

ANTON
KARSTEL

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ANTON
KARSTEL

— PAINTINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHIC INSTALLATIONS (1989 - 2009) —

Anton Karstel
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Anton Karstel: Paintings and Photographic Installations (1989-2009)
SMAC Art Gallery, Stellenbosch
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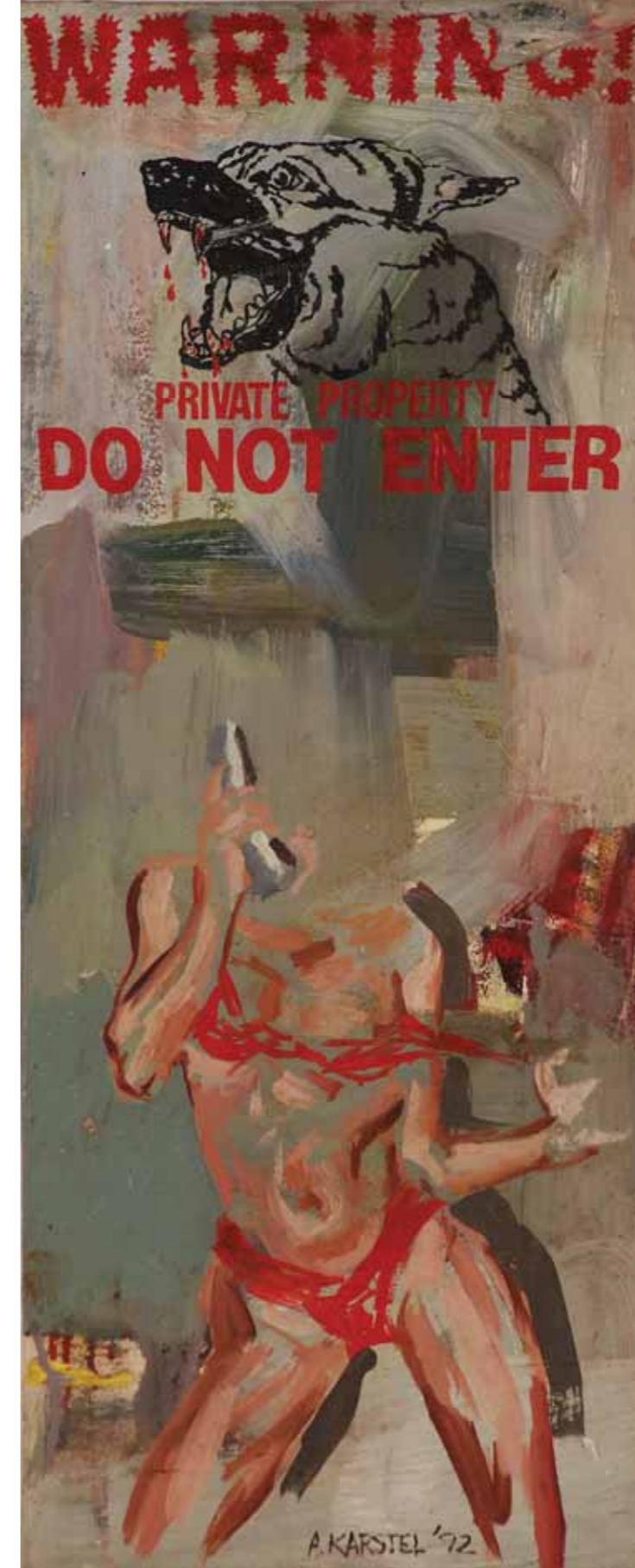
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stellenboschmodernandcontemporaryartgallery





Jong Seun met Halwe Winkelpop
1995
Oil on canvas
55 x 25 cm

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Tempers Flare as Policemen and Protesters Struggle
1992
Oil on canvas
84 x 84 cm

GALLERY STATEMENT

By Baylon Sandri

This publication coincides with a large exhibition entitled; *Anton Karstel: Paintings and Installations 1989-2009*, presented by the Stellenbosch Modern and Contemporary Art Gallery (SMAC), commencing 3 October 2009.

The gallery's interest in Anton Karstel was sparked whilst doing preparatory work for a series of exhibitions entitled; *Before '94*, which focuses on conceptual and Neo-Expressionist art in South Africa during the eighties and early nineties. The first installment is planned for 2010, but the fact that Anton Karstel now precedes this exhibition bears testament to the enthusiasm with which SMAC Art Gallery has embraced and connected with this remarkable and important artist.

For lack of a better term, the "protest period" represents a coming of age for South African art. Dating back to the start of the previous century, there were few significant art movements to speak of and for the most part our art history is comprised of loose associations and classifications of individuals who defy categorization. Furthermore, much of our art dealt with easy subjects and skirted around political and social realities, with the result

that South African post-war art became irrelevant in international terms. The enormity of the changes which occurred in the country over a relatively short space of time, coupled with the broader significance thereof and the unprecedented publicity which it created, resulted in one of the most important periods in modern history. Notably, social upheaval and transformation coincided with major developments in local art production, which makes "South African art in the decade before democracy" noteworthy and impossible to ignore in a global context.

Initial attempts to encapsulate this movement and its various components have lacked coherence, but we believe that sufficient time has now passed to allow for objective analysis and interpretation of the effect of Apartheid on our country's artistic output. A generation of artists, now mostly in their mid-forties and fifties, emerged from these turbulent times and finally broke with our traditional and formal artistic heritage. The emergence of Neo-Expressionist painting and a new wave of conceptualism provided the perfect tools for these rebellious artists to express themselves with absolute freedom.



Untitled
1995
Oil on canvas
43 x 50 cm

During this time, the art faculties of the University of Pretoria and the University of Stellenbosch also started coming to prominence and could compete with the traditional strongholds of South African contemporary art namely, Wits University and the University of Cape Town. These universities

were now producing exciting young talents such as; Johann Louw, Conrad Botes, Minnete Vari and Wim Botha. Anton Karstel was part of this new generation of "Afrikaans" artists or more aptly stated; artists emanating from Afrikaans universities.

This period was also characterized by the emergence of black artists such as Sam Nhlengethwa and Kay Hassan, who despite not having enjoyed the benefit of university education, were breaking away from the naïve traditions of "township art" and producing exciting contemporary work, which placed them on an equal footing with their white counterparts and contributed to the vibrant discourse which was taking place in the country. The artist Wayne Barker, who Karstel befriended, was a central figure and connecting point between the black and white art worlds. Karstel participated in a controversial but celebrated fringe exhibition to the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale entitled *Laager*, which was curated by Barker and exhibited in fourteen shipping containers arranged in the shape of a "Laager" (the protective and battle formation of ox-wagons employed by the Voortrekkers as they forged their way into the interior during the 1800s), on the doorstep of the main exhibition space and included other important artists such as Brett Murray, Barend De Wet and Lisa Brice.

Karstel's early paintings, rendered in an almost typical Neo-Expressionist style, feature his standard confident brushstrokes and contain mixed narratives, pop and political imagery which are splashed onto the canvas in a haphazard configuration evoking Baselitz's upside-down paintings, Schnabel's use of multiple figures, the anecdotal 1970s paintings of Philip Guston, and early works by the influential South African painter, Simon Stone. These works evolved into more direct confrontations with political and historical scenes, taken from newspapers and propagandist-style nationalist journals. This is a theme which would recur during the artist's career.

Karstel's formative years overlapped with a transition period from Neo-Expressionism to

conceptualism. These conflicting influences have endured, and the artist's output is characterized by switches from one format to the other. Karstel is almost plagued by his undeniable talent as a traditional painter and pressure from many quarters for him to pursue a more rigid career. The situation is exaggerated by the fact that he is not known widely for his conceptual work, which seldom formed part of commercial exhibitions, particularly in the Cape, where he now resides.



"Prof" Ockert Stoltz en Jerry Gobosa
1995
Oil on canvas
42 x 31 cm

Some of Karstel's early installations bear resemblance to the more typical installation art of the time and whilst displaying a unique approach to uncomfortable issues of the day, the methodology employed is reminiscent of the type of conceptual art which dominated the international scene during the nineties. Nonetheless, these works remain original and rare in their take on a relatively common but highly personal dilemma which Karstel has to resolve and grapple with, namely his heritage and legitimacy as a white, male South African artist.

In this context, *Self-Burial* (1995) is highly significant. Here Karstel buries a cement cast of himself in the grounds of the Pretoria Art Museum. It is trite to offer analysis of this work, suffice to say that the issues which would inform most of Karstel's later work were evident from a very early stage. Intentionally or inadvertently, the issue of white guilt rears its head in a number of these early conceptual pieces. Three installations; *Ephraim* (1995), *Pumpkin Hut* (1996) and *SMC Plumb* (1996) include cement casts of a garden worker from Karstel's home in Pretoria, who remains in the family's service to this day. By employing a "manipulative" artistic technique, Karstel catches the viewer by surprise and forces him to engage with his discovery on a personal level. Ephraim is placed in recognisable housing units sourced from the rail and construction industries.

The technique of enticing the viewer to look through a window or aperture in order to discover the true content of the artwork is most evident in *Suture* (1993), where photographs taken from the Pretoria Police Museum, are housed in a black steel container and only visible through a small circular window. This work also introduces the theme of police records and forensics as in *Forensic Science Laboratory* (1995), which

plays on our inquisitive nature and the intrigue of mystery surrounding criminological archiving, with the unfortunate rider that in South Africa this evidence often uncovers other undesirable realities which makes the observation process far more complex.

Systematically Karstel developed an almost unique concept of "photographic installations", representing a re-observation, re-consideration and re-configuration of random subjects and chance observations, recorded on film and later digitally. A key early work is; *Air Force Base Waterkloof* (1996), a series of photographs of the perimeter wall of an iconic military institution near to the artist's house in Pretoria. These photographs were taken on two separate occasions, due to the fact that heavy rainfall had interrupted the initial session. As a result, the wall had been stained by the storm and a sinkhole had formed on the second visit. These holes which result from the dissolution of dolomite stone in the mineral composition of the earth is a common occurrence in this specific region.

Another prominent example of this type of installation is; *Wild Thing* (2004), an installation made up of small individual photographs, assembled on the gallery floor which combine to form a life-size, flattened (in the literal sense) police vehicle. Similarly, *108314N* (2004) arranges a lengthy series of close-up photographs of paint which is gradually peeling off the surface of a police vehicle.

These conceptual works are never intended to shock, offend or judge, but serve as simple reproductions of incidental discoveries intended for contemplation, reflection and possible resultant self-evaluation. In this sense, *Super Race* (1996), which was exhibited at the Civic Gallery in

Johannesburg as part of an exhibition entitled; *The Young and Restless without Permission* depicts a series of images taken from graffiti on the walls of the public toilets on the campus of the University of Pretoria, and arranged by the artist in the shape of a swastika.

There are many anomalies and conflicts in Karstel's work which defy explanation or analysis. His art is not preconceived or contrived. He produces instinctively and confronts realities which are stumbled upon and processed through the act of production and presentation and subsequent reflection. He acts on a subliminal urge to present imagery which he has encountered by chance, which trigger latent conflicts and repressed emotions.

Karstel's art is symptomatic and symbolic of a generation of a younger South Africans who have lived through tumultuous change and need to understand, assimilate and arrange contradicting influences, experiences and memories, in the same manner which we would deal with subliminal trauma induced from recollected fragments and objects.

Anton Karstel enables the viewer to engage and deal with the memories and meanings of the past and we, as the audience, are inadvertently drawn to participate in this continuing, unresolved artistic process.

FOREWORD

By Andrew Lamprecht



The Young Men's Bodies Have Been Trained to Obey the Orders Given by the Mind
2009
Oil on canvas
160 x 250 cm

For over two decades Anton Karstel has unflaggingly interrogated the significance and relevance of painting in the post-photographic age while remaining committed to exploring the themes that concern him in conceptual work realised in installation and photography. His researches, whether revealed in his canvasses, photographs or in three-dimensional forms, never fail to overwhelm or engulf the viewer and to demand further consideration, interrogation and contemplation.

Karstel takes the subject matter of his paintings chiefly from found photographs and it is how he reworks this material that gives his work their special and peculiar quality; this is ultimately the power of painting: his canvasses leave the viewer with far more questions than could be answered by simple access to his source images. His paintings have consistently dealt with issues such as South African – and specifically Afrikaner – heritage and history, the human body and the city. It is perhaps not without significance that many of his found images are taken from an archive found in his family home in the seemingly idyllic Pretoria suburb of Centurion, but which was called, when Karstel was growing up, Verwoerdburg. These innocuous photographs have been imbued with a melancholic aspect that growing up in suburbia can often give to the sensitive participant in that process.

His darkly moody cityscapes, reminiscent of the late nineteenth century photography of Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), show local city views in a way that makes them highly atmospheric and laden with potential. Whether that potential is menacing or romantic always seems to be somewhat unclear, as if Karstel is reminding us that these new metropolis with their promise of wealth and growth also signal destruction of an order that could not be imagined when they began to grow.

Even in his images of the human body, often in contorted poses or gymnastic displays, we see a similar sense of beauty combined with foreboding. In his massive work entitled *The Young Men's Bodies Have Been Trained to Obey the Orders Given by the Mind* (2009) which shows a composition echoing Renaissance classicism with a triangle of symmetrical figures, hands clasped, holding aloft one lone figure, we are reminded of the fragility of the body as much as its strength. This is Karstel's particular gift: to take a prone photographic image and imbue it with new layers of meaning, to tease out relationships and to heighten inherent drama.

This is no more clear than in his series of paintings dealing with comparatively minor historical events (which often refer to some other more significant act) such as

Die Gamtoosvallei-Kommando vanaf die Graf van Wyle Kommandant Tjaart van der Walt Word Buite Humansdorp Ontmoet deur die Humansdorpse Kommando (2009). In views such as this, owing some of their technique to the French Impressionists and to Claude Lorrain (ca. 1600-1682) we see Karstel present us with minor history on a grand scale and with a scene that speaks as much of the present as of the past. It is how we locate ourselves in relation to that past in which meaning in the work can be disentangled.

Similarly in some of his installations there is a concern with an implied/present/absent body. From the early 1990s onwards in works such as *Wall* (1993), *Marabi Mnuni and Johannes Mabone* (1996) and *M&R* (1997) Karstel made the absence of the construction workers plain as well as their eventual alienation through anonymity. These absent bodies became eerily present in *Pumpkin Hut* (1996) and *SMC Plumb* (1996) where the viewer was forced to position their bodies uncomfortably to get a peep into the interior of worker's huts and to view the eerie and macabre scene inside, a clear reference to Marcel Duchamp's final masterpiece, *Etant Donnés* (1946-66).

The theme of absence and implied presence is carried through in a more recent photographic installation, *Church of Ascension* (2009). This series of 36 photographs (essentially one spool of film developed and blown up although tellingly presented in the reverse order of shooting) sees Karstel returning to some extent to the forensic works that he explored in the 1990s. Here we are presented with photographs that lie somewhere between snapshots and police diagnostic images showing the results of a devastating fire that took place in a church on Devil's Peak, Cape Town, which the artist 'stumbled upon' in 2003. In looking at these photographs on the grand scale that Anton Karstel presents them, as well as seeking out clues in the blasted wreckage, we are seduced into seeing not only through his eyes but also interpreting the narrative structure that his sequence implies. In many ways this work summarises all of Karstel's practice; here he makes the story unfold before us while presenting us only with shards of history and much laden implication of moral or physical decay and destruction, forcing us to see, as St. Paul put it (1 Cor. 13) as through a glass darkly full of the imperfections of our own experience and blind to the reality before us.



Vigor – 1948
2009
Oil on canvas
110 x 90 cm

MEATY HEADS AND THE DISCIPLINING OF BODIES

Anton Karstel's work wrestles with memory and forgetting in a fraught political environment. How fraught? Tutu's fledgling "rainbow nation" is cutting itself on the shards of past injustice and present expedience – old wounds are re-opened while new ones appear.

By Christi van der Westhuizen

As rainbowism falters, along with state service delivery and civil society vigilance, power-mongers vie over the contents of democracy, human rights and nation-building.

A South Africanness that is substantively democratic and rights-based cannot be forged without remembering and working through where we come from. This becomes more urgent as past traumas are re-enacted through violence and past bigotries are regurgitated from podiums to pulpits, streets to households in the post-apartheid milieu.

Into this quagmire wades Karstel with his evocative work. It coaxes the viewer into remembering. Without prescription, or not? In grappling with this thought, we become (re)located in an open-ended process which allows our forgetting to jostle with memory. This enables a working through at the junctures where we constitute ourselves as subjects in the political space that is South Africa.

What did it mean before, and what does it mean today, to be part of the diversity that is South Africa – to be black, Afrikaans, female, middle-class, Zulu, male, heterosexual, white, able-bodied, poor, and so forth?

Nothing less than engaging critically with how society makes us *and* how we make ourselves and society is required if we want to free up the potentialities inherent in us. Or should we rather crawl back into old certainties which may be familiar but which are also profoundly oppressive?

Karstel invites us to look at his painted interpretations of photographic portraits of the National Party's "Big Men", apartheid's prime ministers from Malan to Botha. Before today's nationalism with its "Big Men", whose every move South Africans follow so intently, seemingly mesmerised by the dangerous theatrics of power, there was another nationalism and another set of "Big Men" whose politics absorbed "the masses".

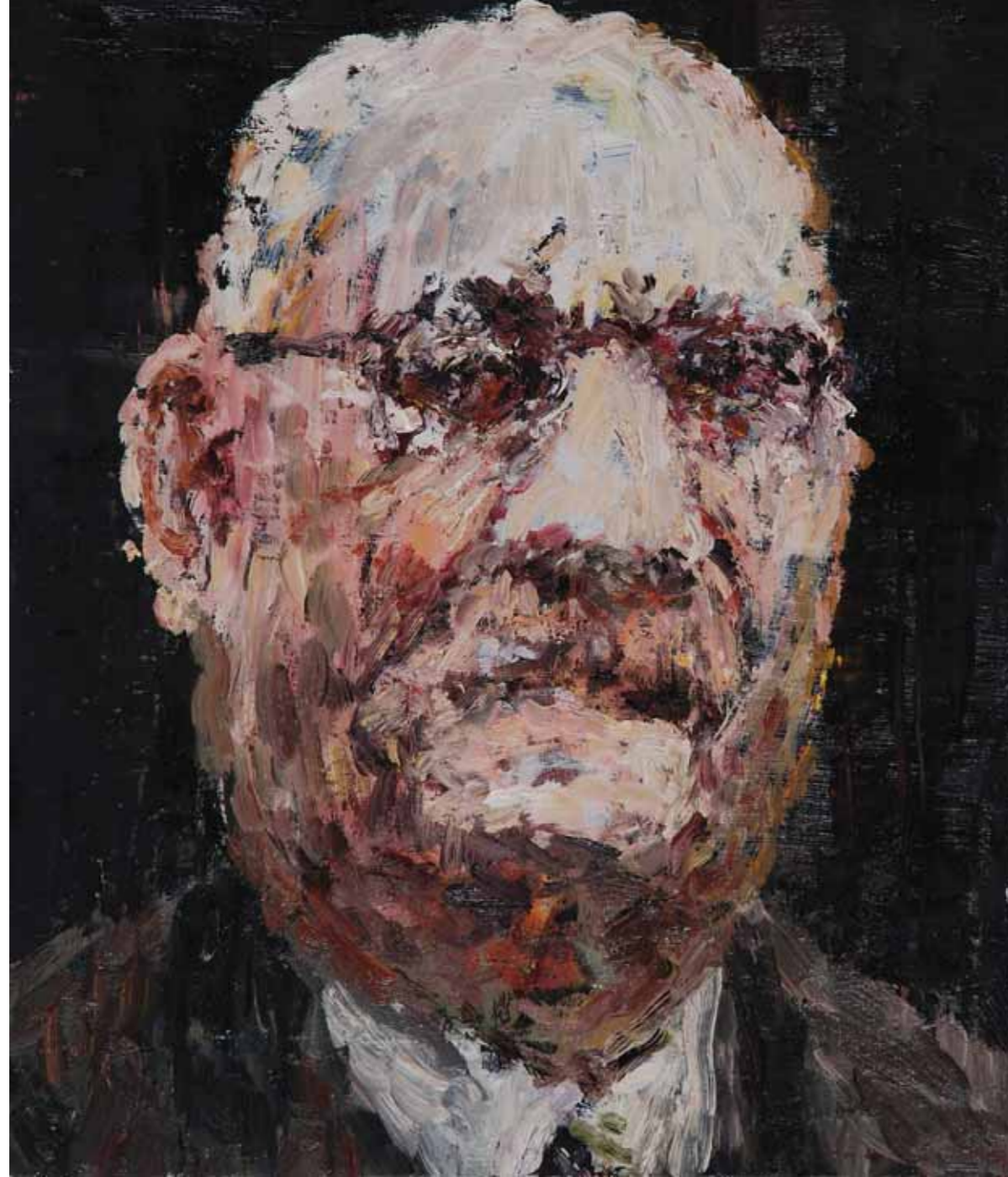
Dominee-cum-newspaper editor, DF Malan, the first National Party prime minister (1948-1958), was one of the Afrikaner nationalists that had capitalised on the slow-burning resentment after the South African Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and Milner's Anglicisation policies of the early 1900s, stoked by the first elite transition in 20th century South Africa, the 1909-1910 convention that led to the Union formation.

Boer general Jan Smuts had brokered a deal in which black people's political rights were sacrificed



Prime Minister (Verwoerd)
2009
Oil on canvas
70.5 x 58 cm

Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
70 x 51 cm



Prime Minister (Malan)
2008
Oil on canvas
61 x 50 cm

Opposite page (top):
Prime Minister (Strijdom)
2009
Oil on canvas
150 x 110 cm

Opposite page (bottom):
Prime Minister (Verwoerd)
2009
Oil on canvas
150 x 110 cm

to ensure Boer compliance but his elite grouping became oriented towards and ultimate advanced British interests. This provided National Party founder JBM Hertzog and, later, budding Afrikaner nationalists such as Malan with fodder to attract a disillusioned section of the enfranchised whites.

Malan was one of a rising generation of competing Afrikaner nationalists whose positions as journalists, dominees, teachers, small-scale traders and university lecturers were contingent upon the (re)production of an imagined community of people, demarcated by whiteness and the language Afrikaans – the latter serving as an ethnic marker of distinction from the competing settler group of English-speaking whites.

The Afrikaner nationalist discourse constructed “the Afrikaner” and, while the majority of whites refused the National Party’s version of this identity in the 1948 election, the party still won due to a 1910 compromise that advantaged parties with more rural support.

With state power the party entrenched itself, increasingly through a vicious exercising of force covered by the veneer of Christianity and Social Darwinist civilisation and the bogey of Communism.

In racist and sexist ideologies, physical markers are utilised as signs to organise bodies, determining exclusion or inclusion in spaces. In this exhibition, in contrast to Karstel’s earlier paintings displaying one of the colonial uses of black male bodies (labour), we witness white male bodies in fantastic constellations, arranged according to Western aesthetic norms and in formations that require intense exertion.

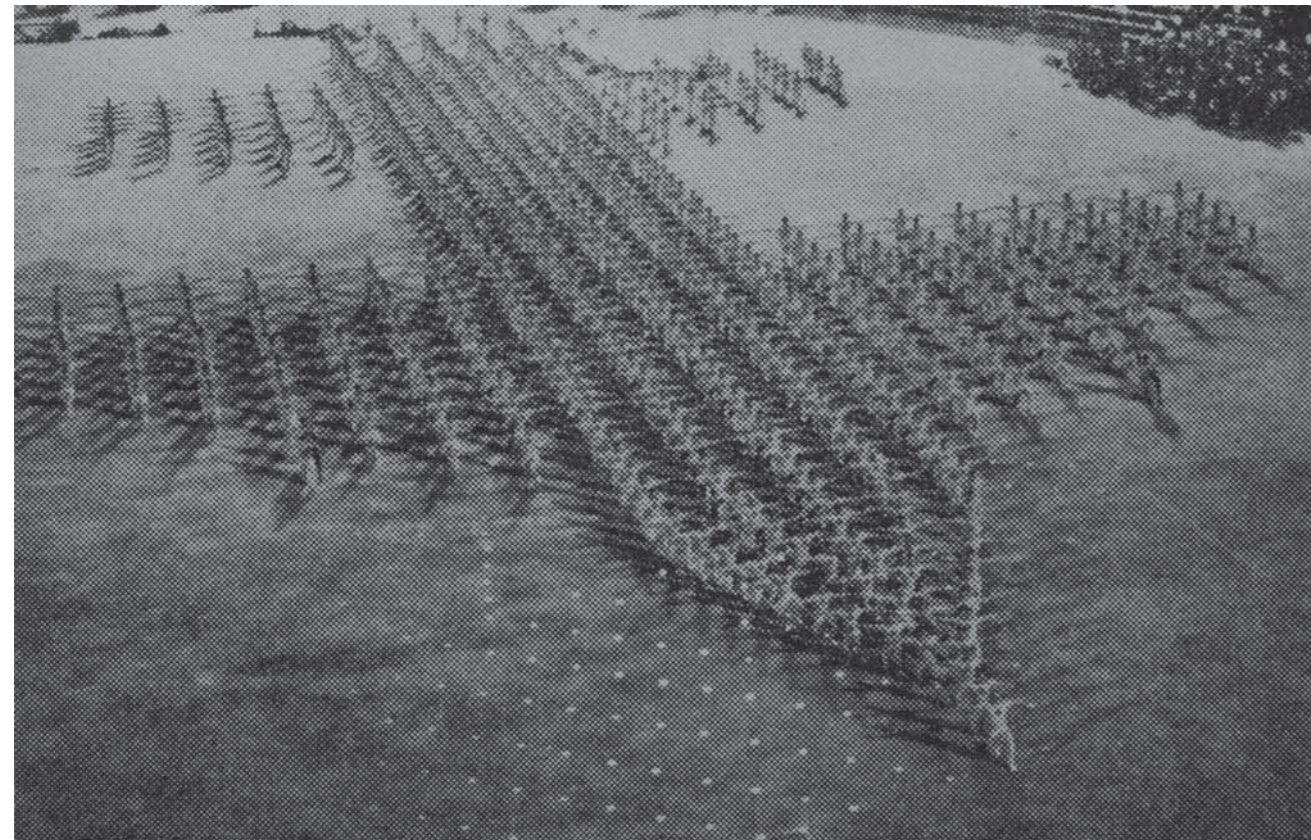
Ultimately, the paintings expose what the photos cannot: ideology’s disciplining effects on bodies. Karstel used as source materials the journals *Vigor* and *Liggaamsopvoeding/Physical education*, read by practitioners of physical education from the 1930s



onwards. From these journals emanate Afrikaner nationalist prescriptions on how white bodies should be disciplined, a project that has not been investigated sufficiently given the usual emphasis on the uses of black bodies.

In an article published in the *Liggaamsopvoeding* of June 1939, secretary of defence AH Broeksma emphasised

the interconnection between physical education and discipline, on the one hand, and technical and “cultural education”, on the other. This was against the backdrop of the re-enactment of the “Great Trek” during its centenary in the late 1930s which captured white Afrikaans-speakers’ imaginations and added impetus to Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation.



Five hundred trainees of the Air Force Gymnasium assumed the shape of a fighter plane.
(Photo: Department of Information.)

Image from *Vigor – Journal for Physical Education, Healthful Living and Recreation*
A collection from 1947 to 1966

The ideological connection of physical education and militarism manifested in the defence secretary not only writing for *Liggaamsopvoeding* but also being a member of the Nasionale Adviserende Raad vir Liggaamsopvoeding (National Advisory Council for Physical Education) which counselled the Minister of Education. His article revealingly tied the government’s department of defence to “the forging of citizens” (always white in apartheid thinking).

In the article Broeksma argued that a defence department programme of the time, which routed Afrikaner male youths to technical professions via a military training course, be piloted for expansion at the physical education department of the University of Stellenbosch.

Broeksma stated that “physical exercise, healthy food and strict military discipline physically not only make the (Afrikaner) boy gloriously healthy and suitable but he learns to get his brain working immediately. He should obey immediately and quickly.” Because: “until we reach the point that strict mass- and self-discipline is accepted as an obvious necessity, our much reviled military discipline for the Afrikaner will always achieve more than the sentimental, disorderly slackness now being extolled as ‘freedom’ and individual autonomy.”

This rhetoric was a disturbing harbinger of the growing militarisation of Afrikaner masculinity in years to come, especially under BJ Vorster (1966-1978) and PW Botha (1978-1989), also depicted in this exhibition. Photos of a military tattoo in *Vigor* presented by the South African Defence Force in September 1964 in Johannesburg, at the height of NP power – provide a vivid exposition of this militarisation through the submission of 500 male bodies forming a “living” fighter plane.

The rhetoric and the images hint at the ideological necessity of “self-less” group-think and the unquestioning acceptance of leadership stances that underpinned the sway that Afrikaner nationalism held for some 40 odd years.

In the *Liggaamsopvoeding* edition of June 1939, “Miss” Hilda Robra of the Stellenbosch University’s physical education department addressed the physical education of “the woman”, positioned as “a mother”.

She pointed out that “a healthy *volk* can only remain so through healthy mothers who can give birth to healthy children. As such, the woman is the most important bearer of *volksgesondheid* (the health of the volk) [...] [S] he must bring up her sons to be capable chaps who would be willing to use all their powers in the service of the fatherland. The daughters should be kept healthy for the welfare of the *volk*”.

Thus differs the use of bodies marked as “female” in the Afrikaner nationalist discourse. But the end of apartheid, coinciding with the end of that other totalitarian system (Communism), did not bring the end of ideology, despite the insistence of Afrikaner neo-liberals following Fukuyama’s false “end of history” theory. Discourses seemingly more subtle than Afrikaner nationalism still seek to construct us, which is what Karstel’s paintings of contemporary “bikini girls” alert us to in this exhibition.

What would such “pretty” pictures be doing at an exhibition showcasing meaty (in more ways than one) male heads of the apartheid regime?

While the Afrikaner nationalist discourse constructed a “pure” white Afrikaner woman whose body served as boundary of the volk – to be controlled at all costs – a powerful, globalised discourse of hetero-femininity circulates in the South Africa “liberated” from the insulation of apartheid.

This discourse renders the descendants of the *volksmoeders* sexually obtainable through revamped constraints on their bodies. The results are clear to see in Karstel’s paintings. Or are they?

ANTON KARSTEL: CONVENTIONAL PAINTINGS IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN ART

Neither young nor old, Anton Karstel is a white Afrikaner artist in his early forties. To be exact, Karstel is forty-one years old this year, an important time to present an exhibition which provides an overview of his art career in the last two decades. His exhibition features about one hundred artworks dating from 1989 to 2009. Although the exhibition showcases his paintings and photographic installations, the former dominates the sizeable SMAC Art Gallery. There is no doubt about the apparent fact that the painting medium is his strength.

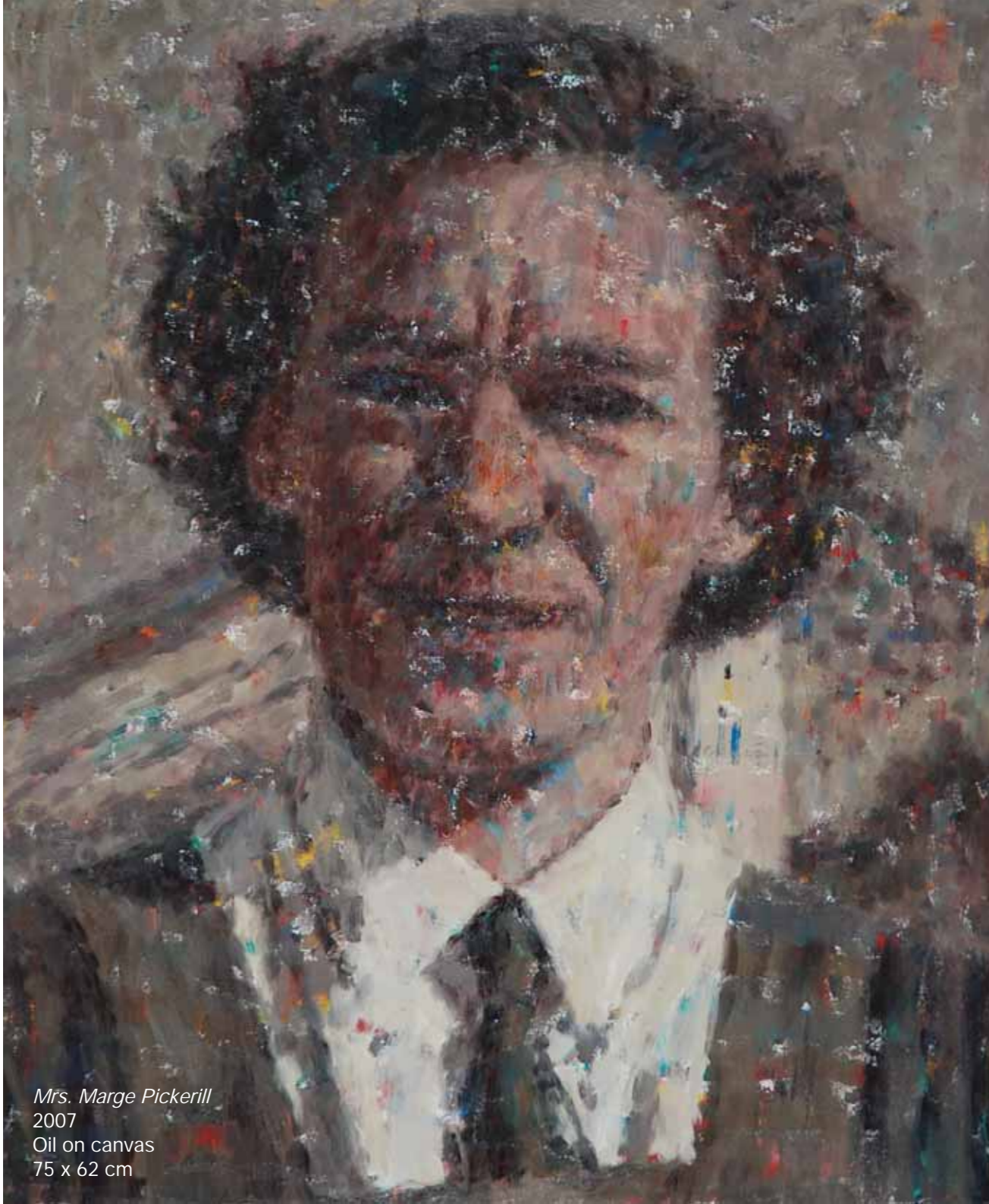
By Thembinkosi Goniwe

In spite of having spent the last two decades exploring and experimenting with different artistic mediums and discursive trends that include conceptual art and installation art, Karstel has a compelling passion for oil painting. In fact, he is a committed painter, a diligently earnest one, whose body of oil paintings is unmistakably conventional in its modernist register. He deserves applause given that his conventional paintings have somehow found their way into the discursive realm of South African contemporary art.

The conventional qualities of Karstel's paintings are evident not only in his apparent use of oil paints on canvas, but also in his typical representational genres and painting style. Take for example his series of *portraits* and *cityscapes* both of which trace their lineage from the history of painting in Western art. Even if they are not quite a fitting match, Karstel's portraits of *Old Ministers* and those of members

of the 1988 NG Church Council recall the American artist Chuck Close's massive self-portraits. Karstel's cityscape paintings such as *Adderley Street, Cape Town* (2000) and *Main Street, Port Elizabeth* (2000) are suggestive of Edward Monet's paintings of the Parisian boulevards, and more so they share artistic qualities reminiscent of Claude Lorraine's work.

In Karstel's paintings, explored is a combination of realism and abstraction that produces something expressively defiant to naturalism. Yet Karstel's paintings do not operate outside the dominion of familiar modernist styles that in themselves have long become a tradition. This is apparent in his painting technique which appears to be a combination of painterly approaches notable with Realist-like, Impressionist-like, Futurist-like and Abstract Expressionist-like brushstrokes.



Mrs. Marge Pickerill
2007
Oil on canvas
75 x 62 cm



Main Street, Port Elizabeth
2000
Oil on canvas
110 x 139 cm

Opposite page (top left to right):
Sorting Diamonds
(Wonderful South Africa Series)
1998
Oil on canvas and mounted
photograph
32 x 44 cm

Opposite page (bottom left to right):
Native Labour on the Mines
(Wonderful South Africa Series)
1998
Oil on canvas and mounted
photograph
32 x 44 cm



SORTING DIAMONDS
Native boys are seen here sorting the small stones. In the old days hundreds of thousands of pounds were lost annually through theft by Kaffirs. To hide his haul effectively, a Kaffir would even go the length of swallowing the stones. To-day, there is comparatively little diamond stealing. Even so, in some mines, native workers are given a purgative when they come off the workings.

But a closer look at Karstel's paintings makes it possible to detect his own re-invented painting style which is neither new nor original but effective enough to serve his artistic quest. Karstel, during our meeting at Stellenbosch, told me that he "chose not to invent anything new" because "it is too late to invent new art forms"; particularly when working with the exhausted traditional medium of painting, I suppose. What seems enthralling though for Karstel is to recycle what is already in place, but doing so in ways that are creatively enabling to producing meanings that are distinguishable from the historical source materials he references. All of Karstel's paintings are copied from photographs that serve as an archival well which he excavates and dissects, in so doing confronting and reflecting on the past. This is evidenced by his painting series of *Old Ministers*, which were appointees of the National Party and instrumental in reasoning and implementing the apartheid system.

History is important to Karstel, although more critical is how its consequences are instrumental in shaping the present. His deliberation to paint *Old Ministers* should be read as a quest into probing the damages caused by such heads of the apartheid state, damages that remain haunting spectres in a democratic South Africa. Karstel's paintings bring to our attention the reminder that the past is always already in the present and shaping the future. But its existence and damaging effects tend not to be exposed into the light of the present today but rather hidden and relegated to what is expressed in rhetorical sentiments described by Charles Cilliers as follows: "Why can't we just leave all what was in the past, in the past and look towards the future" Let's let bygones be bygones and work together for a better South Africa." Such rhetorical utterances function as acts of denying unrelenting ills of the past, denying persistent racial inequalities, denying unremitting oppression of the black majority in democratic South Africa. These problems

are indebted to the white Afrikaner figures and practices which Karstel dares to retrieve from colonial-apartheid photographs and then translate into representational paintings which we have to contend with in our contemporary *Wonderful South Africa*.

"Why can't we just leave all what was in the past, in the past and look towards the future. Let's let bygones be bygones and work together for a better South Africa."

Whether in paintings such as those featured in *Wonderful South Africa*, Karstel provides us with political reminders of a country wrestling with apartheid leftovers. He does so without being didactic but subtle in ways which render his painting open-ended, ambiguous and ambivalent. Karstel achieves such visual effects through his liberated and expressive impasto-like and gestural brushwork. He

renders paint in dense impasto brushstrokes to produce dazzling effects that bring about vibration and sparkle. Supplementing such visual effects are Karstel's subdued but rich tonal arrays of saturated colours which dissolve into the surface of the canvas. Surface is critical in producing unusual vagueness and grainy atmospheres that turn these paintings into spaces of silent tension.

Karstel's paintings manifest in the form of sustained narratives, which are developed and organized in various sets or series. Seldom has he painted just one piece; not to



NATIVE LABOUR ON THE MINES
Large numbers of coloured men are employed in the Kimberley diamond mines and the proper housing of the community is a considerable problem. The natives are drawn from all sorts of tribes and tend to maintain tribal distinctions when resident in the mining compounds.



Figure 520 (a)
1996
Oil on canvas
50 x 70 cm

Opposite page:
Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
70 x 50 cm



say he does not or will not. Rather, he seems to or prefers to paint a theme or themes in a manner of continual sequences that, in their appropriation of cinematic frames, present themselves in a rhythmic ordering, a visual arrangement of build-ups that in due course constitute narrative scenes.

As a series, Karstel's paintings invite viewers into a journey through which politics is negotiated. Nothing is overt or shocking about the politics Karstel explores. There is rather a sense of modesty and reservation in Karstel's painting. There are also subtle tensions whose visual rendering forwards representations of ideas, experiences and desires imprisoned, contained, controlled within the surface of the paintings, through a manipulation of visual qualities. Incarcerated and buried beneath the

visual surfaces of the painting is a constellation of human emotions, feelings and ideals, ranging from anxieties to worries, anticipations and somehow, bliss.

There is a quality of coldness and reticence in some of Karstel's paintings, a quality rendered proficiently and gracefully through interplay between things realistic and abstract. Take for example his photographs of South Africa's major urban centres depicting street scenes of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. In paintings such as *Adderley Street, Cape Town* (2000) and *Main Street, Port Elizabeth* (2000), we detect a sense of absence or disappearance of the evidence of materiality in the fading architectural structures and urban streets. As such, the depicted cities have become mysterious. In a review of this exhibition, Andrew Lamprecht reflectively analyzed Karstel's cityscapes as follows: "Formal elements—massive urban structures represented through small fragmented brushstrokes in gorgeous deep golden hues—invest the canvases with an ambivalent and somewhat melancholic air: It is as if Karstel wishes to rewrite the grey seemingly neutral *fin-de-siecle* photographic archives of a century ago with a post-colonial context at the turn of a new century."¹

Karstel has also painted photographs of physical education and health disciplining for Afrikaner youth subjected to undergo military training. The military trainees were prepared for the apartheid South African Defense Force, to defend the mission of the Afrikaner Nationalist State in its construction of the *volksei*, Broederbond, Afrikanerdom. Such a mission was a reaction to the preceding British superiority while also advancing British segregation for ends mainly instrumental in the institution of Afrikaner superiority against Africans. Through apartheid, the Afrikaner National Party would establish white South Africa in which Africans were denied citizenship. Such denial rendered Africans baseless and thus subordinate, available for exploitation as cheap labour in the land of their birth.

Although whiteness was already in place through British racial segregation, it became national by institutionalizing



Untitled | 1998 | Oil on canvas | 39.5 x 47.5 cm

racism through apartheid. Consequently, social divisions between blacks and whites would have far-reaching results, more so that the production of racial purity would be mobilized by regulating white female bodies from intercourse with black male bodies. As such, white (Afrikaner) women bodies would be protected against miscegenation, a protection underpinned by disciplinary mechanisms of control in the event of constructing and producing the *volk*. Meanwhile, black men who dared to cross the colour bar sexually and even by showing desire for white women faced severe punishment.

Karstel's paintings of photographs depicting young Afrikaners in physical education and militarism speak to the politics of constructing the apartheid South African Defense Force and whiteness. They recall the disciplining of white bodies in the event of constructing the *volk*, particular the controlling of white Afrikaner female body in order to preserve white purity. Such a discourse is not so absent in Karstel's seemingly pleasurable to look at *beach scenes* of white young girls in bikinis. While this series of paintings is indicative of Karstel's private fantasies and erotic desires about white girls, it nevertheless reproduces



Union Blues | 1995 | Oil on canvas | 28.5 x 34 cm

a sense of preserving white female bodies within private spaces in which access is controlled.

Furthermore, the *bikini girls*, are painted in such a sexualized manner, that it makes them not only objects of white male fantasy, but also white male consumables. Yes, their visual rendering in what Karstel refers to, as 'ice creams' should be offensive to white women. For there is nothing more insulting than to construct women as edible objects, ones which become things circulated in gallery circuits for public consumption. Yet, it is fair to read another reflection on the bikini girls, that Karstel's critique also points to pornography, especially in visuals produced as spectacle in porn magazines.

Having made that argument, I also wish to acknowledge Karstel's paintings to offer possibility for critical debates in contemporary South Africa. Thus the discourse which underscores his paintings as contemporary art is however not surprising taking into account his artistic quest which is premised on wrestling with the very meaning of art and its critical engagement with historical, social, political and cultural problems. Karstel's paintings, therefore, should be engaged as sites that give rise to contentious

debates which democratic South Africa needs in order to address haunting spectres of the past. With this foregoing argument I want to point out that, Karstel's excavation and dissecting of colonial-apartheid archival photographs is a discourse re-visiting the past for reasons that are not only political but also aesthetic, personal and intimate.

Born in Pretoria, the capital centre of the former apartheid regime, Karstel is one of many South Africans who still have to wrestle with the past and its consequences in how they have structurally informed the present while shaping future. His paintings are however indicative of deep-seated preoccupations with apartheid's violent acts that are visually recuperated in paintings such as *The Baker's Man Can* (1992) and *Union Blues* (1995).

Of course, Karstel is one of the beneficiaries of the violent apartheid regime and him being and becoming a privileged white male in South Africa has been at the cost of horrific violation, exploitation and murdering of Africans. Their properties, intrinsic to their existence, in order to nurture their humanity were dispossessed by Karstel's fathers and forefathers. It is therefore understandable, at least for those individuals who feel remorse and responsible about the ills of colonial-apartheid, to be somewhat touched by the haunting specter of the past. Yes, I say to be touched in various ways that are not selectively restricted to white guilt and shame, or empathy for violated Africans, and more so white denialism. It is also neither to brush aside nor gloss over historical consequences that have become a violent past that is always already in the ever-shifting present.

By way of conclusion, I want to note that in this essay I have discussed a selection of the Anton Karstel artworks. My interest has been restricted to his paintings that appear to constitute a sustained but also engaged body of reflective artworks, in the course of his still evolving artistic career in South Africa. While my focus has been restricted to his paintings, I do want to acknowledge his conceptual and installation art projects, which I consider curiously challenging.

What seems to drive my interest though is his command of the painting medium. I am moved by his committed endurance to producing conventional paintings at a time when most, if not every, young (South African) artist with a desperate desire to succeed both locally and internationally, perceive painting impotent and disabling as a fit into the cutting edge of contemporary art. For young artists, an instant solution to making it in the art world has been to cash into current artistic trends dominated by conceptual, installation, performance and video art! These arty-trends have become not only tickets to entering mainstream; they have also become passwords for self-positioning in the desperate race for relevance and marketability. As such, many young artists are not simply compromising their creative and intellectual potentials, but are also performing the disappointing discourse of self-prostitution, subjecting their creative and intellectual potentials to exploitative ends.

Such is a desperate reality brought about by capitalism in a society wrestling with the desire to be politically moral or ethically correct. The market dominates and drives what type of creative and intellectual product artists are subjected to producing. Without a viable market, it is supposed that the chance to sustain a durable art career is very slim. Thus, meeting needs dictated by the market is strategic to keeping up with the pace and more so, winning the game.

By producing conventional paintings in a contemporary fashion, which are critically reflective and self-conscious, Karstel deserves applause, if not only for keeping the tradition of painting alive. He also provides an exemplary possibility of rejecting the seduction imposed by instant artistic trends in contemporary art practice. In so doing, he makes painting as a medium relevant and viable for discourse.

Endnotes:

1 Andrew Lamprecht, *City Slicker* in *Mail & Guardian*, Friday, March 23-29, 2001.

PAINTINGS

1992 - 1995





Messerschmitt
1994
Oil on canvas
37 x 77 cm



Untitled
1994
Oil on canvas
140 x 150 cm



Untitled
1994
Oil on canvas
165 x 199 cm



Prof. Johan Heyns, Assessor van die Algemene Sinode van die NG-Kerk, Gister by die Begrafnis-Diens in Boipatong
1992
Oil on canvas
38 x 78 cm



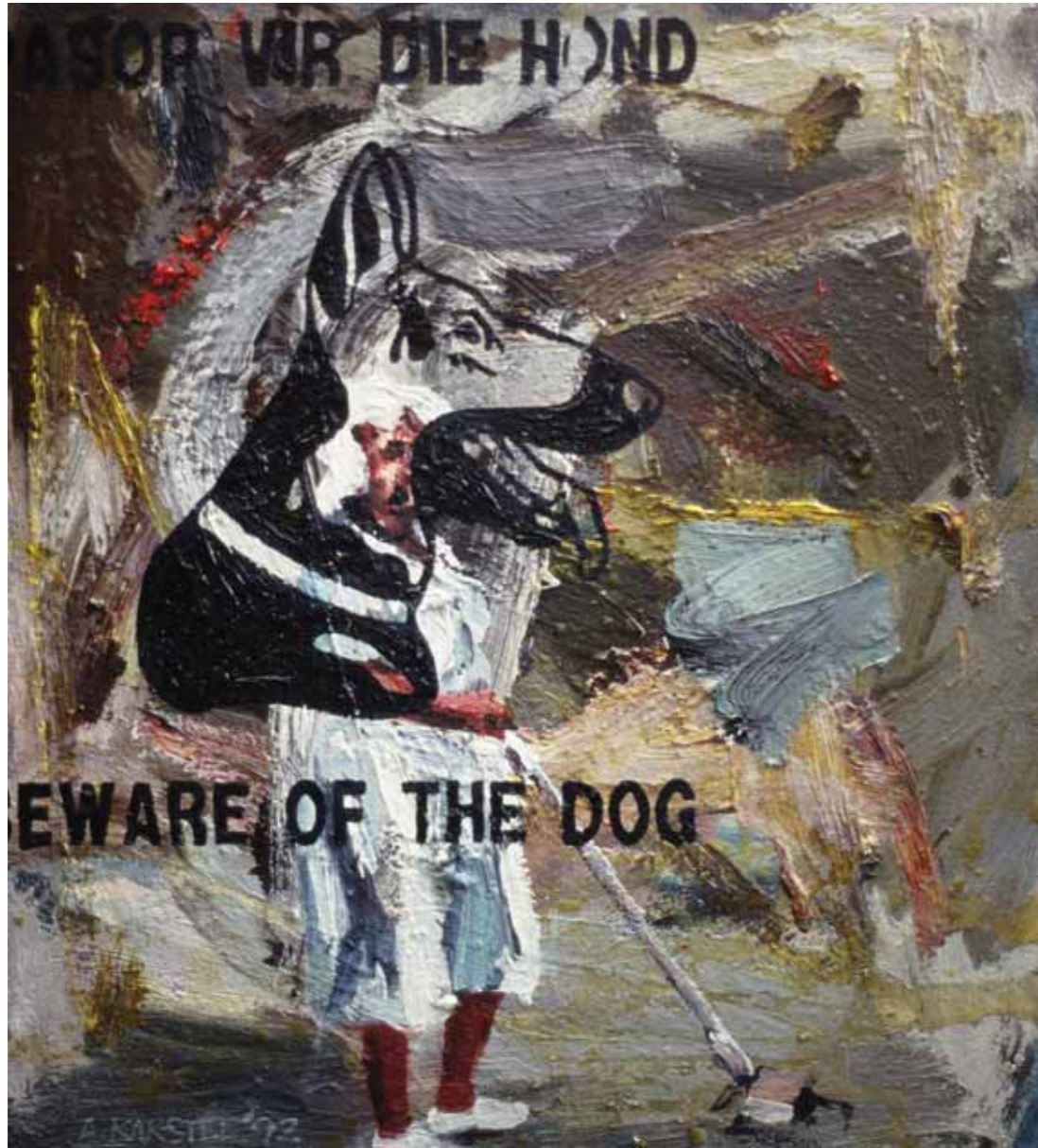
Willie en Salomé te Nederduits-Gereformeerde
1992
Oil on canvas
55 x 64.5cm



I Just Want to Start a Flame in Your Heart
1992
Oil on canvas
35 x 48 cm



The Baker's Man Can
1992
Oil on canvas
55 x 52 cm



Pasop vir die Hond / Beware of the Dog
1992
Oil on canvas
46 x 42 cm



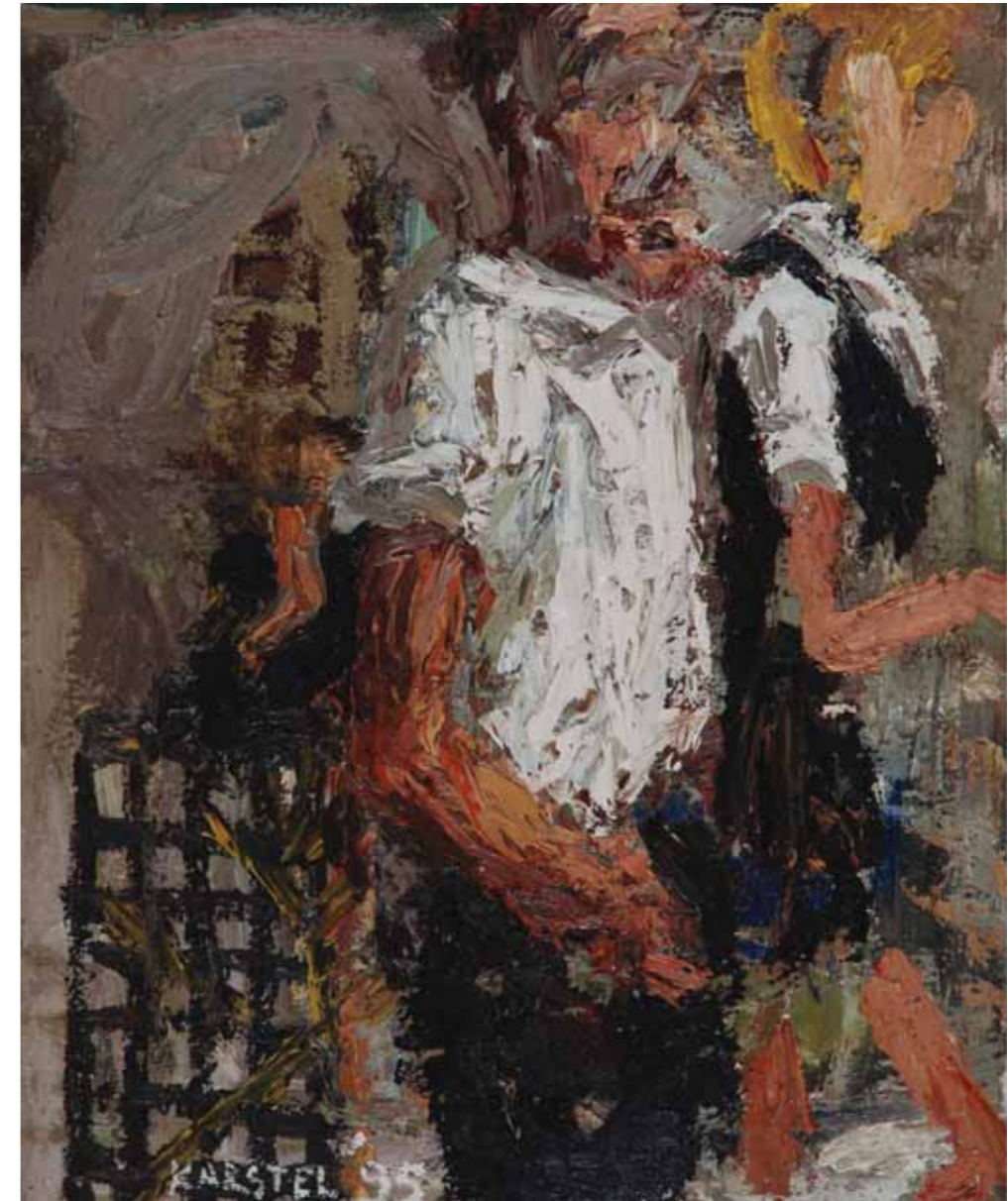
Patrollie Honde op Diens
1992
Oil on canvas
93.5 x 93 cm



Selina Baloyi and Maria Hlabathi
1995
Oil on canvas
46.5 x 53 cm



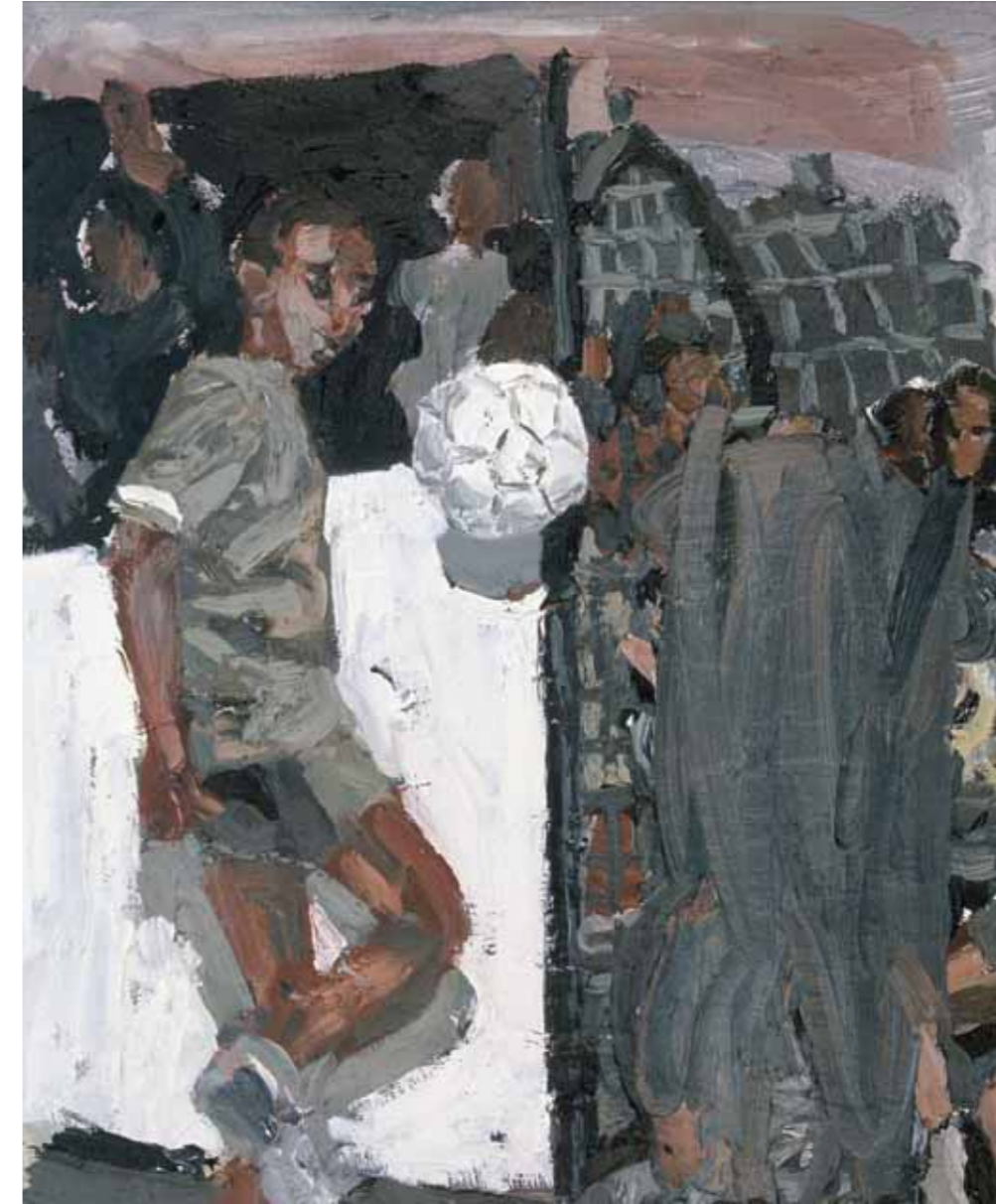
Happy Education
1995
Oil on canvas
37 x 54 cm



Liggaamlike Opvoeding en die Kleuter
1995
Oil on canvas
41.5 x 34 cm



Small Business Success
1995
Oil on canvas
38 x 28 cm



Defence Sports Club Plays Goalkeeper
1995
Oil on canvas
43 x 33 cm



Policemen (Set of 5)
1992
Oil on canvas
20 x 15.5 cm each



Hendrik Verwoerd se Dood
1994
Oil on canvas
29.5 x 34.5 cm



Oppad Kerkhof Toe
1995
Oil on canvas
30.5 x 35.5 cm



Violence Erupts in Actonville
1995
Oil on canvas
29 x 31 cm



Our First Line of...
1995
Oil on canvas
35 x 27.5 cm



Vrees is die Enigste Emosie
1995
Oil on canvas
24 x 35.5 cm



Scuffle
1995
Oil on canvas
27 x 48.5 cm



Minster of Defence Joe Modise and SADF Chief General George Meiring
1995
Oil on canvas
47 x 34 cm



Rwanda Rampokkers Beskerm Kos wat Hulle Gesteel Het
1995
Oil on canvas
40 x 50 cm



Met Sy Sak Buit by 'n Brandende Motorwрак Verby
1995
Oil on canvas
35.8 x 36.7 cm



Youths Vent Their Anger
1995
Oil on canvas
49.5 x 42 cm



Weermag Herstel Wet en Orde
1995
Oil on canvas
48.5 x 35 cm



Trooper Jacob Lottering
1995
Oil on canvas
47 x 37 cm

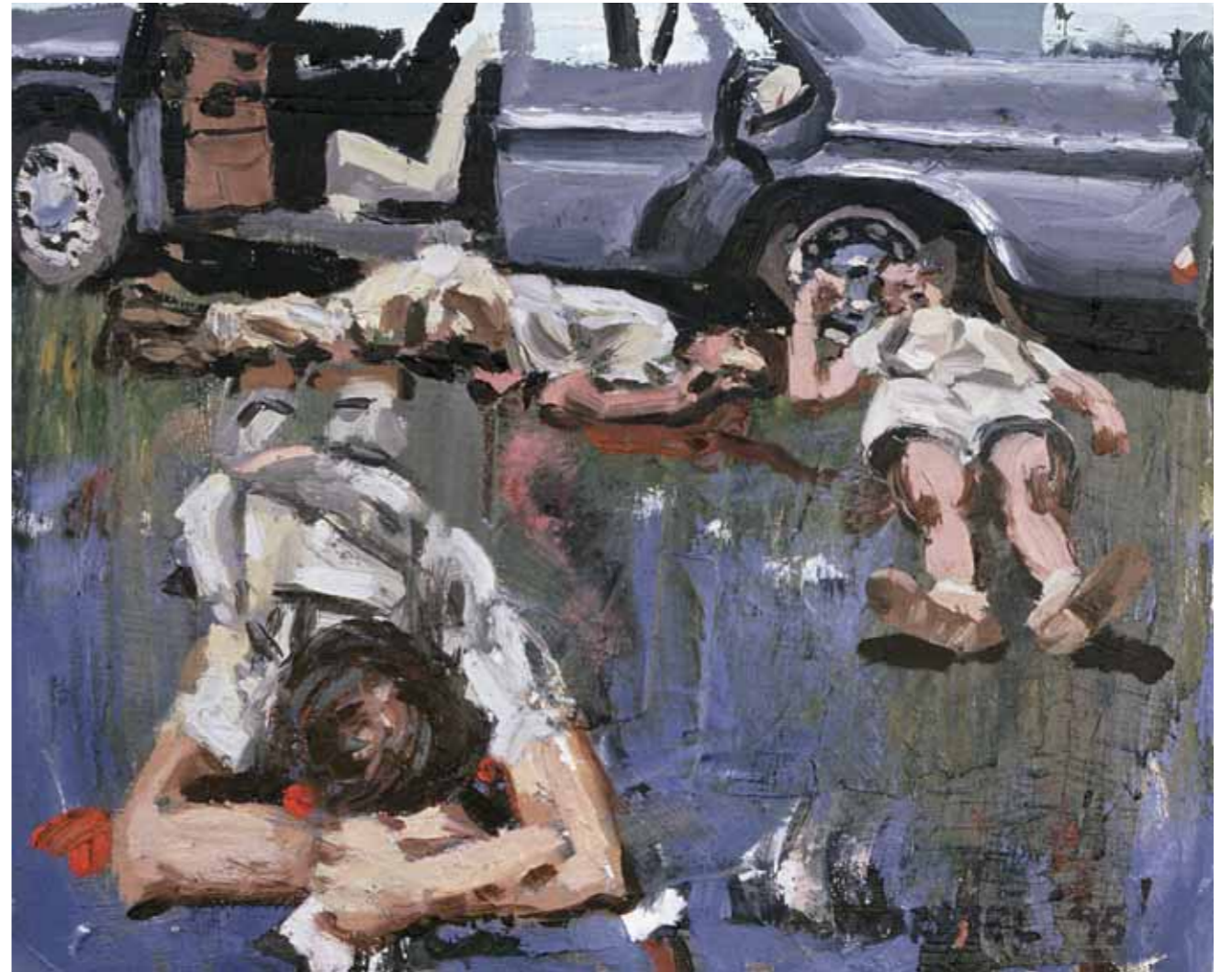
'n Groep Rou Zulu-Rekrute Besig om Voete te Stamp
1995
Oil on canvas
34.5 x 37 cm



Untitled
1995
Oil on canvas
47 x 36 cm



*Mnr. Sarel Fourie, Swaar Gewond en
Bewusteloos op die Grond*
1995
Oil on canvas
33 x 41 cm



Die Doodstoneel 'n Paar Minute Later
1995
Oil on canvas
38 x 45 cm



Die Lyke van Twee Mans
1995
Oil on canvas
72.5 x 80 cm



Lyke in die Sneeu
1995
Oil on canvas
50 x 54.5 cm



INSTALLATIONS

1993 - 1997

SUTURE



Suture
c. 1993
Wood, steel, photographs and bronze
Exhibition: Pretoria Art Museum



WALL

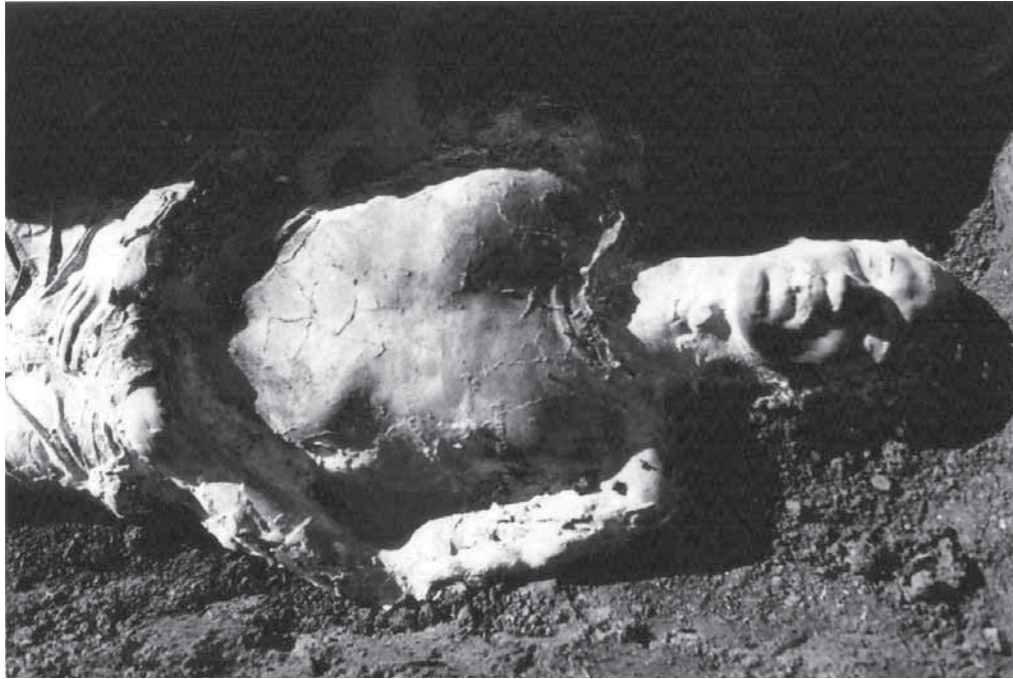
Wall
1993
Bricks, cement, paint and photographs
Exhibition: *Real Art*, ICA Gallery, Johannesburg





Self-Burial at the Pretoria Art Museum
1995
Photographic record of event
Exhibition: **Brown and Green**, Pretoria Art Museum







Forensic Science Laboratory
1995
Mixed media and objects from the Forensic Science Laboratory in Pretoria
Exhibition: *Brown and Green*, Pretoria Art Museum





EPHRAIM



Ephraim
1995
Soil and cement cast
Exhibition: *Laager, Africus Biennale* (fringe exhibition), Newtown, Johannesburg

PUMPKIN HUT

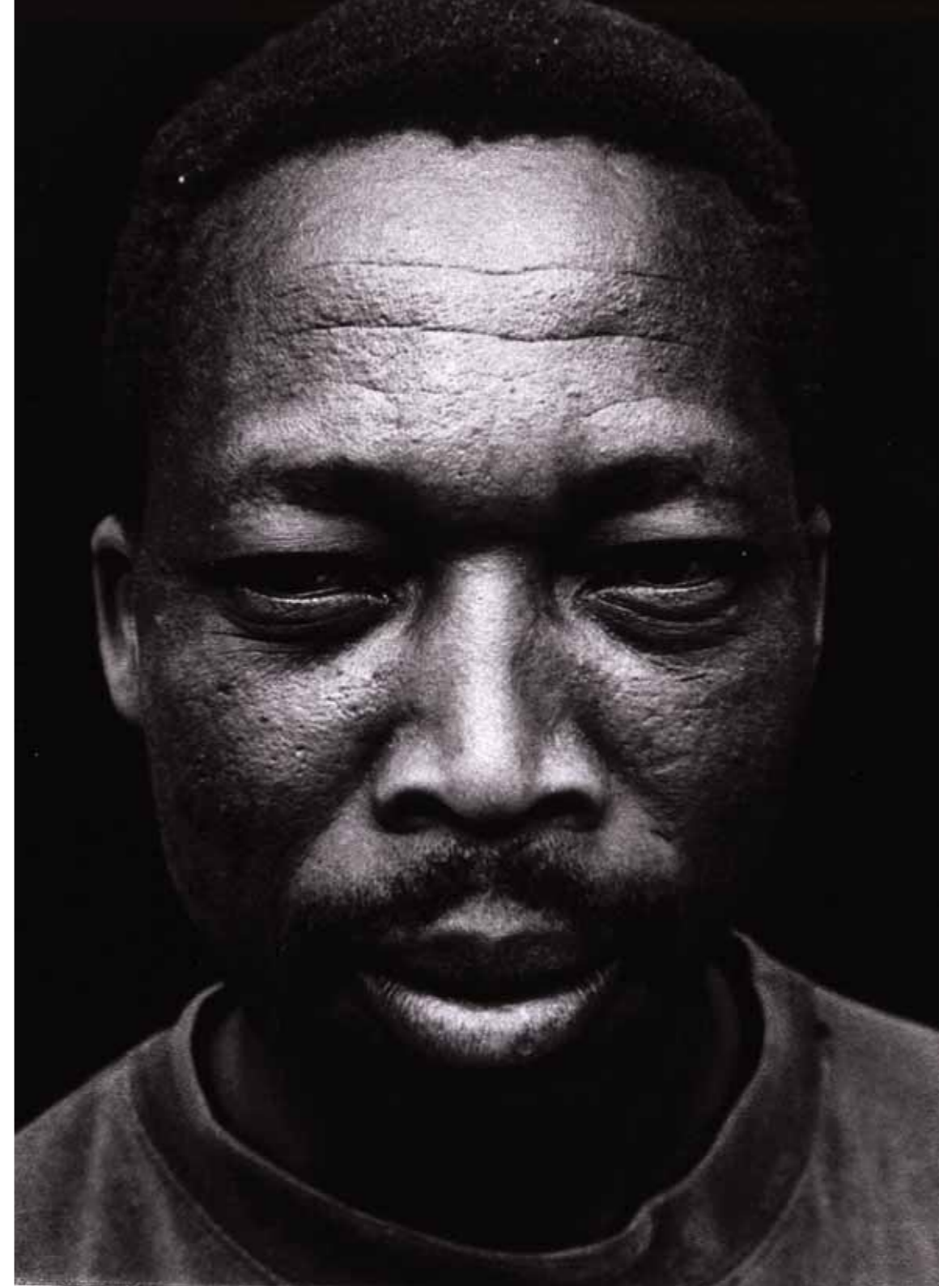


Pumpkin Hut
1996
Worker's hut, soil and cement cast
Exhibition: *The Way West*, Newton Galleries, Johannesburg

MARABI MNUNI AND JOHANNES MABONE



Marabi Mnuni and Johannes Mabone
1996
Bricks, cement, paint and photographs
Exhibition: *The Way West*, Newton Galleries, Johannesburg





AIR FORCE BASE WATERKLOOF



Air Force Base Waterkloof
1996
Installation of 49 framed photographs
21 x 29.7 cm each
Exhibition: *The Way West*, Newton Galleries, Johannesburg



Detail of *Air Force Base Waterkloof* Installation



Detail of *Air Force Base Waterkloof* Installation





Detail of *Air Force Base Waterkloof* Installation



Detail of *Air Force Base Waterkloof* Installation

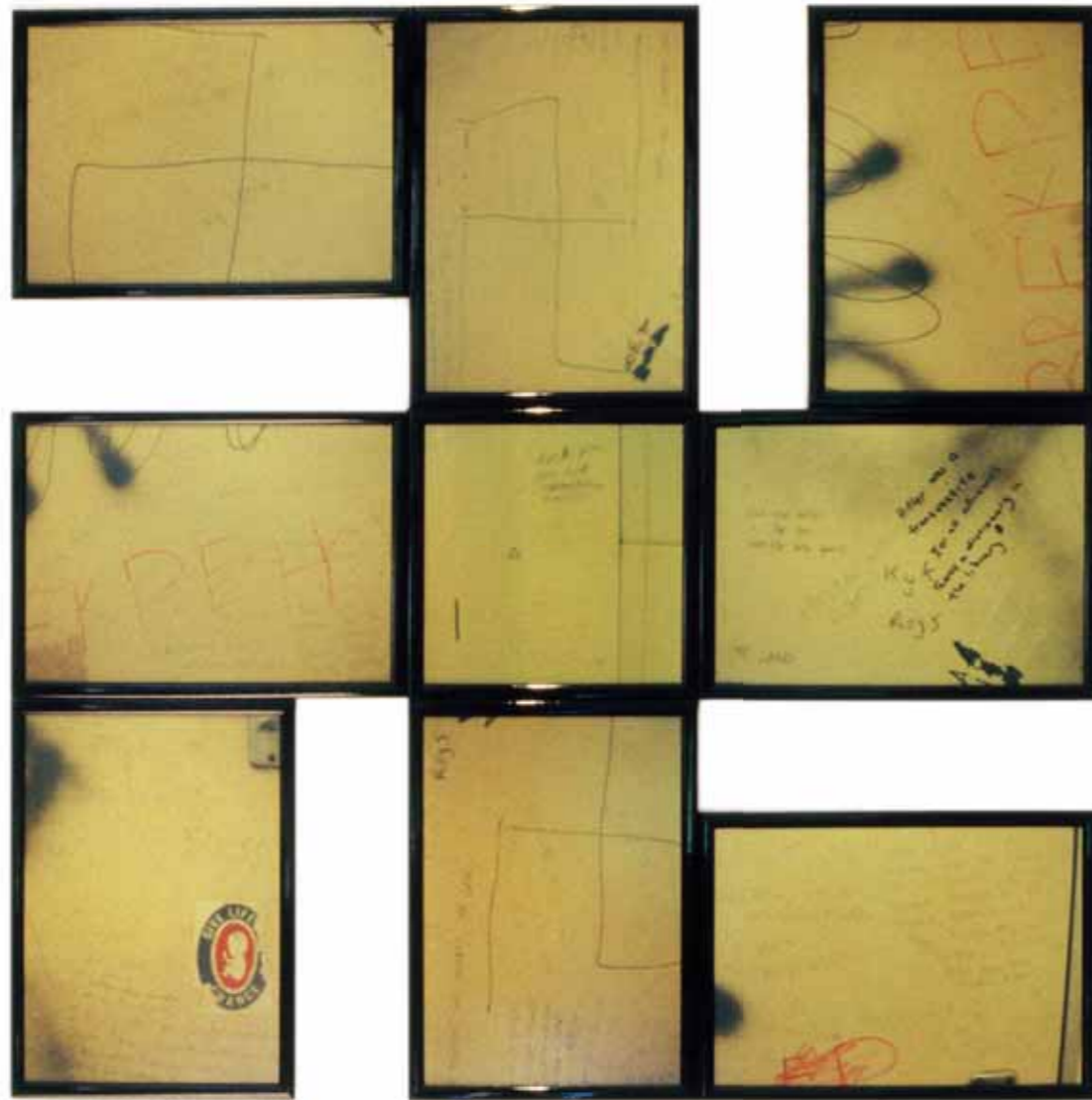


SMC PLUMB



SMC Plumb
1996
Worker's hut, soil and cement cast
Exhibition: *Earth and Everything*, Arnofoli Gallery, Bristol, UK

SUPER RACE

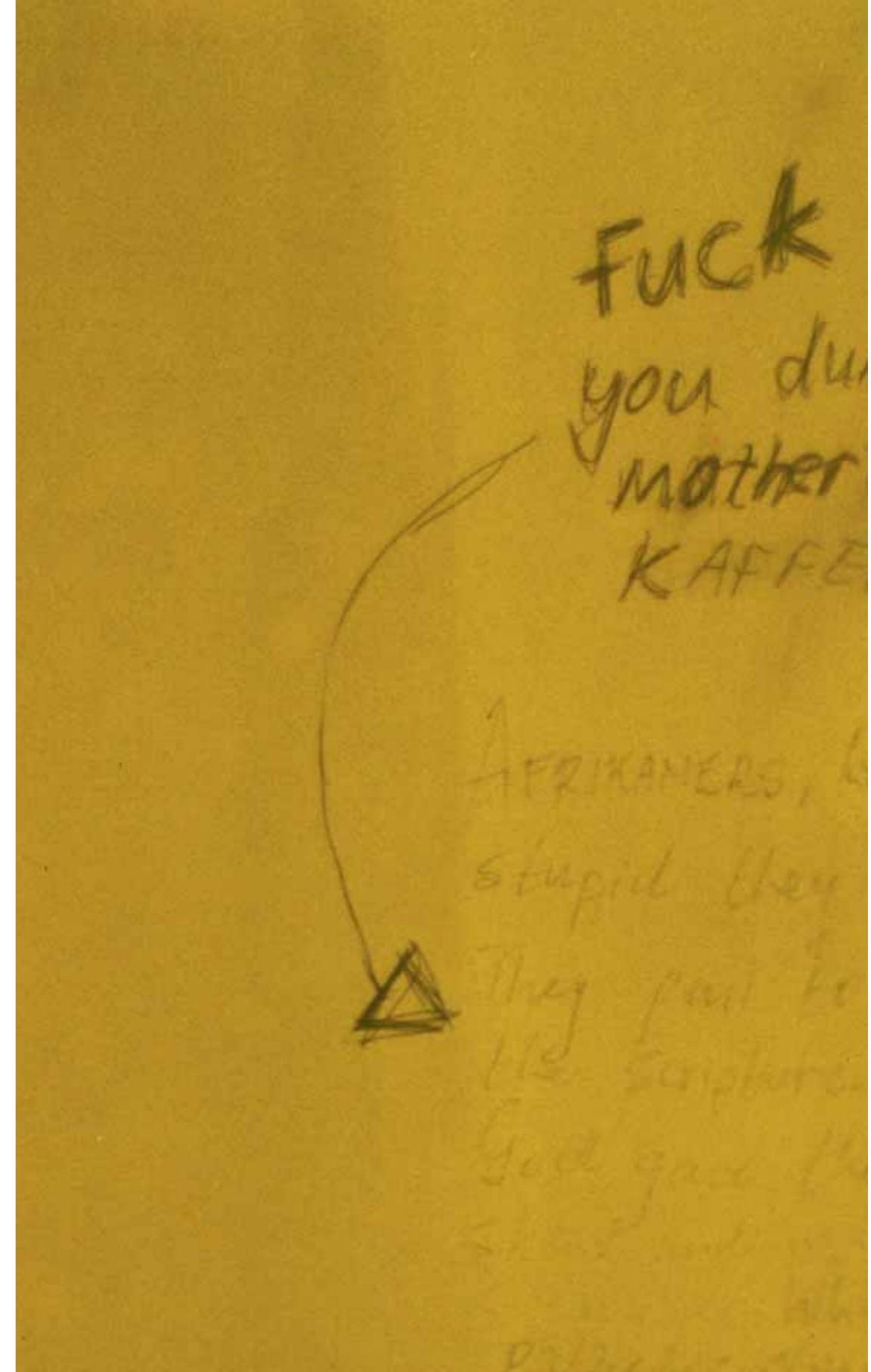


Super Race
1996

Installation of 9 framed photographic prints
8 x (29.7 x 21 cm), 1 x (21 x 21 cm)

Exhibition: *The Young and the Restless without Permission*, Civic Gallery, Johannesburg

Detail of
Super Race



No9 nooit in drie
bestaan van die men
het in swarte iets
Waarde ontdek of
Stand gebring nie
- Geen Rembrandts;
- Pasteur's; Eins
Bell's eas. end
noem maa
WIT is BET
Dis die les van
die aeskiedem
- wie dit ontdek na

Detail of
Super Race

HIS IS FOR
THE WHITE
BITZIE
We make the
I advise your family;
I advise your gait;
I honestly advise your Love for Mankind. I
However, believe for love to be complete, there has
to be a vertical dimension. Can't we, in our
Craving for Happiness



Detail of
Super Race



M&R
1997
Video
Exhibition: *Graft* (Second Johannesburg Biennale), South African National Gallery, Cape Town



M&R
1997
Pillar



PAINTINGS

1994 - 2003



Adderley Street, Cape Town
2000
Oil on canvas
90 x 130 cm



Adderley Street, Cape Town
2000
Oil on canvas
143 x 192 cm



The Strand, London
2002
Oil on canvas
176 x 248 cm



Argyle Street, Glasgow
2003
Oil on canvas
180 x 250 cm



Commissioner Street, Johannesburg
2001
Oil on canvas
78 x 140 cm



Donkin Street, Beaufort West 1900
2000
Oil on canvas
40 x 52 cm



Untitled
1999
Oil on canvas
43 x 65 cm



Untitled
1999
Oil on canvas
40 x 62 cm



Nkana Mine (Wonderful South Africa Series)
1998
Oil on canvas
30 x 32 cm



View of Grahamstown, from the Fort England Asylum
1997
Oil on canvas
32 x 43 cm



Untitled
1999
Oil on canvas
40 x 43 cm



A Disused Railway Truck at which a Roaring Trade is Driven
1994
Oil on canvas
35 x 42 cm



The Wealth of the Mines (Wonderful South Africa Series)
1998
Oil on canvas
37 x 42 cm



Work at Nkana Mine (Wonderful South Africa Series)
1998
Oil on canvas
60 x 82 cm



INSTALLATIONS

2004

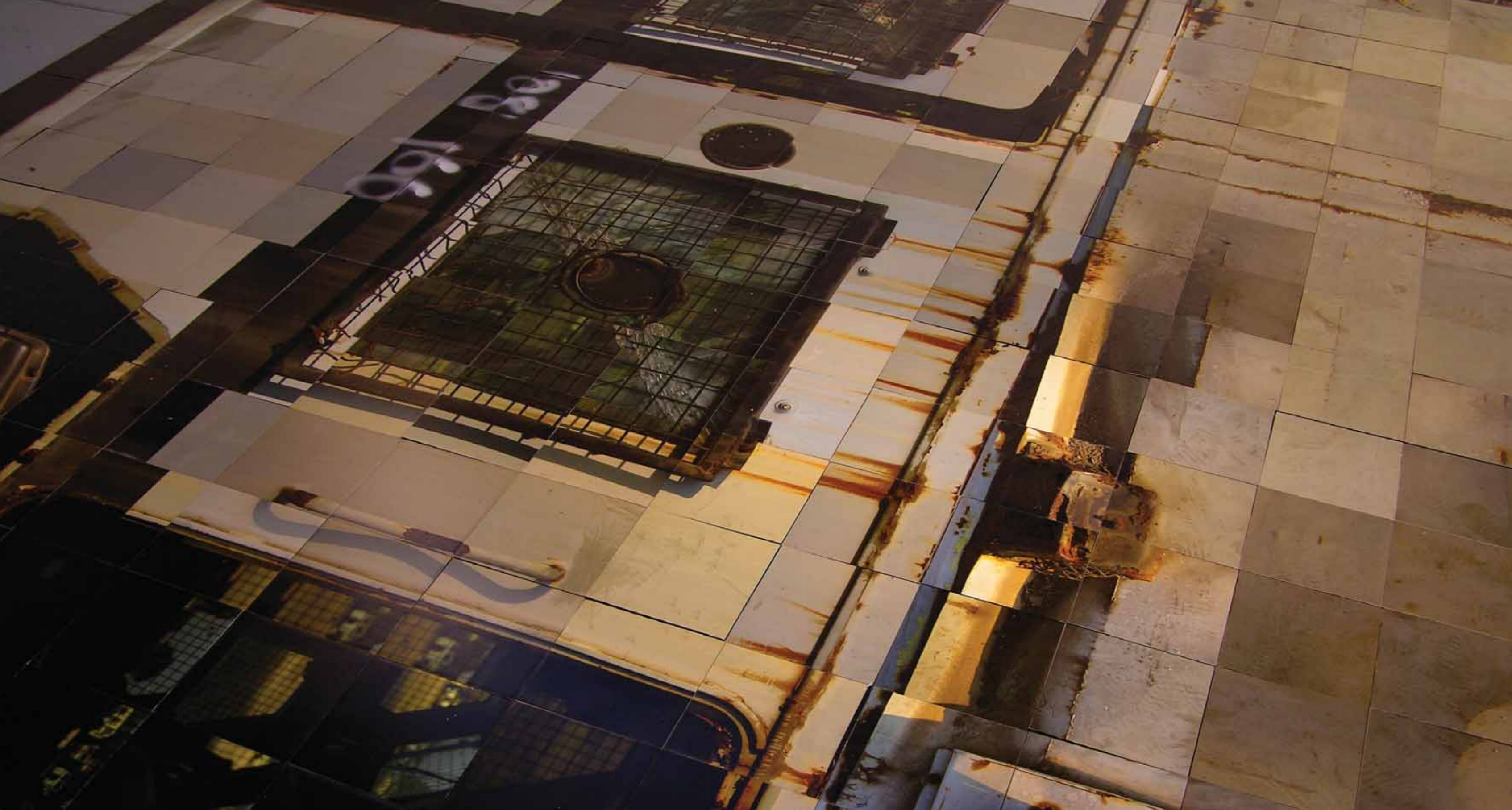
WILD THING



Wild Thing
2004
Mounted photographic tiles
20 x 20 cm each
Exhibition: *Wild Thing*, Franchise, Johannesburg



Detail of
Wild Thing



108314N



108314N
2004
Partial view of installation of 320 framed photographic prints
23.5 x 36.5 cm
Exhibition: Pretoria Art Museum



Partial view of *108314N*



Partial view of *108314N*



Partial view of *108314N*



Partial view of *108314N*



PAINTINGS

2008 - 2009



I-3
2008
Oil on canvas
63 x 41 cm



Untitled
2009
Oil on canvas
70 x 50 cm



Untitled
2009
Oil on canvas
63.5 x 42 cm



Untitled
2009
Oil on canvas
80 x 55 cm



Prone-Kneeling
2009
Oil on canvas
52 x 70 cm



Piramide-bou deur Leerlinge van Mnr. Gericke, Tiervlei
2009
Oil on canvas
80 x 65 cm



’n Vertoning deur die Kinders van die Hoërskool Hofmeyer tydens die Rapportryersfees
2009
Oil on canvas
110 x 149.5 cm



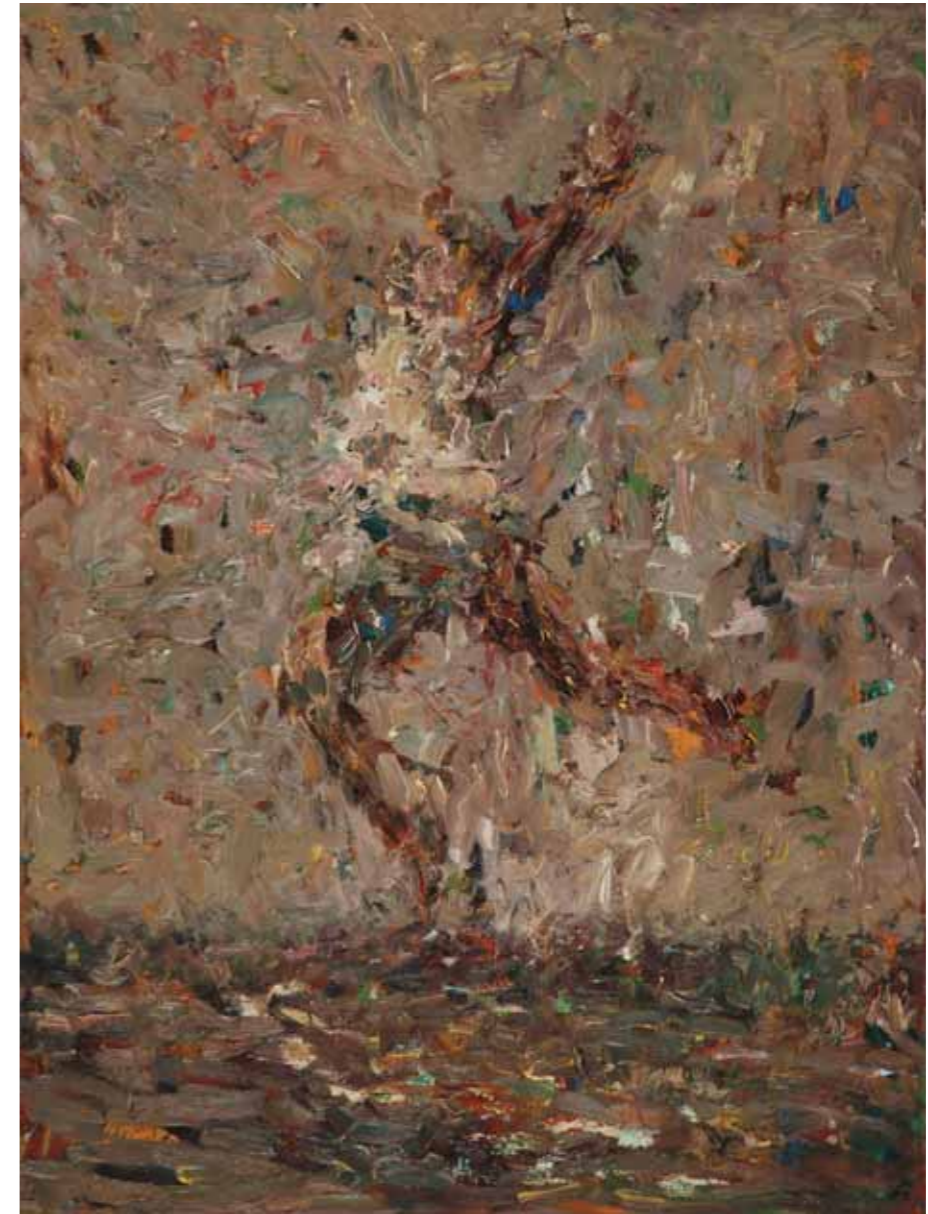
Wendy Almond, 1st Grade Woman Champion, Performing a Free-Standing Exercise
2009
Oil on canvas
90 x 90 cm



Recreation
2009
Oil on canvas
70 x 52 cm



Afb. 8
2009
Oil on canvas
90 x 67 cm



Afb. 9
2009
Oil on canvas
90 x 67 cm



Afb. 17
2009
Oil on canvas
90 x 67 cm



Afb. 15
2009
Oil on canvas
90 x 67 cm



INSTALLATION

2009

CHURCH OF ASCENSION



Church of Ascension
2009
36 Mounted photographic prints
59.4 x 84 cm each



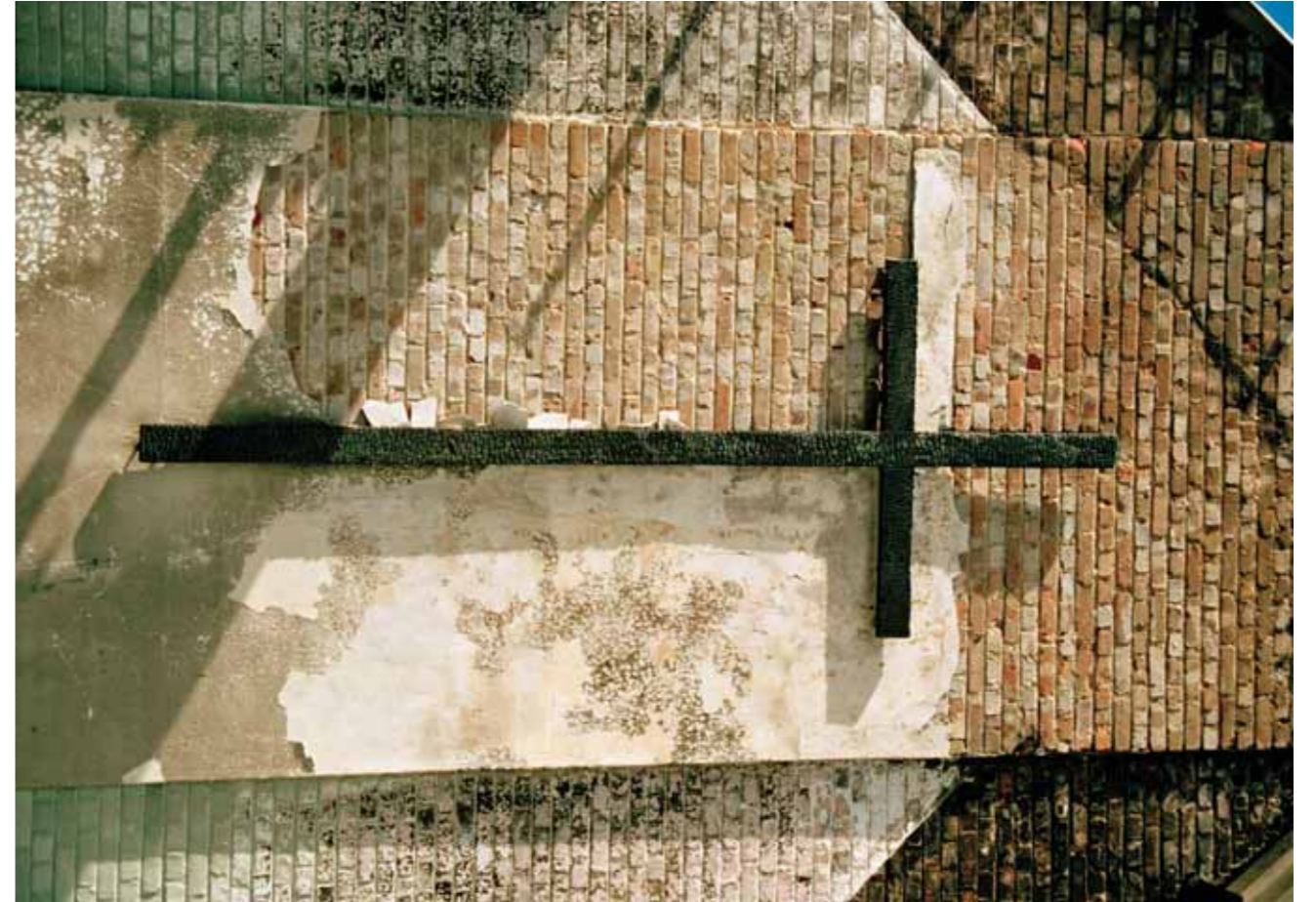
Church of Ascension – Installation Detail
2009
Photographic print
59.4 x 84 cm



Church of Ascension – Installation Detail
2009
Photographic print
59.4 x 84 cm



Church of Ascension – Installation Detail
2009
Photographic print
59.4 x 84 cm



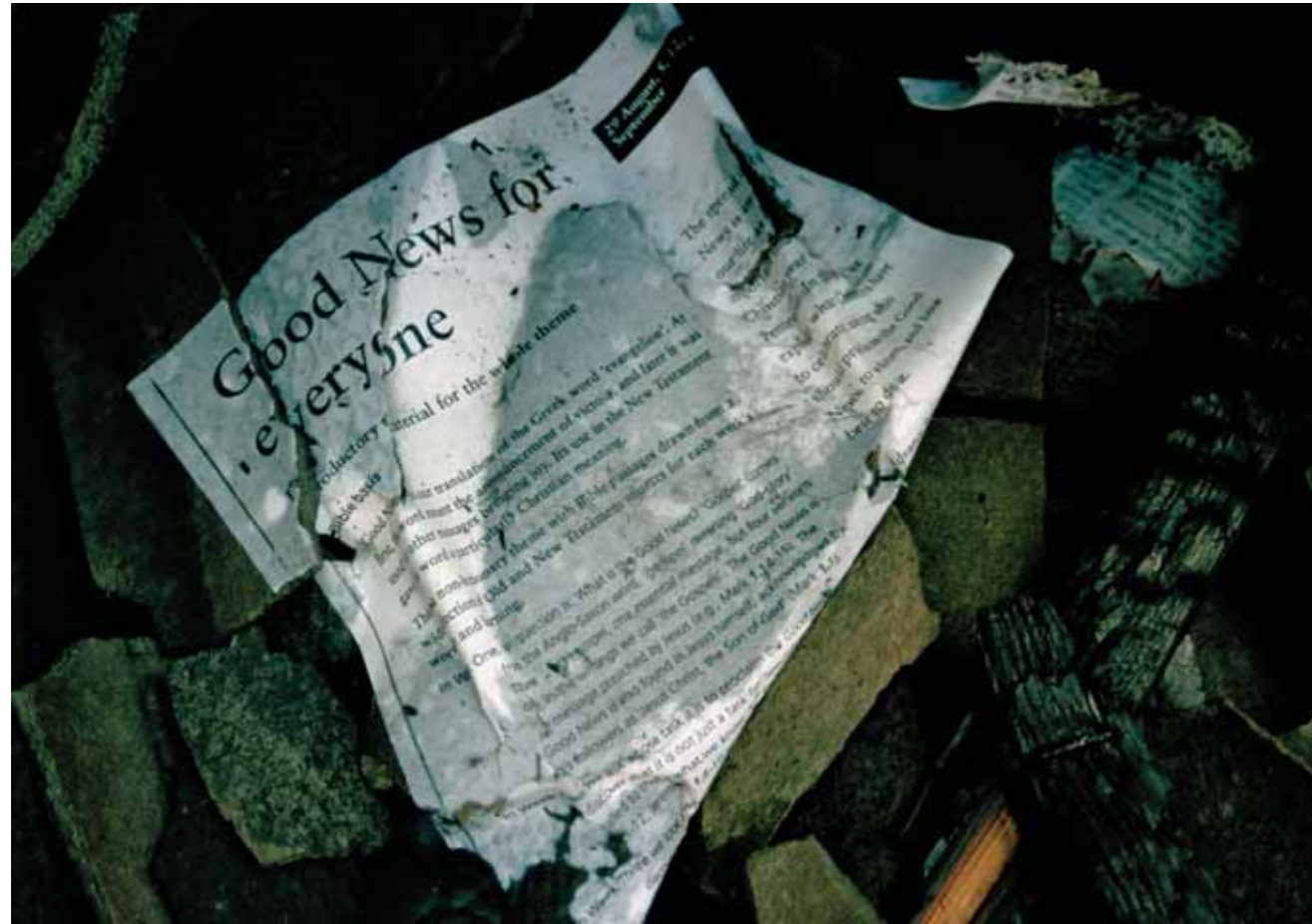
Church of Ascension – Installation Detail
2009
Photographic print
59.4 x 84 cm



Church of Ascension – Installation Detail
2009
Photographic print
59.4 x 84 cm



Church of Ascension – Installation Detail
2009
Photographic print
59.4 x 84 cm



Church of Ascension – Installation Detail
2009
Photographic print
59.4 x 84 cm



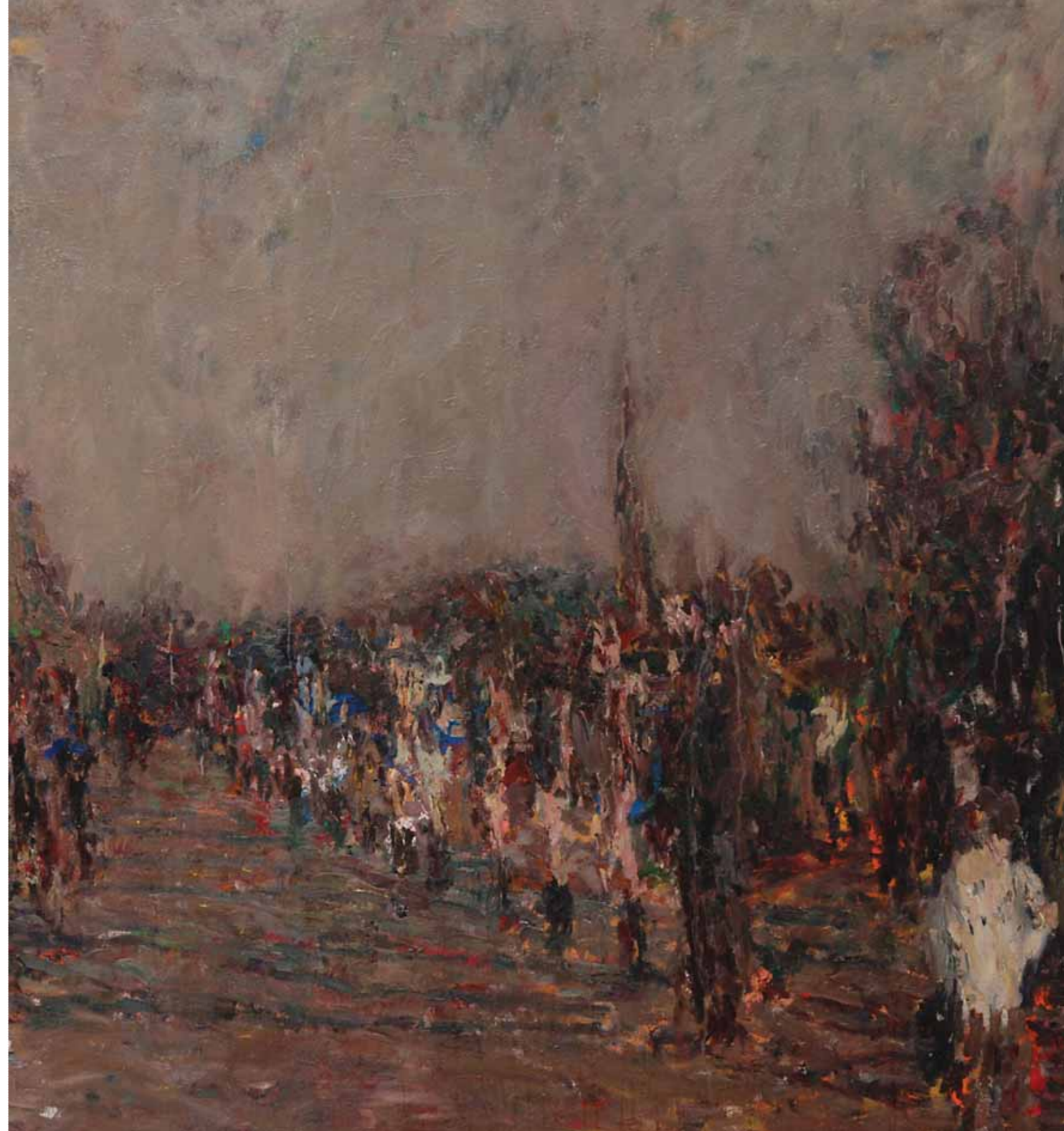
Church of Ascension – Installation Detail
2009
Photographic print
59.4 x 84 cm



PAINTINGS

2008 - 2009

'HULDEJAAR' SERIES





Die Rapportryers ry Tzaneen binne deur 'n Erewag van Voortrekkerseuns en -Dogters
2008
Oil on canvas
110 x 150 cm



Die Rapportryers; Begelei deur 'n Perdekommando oppad na Villiersdorp, nadat die Rapporte van Caledon Oorgeneem is
2009
Oil on canvas
110 x 149.5 cm



*Die Gamtoosvallei-Kommando vanaf die Graf van Wyle Kommandant Tjaart van der Walt word Buite
Humansdorp Ontmoet deur die Humansdorpse Kommando*
2009
Oil on canvas
94 x 155 cm

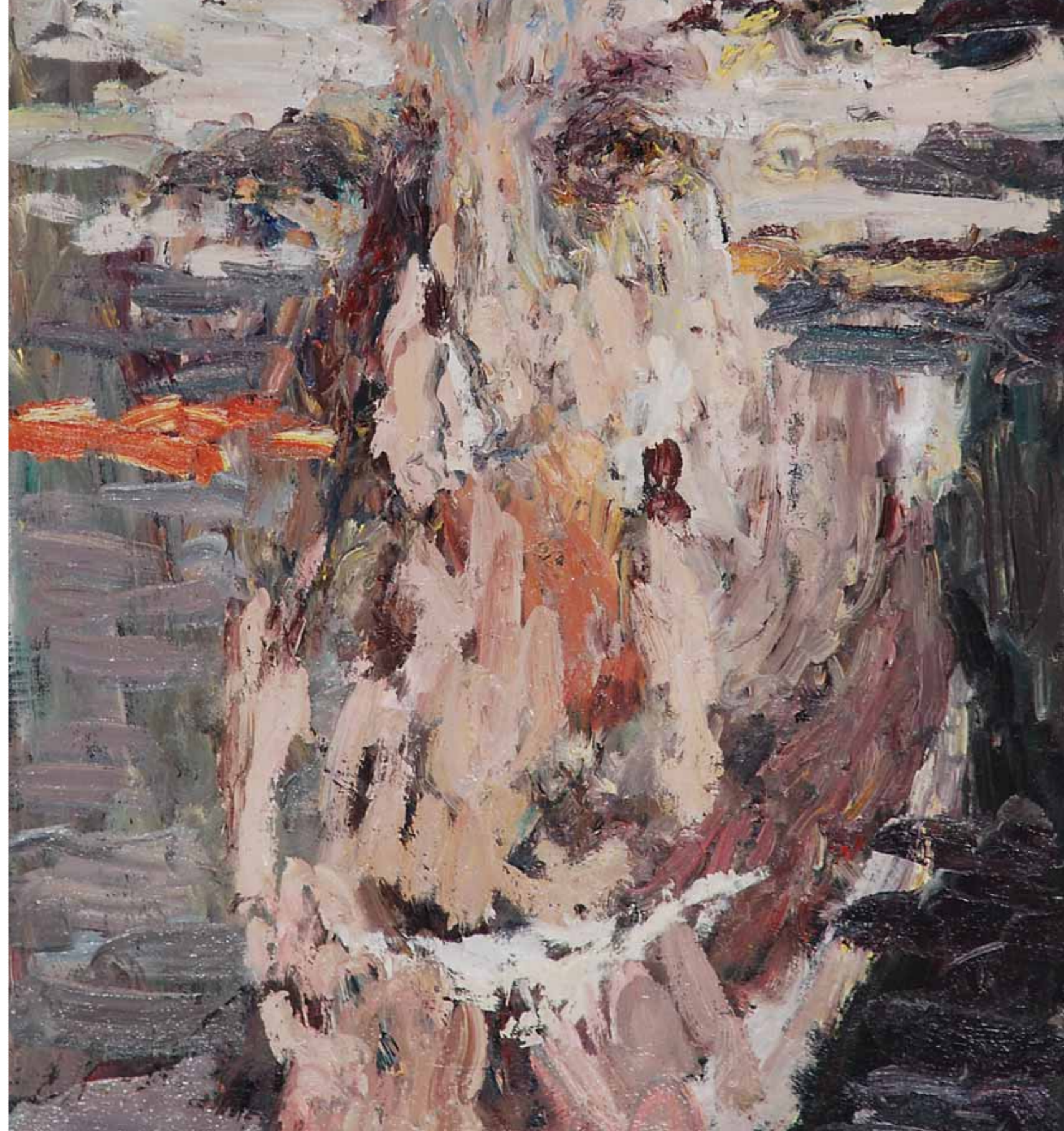


*Gedeelte van die Perdekommando by
die Rapportryers op Grunau*
2009
Oil on canvas
86 x 154 cm

Overleaf:
*Rapportryers op Roetes 2 en 6 Verlaat Bedford deur 'n
Voortrekker-Erewag op Weg na Glen Lynden (Bezuidenhouts-Grot)
en Slagtersnek Onderskeidelik*
2009, Oil on canvas, 170 x 270 cm



PRIME MINISTER SERIES & BEACH GIRL SERIES





Prime Minister (Botha)
2008
Oil on canvas
70 x 52 cm



Prime Minister (Verwoerd)
2008
Oil on canvas
70 x 52 cm



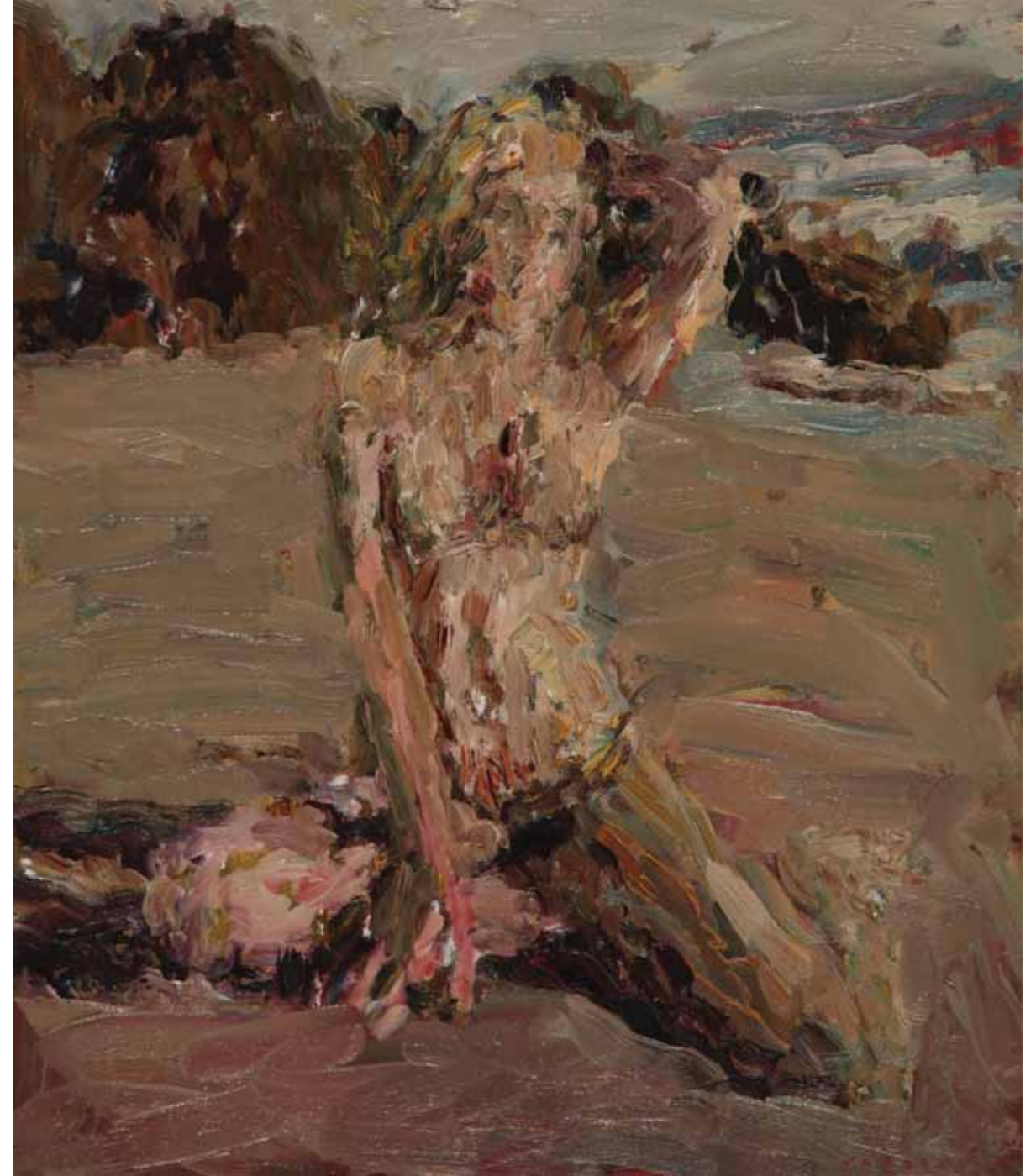
Prime Minister (Botha)
2009
Oil on canvas
74.5 x 63 cm



Prime Minister (Vorster)
2008
Oil on canvas
69 x 53 cm



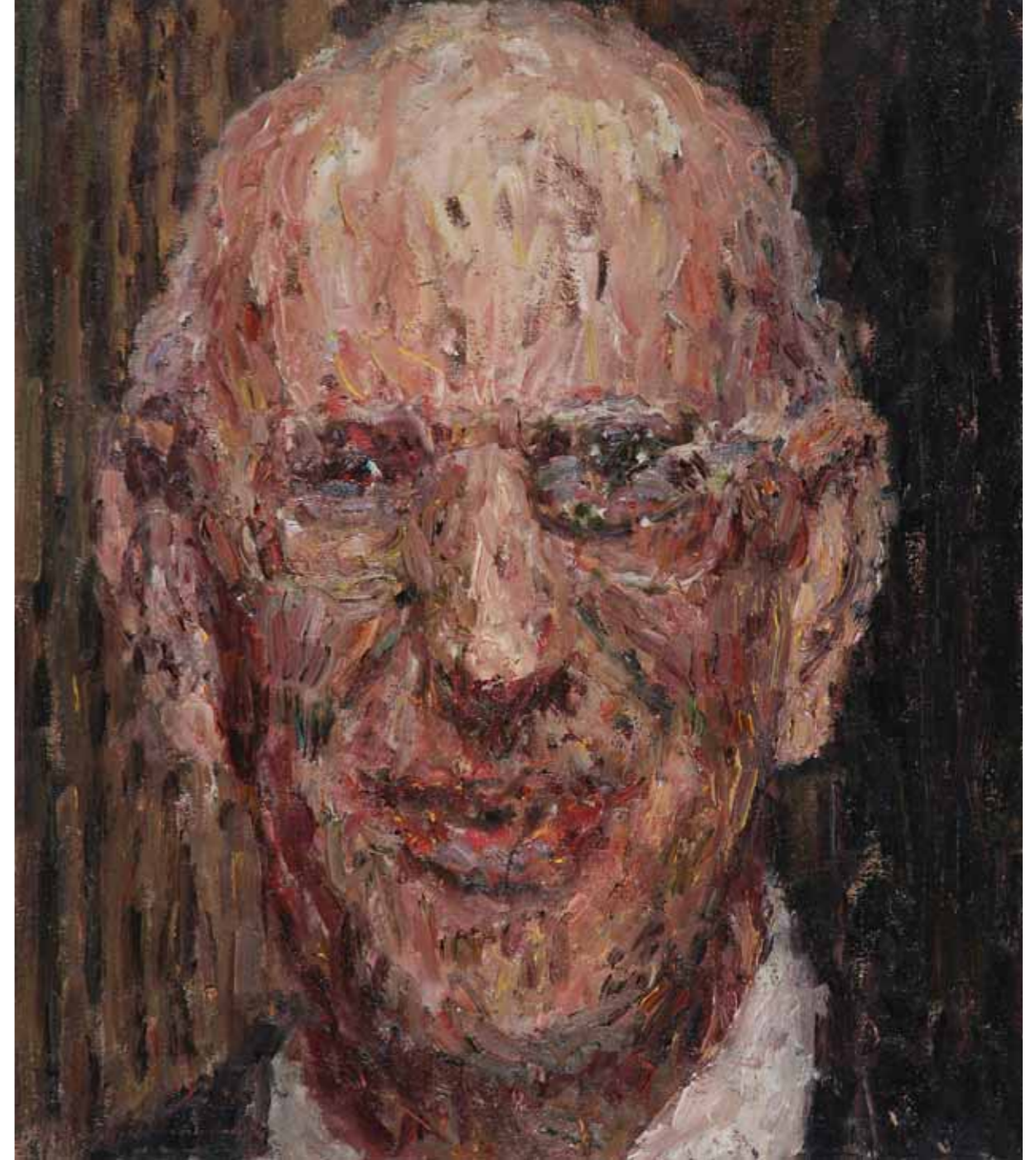
Prime Minister (Vorster)
2008
Oil on canvas
89.5 x 75 cm



Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
60 x 40 cm



Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
64 x 42 cm



Prime Minister (Botha)
2008
Oil on canvas
79.5 x 67 cm



Prime Minister (Vorster)
2009
Oil on canvas
99.5 x 77.5 cm



Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
90 x 66.5 cm



Prime Minister (Strijdom)
2009
Oil on canvas
95 x 75 cm



Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm



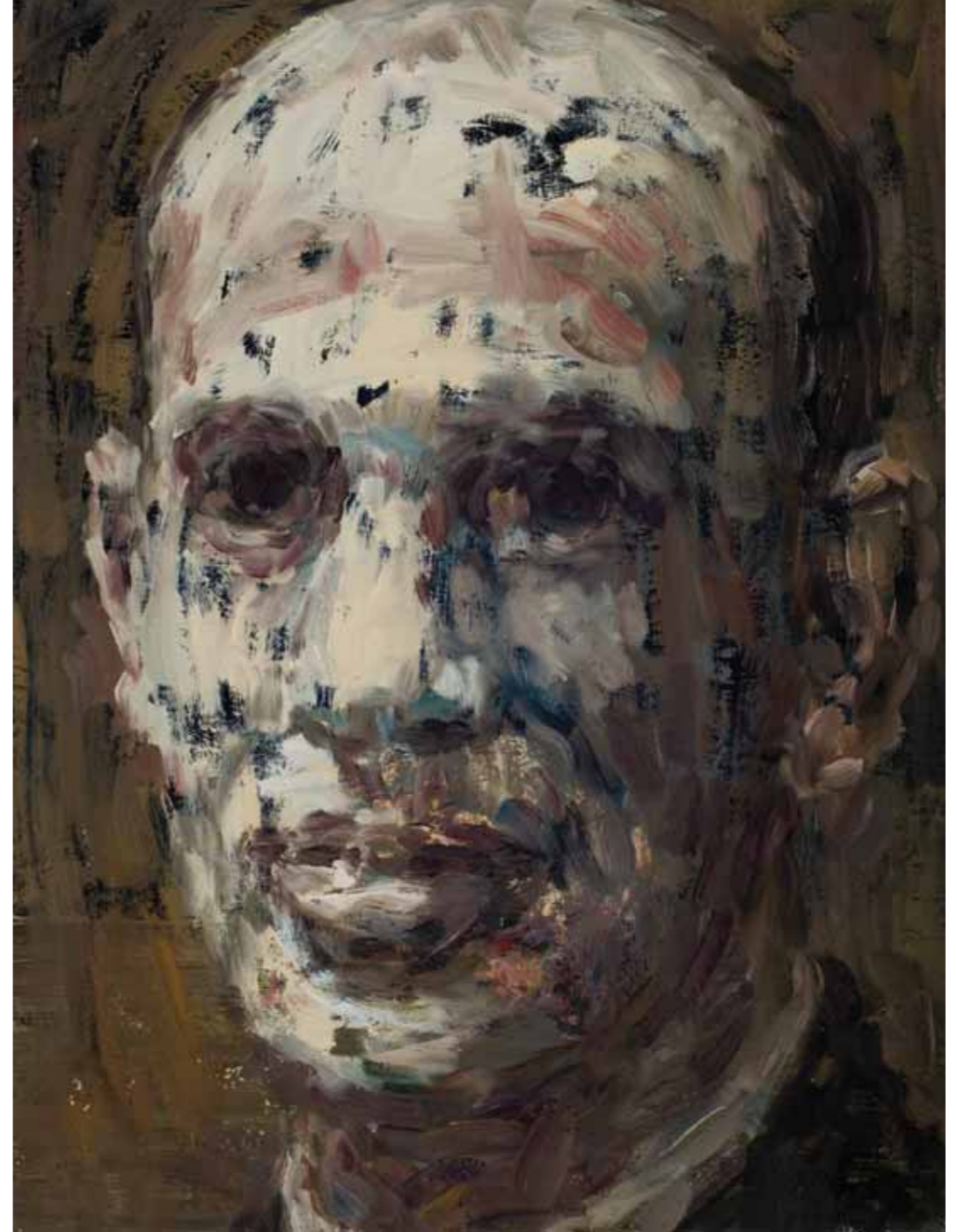
Prime Minister (Verwoerd)
2008
Oil on canvas
90 x 67 cm



Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
80 x 55 cm



Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
70 x 50 cm



Prime Minister (Botha)
2009
Oil on canvas
71 x 52 cm



Girl on Beach
2009
Oil on canvas
64 x 42 cm



Prime Minister (Strijdom)
2008
Oil on canvas
100 x 78 cm

BIOGRAPHY



Anton Karstel installing *108314N* at the Pretoria Art Museum. 2004

ANTON KARSTEL

b. Pretoria 1968, South Africa
BA(FA) University of Pretoria 1990
MA(FA) University of Pretoria 1995

EXHIBITIONS

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 **Kerkraad NG Gemeente, Lyttelton-Oos**, João Ferreira Fine Art, Cape Town
- 2004 **Wild Thing**, Franchise, Johannesburg
108314N, Pretoria Art Museum
- 2003 **Trail-blaze**, Association of Visual Art, Cape Town
- 2001 **Extract**, João Ferreira Fine Art, Cape Town
- 1998 **Wonderful South Africa**, Millennium Gallery, Pretoria
Pol-aesthetic, Civic Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1997 **Too Close for Comfort**, The Rembrandt Van Rijn Gallery, Johannesburg

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 **Once were Painters** (KKNK), Oudtshoorn
- 1997 **Graft** (Second Johannesburg Biennale), National Gallery, Cape Town
Purple and Green, Pretoria Art Museum
- 1996 **Earth and Everything**, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, UK
The Way West, Newtown Galleries, Johannesburg
- 1995 **Springtime in Chile**, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Santiago, Chile
Brown and Green, Pretoria Art Museum
Laager, Africus Biennale (fringe), Newtown, Johannesburg
- 1993 **Real Art**, ICA, Johannesburg

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Iziko South African National Gallery
University of Pretoria
Development Bank of Southern Africa
Gencor Collection
Pretoria Art museum
University of Pretoria
Tshwane University of Technology
Sasol
Vodacom

CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew Lamprecht

Andrew Lamprecht lectures in Theory and Discourse of Art at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town. He has a multi-faceted academic profile and respected as a lecturer and researcher. Andrew Lamprecht has an active interest in contemporary South African Art, as a writer, curator and occasionally as a practitioner.

Christi van der Westhuizen

Christi van der Westhuizen writes regular columns on political and social issues in the English and Afrikaans press. She is the author of *White Power & the Rise and Fall of the National Party* (2007) and serves as a board member of the African Arts Institute. Her career as journalist started at *Vrye Weekblad* and she holds an M. Phil. in Political Economy and South African Politics. She writes in her own capacity.

Thembinkosi Goniwe

Thembinkosi Goniwe is an art lecturer at the Art Department of Wits University. He received an MA(FA) from the University of Cape Town in 1999, where he also served as an assistant lecturer in drawing and printmaking. He is currently completing his doctoral studies in History of Art at Cornell University, New York. He has been included in, and has curated numerous national and international exhibitions.

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p.5
WARNING: Private Property, Do Not Enter
 1992
 Oil on canvas
 70 x 28.5 cm



p.35
Made In Hong Kong
 1991
 Oil on canvas
 44 x 55 cm



p.62
Self-Burial
 1995
 Photographic record



p.96
Adderley Street, Cape Town
 2000
 Oil on canvas
 100 x 130 cm



p.112
108414N
 Partial view of installation
 2004



p.124
Untitled
 2009
 Oil on canvas
 69.5 x 58 cm



p.138
Church Of Ascension
 Installation Detail
 2009
 Photographic print



p.150
Girl on Beach
 2009
 Oil on canvas
 70 x 50 cm



p.153
Rapportryers Op Roetes 2 En 6
 2009
 Oil on canvas
 170 x 270 cm



p.161
Untitled
 2009
 Oil on canvas
 80 x 55 cm

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