

TRANSCODE //

DIALOGUES AROUND INTERMEDIA PRACTICE

Exhibiting Artists

COLLEEN ALBOROUGH / CELIA DE VILLIERS & INTUTHUKO SEWING GROUP / FRIKKIE EKSTEEN / LAWRENCE LEMAOANA / CHURCHILL MADIKIDA / SELLO MAHLANGU / GWEN MILLER / MARCUS NEUSTETTER / CAROLYN PARTON / NATHANIEL STERN / MINNETTE VÁRI / FABIAN WARGAU

Introduction

TRANSCODE is an art exhibition that frames the theoretical gap between digital and analogue media. It focuses on intermedia art practices that articulate differences between hands-on and digital media. This curatorial focus also approaches the concept of mediation as a dialogue between supposedly conflicting positions, materials and traditions.

Artists who work in traditional media, but whose creative processes are increasingly influenced by digital technology, were invited to participate in the exhibition. Their ways of re-coding traditional processes reveal formal and conceptual parallels contained by presence and embodiment. Within these processes the artists explore assumed differences within unfolding dialogues while reconstructing 'grey areas'; places where slippage and intervention may avoid rigid classification. The creative convergence of the individual expressions within TRANSCODE makes these liminal spaces visible.

This pamphlet contains brief statements by the artists regarding their personal positions within the exhibition. The role of the curator here was to engage with the invited artists in order to develop ideas on different conceptual levels. Gadamer points out that dialogue is an action "to speak with the other". This implies the possibility that different approaches may co-exist: neither one voice dominate, nor is there an endless deferral of meaning.

Formally the exhibiting space is sectioned into installation 'rooms'. Here the works mediate the abstract ideas of narration, time, embodiment, and systems of order; and set up relationships of engagement due to the proximate order of one 'room' to another. With TRANSCODE, the artwork becomes a trace, evidence of the interaction between artists, as well as isolated actions of single individuals.

The concept of transcoding implies not only a sharing of cultures, but also the potential for a cross-contamination between different disciplines. In software jargon, the term transcode refers to a process that enables the conversion of data from one encoding to another, permitting the export and interchange of dissimilar formats. Similarly, TRANSCODE enables metaphoric transformation. Within the context of this exhibition, transcoding also points to the significant, yet often inconspicuous manner in which we adjust our lives in a world of ubiquitous technologies.

TRANSCODE exposes the way that artistic mediation processes may carry meaning across apparent boundaries to produce unexpected overlaps - a complex creative detour that offers an alternative way of imagining the presumed dualism between traditional and digital art. The visual arts translate the world in ways that language and other forms of research are unable to do. The artwork presents the 'plasticity' that cannot be obtained in a verbal 'language'. The principle of material processes as being reflective of thinking, knowledge and research is strongly supported in current writing within practice-led research. This exhibition is the first practice-led research on a Doctoral level in the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology at UNISA.

Walkabouts by artists will take place on Friday, 9 September, at 13h00 and Saturday 24 September, at 11h00.

Prof Kenneth Hay, Professor of Contemporary Art Practice from Leeds University, United Kingdom, will present lectures on practice-led research. Kgorong Building, Main Campus, Unisa, Bamboo Seminar Room, 1st Floor on Friday 23 September, from 10h30 until 15h30.

A comprehensive catalogue will be published in 2012 documenting the exhibition.



Lawrence Lemaona

The popular media, in the form of newspapers, radio and television has focused recently on the topic of economic changes among Black South Africans. This theme has provoked a number of debates. Adjectives such as Black Diamonds, BEE Types, Buppies, Wabenzis, Tenderpreneurs and Fat Cats have become synonymous with young black professionals in the imaginations of many.

In this body of work, Lemaona sifts through this idea to reveal the many social layers that seem obvious but are edited out. He powerfully undermines the stereotype of the Post-Apartheid Black Experience as being both homogenous and singular by exploiting materials considered 'feminine', such as fabric, wool and embroidery, to portray subjects considered 'masculine', namely the 4x4 BMW X5. Lemaona also concentrates his creative efforts around issues of 'upward social mobility' and aspiration.

Lawrence Lemaona holds a B-Tech Fine Art from the University of Johannesburg. He is recipient of several art awards and residencies, is active in collaborative and community projects, and participates regularly in international exhibitions. Lemaona lives and works in Gauteng, currently lecturing in the Department of Visual Arts at The University of South Africa.



Celia de Villiers and Intuthuko Embroiderers

The collaborative artwork created for TRANSCODE reveals the negotiation and dialogue between the traditional medium of stitching and the animations made for The Journey to Freedom Narratives. Intuthuko contributed the majority of the embroideries for the first award winning Journey to Freedom project. These consisted of two quilts and animated embroideries compiled in DVD format, depicting the struggle for freedom and reconciliation in South Africa. The current collaboration engages with the theme of the labyrinth and knot, metaphors of rhythmic movement, continuous annulment and reconstruction. The stitch moves from the centre to the periphery and back, following the path of hand and heart, because narrative construction is often circular instead of linear. The stitched anecdotes and characters in the artwork branch out and intersect forming an interdisciplinary cartographical structure depicting our recent South African history, iconography, disorientation and eventual mediated knowledge.

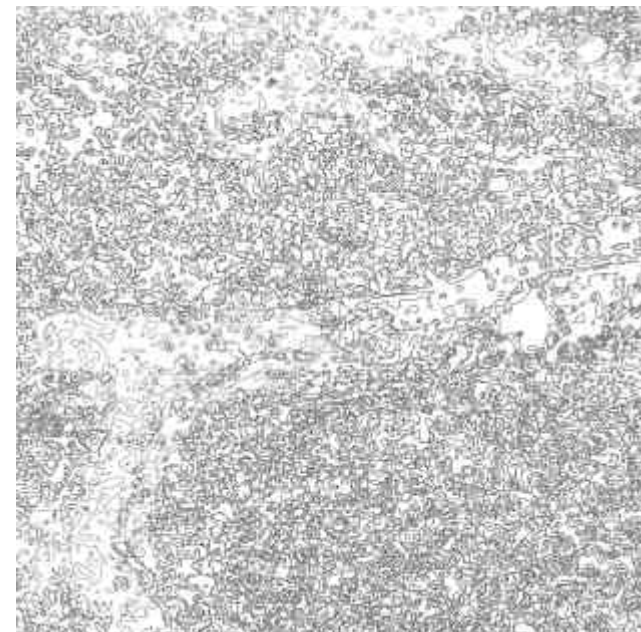
De Villiers holds a BA (Fine Art), Higher Education Diploma and a MA in Visual Arts cum laude (UNISA). She lives in Gauteng and is a lecturer at The University of South Africa. The Intuthuko group, from Etwatwa, a rural township in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng, consists of 30 women and one male artist. De Villiers and businesswoman Susan Haycock facilitate the group.



Frikkie Eksteen

Eksteen's art is a multi-disciplinary permutation of traditional and non-traditional practices and often questions the underlying mechanisms of representational systems. Most recently, this focus resulted in a series of artworks where the precision of computer imaging is contrasted with volatile painting processes. In a portrait series entitled Stock Characters (2011); 3D wire frame figures were printed on canvas and adapted as a scaffold for a range of painterly effects. The confrontation of traditional and digital media created a compatible yet contrasting union. The materials spoke to as well as against each other in a way that prompts questions about representational substance. These works present an open-ended conversation about the physical matter of painting, the body, and the analytical space of the computer. Apart from approaching its own signification as central to its subject matter, the work is also concerned with the traditional uses and aims of portrait painting; specifically its relationship to power, notions of likeness, the artist's stylistic signature and the passage of time.

A graduate in the town of his birth, Frikkie Eksteen completed his Master's degree at the University of Pretoria in 2000. He is recipient of several art awards and residencies. He lectures part-time at the University of Pretoria.



Marcus Neustetter

Mostly process driven, Neustetter's creative production intersects art, science and technology, causing him to work with a multi-disciplinary approach. For 10 years, he has concentrated on the translation from traditional media and the changing language of new technology based practice.

This series of works represent his fascination for the space in between, as seen in the subject that he explores and in the medium or technology he engages. These include a site-specific installation using gallery resources to map his research in a current potential archaeological dig site in the Cradle of Humankind, penetrating the pixels of Google Earth to attempt to reveal what exists below. In other works, a Google Earth video and a series of drawings capture impressions and document Neustetter moving between particular spaces, namely his travels from Johannesburg around the globe as well as the distance travelled between Johannesburg and Pretoria for this exhibition. Motion and the space in between are subjects of his experimental performance series digital light drawings.

Born (1976) and based in Johannesburg, artist and cultural activist Marcus Neustetter read for his Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, earning his Masters Degree in 2001.



Carolyn Parton

A fascination with the cumulative weight, mass and volume of paint, its evocative therapeutic applications, and how it behaves independently as matter within our shared global context led Parton to her present work, Time will tell. Her research and use of spent paint has been influenced by her experiences and work with digital technologies as well as research of art therapy processes. Through these, she explored the blurred boundaries between the virtual and the real in manifesting physical and emotional space.

Initially, the ocean with its contradictory dynamism – the generative and the destructive – was a symbolic basis for her interest in the submerged within a collective consciousness. In this, she saw correlations with the global collective consciousness embodied in the digital ocean. A result is her fascination with the fragment – the piece of paint dust, the discarded paint tube, the digital bite – and its collective, accumulative power. She has collected paint from painters ranging from acclaimed artists to commercial house painters.

Carolyn Parton is a painter and graphic designer living and working in Cape Town. She completed her BA (Fine Arts) with distinction at The University of South Africa. She is currently a creative director of Hippocampus.



Churchill Madikida

Madikida maintains that there are few clear biological indications to provide boundaries between different stages of our lives. Rites of passage are social events that fill this gap. Within Xhosa culture, circumcision is one of the last surviving traditional practices, considered sacred and secret. The digital video Blood on my Hands acknowledges the initiates who go under the spear each year, and is dedicated to those who lose their manhood and their lives undergoing this ritual.

The video Stampede consists of found, edited footage and exploits the imagery of a stampede to reflect on our drive to reach some level of safety and well-being in relation to recent history. A stampede is an act of mass action, a herd's frenzied charge. This emanates from the animal – or human – instinctive 'flight or fight' impulse. The herd acts, and reacts, as a single entity, often with maximum aggression.

Born in Umtata (1973), Churchill Madikida obtained his BA (Fine Arts) at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2001. In 2003 he was a joint winner of the Tollman Award for a young artist; and was The Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year in 2006. Madikida is an arts and culture consultant contracted to project manage the Nelson Mandela Museum Arts Incubator Program.

Images

Cover: Frikkie Eksteen, detail from The Faultfinder from the Stock Characters series (2011). Oil and inkjet print on canvas, 36.2 x 94.2 cm.

Lawrence Lemaona, Resurrection Series (2008). Print on cotton paper, 73 x 123 cm.

Celia de Villiers and Intuthuko Embroiderers, Synchronic Journey (2011). Hand-dyed thread embroidered on quilted cotton, 220 x 220 cm.

Frikkie Eksteen, The Complaisant Man from Stock Characters series (2011). Oil and inkjet print on canvas, 36.2 x 94.2 cm.

Marcus Neustetter, In Between: The Cradle Observation 1 (2011). Ink on paper, dimensions variable.

Carolyn Parton, 24.925kg Landscape (2010). Paint residue, 63 x 101 cm.

Churchill Madikida, Blood on my Hands (2004). Video.

Nathaniel Stern, Static (2011). 6-channel video installation.

Colleen Alborough, Fear and Trembling (2010 -2011). Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Sound design: João Orecchia.

Sello Mahlangu, Xenophobia Mars Legacy (2010). Interactive DVD.

Fabian Wargau, Dripping Actuality (2007). Installation detail, (2007), dimensions variable.

Minnette Vári, Oracle (1999). Digital video, loop.

Gwen Miller, Detail from Continuum System (2009). Ultra Chrome inks on Hahnemuhle paper, 1500 x 700cm.



Nathaniel Stern

Stern is an experimental installation and video artist, net.artist, printmaker and writer. His work combines new and traditional media, and the focus is to intercept taken-for-granted categories such as 'body,' 'vision,' or 'knowledge.' The works on this exhibition include performative artworks consisting of a translucent print mounted to a video screen, physical computing and an immersive sound and video environment.

The installation *Stuttering* attempts to blur the lines between body and language through physical interactions that trigger spoken word. The purpose of each interaction is to refigure fixed subject/object hierarchies as unexpected and dynamic engagements. The work he created for TRANSCODE, entitled *Static*, is a 6-channel audiovisual installation made up of generatively edited Best Picture-winning films. It creates a potent space for engaging our collective, social relationships to archetypal stories and other characters.

Nathaniel Stern holds a design degree from Cornell University, a studio-based Masters in art from the Interactive Telecommunications Program (NYU), and a research PhD from Trinity College Dublin. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.



Colleen Alborough

Alborough's interest in the intersection between traditional art media and digital technologies has led her to create experimental installation spaces. The production of her work is labour-intensive and she presents tactile environments together with Stop frame animations. These are combined into evocative and experiential spaces that foreground questions around identity, memory, social interactions and responsibilities. Her current area of research investigates how the notion of the haptic manifests within video installations.

Fear and Trembling is a fantasy video installation that reflects upon contemporary living in Johannesburg. The work depicts a headless character engaged on an endless search through the matted cityscape to find his head. The presence of historical ghosts and the threat of the environment, a mysterious underground world, and darkened city spaces haunt the character's search for stability. In mapping an imaginary landscape, the work aims to reflect upon the negotiations and manoeuvres we make within the complex, and at times disconcerting and chaotic space of South Africa.

Colleen Alborough is a multimedia artist living and working in Johannesburg. She completed her BA (FA) and MA (FA) both with distinction at the University of the Witwatersrand. Alborough is currently lecturing in New Media and Visual Arts at The University of South Africa.

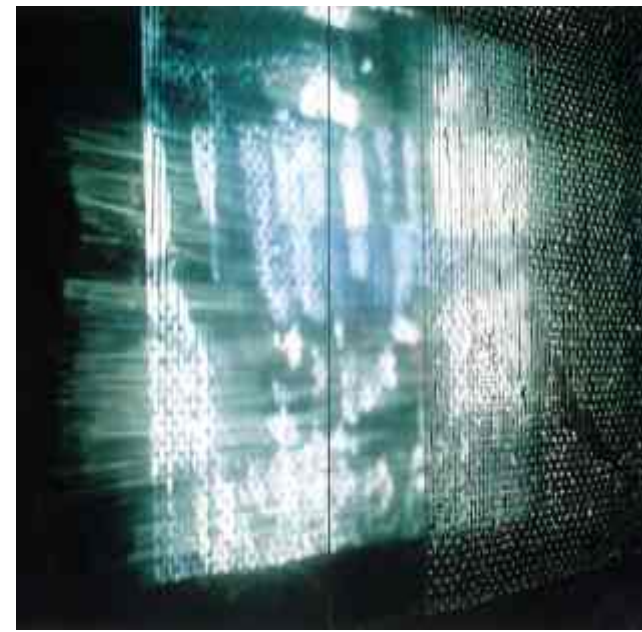


Sello Mahlangu

Mahlangu is a multimedia artist who is passionate about interactive installations. His artwork takes a critical view of social, cultural, and political issues. In his work, he deconstructs the notions of the South African dream, the spirit of Ubuntu, the Rainbow Nation and Democracy, as preached by iconic South African leaders. After having engaged subjects as diverse as Xenophobia, and foreign and local languages, the work exhibited here reproduces a utopian vision of a metro city, arranged into abstract layers.

The monochromatic black and white nature of the imagery establishes a surreal, dream-like quality, suggesting notions of deterioration of the spirit of Ubuntu; and formally acknowledges the different locations where xenophobic attacks took place. The monologue provides clues to the foreigner's state of mind. During research and production, areas of interest prompt the question: do we value the language, accent or origin of a foreign individual within South Africa today?

Sello Mahlangu works as a graphic designer in Pretoria. With many years of experience in the graphic design industry, he is currently a freelancer in the corporate industry around South Africa and neighbouring countries. Mahlangu is studying towards his Bachelor's Degree in Multimedia and Digital Arts at The University of South Africa.



Fabian Wargau

Wargau maintains that the contemplation of ways to see and understand the world through visuals that have been distilled into pixels and dots has forced him to establish a different paradigm to deal with visual imagery. His creative methods include exploiting printers, machines, surveillance, and television sets, through to attempting to express the sensory perceptual spectrum of the human being while drawing concurrently on the similarities between the digital-mechanical and the organic realms of sight and projection.

In defining his personal translation of media as reproduction and remediation, Wargau's work speaks of the denied realities of the watcher and the watched, the subject and the object; and the way this could be comprehended in a single visual by the human mind. This multimedia exhibition of traditional paint, photography and video projections is, according to Wargau, "all dripping in actuality".

Born in Pretoria (1984), Fabian Oliver Wargau completed his BVA at The University of South Africa cum laude. He is currently furthering his interest in cinematography; and his works range from experimental painting through to digital video art, animation, photography, performance and installation. He is a multimedia lecturer and the Multimedia Laboratory Manager at The University of South Africa.



Minnette Vári

Through her work, Minnette Vári traces the signs encoded by mass media, breaking open the surface to reveal the often frightening aspects of our times. She refers to the gaps in our memories and the reconstruction of missing history as equal to a confrontation with a menacing apparition. To re-incorporate disparate truths into one body, to make it whole again, is an excruciating task. Unlike Saturn (or Chronos), the god of time who, in an attempt to evade his fate, devoured his children, the figure in *Oracle* wants desperately to hasten her fate, to bite into, over and beyond time.

Vári chose footage from the media in accordance to the characteristics of Saturn's children - themselves deities associated with various human endeavours such as wealth and war; and in this way has produced a portrait of her country and of the world at a certain point in time. It is this portrait that becomes the setting for a more personal interrogation of the histories that shape who we are.

Minnette Vári has an acclaimed international art career and also exhibits regularly in Johannesburg and Cape Town. She was born in Pretoria (1968) and lives and works in Johannesburg. She obtained her Masters degree in Fine Arts from the University of Pretoria in 1997.



Gwen Miller

In an organised society of a constantly changing world, we attempt to measure, control and determine reality through regulation. The use of glass laboratory equipment recalls the continuous alliance between technology and urban life. These works concern the values of purity and intellect that society promotes, while acknowledging the grinding, organic, underlying imperfection of physical existence. The reality of 'living' these systems has become a grey area that is a far more random and chaotic place than the presupposed ideal. The ordering of knowledge into systems is influenced not only by previous knowledge and traditions, but by new digital ways of communicating and creating, as well as by conformity to physical reality.

In a time where progress is associated with expansion and industrial development, the consideration of the earth as a closed system has jolted us into urgent responsibility. The grime we create comes back to us in unwelcome structures that dictate alternative rules.

Born in Musina, South Africa, (1962) Gwen Miller completed her MA (Fine Arts) at Pretoria University in 1997 and is currently registered for a DLitt et Phil degree at The University of South Africa. She lectures in the Department of Art History, Visual Arts, and Musicology at The University of South Africa.

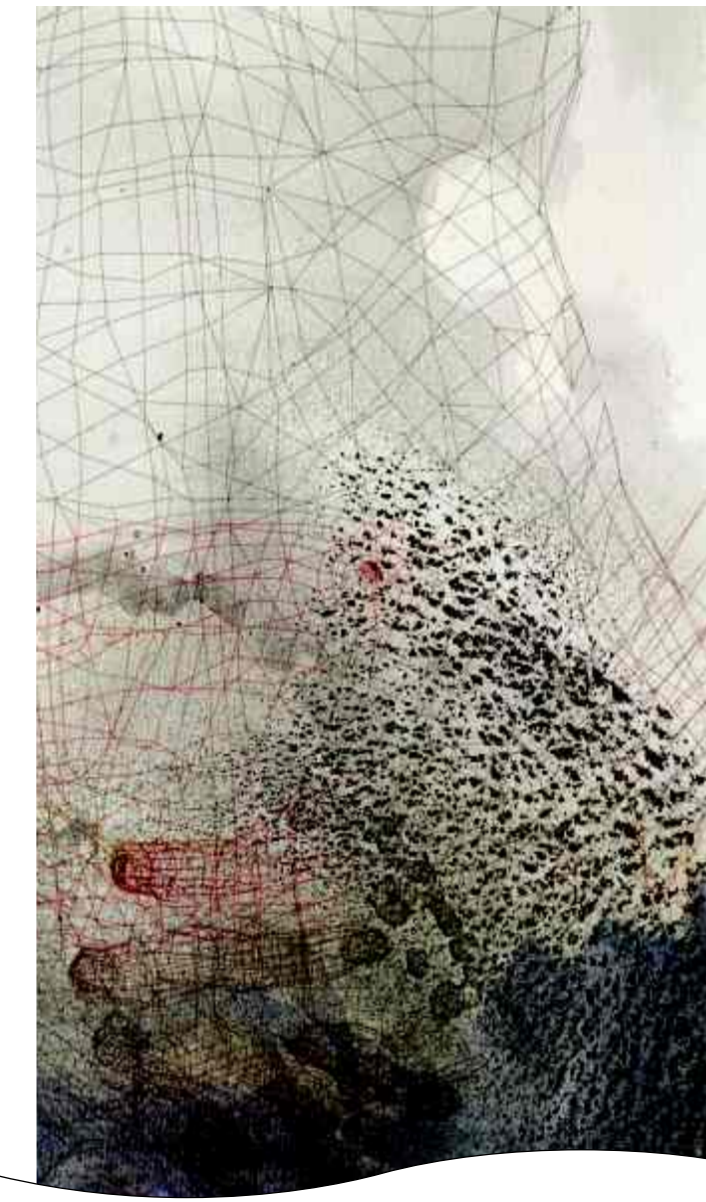
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Curated by Gwen Miller

7 - 30 September 2011

UNISA Art Gallery



UNISA Art Gallery
Kgorong Building,
Ground Floor, Main Campus
Preller Street, Pretoria, 0003,
Tel: (012) 441 5683
ukun1@unisa.ac.za
www.unisa.ac.za/gallery