

Un(en)titled

A retrospective exhibition of work by the late Joan Mackenzie (1941 – 2004) to be shown at “The Studio” art gallery in the “Harbour Bay” complex, Simon’s Town. (Corner of Main Road and Dido Valley Road).

Opening night, Friday March 1st @ 6pm. Exhibition closes Wednesday March 13th.

Timeless

It is ironic that, fifteen years after her death and nineteen years after her original exhibition, the issue of land and entitlement is still as unresolved and contentious as ever.

Her textural and textual statements have, therefore, lost nothing of their impact; her art is as relevant today as it was in her lifetime.

Motivation

Joan Mackenzie unearthed a 1940s, railway worker’s, “free” ticket, coupled with a 1950’s “white”, political pamphlet, that the worker had pencilled over with a simple sum that, he just could not add up correctly.

These three elements encapsulated a time in a land, where “culturally conditioned” people possessed a mindset that would never “add up”.

For the artist, finding that railway ticket initiated a chiasm*, through a series of metaphorical journeys, that encompassed crossing the “fenced” boundaries of time and memory, along with textually traversing and depicting the physical panoramas of a “fenced”, colonized land; excavation of that land would reveal, not only irresistible, pyroclastic forces at work on the strata, but historical evidence of equally overwhelming political forces on the surface, inciting the pogroms and removals of “un(en)titlement”. (Chiasm : intersections of personal memory, myth and historical fact).

Textural and Textual Semiotics

The textural image of prehistoric tools reinforces her metaphor of excavations, both physical and analytical; ancient tools, like flint, or modern tools, like computers, can reveal layers of strata, or societal levels, layers of historical palimpsests or colonial documents, overlays of maps and photographic images.

All this data can be utilised as a tool for enlightenment, or subverted to fabricate propaganda.

Umberto Eco saw artworks not as images, but complex textural indicators – his “fuzzy signs”, which Joan acknowledged in her work. Jacques Derrida, too, would have given significant textual weight, even to her crossed out/ truncated words.

Media

The artist used “earthy” materials: engraved slate pieces on a pyroclastic flow, poured molten lead numerals, copper wire, white cement (stone). Sea shells, paper, canvas and gauze as naturally apposite elements for land images and issues. Her use of the cyanotype process, whereby the sun simply bleaches images and text into her stone slabs, again exemplifies her simplistic / primitive working mode.

Throughout the exhibition one must accept that, although the issue of entitlement has often been addressed before, the artworks, themselves, force the viewer to engage on a purely visual level, so individual is her use of the media and materials.

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