

I would not have guessed that I would ever make art for the sake of gay activism. Not because of a sentiment of dislike towards the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex community, but rather with the knowledge that being gay in South Africa was becoming more acceptable. The end of apartheid saw the discontinuation of laws against homosexuality, and in 2006 South Africa was the first African country to implement a Civil Union Act, superseding the timeworn Marriage Act of 1961 (<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~famak20o/classweb/wp/southafrica.html>). The government finally projected the idea that homosexuality was acceptable.

It was not until earlier this year when I read an article about the lives of coloured transgender men from Cape Town that I realised that South Africa was unfortunately still stuck in a sociological contradiction: the article stated that living a gay lifestyle was acceptable, but being gay was not (www.allafrica.com/stories/201004080844.html). Being homosexual meant betraying your own masculinity, your male peers and your family. This information had me questioning the ideals and values of masculinity in society, but also the sources of masculinity in different cultures. With this I decided to trace masculine hegemony through history, particularly focusing on my own Afrikaner heritage, in an attempt to better my understanding of the current social issues surrounding homosexual acceptance in Afrikanerⁱ culture.

In 1918 the Afrikaner-Broederbond was established as a corrective measure for numerous socio-economic and political eventsⁱⁱ that “reduced the Afrikaner to a slave in the land of his birth” (O’Meara 1977:160). The Broederbond was an elitistⁱⁱⁱ society that vowed to restructure the Afrikaner economy, but also to further Afrikaner nationalism and culture, and to gain control over the South African government (O’Meara 1977:160). Up until 1994, when the Broederbond came to its end, it became infamous for its secretive dealings, political interference and male dominance. The Broederbond became a

beacon of Afrikaner pride and is considered one of the main influences of Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity (Du Pisani 2001:158). The ideal of this hegemony required the Afrikaner male to be religious, honest, reliable, committed and hard working. Deviations, particularly homosexuality, were not tolerated.

After the National Party's loss^{iv} of political power in 1994, Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity translated itself into rugby. Rugby became a game of politics in its own right and represented the puritan ideals of the Afrikaner male – a type of subconscious succession of the Afrikaner-Broederbond. The 1995 Rugby World Cup victory for the Springboks was an incredibly significant moment for the Afrikaner. Many still consider it proof of male superiority: the possibility of the Afrikaner male as a 'super race' (Du Pisani 2001: 166).

This body of work is an amalgamation of my own experiences as a white Afrikaner male growing up in post-apartheid South Africa, but it also takes a look at the Afrikaner society of the present, particularly focusing on masculine ideals versus homosexuality. The title 'Broederbond' does not only refer to the roots Afrikaner masculine hegemony has in history, but also the potential for a more caring and accepting society: a true brotherhood.

The most noticeable aspect of this installation is the overwhelming use of colour: the gay flag (red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple) is a reminder that the South African constitution was the first in Africa to outlaw discrimination against homosexuality, whereas pink has global associations with femininity and the counteraction of disorder (<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/SA-set-to-recognise-gay-flag-20121006>). These colours are activated with the use of yarn bombing^v, comprising more than 18 000 metres of woven, knitted and spanned acrylic yarn. Yarn bombing attempts to familiarise and reclaim cold and sterile spaces; in this case, a traditional Afrikaner living room in the midst of the 1995

Rugby World Cup final on television^a. It also assists with the creation of juxtaposition.

Juxtaposition plays a vital role in this body of work: it generates awareness of the relationship that seemingly conflicting issues such as masculinity and homosexuality can have. This is particularly evident with the substantial amount of rugby balls, which I will yarn bomb during the exhibition period as part of a performance that addresses the predominant identity crises gay Afrikaner males experience in post-apartheid South Africa. The act of covering the balls in carefully knitted covers is a metaphorical act of superimposing my own identity onto the traditional male hegemonic identity. It creates the possibility to change the expectancies of Afrikaner masculinity to something more accessible and friendly to gay men, effectively subverting the pre-conceived, super-imposed ideas of Afrikaner masculine hegemony.

Steven Cohen, a performance artist who is well known for his public intervention and concepts of sexual identity within queer and Jewish subcultures, had a particularly significant influence on this body of work. In his work *Ugly girl at the rugby*^{vi} (not illustrated) he shows up dressed in drag at a rugby game at Loftus Versfeld. Cohen playfully others the rugby-loving Afrikaans people by placing himself in their territory and turns the simple act of buying a ticket into something more confrontational. Cohen's elaborate use of drag makes this even more dramatic, and provokes the spectators. The dramatic nature of his costume, which is essentially queer in appearance, draws on the subconscious discomfort the spectators feel towards homosexuality and this provokes them: he is immediately unwelcome.

Although my own subject matter relates to Cohen's work, my intentions are different: my presence in the installation gives the viewer the chance to discuss his/her personal life experiences regarding homosexuality in Afrikaner

^a The rugby match displayed on the television is muted. Whilst growing up, my sexuality was never discussed. In this body of work the tables are turned: dialogue is of the utmost priority.

culture. This effectively breaks the silence gay men experience in Afrikaner culture, but also leaves myself as the artist empowered: my art creates a dialogue between myself and the viewer, constantly reminding him/her of the possibility that they can find a new identity beyond the expected norms of society (De Villiers 2008: 122).

Through the looking glass^{vii} (not illustrated) is an incredibly intimate exploration of my own identity within the Afrikaner culture. While it speaks of personal vulnerability, the layering and casting process used to create the work also addresses the typecasting I have experienced from my own culture. This self-portrait is a depiction of the way I saw the world whilst growing up: my looking glass. The work is placed outside the yarn-bombed room as a constant reminder of a previous, more naïve sense of self and a newly found identity beyond the preconceived ideals of my own culture.

Broederbond investigates the history of Afrikaner masculine hegemony in an attempt to validate the acceptance of homosexuality in Afrikaner culture. The body of work does not use vigorous activism to promote change, but rather becomes an activism that invites the viewer to grow. My art strives to open discussion among Afrikaners, and South Africans, about homosexuality in an attempt to strengthen cultural bonds and to promote cross-cultural acknowledgement and brotherhood.

Endnotes

ⁱ During the course of this essay the term “Afrikaner” refers to white South Africans with an Afrikaans-speaking, Calvinist background and/or upbringing.

ⁱⁱ “The 1913 split in the South African Party produced confusion and bitterness among Afrikaners, particularly in the Northern provinces. This was compounded by the violent suppression of the Rebellion, the execution of Joupie Fourie and the imprisonment of its leaders by the Botha government. Agriculture was depressed and the influenza epidemic raged. The squeeze on land and effects of the Rebellion drove increasing numbers of rural whites into the cities, accelerating the problem of ‘poor whiteism’” Quoted from O’Meara (1977: 159).

ⁱⁱⁱ In this particular case ‘elitist’ refers to a small group of Afrikaans male “intellectuals” (O’Meara 1977: 167).

^{iv} The Afrikaner lost his political power in April 1994 when the National Party lost the general elections to the ANC in South Africa (<http://electionresources.org/za/>).

^v Yarn bombing, or guerilla knitting, is a type of graffiti where knitted yarn is used as a medium (in stead of paint or chalk) to create a non-permanent work of art. It is the intention of yarn-bombing artists to intervene in and reclaim cold and sterile spaces, making it more personal and inviting.

^{vi} Steven Cohen, *Ugly girl at the rugby* (1998). Medium unknown, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown. Illustration available at <http://vweb.isisp.net/~elu@artslink.co.za/stevencohen/objects/walkpark.jpg>

^{vii} Pierre le Riche, *Through the looking glass* (2012). Resin, rice paper and acrylic yarn, 33 x 45cm. Private collection.

Bibliography

Butler, J. 1993. *Critically queer*. <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/JudithButler-CriticallyQueer-1993.pdf> (accessed 29 July 2012)

De Villiers, CH. 2008. *Identity politics and the body in selected contemporary artworks*. MA dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Du Pisani, K. 2001. *Puritanism transformed (Changing men in South Africa)*. University of Natal Press: Pietermaritzburg.

Myer, T. 2010. *The practical epistemology in seeing oneself while listening to others*. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+practical+epistemology+in+seeing+oneself+while+listening+to+others-a0276999773> (accessed 23 June 2012)

O'Meara, D. 1977. *The Afrikaner Broederbond 1927-1948: Class Vanguard of Afrikaner Nationalism*. *The Journal of South African Studies* 3.

Stefanova, I. 2007. *Performance art in public space. Cultural Management and Cultural Policy in the Balkans* master thesis, University of Arts in Belgrade, Belgrade.

www.allafrica.com/stories/201004080844.html (accessed 29 July 2012)

www.electionresources.org/za (accessed 29 July 2012)

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~famak20o/classweb/wp/southafrica.html>
(accessed 30 August 2012)

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/SA-set-to-recognise-gay-flag-20121006> (accessed 6 October 2012)