

in conversation

***This email interview was held between Barry Rautenbach and Mandy Conidaris in October 2014.***

**MC - Why did that particular image or body of artwork come into existence?**

**BR** - *unburdened* – *burden* came into being as a reaction to the feelings that were bottled up inside me about the forced conscription military service that I had to endure in the South African Defence Force under the then-apartheid government [in the 1980s].

**MC - Do you remember a specific trigger or was it a more slow-growing need to express your thoughts/feelings on the subject in a visually creative manner?**

**BR** - I think the release of my feelings in the form of artistic expression has always been with me, whether it was through dance or building model aeroplanes or drawing pictures. The feelings had been kept inside festering for so long that when I had the opportunity to free them I did.

**MC - Did you have any creative influences?**

**BR** - I had to look inside myself and listen to my own voice and experience as a soldier as my creative influence. I also read the stories of ex-servicemen that were in current publication. A book I must regard as the most influential in helping me to conceptualise this work was Batley's 2007 publication *A secret burden: memories of the Border War by South African soldiers who fought in it* \*. It is to me the most honest account of the burden that was conscription.

**MC - How did your conceptual process inform your imagery?**

**BR** - I am a sculptor at heart. I see the world in three dimensions. I think in terms of installation, things that I am able to build. I decided on sand and rock to symbolise the weight or heaviness of this burden.

**MC - Do you remember why your other material choices came about?**

**BR** - My choice to use old military uniforms was a logical development as I was talking about the military and in particular the old SADF. I had to connect with what was in the past and I found that I could buy old SADF uniforms from an army surplus store.

**MC - How did you feel once you had set up the whole installation? Did you have any strong or conflicting emotions?)**

**BR** - I felt a release from the heavy burden of my memories. The anger seemed to have become less as well. I think the physical toil of carrying almost a ton of sand and rock, and equipment to the site was cathartic ...

**MC** - **Do you feel that the work expresses your intentions?**

**BR** - One the on hand I would say that the work is an expression of a place, a time, and of a journey; and that the sheer volume of the work expresses the intention to show the burden I was carrying around.

**MC** - **How do you assess your image afterwards from the perspective of its meanings to you, namely the memories it evokes of your thought processes during the making process?**

**BR** - For myself *unburdened* – *burden* is incomplete. It relates to work that I did in 2013 and this year. As I work on *unburdened* it will change in both its form and meaning. There is a lot more that this work has to say about conscription. The work as it is now still brings up painful memories for me, but I think this will fade as the work becomes more of a ritualistic performance ending in a shrine.

**MC** - **Is the work's significance to the viewer important to you?**

**BR** - The work's significance is important because it unveils a past that not many people have spoken about or that are willing to speak about.

**MC** - **Thank you Barry.**

\* Batley, K. 2007. *A secret burden: memories of the Border War by South African soldiers who fought in it*. Jonathan Ball Publishers: Cape Town.