



Disjecta Membra
A catalogue of recent works by Kim Gurney



Exhibited at Gordart Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
March 16 - April 5, 2008

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Gordart Gallery, 72 Third Ave, Melville, Johannesburg, South Africa
March 16 - April 5, 2008

This exhibition is dedicated to my family for their love and support: John, Dot, Jean, James & Leigh

With special thanks and acknowledgement to:

Gordon Froud & Gordart Gallery staff
Julia Teale, for believing
Kobus Brümmer, for sharing every step
James Gurney, for the coffee that helped start it all and for exhibition sponsorship
Dominique Fischer, who lifted me onto the starting block
Leslie Gurney, for his memories
Zweli Mkhize and Dumisane Khumalo at the Khulumani Support Group
And the families of the following:
Dumisane Hlatswayo
Casswell Castro Khumalo
Bongane Shadrack Jinda Makhoba
Sicelo Christopher Maseko
Vuse Melanzi
Bheki Emmanuel Mlambo
Jeffrey Mlangeni
Theophillus Sipiwe Raboroko
Richard Radebe
Duke Ellington Xhola

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Artist's Statement

Disjecta Membra (noun): scattered members; disjointed portions or parts: applied to fragments of poetry or fragmentary quotations

This exhibition couples paintings from two parallel series. The one is derived from photographic slides of my family taken by my grandfather during the 1960s, mostly depicting life in suburban South Africa. The other series is derived from the last photographs of ‘the disappeared’, people who died during a similar era in the fight against apartheid and whose remains have not yet been found.

These paintings challenge rather than affirm the particular reality self-consciously projected by family snapshots. The cropped format, by forcing a more fragmented view, lays new emphasis and nuance. This in turn suggests a less cohesive, more ambiguous condition beneath the constructed façade.

The two series also comment on each other as flip sides of a dislocated world, bridged by surprising resonance and dissonance. In this subtle exchange between a disjointed past and the unfinished business of the present is a restorative attempt to ‘re-member’.

Overview

Disjecta Membra began life in 2006 as part of a broader investigation around notions of ancestry and heritage – biological, cultural and other – that informed my final-year UCT Michealis exhibition, a sculptural installation. During this research, I rediscovered a collection of slides my paternal grandfather had gifted me as a teenager. I was struck by their very particular sense of place and time. I felt inspired to use them as reference for a series of artworks; thus these paintings began life at Julia Teale’s Spencer Street studio in Salt River, Cape Town.

The cropped format suggested itself early on: it drew attention to inter-personal dynamics through visual cues often overlooked in the bigger picture. It also inferred a viewfinder of sorts, peeking back into memories of the past. The net effect was to undermine the fixity and apparent harmony of family mythology by creating a sense of subtle unease, the act of looking simultaneously frustrated and enriched by enforced fragmentation. The format also had the uncanny result of extending the visual commentary from an individual to a group level: the images were at once depersonalised, without their facial features, yet appeared strangely familiar in pose and circumstance. The distorted floating images referred also to a broader dislocation of reality represented by the trimmed lawns and recreational pursuits of a suburban apartheid life.

In September 2007, I visited the Siyanikhumbula exhibition at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, an exhibition that commemorated those who disappeared during apartheid and whose remains have not been found. There are officially 477 such people, according to a list drawn up by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); despite some cases being solved since then, the real figure is likely much higher. The disappeared essentially represent the unfinished business of the TRC and by extension the unfinished business of our democratic transformation. I have a particular interest in this issue and the TRC more broadly; it was the research subject for my M.A. undertaken in London (1997-98).

I was deeply moved by Siyanikhumbula and was inspired to derive the second part of my painting series from fragments of exhibited photographs, as resonant counterpoint. I liaised with the various organisations and persons responsible for the exhibition and directly wrote to as many of the families as possible. The replies I received were overwhelmingly positive and touching: “Please be free to do what you want to do with the photo. Maybe the world will know that we are still waiting to hear or get the bones of the children they have killed”, wrote one mother. The brother of another of the disappeared (whose body was found) had to identify the deceased by his shoes; the same shoes feature in the cropped painting.

We are still grappling on an individual and collective level with unresolved legacies and mythologies, bound by memories. *Disjecta Membra* is a reflective visual response.



Untitled 01 (2006-2007)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 02 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 03 (2006-2007)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 04 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 05 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 06 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 07 (2006-2007)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 08 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 09 (2006-2007)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 10 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 11 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 12 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 13 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 14 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 15 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 16 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 17 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 18 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 19 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm



Untitled 20 (2007-2008)
oil & beeswax on canvas
400 x 600 x 50mm

Curriculum Vitae: Kim Gurney

Occupation: Visual Artist & Freelance Journalist

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Qualifications

2006 B.A. Fine Art (with distinction in Discourse of Art), Michaelis School of Fine Art: University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa

1997-98 M.A. International Journalism: City University, London, UK

1993-96 Bachelor of Journalism (*Cum Laude*): Rhodes University, South Africa

Group Exhibitions

2007 Exhibition of Drawing & Painting, Spencer Street Studio, Woodstock, Cape

2006 Cape Francolin Art Hotel, Riebeeck-Kasteel, Western Cape

2006 Graduate Show: Michaelis School of Fine Art, UCT

Journalism Experience

2003-2008 Freelance Journalist: published in a variety of South African nationals (business, politics, arts & culture)

2003-04; 2008- Correspondent for *Newsweek International*, Africa Bureau

2005-07 News Editor, *Art South Africa* (quarterly magazine)

2004-06 Contributing Editor for ArtThrob (online visual arts publication)

2003-04 Fortnightly arts & culture talk show host, *Fine Music Radio*

2001-03 Freelance financial journalist, London, UK

2000-01 News editor of Investment Adviser, *Financial Times Business*: London, UK

1998-2000 Reporter, Senior Reporter (online & print): *FT Business*: London, UK

1998 Work experience: *News International* online: London, UK

1997 Weekend reporter: *KFM* regional radio station, Cape Town, SA

1996 News Manager, reporter & presenter: *RMR* community radio: Grahamstown
Journalism Tutor, Rhodes University, Grahamstown

1994 Deputy news editor, reporter & presenter: *RMR*: Grahamstown

1993-94 News compiler & presenter, *RMR & Festival FM*: Grahamstown

Achievements & Awards

Dean's Merit List, University of Cape Town (UCT) Humanities Department, 2003-2006

Golden Key International Honour Society for outstanding academic achievement and excellence: UCT, 2004

Humanities Faculty Scholarship: UCT, 2004

Class Medal: Foundation Course, Michaelis School of Fine Art: UCT, 2003

Class Medal: Discourse of Art, Michaelis School of Fine Art: UCT, 2003

Young Financial Journalist of the Year runner-up: London, 1998 (Scottish Widows & Money Marketing)

Full academic colours and Masters scholarship: Rhodes University, 1996

Victor Norton Award for Excellence in Writing and Editing: Rhodes University, 1996

Achievement Award (News Team), *RMR*: Rhodes University, 1996

Jim Coupland Prize for Art; Whitford Griffiths Award for Character & Service to Fellow Pupils; Full academic colours;

Half colours: cross country, tennis and orchestra; Team colours: hockey; Peninsula A cross country team: Pinelands High

School, Cape Town