

mandy conidaris and kevin sneider

dates of exhibitions: Wednesday 8 May – Friday 21 June 2013

exhibited artists:

Zyma Amien, Tony Bingham, Gabi Nkosi, Karen Pretorius, Emma Willemse.

for more details on the artists' works, please read the texts on each artist's exhibition page.

key words:

linocut; screenprint; photography; digital print; video; installation; process; intimacy; personal space; displacement; loss; memory; shadows; traces; mourning; honouring; serendipity; Cornelia Parker;

Displacement, traces, loss: a creative response

Emma Willemse said "The floor of a house maps the inside spaces of a home, it defines the spaces where people experience their most intimate moments." This resonates through many of these works: the intimacy, the poignancy, the frailty, the process of human existence as symbolized through the lived-in space of a home." (2013).

The key to this group of exhibitions lies in the spirit of Gabi Nkosi, who lost her life in her home in 2008. Shortly before, she made a suite of six linocuts that she called *Healing*. This was produced to be exhibited in Gateshead, UK, in 2007 as part of the Bicentennial Celebrations to commemorate the abolition of the slavery laws in England.

Gabi's spirit

Gabi's approach to this brief was to bring the situation forward in time into South African history, and explore aspects of apartheid as a form of slavery and how it had impacted on her people. On reading her comments ('in conversation') around the content of these small, intimate images, it becomes clear that she also considered some positive forces that developed in herself and her people as a result. In particular, she looked at how folk find solace, and the ways they unearth to protect their inner selves. This approach, to start with the general and then focus on the individual, the specific, is pivotal in examining the issues, responses and works of the other four artists which are exhibited here alongside Gabi's portfolio.

In short, she wanted the viewer to consider – and presumably draw his/her own conclusions since her work gives no answers - apartheid in terms of segregation, forced removals, and the way it affected her forefathers. But she also spoke of how people used singing as a way to heal themselves, that her own generation had been made strong, and that out of this strength had come her discovery of her own personal power; how the spirit of *Ubuntu* (humanity) had flourished along with

the idea of the Rainbow Nation, and the honouring of great men such as Nelson Mandela. But still she saw the dreadful legacy of HIV/AIDS, and how it had decimated her people.

Curatorial decisions

As curators, we began with Gabi's portfolio and a loose concept for this group of exhibitions – displacement from the perspective of loss and traces – and decided that, since Tony Bingham's *Lidgetton Portal* series of four prints was inspired by Gabi's personal space and the loss of her to her community, we would show these two portfolios together. But with research, it became clear that Tony's 'portal' became so much more than just his exploration of her life. And we searched for other artists whose work explored universal ideas and then concentrated on individual experience.

Tony's search

Tony had arrived at Caversham with a desire to know more about the country and people. He had been researching slavery, and on viewing San paintings in the Drakensberg, he became intrigued with the young South African artists and writers on the residence and the direct connection he felt they had to the ancient visual traditions of Africa. From this, he heard Gabi's story and the general became specific as he searched her home for traces of her spirit.

His video *A Point of Departure* ('in conversation') explains his process in full detail, from his initial exploration of Gabi's space through the evolution of technical experimentation and collaboration to the resolved images. During this process he developed significant links with the young artists and writers he worked beside at the Caversham residency; and using pinhole camera images of the Caversham landscape, produced an artists book with writer Mxolisi Nyezwa. He further extended his collaboration and integration into the community by commissioning the Mtubatuba Community of traditional Zulu beaders to translate the images from the prints into beaded works.

Zyma's integrity

On 11 February 1966, the apartheid government declared District Six a whites-only area under the Group Areas Act, and began the forced removals and demolition of buildings in 1968. Zyma Amien's work relates to the District Six displacements of her family and community in the 1960s. Zyma's Grandfather was relocated to Lansdowne, and she remembers throughout her childhood spending time in his house, hearing stories of life in District Six. When he was forcibly relocated a second time, she watched him lose his spirit and his identity.

She was shown an old family video of life in District Six and the start of the bulldozing. This was the spur for a body of work she created called *The day they came for our house*. Zyma edited the video, introducing the text of a poem of the same name by Sophiatown poet Don Mattera. Like Tony and Gabi, this work evolved from the general to the specific, from the removals to the effect on her Grandfather. We agreed with Zyma's strong sense that it was unethical to sell either the video, or any aspect of it, such as digital prints created from screen grabs, and so the exhibition is shown on outoftheCUBE as a non-commercial project.

Karen's courage

In *Loss, absence, and a continued bond*, the artwork of Karen Pretorius was a way for her to try to

come to terms with the unthinkable: the loss of her daughter Alex in a car accident in 2010. After a period of time had elapsed, Karen bought a house in Phillipstown in the Karoo, a landscape she had always felt had an inherent spirituality. She preserves this house so she will always sense somewhere the traces of her daughter's spirit, again the general – mourning – to the specific – the imaging of the adoption of this run-down town and house to show the fragile, brittle state of the individual in mourning.

The photographs of the house, manipulated digitally have the sense of another realm, as do Tony's pinhole camera photographs – the source for his screenprints. Her images show traces of shadows moving through the run-down small town and the landscape, echoing those of the moving blurred figures in Zyma's video, transitory. But as well as inhabiting this space to guide her own healing, on meeting Kay Fourie, she has slowly started engaging in Kay's community project, in a way giving back what she is receiving.

Emma's journey

Since witnessing the demolition of a home she had been forced to leave years earlier, Emma Willemse developed an interest in the phenomenon of displacement. Emma's exhibition *dis(place)* is the culmination of years of artmaking and research around ideas related to displacement from a home, and its effects on the displaced person. But alongside this, she asked the question "what traces do we leave on a home". Her working process, like Tony's, had to do with going into her old home to look for these traces, and resulted in her removing the floor to use as material for her artwork. Again, from the general – displacement and demolition – to the specific – a floor she had walked on. Emma's exhibition represents a creative journey, a response to, as she sees it, the violent act of displacement, and loss, and ultimately a moving forward.

An innovative decision we took as curators was to provide Emma with a GoPro camera, and she videoed the construction and installation of the boat, her final piece. The online space of outoftheCUBE provides the ideal format to best exhibit the raw energy of this film. *dis(place)* is an experimental show for outoftheCUBE in another way, as it is the beginning of an association between ourselves and The Lovell Gallery in Cape Town. Emma's solo exhibition at The Lovell Gallery opens on the same night as does this group of exhibitions on outoftheCUBE, so there will be an interesting play between the 'real' and the virtual.

Process

Malcolm Christian said that Gabi's physical making of an image was "a direct emotional response, [an] intellectual response, from heart and head down to the hand". The process of artmaking in these four exhibitions is integral to these artists' search for meaning through their work: Tony's collaborative and layering processes, Zyma's extensive editing, Karen's manipulation of and experimentation with her media, and Emma's construction process – all provided these artists with the opportunity for psychological processing.

Honouring

And there is a degree of honouring: as Gabi honoured the strengths of her people, so Tony honoured Gabi; Karen, her daughter; Zyma, her Grandfather; and by Emma's honouring traces of her own past and the promise of a future journey, so the viewer may honour his/her own.

Serendipity

With every exciting enterprise – such as curating a group of exhibitions – there is often a flash of magic, a serendipitous discovery that confirms choices. Here it came with our watching of Tony's video *A Point of Departure*, and his description of a church, burnt down, that provided him with the material source, the singed pages from a religious book. His subsequent work dealt with his sense of the violation of a sanctuary. The magic was the sudden remembrance of one of Emma's seminal influences – she had been so inspired by the installation of British artist Cornelia Parker titled *Mass (Colder Darker Matter)* (1997), a work where Parker had taken the burnt fragments of a Church struck by lightning and created an installation that spoke, in part, of spiritual displacement.

As curators, the expression of the essence of this theme was found in Tony's words:

I have learned that artmaking is a practice that spans the globe. The artworks speak in a universal language. The forms and objects made by people from around the globe rely on universal truths in the stories that emerge from their hands and hearts. And that work of art can explore feelings of beauty and tragedy that can be inspirational to us all.

(A Point of Departure)