

## curators' comment

mandy conidaris and kevin sneider

**exhibitions open Friday 28 February 2014:** Caversham Textiles; Vusi Zwane;

**exhibitions open Monday 03 March 2014:** A CreACTIVE Project; Kopanang Community Trust; Rorke's Drift Centre;

### **exhibiting artists:**

Caversham Textiles; ELC Arts and Craft Centre Rorke's Drift; Kopanang Community Trust; NAC sponsored project – Hope for a new world; Vusi Zwane;

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

### **key words and phrases:**

community projects; embroidery projects; fabric design; fabric screenprinting; linocuts; ELC Arts and Craft Centre Rourke's Drift; outreach; printmaking; The Caversham Press; The Caversham CreACTIVE Centres;

### **Legacy – The Caversham Community**

The trigger for this group of exhibitions was our witnessing, from time to time, the development of the Caversham Textiles studio and our awe at the final result, since the fabric designs have been inspired by the imagery of contemporary South African artists. The consultants who run Caversham textiles are Sally Scott and Christiane Voith, both of whom have had a long involvement in fabric design. Caversham Textiles itself has evolved as a branch of The Caversham Press tree, and ties into Malcolm Christian's wish that he could somehow pass on elements of his life experience in printmaking and in dealing with creative people.

Often when confronted with visual art and fabric design side-by-side, the viewer feels a sense of confusion – the old 'is it art, is it craft?' debate creeps in along with a wondering as to why the artist has 'allowed' this. But there is no such ambiguity around this group of exhibitions. They reflect art translated into design – and the design is inspired by the art.

The concept of translation is an interesting one. Not only does it denote a switch from one language to another, but from one culture to another, where nuances of phrase and idiom may be misinterpreted, and subtle misunderstandings of social convention may arise. The same applies with the cross-over between different disciplines, where each practitioner may have great experience in their own field, but

may be uncertain of, or even insensitive to, the requirements of the other. Nowhere is this more evident than in any collaboration between creative disciplines.

Visual art and fabric design have very different aims. The visual artist is working foremost with qualities of expression – whether emotional or conceptual or both. A fabric designer works with a practical result in mind – scale, repeat, texture, colour, fashion. So when selecting fragments of an existing work to transfer into design, there is a responsibility on the part of the designer to honour the artist's work; and likewise when an artist is creating an image for fabric design, he or she must acknowledge the needs of the designer.

Similarly, when an artist undertakes a project other than creating his or her own work, such as community-based outreach work, there needs to be a sensitivity towards the intentions behind that project, its specific environment, and the participants.

### **Curatorial decisions**

The Caversham Textiles exhibition *From fine art to fabric* is at the core of our curatorial process. But one can never look at Caversham without considering the extensive Caversham 'community'. This tree has wide branches, and running alongside this exhibition are four others that have strong links to this community.

Outreach programs have formed a large part of the Caversham legacy. Two artists whose artwork was chosen for preliminary fabric design are the current Caversham Artist-in-Residence, Vusi Zwane, who also contributes his printmaking skills to the outreach programs; and the late Gabi Nkosi who was the Caversham outreach facilitator in the 2000s.

#### **Vusi Zwane: *Today it's me, tomorrow ...***

This solo exhibition includes the first two works that Vusi produced at Caversham in the mid-90s, when he came to the Press as a participant in the newly-established Caversham Press Educational Trust (a forerunner of the Press's outreach and residency programs). These prints show Vusi's early creative concerns around a linking of the spiritual and natural worlds; and also featured are his latest dynamic linocuts demonstrating his newer awareness of the environmental threats to animals. His linocut *Penguins I* was one of the first collaborative experiments in taking fine art into fabric, and the result was so successful that he has continued to allow the use of more of his artworks, as well as starting to create his own designs.

We exhibit his fine art prints along with the fabric designs translated from these prints, not only as an example of a successful fusion of disciplines, but also to reflect on the creative path an artist may develop as a result of quiet, focused time to make artwork.

#### ***Hope for a new world* (an NAC sponsored project)**

We selected work produced by members of three of Caversham's community outreach program, also known as the Caversham CreACTIVE Centres. Outreach programs contribute a different kind of legacy –

with clearly stated aims and immediate feedback from the beneficiaries, this legacy is more instant and more easily quantifiable.

Two workshops were held in 2013 – one in September and the second in December. Their first project had the theme of *Birds*, and during the workshop young artists created lino blocks from which they produced an edition of fine art prints on paper, which were then adapted to print on cushion covers – extending the fine art into fabric concept. The printing was assisted by Vusi who inspired them with his own work.

The second workshop, which also revolved around the production of linocuts for fine art and fabric production, took place shortly after Nelson Mandela's death and the participants chose to work with a theme related to his legacy to South Africa. We have called this exhibition *Hope for a new future*.

### **ELC Arts and Craft Centre Rorke's Drift: *The HIV/AIDS Portfolio of Hope***

There is a triple Caversham link to Rorke's Drift. In 1999 Malcolm became the custodian for the Rorke's Drift archive artwork collection, holding it for safe-keeping at Caversham until these were handed over to the Provincial Heritage Collection. This led to his meeting Christiane, who was the Rorke's Drift Director for seven years, and her subsequent joining the Caversham Textiles team.

Gabi worked extensively with learnship students and artists at Rorke's Drift, and one of her on-going concerns was the impact of HIV/AIDS on rural communities. Gabi facilitated the project exhibited here with students from Rorke's Drift. It focuses on the positive coping mechanisms that some people use when living with HIV/AIDS. Again the lino blocks were brought to Caversham to print, resulting in a portfolio of prints that combine the spontaneity of outreach imagery with sophisticated printing that lifts it out of the workshop genre.

### **Kopanang Community Trust: *A Circle of Affirmation***

This exhibition features work by the craftswomen of the Kopanang Community Trust in Heidelberg, a community also impacted by HIV/AIDS. Here the members find affirmation in the positive international support they receive due to their fabric work, by their imagery translated into embroidery. The focus of this community project is the empowerment of women through the acknowledgement of their experiences, and by the transference of income-generating skills.

Their founder, Sister Sheila Flynn OP, is the link here as she was the facilitator for Caversham's first outreach program in the 1990s.

### **The spirit of Caversham**

The Caversham Press is situated in an old Wesleyan Church, and along with the family home, is set in the grounds of the old churchyard. Gravestones from the 1800s co-exist with the trees and flowers planted since the arrival of the Press in 1985. During time spent there, one's thoughts easily turn to one's own mortality. Malcolm is aware of this constantly, which in part explains his concern about legacy.

outoftheCUBE Legacy curators comment Feb 2014

*Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you.*

Shannon L. Alder