

EXHIBITIONS AT THE GENDER & VISUALITY WORKSHOP

VENUE: UWC LIBRARY AUDITORIUM

DATE: 26 AUGUST – 10 SEPTEMBER 2004

ARTISTIC & CURATORIAL STATEMENTS

1. Women's traces: Women, politics and feminism in Argentina during the first half of the 20th Century

By Cecilia Belej, Ana Laura Martin and Cecilia Tossounian (APIM, Buenos Aires)

Women's traces is a photographic exhibition that intends to recover and to narrate, through images, the history of the women's movement and feminist organizations in Argentina during the first half of the 20th century. It is an investigation carried out by the Archive of Words and Images of Women (APIM) of the Interdisciplinary Institute of Gender Studies at Buenos Aires University (Argentina). The pictures that comprise this work have been selected from the General Archive of the Argentinean Nation by the team at APIM.

Toward the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century women from different sectors of society began to organized themselves to fight for their rights in a society that was modernized but that excluded them. Women of the elite, workers and university students came together to protest against the lack of education for women, their precarious labor conditions and the lack of political rights accorded to them. Women's civil, social and political citizenship was a topic of debate and the reason around which they organized and demanded greater rights.

The path was not easy because there were numerous conflicts and differences. However, the women acted with passion, stubbornness, and patience. They demonstrated rebelliousness and challenging the limits of the established authorities. This exhibition uses photographs to try to recover women's historical role in this fight for their rights. It documents well-known personalities and anonymous militants from the women's

movement. The photographs help to provide a context for the women's movement as well as to make this movement visible again.

2. StreetWiseLife: Urban lust in public windows

By blacklinesonwhitepaper, Solam Mkhabela and Kirsten Dörmann (Gauteng)

StreetWiseLife is the exhibit of an exhibit: the documentation of female erotic visuals in public space through advertisement. These visuals are placed in what we call 'public windows': bus stops, shop fronts, on streetlights and billboards. Advertisement for clothes, food, insurance companies and other 'normal' goods of daily life exploit specific and attractive hot spots of the female body to render the goods more beautiful, convincing, trustworthy and desirable. Sex sells. Everywhere and everything and not only in red light districts.

We zoom in, our photographs are details of these posters, which conveniently overlook the product but emphasize the nearly pornographic aspect of these campaigns, which use female flesh and urban lust to design public space and public views.

We walk through the streets of six cities in five countries: Johannesburg-South Africa, Mbabane-Swaziland, Aachen-Germany, Brussels-Belgium, Rotterdam-Netherlands, and Paris-France. They have been our personal stopovers in the first eight months of 2004. *StreetWiseLife* sets up a very particular visual cross section of those cities and compares the treatment of *urban lust* in Europe and Southern Africa. The production of beauty concentrates on the ideal image of hair, lips, teeth, eyebrows, décolleté, legs, hips and crotch area of the female body. Hip lines change from north to south. Our journey traverses those lines.

Urban lust in public windows is a worldwide phenomenon although the 'venues' may vary according to the urban field they are found in. In Aachen, Brussels, Rotterdam and Paris displays are closely connected to an accessible and largely used public transport system. Mbabane presents a mix of shop fronts, hand drawn ads, few billboards, and A4 size posters. Johannesburg is a cross section of all conditions: displays inside malls or

outside, on huge billboards and street poles and easily visible from perspective of the vehicle.

Our images are caught 'on the flight', using the city, passing by, driving through, waiting for the bus, watching closely. Some times we found differences in the images and sometimes striking similarities

3. A Manufactured Lifestyle

By Aysha Price, Donovan Ward, Selvyn November and Paul Hendricks (Cape Town)

Glossy magazines are easily attainable and tend to have a long lifespan, filtering into many aspects of life both public and private. In the absence of alternatives, its captivating style attracts a wide readership. These people have become the main consumers of magazines, despite their ability or inability to purchase the items advertised or promoted between its pages. Hence, while a minority are consumers of the items promoted by these magazines, many more are simply spectators -unable to economically participate. Instead, these magazines offer an escape from their lived reality.

In addition, the world-view espoused by these magazines is perceived as acceptable and even natural. We take issue with the 'taken for granted' reality of these magazines, particularly the way women are portrayed. We will present some of the women usually ignored by these magazines, and highlight the issues related to the contexts and environments where many women live, work, or are found but which are usually ignored by glossy magazines.

This artwork highlights the constructed reality of commercial magazines, focussing specifically on the presentation and representation of women. It attempts to unveil 'how' this reality is manufactured, and raises questions around 'who' conceives the product and 'why' they present it in a particular way, we will do this by celebrating 'ordinary' women and issues which concern these women.

We plan to subvert the reality communicated by glossy magazines through manipulating the images and text of its front cover, while retaining some of the conventions of

magazines to challenge these conventions. This artwork seeks to not only critique the commodification of women but also to convey another perspective on women, particularly those who are neglected by the media and rendered 'invisible' to society. It points to the potential role of the mass media to educate people on an alternative way of life, where resources could be used to break down prejudices and other divides to build a better world, where marketability, selling and lifestyle is not a primary focus.

We intend presenting this work in two forms. Firstly, as large A0 posters that may be block-mounted or laminated, and secondly, as adapted magazines spread among actual ones, on a low coffee table in a recreated waiting room with chairs. Our magazines however are to be glued shut making the contents inaccessible. This implies that the magazine and its alternative contents are not seen as worthwhile in relation to the more commercialised contents of the others. Thus engendering questions around forms of censorship and who or what these magazines represent.

4. Gay Spaces

By Graeme Reid and Sabelo Phakathi ka Mlangeni (Gauteng)

The exhibition emerges from ongoing fieldwork that centres on the creation of gay spaces in unexpected areas and includes work on hairstylists and sangomas as well as church-going gay congregants. This fieldwork includes an in-depth study of the gay community living in Wesselton, Ermelo together with the extensive network that extends to surrounding towns and far-flung cities. This network reveals the intense visual sensibilities of gay life in the small town settings of Mpumalanga. This striking visual presence prompted the photographer, Sabelo Mlangeni, to document the gay community and it is from these photographs that the exhibition is drawn.

5. Durban South Photography Project

By Jenny Gordon, Marijke du Toit and students (Durban)

The project is focused on Wentworth, Merebank and Lamontville in the Durban South industrial basin, which is characterised by extremely close juxtaposition of heavy industry

and homes. The area is very close to the coast but is separated from the sea by a natural ridge that tends to trap air-borne pollution from the two oil refineries, a large paper mill and several chemical factories. One reason for focusing on this area is the long history of contestation between industry, the municipality, residents and national government about high levels of pollution. Another is the existence of a rich local visual culture of personal and familial photography.

The Durban South Photography Project is a collaborative effort between photographer Jenny Gordon and Marijke Du Toit (Programme of Historical Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal). It combines the production of contemporary documentary photography by Gordon and by first-time photographers from Durban South with the creation of a public archive of personal and family photographs. Workshops have included participants from local high schools and the members of local civic, women's and environmental and HIV aids counselling organisations. The project has held three exhibitions in Durban South in 2003 and 2003, featuring the photographs and pictures from the family/personal collections of workshop participants – the third exhibition also included photographs by Jenny Gordon.

Photographs produced by participants in DSPP encompass a number of themes. We propose to select images that may prompt questions about the gendered presentation of self and of the body for cameras, and about the gender dynamics between photographer and photographed. The exhibition will include a focus on different ways in which photographers participating in this project have represented the familial.

We would like to emphasise that the selection of photographs as well as how they are contextualised will be strongly shaped by discussions with various groups in Durban South, particularly with community-based photographers involved in DSPP, in June and July 2004.

6. Visual Sexuality: “Only half the picture”

By Zanele Muholi (Gauteng)

“these are not only subjects, these are my people, this describes the person I am...

...these are not like any other beautiful /ordinary photographs but what I call educational photographs” (Zanele Muholi)

The 13 photographs seek to challenge the dominant media images of the homosexual community (esp. non-heterosexuality), which I argue portray two dimensional identities that conform to sexed and gendered stereotypes and are sensationalist.

The series of photographs documents /constructs some of the key issues that confront our communities including the lack of ownership many LGBTs (Lesbian/Gay/Bi- & Transexuals) feel they have over their voices and space in the places they live, learn and work.

This lack of visibility often results in crisis of sexual and gender identity

(Pic: A WOMAN STRAPPING HER BREASTS WITH A BANDAGE), a closeted life, and unemployment as some LGBTs are forced out of schools and work places

(Pic: SECURITY IN A UNIFORM) because of their gender and sexual non-conformity in a society dominated by heterosexuality and patriarchy.

Yet this show seeks to exhibit the spaces of resistance in which LGBTs challenge communities and service providers to address the need for open dialogue on sexual and gender diversity. In conclusion I believe that such discussions would lead into more effective entry points into related issues of gender-based violence, hate crimes, **(Pic: WOMEN WITH A SCAR IN HER THIGH)** and women and lesbian centred approaches to HIV prevention strategies.

(Pic: CONDOMS ON LINE & DILDO WITH A CONDOM).

With my photographs I like to visually share with the audience by saying there is more to lesbianism: life, relationships, struggle, violence, prejudice, etc.

Life is not always a drag...

... non-heterosexual women still struggle so much in their communities and suffer the most from hate crimes due to their sexuality...

...despite the Constitutional protections afforded to womyn, gay and lesbians, the Constitution has meant little to the women who experience verbal, physical and sexual assault because of their sexuality - on a daily basis.

BY KISS

For ages women have been intimate with each other and they seem to understand their bodies more than any species on earth.

Body-licious/ booty-licious is how others define BEAUTY.

(Pic: TWO WOMYN KISSING & SISTAHS)

SKIN2SKIN

Women who have sexual contact with other women have fewer barrier methods to use for protection. The government only distributes condoms. We still don't have dental dams.

(Pic: CONDOMS ON LINE)

Lately we have had a number of women coming out as non-heterosexual also being HIV positive. Very few service providers in health departments know about same gender loving women and safer sex.

Security

Discrimination in the workplace is another problem that many womyn face.

There is an expectation to bring an opposite partner for corporate functions – why can't I bring my girlfriend since I love womyn?

Lesbian sangoma

Over and over again people are saying it is un-African to be in love with a person of the same sex. But lesbian sangomas are now coming out and claiming their space with their partners.

Sexual identity crisis

This is a problem at school when teenagers have no one to confide in and share their sexual orientation preference. Some end up using drugs and other substances due to the latter. **(Pic: A WOMAN STRAPPING ON HER BREASTS WITH A BANDAGE)** There is a need for understanding homosexuality as we all live with such people in our communities.

If we can't accept them, tolerate them. DON'T victimise them.

7. The arc of violence: paintings of Mozambique

by Sebastiao Matsinhe (Mozambique)

For decades war, famine and poverty have carved their way through the Mozambican landscape. In the debris of this postcolonial existence, new generations witness the persistence of life and loss, and express some revival of hope. In Matsinhe's paintings women often figure simply and centrally when the arc of violence falls historically over the land. The shape of rural life is contemplated from the urban space of Maputo where the artist has mostly worked, both sheltered and exposed.

Sebastiao Matsinhe was born in 1967 in Inhambane province, but grew up in Maputo. A promising athletic and sporting career was cut short in 1985 by a serious medical condition. Matsinhe turned to art. He sought medical treatment in Portugal and South Africa, and has produced and exhibited many artworks. He now studies in the English Department at UWC.

Note: photographs of the exhibition space are attached (photographer Graham Goddard, Mayibuye Centre, UWC).