

yazkam *Journalist and photographer communicating with the world*

May 10, 2013

◦ **1 Comment**

Women artists unite against gender-based violence

Written by Yazeed Kamaldien

Gender-based violence has dominated news headlines in recent months and women artists are speaking out against it in a recent exhibition at the Centre for African Studies (CAS) at the University of Cape Town.

Meghna Singh, an artist from India, is the exhibition curator and a participating artist. The exhibition title, 'Woman.Object.Corpse', was inspired by an article written by Linda Stupart. Its headline was "Woman.Object.Corpse: Killing women through media".

Singh says it is a "collective expression by South African and international women artists responding to the theme of violation and objectification of women."



(<http://yazkam.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/kathryn-smith-incident-roominstallation.jpg>)

Kathryn Smith showed an installation: 'Incident Room'

"It brings together a diverse group of women from different parts of the world responding to the position women inhabit in society today and ongoing violence that is experienced as a part of our everyday lives," she says.

"These artists are or have been engaged with the theme of gender-based violence in their artistic practice in various forms, from political art and activism to surrealist expression and poetry to investigatory method of forensic art.

"It was important for me to represent work and voices that aren't necessarily already represented by big commercial galleries in South Africa, allowing to showcase work that hasn't been seen here before."

Singh believes that the exhibition is relevant to the public because it the "fight to bring awareness to gender-based violence is an ongoing one."

“It can never have enough space until we reach an end to this violence.

Brutal rapes and mutilation of women’s bodies have recently occurred in India and South Africa. And this violence continues.

Singh moved from Delhi to Cape Town in January this year and found a meeting place for women artists from both societies and elsewhere to start a conversation about gender-based violence.

She had already engaged with the “mass movement in Delhi, and other parts of India, demanding for justice against the horrible crimes against women.”

“Being away from India, I thought of responding through a new piece of a personal creative work. This is the same time I was appointed the curator of a newly renovated gallery (CAS) in an exciting intellectual environment,” she says.

“It wasn’t long before when what happened in Delhi was repeated in Cape Town and there was an outburst of protests and media coverage. This was short-lived and compared to the momentum in India, in South Africa it had a short life span.

“This was the moment I decided to bring together works by artists. This includes audio-visual fragments, poetry, video, sculpture, performance, a discussion group and workshops around the universal theme of ongoing violence against women.”

The discussion group will include artists and experts working in the field dealing with trauma and violence, says Singh.

Included in the programme is a workshop led by artist and poet Toni Stuart who will work with women to express themselves creatively via words, colours and movements. Events are open to students and the public.

Singh adds: “We have plans to make the work and the discussion travel beyond an academic space and discourse. These series of events is not only a response to the recent debate and media attention but a part of the momentum that needs to carry on in order to demand change.”

Singh thought about the exhibition starting point as the “violated body as a site on which power is exercised.” She read Stupart’s article that “described the shocking series of events that had occurs” when a woman is violated.

But apart from just highlighting gender-based violence, the exhibition also “responds to this violence through creative endeavours that dream of a better future,” says Singh.

‘Woman.Object.Corpse’ runs at the Centre for African Studies gallery, at the University of Cape Town’s upper campus, from the April 24 to May 9.

Artists participating in ‘Woman.Object.Corpse’ are: Kathyryn Smith (South Africa), Toni Stuart (South Africa), Christie Van Zyl (South Africa), Meghna Singh (India/ UK / South Africa), Maria Kley (Japan/ Belgium/ The Netherlands), Alberta Whittle (Barbados/ UK), Maria Tzanakou (Greece), Jamun (India) and Jade Gibson (South Africa/ UK/ Philippines). Some of them share their thoughts about their work, the exhibition and why it was important for them to participate.

Jamun, showcasing video, ‘Delhi Rising 1 and 2’

On December 16, 2012 a young woman and her friend travelling on a bus in South Delhi were

physically assaulted. The young woman was raped and brutalised and fought for her life for days following.

Unfortunately she lost her life, but her struggle galvanised millions in India to demand for justice. In Delhi, tens of thousands of people protested and the show of support for this young woman and the demand to end rape was unprecedented in history.

The incident left a deep impact on us and as filmmakers, and we felt compelled to address it through our medium of visual storytelling. We were incredibly inspired by the 'Delhi Rising' crew that would gather for weekly meetings at our studio in Hauz Khas Village.

The Delhi Rising films were created by the Jamun Collective to capture the voice of young women and men in Delhi during this time. The films were a contribution to the One Billion Rising campaign on February 14, 2013. This campaign was a global appeal started by the playwright Eve Ensler.

It used the medium of dance as a form of protest against rape and sexual assault. These films were shared widely by the international community and press, and spontaneously across social media networks by people and concerned citizens.

Following the Delhi Rising films, similar initiatives in Mumbai and other parts of the country followed. The films inspired flash mobs, teach-ins, protests, and a huge media coverage in India on the 14th. With over 60,000 views, the films touched the sentiments of many in India and globally.

Jade Gibson, showcasing a video installation, 'War Play'

In a country where women's rights are often disputed in relation to concepts of 'tradition' as well as in relation to domestic and social violence, stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are entrenched in South African society, particularly from childhood.

This is visibly apparent when looking at South African supermarket toy sections, with line upon line of toy guns and soldiers juxtaposed against Barbie-like pink dolls and tea sets.

The film 'War Play' reassembles male and female bodies represented through 'boy toys' and 'girl toys', into mini-sculptures, creating juxtapositions that highlight as well as defy stereotypical relationships, replicating the atmosphere of a war film.

The film complexly alludes to the ways in which toys feed stereotypes of the imagination from childhood onwards, perceptions which are complicated by difficult social histories and experiences in which society, gender relations, land and personhood are in conflict, interwoven and interrelated.

The film deliberately invokes and interrelates notions of sexuality, gender roles, power, land and endemic violence in South Africa, and the impact of the brutality of these relationships; children with guns, the assumed macho-ness of men and notions of what a woman is supposed to be.

Alberta Whittle showcasing sculpture and photography with 'In Transit'

As a Barbadian, the relationship between colonialism and the land is ingrained in my psyche, my notions of self and identity. The Barbadian landscape is flooded with fields of sugar cane, a constant reminder of Barbados' role in British Empire building.

Sugar cane fields present sites of forced labour, rape, miscegenation and capitalism. The complex history of racial and sexual violence, which still resonates today, reflects the mythologising of the female body as object and fetish.

Utilising symbols of export and commodities, such as packaging, maps, sugar and molasses with my own body, I will address themes relating to race, gender, sexuality, power, the consumption and commodification of the female body.

Twin themes of transition and migration, both forced and voluntary run through the West Indian and South African experience, linked as they are to economic, social and individual power structures still in place today.

The legacy of the forcible migration of women's bodies throughout the globe is of a society polarised by power and privilege, where some women's bodies are still more accessible and vulnerable than others, reflecting the increasing frequency of female victims of rape and assault in South Africa.

Maria Tzanakou showcasing video, 'RAWMANTICISM'

In May 2012, the Greek police arrested and imprisoned initially 17 and then five more for prostitution. All women were shown as HIV-infected prostitutes and their portraits and full body pictures were released on the Internet and other media platforms.

The published photographs were accompanied with their personal information such as parent's names, date and place of birth and place of residence. The minister of health described the women as "health bombs" for the "Greek family man".

In March 2013, all women were proved to be innocent and were released. RAWMANTICISM is created in response to this degrading and violent action. I asked my friends and co-artists to photograph their portraits and all together to replace those women who were shamed and humiliated.



About Yazeed Kamaldien

Self-employed journalist and photographer from South Africa.
[View all posts by Yazeed Kamaldien »](#)

Trackbacks / Pingbacks

1. **Women artists unite against gender-based violen...** - May 11, 2013

Blog at WordPress.com. The Skeptical Theme.