

Siona O’Connell was born in Cape Town and completed her secondary schooling at Waterford Kamhlaba, United World College of Southern Africa, in Mbabane, Swaziland. She was educated at the University of Cape Town (UCT) where she studied fine art, receiving her **Bachelor of Fine Arts** (2006), **Master of Arts in African Studies** (2008) and **Doctor of Philosophy in African Studies** (2012). She was a Trilateral Reconnections Project Fellow at Brown University in the US and is a BIARI (Brown International Advanced Research Institutes) alumnus.

She is the Director of the Centre for Curating the Archive (CCA) at UCT and is one of the few black women in South Africa to head a research unit. In addition, O’Connell convenes and teaches visual and African studies courses in the Humanities Faculty at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Through collaboration, she has established and cemented new relationships beyond UCT including St George’s Cathedral, the United States Consulate in Cape Town, Iziko Museums, The South African Clothing & Textile Workers Union (SACTWU), the District Six Museum, Artscape, City of Cape Town, Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) and Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL). In addition, she initiated a relationship with the acclaimed Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence in the US in 2013, which has resulted in joint student projects and the first ever study abroad visit to UCT by RISD students in 2013.

O’Connell has directed and produced six film documentaries that emerged out of her research projects on identity, memory and belonging in post apartheid South Africa. *Spring Queen* (2014) is a 44-minute film on the local clothing and textile industry that made its debut on the *Encounters Film Festival* in June 2014. This production received television coverage on CNBC Africa, a channel that is broadcast throughout the African continent. *Movie Snaps* and “*Coloured*” (2014) debuted on the Indie Karoo Film Festival in July 2015. “*Coloured*” went on to make its international debut on the SA-UK Seasons in London in July 2015. *An Impossible Return* and *The Wynberg 7* (2015) premiered at the Baxter Theatre in October 2015 and have been screened on national television. O’Connell’s latest film, *Promises and Lies: The Fault Lines of the ANC* is scheduled to premiere in December 2016.

O’Connell serves on the Student Recruitment, Postgraduate as well as the Publication committees at the Michaelis School of Fine Art. She has also served on the board of the Harry Oppenheimer Institute at UCT. She is invited regularly to speak at schools with disadvantaged pupils in an endeavor to recruit these students to UCT, something that she has done with remarkable success.

O’Connell is held in high regard by colleagues at South African universities as well as those abroad. She has delivered papers at Brown University (2008 and 2011), Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL) (2015) and RISD where she was invited to guest lecture during early 2013. Her acceptance to the highly competitive and fully funded Brown International Advanced Research Institutes (BIARI) at Brown University in 2011 is a significant achievement. O’Connell’s interdisciplinary approach has resulted in her being invited to present a paper on her research of the South African clothing industry to staff and postgraduate students at London College of Fashion, London School of the Arts, (University of the Arts).

She actively participates in study abroad programmes hosted by UCT's International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO) by convening and lecturing courses as well as hosting short visit groups from Colgate University (2014, 2015, 2016) and RISD (2013). Her semester undergraduate and postgraduate courses are heavily subscribed and are considered to be popular choices for study abroad students.

In South Africa, she is considered to be a key scholar in her area of curation, heritage and restorative justice. Her regular invitations by the University of Johannesburg, Wits and Rhodes University and local community organizations all attest to her being held in high regard and engaged with innovative research and approaches. Since her 2015 press articles on the questions of transformation and the South African academy, O'Connell is regularly invited to speak on these issues at various institutions and organizations.

The Centre for Curating the Archive at UCT is a research unit that aims through scholarly practice to open up novel combinations of the historically separated domains of the creative arts and the truth-claiming discourses of history and the social and natural sciences. As Director of the CCA, O'Connell is responsible for the research foci, day-to-day management of the centre, administration, grants writing, overseeing staff, budgeting and reporting. She manages 4 full-time and several part-time staff members, a responsibility that includes budgeting, appointments, detailing job descriptions, and staff development. Since assuming the directorship, O'Connell has positioned the CCA as a research unit with strong ties to communities beyond the academy. This has resulted in increased visibility and new partnerships as well as affording affiliated students the opportunity to work with communities across the city.

Study Abroad

O'Connell has over 6 years experience of study abroad in Cape Town through teaching semester abroad students at UCT as well as hosting short visits by visiting scholars and students from abroad. She has received numerous recommendations as a result of her approach to these programs. O'Connell couples her academic knowledge with her lived experience as a Capetonian woman who has at least fifteen years of experience of working with community projects across the city. Her innovative approaches to inter- and trans-disciplinary Africa scholarship pivot on her relationships with community based initiatives. These relationships include being involved in creative projects with schools and youth centers, community garden projects in townships, HIV/AIDS prevention endeavors, empowerment projects with women in the clothing trade as well as hosting workshops with those who were forcibly removed. She is able to carefully balance the lines between a healthy respect for theory and the realities and complexities of practice. Through working with the local, O'Connell enriches the experience for study-abroad students by introducing them to case studies that have global implications. She knows Cape Town intimately, is aware of the divisions as well as the promises of the city and is held in high regard by many Capetonians across racial and economic lines.

Teaching

O'Connell teaches at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels at the Michaelis School of Fine Art as well as at the Centre for African Studies (CAS) at UCT. For the past three years she has delivered a series of guest lectures in the Commerce Faculty, as part of a postgraduate course called 'Information Systems as a Social Space'. She supervises Honors and Masters students and supervises PhD candidates registered at CAS. As course convener, she designs and administers courses, appoints and oversees guest lecturers and teaching assistants.

O'Connell urges her students to rethink historiographies and genealogies, to disrupt and challenge how histories and narratives are constructed in terms of temporality and spatiality, and to think about these representations and connections to power. She believes that the teaching of visual and cultural studies is no different and the development, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, of courses that address these pervading paradigms, is crucial. What this means is that she urges students to think about the construction, the form and content of the writing of history, particularly the histories of South Africa and the African content.

O’Connell reinforces to prospective students that the study of the creative cannot be seen as a self-indulgent exercise at a finishing school, or only a project in aesthetics. Rather, she makes the point that it is crucial in thinking about the politics of the human, and how we live and be.

Although she has a basic course structure, she changes the course outlines each year in response to student feedback as well as to new global and local concerns. She is particularly successful in identifying potential at undergraduate level and assisting these in further study.

She has designed and convened courses that include themes of culture, visual studies, globalization in Africa, identity, heritage and public culture in Africa.

Courses convened and taught

FIN1009S Images in Conflict: Politics of power and propaganda

FIN2029F Envisioning the Body

FIN5012 Images of Africa

AXL5203 Critical Issues in Heritage Studies

AXL4203F Public Culture in Africa

CAS1001 Africa: Culture, Identity and Globalization

CAS2001 Culture, Identity and Globalization in Africa

Social Responsibility

O’Connell conceptualized, funded and managed the 2014 Inaugural Vice-Chancellors’ Conversation at St George’s Cathedral in Cape Town. Chaired by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, vice-chancellors from eight South African universities held a two-hour conversation on the role of the university in post-apartheid South Africa. The event was aired on the national broadcasting channel, the SABC.

In June 2014 she edited and published a revised edition of poetry of renowned anti-apartheid South African poet, James Matthews, which included images from key South African photographers, George Hallett, Rashid Lombard and Benny Gool.

Since 2012, O’Connell has conducted numerous workshops with clothing workers and Miss Gay Western Cape Pageant participants in an effort to think about identities and attendant questions of belonging and citizenship.

O’Connell organized a cultural tournament at the District Six Homecoming Centre in February 2015 that was attended by 85 men and women from townships across Cape Town. The event was used to revive interest in the board games that are have been brought to the Cape through slavery.

Since June 2014, workshops in across Cape Town have particularly focused on her own research interests of forced removals.

Research grants, awards and fundraising

O’Connell has been particularly successful with attracting financial support for her projects, an indication that her subject matter and approach is taken seriously by key funders. She has earned a reputation of working collaboratively and of producing remarkable research outputs.

In 2012, O’Connell and Lease were awarded a USD 10 000 start-up grant by Brown University to develop a larger grant proposal on identity and performance in Cape Town.

Together with Dr Bryce Lease (RHUL) and Dr Nadia Davids (QMUL), O’Connell was awarded an Arts and Heritage Research Council (AHRC) grant of USD 350 000 in January 2014 to extend her initial work on pageant archives of the Cape Flats. *Sequins, Self & Struggle: Performing and Archiving Sex, Place and Class in Pageant Competitions in Cape Town* was a two-year collaboration between the Departments of Drama at Royal Holloway and Queen Mary, University of London (UK), The Centre for Curating the Archive, Africana Studies at Brown University (US) and the District 6 Museum.

O’Connell was awarded a UCT Humanitec Grant to digitize a portion of the archive of the anti-apartheid photographer, Zubeida Vallie. The digital archive is hosted at UCT Libraries.

Together with Professor Pippa Skotnes of UCT, O’Connell has been awarded a significant 3-year (2015/16/17) Mellon Grant for her research projects on street photography and forced removals of Cape Town.

O’Connell was awarded a British Council grant to take her first international exhibition to London as part of the SA-UK Seasons (2014/15).

- 2010 Trilateral Reconnections Project Fellow (Brown University, RI, US)
- 2011 NRF Freestanding Doctoral Scholarship
- 2011 National Arts Council bursary
- 2011 Harry Oppenheimer Scholarship
- 2012 BIARI Start-up Grant
- 2013 URC Start-up Grant
- 2014 Humanitec Grant
- 2014 UCT Short Research Visit Grant
- 2014 AHRC (together with RHUL and QMUL)
- 2014 UCT Merit Award
- 2015 British Council SA-UK Seasons (2014/15) award

Research

O’Connell’s research focus falls within three areas, that of visual studies, memory and restorative justice in postcolonial and post-apartheid South Africa. She uses the creative, in particular the exhibition and the documentary film, to think about difficult questions of belonging, violence and redress. Her work around archives and curation seeks to shift frames from aesthetics to restorative justice to open up questions around representation, freedom, trauma and memory in the aftermath of oppression. She is committed to research that engages new constituencies and in this regard, her projects include extensive partnerships with disadvantaged communities. All have been widely covered in national television and newspapers, community newspapers and radio. Through ongoing and

extensive workshops across the Cape Flats, she argues for a re-think of academic knowledge production and the research subject.

Edited books

- Matthews, J. 2014. O’Connell, S (ed). *Age is a Beautiful Phase II*. Cape Town. Centre for Curating the Archive.
- Rhode, R. O’Connell, S. 2016. (eds) *Hanging on a Wire: The Photographs of Sophia Klaase*. Johannesburg. Fourthwall.

Peer reviewed journal articles

- O’Connell, S. (2008) “Binary and the Bushman: Counting the Cost of the Code.” *Postamble. Themed Issue: Science, Technology and Society in Africa*. Vol 4 Issue 1. pp. 27-45.
- O’Connell, S. (2014). “The Aftermath of Oppression: In search of resolution through family photographs of the forcibly removed of District Six, Cape Town. *Social Dynamics Special Issue: African Photographies: Iterations with Difference II*. Vol 40, Issue 3. pp.589-596.
- O’Connell, S. (2015) “Injury, Illumination and Freedom: Thinking about the Afterlives of Apartheid through the Family Albums of District Six, Cape Town. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*. Vol 9. Issue 2. Pp. 297-315.
- O’Connell, S. 2015. “A Search for the Human in the Shadow of Rhodes”. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*. Vol. 38, Issue 3. pp 11-14.
- O’Connell, S. 2015 “With Light and Lens: Performances of Freedom in Cape Town”. In *Postamble*. Vol. 9.1.

Chapters in books

- O’Connell, S. 2015. “Movie Snaps” in *Movement Cape Town*. Asmal, Z. (ed) Cape Town. The City of Cape Town.

Exhibitions

Curation is central to O’Connell’s research approach as it allows for a critical and creative entry point into how scholars can think about questions of the past. Curation demands, on the one hand, an in-depth understanding of the subject matter, and on the other, fosters a space for knowledge production on several registers. Curatorial practice is increasingly being looked at as being at the forefront of shifting epistemological frames and calls for a sophisticated approach that allows for interest and engagement across broader constituencies.

O’Connell has curated several exhibitions that have all garnered significant media attention, and uses the exhibition to rethink knowledge production of Africa. She uses the exhibition as an entry point, expanding research impact by directing and producing film documentaries, webpages, digital archives, presenting at academic conferences and increasingly, publishing findings in peer-reviewed journals. This multi-dimensional

approach to research outputs approach allows for a further engagement between visuality, digitality and knowledge production.

She has exhibited on the very competitive Main Programme of the National Arts Festival in 2010 and 2013 in Grahamstown, a festival which attracts over 200 000 visitors. Her exhibitions including *Spring Queen, Martyrs, Saints and Sell-outs: The Photographs of Benny Gool, Adile Bradlow and Zubeida Vallie* and *Promises and Lies: The ANC in Exile* have attracted altogether new audiences from the Cape Flats and other parts of South Africa. *Movie Snaps* (2015) continues to be exhibited in over 100 public libraries across Cape Town. “*Coloured*” was O’Connell’s first international exhibition that opened at the Embassy Tea Gallery in London in July 2015 as part of the British Council SA-UK Season, 2015.

- September 2016 *Martyrs, Saints and Sell-outs: The anti-apartheid photographs of Benny Gool, Adile Bradlow and Zubeida Vallie*
Exhibition
Market Photo Workshop, Johannesburg
Conceptualizer and Curator
- May 2016 *Promises and Lies: The ANC in Exile*
Exhibition
Michaelis Gallery, UCT
Conceptualizer and Curator
- May 2016 *A Stygian Darkness: Destruction and Detritus in the South African Mining Industry*
Exhibition in collaboration with UCT School of Law
Centre for African Studies Gallery, UCT
Conceptualizer and Curator
- October 2015 *The Wynberg 7*
Film
The Baxter Theatre
Director and Producer
- October 2015 *An Impossible Return*
Film
The Baxter Theatre
Director and Producer
- October 2015 *Towards an Archive of Freedom: Why Now?*
Symposium
District Six Homecoming Centre
Project Director
- July 2015 “*Coloured*”
Exhibition and film
Embassy Tea Gallery, London
Curator-artist.
- July 2015 *Movie Snaps*
Film
Indie Karoo Film Festival. Prince Albert.
Director and producer
- July 2015 “*Coloured*”
Film
Indie Karoo Film Festival. Prince Albert.
Director and producer
- January 2015 *Movie Snaps: Cape Town Remembers Differently*
Exhibition

- District Six Homecoming Centre
Curator-artist.
- May 2015 *The Mirror in the Ground*
Exhibition
CAS Gallery, UCT
Curator-artist in association with Associate Professor Nick Shepherd
- June 2014 *Spring Queen*
Film
Encounters South African Documentary Film Festival
Conceptualizer and producer
- March 2014 Inaugural Vice Chancellors' Conversation
St George's Cathedral, Cape Town
Conceptualizer and organizer
- September 2013 *Martyrs, Saints and Sell-outs: The Photographs of Benny Gool, Zubeida Vallie and Adil Bradlow*
Exhibition
Iziko Good Hope Gallery, Castle of Good Hope
Curator-artist.
- June 2013 *Martyrs, Saints and Sell-outs: The Photographs of Benny Gool, Zubeida Vallie and Adil Bradlow*
Exhibition
Grahamstown National Arts Festival (Main Program)
Curator-artist.
- March 2013 *Extraordinary Lives: Portraits from a divided land, the photographs of Sophia Klaase*
Exhibition
District 6 Museum, Cape Town
Co-curator with Dr Rick Rohde (Edinburgh) and Professor Timm Hoffman (UCT)
- July-February 2013 *Spring Queen: The Staging of the Glittering Proletariat*
Exhibition
IZIKO Bertram House and District 6 Museum.
Curator-artist.
- September 2010 *Juggling the Familiar II: Works in Progress*
Exhibition
Centre for African Studies, UCT
Curator-artist.
- May 2010 *Appealing UCT: SAX APPEAL 1933 – 2010*
Exhibition
Centre for African Studies Gallery, UCT

Curator-artist.

March 2010

*Shared Legacies: The Alfred Duggan- Cronin and Edward C
Curtis Photographs*

Exhibition

McGregor Museum, Kimberley

National Arts Festival, Grahamstown (May - July 2010)

Curator-artist

Motion pictures and edited video recordings

Spring Queen. 2014. Motion picture. O'Connell, S. (Producer). Yule, P. (Director). Centre for Curating the Archive. Cape Town.

The Inaugural Vice-Chancellors' Conversation. 2014. Video recording. O'Connell, S. (Producer, Director). Centre for Curating the Archive, Michaelis School of Fine Art. Cape Town.

Movie Snaps. 2015. Motion picture O'Connell, S. (Director). Centre for Curating the Archive, Cape Town.

"Coloured". 2015. Motion picture. O'Connell, S. (Director). Centre for Curating the Archive. Cape Town.

An Impossible Return. 2015. Motion picture. O'Connell, S. (Director). Centre for Curating the Archive. Cape Town.

The Wynberg 7. 2015. Motion picture. O'Connell, S. (Director). Centre for Curating the Archive. Cape Town.

Promises and Lies: The Fault Lines of the ANC. Motion picture. O'Connell, S. (Director). Centre for Curating the Archive. Cape Town.

Catalogues

O'Connell, S. Ed. (2013). *Spring Queen: The Staging of the Glittering Proletariat*. Cape Town, Centre for Curating the Archive. Cape Town.

O'Connell, S. Ed. (2013). *Martyrs, Saints and Sell-outs: The Photographs of Benny Gool, Adil Bradlow and Zubeida Vallie*. Cape Town, Centre for Curating the Archive. Cape Town.

Unpublished conference proceedings

November 2016 “Other Archives, New Perspectives” *Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines (CEAD)* Association for CEAD. Cape Town.

July 2015 “Coloured” from Colonialism to the Cape Flats. *Design for Performance Research Hub: Performance and Curation in South Africa - Two Perspectives*. London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London. UK.

July 2015 “Dress, Imagination and Freedom: Pageants from the Cape Flats” *Sequins Self and Struggle*
RHUL
London, UK

March 2015 “Snapshots of Freedom: Movie Snaps and Spring Queen”
Conference paper
VIADUCT 2015 Archival Addresses: Photographies, Practices, Positionalities
University of Johannesburg

August 2014 “Freedom and The South African post apartheid academy”
The Mail and Guardian Literary Festival
Johannesburg

September 2013 “The Aftermath of Oppression: In search of resolution through an ordinary archive of the forcibly removed.”
SAVAH
Cape Town

August 2014 “The Family Album of District Six”
Developing Characters
University of Johannesburg
Johannesburg

May 2013 “Curate Africa”
Curatorial Talks
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg

- March 2013 “Photography and Land”,
Land Divided
UCT
Cape Town
- December 2012 “Spring Queen”
Capturing the Gains Global Summit, UCT.
- October 2012 “Land, archive and Image”
The International Conference on Archives Deepening Democracy,
South African Department of Arts And Culture
East London.
- March 2012 “The Work of the Creative in thinking about the Human”
The South African Humanities and Social Sciences Conference
Johannesburg
- December 2011 “Image, Home and Belonging”
Thinking Africa Differently, UCT
- June 2010 “The Archive of the Oppressed ”
Brown International Advanced Research Institute (BIARI),
Brown University, RI, USA.
- June 2008 “Binary and the Bushman”
*Archaeologies of memory in the south: uncovering and displaying
the remembered and unremembered past*
Brown University, RI. USA.
- March 2008 “Image, Injury and the Bushman”
Critical Heritage Colloquium
University of the Western C and the Department of Arts and
Culture
Cape Town

Webpages

<http://martyrs-saints-sellouts.ccaphotography.org>

<http://sequins-self-and-struggle.com>

<http://sharedlegacies.ccaphotography.org>

<http://sophiaklaase.ccaphotography.org>

Media articles

O'Connell, S., Himmelman, N.2010. "Lessons in Continued Oppression" in *The Mail and Guardian*. March 2010.

O'Connell, S. 2013. "Still searching for the human" in *The Mail and Guardian*, April, 2013.

O'Connell, S. 2014. "A Campus at odds with Itself" in *The Mail and Guardian*" August 2014.

O'Connell, S. 2015. "What UCT's not telling its first years" in *Independent Media* February 2015.

O'Connell, S.2016. "The Troubling Question that won't go away" in *Independent Media*. May 2016.

