

Press release

Uproot

Exhibition by Emma Willemse

RK Contemporary, Riebeek Kasteel

9 February to 1 March 2020

The conceptual artist Emma Willemse is known for her three-dimensional installations and artist's books in which she uses found objects collected from sites that are infused with a history of loss. Willemse's interest in displacement as a theme is informed by her own experience of the loss of several homes in the 1990's. She conducted an academic study into ways that the loss of a home affects the psyche of the displaced and came to the conclusion that such traumatic experiences cause consequential losses of memory and identity. The quest to make these notions visible runs like a golden vein through her oeuvre as artist, initiated from a very personal manifestation and developing into more universal issues of loss.

In her new exhibition called *Uproot*, which takes place in her home town Riebeek Kasteel, Willemse expands her investigation into the natural environment. She explains: "In much the same way that a floor of a house could be considered the footprint of a home, and its demolition could therefore be deemed as an uprootment of all the meanings we assigned to that home, I interrogate questions around the physical uprootment of trees, probing the aftermath of the losses occurring when trees are destroyed."

In a world inundated with the one environmental crisis after the next, the focus of the exhibition *Uproot* is particularly relevant. Trees are known to create ecological environments in which a myriad of life forms flourish and through their green canopies, trees provide much of the earth's oxygen. It is known that deforestation world-wide has extreme negative effects on the environment, such as loss of biodiversity, displacement of people and the expansion of arid land.

As the first step in her creative process for *Uproot*, Willemse has embarked on a pursuit to find and document huge uprooted trees from the Riebeek Valley and surrounding areas. Her intention is to honour these fallen giants through her art making. True to her practice, the exhibition comprises works in a wide range of media, including an installation from found materials as well as mixed media works on paper, digital prints, drawings and handmade collagraphs and monotypes.

Emma Willemse has exhibited extensively in South Africa, Africa and abroad. Her works have been included in the Nando's Collection, the Arcadia Collection, and the South African Embassy in Beijing.

Her award-winning artist's books installation, called *101 ways to long for a home*, has been exhibited in diverse configurations in Florence, Dakar, Senegal Johannesburg, Stellenbosch, Paris and London.

Emma holds a Master's degree in Visual Arts from the University of South Africa and qualifications in psychology and librarianship.

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