

Interview with Lien Botha

Joanna Dufour, May 2005

1. Having studied painting, why is photography now your medium of choice?

Mainly through necessity, i returned to my original medium ie having worked as a photographer before studying Fine Art .At this time however, i was now able to add the textures of mediums such as printmaking, painting and sculpture.

2. In your works you use a variety of images from various sources in a very evocative and poetic way. What is the intention of this style of mixed-mediums and how does it contribute to the meaning and intended interpretation of your work?

In a sense Q 1 answers this. But also: a trace in the landscape, a loved one, a death, a battered nest, the sounds of insects, i probe libraries as well as city streets, articles on the myrmicoleon, codex witsenii, a lost man found after nine years with only bone and cloth intact; WG Sebald's seamless integration of image/text.

3. In your series History portrait, Gender portrait, and Religious portrait, you isolate different identities in order to examine them. If you had to separate the characteristics of religion, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, race and class, what would be most important in your self-identification? Can these characteristics be isolated?

Sometime ago i may have answered gender but at present i guess nationality (by which the external world binds and defines us.)i have always loved and despised this country equally, and often wished for an undoing of some kind - but it remains : a certain hereness which at times renders one without language.

4. To what extent does your work represent a form of self-portraiture?

After careful consideration, it will appear as if the work mirrors back. What other vessel do we have but our own searching selves?

5. How does gender influence your work?

Patriarchal systems have been prevalent in this society so as a female artist i will have particularly addressed my paternal history, i will also have made small works commemorating women who have been signifiers in my life, and then, long after an epitaph, i will have been able to wear a photo brooch of my grandfather (sociology project).

6. Do you have a choice in your own identity? How much of your identity is predetermined. How much, if any, is a result of your own construction of self?

Genetics will inevitably lock you into a code with a distinct pattern, yet there are sufficient chromosomes enabling one to develop routes which you can make your own, without forever belonging to a tribe.

7. Much of your work seems to touch on memory, particularly the intersection of personal and collective memory. What role does both personal and collective memory play in your work? Does memory play a role in healing?

Memory is a site. Combining a fascination for pathology and archaeology, i cut through what i remember.

8. Do Afrikaner history and identity play a role in your work? If not, do the references to Afrikaner historical figures and events in your work refer to a more personal individual history?

To a lesser extent.

9. Some of your work seems to question the value and use of symbols and objects. Is art an object? If so, is its value in question?

Art imitates life.

10. Can a photograph ever represent truth?

Possibly

11. Can manipulating a photograph make it more representative of truth?

But what is truth?

12. Would you describe your art as "surreal"? Why or why not?

Insofar as it implies subtlety and the suspension of conscious control. Living (here) is surreal in itself.

13. Do you consider your art "African" art?

Define African art.

14. Having experienced the transition to a democratic 'new' South Africa, was your work or focus effected and if so, how?

I only started producing consistent portfolios 2 years prior to democracy, so i do not believe my work was ever held ransom by political ideology.

15. Do you create with the specific South African context in mind or does your artwork extend a more universal message about the human condition and human relations?

I am working in the crevice between the two.

- Joanna Dufour is a Sociology major (Visual Arts minor) from Hamilton College, US. She completed a semester at the School for International Training in Cape Town with the theme "Multiculturalism and Social Change". Lize van Robbroeck of Stellenbosch University acted as her advisor.

This interview was conducted in May 2005 as part of her research.