Medu Art Ensemble (Medu) was a cultural association operating in Botswana and was initiated by Dr Wally Serote (The current CEO of Freedom Park) on his return to Botswana after a period of study in the USA. Medu, was a resistance front, following discussions between Dr Mongane Wally Serote, Johnny Makathini and Keorapetsi William (Willie) Kgositisele - all members of the ANC - in New York and Paris in the mid-seventies...Medu, which means 'roots' in Sepedi, as its name suggested, grew organically. It was established in the aftermath of the Soweto uprisings by members of the disbanded Pelandaba Cultural Effort and Dashiki, the two previously having fused into Tuka Cultural Unit...Medu drew heavily on the experience of these disbanded associations and continued to be a forum for cooperation between South African exile and Botswana artists.

Condemning apartheid through poems and images was therefore a common means of expression for these artists and writers. Medu was initially for Black artists with an embargo on White artists and foreigners. In 1979, after huge debates, Medu members adopted the Freedom Charter beliefs. They agreed to open its membership to all who identified with the struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa. Medu attracted skilled European, American and other expatriates to become members. Sergio-Albio Gonzalez and Teresa Devant were the first Whites and international artists who joined the group. Funding was received from a variety of overseas bodies, e.g. Sweden, Denmark, Norway and others. The underground funding came from the ANC underground structures based at their headquarters in Lusaka.

During the time of the formation of Medu in Botswana, violent military activities were the order of the day in Southern Africa. Struggles for independence and assertion for national identity were underway in Namibia and Zimbabwe, while civil war fuelled by foreign interests was shaking Angola. All countries in the region, from Tanzania to the Congos, were involved in one way or another in the political instability and intimidation derived from the policies and actions dictated by the apartheid government.

Medu’s aim and objectives can be summarised as follows:

- Training Botswana nationals and exiles in the above mentioned skills
- Fostering an environment suitable for cultural workers and the community
- Creating closer relations between cultural workers and community
• Establishing closer relations and practical cooperation amongst Southern African and International cultural workers. Its primary goal was to create a cultural front against the apartheid regime, although it had to balance this goal within the parameters of the Botswana's Law.

Local students and exiles set up exhibitions, music and theatre performances at the University of Botswana and the National Museum and Art Gallery of Botswana (NMAG). Up until to date this trend is followed in Botswana to keep Medu ‘alive’

2. DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name (person or organisation)

Mr Ramzie Abrahams, The Head of Department: Heritage and Knowledge Department, Freedom Park

Freedom Park

The mission of Freedom Park is to provide and empower a heritage destination in order to mobilise for reconciliation and nation building in South Africa; to reflect upon our past, improving our present and building our future as a united nation; to contribute continentally and internationally to the formation of better human understanding among nations and peoples. Driven by the necessity for the diverse people of South Africa and the world to understand and appreciate the country’s struggle for liberation, the Freedom Park was born as a national and international icon of humanity and freedom.

During the Freedom Day celebration in Umtata (South Africa), 27 April 1999, Dr Nelson Mandela (Former President of South Africa) stated that “… the day should not be far off, when we shall have a people’s shrine, a Freedom Park, where we shall honour with all the dignity they deserve, those who endured pain so we should experience the joy of freedom. From this statement and as a response to the need identified by the Truth and the Reconciliation Commission for symbolic reparation of past conflicts of history Freedom Park was launched on 1 June 2000.

Freedom Park has different elements and for the sake of this motivation two will be mentioned, the Gallery of Leaders and Wall of Names:

THE GALLERY OF LEADERS (GOL) - the indoor space that has been reserved to pay tribute to the achievements and to represent the leadership qualities of those who brought about qualitative leaps in the struggle for humanity and freedom nationally, continentally and internationally. These leaders are portrayed as exemplary role models worthy of being emulated in the way they brought about qualitative leaps in the national democratic struggle for humanity and freedom. As the struggles they have engaged in, have played itself out in a national, continental and global context, these leaders will be nominated from the national, continental and international arenas. Those from the continent and international arenas will specifically be nominated on the basis of their contribution to the liberation of South Africa and/or the liberation of the oppressed in general.
Following are some of the names that are selected for the Gallery of Leaders:

South African - Steve Biko, Bram Fischer, King Moshoeshoe, King Hintsa, Autshimato, (Harry the Strandloper), Hendrik Witbooi, General Koos De La Rey, General Christiaan Rudolph De Wet

Continental - Julius Nyerere, Agostinho Neto, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, Thomas Sankara, John Garang de Mabior, Samora Machel

International - Che Guevara, Toussaint Louverture, W.E.B. du Bois, Marcus Garvey

WALL OF NAMES

The Wall of Names is adjacent to the Gallery of Leaders where names of hero and heroines who contributed to the struggle for humanity and freedom are inscribed. Through consultative process Freedom Park identified eight conflicts under which the names are categorised:

- Pre-Colonial conflicts/achievements
- Genocide
- Slavery
- Wars of Resistance
- South African Wars
- First World War
- Second World War
- Liberation Struggle

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated

Custodian

2.3 Contact person(s)

Dr WM Serote (Chief Executive Officer)

Mr Ramzie Abrahams: Heritage and Knowledge (Head of Department)

2.4 Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)

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P.O Box’ 2710, Pretoria. 0001
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E-mail: ramzie@freedompark.co.za

3  IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE
3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated
Medu Art Ensemble (Medu) Archives (1978-1985)

3.2 Description

4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

Refer to section 4.2 of the General Guidelines for the selection criteria. If space insufficient, attach separate sheets. Each question must be answered

4.1 Is authenticity established? (see 4.2.3)

These items were designed and produced - by the Graphic Art Unit of Medu to which Sergio Albio Gonzalez, the donor of the collection, was a member. The authenticity of these documents have been tested beyond reasonably doubt as these posters have been exhibited in South Africa, continentally and internationally. In October-December 2009 these posters and other materials were used for an exhibition put up jointly by Botswana National Museum and the French Embassy. Since there are still survivors of the MEDU Art Ensemble the authenticity can be backed up by interviews of the survivors. This project of interviewing survivors will be done by Freedom Park in partnership with National Archives and Records Service of South Africa. (Audio visuals that will cover these interviews will be made available if need be.) Among the people that can be interviewed would be Rona Segale (Thami’s wife), Dr Wally Serote (Founder of Medu), Baleka Mbethe (Former South Africa Deputy President), Prof. W. Kgotsisile, Barry Gilder and others.

4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established? (see 4.2.4)

This collection has both locally and internationally significance because the South African Liberation Struggle had sympathisers all over the world where they were granted political asylum. This is evident in that members were firmly grounded in African’s national liberation culture and admired the rich heritage of Sekou Toure, Almilcar Cabral, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Wole Soyinka. Medu and also drew upon images and concepts from other revolutions worldwide. While both the colonial and apartheid regimes rigorously banned printed material produced by foreign revolutionary movements some did find its way into Medu collection. South African artists in exile or travelling abroad (including several who trained in Cuba, Eastern Europe and Soviet) absorbed the iconography, styles and aesthetic approaches that characterised “art of revolution”. Sometimes, South African artists reinterpreted, extended and adapted international images to describe their own circumstances of the struggle. Medu members studied, and engage with revolutionary artwork ranging from Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes, to German play writer, poet and critic Bertolt Brecht and Mexican muralists Diego Rivero, Jose Orozco, Davis Siqueiros and painter Frida Kahlo.

From the history of its establishment Medu has proven to be of World significance, and unique. As Medu was formed in Botswana, the government of Botswana was very sensitive to the formation of this South African cultural group that was active in
Gaborone. It overtly declared that no political or military activities against South Africa would be sanctioned within its territory. The government of Seretse Khama found itself walking a tightrope, showing solidarity with the struggling peoples of a brother country by denouncing the apartheid regime, while acting cautiously at the South African heavy stick. Medu’s founders were aware of the fragile position of the host government and carefully planned the Ensemble’s activities so as to avoid serious reprisals or endangering its own existence. One way of proving Medu’s legitimacy as a cultural group therefore was allowing any citizen, Motswana or expatriate, to join its units and train in any of the particular disciplines on offer.

In July 1982 Medu organised the Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of Arts held in Gaborone. The Culture and Resistance Symposium was made up of three components—the exhibition Art Towards Social Development; the Culture and Resistance Symposium and the Festival of the Arts. The exhibition and the symposium were also important because they created the opportunity for South African artists to meet cultural workers from all over the world. Among international artists were Abdullah Ibrahim from New York; Lindiwe Mabuza, Johnny Diani and Lefifi Tladi from Stockholm; Gavin Jantjies from Germany; George Hallet and Pam Hartog from Zimbabwe. And others. Diplomatic representations from different embassies in Gaborone were also present. Medu decided to keep a low profile following the successful symposium. The tremendous success of the symposium brought Medu to the attention and scrutiny of Botswana's authorities, and no doubt to South Africa’s too. Medu attempted to minimise the risk of intervention into the Ensemble’s activities, and six months later decided to organise a conference, The Cultural Voice of Resistance in Amsterdam. This conference gathered Dutch anti-apartheid activists, ANC representative from several countries and MEDU members. The visit to the symposium by Co Derr resulted in an agreement to send part of the exhibition Art Towards Social Development- to Stockholm. Artworks, posters and photographs were shown in Stockholm and Goteborg in 1984. The success of the Symposium resulted in the establishment of the ANC’s Department of Arts and Culture in Lusaka. It further produced a boost to relations between artists and organisations within South Africa, tightening the cultural boycott and facilitating dialogue between the overseas and home activists and artists at a personal level. The Symposium on Culture and Resistance was important not only because it placed culture on the forefront of resistance to Apartheid but also because it allowed participants to envisage a role for culture in a liberated South Africa.

On 14 June 1985, South African Defence force (SADF) carried out a raid in Gaborone. The South African Security Police had provided SADF with detailed information on the targets identified as ‘dangerous MK militants’. Amongst the 12 people who were killed four – Thami Mnyele, Mike Hamlyn, George and Lindi Phahle- were Medu members. After the Botswana Raid Medu disbanded and many of it its surviving members left Botswana. Other noteworthy South Africans who were part of Medu are Ms Baleka Mbete (former Deputy President of South Africa), Mr Willy Kgotsitsile, Tim Williams, Jonas Gwangwa, Professors Patrick Fitzgerald and, Heinz Klug, Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler.
4.3 Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style (f) social, spiritual and community significance satisfied? (See 4.2.5)
Provide an explanation against each criterion selected. Attach separate statement if space insufficient.

Time

Medu was created during the time of crises by political activists in Botswana from 1978-1985. Medu set out to teach art skills to both exiles and local Gaberone residents. Encouraging ordinary, disempowered people to reclaim their social rights and responsibilities. Medu went beyond 1985 since it is celebrated through exhibitions in South Africa and abroad.

People and Place

Medu’s aims were also in line with the ANC policy. Albio and Teresa Gonzales were the first white members invited to join Medu. Soon others followed, although this shift in policy alienated some BCM and PAC members who were part of Medu initially. Some of the surviving members of Medu are Dr WM Serote (CEO: Freedom Park), Ms Baleka Mbethe (Former Deputy President: South Africa), Barry Gilder, Tim Williams and others. In honour of one of the late members of the Medu who died in 1985 Botswana raids, Thami Mnyele, a Foundation that runs a unique three month artists-in-residence program in Amsterdam was established in 1992. The first years the focus was only on artists from South Africa, but since 1997 artists from all African countries can apply. The main objective of the Foundation is to advance cultural exchange between artists from Africa, the Netherlands and Amsterdam in particular. The Foundation engages African artists of all disciplines of contemporary visual art (painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, video, film, audio and multimedia) to work for three months in the Thami Mnyele Foundation studio, located in an old school building in the center of Amsterdam. As already mentioned many people were involved in Medu but for the sake of this proposal a brief backgrounds on Albio will be made.

Albio Gonzalez was born in Cuba and after settling in Sweden as an adult, he was involved in designing posters for the Swedish – Cuban Friendship Association. During his stay in Cuba he noticed how effectively posters and billboards could produce a political message. Albio was responsible for setting up poster production for Medu’s graphic unit. This also bears testimony to the authenticity of the posters as they were developed by Albio - who is in close contact with Freedom Park - and can be available if further verification is needed. He visited German artist Petra Rohr-Rouendaal for acquiring the necessary equipment and technical expertise that he later transferred to Medu members. During his time of involvement with Medu Albio was working for the Swedish Aid Mission (Sida) as a senior planner in the Department of Town and Regional Planning in Botswana.

He was also involved in organising the Medu exhibition in 1982 (Botswana); 2008 in Johannesburg Art Gallery and 2009 in Botswana. Albio Gonzalez produced the very first Medu poster for the theatre units production play Marumo, written by Mandla Langa to commemorate the historical battle of Isandlwana, which had taken
place exactly 150 years before. The story of the heroic Zulu victory over the British occupation was used to motivate people in their present situation of oppression. Albio’s poster design integrated a British army helmet with a spear and an AK 47 assault rifle. Albio has contributed most of his works to Freedom Park and he is helping us to collect more from people who were involved with Medu both local and internationally. Albio was also instrumental in putting up Medu, exhibition in Botswana National Museum in 2009 and this exhibition attracted a lot of international audience since it was hosted by the France Embassy.

4.3 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination? (see 4.2.6)

This is a rare collection that cannot be imitated since there was only ONE Medu that existed at that time (South Africa Apartheid) and space (Botswana). There are no chances of duplicating since main aim was resistance through culture. South Africa is liberated now and therefore Medu has accomplished its mission and much as it was disbanded its existence continues through the exhibitions that have been mentioned and the establishment of Thami Mnyele Foundation that runs a unique three month artists-in-residence program in Amsterdam.