

in conversation

This email interview was held between Karen Pretorius and Mandy Conidaris on 11 April 2013.

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

KP - I have spent many years travelling the Karoo and in 2012 the go-ahead for the Fracking project to take place in various Karoo regions was not given yet. Research about Fracking revealed that the long-term impact could be devastating, not only environmentally, but also socially. The artworks were going to be protest works against Fracking.

During the process of developing a body of work, I realized (with the guidance of you, our lecturers) that, underlying, there was a more personal reason why I wanted to protect the Karoo. The Karoo has always been a place of spiritual enlightenment to me and after my only daughter Alex passed away in 2010, I found it to be the only place where I could experience peace, hope and closeness to Alex. The theme evolved to that of loss and absence, but the Karoo remained the source for visual and conceptual ideas.

MC - What were the senses and ideas that prompted you to embark on this creative journey?

KP - Art making, to me is a language in which I can express my thoughts best. To be able to “talk” about the loss of an only child through visual images was the most natural thing to do, and pretty much the only concept that I could fully engage with at the time.

MC - Did you have any creative influences, e.g. other artists? (ideas or techniques)

KP - At UNISA workshops we were bombarded with images of artists’ work. This influenced my way of looking at other artists. I usually look at hundreds of artists’ work in quick succession without paying too much attention to detail at first, but rather to let the images flick through my mind and muddle up somewhere in my brain. Later when I work, the feelings these images provoked will come forth and guide my creative thinking.

Once I have rendered some work, I know which artists influenced me most and I would then go back to those artists and study their work in more depth. For this body of work I was influenced by Jo Ractliffe and in particular her *Revelation of absence series*. I also identified with Michael Borreman’s methodology of “messing around”.

MC - What role did process play in your image creation?

KP - Process was the key component here and became part of the content. This also reflects the process of healing and the search for meaning. The final works, however, do not

necessarily reveal the extent of the process. I guess that is also true of dealing with loss ... the process is personal and mostly hidden from society.

MC - How did your conceptual process inform the specifics of your image creation? Are there particular metaphors underlying your choice of imagery?

KP - Transparent figures in a landscape stand as a metaphor for the fleeting existence of humans in places that have been in existence forever.

A passage served as metaphor for passing or crossing over.

Inverted images explored a quest to find the hidden.

The artist's book talks about a continued bond and the umbilical cord was used as metaphor for a continued spiritual bond between mother and child.

MC - Do you remember why these developed?

KP - The awareness of our mortality, a continued search for meaning, but also knowing that the bond with my child remains.

MC - How did your choices of image selection develop?

KP - Because process itself played a big part in the development of images, the outcome was often a result of chance.

MC - Regarding your reflections on the work afterwards, do you feel that the work expresses your intentions?

KP - Conceptually yes, as the work is honest, but technically I always wonder ... is it good enough ...am I a fake... can I call myself an artist?

MC - How do you assess your image afterwards from the perspective of its meanings to you, e.g. the memories it evokes of your thought processes during the making: conceptual, technical, personal, your larger life experiences?

KP - Once the work is installed in the gallery I experience a kind of distance from it and I become a viewer. I then see all sorts of other possible meanings.

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

KP - Yes, as art is my language I hope to engage the viewer in conversation.

Thank you, Karen!