

There is no intelligible present in a democratic South Africa that is not always and already haunted by its past. This is one of the key arguments of *Home Lands – Land Marks*. While landmarks are important cultural signposts, historically and geographically specific, 'Land Marks' suggest the tracks and traces of people and presences, both inadvertent and deliberate, on territories and cartographies, places and representations. The designation 'Homelands', in the South African context, points to the deliberate historic strategies of the apartheid state to disenfranchise people and deport population groups to designated regions. But the prising apart of the two component nouns suggests a plurality of land masses and geopolitical entities, while drawing attention to the status of 'home' as phantasm or threatened physical structure. Such ambiguities are entirely appropriate. South Africa is a country where exile, dispossession and house arrest form part of a national consciousness, yet the essentials of housing and shelter remain burning and topical political issues.

In recent years, South African art has come under considerable international scrutiny. Just since 2006, for example, when we first discussed the possibility of this show, exhibitions in Europe have included *Reality Check: Contemporary Art Photography from South Africa* (Galerie der Stadt, Sindelfingen, 2007), *South African Contemporary Photography* (Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, 2007), *Apartheid: The South African Mirror* (Centre de Cultura Contemporània, Barcelona, 2007) and *za Giovane Arte Dal Sudafrica* (Palazzo della Papesse Centro Arte Contemporanea di Siena, 2008). South African art has figured strongly in important group exhibitions such as *Snap Judgements: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography* (ICP, New York, and tour, 2006-2008) and *Africa Remix* (Museum Kunst Palast Düsseldorf, Hayward Gallery, London, and tour, 2004-2007), and artists including David Goldblatt, Guy Tillim and Churchill Madika were prominent within *Documenta XII* (Kassel, 2007). Yet surprisingly, amidst all this fevered international activity, there has been no significant exhibition of South African art in London. Indeed, there has been no major show of contemporary South African art in the UK since 1994,

Introduction

Tamar Garb and Ben Tufnell

the year of the first democratic elections in South Africa. The current exhibition, therefore, goes some way to correcting a critical imbalance. It represents a first opportunity for a British audience to examine some of the strategies by which South African art reflects and articulates the seismic shifts and changes within that country since the end of apartheid. It demonstrates also the ways that, as Pep Subirós has recently argued, 'like the country itself, South Africa's art continues to constitute a stage and a privileged observatory upon which and from which we can approach the cardinal issues of our world'.¹ It is this unique position, perhaps, of specificity and universality that makes the art of South Africa now so important, so vital.

This exhibition brings together recent work which pictures and constructs a vexed terrain, one that registers the specificity of South Africa's past, while confronting the ongoing traumas and triumphs of living in its aftermath. It is in no sense a survey. Rather, this exhibition of just seven artists, ranging in age from 32 to 78, represents a partial, necessarily focused, attempt to address a series of questions. How does art negotiate the relationship of people to place, of testimony to territory, of personal suffering to collective experience in the putative 'post' of this moment: the 'post-apartheid', the 'post-colonial', the 'post-euphoric'? How does memory conjure up an image of the land, re-imagining a specific terrain – a beach, a bay, a view – with the hindsight born of age and critical distance? How do words – sung, read, deciphered – invoke the smell and sound of a place with affection and longing while at the same time registering its shame? How do the inherited proper names and place names, signs and icons, the laden verbiage of a lost world, live on materially and in memory and fantasy? What are the new inscriptions that compete for attention and overwrite the languages of old? The artists in this exhibition consider the surfaces of lived and located experience in the place they call home, discovering, recording and re-drawing the marks history makes on the land and its occupants, while using the expanded field of landscape as a site for a new poetics of place. In the works in *Home Lands – Land Marks* each artist articulates a view of this multilayered landscape in relation to historical narratives, pictorial precedents and personal experience.



The making of an exhibition is both a journey and an exercise in collaboration. In realising this project, many people have been extremely helpful. We are particularly indebted to Michael Stevenson and everyone at his gallery in Cape Town, Linda Givon and Kirsty Wesson at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, Anne McIlhenny at the William Kentridge Studio, and earlier Igebauer, Berlin. Their help and advice has been crucial at every stage in the development of the exhibition.

We are also grateful to the contributors to this catalogue. Okwui Enwezor's important essay addresses the present centrality of photography in South African art practice (reflected in the fact that almost half of the artists in the exhibition work in this medium), and extends his ongoing investigation of this field. Ivan Vladislavić's text, which was specially commissioned for this publication, occupies a liminal territory between memoir, history and social analysis. It reveals a city – Johannesburg – which is subtly yet insistently in a state of flux. As such, it articulates an archetypically South African urban reality.

Above all, we are grateful to the artists, many of whom have made extraordinary new works specifically for the show. It is their work that justifies such an ambitious undertaking.

Tamar Garb

Durning Lawrence Professor in the History of Art
University College London

Ben Tufnell

Head of Exhibitions
Haunch of Venison

1. P. Subirós, *Apartheid: The South African Mirror*, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2007, p.112.

Cover and left:
Plan of Johannesburg and
suburbs from the collection of
William Kentridge. 1890

It is Goldblatt's sign which Vivienne Koorland appropriates in her paintings of the AIDS ribbon [plates 25-26]. Self-consciously addressing the Goldblatt photographs, as well as the histories at settings they reference, Koorland isolates and enlarges the signs the emptied-out field of painting. Nothing of their context remain. The opacity of her painted surface replaces the sharp-focused illusionism of Goldblatt's detailed photograph, providing a new setting for the over-determined ribbon. Koorland has used icons, emblems, plucked from their contexts and resituated as illusive personal mnemonics with residual historical associations, in her works over the years. One of her recurring motifs is the protea, national flower of South Africa, which appears in *Big King Protea* (2007-2008) [plate 27] enlarged, simplified and monumentalised. Devoid of setting or situation, the emblematic nature of the icon, its power as a cultural symbol - is asserted. At the same time, the battered and over-worked surface, on which hand-sewn stitches and layers of under-painting remain visible, undermines its propagandistic function (often subsumed into nationalist discourses and tourist publicity) and grounds it in a hard-won world in which past failures and imminent disasters seem materially manifest.

It is the strategy of appropriating and reworking well-known icons that Koorland deploys too in her painting *Who Drew Bokkie* (2007) [plate 19]. Working from a newspaper article which posed this question, she transcribes the anthropomorphised head of an antelope or buck (taken from a famous road sign or poster used in



Original 'Bokkie'
poster

Santu Mofokeng
Winter in Tembisa
1999
Black and white photography
on Baryth paper
100 x 150 cm

warn motorists and passers-by of the dangers of forest fires throughout the apartheid period) on to a thickly-encrusted ground which looks, itself, like the charred or cracked crust of the earth's surface.³² The original 'Bokkie' poster, of which there were later many versions, situated the animal's head, with its wet nose, alert ears and Disney-like tear, against a backdrop of distant mountains and burned-out trees. Koorland, though, has reduced the setting to a minimum, emphasising the head-on confrontation with the wide-eyed animal whose face looks out accusingly at the viewer. 'Look what you've done' read the words on one of the early versions of the poster, laying the blame for the destruction of the land on human, rather than natural causes.

The significance of 'Bokkie' is complex. The word in Afrikaans is the diminutive of buck or antelope and refers on the one hand to the springbok, national animal of South Africa (still used on the logos of sports uniforms), and on the other is a term of endearment meaning 'my sweetheart'. As an icon, the springbok is most often linked with the national rugby team, known internationally now as the 'Bokke', a word which connotes a virile masculine collective energy, traditionally associated with whiteness and Afrikaner patriotism, but its symbol is a distinctive leaping buck not the frontal image of 'Bokkie', an altogether more elusive signifier. Nevertheless, it is still a sign associated with the South Africa of old. For one thing, 'Bokkie' is an Afrikaans name, and the textual inscriptions that accompanied the original posters were exclusively written in English and Afrikaans, the two official languages of the apartheid state.³³ It was linguistically exclusive. It is not surprising, therefore, that 'Bokkie' has now been superseded by 'Mmaditsela', a reversed 'Bokkie' without the tear and set against a stylised backdrop of flames superimposed over the green map of South Africa.³⁴ 'Bokkie' is now a redundant sign, relegated, like the old apartheid signs, to the archives and fast disappearing from the roadside.

For Koorland, 'Bokkie' has complex resonances. Like Kentridge's Muizenberg or Searle's Signal Hill, it references a personal relationship to a place that has been overtaken by history. It is a sign of a time that is no more, but it is also a beloved and personal symbol of a childhood which is doubly lost, once through the

process of ageing, but also through the tarnishing of memory by guilt. Even the precious tokens of youth cannot be remembered without pain. There is no room for nostalgia here. Retrospectively, 'Bokkie' comes to stand, therefore, as a sign of a lost era and as an inadvertent and silent witness to the horrors that he saw, his outsized tear crying for a beloved country³⁵ that was in crisis around him. The tear articulates the cost, both human and natural, personal and collective, that this entailed.

The relationship between sign and setting is suggested rather than depicted by Koorland. The meanings that we attribute to 'Bokkie' are speculative, the texts and contexts associated with it recalled and recovered.

24 to an imagined territory marked by an accretion of proper names. Here famous figures of South Africa's liberation struggle – Mandela, Sisulu, Goldberg, Tambo – are placed alongside their comrades who were linked to the Rivonia Trial of 1963, when leaders of the outlawed ANC were arrested and charged with sabotage. Out of the larger group, eight were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment, but Koorland records an extended cast of characters, including the Afrikaans lawyer Bram Fischer who defended Mandela at the trial. In *Rivonia Map* (2007) names of people are placed alongside their birthplaces and dates of birth, with again no recourse to conventional geographies or chronologies. Instead, the imbrication of place and personality is enacted by linking city or region with one of its now-famous children. The painting records places whose names are obsolete (Orange Free State, Ovamboland, both superseded by history), as well as tiny rural villages, large cities, suburbs and towns. Constituting an atlas of an event, *Rivonia Map* overturns accepted scales and topographies: on this surface Ngcobo, the little-known birthplace of Walter Sisulu, can co-exist with metropolitan Cape Town, birthplace of Dennis Goldberg, in an arrangement which defies the logic of standard geography. But the names resonate: places and people form part of a 'poetic geography'²⁴ at the same time as the prosaic listing and plotting of proper name and place name serves as a reminder of an historical event.

Included in *Rivonia Map* is a smaller map, this time transcribed from an anti-apartheid pamphlet, situating Sharpeville, the location of the notorious massacre of 1960, on to an official map of the old South Africa, from which it was always excluded. 'Where is Sharpeville?' quotes Koorland, lifting the question from her source, but referencing too the enforced ignorance and partial knowledge of official histories. By placing this 'historical' map into her own imaginary one, Koorland associates the subversive received cartography of the inset with the memorial map she invents, pointing to two foundational events in anti-apartheid history. Visible too are a number of icons, also drawn from the archives, of figures, one brandishing a weapon, the other prostrate on the ground, as well as the characteristic corrugated iron-roofed shacks still seen all over South Africa. Under one sits the word 'ZOZO', slang for hut,

placed directly above 'LILIESLEAF', the farm in the Johannesburg suburb of Rivonia which was used as a hideout for the trialists. Two forms of shelter, one poor and precarious, the other solid and clandestine but ultimately insecure, sit alongside one another in this invented reconstruction. On the right-hand side is a signpost with the words 'To Freedom' handwritten on it. Resonant of liberation slogans and speeches, banners and placards, it reinforces the political struggle in which the individuals inscribed on the map were engaged. In particular, it connects with Mandela, whose full name Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is broken by the insertion of a nickname, 'the Walker', evoking the title of his autobiography *A Long Walk to Freedom*. But the generalised allusion to liberation and the orientation of the sign, which points beyond the edge of the frame, is important. For the origins of this signpost are not South African at all. Instead, Koorland has lifted it (and rendered it into English) from a drawing by a Polish artist interned in Auschwitz, and it is inserted into this history and this location as a coded reference to other histories and geographies, in whose shadow our own still falls. In this context, the small sign functions like a pointer, beyond this map and this event, memorialised as they are, to multiple pasts as well as an uncertain and unknowable future.

Rivonia Map commemorates the heroes of a democratic South Africa. With their names positioned over the country of their birth, proper name and place name become intertwined. Birthrights are placed like placards over an indeterminate earth-stained surface. But this evokes a different 'land of signs' from that described and documented by Ernest Cole. For Cole, the real signs of segregation stood for the tyranny of a political language as it was imposed over the country. His project was to document the lived experience of those who were subjugated and suppressed by their divisive injunctions. For all its didacticism, Koorland's 'history painting' denotes rather than records an event. Retrospective and reflective in tenor and sensibility, in Koorland's imagined terrain written words serve as linguistic signs for a past and a place which is remade in memory and history. Her poetic reworking of the past is born of the hindsight and historical distance that the end of apartheid has facilitated. Now, at this point in time, it is possible to rethink the past and reclaim histories and subjectivities long suppressed, not only of the familiar and famous, but also of the groups and communities on whose labour and lives the country was built. While apartheid's racial signs stipulated who went where and when, policing movement with vulgar predictability, no actual signposts pointed to the underlying economic systems and structures that formed identity. But they too find their residue in the landscape.



Vivienne Koorland
 Details from *Rivonia Map*
 2007
 Oil on burlap over linen
 325 x 254 cm