

# Photographers in an experimental frame of mind

Carol Brown , *The Weekender*

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PHOTOGRAPHY is becoming highly collectable. The Durban Art Gallery is hosting an exhibition, Construct: Beyond the Documentary Photograph, which illustrates how well local photographers are experimenting with different ways of using their lenses.

Local curators are also experimenting with displays of photography, with more varied presentations, including installation art, video, colour modification and a return to hand colouring. Dramatic formats include panoramic views and huge prints that rival the scale of modernist paintings .

Berni Searle's three-channel video installation, About to Forget, brings a performative element into the work of photography.

She created this haunting piece by gathering small black and white photographs of several generations of her family members and cutting their silhouettes out of red crepe paper, which she floated in warm water - allowing the shapes to dissolve, bleed and flow into a blood-like river.

The work by implication brings her own (absent) body into the three-minute film.

Unfortunately, this piece is not shown at its best as it needs a quiet, intimate space for display .

Performance is taken to a different level in the haunting works of Lien Botha, whose photographs depict complicated and mysterious images, which are like the stage set of a fantasy play.

In the series, White stick for the Arctic, the female body — which one assumes is her own — is masked in each image. Sometimes it has the head of an animal, sometimes it is covered with a lace cloth (or shroud?).

This enigmatic figure is placed in otherworldly landscapes caught between the states of dreaming and waking. The narratives of each piece are unfathomable, but intriguing.

Environmental degradation, loss of the individual and the passage of time are threads which link them in a strange, melancholic universe, which harks back to the unexpected juxtapositions of surrealist artists.

If photos could wail, these would do it.

Roger Ballen's photographs have also been described as surrealistic due to their unexpected juxtapositions. Each new body of his work reveals greater depth and intensity. There is a sense that

only the surface is revealed and in his work, *Culmination*, we experience a build-up of deep, dark fabric suggesting a bed of cushions offset by gnarled and weathered hands joined together and reaching hopelessly towards a broken toy, strangely out of reach.

Zander Blom's work is energetic, edgy and explosive.

The photos, set up in his home studio, juxtapose elements of architecture with intricately constructed paper forms, which seemingly burst out of the walls in a frenzy of deconstruction.

The work expresses a particular urban sensibility where the cacophony and chaos of the city are played out alongside the 19th-century buildings erected to reinforce a certain power, which seemed indestructible.

Other artists on the show are Barbara Wildenboer, Jacques Coetzer, Abrie Fourie, Nomusa Makhubu, Dale Yudelman and Zwelethu Mthethwa. The exhibition is curated by Heidi Erdmann and Jakob Lebeko.