



Outpost II

US Art Gallery | Stellenbosch

The word "outpost" is seldom without its "colonial" qualification, and artmaking from KwaZulu-Natal is often seen as a product of both. Starting there, Durban curators Virginia MacKenny and Storm Janse van Rensburg explore various permutations of the term "outpost" in a diverse range of practices. Steeped in the politics of centre and margin, the show probes what it means to operate on the fringe, and how activity on the outskirts has an irrepressible bearing on the mainstream.

KwaZulu-Natal is a hotbed of political instability and Durban is one of the fastest growing cities in the world. As such, this "outpost" is a fertile site for exploration and experimentation and there is clearly a need to erect filters, to categorise, detail and label. Perhaps there is also a tendency to gauge the impossibility of this, to see the tools of measurement fall short in their descriptions.

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Isabella Quattrocchi's hanging scroll-like gauzes dominate the main space at the US Art Gallery. Her central *Untitled* work consists of mesh, the surface of which provides purchase for nails and staples. This hardware outlines a series of elegantly drawn objects. Classically rendered images – a nude, a dog, a palette, disembodied hands and feet – are disrupted by the ephemeral nature of their depiction; the gentle forms deny the rigorous grid upon which they are found. In other pieces, growing and dying grass imposes a larger grid on the mesh, engaging the push-and-pull between the organic and regimented.

Greg Streak's *Public Speaker* is simple in form and principle but complex in operation. A white pipe rises at the altar's place in the former church. This houses an amplifier and a large speaker cone. From its spine cables lead to various locations in the gallery where lapel microphones pick up and transmit sounds. Voices, footsteps, traffic and running water compose a complex sound-

scape. The surveillance metaphor is obvious, but more subtle is the slip the piece reveals between one's actions and one's ability to perceive them.

Langa Magwa's *Untitled* sculptures are large book-like forms covered in materials like cowhide and pigment. The size of authoritative tomes, Langa's books apparently contain knowledge rooted in the material and visceral rather than the verbal. A cowhide covers one book, a section cut away to reveal more of the same inside. The tail hangs loose like a place marker.

Clive Hardwick's *Severance* series operates in a more evocative than narrative way. Two lightboxes each house half of a black-and-white transparency of his torso, arms spread in cruciform fashion. A surgical scar runs the length of his trunk. Together the lightboxes approximate the volume of a torso and their separation grants the piece a disquieting physicality. His sepia-toned prints of leaves are strangely truncated, evading a satisfying resolution. Nearby, Carol-Anne Gainer's looped two-minute video *Sleep* echoes Hardwick's images and palette. A close-up of a sleeping dog's belly defies immediate recognition, invoking curiosity about the comfort and mystery of one of life's basic functions.

In Andries Botha's exploration of "home", constructed machines allow the artist's social concerns to meet his arcane tendencies. The larger work proclaims *Surface Area is Equal to Land Multiplied by Memory Divided by Time*. Supported by a large trussed steel structure, a stitched cowhide bladder leaches liquid onto a rudimentary house cast from weak cement. As this form slowly erodes, its sediments are filtered before the water cycles to the top. In this and his other work, "home" evades attempts to rationalise, measure or plot its dimensions.

Ingrid Winterbach charts a similarly emotional terrain in a more scientific fashion – in the form of maps, diagrams and scripts. Her layered drawings narrate the well-worn tale of Sarah Baartman alongside more unanswered musings on the anatomy of the heart and vulva. Thando Mama's *(un)heal(r)d* video piece features a close-up of the artist's face speaking in barely audible tones. Filmed with the camera's nightshot feature (which picks up infra-red light), his skin is milky and luminous and his dreadlocks are silhouetted like a craggy landscape. He speaks of his blackness with equal measures of threat and vulnerability in this intriguing, beguiling piece.

Paul Edmunds

Paul Edmunds is an artist and critic who writes regularly for Arthrob.co.za

Left: *Outpost II* installation view; on left Thando Mama, *(un)heal(r)d*, 2002, video, five-minute loop; on right Ingrid Winterbach, *Body Project* series, 2002, pastel on paper
Right: Clive Hardwick, *Severance*, 2000-2002, one of three toned silver prints