

“Home Lands – Land Marks”

Haunch of Venison
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by
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South African artists are gaining international attention and have been well represented in group shows throughout Europe, yet “Home Lands – Land Marks” is the first notable show of South African art to take place in Britain since 1994. Fourteen years after the first democratic elections in South Africa, this exhibition reflects on some of the realities of the rainbow nation. “Home Lands,” curated by Tamar Garb, gives the viewer an insight into the climate in post-Apartheid South Africa, without straying into sensationalism.

“Home Lands” opened in London shortly after a period of xenophobic violence in South Africa. The exhibition goes a long way towards illustrating the contrast between the optimism of the newly democratic country and the realities of AIDS, poverty, corruption, and the leftovers of the previous regime.

David Goldblatt’s *Incomplete Houses* (2006) is probably the first work that one sees on entering the exhibition. This work sets the tone for the rest of the exhibition. The understated photograph eloquently speaks of many of the problems facing South Africa. In an attempt to address the chronic shortage of housing in the country, the current government embarked on a programme to build low-cost housing throughout the country shortly after it came into power.

However, mismanagement and corruption have impeded progress on the scheme. So, while people live in makeshift accommodation, large tracts of land are covered in half-built houses. In a *Catch 22* situation, the building materials are stolen from the housing projects in order to make the informal dwellings more comfortable, further delaying the completion of the low-cost housing.

Guy Tillim's *Joburg Grid 1 & 2* (2003-2007) further explore the question of shelter in South Africa. These two series of photographs depict in documentary style the circumstances of people – largely refugees from other African countries – living in abandoned office buildings in central Johannesburg. Corporations abandoned the central city as crime in the area increased, creating a wasteland of empty buildings which have now become rather dilapidated accommodation for thousands of people.

The landscape of Johannesburg is also featured in William Kentridge's *Anamorphic Landscapes* (2007). These are distorted circular charcoal drawings which come into perspective as reflections in polished cylinders. It is impossible to see the whole image at once. The act of walking around the work gives the landscapes a living, almost three-dimensional quality. Kentridge is playing with the difficulty of nostalgia associated with the landmarks of Apartheid in the current context in South Africa.

Berni Searle's video piece entitled *Alibama* (2007) is heavily steeped in nostalgia. The traditional Afrikaans song *Hier Kom die Alibama* (a song associated with the Cape Minstrel parades in Cape Town) plays while the camera spans Table Bay. The first aspect of the video brings to mind the slave heritage of the Cape. At the sound of the Noon Gun, the scene changes to that of a paper boat and black streamer in clear water and Berni Searle and her son sing in place of the Malay chorister, changing the mood of the work to reflect the nostalgia related to the passing of culture and heritage from one generation to the next.

Nicholas Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) depicts a kraal – a masculine space in traditional Xhosa culture. This work speaks of the uncomfortable relation between Hlobo's Xhosa heritage and his homosexuality. The kraal is covered by woven pink ribbons, which simultaneously hide the inner area and make the kraal inaccessible. A lone rubber ball attached to the outer wall of the kraal intensifies the feeling of expulsion.

Vivienne Koorland's work echoes the rough aesthetic of Hlobo's installation in its use of burlap. These paintings differ from the rest of the work on the exhibition in that they blatantly reference Apartheid. While these works are less successful in revealing the social complexities of South Africa today, they do put the work of other showcase artists into a historical context.

Santo Mofokeng's photographs of billboards amidst life on the street in South Africa have an element of humour to them; the viewer is confronted by slogans such as "Democracy is Forever" on a billboard advertisement for diamonds and "Y'ello Freedom" on an advertisement for a mobile phone network. The language of the struggle has been appropriated by advertising companies. The series of photographs illustrate the relationship of the ideals of democracy and materialism in a country where the vast majority of the population live in poverty. Twenty years ago the population aspired to freedom, now consumption has taken over as the dream of a nation. Mofokeng's work also touches on the controversial renaming of many streets in towns and cities around the country that attempt to reflect the change of power. These name changes are often met with resistance as the many cultures in the country struggle to maintain their identities in the new South Africa.

A strong show, with many of the works created specifically for the exhibition, "Home Lands – Land Marks" gives a concise overview of the social environment in South Africa today. Media and themes of individual artist's works differ from each other, but shown together, they paint a compelling picture.



David Goldblatt
Copyright: David Goldblatt 2008
Courtesy: Haunch of Venison



Santu Mofokeng
Democracy is forever - Pimville
2004

B/W photography on Baryth paper
70 x 100 cm

Copyright: Santu Mofokeng 2008
Courtesy: Haunch of Venison



Guy Tillim
Jo'Burg Series - Tayob Towers, Pritchard Street
2003-2007

Archival pigment inks on 300g coated cotton paper
Paper size: 49.6 x 71.5 cm

Copyright: Guy Tillim 2008
Courtesy: Haunch of Veniso



Nicholas Hlobo
Umthubi
2006

Exotic and indigenous wood, steel, wire, ribbon, rubber inner tube
200 x 400 x 730 cm (variable)

Copyright: Nicholas Hlobo 2008
Courtesy: Haunch of Venison



William Kentridge
Tide Table
2003

Single screen video projection

Copyright: William Kentridge 2008
Courtesy: Haunch of Venison



Berni Searle
Night Fall
2006

Three channel video projection; 5 mins 52 seconds

Copyright: Berni Searle 2008
Courtesy: Haunch of Venison