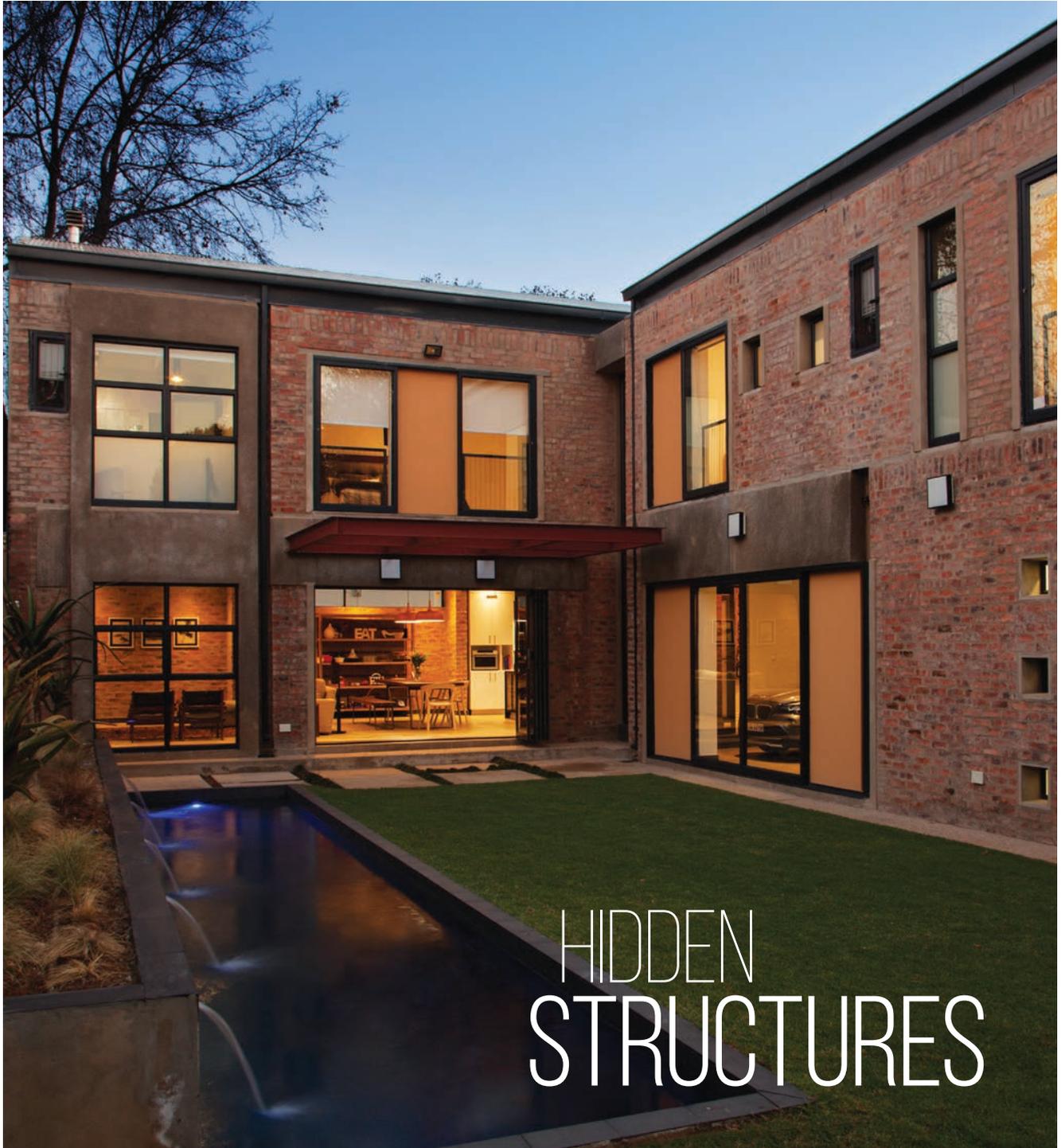


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HIDDEN STRUCTURES

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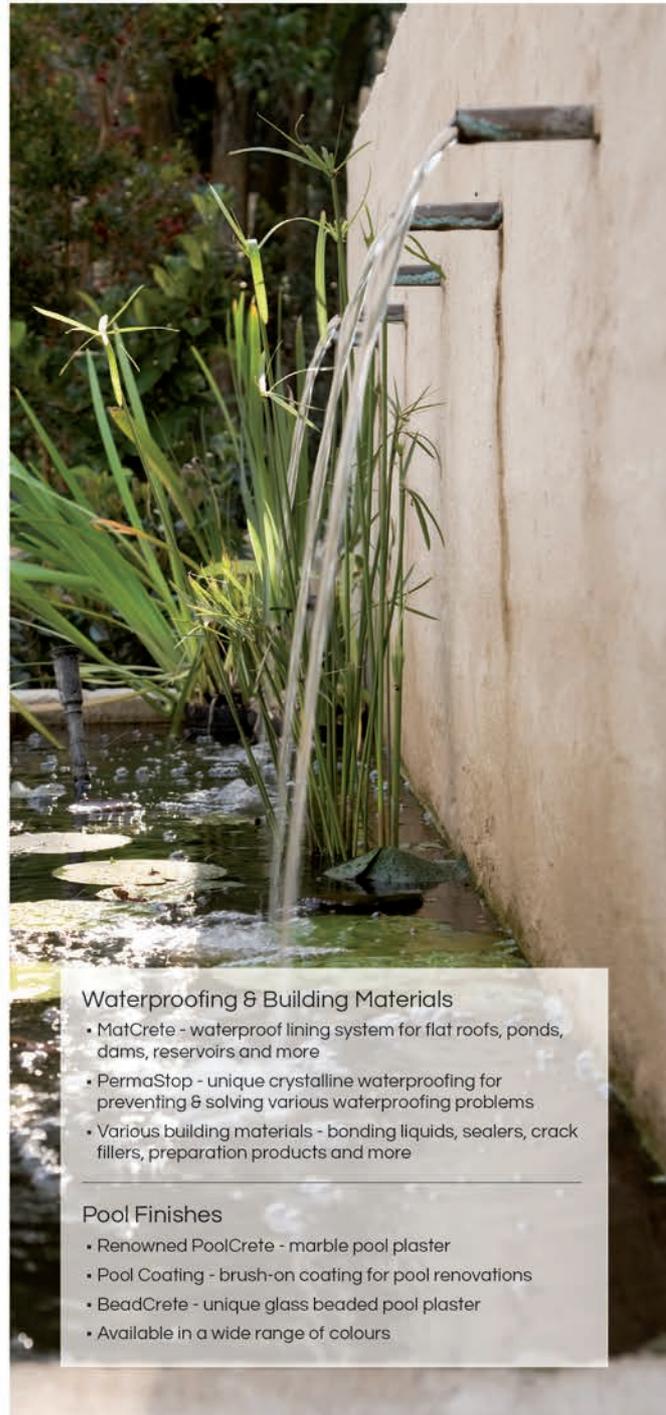
Alexandra Singer

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- Suitable for interior and exterior use
- Variety of colours and textures available
- Versatile products for a variety of applications from counter tops, bath tubs, vanities and more

Floor Finishes

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- Suitable for interior and exterior use
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WHERE ARCHITECTURE MEETS ART

In an effort to nurture discussions around innovative approaches to city-making, the AMA Talk Series brought architects and artists together to consider multi-modal practice.

By: Stephen Hobbs

AMA TALK SERIES

'A critical dialogue between art and architecture is sorely lacking in South Africa. While architecture delivers public, physical structures endowed with seeming omnipresence, art, as an unrestrained field, has the capacity to expose and reconstrue the human condition. By academically and vocationally separating these disciplines, we fail to appreciate buildings as artistic objects

which belie the human experience.' –Extract from the Architecture meets Art press release, David Krut Projects, Parkwood, March 2016.

David Krut Projects' core business centres around the production of print multiples and book editions. Born out of a passion for education through the arts, the Architecture-meets-art (AMA) Talk Series presented a series of conversations considering potentials for the intersection between architecture and art.

A POINT OF REFLECTION...

In 2007 I had access to the respective rooftops of Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Lever House building in Midtown Manhattan – two exemplary modernist buildings out of a collection of skyscrapers owned by property mogul Aby Rosen.

Since their inception, these buildings have played host to major works of art – in their forecourts, foyers or corridors – and are appreciated as aesthetic objects in their own right. During my visit, the Lever House building boasted Sol LeWitt's 2001 *Wall Drawing #999*, visible through the glass curtain, Damien Hirst's 2005 bronze sculpture *The Virgin Mother* in the courtyard, and Sarah Morris' 2006 site-specific *Robert Towne* painting, spanning the full extent of the soffit.

From these respective rooftops one is confronted by the density of the skyscraper horizon and the myriad built protrusions all hustling for a unique presence on the Manhattan grid. And in all of this, there's a realtor passionate about collecting buildings and showcasing art.

In his book *Delirious New York*, Rem Koolhaas argues that the seemingly irrational plotting of the grid on Manhattan Island (by the Dutch) in the early 19th century forced a vertical agenda on the building logics of the time, ushering in the birth of the elevator, the multi-story building and the skyscraper – a hyper extrusion on the fast-becoming modern face of major American cities.

In stark contrast, the 'mud' architecture of Mali, Djenné and the surrounding islands, in particular, demonstrate the natural-world version of this idea of an extrusion of the earth's surface. These are islands of mosques and modest single- and double-story buildings networked in the Niger River delta, moulded like plasticine from a malleable base. The city of Djenné demonstrates a powerful condition of collective construction done by hand; an embodied scale of centuries-old rituals of fishing, herding, weaving, religion and so on.

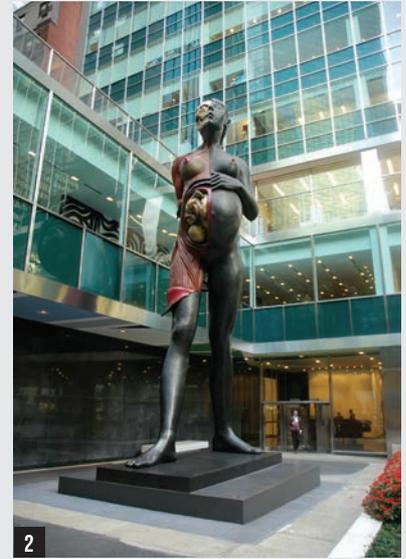
The visceral nature of Djenné, an organic mesh of dwellings, offered a rethinking of the forms produced by the modernist city grids of Manhattan and Johannesburg – in so far as the abundance of a particular material, in this case earth and water, could offer enough scalable options for mapping out, relative to the scale of family and community, a sustainable building typology. Put another way: the creation of a functioning sculptural portrait of community and society in a material matrix determined by the sensory capacity of the body.

As an artist practicing between the studio and public domain, I'm looking for a midpoint between the two; where scale, material, experimentation, process and documentation serve as a language to explore the hands as tools and the body as a medium. >

A\|M\|A
ARCHITECTURE MEETS ART
IN "POST-APARTHEID" SOUTH AFRICA



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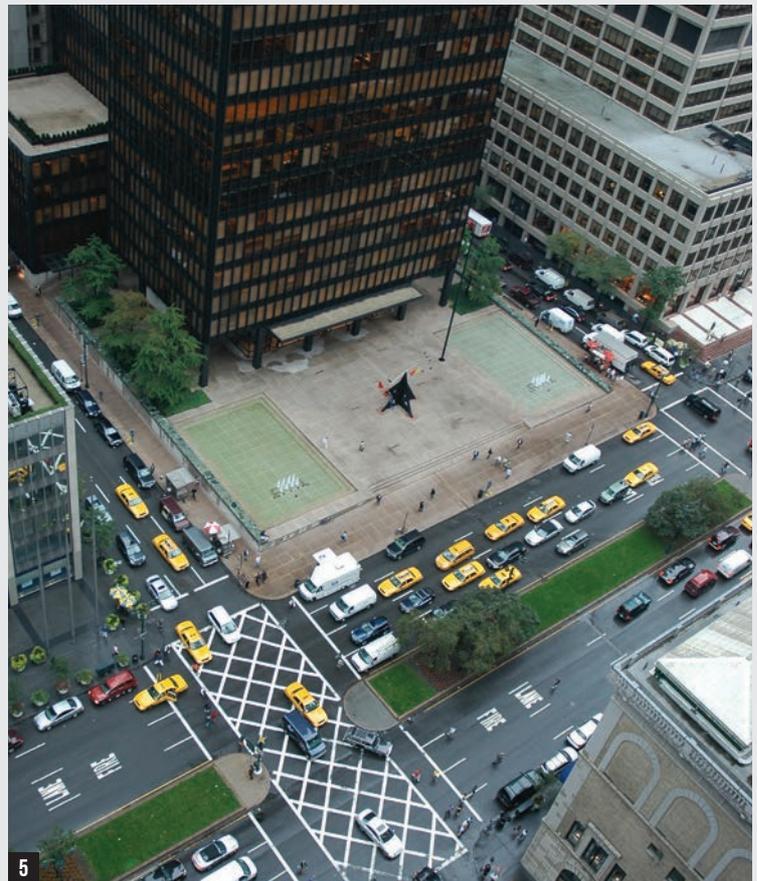
'AS AN ARTIST PRACTICING BETWEEN THE STUDIO AND PUBLIC DOMAIN, I'M LOOKING FOR A MIDPOINT BETWEEN THE TWO' — STEPHEN HOBBS



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1 View of Djenné Island, Mali, 2011. 2 View of Lever House with Damien Hirst's *Mother and Child*, 2006. 3 View of Lever House soffit, with Sarah Morris' site-specific *Robert Towne*, 2006. 4 Manhattan skyline from the Seagram Building. 5 View of Seagram Building with Calder mobile, 2006.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Below follow some key extracts from the AMA series of discussions...

SH: *Henning Rasmuss, Paragon's projects are increasingly recognised for their scale and form. What is your attitude towards the function of this approach in Johannesburg?*

Henning Rasmuss (international projects director and architect at the Paragon Group): I believe that every city has its own DNA. Each place on earth begets the surface that results from its history and suits its trajectory. Each place moulds its people as it is moulded by its people.

Architecture in Johannesburg remains fashionable, and the making of form has a long and strong history in this city. Jozi is make-do, and pushes innovation. The buildings we make now try as hard as HPP's (Hentrich, Petschnigg & Partners) Standard Bank Centre of the 1970s to overcome the limits of technology and skill.

The silhouette of buildings has been rediscovered as an ingredient of delight, having been lost sometime in the late 1970s and squashed in the postmodern 1980s. Now, we are back at work, carving out interior spaces that surprise and delight, and beginning to make inviting spaces between buildings.

What makes architecture in Jozi easy is the realisation that it will not be around forever. The city still eats itself

up, and discards architecture like yesterday's old hat. But at least we know that when we sit down to make it. We do not expect our architecture to last. It needs to delight for a short window of time. And that it does well.

SH: *Thiresh Govender, UrbanWorks has often adopted the logics of performance and interventionist practices of art as a means of discovering value in alternate ways. I'm interested in the conclusions you draw from your fieldwork.*

Thiresh Govender (architect and urban designer at UrbanWorks Architecture and Urbanism): Stuck between concrete and a hard place, resourceful acts

'ARCHITECTURE IN JOHANNESBURG REMAINS FASHIONABLE, AND THE MAKING OF FORM HAS A LONG AND STRONG HISTORY IN THIS CITY' – HENNING RASMUSS

'IF THESE ACTS CAN BE SEEN AS ART, OF A KIND, THEN ARCHITECTURE HAS FOUND ITS IDEAL COMPANION FOR ITSELF AND THIS METROPOLIS' – THIRESH GOVENDER

of desperation, courage and desire reveal themselves in incredibly inventive situations. These lived acts morph seemingly unbreakable concrete structures for new, appropriated human formations that exceed our imagination. These early practices and rituals have the capacity to rewrite our urban future – for better or worse. Their creative potential is diagnosed short-sightedly as chaos. Yet hidden within their underlying messy logic are thoughtful creative acts. If these acts can be seen as art, of a kind, then architecture has found its ideal companion for itself and this metropolis – to reclaim its relevance and future.

For example, a modified shop front that simultaneously reconciles the idea of engagement and protection. The elongated exchange both protects the shopkeeper from attacks while still being able to trade.

SH: *Sphiwe Giba, as a graphic designer and visual communicator you have been concerned for some time now with urban change through art in public space. Coming from Ekurhuleni, you have a particular agenda around taking pride in public space. Please elaborate.*

Sphiwe Giba (designer, illustrator, photographer and strategist at Juxtapoz Concepts): Architecture meets Art is an interesting subject – 'normal Joe' from the township won't relate to this. The question is: how, as creatives, do we bring this closer to the public? If the community takes pride in the space they live in, demolition and vandalism will be minimised. This is when urban art takes charge. Formal and informal spaces can be transformed into art alleys where any form of artistic expression can be seen – from dance, public art and painting to sculptures. >



6 Elephant Trunk. 7 Sphiwe Giba's Pavement Art concept rendering.





SH: *Counterspace*, in the short time that I have come to know your practice, I've been fascinated by your embracing of the logics of different genres of art in an interdisciplinary, multi-modal way. As a young practice, this is a refreshing point of departure.

Counterspace: When we use line, colour and angle in our distinctions of space or the city, there is room for negotiation, alteration and therefore new meaning. Through the process of image production, we reveal to ourselves unpredicted imagined lands that become their own thing, hanging on to the real world by a thread of a set of recognisable elements in the chaos: a pillar, a wall, a beam. Fiction is all around in architecture; one merely needs to invent the reality to make sense of it.

SH: *Tseleng Phala*, with the specifics of a city's identity, and the varied modes of expression that can come from its inhabitants, is a concern for you. Can you explain further?

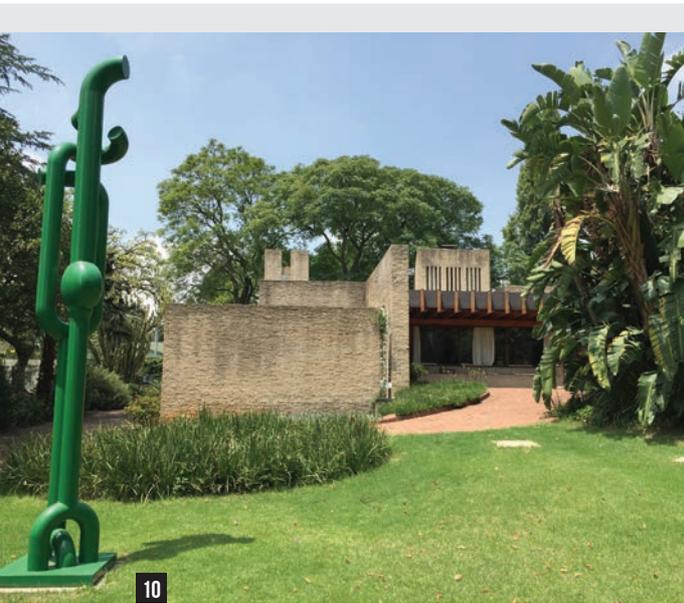
Tseleng Phala (art director at Tseleng Phala Art Directed): Art meets Architecture in different ways due to scale and density around Johannesburg. Take the stark contrast between the public transport corridor (north of Plein Street) and the Eurocentric business district. While the latter has ample space for flamboyant installations, the former are pressed against the wall in heavily congested pavements. These dense, high-paced walkways lead to the loss of sense of



identity (Ubuntu), breeding anonymity – and thus crime and many other social ills.

As a social people, the rise of ‘trolling’ in social media, like memes, are changing the socio-anthropological landscape of South Africa as a whole, offering a unique moment for individual expression, in keeping with international trends. Art installations that can help people to remember to ‘walk and greet’ could help curb the facelessness, bring awareness to our fellow citizens and their plights to survive in the city of gold. >

8 *Counterspace's* process image for an immersive exhibition proposal, June 2015. 9 Tseleng Phala: *Stone Tower, Khethekile - Urban Boutique Garden*, 2017.



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CONCLUSION

Inspired by the interplay of artist to building and building to art object, the AMA series concluded with an attentive audience at the Edoardo Villa House in Kew, Johannesburg. Today the house is owned by Lunetta Bartz and Warren Siebrits, one of the

city's most well-respected creative couples. Both have been influential components of their respective fields for over 20 years. Bartz is an interior designer by trade but prefers to be called a 'maker', as she dabbles successfully in design, book binding and art, amongst other things. Siebrits is an art dealer with an infectious passion for the stories entangled in every artwork he handles. It therefore seems fitting that in 2013 Bartz and Siebrits purchased the home and studio of Edoardo Villa (1915-2011), the revered Italian-South African modernist sculptor, with the aim of preserving a piece of Joburg's cultural history.

Edoardo Villa always admired the dynamism and industrial nature of Johannesburg, recognising its great potential for opportunity. From 1948 until the end of his life he lived at 73 4th Road, Kew, with his wife, Claire. He first lived on the property as a lodger but in 1959 bought it from the previous owners. In the

sixties Villa began to flourish as an artist, and with the added financial benefits that brought, he was able to commission his dear friend, architect Ian McLellan, to design him a new house on the southern boundary of the Kew property. The outcome was what is considered by many to be one of the masterpieces of domestic architecture in Johannesburg. The house, which was completed in 1968, has received enormous coverage over the years (first published in *Artlook* 49 in 1970 and then in *Habitat* in 1972), having boasted many prominent supporters in the architectural community.

The Architecture Meets Art series takes its inspiration from the life and practices of the late Portuguese architect, sculptor and painter Pancho Guedes: 'Guedes' buildings had personalities, became paintings, carried ornaments that abstracted African sculptures, mutated and adapted, were embellished with dreams, graphic patterns and anthropomorphisms. In his world there was no question whether it is relevant or even political to make all of the arts an inherent part of creative production. Such freedom of expression, combined with the wry pragmatism with which he defined and commented on the urban tapestry with his many commissions, is certainly born of the unique context in which Guedes was able to expand the architect's remit in such an inimitable way' (Exhibition, Pancho Guedes: An Alternative Modernist, Swiss Architecture Museum, No 3).

As Johannesburg-based practitioners, we know what lies in front of us. Like Maputo in Guedes' day, we are confronted by heightened contextual complexity, an onslaught of new languages, symbols and daily rituals. There is an opportunity here to push beyond our known modes of practice in pursuit of new and innovative city-making. ■

'LIKE MAPUTO IN GUEDES' DAY, WE ARE CONFRONTED BY HEIGHTENED CONTEXTUAL COMPLEXITY, AN ONSLAUGHT OF NEW LANGUAGES, SYMBOLS AND DAILY RITUALS' —STEPHEN HOBBS

10 Villa House north façade, with *Mother and Child*, steel and enamel, 1974. 11 Villa House skylight detail and *Duet in Yellow*, steel and enamel, 1974.