

Lien Botha at Erdmann Contemporary

Andrew Lamprecht, *ArtThrob*, Issue No. 111
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The works in Lien Botha's 'Amendment' present as a formal, stately progression: 14 uniform photographic triptychs on the wall of Erdmann Contemporary, leading from one to the other to make up a visual poem. Each presents a somewhat hazy landscape on the left, as if seen on a blisteringly hot day or in winter's snow; and on the right an object, small and domestic, having the air of a memento or cherished souvenir. Wedged between these two square opposites a slim photograph that appears to be a detail or close up of some other object or material, from porcelain, to twine, or text in a book. Each is titled sequentially Amendment 1 to Amendment 14 and then further subtitled, each in the form the case of the...

A mystery indeed. Lien Botha has provided the visitor with a piece of text that offers a few clues but no easy solution. It concludes: 'It is possible that the work is a metonymic reflection of our genesis: murmurings lost to fractured atonement. But then again, it is also possible that these are just 14 pages from a personal chronicle.' Perhaps more helpfully this text also tells us that *Amendment 8: the case of the drowning river* references Ingrid Jonker and Virginia Woolf, two writers who took their own lives by drowning.

I went to the walkabout hoping to have it all explained to me. Alas, along with what seemed like *hundreds* of others (mostly students) the artist was holding her cards quite close, having us play out another guessing game in what she called 'three acts'.

So I am going to stop guessing, at least for the moment, and simply *look*. Maybe that's what the artist had in mind after all.

There is something very evocative in these images, familiar and comfortable, even though I do not think I've been to any of the places photographed or own any similar objects. Even though some of the images appear to have been taken overseas, for me there is something that shouts out with South African identity here. In *Amendment 1: the case of beginning at the end* the object on the right is a sun-bleached copy of Una van der Spuy's classic *Gardening in South Africa*. (Botha brought it to the walkabout and had everyone in the audience smell the pages.) *Amendment 14: the case of ending at the beginning* shows a notebook with a picture of Adam and Eve being expelled from Eden in the same place. In between we get many things that speak to me of the works of people and the destruction or cruelty inflicted on nature.

I suspect (but I cannot say why) that the two images at either end of each panel are not supposed to be seen as oppositional but rather as manifestations of the same thing in landscape and in object. Whatever they mean, whatever each line says, these works somehow filled me with a desire to be silent and to consider. I think this has nothing to do with the desire to 'work out' or 'solve' clues left by the artist but rather everything to do with my sense that there was sound just beneath the picture surface. What beautiful evocations! But of what? What frightening laments! But who or what is mourned?

If you can, go and see this poem and share the artist's burden of work and maybe then you will arrive at an answer. I certainly enjoyed the journey.

To view footage from Botha's walkabout, visit

http://www.24.com/media/podcasts/news/lien_botha.wmv

http://clips.mweb.co.za/news/lien_botha.asx