

in conversation

This email interview between Mandy Conidaris and Yolanda Warnich was based on a lengthy conversation that took place when Mandy visited Yolanda's studio.

MC - As we have discussed, outoftheCUBE is interested in the creative process – the 'why?' The works exhibited here in TITLE OF EXHIBITION form part of a creative exploration that you are undertaking from different perspectives, and we are fortunate enough to have you agree to share your work in progress with us. One medium you have worked with in the past has been oil painting. Could you describe what ideas prompted your interest in using the camera, not as a tool for documentation, but as a tool to generate a visual medium different from traditional painting?

YW - As a painter, I have always used photography as a way of documenting and as a starting point for my paintings. This particular body of work started off no differently - in a way these images still ended as *paintings* but in digital format.

My art making over the past 2 years was mainly influenced by doing some work in the commercial photography industry and definitely contributed in my experimenting more and more with the camera as a tool. Having to come to grips with the technical side of such a device together with being a painter first made the difference in my approach in using the camera which ultimately resulted in a different method all together in handling the outcome of these imagery.

MC - Do you remember a specific trigger for your development of this concept?

YW - Yes, I suppose being trigger happy for a start and going on holiday... Going on holiday can turn the most unlikely person into a photographer even if it is just for a few seconds in order to document 'happy' moments, only to then immediately edit and distribute them with the use of a smartphone on Facebook – in a sense social media sights like Facebook is a space where people's lives are being documented – it has replaced the family album. It is instant and it is easy to share with family and friends from all over the world. I too wanted to capture the landscape and the experience of my trip traveling.

MC - Regarding your imagery, these 'photographs' were taken as you travelled in your car through the Karoo, which is a region of this country that is both beautiful in its barrenness and overwhelming in its physicality when walking through it. You speak of trying to evoke the experience of travelling in a car through the countryside, which causes the landscape to be experienced in a removed way. Could you elaborate on this?

YW - In a car one is traveling at high speed. Experiencing the landscape is visual– your other senses are numbed by the drone and the subliminal white noise of the car. You are almost traveling in a vacuum or bubble cut off from the elements (sun, wind on your face, the

feeling of the ground beneath your feet or listening to nature's creatures – the birds, bugs flies etc.) In a car you view the world through your windscreen you might be listening to music – all these factors contribute to your experience being somewhat removed.

MC - The images hold a strong sense of the spiritual, and visually evoke the landscape paintings of the 19th Century British landscape painter Turner. His travels were a main source of inspiration for him, his images were influenced by the presence of dust in the atmosphere, and he made many sketches but painted his works in his studio. Would you say that this traditional creative process almost mimics your own, in that you capture your images while travelling and then work on them on your computer?

YW - Yes, one could say that there is some correlation. I have always been attracted to Turner's work and his ability to translate the power of nature into painting. I suppose subconsciously these forces were at work and somehow contributed to the final product. In essence my creative process mimics that of the traditional – by using the camera to document and as a tool in order to create a painterly quality - but more importantly it becomes a simulated experience of the landscape in a 21st century landscape.

MC - What significance does the Karoo have for you?

YW - The fact that it can be so many different things at the same time. It can mean everything or nothing to person. Viewing a picture perfect "touristy" image of the Karoo can surely sell you every romantic notion in the book – but try and inhabit it, experience it for real? You are surely in for a surprise. That very beautiful landscape can just as easily confront, even turn on you with its harshness and emptiness. In my opinion you cannot experience it by taking a perfect, well-composed photo – you cannot 'frame' it.

MC - In a conversation, you mentioned that you had originally intended to translate these images into traditional painting, but that for this early project you have decided to let them exist in their own right as digital images. Could you say why you have made this decision?

YW - I think that because the work started out by 'documenting' the landscape driving through it – the vastness and its difficulty in capturing it - the digital image in a certain sense allows for this moment/experience to exist without borders. As a digital image it can be experienced as 'virtually' endless. The digital image also simulates that experience in a removed way – viewing it on the screen on a computer. The dust specks that became more obvious during the actual editing process act as a sort of reminder that there is a disconnect between the viewer, the landscape, and the physical experience of it. In the end it translated better into digital format - with what I was trying to achieve with the image in itself.

MC - Jean Baudrillard has stated that for contemporary society, the simulated copy has superseded the original object. Could you comment on this statement regarding your own work?

YW - I think that is really what I am trying to get at in my work. The physical world today is experienced in the virtual through processes of simulation. That anxiety that is experienced with all that has become digital - the disappearance of the original object only to continue its existence as a simulated copy. The fast pace we live our lives at – most of the time it is experience through a screen as a simulation of some sort. It also relates to the ease with which one can dismiss the landscape, the experience once home a result of the fact that you already have these experiences documented and going viral on Facebook.

MC - In terms of releasing these images into the larger art world, you have indicated that you might do so as JPEGs, which would disallow your controlling their use. Would you say that this is a way of ‘democratising’ the visual arts, or is this just a side-effect?

YW - My thinking in releasing these images in the larger art world as JPEGs has a lot to do with where I am in my career as an artist. As creator of these images I am constantly putting it out there, either on Tumblr, Instagram or recently started tweeting about it. My physical studio/work space have extended into the virtual landscape sharing work with whoever finds it interesting. There is no pressure, I am creating at free will learning to trust the process and doing what I like. The image can exist in whatever format, whomever ends up with it can do with it what they like, namely print it or just keep it as a screensaver or thumbnail. In saying this it does not mean that I am not serious about my work. The worth and seriousness of the work does not necessarily have to be connected to that of a physical gallery space – and I think I am trying to make that shift. So maybe it is a combination of ‘democratising the visual arts’ due to some serious side-effects.

MC - Who have been your most significant creative influences?

YW - Gerhard Richter and Roe Etheridge. Richter for his exploration that demonstrates both illusionistic space that seems natural and the physical activity and material of painting—as mutual interferences. For Richter, reality is the combination of new attempts to understand—to *represent*; in his case, to *paint*—the world surrounding us.

Etheridge for his approach and democratic attitude successfully integrating conceptual photography with commercial work, including out-takes from his own shoots and borrowed images already in circulation in other contexts. Existing in its finality either as or a framed print on a gallery wall, an advertorial in a magazine or just as a digital image on the Internet.

MC - When you reflect on these works afterwards would you say that they express your intentions and give you a path forward for further creative exploration?

YW - They certainly do. I am excited as to where my exploration could lead and am already working on some new ideas for these images - possibly combining them with some video animation. I also intend translating them into painting in the future - as it will always be my first love.

MC - **How do you assess your images afterwards from the perspective of their meanings to you, namely the memories they evoke of your thought processes during the making: conceptual, technical, your own larger life experiences.**

YW - To me the works 'resolve' lies in me wanting to do more – taking the next step. The creative process never stops, although you have created an image as a 'final' product – it is never final because that last image wants you to create more. Create more on all levels, conceptual, technical and all these new experiences you have encountered through the process itself. It makes me happy to look at my work and it keeps me wanting to go back to it. The minute I have a feeling that I am done with an image I know it is not resolved.

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

YW - I think that if you are serious as an artist the significance of your work to the viewer will always be important. Each decision or step you take as an artist projects a certain outcome and even though you cannot fully be in control of that outcome you certainly strive towards it. To me the importance of this body of work not only lies with experiencing the landscape in a different way but that it should not be overlooked because I have decided to release it in digital format and not necessarily intend it to be in a physical space in a gallery.

MC - **Thanks so much Yolanda, and we look forward to seeing your further work.**

Sources for interview questions

http://www.artble.com/artists/joseph_mallord_william_turner

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simulacra_and_Simulation