

Critique on “Accumulative Disintegration”

It is not strange to the tradition of art that art has been used to document, in the various manners available to it, history and history in the making. For instance, the Romans, using a variety of media, represented events such as military triumphs, civic benefactions, revolutions, general culture and even religious sacrifices. It has then subsequently become the task of civil society to collect and protect these bits of documentation, premised on the notion that they are direct links, as opposed to retrospective links, to our past. The artist has, in this sense, also taken on the role of scribe. So, save the commonly perceived and often highly controversial roles which society already ascribes to the artist, the artist does frequently come to serve as a sort of archivist for the constantly evolving social and political history of human kind.

It is in the light of art sometimes serving this end that I comment on the latest exhibition by Greg Streak, titled *Accumulative Disintegration*.

The exhibition as a whole seems very easily interpreted as a comment on both a pervasive and also deeply felt sense of social and political disintegration. But it would be a mistake to see this commentary as only pertaining to a condition particular to South Africa. The complete lack of ethnicity, ensured by the careful choice of universal and entirely culture neutral symbols, is a signature property of this exhibition. It appears that Streak has, in a very measured and deliberate manner, created an experience which captures a global sense of uneasiness, instability and the apparent falling apart of the systems we deeply rely on. But all this is interspersed with little pieces of hope. And it is this fact which grounds it even further in reality. The dance of society and politics has always been a string of events, succeeding each other in a manner not dissimilar to the notion of thesis and anti-thesis. Streak’s articulation does not fail to take note of this pulse, which is history.

It is my view that the works of art which consist this exhibition hang on the walls like the portraits of famous war heroes, leaders, great intellectuals, martyrs and reformers of society. They stand in guard of human heritage in the same manner as the painted and sculpted scenes in our public spaces and archival halls, which have captured events such as famous battles, uprisings, executions, economic depressions and civic celebrations. But it is not within the nature of the modern man or woman to appreciate the literal interpretation of such goings on. Art has a new language, and Streak speaks it.

For every falsely justified war that ends, if it is true that *The end always has a beginning*, we must wait to see if it will be the beginning of a *Penance in progress*. If the world had *Envelopes for tears* and little bits of paper wrapping for all its *Secrets*, we would already have run out of space. And the fact that acts of violence are mostly *random but deliberate* and can, despite the fact that these are portrayed as nothing more serious than Paper cuts on the skin of humanity, still cause a *Rush of Blood* is a sign of our times. We are filled with contradiction; the grossest acts of disrespect can be redeemed by nothing more than excuses for survival and, simultaneously, the study of something as innocuous as the *Anatomy of a captured snowflake* can lead to bizarre revolutions about the basic rights of all things inanimate.

Since we live in strange times our history calls for documentation of a genius type. It seems to me as if it would be impossible to really capture these past few decades in any other language but the one which *Accumulative Disintegration* has appealed to. The times are those of a society purging itself on the monochromatic diet of notions about fairness and equality, while insidiously hating each other for being as varied as the textures of a thousand razor blades and the softness of a snowflake.

And, the suggestion is, that it is our responsibility to capture these pieces for future reference.

- Carin Goodwin

(Carin Goodwin has received a master's degree in philosophy, specialising in the philosophy of language. She is currently pursuing her PhD in a similar field. Goodwin has a particular interest in art and literature and has recently started writing as a critic).