



# \*imagetext\*

24 July 2015

Department of Visual Arts (UP), Van Wouw House

08h30-9h00 Registration/Tea/Coffee

09h00-10h30 **SESSION ONE**

**Amanda du Preez:** Welcome  
Professor, Visual Culture Studies, Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria

**Keynote address** **James Sey:** *Photographing a Form of South African Death*  
Research Associate, Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, FADA, University Of Johannesburg

**Keynote address:** **Raimi Gbadamosi:** To be announced  
Professor, Fine Art, Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand

**Cynthia Kros and Georges Pfruender:** *Babel Re-Play: A Theme from Friedrich Dürrenmatt*  
Research Associate, History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand  
Kulturvermittlung Theaterpädagogik, Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz, Switzerland.

10h30-11h00 Tea/Coffee

11h00-13h00 **SESSION TWO**

**Keynote address** **Roger Ballen:** *The Best Photographs Have No Words*  
Photographer and Artist

**Keynote address** **Sean O'Tool:** *The Reluctant Art Critic: Ivan Vladislavić and the Writing of South African Art History*  
PHD candidate, Department of English, University of Cape Town

**Marko Stamenkovic:** *From Hyper Textual Self to Hyper Visual Self: The Puzzle of Cybersuicide*  
Post-doctoral fellow of the Archie Mafeje Research Institute, University of South Africa

13h00-14h00 Lunch

14h00-15h30 **SESSION THREE:**

**Lize Kriel:** *What gets lost in transcription?*  
Associate Professor, Visual Culture Studies, Department of Visual Art, University of Pretoria

**Jenni Lauwrens:** *SomaticXSemiotic: the X-factor in image and/ as text*  
Lecturer, Visual Culture Studies, Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria

**Natalie Fossey:** *Revisiting a collaboration, infecting the city 2013, Media Me*  
Lecturer, Fine Arts, Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria

**Johan Thom:** Conclusion  
Senior Lecture, Fine Arts, Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria

**ARTISTS EXHIBITING IN ROOM 1-3 & 1-13**

<b>Nigel Mullins</b>	<i>Obsolete Remnant of the Industrial Age</i>	(Oil paint and copper wire, on superwood and antique frame)
<b>Sarel Petrus</b>	<i>Geological time 3</i>	(Bronze and wood)
<b>Carina du Randt</b>	<i>Eating away the text</i>	(Sculpted into book)
	<i>Sweet Berry Sunshine Land</i>	(Crayons and books)
	<i>The invented Forrest</i>	(Wooden tongue depressors and ice-cream sticks)
<b>Johan Thom</b>	<i>fiction /non-fiction</i>	Modified books, action and mixed media.
<b>Matilda Engelblik</b>	<i>Ashes to ashes</i>	(Ceramics)
	<i>Ashes in motion</i>	(Video)
	<i>if memories fail, words prevail</i>	(Video)
<b>Ian Jacobs</b>	<i>To be announced</i>	
<b>Tanya Klöpping</b>	<i>Bodily Decay: a looking glass</i>	(Needle piercing on Fabriano with charcoal and Perspex)
	<i>Withered Contagion</i>	(Needle piercing on Fabriano with charcoal and Perspex)
<b>Shenaz Mohamed</b>	<i>Work in Progress</i>	(Paper cut out)
<b>Avita Sooful</b>	<i>For my queens</i>	(Installation: wood, cow dung, acrylic paint and sound)
<b>Juliana Irene Smith</b> (JC Mountain Schmied)	<i>Exakt Neutral</i>	(Video)
	<i>Occupy My Ass</i>	(Posters)
<b>Mariska Meyers</b>	<i>Prophet</i>	(Assemblage sculpture)
<b>Genre Pretorius</b>	<i>Fruit Stick</i>	(silkscreen)
	<i>Muscle Mary</i>	(silkscreen)

## ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS

### SESSION ONE

#### Keynote Address:

To be announced

**Raimi Gbadamosi: Professor, Fine Art, Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand**

#### Keynote Address: *Photographing a Form of South African Death*

**James Sey: Research Associate Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, FADA, University of Johannesburg**

Through a close reading of two photographs of the same death scene – press photographs of a Vlakplaas apartheid hit squad double murder in Lesotho in 1985 – this paper ruminates on the well-documented relationship between the photograph and death. In particular, it asks the question if there might be a particular form of this relationship in the South African instance.

#### *Babel Re-Play: A Theme from Friedrich Dürrenmatt*

**Cynthia Kros: Research Associate, History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand**

**Georges Pfruender: Kulturvermittlung und Theaterpädagogik, Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz, Switzerland**

We would like to use this opportunity to present work from the *Babel Re-Play* project that we have launched recently. For some time we have been exploring the mythical and philosophical ideas inspired by the story of the Tower of Babel. Along the way we (re) encountered Swiss playwright and writer, Friedrich Dürrenmatt's works and his tremendous struggle to write a play about Babel. Dürrenmatt interested us because, not only, did he evoke terrifying images of the post-Second World War world, which we contend are still valid, but another of his plays, translated into English as *The Visit*, was appropriated with Dürrenmatt's approval by Senegalese filmmaker, Djibril Diop Mambéty and transposed into an African setting as *Hyènes*. The way in which Mambéty conceived of the relationship of his protagonist to Europe, and his description of the exercise as one in which he was reclaiming her, seized our imagination and made us think of Babel and Babylon as extra-European myths that were also crying out for repatriation to a non-western space.

Dürrenmatt, as we have intimated, engaged with the post-war world with its potential for self-destruction, its cruel power struggles and ideologies, and the possibility that God himself was heartless. While Dürrenmatt urged continued resistance to the terrible conditions that prevailed, he did not hold out much hope for their resolution. He deliberately refused to offer any easy consolations or formulaic responses. There are two aspects to his approach that we wish to explore in a mixed media format, one philosophical and the other aesthetic: Dürrenmatt suggested that it was impossible to convey the complexity of narratives through writing. Though he never considered himself a visual artist ("I draw like a child") he engaged with drawing and painting as an essential medium of expression for tales he grappled with, including the Tower of Babel, explaining that it was only through this visual rendering that he could seize and translate its mammoth proportions – and so we go on to probe: does writing fail us when we try to represent the imminence of catastrophe, the possibility that Atlas will fail (imagery from Dürrenmatt), the infinitesimal mechanism of balance upon which the universe rests, the exploding stars and encroaching black holes (whose imagery he borrowed from contemporary astronomy), the misguided follies of patriotism and nationalism, the colossal absurdity of human endeavour and hubris - the tower that is 9 000 kilometres high? And if writing cannot bear these tasks, can images, and particularly images doing work as (spontaneous and always partial) metaphor, take us forward? Dürrenmatt explained that he did not make his plays before he had a visual image of what they would look like. He often made sketches before he even started to write. He took distance from his writing as one might stand back from one's easel to see, he said, if more red were needed. Our input will take the form of a short explanatory introduction followed by a text that tries to engage playfully, in the manner of which we think he would have approved with Dürrenmatt's work, and the simultaneous projection of images created to - as we have visualised it – allow us, as we tramp over the frozen surface to glimpse through worn patches of the ice, the things that lie in the dark water below.

**Keynote Address: *The Best Photographs Have No Words*****Roger Ballen (Photographer and Artist)**

Bio: Ballen is one of the most important photographers of his generation. He was born in New York in 1950 but for over 30 years he has lived and worked in South Africa. His work as a geologist took him out into the countryside and led him to take up his camera and explore the hidden world of small South African towns. At first he explored the empty streets in the glare of the midday sun but, once he had made the step of knocking on people's doors, he discovered a world inside these houses which was to have a profound effect on his work. These interiors with their distinctive collections of objects and the occupants within these closed worlds took his unique vision on a path from social critique to the creation of metaphors for the inner mind. After 1994 he no longer looked to the countryside for his subject matter finding it closer to home in Johannesburg.

Over the past thirty years his distinctive style of photography has evolved using a simple square format in stark and beautiful black and white. In the earlier works in the exhibition his connection to the tradition of documentary photography is clear but through the 1990s he developed a style he describes as 'documentary fiction'. After 2000 the people he first discovered and documented living on the margins of South African society increasingly became a cast of actors working with Ballen in the series' *Outland* and *Shadow Chamber* collaborating to create disturbing psychodramas.

The line between fantasy and reality in his more recent series' *Boarding House* and *Asylum of the Birds* (published in the Spring of 2014 by Thames and Hudson) has become increasingly blurred and in these series he has employed drawings, painting, collage and sculptural techniques to create elaborate sets. People are now often absent altogether; replaced by photographs of people used as props, by doll or dummy parts or where they do appear it's as disembodied hands, feet and mouths poking disturbingly through walls and pieces of rag. The often improvised scenarios are completed by the unpredictable behaviour of the animals which appear snapped in an instant of observation. Ballen has invented a new hybrid aesthetic in these works but one still rooted firmly in photography.

**Keynote Address: *The Reluctant Art Critic: Ivan Vladislavić and the Writing of South African Art History*****Sean O'Tool: PHD candidate, Department of English University of Cape Town**

Ivan Vladislavić announced his interest in the visual arts right at the outset of his literary career, in his debut book *Missing Persons* (1989), a collection of 11 stories offering acute, sometimes startling fictional re-imaginings of recent South African history. "They have come to topple me," says an unidentified sculpture in Pretoria in his story *We Came to the Monument*. Many of Vladislavić's early stories, while preoccupied with the symbols of colonial and apartheid history and power, have a striking contemporaneity. Mindful of Vladislavić's long-held resistance to writing in an openly discursive or analytical mode, a position he has only nominally given up in his more recent essayistic writings in *Portrait with Keys* (2006) and *The Loss Library & Other Unfinished Stories* (2011), this talk will biographically locate his historically-mindful and visually-literate texts. The talk will recapitulate aspects of Vladislavić's early biography, including his peripheral involvement with *Possession Arts*, a neo-Dadaist collective of avant-garde artists living in Yeoville, Johannesburg (members included Joachim Schönfeldt, Jeff Lok and Chas Unwin, all close associates of Vladislavić), as well as his attendance in 1982 of *documenta 7*, directed by Rudi Fuchs, during an extended trip abroad. Rather than simply forming an anecdotal aspect of his output as a writer, it is my contention that his literary corpus, which includes edited art books (notably Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse's 2015 *Deutsche Börse* photography prize winning *Ponte City*), capably functions as a form of art criticism. Fundamental to my argument is the position that Vladislavić's writings offer the possibility of widening and deepening commonsense notions of art criticism.

## ***From Hyper Textual Self to Hyper Visual Self : The Puzzle of Cybersuicide***

**Marko Stamenkovic: Post-doctoral fellow of the Archie Mafeje Research Institute , University of South Africa**

This paper questions the visual nature of cybersuicide: how it becomes visually communicated, engineered, performed, staged, recorded and documented over the Internet in the context of live broadcasting. Under the term “cybersuicide” (a phenomenon also known as “deathcasting”) I understand the act of overexposing one’s own death under conditions that the Internet plays a crucial role in facilitating the public display of (self-inflicted) death in full view. Moreover, this paper examines the mediatory assistance performed by the computer-based textual and visual tools (such as the screen and the Webcam), without excluding the responsibility of other participants in online communication and their assistance in the victim’s decision to terminate his/her life. Normative scientific analyses and media reports on this issue tackle the problem almost exclusively from the verbal-centered methodology, embedded in the belief that it is only through the information exchange (written and spoken words, farewell messages, notes, etc.) that our knowledge about cybersuicide becomes constructed. While focusing on the global and accelerated Internet-based visual regime and the fundamental shift occurring online (from text-based to image-based choreography of personal death), the aim is to discuss the witnessing experience of a new mode of “representation of suicide” in the cyber world, and the transformation from its underexposed toward its overexposed status. Hence, my questions: why does a suicidal individual need to establish visual contact with the other (a survivor/witness) through online communication in order to commit an act of self-destruction? Is it possible to think beyond the verbal model of human contact as a dominant form of communication, in order to make it complementary with the non-linguistic methods of analysis? Can the visual nature of human communication and the vision-exchange itself be treated as a specific kind of text - another language to be ‘learned’ if we want to understand the phenomenon of cybersuicide? What is actually represented/showed/displayed via the Internet through cybersuicide if we try and decolonize ourselves from standard psychiatric epistemic procedure?

### **SESSION THREE:**

#### ***What gets lost in transcription?***

**Lize Kriel (Associate Professor, Visual Culture Studies, Department of Visual Art, University of Pretoria)**

In this short presentation/demonstration/participation the experience of typing up onto the computer the content of handwritten letters by African Christians dating from the late-nineteenth-century Transvaal is contemplated with the audience.

#### ***SomaticXSemiotic: the X-factor in image and/ as text***

**Jenni Lauwrens (Lecturer, Visual Culture Studies, Department of Visual Art, University of Pretoria)**

This experimental presentation plays with and against the notion that images are texts and that therefore, they can be read semantically, ideologically and/or discursively). The presentation delves into the somatic (as opposed to semiotic) encounter with a slide and an amateur digital video production.

#### ***Revisiting a collaboration, infecting the city 2013, Media Me.***

**Natalie Fossey (Lecturer, Fine Arts, Department of Visual Art, University of Pretoria)**

Having participated in Infecting the City in 2013, this presentation will take the form of an anecdotal narrative traversing the experiences and interventions that took place as the project materialised and culminated in a public art work. The formation of the collective which produced the work will introduce the topic and the various people driven activities thereafter will be discussed. Finally the artwork and some observations made thereafter will be showcased highlighting some of the difficulties and challenges.