

outoftheCUBE curators comment 2014 OCT a sense of space/place

mandy conidaris and kevin sneider

current exhibitions begin Friday 10 October 2014

run till mid-February 2015 then the exhibitions go into the outoftheCUBE archive

Friday 10 October *Welcome Stranger* by Karin Daymond and *Nuances* by Janet Botes

Friday 17 October *A Room with a View* by Johann du Plessis

Tuesday 21 October *Memory Game* by Louise Ross

Friday 24 October *Karoo fragments* by Kay Fourie

Friday 31 October *unburdened-burden* by Barry Rautenbach

Monday 10 November *reading landscape* by Lyn Smuts

online catalogue launched JANUARY 2015

http://issuu.com/outofthecube/docs/outofthecube_a_sense_of_space_place

exhibiting artists:

Janet Botes; Karin Daymond; Kay Fourie; Barry Rautenbach; Louise Ross; Lyn Smuts;

for more details about the artists and their works, please see the texts on each artist's exhibition page.

key words and phrases:

digital prints; the land; environmental art; migrancy; oil painting; refugees; transience; urban spaces; watercolour painting; linocuts; portraits; fracking; catharsis; trauma; sound and land; landscape; community work; intaglio printing;

catalogue essay

a sense of space/place

A path. Drive it, walk it, take it to be somewhere. When you're on a path, you're in the place you're in. There's no distinction between the path and the place itself ... reality [has been] blown or washed away ... The path can only be where it is and nowhere else ...

The theme for this group of exhibitions relates to *a sense of space/place*, and all our artists have used an environment as an expressive form of communication – some the landscape; some the physical land; and some their home space or the geographical space they interact with on a daily basis.

Between 10 October and 10 November 2014 we posted seven exhibitions; and in January 2015 we launched the outoftheCUBE online catalogue for this creative journey. Travel with us down this path.

The first two artists we meet are Karin Daymond and Janet Botes, and the visual subject for both is the landscape.

Karin Daymond

Karin Daymond has explored aspects of the land in her work for many years, and as well as depicting real places, her images refer to a space deeper within our world: the human condition.

During a recent trip to Sicily, Karin became aware of the hidden presence there of refugees from Africa. This moved her, and on her return she explored her own surrounding familiar land in her hometown of Mbombela, Mpumalanga, the bushveld that she had always found reassuring and affirming of her identity and sense of belonging. She relooked at it from the eyes of a refugee, reassessing it as potentially hostile and as a barrier to freedom. This shift in perspective brought an awareness of the desperation inherent in being transient, a migrant.

The resulting paintings and monotype prints of *Welcome Stranger* are a subtle reference to this state. Karin has taken the patterns of African fabrics, so beloved by the refugee women, to signify their subtle presence. Traces of these patterns have been integrated into her landscapes as natural textures, almost as fossils.

Janet Botes

Janet Botes works in multiple mediums including performance and land art; drawing, painting, photography and assemblage; and more recently digital prints, which are shown in this exhibition *Nuances*. Here, her way of stitching and layering images speaks of human memory, both personal and collective, as well as the earth's memory of its own evolution.

Her work reflects her belief structure – that we are all part of the web of life, and that each of our actions, however small, impacts on the world. Janet's total commitment to these values trigger her enormous energy levels. Her main aim in creating her artwork is to encourage her viewers back into the ecological world, to help them reconnect, appreciate and respect nature, not only the physical Earth but also ourselves as biological beings of nature. She feels many have lost touch with a necessary engagement with nature, and so are missing the essence of what it means to be human.

Janet says that if we could “accept the wildness [within ourselves] and create stillness within ourselves, we would ... contribute to humanity in a collective revolution.”

Secondly we meet Cape Town-based Johann du Plessis, and Louise Ross who lives in Johannesburg. Both

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of these artists draw inspiration in very different ways for very different reasons from the city spaces directly around them.

Johann du Plessis

After an encounter with cancer that threatened his very essence, taking away a degree of his sensory faculties including those crucial for an artist – sight, sound and touch – Johann du Plessis began the long journey towards recovery, which included starting from scratch with his creative work.

He began the series of works *Room with a View* by looking out from the balcony of his urban home space and photographing the night skies of Cape Town, only to shift and manipulate those images in such a way that the technical interference has become a metaphor for the way he had to ‘re-humanise’ his living/feeling environment.

The reworking of the images by drawing and painting on them, and adding elements of collage, gave him the emotional space to reflect on the dissipating effect of his illness, its seeming illogicality and how it rendered him ‘weightless’. Johann said “These works reflect moments in time and space, or rather through time and space – letting go of the ‘now’, allowing ideas to form meaning through different layers of reality – an interplay between the passing and dissolving of time.”

Louise Ross

Louise Ross’s exhibition *Memory Game* in part refers to the seemingly insignificant ‘stuff’ in the city, things we don’t see, the bins, the cranes, the billboards and in her outoftheCUBE exhibition, the trees. The city of Johannesburg has long held an attraction for this artist, and she finds it simultaneously fascinating yet overwhelming.

Louise began to take snapshots of the tiny sections she passed during her daily commute. She documented from the bus windows, from her car window, while on foot and from her inner city studio window. This activity became a form of mapping of her own pathways through the city, and she comments that her sense of the places/spaces of Johannesburg shapes her own experience of life. She says “Johannesburg is a complex place that takes hold of you and draws you in ... My paintings are of Johannesburg.”

Loosely rendered, gentle, almost abstract in nature, visually poles apart from photographic documentation, Louise’s work combines the seeming spontaneity of a small watercolour landscape painting with a broader concept: how do our urban surroundings impact on us? And what do we really remember?

Next we meet Kay Fourie, an artist whose creative work is an expression of the way she is rooted in her home environment of the Great Karoo.

Kay Fourie

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Kay Fourie's living environment is a farm in Philipstown; and she is a woman of many layers, echoing those of the Karoo around her. She is an artist who is predominantly a sculptor and printmaker, both techniques that require a degree of excavation and/or building up of layers. Kay's portrait sculptures, shown here, are of people close to her, and are executed with a great sensitivity towards the subject's essence and mood; as opposed to her found object sculptures which, quirky yet functional, pay tribute to the impulse for scavenging often necessary in rural life.

Kay's prints relate to the folk on her farm, and she explores concerns around the hardships that many of them face. She has also made some linocuts to exhibit in the traveling group exhibition 2052 KAROO, an ongoing project curated and organized by Katie du Toit which speaks out about fracking. Like many people of the Karoo, Kay sees fracking as a potential rape of the land that will endanger the way of life of both its human and animal inhabitants.

Alongside these social issues, Kay works among the youth in her community, creating projects that attempt to raise their sense of self-worth. This has resulted in the Car door Self-Portraits Project, and Roof Runners Project, both original and taking cognizance of the culture of the area, where children constantly gather scrap to build small cars.

Now Kay has co-founded the Groenstraat Gallery in Philipstown – she says:

It is very exciting and daring or maybe a bit stupid.....who would put up a contemporary art gallery in the middle of nowhere? The Gallery is situated on the premises of the only garage in town and the Car doors are right above our door, as well as the Roof runners. So somehow ... it makes sense. We want to make conceptual, contemporary art accessible to everybody who is interested, even (no, especially) for the kids of Philipstown's shanty town.

Our next encounter is with Barry Rautenbach, a sculptor and installation artist who uses the actual physical elements of the land to create his artwork.

Barry Rautenbach

Barry Rautenbach, like so many young South African school-leavers of the late 1960s to the early 1990s, was conscripted into the SADF. Now in middle age he has come to realise that whole generations of South African men, still damaged by their Bush War experiences because of the government insistence at the time on secrecy around the specifics of military actions, were carrying unspoken burdens of guilt and anger.

He began to explore these emotions by creating small assemblage sculptures of fragmented experience that resulted in the installation *unburdened-burden*. By exploiting actual material elements of the Bush War – sand, rock, military kit, letters – Barry created the timeline of order then chaos that the soldiers underwent during their journey through 'the Army'. He uses aspects of the physical land to show the psychological space, sand laid out in the shape of the Caprivi Strip, a particularly dangerous war zone.

Post-traumatic stress disorder was first acknowledged as a consequence of war among returning

veterans after the Vietnam War. But there was no such acknowledgement of the trauma suffered by our Boys on the Border because the specifics of the war were purposefully hidden from the South African people at home by the government, and once home, the soldiers were forbidden to speak of their experiences, afraid to do so because of the threat of being labelled – or worse, prosecuted – as a traitor.

Returning soldiers have always been exquisitely sensitive to the degree of support they encounter at home ... seek the meaning of their encounter with killing and death in the moral stance of civilian community. They need to know whether their actions are viewed as heroic or dishonourable, brave or cowardly, necessary and purposeful or meaningless. A realistically accepting climate of community opinion fosters the reintegration of soldiers into civilian life; a rejecting climate of opinion compounds their isolation.

Judith Lewis Herman (1992:70)

Finally we meet Stellenbosch-based Lyn Smuts, whose work has been inspired, in part, by the natural physical environment around her.

Lyn Smuts

Lyn Smuts' early years in the Free State with its silent and expansive open spaces influenced both her use of extreme horizontal formats and her ongoing search for ways to explore the relationship between sound and the land, and a sense of interconnectedness. Lyn has undertaken extensive research into sound, including the sound-waves of both music and sonar, and increasingly her landscape formats have begun formally to parallel music scores.

For many years now based in Stellenbosch and surrounded by the Cape mountains, Lyn continues to look for alternative ways to experience the landscape. During her investigations, one revelation to her was that an old graph of a new-born baby's cry looked similar in contour to Table Mountain. When she asked a singer to vocalise it, the singer chose to intone it in a pentatonic scale, and it became apparent that the resulting refrain mimicked the melody of lullabies, common across many cultures and centuries. Other research looked into Ernst Chladni's experiments of the late-1700s where he allowed dust to settle on a metal plate after drawing a violin bow across the plate so as to indicate that all matter vibrates.

reading landscape shows just six works, representing a small stretch of the path along Lyn's creative journey. She says "My work on sound and landscape reflects a constant echoing between the human being and environment." As seen here, the delicacy and intricacy of her mark-making corresponds to music made by the most sensitive violinist or empathetic singer, while the visual power of the imagery speaks of her fascination with the earth's shiftings.

conclusion

At a time in South Africa's history when land rights are becoming a significant issue, the work of these seven artists stands as a reminder that, ultimately, humankind can never truly own the land, can merely

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experience and interpret it, whether creatively or politically. Each of these artists has used their own surroundings –urban or rural, intimate or vast - to examine their own life paths and philosophies.

As long as you don't stop there's no getting lost in the labyrinth, although there is the illusion. The labyrinth razes all distinctions. Disorientation comes quickly. Your sense of place breaks down. Your relation to the world beyond becomes tenuous. The more protracted your journey, the greater the chance of ambiguity forming about your identity. Go on long enough and you may lose it altogether. Go on long enough and you will be fortified, clarified. It depends on your ability to endure, to negotiate the tangled, endless web of direction. As long as you don't stop – stop moving, stop being present, stop paying attention – you won't get lost.

Roni Horn (cited 2000:30)

What thought-provoking travel companions.

note

Karin Daymond's online exhibition *Welcome Stranger* opened on outoftheCUBE concurrent with its opening at Gallery 2 in Parkwood Johannesburg.

<http://www.gallery2.co.za/>

sources

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