

Home is where I want to be. Pick me up and  
turn me 'round. I feel numb, born with a weak  
heart. So I guess I must be having fun. The less  
we say about it the better. Make it up as we go  
along. Feet on the ground, head in the sky. It's  
OK, I know nothing's wrong. I got plenty of time.  
You got light in your eyes. And you're standing  
here beside me, I love the passing of time.  
Never for money, always for love. Cover up & say  
goodnight. Home is where I want to be, but I  
guess I'm already there. I come home, she lifted  
up her wings, guess that this must be the place.  
I can't tell one from another, did I find you, or  
you find me? There was a time before we were  
born, if someone asks, this is where I'll be. We  
drift in and out. **Sing into my mouth.** Out of all  
those kinds of people, you got a face with a view.  
I'm just an animal looking for a home. Share the  
same space for a minute or two. And you love me  
till my heart stops, Love me till I'm dead. Eyes  
that light up, eyes look through you. Cover up  
the blank spots, hit me on the head.\*

Text by Julia Rosa Clark

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*\*This Must Be The Place (Naïve Melody)* Byrne/Harrison/Frantz/Weymouth. 1983.

## Initial proposal notes (12 September 2008):

- *Keen to avoid a specific “theme”, rather to work with complex connections and associations between people, moments and objects, driven by a call and response process (much like the way I made Hypocrite’s Lament and Fever Jubilee). Choices will be idiosyncratic, and sometimes difficult for me, involving challenging relationships and the past.*
- *Curatorial process guided by a set of decisions prompted by new ideas formed from work to work, initially in response to a set of personal relationships that the artist-curator has with the artworks, and /or artist-exhibitors (a story that unfolds as the curatorial process progresses). Influenced by Tacita Dean’s An Aside.*
- *Excites and terrifies me, it’s a project that sits somewhere between my past work and where I would like to be going. It’s an extension of my curatorial collecting-associative process that I usually apply to objects. Also a chance to observe and learn from other artists.*
- *Questions about time, process and form as meaning/ complex not simple/ slow time, to re-collect. the space as museum, show, diagram at the same time?*

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## Introduction and notes:

An apocryphal saying is that “writing about music is like dancing about architecture” (either Frank Zappa or Elvis Costello). I often feel the same way about artworks – that if they are good, they exist in a cerebral and emotional space beyond translation. Even good conceptual works are more than words in the mind.

In these notes, I am not going to try to explain the works on show. I can only add my own stories and observations. Take it or leave it. I hope that along with the experience of the works themselves, threads between works will lead to further thoughts, feelings and questions in the viewer.

There is much reference made to music, lyrics and poetry on this show. *Sing into my mouth* is a line from the song “This Must Be The Place/Naïve Melody” by The Talking Heads (1983). This song is literally the domestic anthem of my home: it’s my partner’s ring tone. It’s a party favourite amongst my dearest of friends, one I can never resist dancing to. It’s a bitter-sweet mysterious song with a beguilingly simple melody yet complex connotations. It’s a love song, but not quite.

This song refers to ideas of “home”, of wishing for “home” and then suddenly realizing that *this* is home *this* is life - you are living it and have already lived it.

The surreal image of *singing into a mouth* suggests synesthesia and exchange – sensation, sharing, production, intimacy and sexual or visceral acts. It also

suggests a kind of mismatch or a failure to correspond: could this be the inability to communicate (even through artworks) as clearly as we would wish, even in close relationships to the ones we love most?

It also reminds me of the image of a bird feeding its chick by regurgitating its food that has been sourced elsewhere. I think of the mental sustenance and reflexivity one gets from viewing artworks, the memory of a work that stays, or the experience of living with artworks and how they change physically and in meaning over time.

These images have guided some of the decisions in this show along with memories, encounters and discoveries that unfolded during the process.

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Many years ago whilst visiting **Tom Cullberg** in his studio, I saw a little model of a room built of old bits of wooden off-cuts. In it hung a series of tiny abstract paintings. When I was a child my father made me an amazing dolls house. I was an only child, and this mini domestic space became completely mine to enact endless ongoing interpersonal relationships between the characters embodied by my doll collection. Playing, especially alone, one is god-like, the author of the activities and fates of these characters and their surroundings. I immediately identified this impulse in Tom’s little gallery. It was a device for exploration from a position of control. It wasn’t made for a show, or public consumption but as a private, child-like act. That piece never survived, but I asked Tom if he would like to build a new gallery for this show.

**Gallery 2009** is a dream space: the projection of an ideal, where the artist becomes architect, curator and gallerist in one. The menacing dark figures (former plastic soldiers) of viewer and critic are less threatening in this miniature scale.

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I don’t remember much of **Barend De Wet’s** 1986 exhibition opening, but I can picture a very large open room with long wooden floorboards. It was a space above Anatoli’s Restaurant in Napier St. Scattered throughout were very large, rough wooden sculptures painted in bright shiny enamel colours. These must have seemed like oversized toys, but depicted objects in a way that was confusing to my senses. I was only 11 years old. I remember a boat, snakes, a big fish covered in candles and a large romantic heart with tampons nailed all over it, dripping with red paint. And, of course, a large figure covered in broken bottles, with a huge penis. Barend’s show presented a series of visual puns, concerned with questions about jokes, language and abstraction and influenced by the work of contemporary Neo-Expressionist artists such as Georg Baselitz.

I remember feeling particularly embarrassed and flustered by this work, but also realising with excitement

that I had been allowed into an adult space- a space of power and critical action. In retrospect, this was the first time it occurred to me that art could be more than just aesthetic. I had been to many exhibitions before, but this remains in my memory as a turning point, the end of innocence. It was then that I realised that Art is more than pleasing handiwork. The sense of people's reactions, frustrations and questions seemed very different at this show.

A while ago, I asked Barend if I could re-show some of these works but he took it one step further by offering to return to the method and revise one or two of those works. What emerged from this proposition is *die regte piel vir thandi* 2009. It differs somewhat from the original work. He has replaced the dark brown enamel paint with a peachy-pink and swung the emphasis in the title (originally "*die regte piel vir sannie*"). It has also been made much higher than the original. It towers over the viewer to mimic -says Barend- my childhood experience.

Barend's work marks a shift from innocence to self-awareness. This reminded me of another set of works, by my old friend **Mandy Lee Jandrell**.

While visiting her in London last year, she showed me some test prints of recent work, a series called *New Utopia* 2007. Much of Mandy's previous work had relied on travel for its production – her images of gardens, parks, zoos and such spaces are integral to her inquiry into leisure, authenticity and landscape, and, she says, "our enduring emotional investment in utopian dreams of paradise". For this body of work, she had however undertaken a different process, collage. I have always been interested in how collage can act as critical form. I enjoyed these images for the way they explore and reveal the seams of visual trickery alluded to in her earlier work.

These images initially tricked me into an imagined other place – a paradise before the fall. Naked men and women emerge from dense, seemingly 'natural' spaces. At closer inspection one sees that these are actually sliced up images of man-made indoor gardens and regulated parks, juxtaposed with voyeuristic images of strangers engaged in sexual acts in public places, sourced from 'dogging' websites and the like. I thought about hot houses, abundant growth, procreation and breeding. I liked the way I became aware of my own voyeuristic urges whilst looking at these images, but then felt guilt and shame.

**Gregg Smith's** video work *Untitled (Paysage/ Landscape)* 2007 is a kind of video sketch towards two more recent films, *Le Courant (The Current)* and *Underexposed*. In it a figure dances in an eccentric manner to music on his iPod. The camera point of view implies some sort of voyeurism, as if one is observing a protagonist who is completely alone. Our point of view even seems to be that of Nature itself, observing this bizarre human act. At times he seems at odds with his natural surroundings, at other times he seems to mimic the staccato movements of

the leaves, or do they mimic his dance back? This piece is funny and disarming at the same time.

I thought about the difference between being contentedly alone, as Gregg's dancing protagonist seems to be and lonely. I thought about fulfilment and dissatisfaction and I was reminded of **Ed Young's** early sentimental works, much of which was filled with expressions of 'Feelings' craftily disguised by the ruse of boredom.

Originally I had asked Ed if I could see an older student work. He told me how he had just thrown that work away, but went to salvage the slides nevertheless. Along with documentation images, the text from this piece read: 'I measured the distances between me and other people because I wanted to find out how much I have been distancing myself from other people these days. I added up all the distances and it came to exactly: 16,574m. I can now start working on my interpersonal relationships" 2001. Beneath the surface of the humour, is an earnest desire for self-improvement. This too is present in *Record* 2001. Every 20 minutes or so, amidst an endless loop, the needle magically lifts and drops onto the warped spinning vinyl to play Michael Jackson's *Man In the Mirror* "... I'm starting with the man in the mirror. I'm asking him to change his ways...".

**Peter Eastman's** *Crying Self-Portrait* 2006 also strikes an emotional nerve, but uses realism in a different way to Ed's piece. The viewer is not privy to any contextualising of the pain, yet is drawn in nevertheless to a revealing almost frozen moment of expression.

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**Douglas Gimberg's** self-explanatory *Plain Gold Ring* 2009 is a work that I encountered very recently on a show called *Sometimes I forget that you exist*. The work is form as critique: a physical manifestation of a meditation on the wedding ring, and in turn, what this sentimental talisman represents and what an alternative might be. I thought this was such a wonderful work, and apt to this exhibition, that I keenly persuaded Douglas that it could do with a second viewing.

**Teboho Edkin's** *Untitled* is a student work, one of a series of videos of his that I viewed in 2002 and have always wanted to see again. I was surprised to bump into him at a party a few months ago – he lives abroad. It was the week that I was starting to meet with artists for the show. Reluctant at first, he agreed to go through his old stuff with me. I had originally wanted to show another clever piece, but as the show started to take form, it became clear that this was the right work.

In order to film this piece, the artist constructed a special device to film the horse's hooves simultaneously with the self-portrait footage. What starts out as a skilful documentation of everyday life becomes a circular journey that never really gets anywhere, but rises and falls at a mesmerising pace. The artist's glances at the

camera hover somewhere between narcissism and desire. He becomes the handsome cinematic hero, the cowboy and the mounted young lord of the land exerting control over the horse -which we never see, except for its legs. The cadence of the breathing and hooves analogously evoke of the nature of intimate relationships: now fast, now slow, now gentle, now hard, going somewhere, going nowhere.

**Pieter Hugo** and I had been in a relationship for a while when this photo (*JULIA CLARK* 2001/09) was taken. By this stage it was taking strain. He had just bought his first large format camera and wanted to do some test shots. I had assumed they would be kept private but, of course, in time they came to be seen by friends in passing. The casualness of it all upset me. I realised, albeit too late, that in wanting to please I had reluctantly performed the artist's model and foolishly relinquished control over privacy. I had a very specific memory that I had been wearing a teal blue woollen skirt, and that I had felt odd, vulnerable, grumpy and resistant to taking my top off.

I've often gone back to the emotional memory of this event when looking at photographs. I often project this memory of awkwardness and resistance onto images of sitters, not only nude ones. I look for a certain look in the eye – one of slight confusion and self-consciousness.

When planning this show, I decided to act on a nagging desire to see these images and rectify my frustration with myself. Pieter agreed to dig them out. We met in a coffee shop. It was rather odd. When I held the slides up to the light I was shocked to see that I had had a completely false memory of the occasion. I wasn't wearing that skirt at all- I had willingly stripped down even further and I looked rather calm, even amused. I search my memory banks to make sense of this image. No recall. I felt disembodied, separated from my sense of self.

Pieter and I agreed that this particular shot was an image worthy of exhibition and he decided to print it at the same scale as his current portrait work. Even though I still look like that person in the image, the only part of it that I can really identify with is the patch of eczema on the inside of my arm. This little patch seems real – it reveals the stress I was under at the time- the rest is the pose a staged performance.

As an act, the revival and “publishing” of this photograph seeks to explore and rectify my false memory, and sense of loss of control. Aesthetically pleasing, it has become an interesting relic of the beginning of a prominent career and the demise of a relationship.

I first encountered **Bridget Baker's** *Our first meeting, he had a green bag and I had a pink one, 2000 in a bar in Germany* 2000, at the home of a friend. I am familiar with Bridget's larger photographic works and public installations but was fascinated by this mysterious little collage. The friend explained to me that it had been a gift for his birthday. I asked him what the text referred

to and he told me how the blue embroidery was a copy of ballpoint pen scribbles made on a serviette during a lunch meeting between the artist and a man she was about to fall in love with. Embroidered by hand after the eventual demise of this relationship, it becomes a kind of memorial to a significant moment in the arc of a relationship. It also seems to hint at the problem of communication and decision-making. As fabric swatches present options for choices, so too does the text seem to outline the discussion of options in a conversation that we are not privy to hear. The framed work becomes a kind of museum case or a curiosity cabinet, juxtaposing some grand historical narratives with clues of the personal and everyday: Anglo-Zulu, Johnny Clegg, Berlin Zoo, turquoise, pearl, jade, ‘do love P’, “My mother/my camera in bag”.

When the work was framed, the trademark BB Project logo was mistakenly placed facedown. This has been left like this, with permission of the artist - the tangled side of the slick logo revealing tangled complexity. .

**Cameron Platter's** *Beware the Curves: Storyboard: Version 1'/ Plot for BB* 2005 (displayed behind Barend De Wet's sculpture) was a gift to Baker from the artist. I saw it first in her flat. It is interesting to compare the work of hers just mentioned. Whilst hers presents a secretive musing on the lived everyday idea of romance and tragedy, Cameron's sketch explores with set narrative devices the made up world of fast cars, fast girls, on screen sex and pulp romance. The narrative spreads chaotically in twists and turns across the page- “I've been searching for you for so long, you are in fact my daughter...”. Drama overlaps with real life- scrawled in close proximity to RANSOME NOTE is “for Bridget Baker”.

Juxtaposed with Bridget's little memorial work, is a Hylton Nel plate. The provenance of the text is not given, but its ardent sentiment is clear. I inherited this from a wonderful childhood mentor, Stevie Daitsh, after his death. I have eaten off this plate for many years.

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Through two miniature portholes one can see two skies (one dark, one light) made up of fine stitches. Embroidered by the artist, **Doreen Southwood's** *Day In Day Out* 2001 literally present a record of the passing of time. It hints at obsession, longing, insomnia (the medium is “embroidered slip”) and endlessness. The scale suggests a sense of someone trapped, glimpsing the outside world through a narrow aperture. I have always found this subtle work magnetising. It turns out to be one of the artist's favourites. It is wonderful to be able to see it again.

**Anja De Klerk's** rotting leaves, *Hoping for Quick Compost* 2008, also presents a magical contemplation of time. Here it is not the passing of days, but the passing of months and seasons that is alluded to. Slow time. Incubation and decay – seeds sprout and leaves

decompose. The title card tells us that there is a ruby somewhere in this vitrine. If we wait long enough will the little red jewel be revealed? Is it more precious, less natural than the small green shoots which will also appear? Nature itself is alive on show. It is a box for examining the everyday but it also has other poetic connotations. Like a small drop of blood from a pricked finger, the ruby and the natural process surrounding it hint at the sacrifice and patience of the creative process.

About a year ago I discussed the early ideas for this show with my father, John Nankin. I asked him if he would consider remaking **BOX**, which I had seen when very tiny. I can't remember it but have mental pictures built up by photographs scrutinised over the years. The moment has come: mystery is made manifest. It is a mother father machine: the condom shapes are also teat-like and reminds me of the mythical Greek goddess with many breasts. It presents a cycle of inflation and deflation - ups and downs, highs and lows: a materialised schematic of the gamut of repetitive emotional cycles which life presents. I find it difficult to write about now, my father has said so much in his text, I would rather let his words lead the way.

Although a historical replica, **BOX** 1967/1975/2009 is now freed from my preconceptions of it: it can take on new meanings for me over time. I can now relate to it as a viewer, an adult. It feels magical, surreal.

Gregg Smith's *Postcard Series* 1998 conveys elements of human relationships and utopian wishes through analogies found in everyday life, banal objects and mundane moments. The artist explained to me that each series was made over a short period of time. The photographic documentation allowed a way for the artist-interloper to enter and explore various urban spaces and communities. These images of found moments and observed confluences become magically multilayered through their poetic captions. The viewer is asked to reflect on altruism, gifting, co-operation, companionship and patience in relation to the social public sphere.

I met **Andrew Putter** when I was 15. Like many other young people over the years who have been moved by him, our encounters regularly inspired me to engage with exciting questions about art and practice. Andrew is someone who breathes in the world around him and breathes out a response through action, practice and engagement. The result is a constant flow of tests, made from fragments and cheap materials My mother owns all these particular examples on display here. Some were given to her as gifts over the years, as can be noted by the inscriptions. These are "studio experiments and tests that (he) finished off and framed as gifts... with her sensibility in mind". Others were bought from the artist.

About the red and green piece with crosses, Andrew says: "although not visually resolved (this) has 2 small pieces of the original ceramic tiles from the cape town train station toilets, where i used to cruise as young teenager.

when it was being refurbished in the late 80s i kept those two little fragments of tile out of sentimentality - but because my dislike of owning things outweighs any feelings of sentimentality i ever have, i ended up nearly throwing it away. the wonderful thing about close friends like sue is that they have kept some of these things, generously providing me with extra memory" (from email correspondence).

The fruit of **Douglas Gimberg and Christian Nerf's** collaborations are delightfully labyrinthine artworks that revel in iconoclasm and challenge supposition and myth. I am a devout follower and look forward to each new project. The act of collaboration implies an ongoing conversation, a kind of endless to and fro gifting between two individuals. The work on show here – **Prior** 2009 – acts as a throwaway memorial to their first collaboration, the documentation of which is contained in the most mundane of places, the AVA advert in the 2008 SA Arts Diary. The alterations made in the dead of night by these two carpenters to an outdoor wooden cross, were in a sense a provocative gift – a question mark - to an unsuspecting public.

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**Limbo/ Childlike Emperor/ Performance Anxiety/ Untitled/ Golden Anonymity.** Emma Coleman's piece has only been shown once before, at Michaelis in her graduate year in 2002. These video works always stayed with me and I promised her that if I ever curated an exhibition I would certainly ask to show it. I still feel, on review, that it remains a pertinent and contemporary work about South African youth culture, identity and masquerade. Fragmented and reframed through the editing, each of the disembodied characters resonates in different ways with my sense of self.

The works suggest some type of audition, a space in which anxiety and pretension is performed. It plays with our assumptions about generic "types". It is also a portrait work of the artist's friends or what they are and what they might superficially appear to be. A boy dances to a heavy ominous beat, his actions seem weighted with more than just a dance. They become a kind of fight filled with adult aggression. Another man is divided, comprised of a charming romantic and a macho ambitious dreamer. A doll-like pair of blonds with blurred faces mime to Die Briele. The artist literally creates schizophrenic doublings though visual schisms. We see split personalities, a double-take ethnicity, vulnerable machismo, an adult-child and childlike adults.

Similar to the Emma's work is **Gregg Smith's** video piece, *The Interview* 2002, in which the artist enacts both the interviewer and interviewee- a job applicant. He explores the anima and animus as well as the hidden, unexpected layers of private and public persona. Although also working on a metaphorical level, this work dwells on the vulnerabilities of the social field, in particular the work place.

Like the job interview, we often feel anxious, frustrated and at the mercy of others when performing public administrative processes, such as banking, applying for official documents or going through customs. We are no longer in a safe private space but must engage, exchange and compete with a broader set of strangers and adversaries in order to succeed. **Bridget Baker's** 2001 performance/ installation *Official BB Project: Leaf Project* drew on the visual language of such administrative events and put the viewer through a similar process. One was required to become an active part of her complex and expansive model of achievement, success and failure.

I remember a cold winter night driving out to the opening in Stellenbosch. I was surprised to see that a barrel vaulted plastic green house had been erected within the gallery space. Inside this structure, amongst various tables and other props, assistants dressed in yellow plastic overcoats led the viewer through a complicated pseudo-bureaucratic procedure (as can be followed by flipping through the hanging photo device on display on this show). The freshness of the entire experience, the use of space and interactivity as well of the layers of meaning which suggested not only questions about everyday life but also about the art world and being an artist, influenced me for years after.

At first the viewer punches a paper leaf out of an ATM slip and then adds various bits of information to this by working round the stations of the desk-table. The stamps, spirit levels, counter and so on point to repetitive control and equality (a rationalising). However this order is replaced with chaos and chance in the second part of the work: the viewer 'submits their form' by sending it down a suction pipe which spits it out into a separate area of installation. Here the form must land in a bucket to succeed. On its journey through the air the little leaf-document is buffeted by random air currents produced by a set of electric fans. The open mouthed buckets await the lucky leaves. As the one-in-a-million sperm hits that egg, the odd leaf makes its way into the bins and are magically transformed by the artist into little kites (strong enough to fly higher still). Those that landed on the floor become rejects, failures, one in a pile of many.

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**Doreen Southwood's** *A Friend \ 'n Vriendin* (2001) presents a looming crucifix emblazoned vitrine filled with Rooi Rose and Sarie Magazines. Spanning from 1999-2001, we can only see the spines on which appear slogans such as " 'n Ruiker vir jou", " 'n Vriendin vir elke vrou" and "Word jou eie baas". From a distance the repetitive red and black text reminds one of the record from a heart rate monitor, or some kind of chart drawn by a medical plotting machine. Like other works on this show, this piece touches on the construction of self as well as isolation. The collection reflects a possibly lonely and tragic investment in a set of beliefs, hopes and dreams for self-improvement and spiritual salvation or cleansing.

**Sarah Nankin** is my cousin. She is a portraitist and usually includes her sitters in her images. When looking through her portfolio, I was intrigued by these two mysterious little square images. Of *Black Sea* and *Black Tree* she writes: "The black sea is the ocean off the pier down at the docks. I took it with Sam at the beginning of our relationship, reminds me of early love, unfolding unknowns, and mysteries of this other person" and "this is a tree in my mom's garden, which hangs above a wooden bench that was very special to her. I took this photo while she was sick, when I would sit with her in her bedroom, we would speak about when she got better that she would soon be able to walk down to her bench and sit in her garden. So this tree really represents that hope that we gave each other over that time. It also, of course, has a sadness - we didn't get to sit on that bench again after all."

Even without contextualisation, these images speak to me of time. Like other works on this show, they have become mementoes. Yet there is awareness that this is only one moment in the ever-changing flow of Nature. These spots will never be the same again: the light will change; the tree will grow and eventually die; the sea will change with passing storms and swells. Relationships too are only momentarily fixed within broader changing dynamics. Often these dynamics are extremely hard to articulate and the articulation becomes as much a focus as the relationship or the sentiments attached to it, as my mother, **Sue Clark**, her untitled poem from 1977 that seems to be written about the infant me but in fact is also about the act of writing and recording.

**Gus Ferguson's** *Senryu* also examines a moment in time. This fragment has been stuck up on my mom's kitchen pin board since 1985. Gus is a brilliant thinker, poet, cartoonist and friend. As long as I can remember his wit and insight into the world has played a huge role in shaping my own. I originally wanted to show a selection of photostats of drawings sent to my mother and I over the years. On re-reading this piece, however, I felt it summed up so much to do with the threads I had followed in making this show art. Please take one- I hope it ends up on your pin board too.

Julia Rosa Clark  
April/ May 2009

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