

About *de(part)* (2013)

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About the wooden floor blocks

The first artwork in which I used parquet floor blocks was constructed from blocks salvaged from a derelict house which was once my home, retrieved a few hours before the house was demolished. These blocks resulted in a series of artworks, such as the *How to remember a home* installation (2011).

The floor of a house maps the inside spaces of a home, it defines the spaces where people experience their most intimate moments. By retrieving the floor blocks and inverting them in my artworks, I attempted to re-connect to these experiences. In her book *The skin of the film*, Laura U Marks maintains that objects “are not inert and mute but they tell stories and describe trajectories” (2000:120). In this way, Marks assigns an animated role to objects in which their meaning and significance resides in their physicality, their materiality and their tactility, in the same way “as habit stores memory in the body” (2000:121). For me, the trace-like qualities of erasure and elusiveness inherent in the inverted parquet block fragments imply the imperfect memory processes linked with trauma prevalent during displacement.

The wooden blocks in the suspended installation *de(part)* were sourced from second hand building material shops in Woodstock, Cape Town, also the site of The Lovell Gallery. Since my move to Cape Town in 2008 and my involvement in a residency as an artist at Greatmore Studios in Woodstock, I have been intrigued with this area’s social dynamics of change and transition. As carriers of the history of their places of origin, the discarded wooden blocks in *de(part)* speak of a collective memory of social upheaval prevalent in urban development. The boat-like structure of *de(part)* suggests a vehicle that transports the viewer to the narratives of many lives lived in many homes: a direct link to the feet walking on the blocks, the words and whispers spoken and the intimate events experienced in many rooms in many homes that do not exist anymore.

About the boat

Archaeological discoveries of boats that have been buried underneath the soil for centuries, such as the Dufuna Canoe in Nigeria (fig 1) and the Egyptian solar boat (fig 2) inspired the visual aesthetic that I was searching for in my planning the construction of *de(part)* (fig 3). The boat-like structure in the installation *de(part)* was built by myself and a team of assistants in an extremely laborious process of layering the inverted floor blocks found in Woodstock. Guided and directed by the inherent qualities and materiality of the blocks, the process involved a slow and painstaking uncovering of a visual expression in an attempt to reveal the many narratives and histories that the floor blocks contain, much in the same way that archaeologists meticulously unearth the remains of centuries ago to uncover links in history and humanity.



fig 1



fig 2



fig 3

About the journey

In travelling over water - a symbol of the unconscious - a boat has connotations of a vessel transporting the deceased to the afterlife. When linked to the displacement experience, a boat may signify the physical means of displacement, while holding the potential for emotional transcendence.

In its suspended state in the gallery, *de(part)* supports this reference to alternative realms. The journey is through the intangible seas of the psyche and the spirit, and above all the elusive process of recollecting events. It is however, the tangible fragments and weathered brokenness of *de(part)* which evoke an archeological find and suggests wounding and scarring. *de(part)* has a 'post-fossil' sensibility, creating an awareness of the link between past and future, and providing a vehicle in which the possibility exists for the past traumatic experience of displacement to be psychologically transcended through excavation of memory.

Illustrations

Fig 1: Dufuna canoe dated around 6000BCE, found and excavated in Nigeria.

<http://academics.tjhsst.edu/canoe/hum/rb/g4/index.html>

fig 2: Archaeological site of the roughly 5000 year old pharaonic solar boat discovered near Cairo, Egypt.

<http://archaeologynewsnetwork.blogspot.com/2012/07/french-archaeologists-unearth-pharaoh.html#.UXyqeOAYHww>

Fig 3: The artwork *de(part)* in progress, March 2013. Photo: Emma Willemse.

Bibliography

<http://academics.tjhsst.edu/canoe/hum/rb/g4/index.html>

<http://archaeologynewsnetwork.blogspot.com/2012/07/french-archaeologists-unearth-pharaoh.html#.UXyqeOAYHww>

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