

# LIEN BOTH

YONDER  
BARNARD GALLERY



ABOVE Lien Botha, *Rocking Horse in park*. Beaufort West, July 2013. Courtesy of Barnard Gallery

In an essay entitled "Beyond what we can see" Virginia Mackenny comes to grips with the art of Lien Botha. Of photography – the artist's medium – Mackenny notes that it "carries the stain of its moment ... the disintegrating instant." The emphasis on an impediment suggests that, for Botha, photography operates curiously as a blockage; a medium that resists transparency.

It is as a form of perceptual difficulty, therefore, that Botha returns the viewer to that we fail to, or cannot, see. Botha asks that we reconsider what it is that we think, or believe, or feel that we see, so that the act of seeing becomes a phenomenological experience, a mysterious event.

As Mackenny notes, Botha's artworks "give a sense of her bearings, rather than fix location." It is as an act of mapping, as an evocation and an invocation that the artist finds her way through her art. A ritualised orientation, an enigmatic and accidental

procedure, Botha's photography renders both the artist and the mechanism fallible.

It is through this fallibility that we come to understand the subjective and always occluded nature of seeing. Botha's photographs, therefore, amount to "a private inventory," a deeply personal "taxonomic collection." There is a paradox here in the marriage of the taxonomic and subjective, but then again it is this very paradox which has come to define our understanding of Lien Botha.

'Yonder', the title of her most recent mid-career exhibition at the Barnard Gallery, elegantly evokes this paradoxical collection of images as both substantial and effervescent. As Mackenny points out, 'Yonder' suggests distance – some horizon of the knowable yet uncertain – "something pointed out over there." If a colophon, like an arrow, directs us to a fixed mark, then it is the hazy indeterminacy of

Botha's projected worlds which reminds us that directives are never quite as clear as we would wish or infer them to be.

'Yonder' reaffirms the power of enigma which has shaped Botha's twenty-five year long career; a career which has proved remarkable because of its mystique, its uncanny quiet. For Botha's photographs are brooding, ruminative; they operate as runes or ciphers rather than as symbols or icons. Always wary of the graven image, Botha's moment of looking and making ends up being a chance construction; something liquid, amorphous, intuited but always ... yonder....

**ASHRAF JAMAL**