

curators' comment

mandy conidaris and kevin sneider

exhibition opens: Tuesday 10 December 2013

exhibiting artists:

Barend Chamberlain; Celia de Villiers; Pierre le Riche; Mem Sevenster; Yolanda Warnich;

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

key words and phrases:

creative gestation; digital art; video art; mixed media; sculpture;

Gestation

The primary focus for outoftheCUBE when engaging with artists has always been the question 'why?' Why did this body of work come into being? From what thought processes and technical explorations did it develop?

When viewing an artwork, our first encounter is always the tangible - how an artwork was made, what it looks like, how it engages with our physical space. Significant also is the individual viewer's experience should they decide to spend time with it – the contemplation of the questions and associations in their own heads that the work may provoke. But even more fascinating are the intangibles – from where in the hidden corners of the artist's mind did this artwork evolve?

Most people are familiar with the concept of biological gestation. A baby is born. As he or she develops, the tangibles are always evident, wired into the baby's DNA: male or female? blond or dark hair? blue/green/brown eyes? thin or chubby? And during the baby's development phase, everyone involved with the child has the experience of physical engagement, not to mention projecting their own desires onto the child!

But the intangibles are revealed only later: will the baby become musical? creative? practical? sporty? submissive? assertive? Nature or nurture? An age-old question. And although the baby's characteristics may be modified or redirected by the society or culture that the baby is born into, they are still inherent.

So back to the 'why', the intangible. The 'why' evolves during the creative gestation period which, for any given body of work, may be lengthy and usually determined by the artist's unconscious: his or her background, forgotten experiences, early influences, later creative influences, and conscious concerns based on their life environment and remembered experiences. And although there may be conscious

reasons for an artist to deal creatively with an issue – such as a social or political issue – what are the unconscious spurs that make this issue rather than another sufficiently significant to the artist that he or she will bleed, sweat and weep through the process? That make the artist so vulnerable when exhibiting the work, so sensitive to criticism? To be an artist requires commitment, sacrifice, courage and real work at many levels, both psychologically and practically.

The Muse?

The layman often feels that an artist, or any creative person, is special because they receive flashes of inspiration - that an artist merely sits around daydreaming, when suddenly from nowhere, an idea forms, and he or she just starts working spontaneously and makes a really good and interesting artwork. But no. There is magic to be sure, a flash and something somewhere clicks into place, an image, a symbol. But only after months of creative gestation subsequently allowing for an unconscious openness to relevant suggestions.

Curatorial decisions

In selecting the artists for this group of exhibitions, our focus was on some aspect of the concept of gestation. Although this group of artists' works, as shown here on outoftheCUBE, form convincingly resolved exhibitions as they stand, each is part of a larger process one way or another.

Barend Chamberlain's thought-provoking video, *No Gods B4 Me*, suggests a form of evolution – the ultimate in gestation – starting with nothing ... then an explosion of violent activity alongside words, graphs, diagrams, mathematics, theorems ... a sudden implosion ... then nothing. The End. Of what? The accompanying digital stills and process images speak of months of technical experimentation, a balancing of the visual with technology so as not to create merely a 'special effects' artwork.

Celia de Villiers is an artist whose extensive research and technical skills inform each other continually in her art making. *Size 5 shoes* form a small part of her almost ten-year creative obsession with contemporary cultural anxieties, including aspects of 'appearance management' such as identity formation, surgical intervention, adornment and as a result, illusion. As well as this on-going process of creative gestation, the shoes imply metamorphosis, the physical transformation the foot would need to undergo to fit each shoe – a metaphor for the individual's uncertainty in an era of unpredictable social transformation.

Pierre le Riche has undertaken a year of self-examination as both an artist and an Afrikaner to develop his exhibition *Op Hierdie Rots (Upon This Rock)*. Here he has explored male Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa, using as metaphor the 'rules' both of rugby and of their traditional Calvinistic religion, which Pierre feels merge to form the cornerstone of Afrikaner social culture. This work evolved directly from his 2012 installation *Broederbond*. Although this existed as a fully resolved exhibition in itself, Pierre now considers it to have been, in part, a rich creative gestation period giving rise to this later work.

Mem Sevenster similarly has created new work from her last exhibition *FIVEL ETTER WORDS OTHER SOUNDS*. Part of this exhibition was a wall installation where Mem examined the manifestations of her experience with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. For the outoftheCUBE exhibition *Redemption Wall*, Mem has taken fragments of the collage and assemblage elements from the original wall installation and created new mixed media two-dimensional works, while at the same time extending its symbolism. This represents a 'coming off the wall' and an entry into the larger world, and Mem also now considers her total absorption in the creation of her earlier installation as fertile ground for this newer work.

Yolanda Warnich has consciously given herself two years – as a starting point – to discover a new direction for her creative expression. As a painter and installation sculptor, Yolanda in the past used her camera merely as a tool to document her source material for translation into other mediums – the literal into the artwork. Now her work as a commercial photographer has caused her to relook at her camera, this time as a creative tool in its own right. Still influenced by her painting aesthetic, Yolanda has surveyed the landscape with her camera, and rather than documenting it, has tried to suggest the experience of travelling through it. *Karoo.bitmapped* demonstrates the evocative nature of this work in progress and shows traces of the potential in her on-going exploration.

'Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties' (Erich Fromm)

To make any creative work takes an enormous amount of on-going energy, both mental and physical. This is attested to in our artists' outoftheCUBE interviews. Each of these artists took time to give considered and detailed answers to our interviews ('in conversation'), showing that, for them, a period of mental gestation is essential in their art making processes, as is time spent exploring techniques and methodology. These two aspects of art making are interlinked, and they influence each other all the time, back and forth, while these artists attempt to navigate the unpredictable.