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Chris Ledochowski: Social Documentary Photography and Beyond*

1. Ex-centric

When in 2023 I visited Chris Ledochowski in his Cape Town home for the first time, he struck me as a real flesh-and-blood person as much as an allegorical literary figure; an ex-centric literary protagonist, the kind that populates the stories written by his father, Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (Kusek 2026). He seemed to inhabit two (art)worlds, yet simultaneously belong to neither. This was reflected in the architecture and interior design of his two-storied house. The spacious, ascetically furnished, nearly empty interior of the first floor was filled primarily with splendid ocean light streaming in through large windows. On the walls hung artworks on paper by prominent Polish artists of the 19th and 20th centuries: drawings by Piotr Michałowski, Witkacy, and Piotr Potworowski. A special place was held by the portrait of the artist's mother, Barbara Ledóchowska, painted by Teresa Tyszkiewiczowa, an acclaimed Polish modernist artist, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, and his aunt.

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I am indebted to Chris Ledochowski for his time and effort to explain to me the intricacies of his work. I am also grateful to Jeevenundhan (Jeeva) Rajgopaul for his invaluable editorial comments.

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It was among these art works—mostly once owned by his parents—that the artist worked on his *magnum opus* for decades: a photobook devoted to the life of a Black home assistant in his parents' house—Petrus Mulaudzi, who became the artist's life-long friend and 'other' father.[1] The dark ground floor of the artist's home was the opposite of the luminous first floor: it housed the artist's archive consisting of photographic negatives, transparencies, and black and white vintage silver prints. It was also a space Ledochowski had not entered for a long time due to his emphysema and multi chemical sensitivity; literally and symbolically cutting himself off from it and its contents.

I am calling Chris Ledochowski an ex-centric figure; not because I am referring to his lifestyle, which, perhaps, may seem unusual, peculiar or extravagant to bourgeois moralists. If I think of the artist as an ex-centric, I mean both discursive and spatial ex-centricity; such that was revealed in the description of the space of his home-studio. Thus, I think of his ex-centricity as a conscious positioning of himself, as locating his photographic and artistic practice outside the center of conventional art practices and established narratives, and on the margins of the discourses offered by academic art history and visual studies.

Moreover, Ledochowski's work appears marginalized in art history and institutional museum practices in South Africa at the turn of the 21st century. On the one hand, the artist's works are included and displayed in significant public collections of contemporary art, including the Iziko South African Gallery in Cape Town. The artist is also recognized for his engagement in nationally and globally significant projects, such as his contribution to one of the most important photography projects of the 1980s in the country: *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* (1984–86)[2] and his participation in one of the main group

1 Ledochowski began photographing Petrus Mulaudzi as a teenager in the 1970s. Mulaudzi is also the subject of his photo essay *Venda* published in 1986 (Cf. Ledechowski [sic!] 1986: 26–9). The photobook on which the artist was still working in 2023, as well as in 2026 when I revisited him, is to be titled: *Return to Nthabalala: The Story of Petrus Mulaudzi, The Man of Two Worlds* (Kusek, Szymański 2023). The artist described Petrus Mulaudzi as his second father already in 1985 (*Conversation* 1985: 2).

2 The exhibition and the book were products of the photographic project headed by Omar Badsha between 1982 and 1986. The exhibition comprised 36 photo essays by 20 photographers and was launched in April 1984 at the University of Cape Town. The book with text by Francis Wilson was published in 1986. In the same year the exhibition was presented at the International Center of Photography (ICP) gallery in New York (Cf. Wilson 1986: xvii–xviii).

exhibitions of the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003.[3] On the other hand, so far no art historian or visual studies scholar have devoted a book, a chapter, or a full article to the artist.[4]



Fig. 1. Chris Ledochowski, *Petrus Mulaudzi*, 1982

The artist's name appears mostly in the context of his engagement and membership in the Afrapix photographic collective; Ledochowski is thus mentioned in the same breath as other members of the group; his work, though acknowledged and appreciated, is not discussed extensively, at most being compared to the works of other Afrapix photographers (Hayes 2007: 153–9; Godby 2009: 77–9; Peffer 2009: 254, 255, 259; Enwezor 2013: 30; Allara 2013: 473; Hayes 2013: 343; Hayes 2015: 156–57; Hayes 2017: 307; Miles 2019: 53; Thomas 2021; Clarke 2025: 141). In Polish art history, the artist practically does not exist. The only sign of his presence in the country of his parents and ancestors was

3 The artist took part in a group exhibition entitled *The Structure of Survival* curated by Carlos Basualdo. The show at the Venice Arsenale was one of the 10 projects of *Dreams and Conflicts – The Dictatorship of the Viewer* conceived by the 50th Venice Art Biennial artistic director Francesco Bonami. The exhibition took place from June 15 to November 2, 2003 (Cf. Bonami, Frisa 2003: 241–89).

4 Until now, it was Patricia Hayes who wrote most extensively about the artist in her article on colour in photography (Cf. Hayes 2015: 156–8).

a small solo exhibition organized at Galeria Wizytująca (*the Visiting Gallery*), a private commercial art space in Warsaw in 2005.[5]

2. Photographer

Ledochowski's ex-centric position in the discourse and practices of art history is the result of several factors. The artist's self-consciously—as I have suggested—ambiguous positioning in relation to artistic traditions, i.e. European modernism and South African contemporary documentary photographic practice is just one of them. Ledochowski's place is also unique among his own the post-1976 generation of photographers.[6] His practice goes far beyond the social documentary mode, crucial for numerous photographers involved with the Afrapix collective, who were inspired by the documentary photography of South African photographers of the older generation, such as Eli Weinberg, Ernest Cole, David Goldblatt, Peter Magubane, and Afrapix co-founder Omar Badsha (Badsha 1986: xvi).[7] In this sense—although Ledochowski's practice clearly belongs to the Afrapix group's photography of resistance and struggle (cf. Krantz 2008: 290)—his work can only partially be classified as social documentary photography or photojournalism.[8] Another reason for Ledochowski's

5 The exhibition entitled *Chris Ledochowski: Fotografia/Photography* took place from June 15 to October 6, 2005. Ledochowski also took part in a group exhibition of Polish photographers photographing Africa entitled *Autres lieux, autres regards. Pologne–Afrique* hosted at the Polish Institute in Paris in 2002.

6 I use the term "post-1976 generation" after Omar Badsha. His intention was to refer to photographers born in the 1950s, for whom the 1976 Soweto uprising was a decisive generational experience (Cf. Badsha 1986: xvi).

7 An equally important point of reference for Afrapix collective members was the activity of the Magnum Agency and the work of photographers such as Robert Capa, Dorothea Lange, and Eugene Smith (Krantz 2008: 293–4).

8 Heidi Saayman-Hattingh writes extensively about the notion and the idea of "photography of struggle," as well as the terms "documentary photography" and "photojournalism" in South African photographic practice in the 1980s. Considering the differences (such as generic, historical, and practical among others) between documentary photography and photojournalism, she draws attention to the generally accepted interchangeability of the two concepts. As she writes, "it is not just about the interchangeability of the terms, but also the fluidity of the boundaries, in terms of the intended purpose of the work and how the images were regarded by the viewer, both in their original capacity, as well as from a historical point of view" (2011: 193). For the purpose of the present study my intention is not to make distinctions between the two notions. However, the very idea of documentary photography as a cultural practice seems to me to be evidently broader and therefore more applicable than the concept of photojournalism.

underrepresentation in art history is the critical reevaluation that South African photography of the 1980s is undergoing today, including the work of the Afrapix collective and the infrastructures of social documentary photography of the late apartheid era. This issue was addressed by Patricia Hayes already in 2007, when she paid attention to the ethical entanglements of photography within the Afrapix collective (Hayes 2007: 150–4).

It is not without significance for the ethical aspects of the Afrapix photographic practice that the collective operated as a regular photography agency. Consequently, photographs submitted by photographers to the agency headquarters were sent to anti-apartheid organizations and media abroad. Dozens of photographs of apartheid victims circulated internationally, while being rarely or not at all available in South Africa, where they were often censored and banned. In this sense, the photographed individuals had neither access to their own images nor control over how they were used. Furthermore, the subjectivity and complexity of their lives were photographically limited to one aspect of their existence only (cf. Hayes, 150–152). As a result, the distance between the photographed and the photographers and their audience of international viewers grew. As Hayes writes: "There were two related problems, firstly the social distance between the photographer and the photographed, and secondly the huge gulf between the world audience of viewers and the photographed" (152–153). Hayes argues that although "in the 1980s,… political proximity overcame class and race differences to a large extent,… the problems of distance did not go away, despite insider positions or strong political identification" (154).

This is, indeed, a crucial issue, also from the perspective of the 2020s and the present debates on decolonization—specifically, on the problem of the violent status of the medium of photography, its history, and its practice; in other words, the problem of photography's involvement in the production of the colonial gaze and the postcolonial redistribution of the right to look (Mirzoeff 2011). I believe this is a problem that Ledochowski consciously struggled with from the beginning of his career and attempted to overcome as early as the 1980s by redefining the role of photography in his own practice.

3. Artist

Before I discuss the artist's practice that eludes easy categorization and anticipates today's postcolonial debates, I would like to briefly introduce him, adding to the known facts from his life (Goldblatt 2003: 2–3; Hayes 2015: 156–157) some new information obtained from the artist during conversations with him (Ledochowski 2023). Ledochowski was born in Southern Africa in 1956, to Polish parents, emigrants to South Africa. His parents—Włodzimierz (Vladimir,

Wlodek) Ledóchowski and Barbara (Basia/Basha) Ledóchowska—were intrepid critics of the regime and anti-apartheid activists involved in a number of social organizations and anti-regime actions (Kusek 2026). Their stance profoundly influenced the artist's approach and choices. Ledochowski grew up in his parents' home in Johannesburg, and after graduating from the Waterford School, a multiracial boarding institution in Swaziland, he moved to Poland in 1974 with the intention of studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. Interestingly, during his stay in the city, he was hosted by the renowned Polish conservation photographer and author of wildlife photobooks, Włodzimierz Puchalski (Kusek, Szymański 2025: 148; Ledochowski 2023). However, he spent only a few months in Poland; his stay was interrupted by a conscription in South Africa, which he had to accept to avoid legal consequences. Having been given the choice of either remaining in exile and having his South African citizenship relinquished or undergoing his compulsory military service, Ledochowski returned to South Africa in 1975 to undergo obligatory military conscription in the South African Defense Force. From 1977 to 1980 he studied photography at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town. In 1983 he joined the Afrapix Photographic Collective. While living in Cape Town, as David Goldblatt notes:

> He lived in a student commune in Harfield Village, a racially mixed Cape Town suburb to which the Group Areas Act was now being applied. It was to become 'white' and people of color were being forced out. Friends that he made in Harfield were now being scattered across the Cape Flats, and he began to visit them there (Goldblatt 2003: 2).

In this way the artist's long-standing bond with the Cape Town townships began. Over the next years, they became a permanent subject of his work. It was also then, in the mid-1980s, that he started a small business producing commissioned hand-coloured photographic family portraits for the townships' residents.

In the 1980s, Ledochowski became a part of the townships' community, not only working there and developing personal relationships with residents, but also attempting to raise his own family there, namely his partner and son (Ledochowski 2023). His seminal work is the photobook *Cape Flats Details: Life and Culture in the Townships of Cape Town*, published in 2003.

Apart from photographs taken by the artist in the years 1984–2002 in townships, the book also contains a collection of texts in many languages (such as religious texts, prison poetry, and tattoos) collected by the artist. They show that—without acknowledging the cultural and religious practices in languages



Fig. 2. From *A Set of 12 Postcards from the Exhibition "Hand Coloured Documentary Photographs by Chris Ledochowski in Ceramic Frames made in collaboration with Joe Faragher"*, 1995

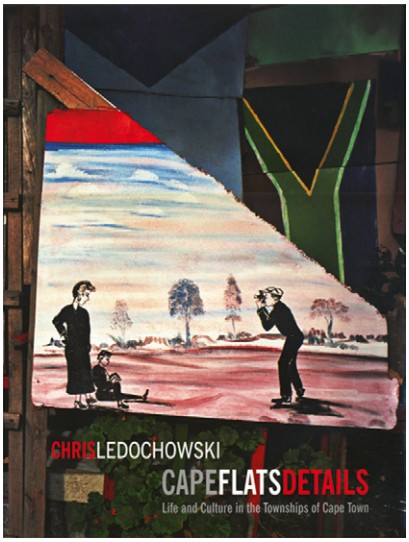


Fig. 3. Chris Ledochowski, *Cape Flats Details: Life and Culture in the Townships of Cape Town*, 2003, book cover

indigenous to these communities, their artistic expression and functions thereof remain unknown to viewers (Ledochowski 2003: 205–212).

All of Ledochowski's works mentioned in the previous paragraph—that is, the documentary photographs taken in townships, the hand-colored and framed portraits of townships residents, and the book—are connected not only by their place of origin, but also by their role in revolutionizing the medium of photography: all of these works go far beyond the social documentary mode and their creation is inextricably linked to the artist's self-awareness of the problematic infrastructures of documentary photography and its ethical implications.

Ledochowski was acutely aware of these problems in the 1980s already. This is confirmed by the typescript of an interview conducted with the artist at his home in Cape Town in October 1985 by Omar Badsha (*Conversation* 1985).[9] The interview can be considered Ledochowski's artist statement, in which he criticizes the superficial relationships between documentary photographers and the individuals they photograph, and presents his practice as an attempt to overcome the ethical impasse in which photography has found itself. Ledochowski draws attention to the radically different ontological situations—i.e., economic, racial, class, and existential—of the photographer and the photographed. In an attempt to bring the privileged photographer and the underprivileged photographed closer together, he seeks to build a kind of community around his own photographic practice. A practice whose fundamental feature is the agency of the photographed, who can accept, reject, or even destroy the photograph. The decision regarding the photograph rests with the photographed person. This articulates the subject's agency, who—at least to some extent—retains control over their own image before it reaches a global, international audience through photo agencies. The photographed person also literally preserves their own image when the photographer presents them with a copy of the photograph. Ledochowski spoke about these aspects of his practice in 1985:

> My whole theory was #1, Evidence. Each photograph you take you give back to that person, or those people, and that is why you are taking the picture. You gave them [the] big one, because the whole process is an educational process. You are not just giving them a picture, you are breaking down a whole idea of special picture, after a week and after a month, and after six months, and after a year of handing over hundreds and hundreds of pictures, and being there every day taking pictures, you break down that whole 'specialness' of pictures and you start to actually see the everyday life, and the relationship with the photographer, whatever it might be (*Conversation* 1985: 2–3).[10]

9 Although the title of the manuscript does not mention the name of the interviewer, and the manuscript itself appears to be essentially one long statement given by Ledochowski (that is why I consequently refer to it as an artist statement), the last page of the document contains a comment attributed to "Omar." Therefore, I believe that it is most likely that it was Omar Badsha who was interviewing Ledochowski.

10 In the email of March 16, 2026, Ledochowski changed this fragment as follows: "My whole theory was #1, Evidence. Each photograph you take, you give back to that person,

He further spoke about the empowerment of the people he photographed as follows:

> I always told, you have to tell people exactly what… is going on before you can even take a picture. So[,] they know these pictures are going to go to Afrapix… and they have still got option to refuse, when I bring them the picture and they check it. If they don't like the picture, I'll scrap it, I can't sell it.… And people said, go and show this.… And for me I always try and take that photograph for that person who is in the picture. And it can be used by Afrapix or anybody with that person's consent, but first thing is for that person.… I mean there are two different kinds of photography. One is to try to build up the peoples[']hearts, and the other is to satisfy what the bourg[e]oisie actually envisage, what their idea of poverty is.… Now all those… pictures are in galleries, all very romantic, but that wasn't the actual people. It wasn't what they see (*Conversation* 1985: 4–6).[11]

The fragments of the artist statement cited here clearly demonstrate Ledochowski's self-conscious positioning far beyond the established understanding

or those people, and that is why you are taking the picture. You brought them prints because the whole process should also be educational. You are not just giving them a picture, you are breaking down a whole idea of special picture, after a week and after a month, and after six months, and after a year of handing over hundreds and hundreds of pictures, and being there every day taking pictures, you break down that whole 'specialness' of pictures and you start to actually see the everyday life, and the relationship with the photographer, whatever it might be" (Ledochowski 2026).

11 In the email of March 16, 2026, Ledochowski changed this fragment as follows: "Long before you could even take a picture, I always impressed upon people the importance of documentary photographs in visually capturing a particular place and moment in history. However, as with photos taken for unions and organisations, they know these pictures are going to be sent to organisations such as Afrapix. But in more private or religious settings, people still have the option to refuse for the picture to be used, upon bringing them the pictures and they check it. If they don't like the picture, I wouldn't send it. […] And people said, go 'Go and show this.' […] I always try to take a photograph 'for' not 'of' that person in the picture. I mean, there are two different kinds of photography. One is to try to build peoples' self-confidence and self-worth, and the other is to satisfy what the bourg[e]oisie actually envisage, what their idea of poverty is. […]. Those types of photographs will forever fill galleries, all very romantic, but a true interaction with the actual people never occurred. It isn't what the subjects would have seen" (Ledochowski 2026).

of documentary photography. The artist's concept of photography transcended its conventional understanding as a purely pictorial medium. His attentiveness to photography as a social practice, a kind of social contract between the photographer and the photographed, clearly emphasized the need to create a community through photography; "citizenry of photography", as Ariella Azoulay would say (Azoulay 2008). In this way, the photographic image circulated in international print media returned to its source, establishing an alternative community of viewers in townships, a kind of subaltern counterpublics, which, following Nancy Fraser, I understand as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (1990: 67). It could be argued that focusing on the act of taking a photo and emphasizing the importance of the relationship between the photographed and the photographer brings Ledochowski's 1980s practice closer to the model of relational aesthetics described a decade later by Nicolas Bourriaud in his influential description of the art of the 1990s (Bourriaud 2002). For Ledochowski, as for artists representing Bourriaud's relational model, a work of art is not just an artifact to be looked at, but rather a place of encounter, a moment of sociability, an object producing sociability (18, 33).

4. Educator

One might ask what influenced the artist's approach to documentary photography and his attempt to expand the field of photography to include a relational model. Sensitivity, presumably; as well as various attempts by other South African photographers to depart from the documentary mode.[12] In fact, South African documentary photographers of the era extensively debated the ethical—especially racial and class—entanglements of the medium and its limitations. It is well evidenced by a text published in *Spark* magazine in

12 For instance, the work of David Goldblatt and Santu Mofokeng exemplifies this shift. In the 1980s, Goldblatt expanded his photographic practice to include social activism. In 1989, he founded The Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg, a school of photography, a gallery, and a project space offering training in visual literacy for marginalized parts of South African society and providing disadvantaged students a high standard of photographic education (Goldblatt 2019: 134). In the second half of the 1980s, Mofokeng who became an important internal critic of mainstream photojournalism (Hayes 2009: 34) turned to research on the history of photography in South Africa and its archives, proposing both a sociohistorical and conceptual approach to the medium of photography (Cf. Miles 2019: 53).

1989.[13] The piece entitled "On Documentary Photography: A Photographer's View," is an anonymous account of a participant of the first-ever conference on documentary photography in South Africa, organized in July 1988 by Omar Badsha and hosted in the Centre for Documentary Photography at the University of Cape Town. An anonymous author reports that:

> documentary photographers from all around the country met… [and] [p]apers given at the conference raised many issues that are important to documentary photographers working in South Africa. These included: *the role of photographers in the democratic movement *the position of women cultural workers and the image of women reflected in our own cultural products *the creation of and response to images of violence *the aims and operation of photographers[']collectives such as Afrapix, Vakalesa, Dynamic Images *the need for communities to take control over the production of images of themselves (*Spark* 1989: 18).

Due to the fact that "in South Africa […] the majority of photographers come from the group that has privileged access to money and skills—white, middle-class men," as the anonymous author/photographer writes, the relationship between the photographed and the photographers, in particular, seemed to be highly problematic (*Spark* 1989: 20). Own reflections on the complex interrelationships between photographer, subject, photograph, and audience in South Africa the author begins with a question posed several years earlier in the United Kingdom by Su Braden, but perfectly suited to the South African documentary photography of the late 1980s: "What kind of collaboration can there be between photographer and photographed that will ensure that the person behind the camera is not appropriating the identity of the person in front of the lens?" (Braden 1983: 2 qtd. in *Spark* 1989: 18).

However, I would like to suggest that it is difficult to ignore the role of the artist's mother, Barbara Ledóchowska, her activist and educational work, as well as the collaboration between the mother and the son that developed in the 1980s. In the 1985 conversation, the artist repeatedly draws attention to the educational aspect of his photographic practice; "the whole process is an educational process," he says (*Conversation* 1985: 2). Photographs therefore seem

13 *Spark* was one of the projects run by PAP, i.e. The Progressive Arts Project, a collective of progressively minded artists established in 1987 whose main aim was to create of a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa. The magazine was printed in the late 1980s and included poetry as well as topical cultural issues.

to be a kind of educational material and a tool of cognition for the persons photographed, while the photographer plays the role of a teacher who not only teaches but also creates conditions for understanding of the self. In the artist's own words:

> My whole line has been, this has to be documented, this stuff has to be documented, what is happening has to be documented, you know, but the type of picture I take, I try and make more for the individual also, apart from… showing the environment and the situation, so they can objectively see their situation. That's why I take the pictures. If everybody was educated, I wouldn't take, one picture.… A photograph is a beginning, the fact that you see yourself, see the place you live.… Suddenly they are being confronted with their actual image of reality.… Here's the picture and I can explain them why I am taking pictures, and they can tell me what they see in the pictures (*Conversation* 1985: 5).[14]

The story of Barbara Ledóchowska's activism—reconstructed recently by Robert Kusek, Zannie Bock, and Caroline Kerfoot—leaves no doubt that she also saw for herself the role of a teacher who did not simply teach but created conditions for gaining knowledge and self-understanding. Ledóchowska, as Kusek writes:

> Was… active in establishing the structures of resistance to apartheid policies.… In the early 1970s, she founded two important literacy organizations, i.e. Learn and Teach and USWE (Using Spoken and Written English) which helped adult learners to get basic literacy skills and, under her leadership, developed a new methodology.[15] In her own

14 In the email of March 16, 2026, Ledochowski changed this fragment as follows: "My whole line has been, this has to be documented, this stuff has to be documented, what is happening has to be documented, you know, but the type of picture I take is principally for the individual, but also shows their environment, so they can view their situation objectively. That's why I took pictures. If these subjects had been well educated, I wouldn't have bothered to take any pictures. […] A photograph is a beginning of self-awareness, the fact that you see yourself, see the place you live in. Suddenly, you are being confronted with your actual 'image' of reality. When the subject had the picture in their hands, I could then explain to them why I am taking pictures, and they could also tell me what they see in the pictures" (Ledochowski 2026).

15 Methods implemented by her were clearly inspired by the ideas of Paolo Freire and his influential *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968, English edition: 1970).

> words, this methodology nullified an 'authoritarian classroom situation' and destabilised the traditional (oppressive) relationship between the teacher and the learner" (2026).

Ledóchowska's method of teaching/learning literacy was based on developing a specific set of skills that would enable her students, Black domestic workers, to read and write their life stories, their "memoirs," some of which were later published in book form by USWE as textbooks used for learning with groups of illiterate adults (Kusek 2026, cf. Bock, Kerfoot 2026).

The books consisted of texts by adult learners and photographs by professional photographers, including several members of Afrapix collective who provided USWE with photographs to assist in the process of teaching and learning.[16] As a result, these volumes, designed primarily as English textbooks, might be read as a kind of photobook or photo essay, a collaborative and relational work whose authorship was shared among various actors.

A good example is the book *We Came To Town*, published in 1985, in which Ledochowski's significant contribution is evident (Kerfoot 1985)—a collection of stories written by Black workers learning English, with photographs by Vicky Alhadeff and a cover photo by Ledochowski.

The "Teacher's Notes" attached to the book seem to perfectly align with Ledochowski's artist statement. The publisher's goals are to: "Provide learners and teachers of English as a second language with reading material based on the experiences and statements of the learners themselves," "stimulate a critical consciousness of the issues governing the world around [them]," "[relating] to the reality of their everyday lives," (Kerfoot 1985: 63) and, last but not least, give students a chance to teach the teacher through photography: "The photographs are designed to stimulate discussion by contrast and comparison with the text or other photography.… The teacher need not be an expert—this is a chance for her students to teach her!" (Kerfoot 1985: 64). These goals seem to be very similar to the goals the artist set for his practice. What is more, it seems certain

16 USWE's photographic archive reveals the organization's collaboration with other Afrapix members, i.e. Omar Badsha and Eric Miller. Among the archival materials also photographs by Sally Shorkend might be found. I would like to express my gratitude to Zannie Bock for allowing me to view the USWE archival materials at her home in Cape Town in 2023 and 2026. On Afrapix collaboration with anti-apartheid institutions and providing them with photographs to assist in their education and mobilization kindly see: (Hayes 2017, 307). The author, however, does not mention USWE among the Afrapix collaborators.

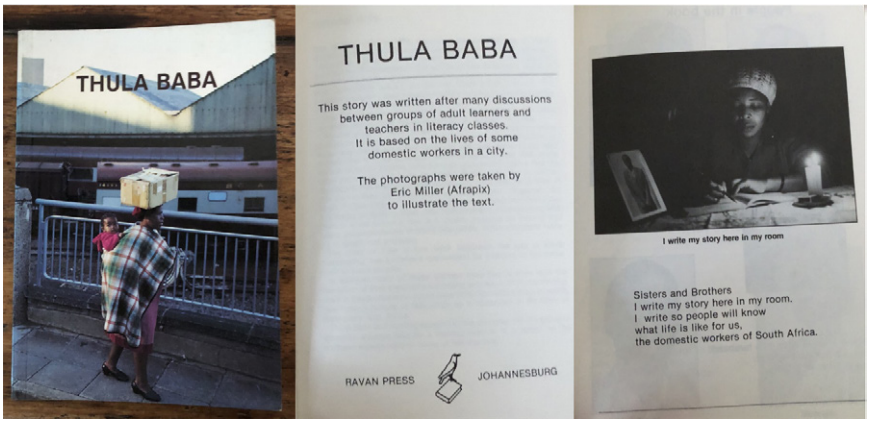


Fig. 4. *Thula Baba*, 1987, book cover, front page, and first pages of the book



Fig. 5. Caroline Kerfoot, *We Came To Town*, 1985, book cover

that Ledochowski not only gave permission for his photograph to be used on the cover of *We Came To Town* but also proved to be a keen reader of the book.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was neither an iconic analysis nor a visual interpretation of particular photographs by Chris Ledochowski. Therefore, I did not discuss, for instance, how images were selected, edited, sequenced, or presented in his exhibitions or books.[17] These significant and otherwise fascinating issues deserve, I believe, a separate, much more extensive study. What interested me

17 Ledochowski's other photobook, apart from *Cape Flats Details*, is the self-published, hors commerce book entitled *Dialogues* (Ledochowski 2022).

in this paper were rather—based on the artist's statements from the 1980s and his pioneering practices at the time—attempts to expand the field of documentary photography. This is why it is more about what accompanies the whole process of making a photographic image (a tangle of affects, reflections, and hesitation); not the photographic image itself, nor its affirmation through its visual interpretation. And this is why it is more about distrust of the image than its abilities. A position, I believe, clearly expressed once by Ledochowski himself, who wrote about the limitations of documentary photography as follows: "Photography is certainly not the most suitable medium for recording the greater part of township artistic and cultural expression, limited as it is to static two-dimensional images" (2003: 10).

His constant reflection on the medium of photography, as well as the aspects of own practice emphasized by Ledochowski in his 1985 artist statement and visible in his work, such as: affirming the subjectivity of the photographed, as well as including them in the photographer's decision-making process, presenting (where possible) the photographed with their portraits, running a portrait firm for the needs of townships residents, collecting texts and vernacular literary works to include them in his photobook, working within a relational model, finally, the pivotal, educational aspect of photography—are key features of the artist's practice, which encourage me to place his work far beyond the mode of documentary photography.

Additionally, what I also find highly interesting, especially in the light of the Polish-South African cultural relations, is the convergence of the artist's practice with the educational practices of his mother. A comparison of the artist statement with educational materials published by USWE leaves no doubt about the intriguing connection between the 1980s ideas of anti-apartheid education movement and his own practice. The radical ideas in education, undertaken and promoted by Barbara Ledóchowska, occurred at the same time when Ledochowski's sensitivity as an artist was being shaped.

An artist who teaches the photographed to look at themselves, while simultaneously learning from the photographed how to look at himself.

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Fig. 1. Chris Ledochowski, *Petrus Mulaudzi*, 1982, photograph reproduced in *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart. Essays by Twenty South African Photographers*, edited by Omar Badsha, with text by Francis Wilson, 1986. Photo by Wojciech Szymański

Fig. 2. From *A Set of 12 Postcards from the Exhibition "Hand Coloured Documentary Photographs by Chris Ledochowski in Ceramic Frames made in collaboration with Joe Faragher"*, 1995. From left to right: publication's cover, Chris Ledochowski, *White Wedding*, Bontenheuwel, Cape Town 1984. Hand-coloured photo with ceramic frame by Chris Ledochowski made in collaboration with Joe Faragher, Chris Ledochowski, *Sunset*, Hanover Park, Cape Town 1988. Hand-coloured photo with ceramic frame by Chris Ledochowski made in collaboration with Joe Faragher. Photo by Wojciech Szymański

Fig. 3. Chris Ledochowski, *Cape Flats Details: Life and Culture in the Townships of Cape Town*, 2003, book cover. Photo by Wojciech Szymański

Fig. 4. *Thula Baba*, 1987, book cover, front page, and first pages of the book. Home archive of Zannie Bock, Cape Town. Courtesy of Zannie Bock. Photo by Wojciech Szymański

Fig. 5. Caroline Kerfoot, *We Came To Town*, 1985, book cover. Home archive of Zannie Bock, Cape Town. Courtesy of Zannie Bock. Photo by Wojciech Szymański

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| Abstract

WOJCIECH SZYMAŃSKI
Chris Ledochowski: Social Documentary Photography and Beyond

The paper discusses Chris Ledochowski's photography and his art practice. Having investigated the artist's oeuvre and his 1980s activity, i.e., the 1985 artist statement and Ledochowski's collaboration with anti-apartheid educational organization USWE (Using Spoken and Written English), the paper formulates claims about his revolutionary and precursory views on the medium of photography. Ledochowski's practice goes far beyond the social documentary mode, crucial for photographers gathered, like himself, in the Afrapix collective, inspired by the documentary

photography of South African photographers of the older generation, such as Eli Weinberg, Ernest Cole, David Goldblatt, Peter Magubane, and Omar Badsha. Special attention is paid to the aspects of Ledochowski's practice emphasized by him in his 1985 artist statement and visible in his art, such as: affirming the subjectivity of the photographed, including them in the photographer's decision-making process, presenting the photographed with their portraits before sending the photos to the agency, running a studio for the needs of townships residents, collecting texts and vernacular literary works to include them in a photobook, working within a relational model, finally, the pivotal, educational aspect of photography. The paper also focuses on the convergence of the artist's practice with the educational practices influenced by his mother, Barbara Ledóchowska. A comparison of the artist statement with educational materials published by USWE, leaves no doubt about the profound connection between the ideas of anti-apartheid education movement and the artist's practice.

Keywords: Chris Ledochowski; Afrapix; documentary photography; art in South Africa; Barbara Ledóchowska

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