

## *Uncanny stories*

A GROUP EXHIBITION curated by Gwenneth Miller

The exhibition features work from Unisa Staff members, Third Level students and maquettes for the developing Unisa Science Campus Art Walk.

7 December 2021 – 11 February 2022: Viewing from Tuesdays to Fridays

2-3 February 2022: Walkabout and Round table discussion

### **CURATORIAL BRIEF**

When the familiar becomes strange and the strange becomes familiar, we encounter uncanny stories. Making art often includes searching for the tensions between known and unknown, between ordinary existence and intriguing events that write peculiar new stories into our lives. In *How to make art at the end of the world, A Manifesto for Research-Creation*, Nathalie Loveless (2019:8) writes “I continue to see research-creation as one of those cracks (to paraphrase Leonard Cohen) that lets the light shine in, through its experimental and dissonant forms of practice, research, and pedagogy”. This statement contains the challenge for creative practice to unsettle traditional approaches and disrupt what we take for granted. This characteristic is connected to a history of *making strange*, as can be found in the concept of the uncanny/*Das Unheimliche* by Sigmund Freud (1919) and developed by psychoanalysts (Lacan) and feminists (Kristeva). In each of these cases we find an anxiety in real and authentic life, an anxiety not with the unfamiliar, but with the normal.

When the familiar is ruptured, we encounter the uncanny, but when it is continuously reified, like in *The Stepford Wives*, we find it there too. This concept has been extended to

the notion of the *Uncanny Valley* in animation, video games or robotics producing disturbing feelings of antipathy where we should feel empathy, like encountering a doppelgänger or impostor. In these interactions, things we are at ease with are placed in unexpected perspectives, and it can evoke narrative of disquiet, mortality awareness or simply stories where we become part of our fantasies.

The idea of the uncanny has also been linked to discourses of dispossession, “unhomely” locations (Nayar 2010) or domains, rendered through strategies of sensory ambiguity. Being “out-of joint” with ideas can also foster critical thinking and bring new appreciation for our world – the rush of blood when your heartbeat quickens, when social subversion shifts of power relations (Kokoli 2016) and new narratives find expression. The uncanny also creeps into spaces where our relationships with nature change or become broken, where learning that a once comfortable part of life is harmful to the environment, forever alters our perception of our everyday actions. Even our own consciousness cannot be trusted to always deliver us safely beyond the gulfs of grief, depression or mania. This exhibition offers reflection to on these uncanny stories.

## Participating artists

### Staff members

Ania Krajewska / Johann Opperman / Hetta Pieterse / Kabelo Maja / Nombe Mpako / Elfriede Dreyer / Gwenneth Miller / Daniel Mosako / Sango Filita

### Third Level students

Ryan Botha / Kirsty Swanepoel / Gerda Letellier / Sue Clark / Chantal Essex-Ferreira / Johanna Botha

### Collaborative projects exhibiting maquettes and proposals for the Unisa Science Campus Art Walk

Sue Clark and Kabelo Maja / Dionne MacDonald, Hetta Pieterse and the Andrew Lindsay community team / Emma Willemse and Heinrich Joemath from Spier Arts Trust / Alicia Hindson and Lushen Moodley / Marian Hester and Mbangiso Babaso / Linda Hanekom / Reinhardt Sonntag / Ingrid Bolton / Manu Manjesh Lal and Alex Trapani

---

### References:

- Freud, S. 1919. *The uncanny (Das Unheimliche)*. <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf> <https://web.archive.org/web/20110714192553/http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html> (Accessed 30 June 2021)
- Kokoli, AM. 2016. *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice*. Bloomsbury Academic. Introduction available at <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/the-feminist-uncanny-in-theory-and-art-> Durkan and London: Duke University Press. [https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-1-4780-0402-8\\_601.pdf](https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-1-4780-0402-8_601.pdf) (Accessed 30 June 2021) [practice/introduction?from=search](https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-1-4780-0402-8_601.pdf) (Accessed 1 July 2021)
- Loveless, N. 2019. *How to make art at the end of the world. A Manifesto for Research-Creation*.
- Nayar, P. 2010. The Postcolonial Uncanny; The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide". *College Literature*, 37(4), 88-119. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27917766> (Accessed 1 July 2021)