



NATIVE WORK: AN ARTWORK BY ANDREW PUTTER
 CONSISTING OF 38 PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHS
 (With photography by Hylton Boucher, Kyle Weeks and Andrew Putter)

Andrew Putter

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Left: Thandokazi Mbane as 'A Native Girl'.

Native Work is an artistic response to Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's life-long project to photograph black southern Africans. Cognisant of the dangers inherent in Duggan-Cronin's colonial ethnographic approach, *Native Work* nevertheless recognizes an impulse of tenderness running through his project. By trusting this impulse in Duggan-Cronin's photographs, *Native Work* attempts to provoke another way of reading these images, using them as the basis for making new work motivated by the desire for social connection, a desire which emerges as a particular kind of historical possibility in the aftermath of apartheid.

Native Work is based on my encounter with the archive of Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's photographs of southern Africans taken between 1919 and 1939.¹ It recognises an impulse of tenderness in Duggan-Cronin's project – what appears to me as a counter-cultural interest in the aesthetic lives of 'native' South Africans in the first half of the twentieth century.

Native Work is an artwork-installation consisting of 38 photographic portraits. These portraits are divided into two complementary series with each series portraying the same 17 sitters. The black-and-white series shows the sitters in costume loosely – though carefully – derived from the ethnographic archive of photographs and material objects relating to early twentieth-century Xhosa 'traditional' costume, and was determined largely by myself, the artist. There are 21 photographs in this series, as four of the sitters appear twice, in different costume. The colour series portrays sitters in costume of their own choosing, the clothing chosen as a consequence of the opportunity to own a formal

