

in conversation

*The following email interview was held between Leanne Shakenovsky and Mandy Conidaris in September 2013.*

**MC - Why did that particular body of artwork come into existence? Do you remember a specific trigger?**

LS - Having valued artwork at a prestigious fine art auction house in Johannesburg for years, our valuation process and the general business of art constantly baffled me. The auction record for a Pierneef painting in South Africa is R10 583,000. How relevant and accurate were the credentials on which we based our provided auction estimates?

**MC - What role did process play in your image creation? How did you conceive of the 'paint by numbers' with glitter as well as paint, and to use the logo of the Oros man? (see 'Oros' \* below)**

LS - The paint by numbers works speak of a children's naïve recreational activity and thus comment on my feelings towards the business of art.

Glitter resembles all that sparkles and is glistening. It represents the epitome of attractiveness, or rather, what we have come to believe is attractive. Glitter is shimmering and distracting and is created from tiny particles of scrap material. It is a cheap and kitsch material, mass produced and non-durable. It too is associated with children's arts and crafts.

The Oros man is the protagonist of this body of work. This character represents a mass produced and consumed commodity that is familiar to all South African citizens – rich, poor, black, white, educated and illiterate. It is a commodity that is woven into our South African tapestry, just as Pierneef's landscapes are.

**MC - You use the format of a triptych for each work – a landscape in 'paint by numbers', the same landscape traditionally painted (in oils) and another 'painted' with glitter. Did you use the same 'paint by numbers' template for each one?**

LS - I did. I followed a working process whereby different areas are 'coloured in' with different colours, whether this is done in paint, glitter or fine ink drawing.

**MC - How did your thinking processes inform the specifics of your making process, namely your techniques and image creation?**

LS - The conceptual element of my work constantly informed its process. Working at a fine art auction house I was surrounded by highly monetarily valuable Pierneef paintings. I referred closely to these - their style, texture, paint application - when creating my works.

**MC - You have chosen the images of Pierneef's paintings as your subject matter. In terms of your concept, why choose his work as opposed to anyone else's, such as Irma Stern or Tinus de Jongh? And why those particular paintings?**

**LS -** Pierneef's paintings are instantly recognisable. I have a soft spot for Irma Stern, partially as I find her a very interesting and unusual character and am able to relate to her more so than Pierneef. I feel very little emotion when viewing a Pierneef's work - they leave me almost numb. I dealt with those particular works (3 of the 32 station panels) as they are Pierneef's most well-known pieces and are totally typical of his style.

**MC - You have introduced the Oros man into the paintings, and your intention in doing this was to represent a mass-produced commodity – a childhood comfort item - that also references the familiarity of Pierneef's paintings. As well as being a well-recognised logo, almost an icon, the Oros man seems to fit into the current trend for using commercial symbols to provoke nostalgia. Was this also your intention?**

**LS -** I find this interesting even though it was not my intention. I do not see the Oros man as representing a sentimental longing for the past as I see the brand as being deeply rooted in the present. Oros is constantly introducing new flavours, marketing and branding.

**MC - Regarding the nostalgia comment I made above, would you say that visual nostalgia plays a role in the purchasing choices of auction goers? For example, would a Pierneef provoke nostalgia in South Africans, either for the land or for a romanticised way of life?**

**LS -** I think visual nostalgia plays a minimal role in fine art auction purchases.

A Pierneef painting sells for millions of Rands greatly due to the artist's name and precedence. Works of many other artists may provoke a sense of nostalgia and be as aesthetically and technically sophisticated but not reach similar prices.

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

**LS -** This is a difficult question to answer as I have become so engrained with the Oros man, reproducing Pierneef landscapes, and working with 'paint by numbers' and glitter, that I battle to see these works objectively. I have built a strong emotional connection to them and cannot imagine expressing my sentiments any differently from what I have done.

**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?**

**LS -** The oil paintings were the first works I created after a 3-year sabbatical living abroad. They were the start of a massive journey that I never anticipated I would carry to such great heights. Nearly 2 years later I am still dealing with the same concept but have pushed it in

many diverse directions. Saying this, they also evoke a sense of frustration as I had so little time to work on them due to my then demanding job.

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

**LS** - It is not of vital importance. We all see artwork uniquely and differently. Even after the viewer entirely understands my intentions, he/she will view certain things that others won't, like/dislike elements contrary to others and appreciate different things. This is the beauty of art.

**Thanks Leanne!**