

Subtle Insights keep one looking: Photo works by Women

Benita Munitz, Cape Times

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Curated by artist Lien Botha, the show features work by 15 women working with photography and related mediums. From a broad environmental spectrum they select flowers and astronauts, earth, sand and water, men, women and gender-crossers, shapes domestic, abstract and industrial - and more. Our attention is held surprisingly often - not by eye-catching optical tricks, but with subtle and perceptive insights.

Karina Turok's *Five times Mandela* illuminates moments in the life of the man far from his presidential concerns - contemplative while revisiting his cell, captivated by a baby's antics and enjoying an intimate exchange with Felicia. Turok's instinct seems to activate the mechanics just before the revealing instant.

Images in Lynne Stuart's *Comparisons* triptychs are not the same - not even similar. What is the link between a fish, a mass of shells and a few cows? Hard to see. But keep looking and interesting connections start to emerge.

Jackie Meiring's conventional approach to the series *Under a Karoo Sky* seems appropriate to the topic. On another level however, she plays with concepts relating to the permanent and the transient. Ancient faces seem as integral to the landscape as gnarled tree trunks, while solitary dwellings erected on sand might drift away with the wind.

Mavis Mtandeki and Primrose Talakumeni's *Interiors* provide access to environments unfamiliar to many of us. Largely ignored, the photographers point and press - recording whatever appears before the lens. While the camera hardly intrudes, viewers may feel like voyeurs - for the slack features of shack dwellings reveal naked hopelessness.

Tracy Payne's pastel parodies of female sexuality are pretty startling. They're also poignant, sad and intensely moving. Here's a rare artist who consistently maintains high standards of creativity and skills and whose renderings - invariably controversial - always seem timely.

Here's a leading question - if you haven't read the blurb would you recognize these prints and pastels as the products of women artists? Which leads to - are there any characteristics that distinguish the art of women from - well, anyone else? My responses - unlikely and likely - except in the work of artists who seem intentionally to feminise their work.

Lien Botha, for instance, whose small photo collages are as textured and detailed as miniature tapestries. Her images are drawn from different eras and cultures and interplay between diverse elements sets off intriguing resonances. It's an approach Botha parallels in curating this show which ranks as one of the best seen this year.