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'Silence/Violence' - a two-part Pulse project in Nieu Bethesda and Durban
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Curator Greg Streak's two-part 'Silence/Violence' exhibition opened simultaneously in Nieu Bethesda and Durban - 'Silence' in Nieu Bethesda and 'Violence' in Durban on... Despite the overt binaries of the terms and the separation of concerns through geographical place, (the small town of Nieu Bethesda set in the quiet untrammelled space of the Karoo and Durban, aka the Beirut of South Africa), 'Silence/Violence' is by no means an obvious show.

Four international artists (Ivan Grubanov (Serbia), Marco Pollo Rolla (Brazil), Adriana Lestido (Argentina) and Bharti Kerr (India)) and four South African artists (Luan Nel, Paul Edmunds, Carol-anne Gainer and Streak himself) produced a work for both sites in the space of three weeks. The strength of the show rests in the fact that whilst most of the work is politically relevant, it is privately inspired.

Many of the artists engaged with one of the oldest functions of art in their process - that of witnessing. Streak's own work showed a short, but crucial, sequence from the Harrison Ford movie 'Witness', where a young white boy sees the throat of a man being cut. Videoing the sequence and then videoing the retake again and again Streak's piece relentlessly destroys the original image. Not only is the perpetrator of the crime never revealed but what is seen continues to degenerate into a jumble of colours and marks, not unlike some modernist abstraction, only here the 'essence' of the image, its pixels and signals on the video screen, serve not to reveal the truth but further distance us from it.

Ivan Grubanov's small ink drawings of people he has interviewed who have experienced violence have a power well beyond their scale. In one particularly potent series Grubanov interviewed Greg Streak in a work that sheds light on Streak's curation of 'Silence/Violence'. Depicting Streak recounting his ordeal at the hands of hijackers when he had a gun inserted into his mouth and the trigger pulled the power of the drawing lies not in any re-enactment of the drama of the event, but in the cool, almost repetitive, images. Showing Streak in his vehicle, viewed always in profile, never looking at his interlocutor, the drawings present a man trapped by his own impotency in such a situation - his life and sense of self still at risk.

It is precisely the personal reality factor that makes this exhibition so strong - few of the artists stand outside the situations they engage. Carol-anne Gainer's performance piece on opening night was an archetypal gesture of humility and respect as she washed the feet of her maid, Beatrice Mazibuko. Flanked by large photographic scans of objects found during her time in Nieu Bethesda, broken pieces of delft, a single bullet, an old disintegrating white rose from a memorial (its plastic dewdrops now yellowed with age) the piece provided a powerful reminder of the complex history that informs our everyday domestic lives in South Africa.

Brazilian Marco Pollo Rolla's stunning performance directly afterwards also engaged with the theme of latent violence in the quotidian. Holding the audience in tension as he slowly, deliberately and silently ate his way through breakfast at a perfectly laid table Rolla suddenly

erupted, without warning, flinging himself from his seat across the table and up the wall where he remained as though pinioned, the smashed crockery and still steaming coffee strewn across the floor.

Domestic comfort for others is hard-won. Adriana Lestido's slide projection of the homeless on Durban's streets was so simple and effective one wondered why someone had not done it before. Photographing people beneath plastic as they sheltered from the rain, Lestido created a memorial to the anonymous dispossessed that appeared as ghosts beneath the semi-translucent sheets.

Facing other phantoms, Luan Nel's *Nightlight* installation forced viewers to draw close and peer between two boards filled with earth creating a rising landscape with a plastic goose glowing at the far end. Nightlights are meant to create security for those afraid of the dark, but nursery rhymes are full of grim and violent happenings. The concerns of this work were echoed at Nieu Bethesda where white ribbons tied to the trees and bushes produced a calligraphic drawing that at night froze and during the day softened and fluttered in the wind like Tibetan prayers on the landscape.

Paul Edmunds' minimalist burnished steel plate hand-punched full of thousands of holes at varying angles produced a ripple effect on its surface akin to the geological striations he'd noticed in Nieu Bethesda. Suspended subversively at ankle level its low-key presence was both beautiful and vaguely threatening whilst Bharti Kerr's poles pinning pelts decorated with sperm-like bhindi dots to the wall wryly subverted masculine power through its decorative presentation.

A show definitely worth catching as it travels to Cape Town towards the end of this year.