

WOMAN | OBJECT | CORPSE

A collective expression by women artists



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Curated by Meghna Singh

Jade Gibson, Jamun Collective,

Maria Kley, Meghna Singh,

Kathryn Smith, Toni Stuart,

Maria Tzanakou, Christie Van Zyl,

Alberta Whittle

* Stupart Linda, 'Woman, object, corpse: killing women through media',
Africa is a country, March 1st 2013

<http://africasacountry.com/2013/03/01/woman-object-corpse-killing-women-through-media/>



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
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Curator's notes

I left New Delhi in January 2013 to move to Cape Town to pursue my PhD. This was a time when India witnessed a new wave of unprecedented public action demanding justice for the brutal rape of a young student and questioning the violence entrenched in the daily lives of women across the globe.

Leaving Delhi to move to Cape Town presented a shift in the debates I was involved in back home and it wasn't long before the same violence erupted in Cape Town.

The public outrage, action and media coverage in the wake of the brutal murders of Anene Booysens and Reeva Steenkamp were shortlived and reflected neither a strong awareness of the work being carried out by activists, nor the understanding that is required to plan ahead.

Around the same time I read an excellent article in the blog 'Africa is a country' by Linda Stupart titled 'Woman, object, Corpse: killing women through media' and thought those three words very much described the shocking series of events that had occurred.

This is the same time I was appointed the curator of a newly renovated gallery in an exciting intellectual environment of the Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town.

I decided to bring together works by artists-Audio Visual fragments, poetry, video, sculpture, performance, discussion groups, workshops around the universal theme of ongoing violence against women.

I began with the violated body as a site on which power is exercised.

The exhibition is a collective expression by South African and

international women artists responding to the theme of violation and objectification of women. 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.

Using the violated body as a site on which power is exercised, the works seek to respond to this violence through creative endeavors that dream of a better future.

The participants are all women artists who are, or have been, engaging with the theme of gender-based violence in their artistic practice. The artists work in a range of mediums: from political art and activism to surrealist expression and poetry to investigatory method of forensic art.

Hailing from Barbados, Alberta Whittle responds to the theme of the exhibition by reflecting on the site of sugarcane fields in her country as the site of 'forced labour, rape, miscegenation and capitalism' while also a constant reminder of Barbados' role in British Empire building. She brings in the memory of colonialism as something that is ingrained in a lot of peoples psyche and their notion of identity.

The video installation, 'Warplay' by Jade Gibson "complexly alludes to the ways in which toys feed stereotypes of the imagination from childhood onwards and perceptions which are complicated by difficult social histories and experiences in society."

The work for the artists starts to blur the space between art and activism when it is used as a tool for social media to spread awareness, question and bring people together in public spaces.

The filmmakers Collective, Jamun, based in Delhi, uses their craft of filmmaking as a political tool to mobilize a movement to demand for justice and change in the country.

While Maria Tzanakou responds to the brutal act of the Greek police

to imprison and publish full body pictures and details of twenty young women from the streets of Athens as prostitutes and HIV positive, only to be release recently as innocent.

This is a collected effort in helping to amplify the voices of the feminist activists, writers, social media activists and artists and an effort to continue to bring this ongoing debate it out to the public spehere.

Meghna Singh

Curator, Centre for African Studies Gallery

University of Cape Town

Cape Town, South Africa

24th April,2013



Delhi Rising 1, Video still.

Delhi Rising 1 And 2

JAMUN (India)

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 brutalized and fought for her life for days following. Unfortunately she lost her life, but her struggle galvanized 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 story telling. 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. The 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.



Lulu 11 , Polyurethane foam, pipping cord

Lulu II / Lulu III/ Lulu IV

MARIA KLEY (Japan/Belgium/The Netherlands)

The works in the exhibition are part of 'Human Landscape': a series of portrait sculptures and assemblages that derive from close interaction with a number of people during Maria Kley's stay in Cape Town, South Africa.

One of these people is Lulu, a Xhosa woman who lives and works as an upholsterer in the Philippi Township. Over a period of three months, Kley collaborated with her to translate and shape a shared experience and expression towards violence against women.

The three exhibited sculptures, made from the leftovers of Lulu's work are symbolic of the interaction and time spent between the two women. The work on the sculptures was started by Kley and at a certain moment in the process of the making passed onto Lulu to interact with.

Using their professional skills as a sculptor and an upholsterer, the sculptures can be seen as an act of pinning down their own stories.



War Play, video still

War Play

JADE GIBSON (South Africa/UK/Philippines)

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

The resulting 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 .



The Returning, video still

The Returning

MEGHNA SINGH (India/UK/South Africa)

The Returning, an experimental documentary is a meditation on the subject of journeys, the self and identity. It searches for these by exploring the work of the two French surrealist artists-Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore and the role played by the mythical Hindu Goddess 'Durga'.

The work rooted in fiction and non-fiction makes for interesting experimental video and performance merging the real with the surreal. It is poised in a hybrid mix of documentary, travelogue, history and mythology - concocted and almost hallucinatory. The artist makes a journey to Jersey, The Channel Islands, to research and revisit the lives of the two artists. Having been a part of the surrealist movement in Paris in the 1920's, they moved to Jersey later and did majority of their work there focusing on the theme of self-representation and female identity. Here they merged their creative and political work by secretly carrying out resistant activities against the Nazi occupation of the island.

In the film, the body is used as a vehicle for personal and social expression. The artist tries to create a symbiosis between the strength of the goddess Durga and the lives of the two artists by transcending to another dimension of reality.



Incident Room, Double exposure photograph

Incident Room

KATHRYN SMITH (South Africa)

“Don’t be surprised if you read about my corpse in the morning papers” was the last sentence Jacoba ‘Bubbles’ Schroeder apparently threw at Hyman Leibman in the early hours of August 16, 1949, as she got out of his car and began the long walk home from the corner of Oxford Road and Corlett Drive in Illovo, to Rissik Street in downtown Johannesburg. A little more than 24 hours later, her corpse was indeed found a short distance from where Leibman allegedly dropped her, lying in partially burned, bushy veld. She was neatly dressed, but without her coat, handbag and shoes. She had been strangled with a ligature of some sort, and pieces of white, chalky material had been forced into her throat.

The murder of ‘Bubbles’ Schroeder is one of Johannesburg’s most enduring mysteries.

Written and rewritten by journalists and true-crime buffs, Bubbles Schroeder’s murder remains a deeply unsatisfactory narrative. I have attempted to collect everything published on the case since I encountered her story in my mid-teens. I feel exactly the same now as I did then: a girl should not be found dead in a plantation after a night of dancing and socializing. And 63 years later, we should know who was responsible for her death and the violence done to her.



Twin, Light Jet Prints on Fibre based paper

Incident Room

Bubbles has become an emblem of the absurd truism of the criminal justice process that some bodies matter more than others. The police who worked her case referred to her as 'the girl who died twice'. As much as the investigation into her death generated hundreds of column inches of newspaper copy and much else besides, she remains a literal bubble, a lacuna in the maelstrom of dogged detectives, rich boys and frantic mothers. Her biography and posthumous media life has also struck me as an uncanny counterpoint to that of Beth Short, better known as the Black Dahlia, murdered only two years before in post-war Los Angeles. So, several years ago, I set myself the task to burrow

beneath the myth of Bubbles and find Jacoba, to reinscribe her subjectivity, dignity and her memory. Engaging public, private and long forgotten documents, archives and other repositories of human memory, Incident Room is a selection of objects, images, actions and films that have emerged as artefacts of this epic and ongoing quest.



Portrait of Toni Stuart, Poet

Silence[d]

TONI STUART (South Africa)

In her poem, silence(d), the artist us to reflect on our response to violence against women and what motivates that response. Drawing on the public outcry around recent incidents of gender-based violence in South Africa, the poem asks: When we speak out in outrage and anger, is our motivation to affect deep and meaningful change or is it simply our way of coming to terms with an horrific act? It moves from the silence of suppression through to the silence of compassion to determine whose voice is truly being heard. Sound artist Anton Metrowich has created a soundscape which plays with the idea of 'the disembodied voice'.

For me poetry is about listening. I use words to draw people to listen to the silent spaces between life's moments, and ultimately to themselves. I aim to mirrors those silent moments of challenge, defeat and triumph which ultimately make us human.
- Toni Stuart

Anton Metrowich studied sound engineering at City Varsity. His work includes sound for film (live and post-production), sound for television and radio, music production and mixing.



Rawmanticism 2012, video still

Rawmanticism, 2012

MARIA TZANAKOU (Greece)

In May 2012, the Greek Police arrested and imprisoned initially 17 and then 5 more women with the charge of “willing heavy bodily harm” against prostitution customers. All women faced the violent action of pillorying as HIV infected prostitutes when their portraits and full body pictures were released in high resolution 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 men”. In March 2013, all women were proved to be innocent and were released. RAW-MANTICISM 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.



Portrait of Christie Fossilsoul Van Zyl, poet
Photo credit Zanele Muholi

This is the African Woman?
Mourning on Commission

CHRISTIE FOSSILSOUL VAN ZYL (South Africa)

This is the African Woman?

"This is the African Woman?" is a poem raising awareness around the reality of the brutalities that women in Africa face daily due to gender sub-ordination. It is inspired by a book titled 'Kanga and the Kangaroo court - The Jacob Zuma trial' written by Mmatshilo Motsei. There needs to be an awareness and conversation towards solution about the war against life's most prized caretakers, the war against Women.

Mourning on Commission

As a South African lesbian and documentor of our lives, I find myself attending a lot of funerals of fallen lesbians that are victims of hate crimes, I attend these memorials and funerals and wonder always who the person was and what they are like, I always end up having conversations with them. This poem is a letter to/ dialogue with the deceased in which the deceased responds through facial and bodily expression in the form of a contemporary dance; dedicated to all that have lost their lives to loving as they please. Hate crime is nothing but the idolatry of a dictatorships ideology.



In Transit, Photograph

In Transit

ALBERTA WHITTLE (UK / Barbados)

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 mythologizing 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.

Biographies

JADE GIBSON (South Africa/UK/Philippines)

Jade Gibson studied Fine Art at Central St Martins School of Art, London, Anthropology of Art at UCL, London and a PhD at University of Cape Town, South Africa. She also has a BSc in Biomedical Science and is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the UWC Humanities Department.

Her disciplinary interests coincide in her creative work, which incorporates poetry, visual art, creative and academic writing and community-based creative practice.

Her artwork has been in group shows in London (including the Barbican), at the Iziko Slave Lodge 'Dis Nag', Iziko Natural History Museum Africa Day 2012 and the Greatmore Art Studios, a joint exhibition as a form of 'cultural exchange' at Zimbabwe National Gallery, work in a rainforest to set up the first ever environmental centre and an exhibition at Vanuatu Kole Wan village and her short film 'Rootless' being shown in conferences and seminars in Paris, Ghent and Norway.

Part of her multidisciplinary and cross-cultural interest stems from living in South Africa for the past 13 years, her own experience of being half-Scottish, half-Filipino with a South African half-sister, and growing up in the UK, North Africa and the West Indies as a child.

Jamun (India)

Jamun creates unique visual narratives for inspiring concepts and people. We are DIGITAL film makers and believe in the collaborative spirit of film making. Driven by inter-disciplinarian thought, we tell stories that span from brand identities, music documentaries and social change advocacy.

We look at life around us and hope to tell it's stories in beautiful ways. Jamun is currently turned on by creating unique visual narratives for inspiring concepts and people.

Maria Kley (Japan/Belgium/The Netherlands)

Maria Kley (Tokyo, 1981) lives and works in Brussels (Belgium) and Rotterdam (The Netherlands). After her studies in men's fashion design at the ARTEZ Institute of the Arts in Arnhem (The Netherlands), she worked for several years in the professional fashion sector, before she dedicated herself to an autonomous artist practice with emphasis on sculpture. The investigation into 'lost significance' of concrete objects/materials and abstract experiences is central in the work of Maria Kley.

Her creative method dates from the time when she worked as a fashion designer. In 2004 she held an interactive, psychosocial research amongst 58 men, which formed the

basis of her menswear collection. Today, her aim is to use personal information and interaction as raw material for new work in a similar way. For the process to be as natural as possible, Kley deliberately does not have a fixed plan or protocol. While spending time in peoples' living and working environment, she works with materials that surround them: leftovers

Meghna Singh (India/UK/South Africa)

I am visual artist, filmmaker, curator, PhD candidate and a creative of many trades. Born in New Delhi and currently living in Cape Town, pursuing a PhD at The Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, I have at various stages and conjunctions in my life traveled, lived and worked in various cities like London, Prague, Kochi, Istanbul, Turin and beyond. Inspiration for a lot of my site specific and video work comes from new places and everything they encompass- in terms of the physicality of a space, its history, surrounding social circumstances, cultural influences and the emotional immediacy of being in that specific place. Some of my recent works have been shown at Cittadellarte, Fondazione Pistoletto, Italy, The Rag Factory, London, The Greatmore Studios, Cape Town, The Dun Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures, Dublin and The Kashi Art Café n Gallery, Kochi, India

Kathryn Smith (South Africa)

Kathryn Smith (b. 1975) works at the interface between studio work, scholarly research, writing and curatorial work, exploring and documenting spaces of uncertainty, risk and experimentation, with an abiding interest in the processes and aesthetics of forensic science. She holds a senior lectureship in Fine Arts at Stellenbosch University. She is a 2012/2013 Chevening scholar and will be pursuing an MSc (Forensic Art) at the University of Dundee, Scotland.

Maria Tzanakou (Greece)

She is a graduate of Athens School of Fine Arts and has attended the MA Performance Design and Practice at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London. She lives and works in Athens, Greece. She recently participated in the Groups Shows 2013 - "THE NON ZERO SUM ART GAMES", curated by Matthew Nevin, Ciara Scanlan, & Aoife Giles, Unit 4, Dublin, Ireland. Her work has been exhibited at 3rd Biennale of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Nov. 2011, Kunsthalle Athena, Athens, July 2012 and 11th Action Field Kodra, Thessaloniki, Sep. 2011. Maria's work occupies the space of art as public intervention in the streets of her native Athens. Using various mediums such as graffiti art, performance and video, she brings attention to critical contemporary issues during the time of an intense economic crisis in Greece.

Biography of Toni Stuart [South Africa]

Toni Stuart, 30, is a poetry writer, performer and developer. Her poetry has been published in Looking Back, Going Forward: Young Voices on Freedom (British Council, STE Publishers, 2004), the short story anthology Women Flashing (Women's Writing Workshops, 2005). The Ground's Ear (Quickfox Publishing, 2011) and Agenda Journal on Teenage Fertility and Desire (Unisa Press and Routledge, 2011). As a journalist she worked for Cape Community Newspapers for a number of years, and now writes for Word Up eZine and reviews books for the Cape Times.

Toni performed with the And the Word Was Woman Ensemble, from 2004 – 2007, alongside acclaimed poet Malika Ndlovu and the 2010 Ingrid Jonker Prize winner Tania van Schalkwyk among others. She featured at the Urban Voices International Poetry Festival in 2010; was the supporting performer at the Badilisha Poetry Xchange present Lemn Sissay in 2012; was part of The Callings at GIPCA's Exuberance Project in 2012. She is curator of Poetica, at Open Book Festival 2013 and runs The Silence That Words Come From – writing workshops that enable people to explore voice.

In 2010, she co-founded the NPO I Am Somebody!, with storyteller Nicole le Roux, and now serves on its board. The organisation uses youth development and storytelling to build resilient, integrated and reconciled communities.

Christie FossilSoul van Zyl (South Africa)

Fossil Soul (Christie van Zyl) is a poet who was born and raised in Kwa-Zulu Natal, a proud Zulu woman and an advocate for personal development, growth and the evolution of humanity. Inspired by raw emotion, expression and vivid connection to evolution, she is moved by grief, loss & struggle and channels her poetry according to the progression of dealing with the natural process of life. Christie is currently involved in Inkanyiso Productions alongside Zanele Muholi, doing LGBTIQ media advocacy as a documenter, archiving the lives of black queer individuals in Africa; she is also part of Power Tree poetry, a poetry movement focusing of Unity and harnessing one voice through the love of Word! Fossil Soul's daily bread consists of the following words: Celestial love in abundance and exponential evolution and peace!

Alberta Whittle [Barbados/UK]

Alberta Whittle graduated from the Masters programme at Glasgow School of Art in 2011. Whittle has undertaken numerous international residencies, including CESTA (Czech Republic), Market Gallery (Scotland), Fresh Milk (Barbados) Collective Gallery (Scotland) and Greatmore Studios (South Africa). She choreographs interactive installations, interventions and performances as site-specific artworks in public and private spaces, including at the Royal Scottish Academy and has exhibited in various solo and group shows in Europe, South Africa and the Caribbean.

Her practice examines roles and representations of gender and race found throughout history, museums, art, posters, film, mythology and YouTube clips. Mining a variety of sources, using mixed references to cultural rituals, costume, pageantry and drag, she investigates how identity can be projected through masquerade.

In 2013, Whittle has received an award from the Royal Scottish Academy Residencies for Scotland to undertake two residencies at Hospitalfield House and at the Scottish Sculpture Workshop. In 2014, Whittle will be travelling to Norway and Johannesburg for a residency and exhibitions.



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