated in the Eastern Cape, studied at Stellenbosch University, (BA Graphic Design), majoring in illustration (Nettleton, 2010).

She combines a variety of disciplines, products and mediums, incorporating as many complementary themes as possible with an appreciation for contrasts in every sphere. Different cultures and belief systems inspire her. Lisa believes that this is what shapes our perceptions of the world (Nettleton, 2010). Working with perceptions challenges her to see things in new ways, recreating, constructing and layering the creative process with a juxtaposition of opposites – the familiar and unfamiliar and the recognizable and unrecognizable. In so doing, perceptions are challenged and hopefully refreshed. This can be done on many sensory levels.

Having volunteered with organisations such as Keiskamma, Lisa has a greater understanding of the process and the sociological implications of sustaining the craft and craft industry while working with local women (Nettleton, 2010). She offers a working environment that teaches the individual, with support and encouragement which is most empowering and there is the added benefit of a secure income.

All fabrics used are collected off-cuts, old swatch books and clothes; that would otherwise be thrown away. The fabrics are shredded using a rotor blade and can also be cut into specific shapes. The traditional technique of sewing has been deconstructed, with fabrics being torn, randomly positioned and meandering stitching, reflecting modern society where the fabric of societies' traditions and boundaries have been torn and threaded (Nettleton, 2010)

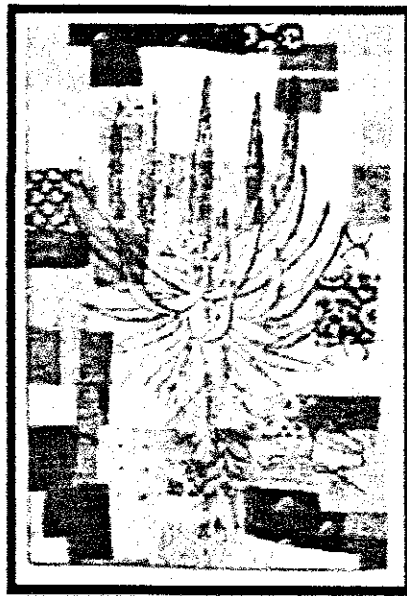
Figure 3.15 "Strelitzia"



(Molomimi, 'Strelitzia'. 2010 [www.molomimi.com](http://www.molomimi.com))

Figure 3.16

"Aloe"



Molomimi, 'Aloe'. 2010 ([www.molomimi.com](http://www.molomimi.com))

Every day seems to be passing us by at an ever increasing rate. There appears to be a constant need for more material objects, more money and the quicker one acquires these material things the better. These aspects do not benefit our diminishing cultures, our quality of life or our carbon footprints, as products are being massed produced and imported, but the quality, carbon emissions and life span of these products are exceptionally poor. By manifesting indigenous cultures, ways of life and processes used to design and create art and crafts alongside products like a sustainable handbag, can make a stance against massed produced products that do not have low carbon emissions and create work for our local people and improve on all socio- cultural and environmental levels. Modern lifestyles do not always allow us to be a hundred percent eco-friendly but, as a designer, I can encourage and allow others to have the choice to contribute to the sustainable discourse through a simple but everyday product, a handbag.

In the next Chapter, the extent of how these 'slow' principles and indigenous design processes and lifestyles can be manifested in a handbag range will be discussed with the influence and inspiration from the Keiskamma Organisation.

## Chapter Four

This chapter specifically concentrates on the design elements, raw materials, processes and forms that reflect and symbolize indigenous cultures, resulting in a contemporary handbag range. The handbag range is targeted predominantly at a middle niche market, namely women between the ages of 23- 50 years. The materials that are used are eco-friendly and I have followed best practise regarding the sustainability discourse when creating my product by designing consciously. Indigenous cultures, specifically the Xhosa were investigated and internalised. The form of a qualitative approach, which deals with people in their context and situation (Bless, et al, 2006, 5) was adapted in order to create this meaningful handbag range. The research journey was a very personal and extensive one.

The Keiskamma Organisation in Hamburg, a rural part of the Eastern Cape, was where the fieldwork was conducted. As there were no expectations on my arrival at Keiskamma, I only knew that the group of crafters consisted of 15-20 isiXhosa women. I too suspected that there would be a language barrier. Observation, data analysis was the method needed to be used due to this and so that I could draw information from the group with or without participation and take my 'findings' and apply them to my practical.

The Keiskamma Organisation is a creative programme AND these women to take traditional Xhosa skills of design, needle work, appliqué and beadwork, and expand it into the production of tapestries that tell the stories about their cultures and environment. Like the principles of "Slow Design", the Xhosa material culture encourages an environmentally friendly way of life that occurs without consciously trying to do so but through an encoded respect for nature and our surroundings. The materials that were used came from what they had and what was around them, resulting in the majority of raw materials coming from their sacred cattle, simple objects in nature that offer uses or design inspiration and are in a close proximity to the crafter.

Reminiscent of "Slow Design" the Xhosa culture inhibits space to think, react, dream, muse; balancing the local and the social with the environmental (Fuad- Luke, 2005). Slow design



deals with themes such as tradition, local, experiential, evolved, slowness and eco-efficiency. It is evident that the Xhosa and Ndebele too deal with these themes, their traditions; people and the natural environment play a vital role in their lives as they depend on it for survival.

Through internalising “Slow” principles at Keiskamma and exploring their cultural forms and processes and material cultures, I hope to contribute to the sustainable discourse in design. I derived inspiration from their way of life in my handbags, by of using what one has for raw materials and inspiration. I made use of the raw materials around myself by using cow hide from our family farm, in the Eastern Cape, as it was going to be given away. The hide was granted a second life and following the “Slow Design” philosophy of keeping carbon emissions low, reusing and creating non- massed produced and quality products is the essential key aspect to this handbag range. Other materials used were a hundred percent natural, such as hemp fabric.

The inspiration for my collection of handbags was drawn from three major influences; the women from Keiskamma, the natural world and spending time on our farm with a herd cows. The Xhosa culture that was experienced at Keiskamma displayed many aspects that influenced my design process. The first aspect was the sense of community and family these women and the village possessed. I immediately felt at home although I could not communicate through speaking but through touch, gestures and physical objects. Their lifestyle is basic and unique. It consists of working together on their tapestries, farming and getting together in the evening to dance. The women are loud, loving, bright and more than willing to share their design essentials with me.

All raw materials come from old blankets or pieces of fabrics they can scrape together; their waste is turned into an artwork. They use traditional, basic, hand sewing skills to piece together components that each woman creates. The sewing takes place in a welcoming sanctuary. True to “Slow design” these women share their knowledge and help each other in every way whilst creating their art. The tapestries function to tell their stories, thereby predominantly signifying the natural world they live in. Most motifs are of the vegetation in the Eastern Cape, namely the Aloe Vera plant and their most sacred and protected animal, the cow, as they provide the people with all they need, food, milk, shelter, clothing and a

medium to their ancestors. Ornamentation is also a means of surface design in their tapestries and art; it is often found objects in nature that are used, such as a shell or seed. The ornamentation does not over-powering the art work but emphasizes certain aspects, such as the hand stitching; cut- outs and appliqués are highly effective form of surface design already. The colours used are very bright as they have access to Western fabrics. It was demonstrated to me that the generations before would use leaves, such as gum tree leaves and rusted objects to dye fabric.

My experience at Keiskamma was extremely relevant in order to understand the Xhosa culture in their context and how “Slow Design” principles and quality of life are unmistakably evident.

Figure 4.1

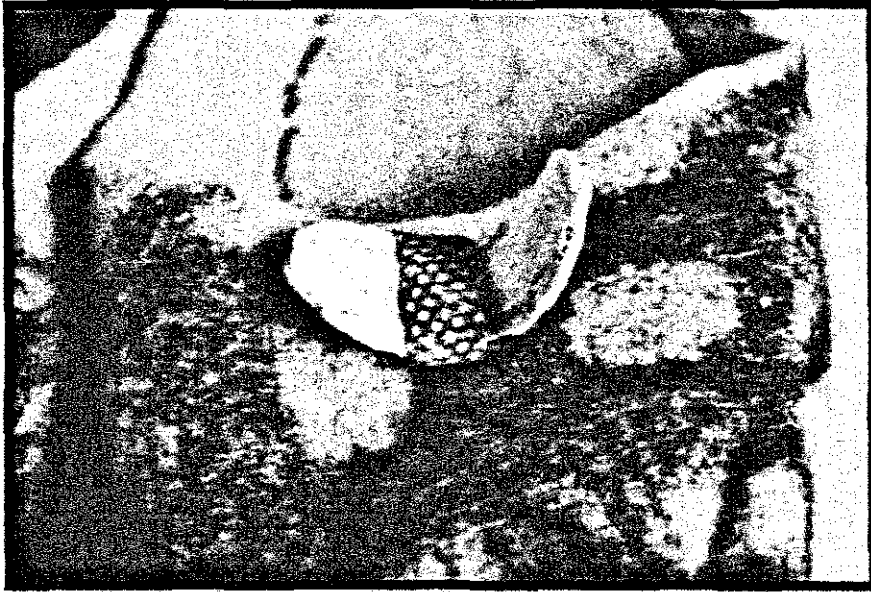
### Women at work at Keiskamma



(Coetzer,2010)

Figure 4.2

**A piece of shell incorporated in a Slipper**



(Coetzer, 2010)

To fully understand the relationship with the cattle and the Xhosa culture and also to appreciate my main material leather and its source, I spent time observing the cattle on our farm. I studied their behaviour, their movements, colouring and sensitivity. As it is a dairy farm there are only cows. Like humans and women, the cows are hyper-sensitive and there needs to be a "slowness" and calm tranquil atmosphere at all times in order for the cow to produce milk. One will never see a cow removed from the herd, they live together as a unit. The cows are present in my bags as their simple movements or mannerisms such as a twitching of an ear or tail has inspired me and can be depicted in motif or shape of a handbag.

Figure 4.3

**Observing of cows.**

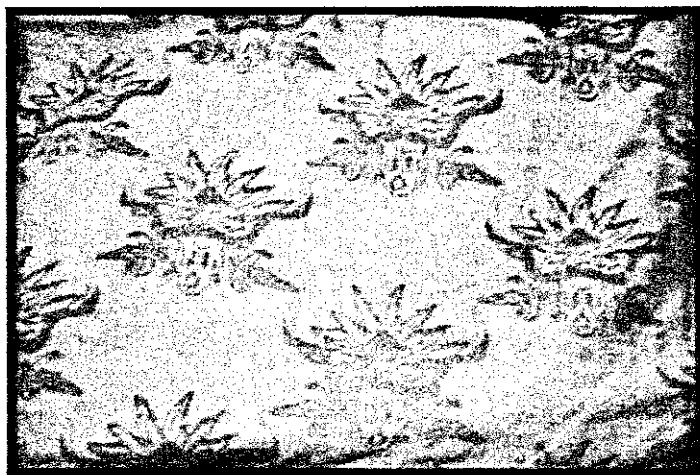


(Coetzer, 2010)

The vegetation of the Eastern Cape and Cape Town was a key inspiration for the bag designs and specifically the lining that was screen printed. The crest is a very personal one as it embodies my research with symbols from the places that my research took place. The indigenous cultures' motifs in their work are predominantly symbols from their surroundings that set a narrative in their material culture. The symbols in my crest consist of a protea, skull and horns of a cow, pin cushions and aloe vera plants. The placements of the symbols are important in the crest, the skull and horns of the cow are the body of the crest as this is the vital part of my bags and the body of my practical, the leather. The protea symbolizes my life and influence of my surroundings in Cape Town. It is placed in between

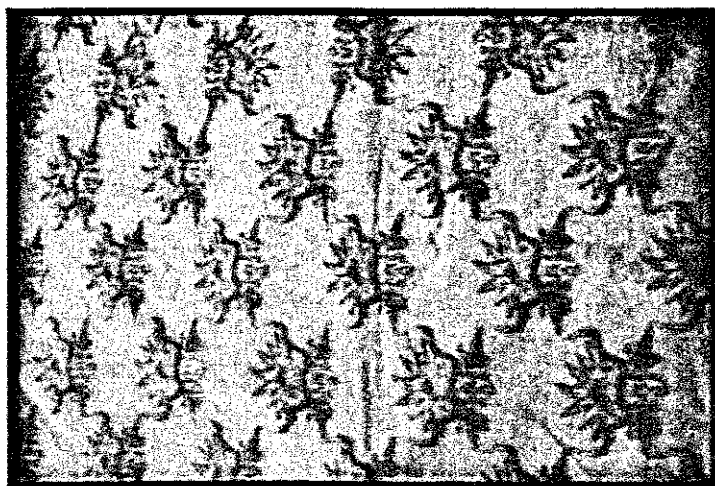
the horns as it represents the process of embodiment my research and inspiration took on starting in Cape Town and expanding to the Eastern Cape. The aloe vera placed beside the skull symbolise the Eastern Cape and how it has become a branch of myself as the Keiskamma organisation and the farm are based there. The design was printed in a structured repeat as it forms a contrast between the handmade and organic handbags. The colour it is printed in is a cold blue grey as it contrasts with the warm natural colours of the leather and the lining.

**Figure 4.4-Screen Printed lining on 100% cotton**



(Coetzer, 2010)

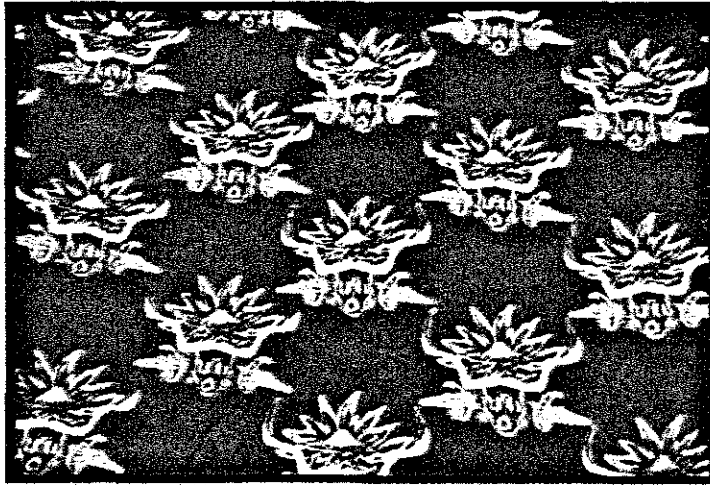
**Figure 4.5- Screen Printed Lining on Hemp**



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 4.6

**Screen Printed Lining on 100% cotton**

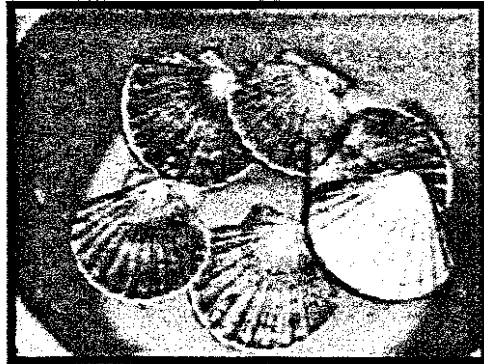


(Coetzer, 2010)

The process that evolved from the inspiration to the manufactured handbag was not always a straightforward one but, through the drawbacks, the most was learnt. The handbags are handmade by a Zimbabwean man, Lovemore. The commission results in a job and constant cash flow throughout the year for him and his wife. There is a healthy work relationship between myself and him but at times are difficult due to communication barriers. Throughout the process both he and I have learnt a tremendous amount about work ethics and craftsmanship. The first five handbags were inspired by nature and the Xhosa's traditional bags. The objects that were found during the time at Keiskamma such as shells pleats, the length and shape of the aloe, to the protection of the cows on the farm and in the Xhosa culture, were a direct influence on these bags to the choices of size, shapes, colours and motifs.

## The Clam Bag

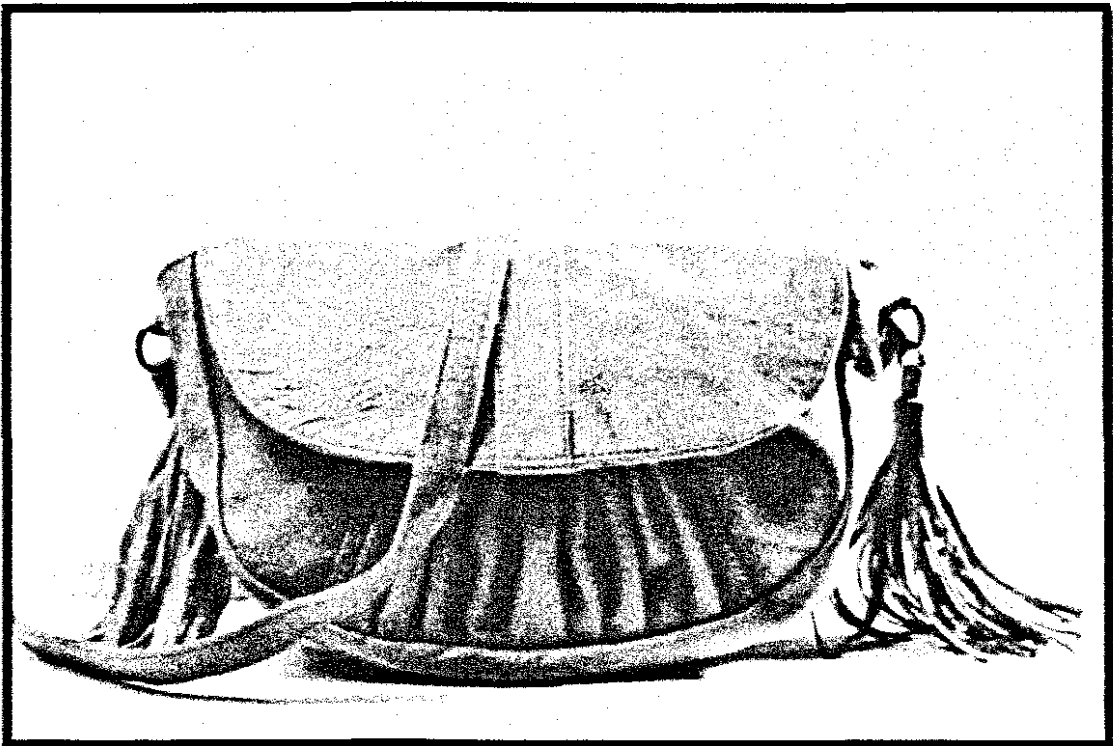
Figure 4.7 Shells found at Keiskamma River



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 4.8

## The Clam Bag



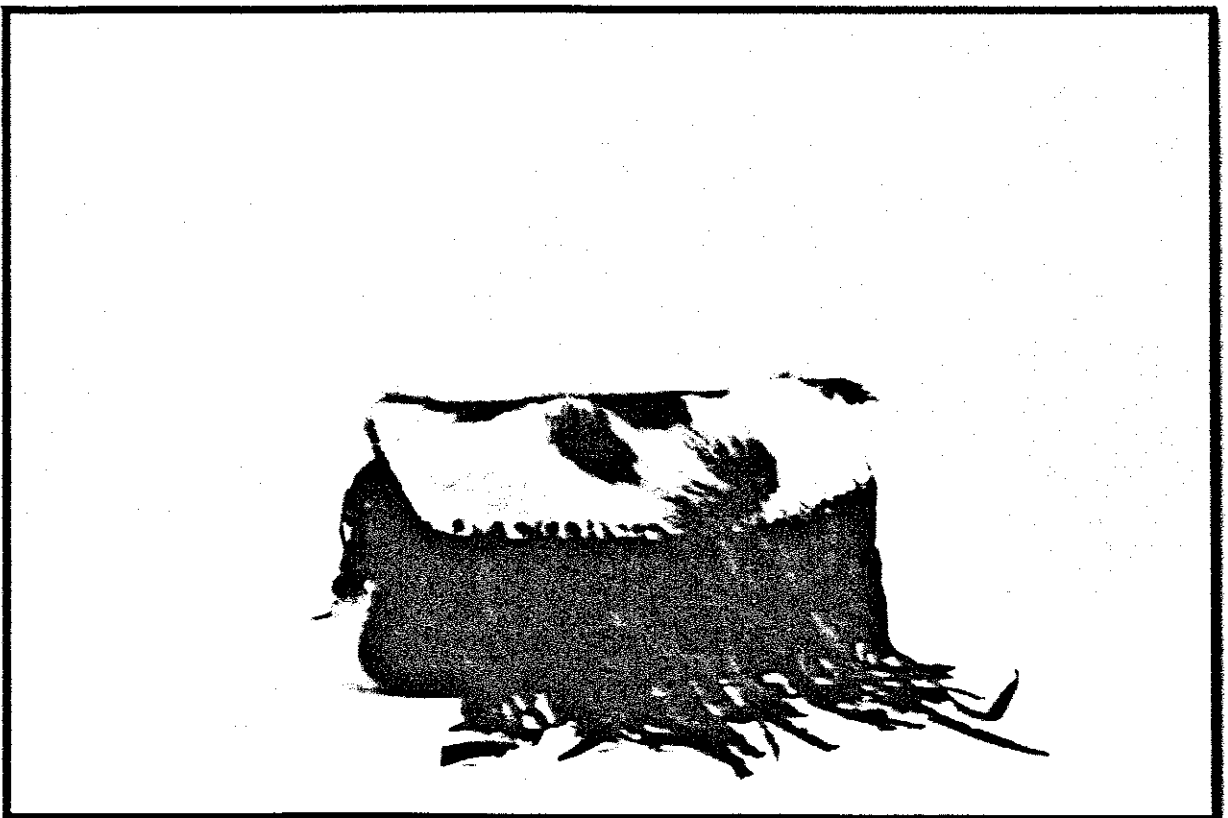
(Coetzer, 2010)

The inspiration for this bag was directly through simply finding an object and mimicking its form and shape. This specific object found at the river at Keiskamma was a clam shell. The shell motif is constantly portrayed in their tapestries. The shape of the bag plays off the shape of the shell with the round curve and pleated section. It is decorated with tassels on the sides of each bag as the traditional Xhosa bags were ornamented with tassels and found objects.

The bag has matching lining to the leather, which forms part of the natural colour palette of the handbags.

Figure 4.9

### The Fence Bag



(Coetzer, 2010)

The design for the Fence Bag's inspiration was drawn from the Xhosa cultures, specifically, their respects for their cattle and my time spent on the farm. This bag represents the cow in both these contexts, therefore the leather the bag is made from, has hair to act as direct



symbol for the viewer. The strands of suede along the back of the bag and the front represent the barb wire that fences the cows in to protect them on the farm. This too is symbolic of protection of the sacred cow in the Xhosa culture and how the people live to protect their means of survival, the cow. The handle was initially made from the same strands of suede to again imitate the barb wire but due to functionality and durability it made sense to have a plain leather strap and the aspect of the barb wire did not need to be repeated.

Figure 4.10

### Traditional Genet Bag



(Elliot. A, 'The genet cat bag', 1970: 37)

Figure 4.11

## The Genet Bag



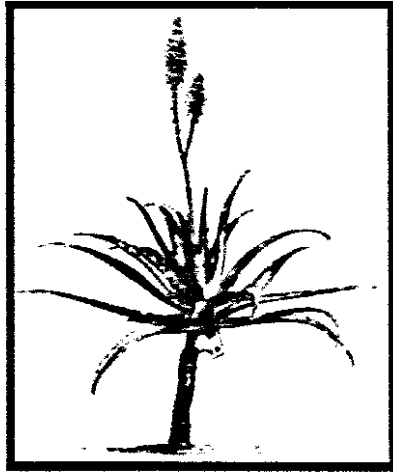
(Coetzer, 2010)

One of the traditional Xhosa bags for men consists of a wild cat's skins (Genet) with the head of the cat being the flap. By creating a stylized interpretation of the pattern on the spine of the cat, traditional cut- out and appliqué were incorporated to emphasize the pattern levels from the hemp to the leather to create depth to the design and bag. The shape of the bag follows the shape the cat's body would naturally take. The fabric that shows through the cut- out is natural Hemp fabric that has not been dyed to add to the natural and hand- made feel and colour palette of the handbags.

## The Aloe Bag

Figure 4.12

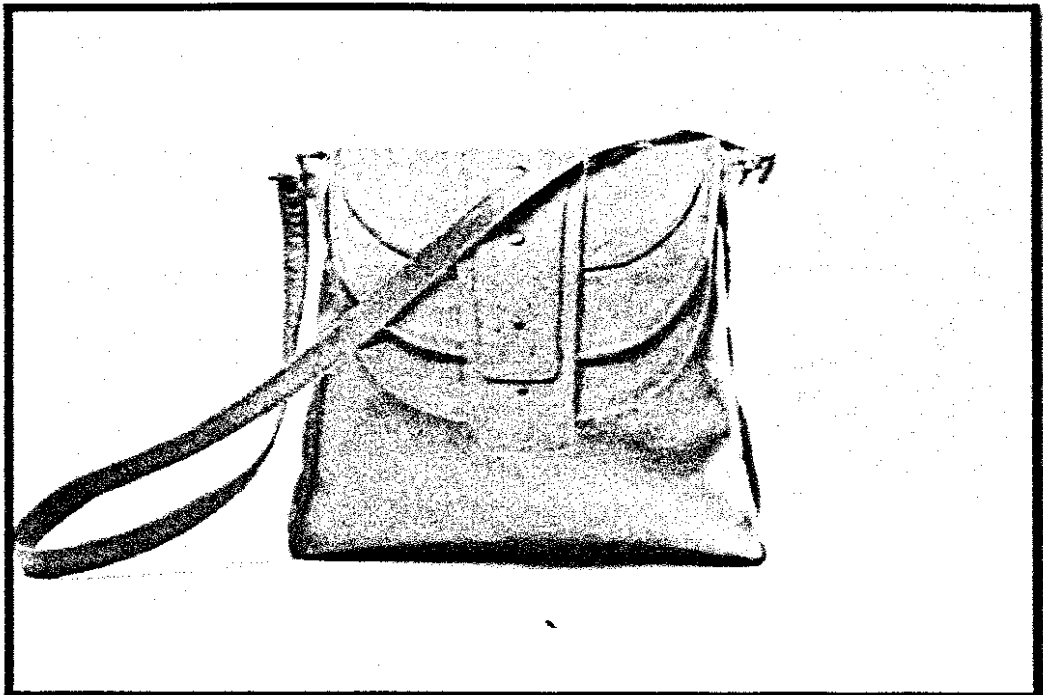
Aloe Vera Plant



Anonymous, *Aloe Vera*. 2008 (<http://www.garden-services.com/gallery/cacti/Aloe%20Vera.htm>)

Figure 4.13

## The Aloe Bag

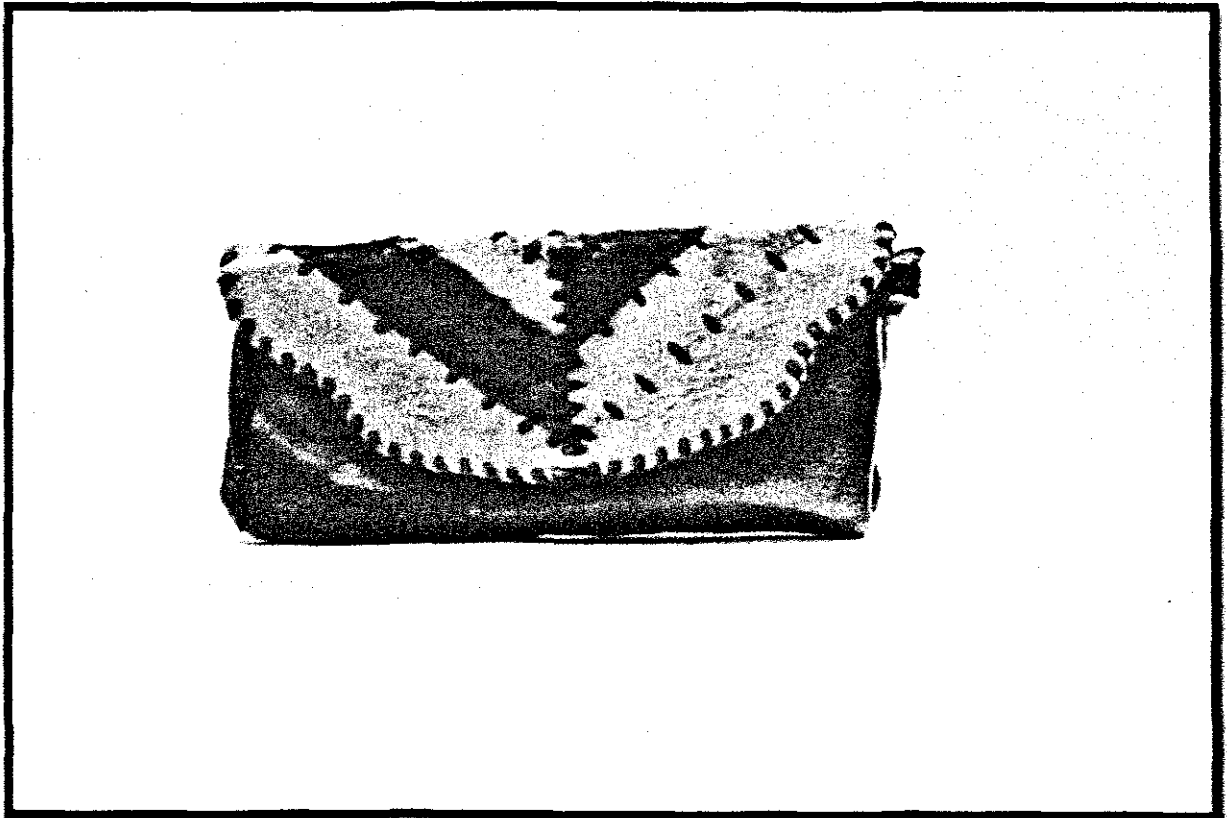


(Coetzer, 2010)

The Eastern Cape is lush with the indigenous plant the Aloe Vera. This bag relies on its shape to represent its inspiration. The base is a classic satchel shape that has a long strap that sits on the hip. The flap of the bag has three circular layers that represent the shape that the aloe's leaves form around the plant. The tubular layers, down the centre are a mimic of the Aloe flower and the elongated form it possesses.

Figure 4.14

### The Keiskamma Clutch



(Coetzer, 2010)

The Keiskamma Clutch, made entirely of off-cuts, is inspired by my time at the Keiskamma Organisation with the women working on the tapestries. Each woman took so much pride in her work and herself, like any woman anywhere in the world would, and wants to look beautiful. This is why the clutch bag was made as it often is used at an occasion to add that elegance. The flap is hand stitched to resemble them and the hand work they do. The choice

of different colours symbolises the different women but how they are stitched together through their means of work and manner of sitting together and having a sense of womanhood.

The second part of my design process was an evolution from the first handbags. I could see that there was a distinct lack of heritage, finishes and a particular emotion the viewer needed to feel when he/she picks up the handbag. I needed to re-evaluate my designs and add an element to bring my collection together. The designing of a crest and screen printing the lining added a more finished look as well as branding. Furthermore the crest shows a link between the handbags. With each handbag a constant check of my design principles took place to ensure ornament, balance, line, colour, contrast, consistency, texture and space. A working relationship with Lovemore was kept as close as possible under the circumstances of the distance and safety between where him and I live, to ensure quality control.

## The Abundant Bag

Figure 4.15

Back of Bag



Figure 4.16

### Inside of Flap



(Coetzer, 2010)

The Abundant bag is a simple bag that just works with leather that still has the hair and works with the natural shape and form that it has. The hair with its texture and patterns is pleasing aesthetically; it too is rich like our cultures and acts as a symbol of South Africa. South Africa houses many cultures, the cow for the Xhosa culture houses many vital aspects such as food, milk, transport, medium to the ancestors and clothing.

After experimenting with the skin, it just seemed the correct approach to take was to keep it simple and work with the natural curve of the animal, specifically its cow's lick in the hair that leads to the tail. Having the tail, incorporated the Xhosa cultures traditional ornamentation on their bags by using tassels, beads and tails. It is a large bag as I wanted to have a sense of warmth as the bag would hang and the majority would be hair. As the hair is very effective on its own I did not want to take away from it so stuck to two colours, black and white.

Figure 4.17

### The Rustling Bag



(Coetzer, 2010)

The Rustling bag is inspired by what I saw and felt everyday during my research, in the Eastern Cape or in Cape Town. In Cape Town I saw nature and felt the wind. In the Eastern Cape I saw the cows, nature and I felt the wind. This bag's purpose is to show movement, whether in the wind or just moving, therefore tassels were added as the main component. What I saw move in nature in the Eastern Cape and Cape Town were leaves and the cows ears twitching constantly on the farm as they stared at me inquisitively. This led to a stylized motif that could represent the cow's ear and a leaf at the end of the tassel. The colour grading was not only chosen in terms of the design principles, but to show growth from two colours merging into one and represent the growth of my research from Cape Town to the Eastern Cape.



## The Twitch Bag

Figure 4.18

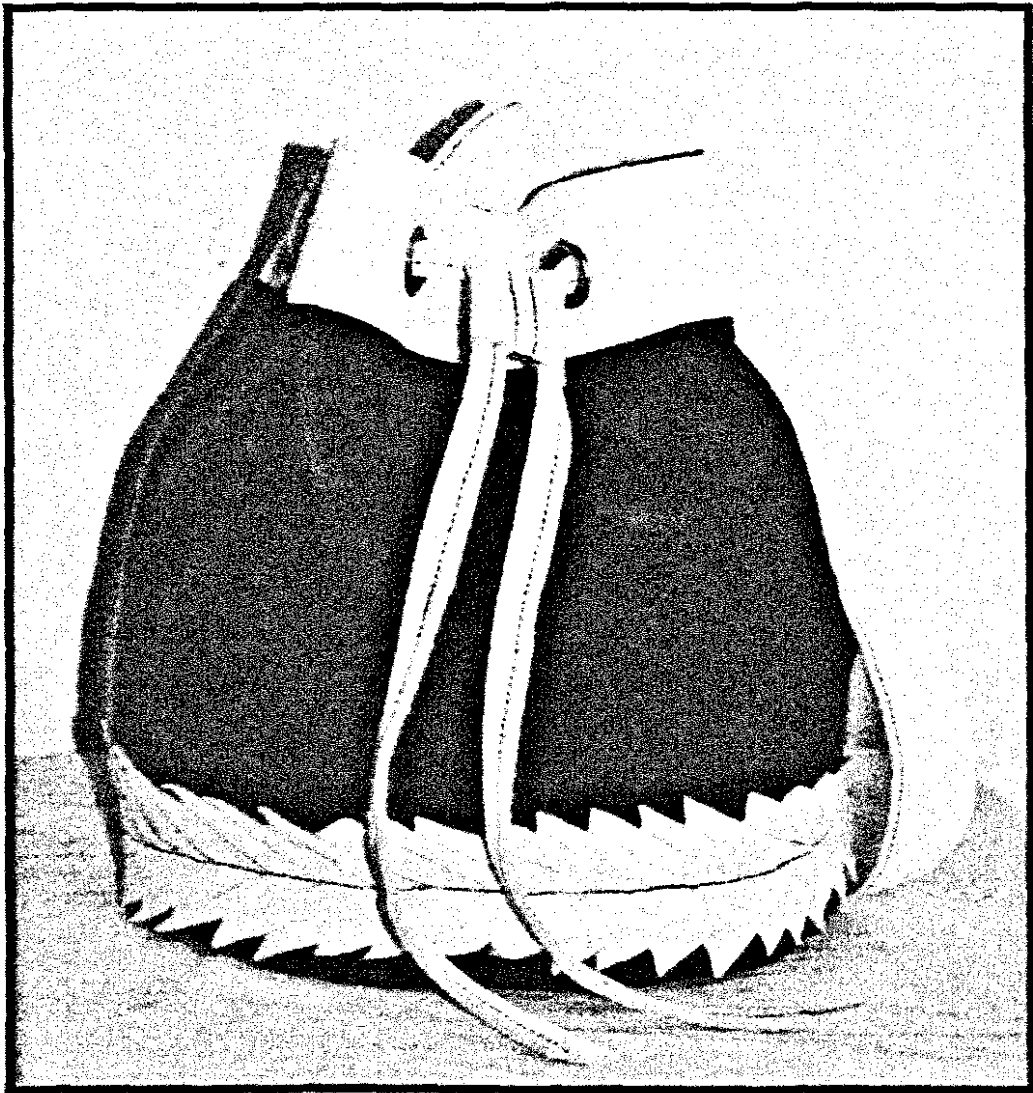
### Cows on the Farm



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 4.19

## The Twitch Bag



(Coetzer, 2010)

The 'Twitch Bag' too is inspired by observations made during my time in the Eastern Cape, at the Keiskamma Organisation and on the farm. The shape of this bag is inspired by the baskets that the Xhosa women use in their day to day lives to carry their belongings. This bag represents how vital the cow is to the Xhosa culture and how it sustains them by providing essentials like food, transport and clothing. The ornamentation at the bottom of the bag is symbolic of my time observing the cows on the farm. When approaching a herd of cows the constant twitching and flapping of their ears always seemed to draw my focus

which led to the stylized triangular shape of the trim around the circular shape of the bottom of the bag. The circle too represents the unity of the herd. The colours of the bag are black and white like the hair of the cow.

## The Basket Pouch

Figure 4.20

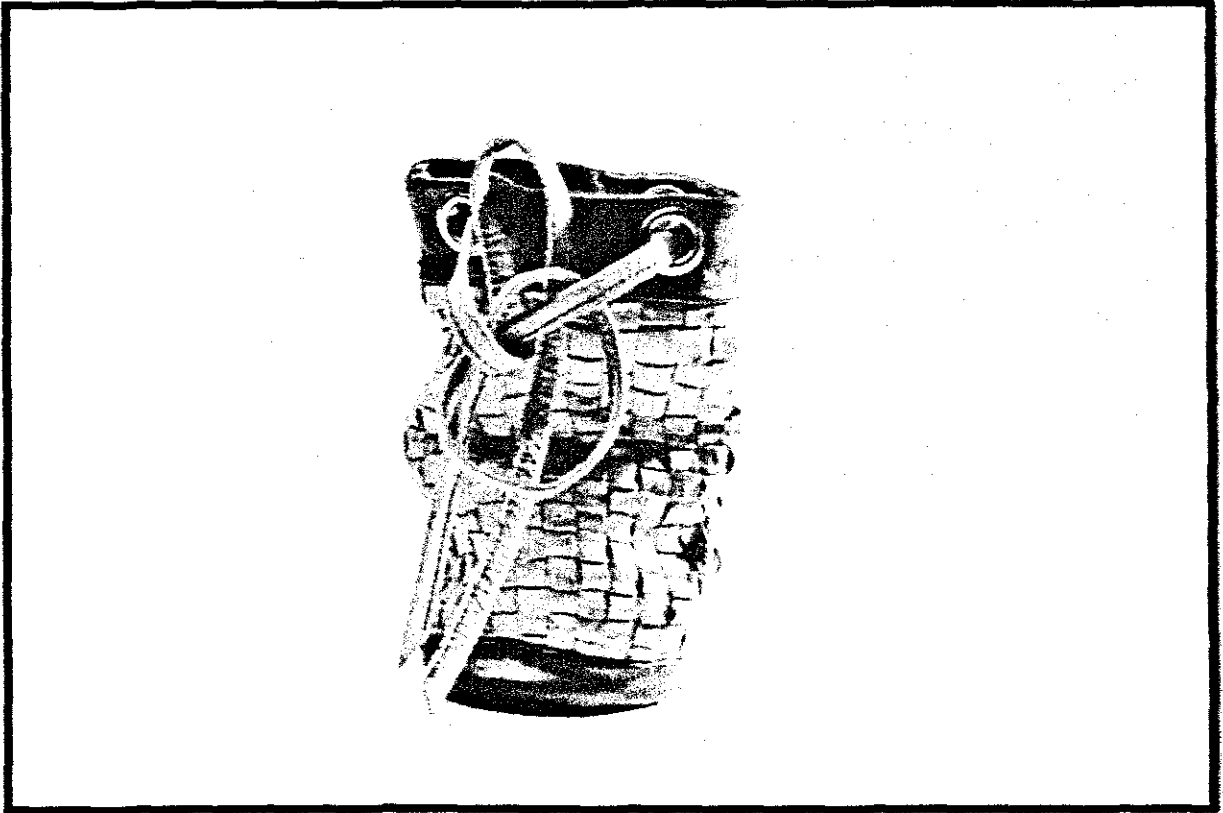
### Woven Reed Baskets



Moreno, S, *Inspirations that Inspire Designers*. 2010 (<http://www.id-mag.com/article/inspirations/>)

Figure 4.21

## The Basket Pouch



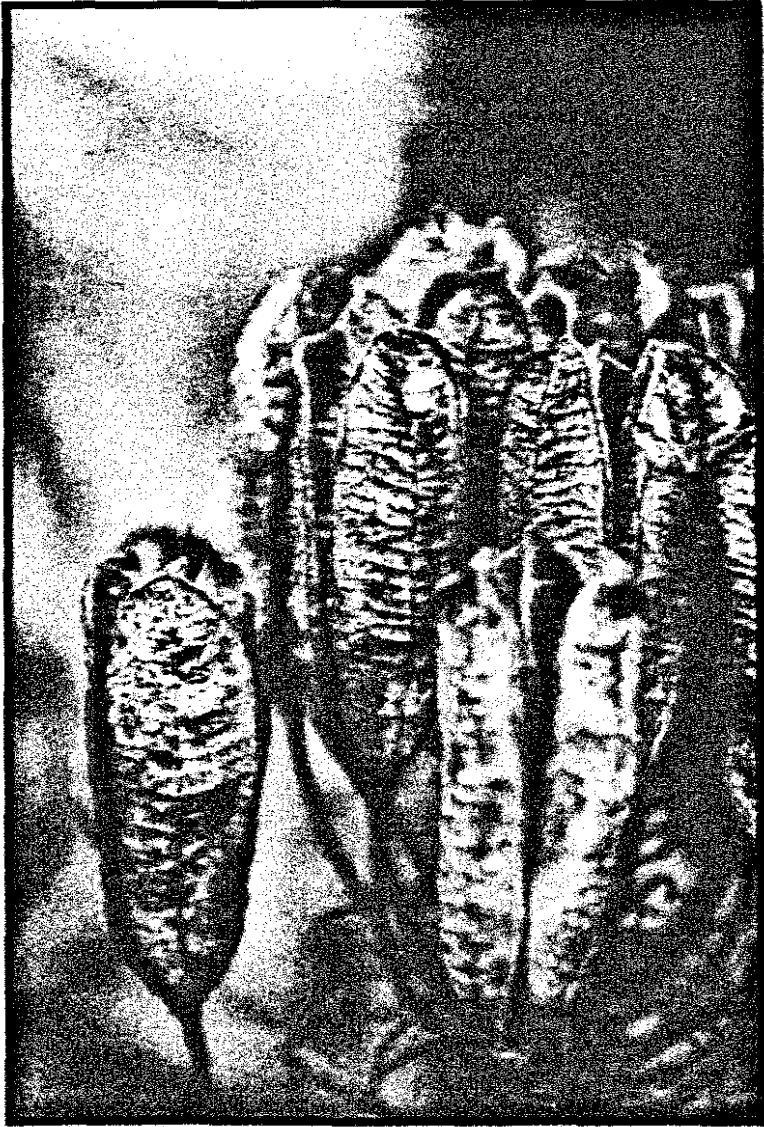
(Coetzer, 2010)

The basket pouch is inspired by the Xhosa women and the baskets they use for many effects, from storing food to carrying their belongings on their head in the typical Xhosa manner. This bag is not a large bag. It is simple and has one purpose to carry essentials. Due to its size it will always make the user have to consider what as the most important things are to carry with them and ultimately not carry too many luxuries as we tend to do today. The bag is in natural straw like colours like the straw baskets and it is hand woven.

# The Bloom Bag

Figure 4.22

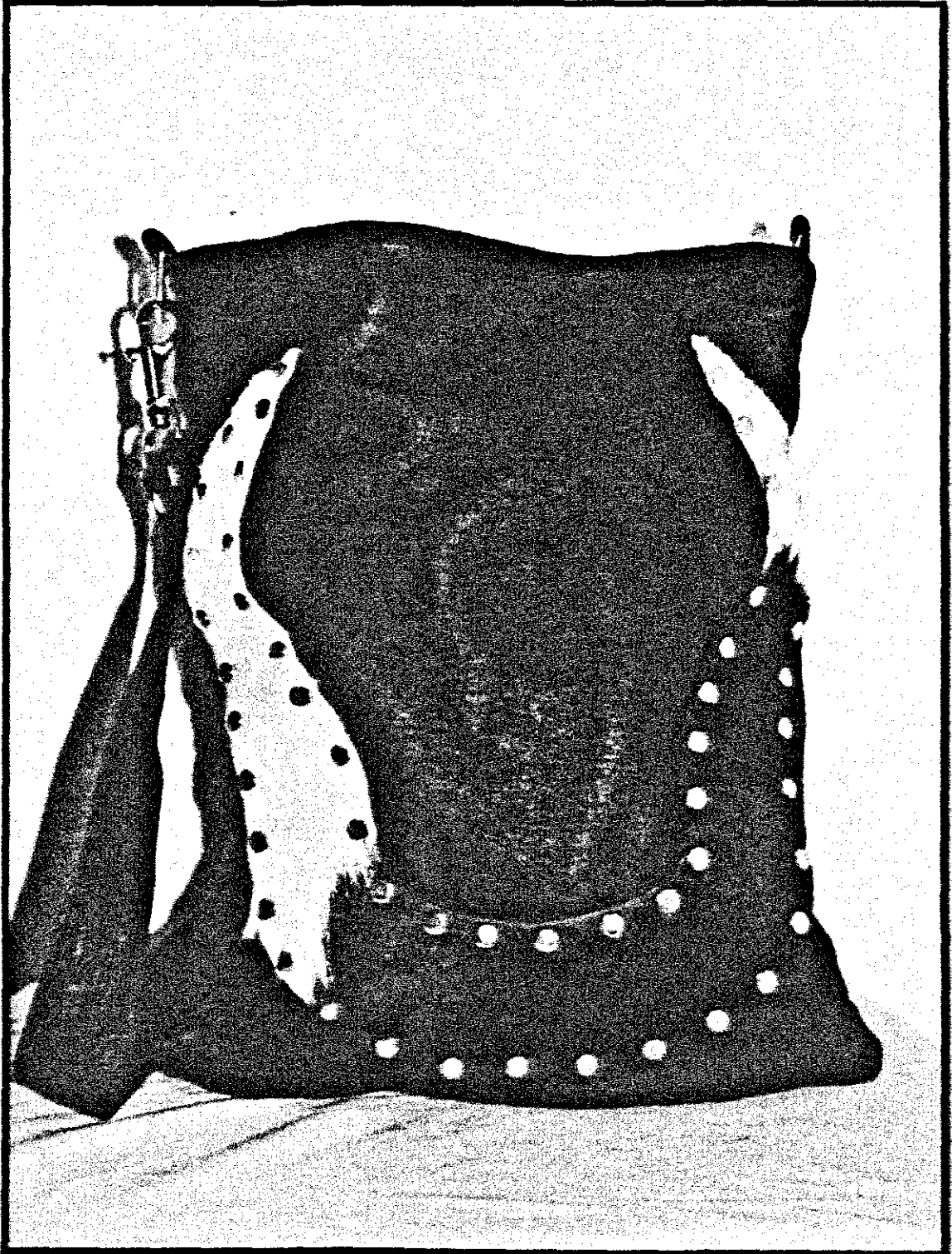
## Inspiration From Keiskamma



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 4.23

## The Bloom Bag



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 4.24

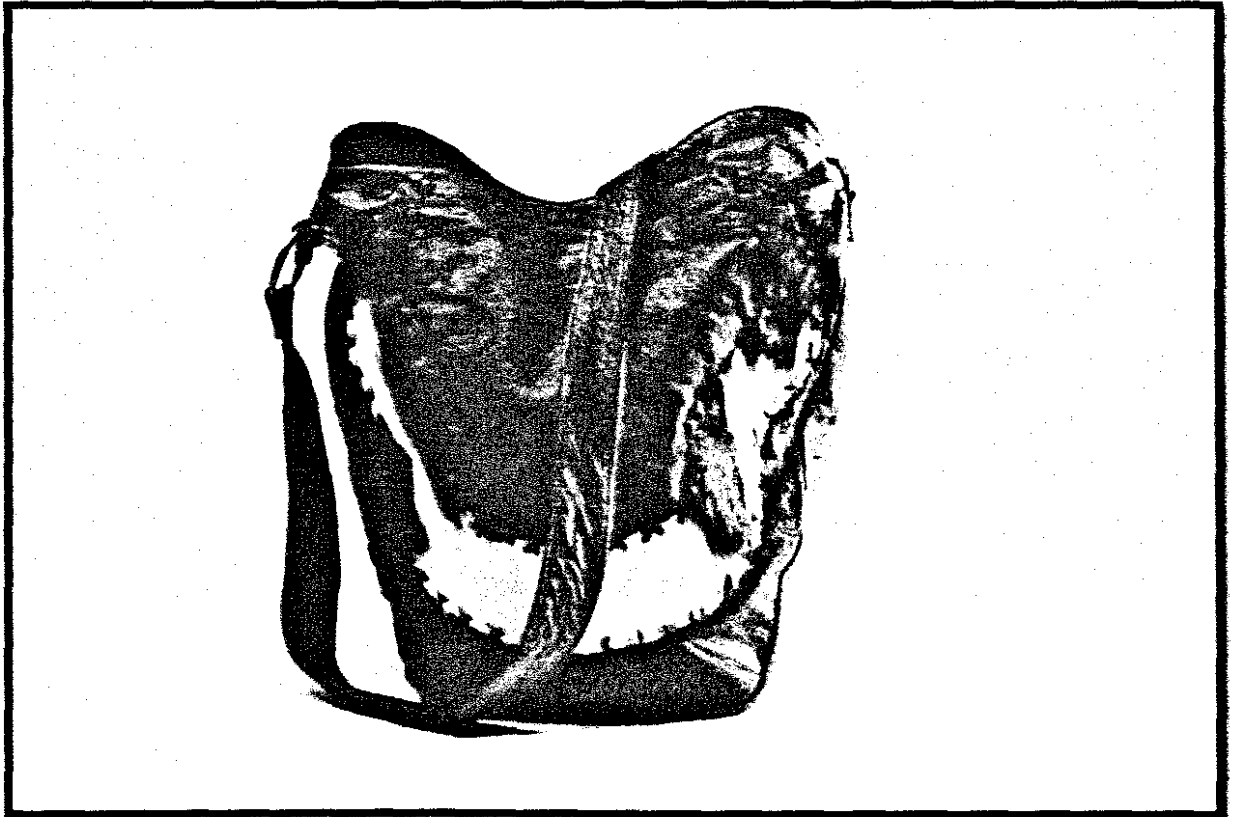
**'The Bloom Bag' Shorter Version**



(Coetzer, 2010)

Figure 4.25

## The Pastoral Bag



(Coetzer, 2010)

The 'Pastoral bag' and 'Bloom bag' symbolize the range and the process behind the it and that the research took on. It unifies the range and research by having the traditional, hand stitched appliqué in rich textured leather with hair that is in the shape of horns which is also in the crest of the lining.

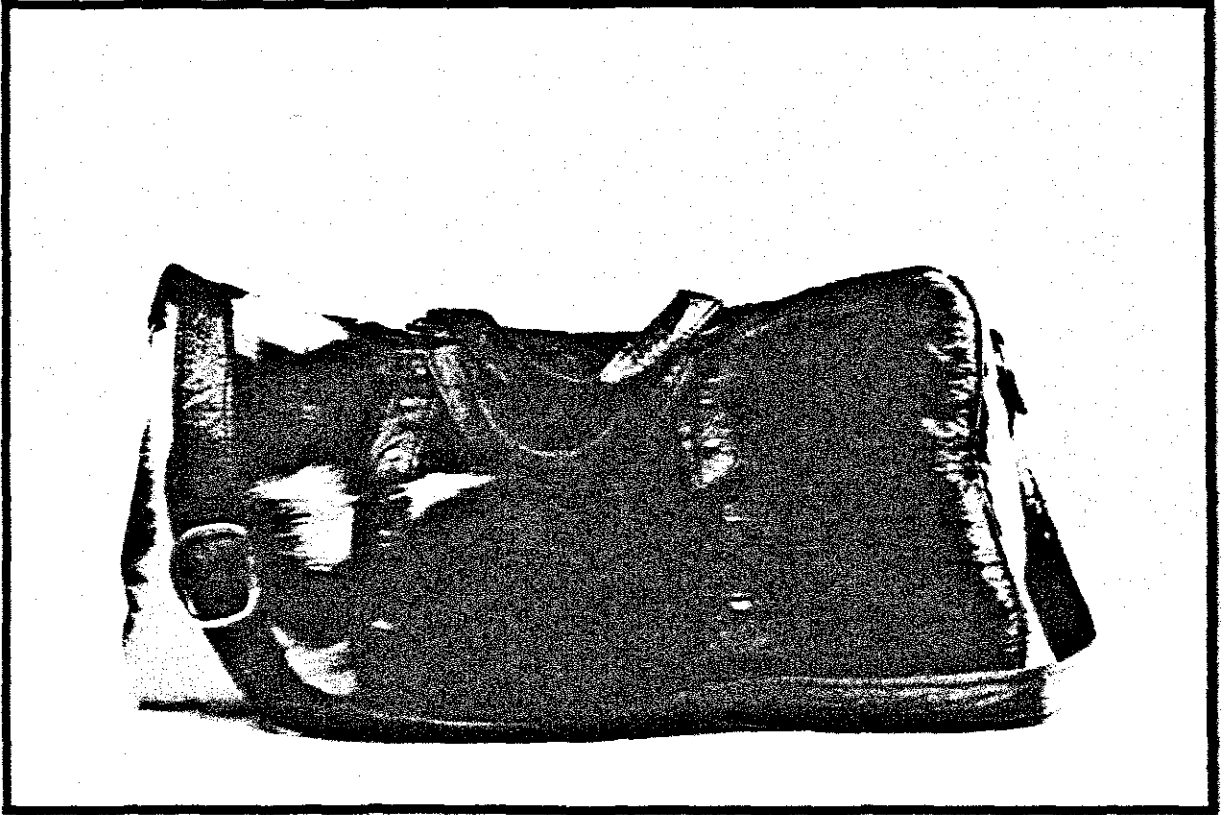
The 'Bloom bag' represents my growth throughout this research and spending time with the women at Keiskamma. It not only shows my growth but the Xhosa women at the Keiskamma Organisation and the creative program that equips them to use their skills and gain an income from their handmade products. Due to the shape of the bag and how it can be worn in two different ways, from a short bag that folds and merges to a longer version. This resembles growth and how my research bloomed through my experiences. These bags



unite all the aspects of the indigenous culture, the influence from the cow and the embodied lining together.

Figure 4.26

### The Nomad Bag

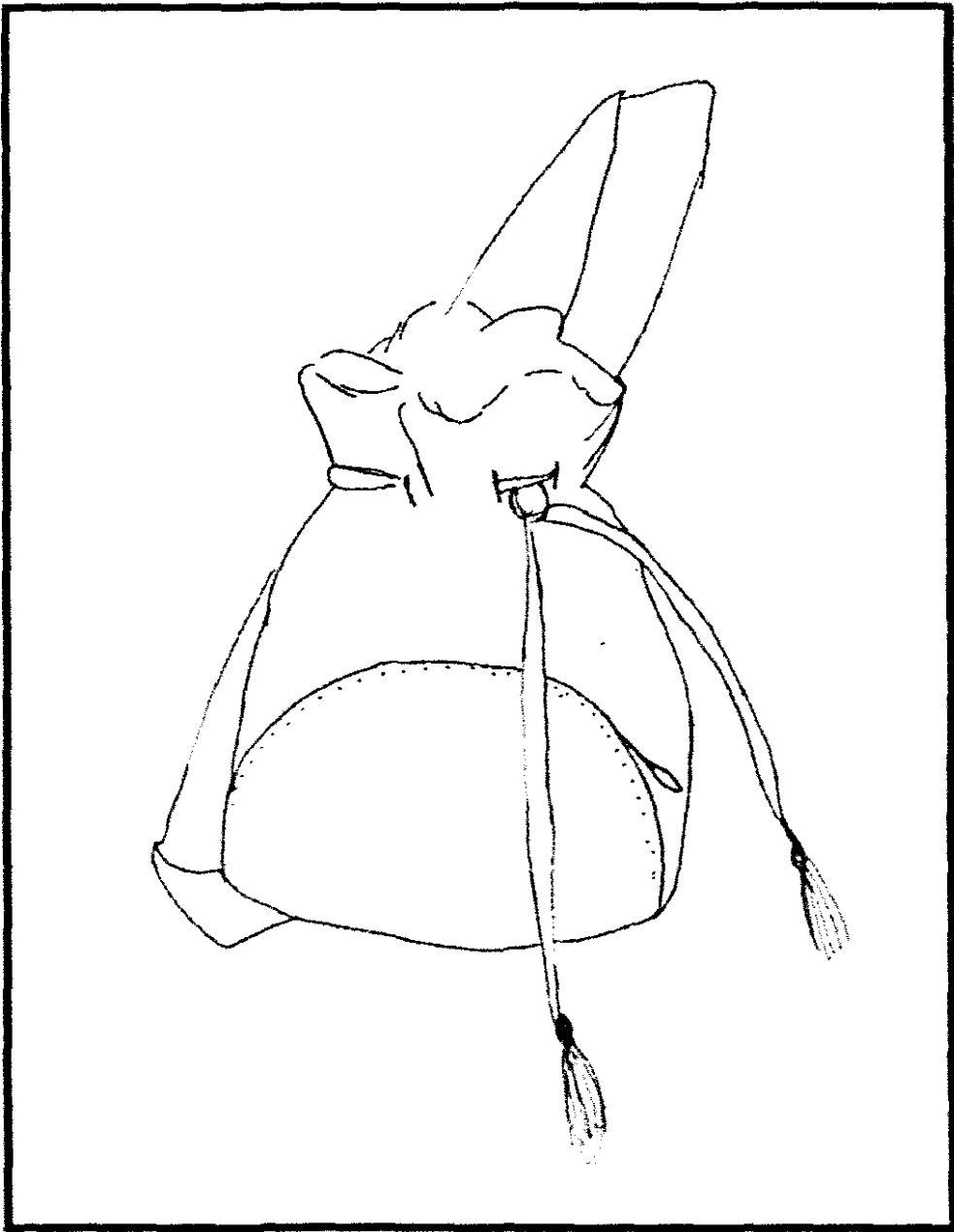


(Coetzer, 2010)

The Nomad Bag was inspired by the Xhosa's hunter gather lifestyle and constant movement. I wanted the bag to be for the contemporary "nomad" as people are travelling more frequently due to job or lifestyle demands. The Xhosa not only moved with their family and community but with their valuable cattle, therefore hide with hair was used and in black and white as it is clean, simple and classic. There are two straps for comfort; the smaller handles can be used to hold in the hand or the longer adjustable strap to be worn over the shoulder.

Figure 4.27

## The Travellers Bag



(Coetzer, 2010)

The 'Travellers bag' too is inspired by the Xhosa's hunter gather lifestyle and constant moving. It is intended for the contemporary "nomad" as people are travelling more frequently due to job or lifestyle demands. This bag however is also inspired by the baskets that the Xhosa women use and its tubular shape and natural colour palette.

Figure 4.28

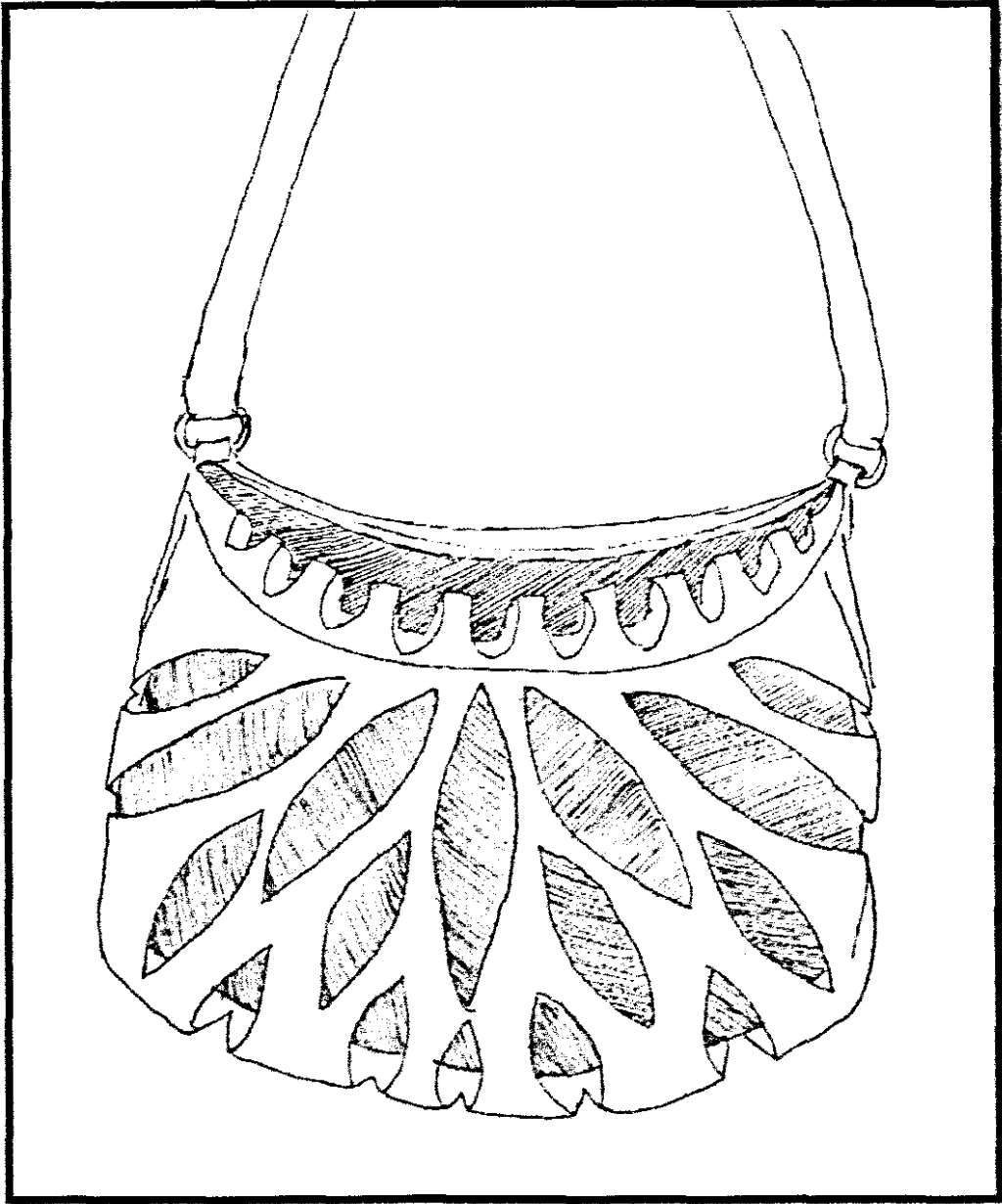
**Tapestry From Keiskamma**



(The Keiskamma Organisation, 2010)

Figure 4.29

### The Exoskeleton Bag



(Coetzer, 2010)

The inspiration for this bag is directly from a piece of tapestry that the women from Keiskamma created (Figure 4.28) specifically the image of the tree. This bag is my take on the image and how I interpreted it. The tree is symbolic of growth, love and community and all the emotions felt during my time at the Keiskamma Organisation. The tree is the inspiration for this bag because as a tree grows so did I throughout my research, specifically

when doing my field work. The sense of family and community at Keiskamma is vast and not only have the women grown as they have been taught skills and given a form of income but so have the organisers and volunteers through the Xhosa culture and their way of life.

The cut-out over the bag is a stylized image of a tree. The tree represents my growth from this research project and the love and care that these women made me feel. Their nurturing natures inspired the cut-out being around the bag, like a mother cradling a child and like roots grow under the earth. The shape of the bag is inspired by the roots of a tree under the surface and how through all experiences there is growth whether visible or not.

To conclude this chapter, I have revealed that the research of indigenous cultures and “Slow Design” guidelines can be manifested and are relevant in an eco-friendly handbag range. It is relevant since the environment is in a fragile state and in order to make a difference both designers and consumers need to rethink the types of products they purchase and why. The Xhosa material culture processes and lifestyle is on par with what ‘Slow’ design encourages and can be valid in today’s society and design field through incorporating the past with the future.

## Chapter 5

This dissertation demonstrates and encourages designers to re-evaluate their design philosophy and way of life in order to address environmental and social needs in a stressful and fast paced society. By doing so, and creating products that have meaning and value, the viewer will have to think and react. These handbags contribute to the sustainable discourse and playing a role in improving the environment.

The aim of my collection of handbags was to manifest 'Slow design' principles; from the designing of the handbag, to ensuring that its life span will be longer than a mass-produced product. I want a strong sense and influence of traditional forms and processes to reflect in the collection of handbags, as they go hand in hand with the 'Slow' lifestyle in terms of why and what materials are used and their purpose.

My design process and product development emerged through my field work and case study. Theory supported this research project. A major influence for certain choices that had a positive effect on my end products came through personal struggles. I really had to internalise my research, not only through my field work but reflecting back on the history of the indigenous cultures as the Keiskamma organisation (where I did my case study) is rural and practised traditions and lived the same lifestyles as their ancestors, is a clear Western influence. Researching indigenous traditions gave me insight into the culture from the unity of the community to the forms and processes in the Xhosa culture's material world. By journalising my experiences and encounters from experiences and simple sketches, it evolved into designs and then into products.

Throughout this research theory, field work and practical were all linked and played a vital role in the development of a product that aims to create an awareness of the state of the environment and our indigenous cultures. How we could learn from them to have a positive effect on today's society through the ripple effect. The indigenous cultures apply these principles and philosophy through their traditional cultures. We need to reinforce unity

within our culture and with our surroundings and nature through craft and rituals in order to preserve and express their traditional group.

Designers need to discover a new way to contribute to society and a way of life. In order to do so they need to primarily re-examine the real needs of society and the environment.

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<http://www.ezakwantu.com/Gallery%20African%20Tobacco%20Bags.htm> [28 September 2010]

Figure 2.2 Material Culture of Nguni

Broster, Joan. 2010. Galerie Ezakwantu. *South African Tobacco Bags*. [Online] Available:  
<http://www.ezakwantu.com/Gallery%20African%20Tobacco%20Bags.htm> [28 September 2010]

Figure 2.3 Thembi at Qwathi

Broster, Joan. 2010. Galerie Ezakwantu. *South African Tobacco Bags*. [Online] Available:  
<http://www.ezakwantu.com/Gallery%20African%20Tobacco%20Bags.htm> [28 September 2010]

Figure 2.4 The Tobacco Bag

A. Elliot. 1970. *The magic world of the Xhosa*, Collins, London, Johannesburg, Cape Town.:35

Figure 2.5 Traditional Genet Bag

A. Elliot. 1970. *The magic world of the Xhosa*, Collins, London, Johannesburg, Cape Town.:37

Figure 3.2 Crowned Plover

Hammond- Tooke, D; Poland, M. 2003. *The Abundant Herds*, Fernwood Press, South Africa:44

Figure 3.3 The Keiskamma Tapestry

Downs, J. 2008. *The Keiskamma Art Project*, The Paper Shop, Cape Town, South Africa:11

Figure 3.7 "Guernica"

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Figure 3.15 "Strelitzia"

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Figure 3.16 "Aloe"

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Figure 4.10 Traditional Genet Bag

A. Elliot. 1970. *The magic world of the Xhosa*, Collins, London, Johannesburg, Cape Town.:37

Figure 4.12 Aloe Vera Plant

Anonymous. 2008. *Aloe Vera*. [Online] Available: <http://www.garden-services.com/gallery/cacti/Aloe%20Vera.htm> [15 June 2010]

Figure 4.20 Woven reed baskets

Moreno, S. 2010. *Inspirations that Inspire Designers*. [Online] Available: <http://www.id-mag.com/article/inspirations/> [15 June 2010]