



ARIANA VAN HEERDEN

*THE SEA CALLS US HOME*

PRETORIA ART MUSEUM



# CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	6
WATER IS THE PATH TO THE VEILED REALM	7
LEAVING TERRA FIRMA	10
BEING AND BECOMING WATER	12
ECOCIDES AND TRACES OF GHOSTS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE	16
THE ANTHROPOS AT SEA	19
'REWILDING' WASTELANDS IN POST-NUCLEAR ENVIRONMENTS	22
THE ANTHROPOCENE IS ALREADY MANIFESTING IN SPACE	25
ARTIST BIOGRAPHY	28
EXHIBITION HISTORY	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY	31



## FOREWORD

Ariana van Heerden's artworks are motivated by two complementary interests: the constant mutations of the natural world, and transcendent forms of consciousness. Van Heerden's artworks consciously and at times unconsciously resonate with the teachings of New Materialism, notable in such concepts as transformation in becoming, vitality in vitalism, embodiment in situated knowledge, agency in intra-action, and nomadism compelled by longing and (un)belonging. Above all, van Heerden's paintings are a call to respond to the Anthropocene. Van Heerden's artworks of weltering polluted waters and atomic abandoned environments ardently advocates for a transition from egocentrism towards eco-centrism. It is a call for humans to situate themselves as one among many other species to enable ecosystems to maintain both diversity and integrity. This age of ecological crisis also emphasises the importance of producing what Serenella Iovino describes as "ethically charged" literature and visual art that would encourage the integration of care and sustainability in our cultural, social, and economic practices as we attempt to put the Earth back on its axis, in order to salvage the organic and inorganic matter that still remain on our acutely damaged planet.







# INTRODUCTION

Ariana van Heerden's oeuvre explores constantly transmuting and capricious elements in the natural world as metaphors for particular forms of consciousness. Her interest in mystical traditions of consciousness which are cognisant of the incorporeal and the transcendent, are likened to occurrences of transformation in the material world and liminal spaces of transition between binaries. Van Heerden introduces us to what she considers to be an "emerging third" that proposes another way of being and perceiving that radically dismantles existing and internalised forms of static identification, embodiment and thought. Homogeneity is merely repositioned elsewhere by reflection and in the place of monolithic thinking, van Heerden advocates for diffractive perceptions that "imply a self-accountable, critical, and responsible engagement with the world" (Geerts & van der Tuin, 2016:175).



The artist draws inspiration from artists who she believes "express the void as a coveted space of potential transcendence rather than mere horror." She is keenly drawn to the artworks of artists such as Kazimir Malevich, Yves Klein, Mark Rothko, James Turrell and Anish Kapoor. In their work, there is a subliminal depiction of veiled spaces believed to separate the material world that we experience as reality from innominate and obscure imaginary or astral realms. Van Heerden perceives this transition from materiality to that which is intangible to be suggestive of "a movement into unconsciousness."

Van Heerden's fascination with the unconscious are illustrated in her paintings of calm and wild waters, the most common symbol for the unconscious. Carl Jung (1969) writes about water as "the living symbol of the dark (or hidden) psyche, of the depths of the unconscious." Water allows the dark Other of the self to be experienced and it is therefore often associated with the Jungian notion of the 'shadow self'. As a sensual element that provides a weightless and meditative experience, our engagements with water are inevitably sensorial and immediate. Van Heerden's depictions of water, particularly the ocean and the sea, recall Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin's notions of 'the painterly'. In *The Pool of the Psyche*, Ingrid Stevens (2013) explains that "the painterly emphasizes the eye that seeks the changing appearance, movement, the "thing in its relations", the immaterial and immeasurable." Van Heerden's visceral works of water appear to seek escapism from one world and has the yearning for another world that is universal, devoid of definability and comprised of movement, colour, and pure light.



Van Heerden's paintings of wild waterscapes and landscapes begin with the real before she reconstructs towards abstraction and novel symbolic reality. Psychological dimensions are rooted in abstraction for it denotes withdrawal and transcendence, which is unlike memetic art or representations of reality that makes an attempt to come to terms with the nature of the world and one's situatedness within it. Through her method, van Heerden creates what Bachelard defines as 'the poetic image' that "does not duplicate reality or reconstruct the past but creates that which reverberates in the consciousness of both creator and viewer" (Stevens, 2013:218). Van Heerden's work offers environmental criticism of the Anthropocene on land, at sea and in space that is masked by a heightened aesthetic experience. Here this negation of realism, which echoes a New materialist critique of representationalism<sup>1</sup>, is intended to subdue the vehemence of her theme and urgent subject matter.

## WATER IS THE PATH TO THE VEILED REALM

The psyche is manifested in everything such as "dreams, myths, psychoses, and cultural artefacts through symbolic images" (Stevens, 2013:218). Psychic states are also revealed in elements of the natural world. Van Heerden particularly uses water, a material mirror in the natural world as a metaphor, and a symbol for manifestations of the imagination that reveal unconsciousness and the psyche. In Jungian philosophy, water is considered to be one of the most central archetypes, as water is often imbued with powerful conceptual dichotomies of life and death and therefore tends to feature prominently in "religious cosmologies as the substance of spiritual being" (Strang, 2008:2).



Water is also associated with the feminine, particularly the maternal force known as the Great Mother, which in many spiritual teachings refers to 'the feminine face of God' (Stevens, 220). Depictions of dark and deep waters are representative of the collective unconscious. Stevens (2013:218) explains that "the contents of the collective unconscious are known as archetypes (Jung 1969:4), which are archaic, primordial energies that have existed in the psyche since remote times." Violent and energising water tend to signify states of genesis and antecedence, or the transitioning space that exists between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead. Here, the 'surface' and the abyss are mediated by the transitoriness and liminality of water. Stevens (2013:228) writes that this is evident in "van Heerden's visual water fields [that] suggest an encounter between self and void, the potential dissolution of the self in nothingness".

---

<sup>1</sup> For a New Materialist understanding of ontology and epistemology, representation is critiqued on the basis of accepting that an object or a subject must engage in either imitation, resemblance, identification or being (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980:237).



Everything in the natural world is composed of juxtaposition. Where there is visibility, there is invisibility, what is internal occurs externally, and light is accompanied by darkness. Such antagonisms also occur in the natural world. This is and has been the natural order of things. The strength of water can be challenged by the elements of air and light. However, water is a peculiar element as it appears to lack a direct and obvious opposite – earth is able to be submerged under water, fire is able to be quelled by water. Instead, the opposites of water occur within itself – for the ocean is characteristically infinite, oscillates between states of transience and turbulence and is often resilient in the face of adversity.

Van Heerden particularly uses the paradoxical nature of ocean and sea water, the substance that is both form and formless as her theme in *The Dynamical: Surf* (2004). In *The Dynamical: Surf*, wholeness is explored through movements of chaos in transition areas of dynamical systems. Here, van Heerden uses the thematic concerns of the dynamical and chaos as a muse and metaphor for balance and wholeness. In this collection of work, the collision of light with variegated shades of blue captures the luminosity and reflexivity of the sea. However, some of these hues of blue are not what we would usually and immediately associate with the sea, for it seems otherworldly, as if there is a merging between our world and another. The aesthetic of the collection simultaneously engenders feelings of serenity and a troubling sense of indeterminacy.

In a New Materialist understanding, great surfaces of water such as the ocean and the sea not only reflect light, but they also refract and diffract<sup>2</sup> light. Whereas reflection is passive, for it merely gives ‘the same’ back, refraction changes direction in response to that which it meets and thus in contrast to reflection, entails an active and responsive engagement with that which it encounters. Geerts & van der Tuin (2016:175) write that for Karen Barad, reading and theorising diffractively is a practice in which the boundaries of different disciplines and theories are blurred, hereby provoking new thoughts and theories.



---

<sup>2</sup> Karen Barad (2007:74) explains that ‘diffraction’ concerns the manner in which “waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction.” Under the right conditions, all forms of waves exhibit diffraction. Waves, in this context, are understood as ‘disturbances’ “that propagate in a medium (like water) or as oscillating fields (like electromagnetic waves, the most familiar example being light) (Barad, 2007:76).





## LEAVING TERRA FIRMA

Van Heerden is an ardent traveller who has journeyed to Antarctica, and 30 regions in Africa, Europe, North America, South America, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. As such, she can be considered a nomad of sorts. Ken Lum (2005:140) writes that nomads usually operate at the threshold of binaries in society, and often traverse spaces in a process of constant negotiation and through the production of personal and collective transcultural identities that destabilize established orders, systems, and codifications. Increases in globalisation has made mobility an emblematic concept alongside the de-emphasis of issues relating to belonging and the desirability of attachment (Lum, 2005:140). Despite her extensive travels, van Heerden does not consider herself to be well-travelled, but she admits that her travels have had an inevitable influence on her work, affirming that “travel has the potential to lead to an openness to experience in general.”



Travel as a concept, and the act of travelling, has an interchangeable relationship with temporality and cultural spatiality. However, van Heerden’s travels are often devoid of the cultural axis often associated with travel, as she finds herself being profoundly drawn to vast uncharted and uncolonized spaces that have not been preyed upon by human activity. Van Heerden’s childhood memories and adult experiences are replete with sea voyages that have cultivated her affinity for the ocean and what she describes as a “distinct sensation to leave land.” To van Heerden, leaving land is a rite of passage in which one leaves the safe and mundane in exchange for stimulating and precarious escapades at sea.

Nomadism is often defined in conjunction with a refusal and rejection of domestication in favour of geographic, social, and cultural receptivity. Dorothy Figueira (2003:80) describes the nomad as appearing “in a state of spiritual becoming, as opposed to the material rootedness of the non-nomad.” This quality of spiritual fluidity possessed by the nomad derives from liberation, in particular from the strictures of ideology, the nation-state, and modern economies. In his psychological analysis of the nomad, sociologist Jean Duvignaud positions nomadic existence as being perpetually external of social codes and unbounded by fixed concepts (Figueira, 2003:80). “Intellectual nomadism”, a term coined by Ralph Waldo Emerson and later borrowed by poet Kenneth White, speaks about a state of openness and willingness to not only engage with, but to cherish diversity.





Perhaps the most renowned theory on nomadology is by French philosophers' Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari who, according to Figueira (2003:80), “present nomads as people existing out-side history, whose geography is to be found in smooth space (*espace lisse*), beyond the control of the rational and administrative machine.” Deleuze and Guattari highlight that nomadism does not invariably connote historical notions of migration, rather that nomads are able to “travel in place”, so that the concept also refers to a state of mind or a state of being in the world (Figueira, 2003:80). From this lens, nomadic life is an expression of deterritorialization, the basis of nomadic thought, and the persistent deconstruction of prescriptions (Figueira, 2003:80)

Nomadic theory was further developed by feminist New Materialist Rosi Braidotti, who advocates for a transition toward nomadic thought and identity. Western thought has been significantly influenced by the philosophy of Cartesian dualism<sup>3</sup> and its various forms, which is often oppositional to and critiqued by nomadic theory (Woods, 2017:302). Braidotti responds to Cartesian dualism through the notion of the “embodied subject” which coalesces the mind and the body as opposed to separating the two entities. From this perspective, the nomadic subject according to Braidotti, is rooted in their subjective experiences of, for example, geography, culture, gender, and sexuality. The embodied subject can therefore not stand in isolation from ‘lived experience’ often comprised of homogenous and heterogenous interactions with materiality. Braidotti’s term is one that renders agency to individuals, but in addition acknowledges the contextual rootedness of bodies and the self.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Cartesian dualism*, also known as ‘substance dualism’, is a theory invented by and famously defended by French philosopher René Descartes. The theory posits that the mind (or otherwise consciousness or the soul) are not only distinct but separate from the body.

## BEING AND BECOMING WATER

Nomadic theory also constitutes what Rosi Braidotti refers to as “lines of flight or *becoming*” (Woods, 2017:304). Both concepts entail chaotic and creative contact facilitated by the zigzag shaped lines of flight and alternative spaces of *becoming*. Hence, a significant amount of nomadic theory implies and is in relation to *becoming* (Woods, 2017:304). *Becoming* is conceptualised as the antithesis of ontology which concerns the nature of being. ‘Becoming’ is entangled with productive desire, with desire being a requisite for evolution. Hence, ‘becoming’, in contrast to the stasis of ontology, denotes constant transformation. This is echoed in the manifestations of metamorphosing materiality depicted through metaphorical horizons in van Heerden’s *Fluid Horizons* (2010).

When at sea, there is a synchronous movement between the horizon and the wanderer. Despite its vastness, the ocean’s ending seems to occur at the beginning of the horizon. The eternal meeting of sky and sea in *Fluid Horizons* is undone as the paintings efface the point of meeting to instead portray a convergence of air and water becoming one unbounded space.

In *Fluid Horizons*, we encounter energising and queerly coloured seas of grey, nude, blue, pink, orange and electric crimson made conspicuous by evocative, indeterminate shapes and fulminations of light. Disappearing into the stretch of the horizon or the deep dark depth of the ocean is reminiscent of the ritual of baptism, in which the old and the known are forsaken and instead exchanged for rebirth and mystery. Similar to oceans, horizons lack a beginning and an end and are therefore characteristically rhizomatic<sup>4</sup>. The rhizomatic nature of oceans and horizons often tend to subvert traditional conceptualisations of commencement and arrival, hereby rendering subjectivity to understandings of place and journeying. In *Fluid Horizons*, *becoming* is not communicated through transformation, as much as it communicates about an eternal boundlessness and continuity.



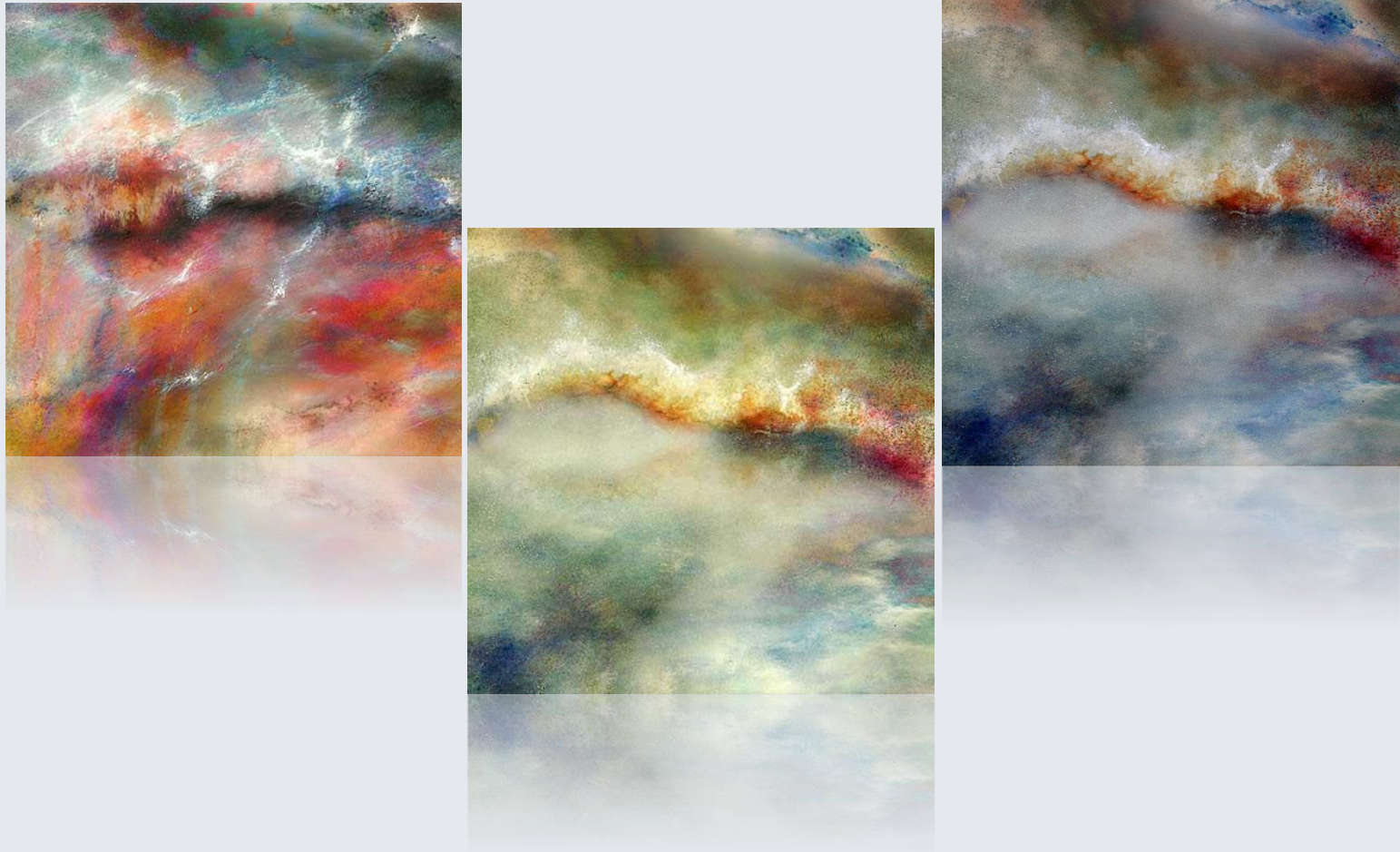
---

<sup>4</sup>The concept of the rhizome, developed by Deleuze and Guattari, stands in contrast to the tree-like structures of Western thought that are comprised of a central and hierarchical coordinating structure (Woods, 2017:303). The growth of the rhizome is characteristically horizontal and begins like many other phenomena, with a centre, but this centre gradually expands to such an extent that it results in disorientation and uncertainty about its former site of emergence. Woods (2017:303) writes that “in their very nature rhizomes demonstrate becoming.”









According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980:238), ‘becoming’ or ‘to become’ does not denote progression nor regression. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari (1980:238) posit that “becoming produces nothing other than itself”, in the sense that “becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself.” For Braidotti, ‘becoming’ concerns specific transformational experiences that constitute “the general notion of ‘becoming-nomadic’”, such as “‘becoming-woman’, ‘becoming-machine’ and ‘becoming-insect’” (Woods, 2017:302). Woods (2017:302) explains that the renegotiation of practice and the nature of thought by embodied subjects at both the centre and the margins is dependent on these processes of multiple becomings. This catalogue, however, is specifically interested in ‘becoming-insect’, which is largely in relation to ‘becoming-machine’<sup>5</sup>. In context with Braidotti’s concept of *Zoë*<sup>6</sup>, ‘becoming-insect’ acknowledges that there is a vitality that exists in the more-than human world and all infrahuman life forms. Therefore, the term intends to bring humans closer to the more-than-human world and to engender a challenge to simplistic anthropocentrism by elucidating that all living organisms in the biosphere, or rather *zoësphere*, are mutually dependent and profoundly interconnected.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Becoming-machine* concerns humans and the development of technology. In particular, it considers ‘machines’ to be metaphors for human activity and looks at the increasing reliance on technology, and the place of humans in a world of rapid technological advancement.

<sup>6</sup> The term *Zoë* is a term coined by Rosi Braidotti and it refers to non-human or ‘infrahuman’ life. The term stands in contrast to the term *bios*, which concerns the life of humankind. Moreover, insects best exemplify *Zoë* as they are representative of that which is wild, and indifferent to human presence.

New materialism necessitates engagements with the ocean and its aquatic tellurian inhabitants that are both agential and material. For van Heerden, the duality of her subject matter compels her to *become* water as she stands in awe of the ocean. To van Heerden, the self is structurally hybrid and transitioning, which explains her aversion to attributing confining definitions to herself. This aversion facilitates van Heerden to seamlessly ‘become water’ and transition toward a state of watery embodiment as she correlates her identity with the ocean’s fluidity. An understanding of any phenomenon requires a comprehensive contextual immersion, and in becoming water, van Heerden not only loses herself but surrenders to the element of water. In situating herself metaphorically and at times literally in close proximity to her subject matter, van Heerden is able to avoid its trivialisation<sup>7</sup>. For the audience, space is destabilised by the tension between proximity and distance, which in addition to the liminality of the work, induces feelings of imbalance quite synonymous with being in real water. Water requires any organism whose natural habit is not water, to surrender and renounce all forms of static and stable ways of being in favour of fluidity. Through her paintings of water, van Heerden brings the fluid and wet ontology of the ocean into the gallery space and compels us to concede to a materiality that is in motion, but also to regard the ocean and water with great reverence as the element and space in which our own insignificance is significantly foregrounded.



---

<sup>7</sup> Van Heerden’s work thus departs from a situated position, and in doing so, she reflects Donna Haraway’s term of *situated knowledge*<sup>7</sup>. *Situated knowledge* refers to knowledge that emerges from your living body as an embodied being. Here detachment becomes an illusion, and knowledge can only be obtained subjectively, for living beings are situated in their bodies which are situated in spatial and temporal contexts. Karen Barad (2007:185) captures this sublimely in her assertion that “we don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming.” *Situated knowledge* also recognises that ontology and epistemology are mutually implicated and cannot be conceived in isolation from one another. Barad (2007:185) highlights that this separation of being and practices of knowledge not only reverberates but perpetuates metaphysical assumptions that dualisms are inherently distinct.



## **ECOCIDES AND TRACES OF GHOSTS IN THE ANTHROPOCENE**

Van Heerden's work, however, does not only engage with transcendent forms of consciousness, but also entails a direct confrontation with the crisis of our current material world. To van Heerden, Anthropocentrism and the Anthropocene are neither constructs nor theories but matters of fact and she staunchly believes that humans are on the precipice of accountability with regard to the manner in which "all matter becomes an extension of human activity and actions." As a species, humans have exited the Holocene to initiate and settle with great distress into the radically unstable era of the Anthropocene<sup>8</sup>. This current era is characterised by an acute exploitation and desecration of the more-than-human world that has resulted in fundamental changes to the Earth's biospheric and geospheric systems.

Anthropogenic change has increasingly begun to conjure senses of loss, grief, and trepidation for uncertain earthbound futures as we advance toward an imminent and precipitating multispecies extinction of perceived Others - those non-human living beings that are embodied differently. Many scientists have argued that by the end of the twenty-first century, a majority of all species might be lost. Ania Krajewska (2016:6) writes that "the anthropocentric perspective is built upon [the] scaffolding of victims." Inequality and the distribution of power in the world becomes visible as the product of hierarchical classifications and the unequal value that we have assigned to human and more-than-human lives, bodies, and environments.

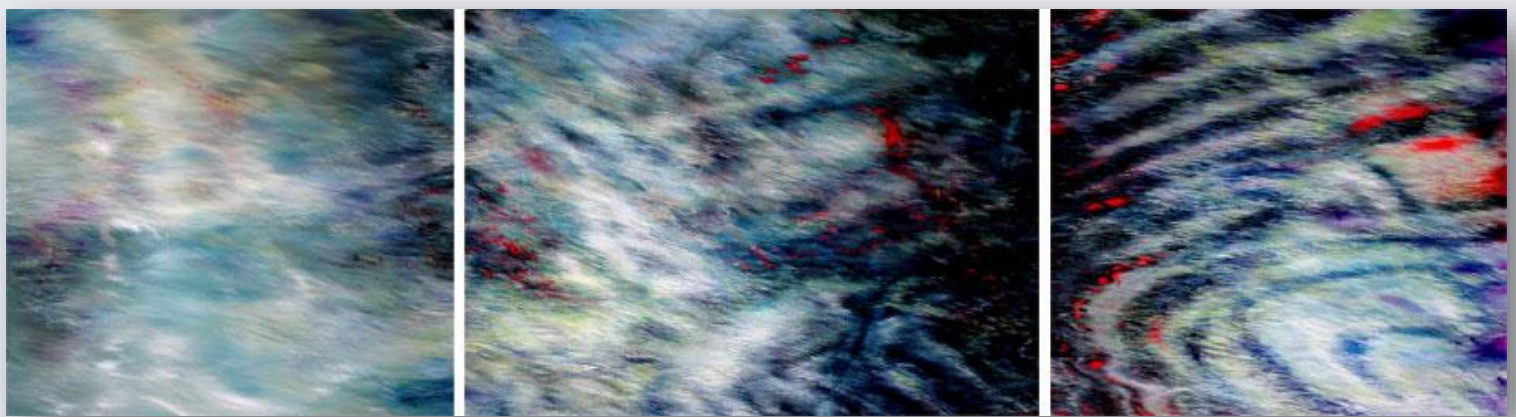
Elaine Gan, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, and Nils Bubandt (2017:1) state that "the winds of the Anthropocene carry ghosts—the vestiges and signs of past ways of life still charged in the present." It is especially within the ecologies that have been made and unmade by the histories embedded in the more-than-human world that these ghosts reside. 'Ghosts' are increasingly beginning to take the place of discovered and undiscovered life-enhancing entanglements (and their assemblages) that have disappeared from the Earth's landscapes and seascapes. Similarly to water that is often perceived as being symbolic of the unconscious, the strange uncanniness of ghosts "disturb the proper separation between life and death" (Helene Cixous in Gan et al, 2017:9), and in the process, end up marking unseen veiled spaces and suggest that life and death constitute a continuum.

---

<sup>8</sup> The 'Anthropocene' is a term coined in the early 1980s by Eugene Stoermer and was popularised two decades later by Paul Crutzen (Barla, 2018:1). The term highlights the alterations that have been made to the planet's atmospheric composition as a result of anthropogenic processes. The Anthropocene thus refers to the Earth's current geological epoch in which there is an excess of human presence and activity.



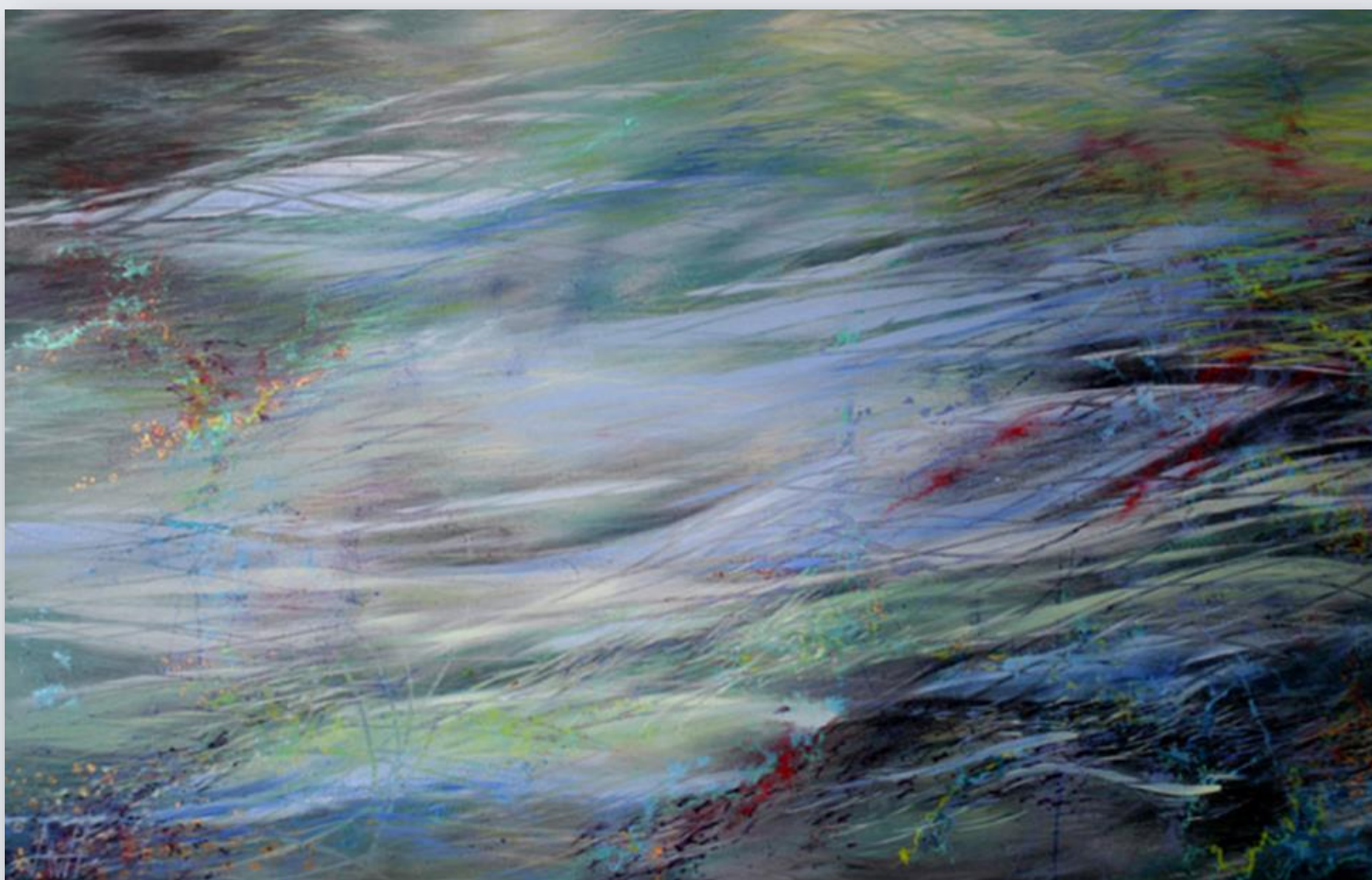
As humans, we have trod ignorantly through our many millennia on Earth, refusing to acknowledge (even in the present), the sanguinary seas and parching lands being haunted by our past and present ways of living. This is echoed in *Blood on the Tides*, which precisely explores such oceanic hauntings. What formerly existed is being forgotten as seas are being drained of marine life forms and oxygen and as landscapes are being ruined and reshaped in accordance with human greed. These ghostly bodies of the Anthropocene evoke the Derridean term ‘hauntology’ which considers the past as a spectre of the present. The term draws on the etymology of the word ‘haunt’ which refers to a constant revisiting of the past or that which is living. Karen Barad (2007:261) captures the substance of the term in her assertion that “the world ‘holds’ the memory of all traces....”



**Above:** *Blood on the Tides*. Oil on canvas, (500cm × 120cm).

In *The Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, Gan et al (2017:4) assert that modernist futures have produced the Anthropocene and that “the extinction event currently taking shape on the horizon of our shared future is the product of modern industry.” These include the advent of human developments such as the industrial revolution, colonialism, globalisation, and capitalism. Jason Moore (2016) reconfigures the Anthropocene through the concept of the ‘Capitalocene’. In *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, it can be deduced that Moore believes that the current ecological crisis is the fault of capital rather than technology or the human species as a collective. Moore (2016:6) explains that “the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology.” The problem with Moore’s *Capitalocene* is that it thwarts us humans from taking responsibility for the seeds that we have sown – for our hazardous human harvests. Capital and the system of capitalism is an invention of the modern West, now globalised, that has undoubtedly imposed relentless patterns of violence on humans and the non-human world.

Van Heerden thus stresses that the separation of the biological from the social results in a negation of accountability that humans can no longer afford, as we dangerously approach the possibility of living or rather suffering on an inhabitable planet that we may be forced to instantaneously flee from. *Dystopian Trailer #1* explores this appalling prospect through metallic paint that enshrouds realist aspects of the Earth's seas and oceans to elucidate the extent to which anthropogenic change is titling life on Earth that all species are familiar with, away from nature's resplendence and ability for regeneration.

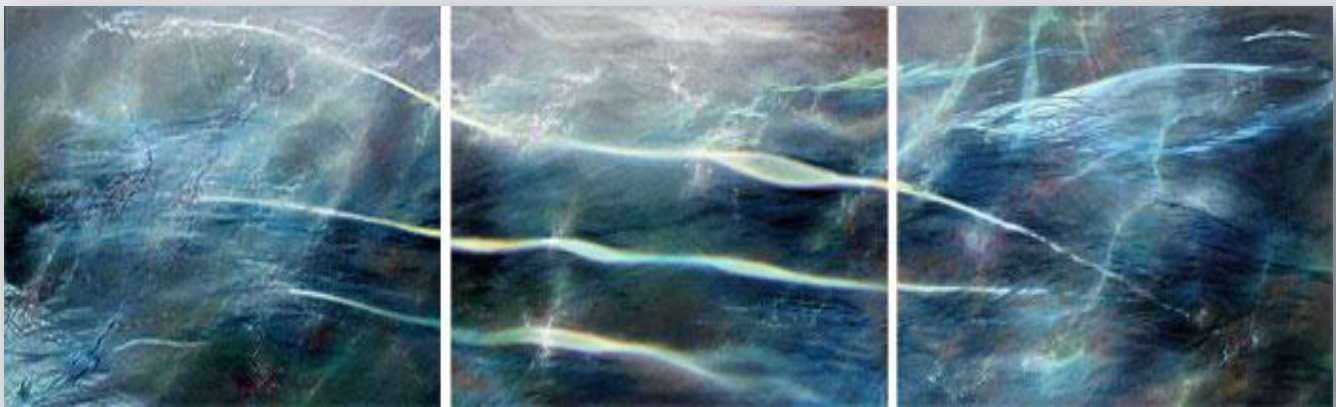


**Above:** *Dystopian trailer #1*. Oil on canvas, (1200 x 1500mm).

## THE ANTHROPOS AT SEA

The control of water resources and watery issues directly intersects with power and agency to reveal complex webs of social, political, and economic relations (Strang, 2008:2). Strang (2008:1) asserts that “water is the lifeblood of processes of production and of human abilities to acquire agency and to act upon the ‘natural’ world.” Similarly, van Heerden proposes that water can be conceived as “a barometer of how the human race is doing.” The Earth’s oceans are continuously being tested beyond their capacity for endurance, and van Heerden laments that “the ocean has become the quintessential metaphor for the way that mankind is steering the Earth into an irreversible void.” Jimmy Carter likened democracy to life, but van Heerden stresses that water “is life itself.” Van Heerden critiques our human attempts to engineer a better world through concepts such as democracy, positing that the ocean is “the most democratic vessel of and for human dumping.”

**Below:** ( $H_2O + Na+Cl-SO_4-Mg_2+Ca_2+K-HCO_3-$  et cetera). Oil on canvas, (84cm × 355cm).



The ocean is the most poignant reflection of the Anthropocene, and this is evident in global warming, ocean acidification, decaying coral reefs, rapidly declining marine species, oceanic dead zones, and the effects of overfishing, bycatch<sup>9</sup>, plastics and microplastics on both the ocean and various marine species. Anthropogenic factors such as pollution and warming oceans result in the depletion of sufficient oxygen levels required to support marine life. This subsequently results in the creation of hypoxic areas that upset the delicate balance of marine ecosystems. Currently, more than 400 dead zones have been identified.

---

<sup>9</sup> The practices of releasing or discarding fish have become what Lauren Drakopoulos (2020:103) describes as “the behemoth of bycatch.” Bycatch is one amongst many other significant issues constituting the crisis of the global fisheries system. Drakopoulos (2020:103) explains that the position of bycatch constantly shifts in the global capitalist system through the possibilities of being sold as a secondary product or traded on the quota market as a result of fishing quotas that allocate rights to catch bycatch. Studying bycatch as a phenomenon not only allows us to question the manner in which the human production of knowledge is effected by processes of research, but also captures the saturated entanglement of human and non-human actors, namely, fish, fishers, and fishing gear in their material practices of fishing and processes of becoming (Drakopoulos, 2020:103).



Van Heerden's *Dead Zones Series* (2019-2021) diverge from her earlier artworks. Whereas her earlier ocean series intended to elucidate ambiguities surrounding the conscious and unconscious, the visible and the invisible, sleep and wakefulness, this body of work generates a spellbinding aesthetic experience by shifting away from the pragmatics of ontology toward the symbolic in which the object is suggested. In its intentions to conceal more so than to reveal, the ethereal seduction of *Dead Zones* beguiles us to confront the unsettling reality of the Anthropocene and our rapid progression toward a dystopian world. Zones of death are brought to life through rhizomatic bursts of ensnaring colour to create what can be described as the 'beauty in the terrible'. The paintings allow for a sublime experience, in which dark futures and the vile are made alluring as we contemplate the apocalyptic from spaces and positions of refuge. The concealed theme in van Heerden's *Dead Zones Series* requires us to read into "the thick of things", and it is through the practice of reading that we participate in the differential becoming of the world.

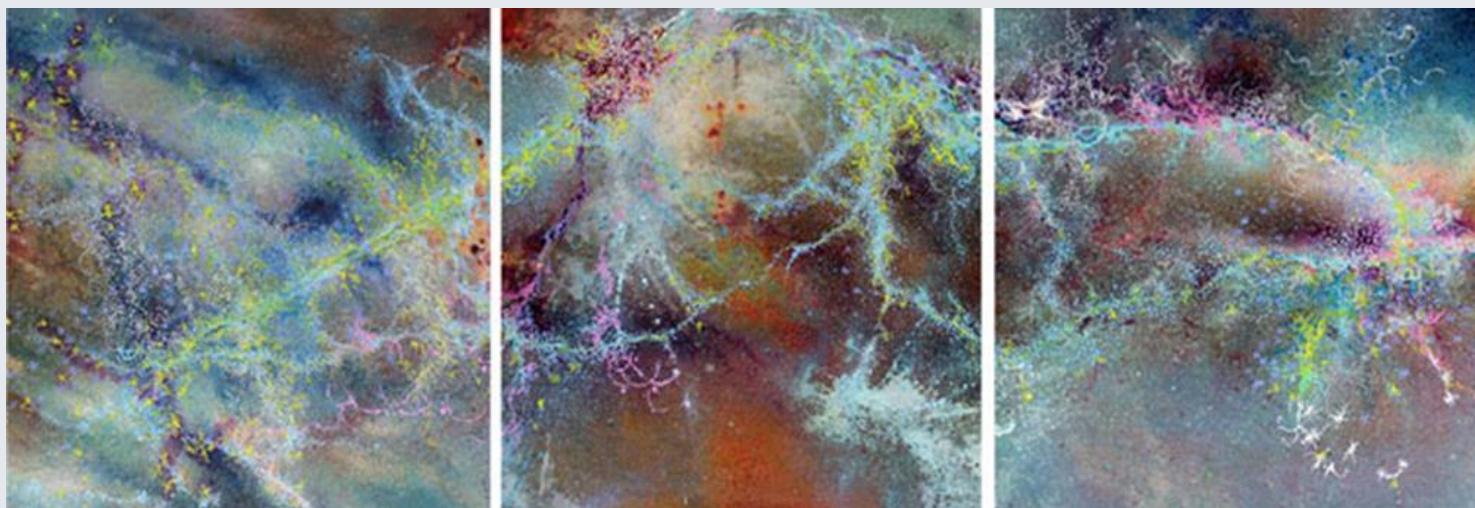


The series also echoes the writing of W. J. T. Mitchell who encourages us to look attentively at "agency, motivation, autonomy, aura, fecundity, or other symptoms that make pictures into 'vital signs'" (Iovino, 2015:71). Mitchell states that these signs do not merely imply "signs for living things but signs as living things" and moves to argue that visual images and materiality have an intrinsic vitality. Mitchell (2005:47) in Iovino (2015:71) explains that the interpretation of vitality centres around the shared effectivity of the visual and human beings in which both agents engage in and generate a particular visual reciprocity, to reveal that viewers are actively constitutive of social reality as opposed to merely being its by-product. These statements and explanations made by W.J.T. Mitchell also resonate with material ecocriticism, specifically notions regarding the textuality of matter and 'narrative agency' that is used to describe the 'telling' nature of agency and the agency of nature<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> Iovino (2015:72) reminds us that within the context of New Materialism, 'nature' is both physical and metaphysical, with the metaphysical implying the "eloquent and signifying agency" of matter, which is the very condition of 'nature'.

Material ecocriticism can briefly be defined as the study of stories embedded in materiality and material forms. Here, material forms produce configurations of meanings and discourses in their *intra-actions*<sup>11</sup> with humans and each other with the purpose of facilitating enhanced interpretation (Iovino, 2015:71). The material-ecocritical approach argues against those claims which posit that matter is passive and inert, but instead perceives matter as “a site of vibrantly ‘vital’ processes where meanings coalesce with material dynamics” (Iovino, 2015:70). Accordingly, the lively and agentic nature of matter implies that both material bodies and material formations are able to tell and make visible those stories that are cloaked by traditional understandings of matter, interaction, and agency. The intention here according to Jane Bennet<sup>12</sup>, is to accord matter a voice. In the *Dead Zones Series* (2019-2021), van Heerden presents us with a formidable and rather daunting form of vibrant storied matter telling of the synergy between nature’s stories of the Anthropocene and human creativity by using art as the medium through which to sound an urgent call to humanity to prevent an impending environmental catastrophe.



**Above:** *Dead zone #2*. Mixed media on canvas, (47.5 x 142.5cm).

Co-existence, co-dependency, extinction, and survival are evolutionary stories told by all living beings. Human beings are such species whose stories of evolution are being told through codes, be they narrative, linguistic, or expressive, that have enabled us to ascribe eloquence to subjective and universal experiences. However, Iovino (2015:71) cautions against anthropomorphising nature and reminds us that we are only using a metaphor when we speak of nature’s “expressiveness”. A reconciliation between anthropomorphism and the narratives of nature can only occur through the transcendence of metaphors. Iovino (2015:71) asserts that this is done through the path of New Materialism that asks us to consider “material agency as a form of expressiveness which emerges in the interchanges between corporeal beings and their social and natural environments.”

---

<sup>11</sup> ‘Intra-action’ is a Baradian neologism that emerges within Karen Barad’s theory of agential realism. *Intra-action* envisions matter as an actor or an agent and it is thus similarly to vitalism, cynical about scientific claims regarding the inertia or passivity of matter (Haraway, 1988:592). Agency within the context of intra-action, is understood as a dynamism of forces that work inseparably and engage in constant processes of diffraction and exchange, instead of an attribute inherently and solely occurring in humans (Barad, 2007:141).

<sup>12</sup> Jane Bennet is one of the prominent theorists of “*vibrant materialism*”.



## **‘REWILDING’ WASTELANDS IN POST-NUCLEAR ENVIRONMENTS**

In her article titled *Post-nuclear Environments and Non-anthropocentric Art*, van Heerden (2020:230) positions “post-nuclear environments as a rather extreme example of a future emerging from a particular past.” Each nuclear event is idiosyncratic, and therefore the damage that a particular environment experiences is called “radioecological damage” (Van Heerden, 2020:234). The most notorious nuclear events occurred in Chernobyl situated in Belarus and the Ukraine in April 1986 and in the Japanese city of Fukushima in March 2011. Dissimilar to the events that transpired in Chernobyl, the nuclear accident in Fukushima is described as a ‘triple disaster’, as it was catalysed by a magnitude 9 earthquake and a subsequent tsunami. However, the nuclear accidents in both these regions resulted in the creation of infamous high-radiation environments. High levels of radiation are regarded to be inconducive to the sustenance of biological life, and humans were consequently forced to evacuate with haste. Human access to post-nuclear hotspots and its surrounding areas were prohibited and these disaster areas have since been referred to as “restricted zones” (Van Heerden, 2020: 232). For scientists and artists alike, these post-nuclear restricted environments have provided novel opportunities to observe the effects of radioactivity on unmarred infrastructure and the genetics of animals that have been exposed to multigenerational and debatable ‘relatively low doses’ of ionizing radiation (Van Heerden, 2020:232).



Plants and animal species in these restricted zones were also granted an opportunity to live in an environment undisturbed by the omnipresence of human interference. Consequently, these abandoned environments facilitated a proliferation in wildlife populations. Van Heerden (2020: 232) hastens to explain that this does not necessarily imply that wildlife in these environments “are better off”, but it rather elucidates that human absence enables the independent reorganisation of the natural world<sup>13</sup>. The term “rewilding” is used to refer to an ecosystem’s positive responses to a human or natural process of post-restoration. Restricted zones that have self-repaired have been referred to as ‘novel ecosystems’, and/or ‘emerging ecosystems’, with the former term referring to the preservation of new pristine ecological conditions and the latter referring to certain biomes that are comprised of an unprecedented combination of species occurring in relative abundance. These ecosystems are described as being ‘resilient environments’ following liberation from anthropogenic pressures (Van Heerden, 2020:233). Van Heerden (2020:233) describes the restricted zones in Fukushima and Chernobyl as “altered environments” as the ecosystems within these environments have “gone wild’, ‘gone rogue’, ‘rewilded’” - undergone alteration through processes of mutation and transformation.



---

<sup>13</sup> These environments that have managed to collectively re-organise themselves can be regarded as examples of Donna Haraway’s concept of *sympoiesis*. Haraway (2016: 58) explains that *sympoiesis* speaks about how “nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing”. Thus the term implies an act of “making-with”.



Residual occurrences of doomed ecological wastelands such as those in Fukushima and Chernobyl are represented in van Heerden's *'Unbroken Wilderness'* (2019). Through an infusion of magic realism and colours reminiscent of the surrealism art movement, van Heerden prompts us to apprehend the dangers of 'playing God', evident in the realities of accidental nuclear events. *Unbroken Wilderness* coaxes us to envision post-nuclear restricted zones that have endured radioecological damage as altered and rewilding environments in which multiple plant and animal species are able to live harmoniously amidst spaces of pernicious and natural radioactivity and human absence.



The vivid colours of this collection of work also generates in the viewer, the feeling of witnessing a post-apocalyptic world or perhaps even an era before the creation of the human species. This is precisely what post-nuclear environments are - spaces of past and future, action, and consequence. Above all, these environments are testaments of the resilience and kindness of the natural world, that continues to provide the human species with sources of sustenance and beauty, despite our rampant destruction and lack of gratitude. Post-nuclear environments remind us about the possibility of rebirth under the proper conditions, quite similar to the myths of the flaming phoenix that either decays and decomposes or dies through fire, only to rise from the ashes anew, stronger, and more pulchritudinous than before.





## THE ANTHROPOCENE IS ALREADY MANIFESTING IN SPACE

In *The Dust Will Not Settle on Selene* (2019), a piece that is reflective of her interest in practical astronomy (which stems from her habits of solitariness), van Heerden moves beyond the Anthropocene on Earth, to the Anthropocene in space. The piece is a moment in which van Heerden speaks to Selene, known as the Greek Goddess of the Moon, as a celestial body of matter personified. Van Heerden states that she implores Selene not to trust the human species for they will do to her what they have done to Gaia (Earth). Humans have already begun to befoul extra-terrestrial space, evident in the alarming amounts of space debris, the presence of satellites and hawkish missions to the moon<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, *The Dust Will Not Settle on Selene* is also a foreshadow of enigmatic yet ominous post-human futures in space and a transhumanist quest for the colonisation of space. The piece then becomes a poetic and symbolic commentary on what van Heerden believes to be the human incapability “to do anything decently”. Although the title may suggest elements of mythology, *The Dust Will Not Settle on Selene* more so draws on ideas concerning manifestations of fractures within the human psyche. This is often evident in myths and mythology that represent metaphors for binaries, particularly the conscious and unconscious, which are core themes in van Heerden’s work.

*The Dust Will Not Settle on Selene* was significantly influenced by the Apollo Eleven lunar landing of 1969. The event left an imprint on a then younger van Heerden, as it not only granted her the opportunity to view Earth from the outside, but also generated a poignant realisation about what she asserts to be “our life-sustaining blue planet”. In this, van Heerden proposes that all human knowledge of space cannot create a façade large enough to enshroud the ubiquitous ecological calamity occurring on Earth that we, the human species, are responsible for.



When asked whether or not she believes that a co-existence is possible between humans and the more-than human world, van Heerden responded with an answer that many have already provided, that she remains cautiously optimistic and hopeful about the futurity and survival of planet Earth and the survival of all species on Earth.

---

<sup>14</sup> Space exploration has culminated the possibility for humanity to establish space colonies and settlements in space in the future, in addition to possible encounters between humans and intelligent extra-terrestrial life and “alien” species (Groff, 2010:161). Linda Groff (2010:154) writes that “the outer space revolution (including human exploration, industrialisation, and settlement in space) would extend our human habitat from an ‘Earth-only’ to an extended ‘Earth–space environment’”. Stephen Hawking made an argument that in the event that the human species causes the extinction of all planetary life, the continuation of the human species would be dependent on the relocation to space.





**Above:** *The Dust Will Not Settle on Selene*. Mixed media on canvas, in six parts, (93cm ×139cm).





## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY



Ariana van Heerden was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1965 in Zimbabwe. Van Heerden travelled throughout her life and lived in Angola and South Africa during her childhood and adult life. Van Heerden's art medium consists of mixed media, oil on canvas, as well as chalk pastels and charcoal on paper. Her works are exhibited both nationally and internationally. Van Heerden's academic career and artworks are largely influenced by the link between processes of creativity and brain states, particularly the brain state known as 'flow' which is in close relation to peak performance and autotelic action. This interest later became the focus of her Doctoral studies. In 2014, van Heerden graduated with a Doctorate Degree in Fine Art at the Tshwane University of Technology. Van Heerden's interest in peak performance was influenced by her master's studies which concerned capability deprivation and issues pertaining to poverty and craft skills training in the rural areas of South Africa, for which she received her Master of Technology in Textile Design and Technology at the Tshwane University of Technology. The Tshwane University of Technology granted Van Heerden's Master's degree equivalence to a Master of Technology in Fine Arts because the research topic was considered germane to matters relating to both poverty and Fine Art. Van Heerden matriculated with full exemption in 1972 at Afrikaanse Hoër Meisieskool, Pretoria. Van Heerden received her National Higher Diploma in Textile Design in 1984 and in 1977 she received her National Diploma in Art and Design. In 2016, van Heerden fully retired from academics, and has since served as a Research Associate at the University of Pretoria. At present, Ariana van Heerden continues to live out her days with her companion, Goya.



## EXHIBITION HISTORY

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2010 *Fluid Horizons*, La Scala Gallery, McGregor, Western Cape

2004 *The Dynamical: surf*, Pretoria Art Museum

2003 *turbulence & transience*, Tina Skukan Gallery, Pretoria

1989 *Ariana van Heerden*, Potchefstroom Museum of Art

1983 *Ariana van Heerden*, Beuster- Skolimowski Gallery, Pretoria

### JOINT EXHIBITIONS

2018 *4 Friends*, Ariana v Heerden, Andre Naude, Ingrid Stevens, Andre Cronje, Tina Skukan Gallery, Pretoria

2012 *'Ltd.'*, Ariana van Heerden, Ingrid Stevens, Carl Jeppe, Association of Arts, Pretoria

2012 *'3s'*, Ariana van Heerden, Ingrid Stevens, Susan Sellschop, Tina Skukan Gallery

2010 *'Passages'*, Ariana van Heerden and Carl Jeppe, David Brown Fine Art, Johannesburg

1996 *Ariana van Heerden & Andre Cronje*, Pretoria Art Museum East Gallery

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2021 *In Conversation with Colour Symphony*, 5 March to 5 September, Rupert Museum, Graaff-Reinet

2020 *Unbroken Wilderness*, The Viewing Room Gallery, Brooklyn, Pretoria

2020 *Members Only*, Association of Arts, Pretoria

2019 *Star Sailors*, The Viewing Room Art Gallery, St Lorient

2019 *Tribute*, KKNK, Oudtshoorn, Western Cape

2018 *Wings*, Association of Arts Christmas Show, Pretoria

2018 *In the public domain*, Art Lecturers of University of Pretoria, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria

2018 *XTANT XTUT*, Retired Fine Arts Lecturers' Exhibition, ArtBox Gallery, Pretoria

2018 *Pandora's Box*, ArtBox Gallery, Pretoria, South Africa

2017 Association of Arts Christmas Show, Pretoria

2017 *Art(ed)*, Tshwane University of Technology Lecturing Staff Show, Pretoria Art Museum

2017 *Members Only*, Association of Arts, Pretoria

2016 *G&W Tellus Sculptura*, Association of Arts, Pretoria

2016 *Cool Capital*, Modern Art Projects, Pretoria

2016 *Awesome Women*, Association of Arts, Pretoria

2014 *Autumn Art Fair*, Fried Contemporary Art Gallery & Studio, Pretoria

2014 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria

2013 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria

- 2012 *Kites and summer colours*, Art Lovers 1932, Long Street, Pretoria
- 2012 *TUT Alumni Exhibition*, Arts Faculty, Pretoria
- 2012 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 2010 *art café @ the hub*, Centurion, Pretoria
- 2010 *phive*, Platform on 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Rietondale, Pretoria
- 2010 *'Poet-tree'*, La Scala Gallery, McGregor, Western Cape
- 2009 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 2007 *16 artists*, Karoo Art House, Pretoria
- 2005 *Especial XXXI Aniversario*, Galeria Sala Barna, Barcelona, Spain
- 2003 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 2002 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 2000 *Group Show*, Kresge Art Center, Michigan State University, Lansing, USA
- 1999 *Leonardo Posted*, Arts Association, Pretoria
- 1999 *Leonardo Posted*, ABSA Bank Gallery, Johannesburg
- 1999 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 1998 *Art Show Faculty Exhibition*, African Window, Pretoria
- 1996 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 1995 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 1995 *Art Technikon Pretoria*, Schweikerdt Art Gallery, Pretoria
- 1995 Arts Faculty Group Show, Pietersburg City Council
- 1994 *Fine Arts Awards/Exhibition*, Kempton Park City Council
- 1994 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 1994 *8 Artists*, Pretoria Art Museum East Gallery
- 1993 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 1993 *Botanical Institute Exhibition*, Welchich House, Botanical Gardens, Pretoria
- 1992 *UNISA student exhibition*, University of South Africa, Pretoria
- 1992 *Art Alive*, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria
- 1987 *Retrospective Lecturers' Exhibition*, Museum of Art, Pretoria
- 1978 *25th Anniversary Exhibition Ex-students*, Technikon Pretoria
- 1977 *UNISA student exhibition*, University of South Africa, Pretoria
- 1975 *Student Exhibition*, Pretoria College for Advanced Technical Education

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. London: Duke University Press.
- Drakopoulos, L. 2020. New Materialist Approaches to Fisheries: The Birth of “Bycatch”. *Environment and Society*, 11(/):100–114.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1980. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Figueira, D. 2003. Cante Jondo: German Literary Gypsies and Theoretical Nomads. *The Comparatist*, 27(/):79-93.
- Geerts, E. & van der Tuin, I. 2021. Diffraction and Reading Diffractively. *Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research*, 2(1):173-177.
- Groff, L. 2010. The Future Evolution of Humanity: Dangers and Opportunities. *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, 14(3): 148-177.
- Haraway, D. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3):575-599.
- Haraway, D. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. London: Duke University Press.
- Iovino, S. 2015. The Living Diffractions of Matter and Text: Narrative Agency, Strategic Anthropomorphism, and How Interpretation Works. *Anglia*, 133(1):69–86.
- Krajewska, A. 2017. *The Anthropocene Shifts in Visual Arts: A Case Against Anthropocentrism*. [O]. Available: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321847226>, [Accessed 2021, May 6].
- Lum, K. 2005. *Everything is Relevant Book: Writings on Art and Life, 1991-2018*. [s.l.]: Concordia University Press.
- Moore, J. (Ed.). 2016. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Stevens, I. 2013. The Pool of the Psyche: Water in the Work of Ariana van Heerden and Kevin Roberts. *South African Journal of Art History*, 28(2):217-234.
- Strang, V. 2008. Introduction. *Oceania*, 78(1):1-4.
- Tsing, A., Swanson, H., Gan, E. & Bubandt, N. (eds.). 2017. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*. [s.l.]: University of Minnesota Press.
- Van Heerden, A. 2020. Post-nuclear Environments and Non-anthropocentric Art. *South African Journal of Art History*, 35(2):227-225.
- Woods, P. 2017. Nomadic Missiology? Bringing Braidotti’s Thought into the Conversation about the Future of Cross-Cultural Mission. *Transformation*, 34(4):301-310.



