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Edited by Heidi Erdmann



Introduction

Two friends are driving from Johannesburg to Cape Town. One likes to drive, and the other is happiest as a passenger. It is a long journey, at least fourteen hours; lots of time to talk, listen to music, discuss plans. Once in Cape Town there are friends to visit, two exhibitions to install, two exhibition openings to attend and an important birthday party.

The two friends are the artists Jan Neethling and Robert Hodgins. The two exhibitions are Neethling's debut solo, *Uncle Six Fingers*, and unbeknown to them at that stage, Hodgins' last solo exhibition in Cape Town. The birthday bash is Neethling's seventieth, and Hodgins was throwing the party. It was November 2008.

Their journey went according to plan as far as Colesberg. That was where Jan's trusted old Opel ran out of steam, literally. They waited a day or two in the hope of a repair, but eventually continued the journey with a hired car. The delay played havoc with their social calendar but not with their official business. When Jan arrived in Cape Town his exhibition was fully installed and nearly sold out. He was pleased with the installation and, in his modest way, somewhat surprised by the sales. Rob was walking a few steps behind Jan; he was preoccupied with having to navigate the steps leading down into the exhibition space. Once in the room he looked up and saw the red stickers.

I cannot remember his exact words. He was obviously pleased for Jan's success, but simultaneously scolded him. He said something like: "Jan, you could have done this twenty years ago!" And that was the truth - Neethling did not have to wait until 2008 to present this first solo exhibition. He is an accomplished artist, inspired by innovation, and who - throughout a long career - refused to subscribe to any form of institutionalization.

In March 2013 Neethling was in Cape Town again, this time for the opening of his solo exhibition, *A Greek Goddess up to no Good*. The collector's base for his work had increased and there was a demand for more information on his life and work. It was at this time that we discussed and developed the broad strokes that eventually became this book. Jan jokingly refers to himself as an emerging talent because he had his first solo exhibition at the age of seventy.

Since that exhibition in 2008 his career has taken off for a second time. The demand for his participation in group and solo exhibitions far exceeded his capacity to produce the work. The success brought a second round of followers and collectors of his work, but it also pointed to a fracture in

his career. There are two distinctly separate chapters, the early years and the present. The essays and images in this book are an attempt to fill in those gaps and take the reader on a long creative journey spanning fifty five years.

I am indebted to Karin Skawran who, over a period of three months, invited Jan to her home for regular weekly conversations. Her resulting interview provides the reader with an insightful introduction to his life. Karin has known Jan since the 1960's and in her professional capacity had secured his work for an academic collection in 1975. She was the perfect taskmaster, probing and questioning the artist about his working processes and urging him not only to remember, but to match those memories with illustrations of his earliest works. This was a challenge as Jan did not have much in terms of an archive of his work. Friends, family members, colleagues, collectors and galleries were called upon, and as this material started coming in the book took on its final shape.

Neethling's printmaking and particularly his collaborations with Hodgins is one aspect of his career that is well documented. The Wits Art Museum publication, *A lasting Impression: The Robert Hodgins print Archive*, published in 2012, references many of these collaborations. Jan and Rob's printmaking innovations and experimentations with cliché verre, at a time when very few artists in South Africa were working in the medium, remain unrivaled. Wilhelm van Rensburg, who has worked closely with Jan and Rob over the past decade, expertly shares his insights into this aspect of his career.

Neethling and Hodgins had been friends since the late 1950's, when they met at art school - Hodgins as the lecturer and Neethling his student. A friendship started that spanned several decades. For the last sixteen years of Rob's life, his studio was based at Jan's Midrand home. Spending such a period of time in each other's proximity, but with Neethling the more reserved of the two, inevitably lead to the perception that Neethling's work was heavily influenced, even derivative of the Hodgins palette. This is a misconception that needs to be dispelled, and who better to do it than an undisputed Hodgins expert. The Goodman Gallery's Senior Curator, Neil Dundas, had enjoyed a close working relationship with Hodgins from the 1980's until his death in 2010. His visits to Rob's studio not only introduced him to Neethling, but gave him a privileged insider's view into how he developed his work, and how Neethling and Hodgins collaborated, inspired and motivated each other. Dundas' profound knowledge of Hodgins' work

also sharpened his ability to recognize precisely the difference between the two artists' styles. His contribution is a personal insight written with the deep intimacy of a long friendship.

This book finally brings together the story of Jan's long and exciting career, and illustrates his multi-talented ability. It is the celebration of an artist who is not afraid, of someone who does not hold back. I want to thank each of the contributors for their input, as well as everyone who assisted in the process of making this book the reality it has become.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to Jan Neethling for having trusted me with this project. It remains a huge honour and pleasure to be a part of his life and career.

Chapter One

Of Villains and Rogues, Maidens and Goddesses

Karin Skawran



Karin Skawran in conversation with Jan Neethling about his life and his art.

Jan Neethling has, over the years, made a name for himself as a distinguished artist. For some fifty years he has creatively collaborated with one of South Africa's foremost artists, Robert Hodgins. Until recently, Jan was little known outside Johannesburg. This, I believe, was partly due to his own modest and introvert nature, as well as to the generous attitude with which he unconditionally welcomed and supported each and every success Robert Hodgins achieved with his art. There is no doubt, however, that from the moment they met, Robert became Jan's mentor and muse.

Due to his retiring nature perhaps, Jan has hardly kept any documentary evidence of his own exhibitions and artistic achievements. This was one of the reasons why his last solo exhibition at Erdmann Contemporary in Cape Town in 2013, lead to Heid Erdmann's decision to produce a book on Jan Neethling's work and to get to know him better as a painter, graphic artist and sculptor, and to try and fill in some of the many existing gaps in his artistic career. In my informal conversation with Jan Neethling, the artist has been challenged to talk about his life and his art. For about three months Jan and I met at my house every Friday morning to talk about his work. Surrounded by images of his work we also shared memories of our beloved friend, Robert Hodgins, who played such a significant part in Jan's life and art.

Although Jan remembers very little about his first attempts to create art, we started our conversation by talking about the earliest phases of his art-making.

Karin Jan, what do you remember of your first attempts at making art and being interested in art?

Jan When I was five years old, in 1944, I accompanied my parents to Canada, where my father was a diplomat. Although this can hardly be defined as art, I recall drawing an Easter bunny with crayons one day. My father proudly pinned the drawing to the wall. This impressed me enormously! I further remember using a lot of green in my drawings at the time, because the Canadian summer, compared with the mostly dry and ochre African landscape, was very green. I recall drawing bright green lawns, trees and leaves.

Karin Interestingly, such saturated emerald greens appear in your work to this day. I am thinking of *Nude Walking through Landscape* (2013), for instance, and *Moon Bathing* (2009). A phosphorescent green occurs particularly in several of your *Calendar Girls* series of 2009.

Yes, coming to think of it, green does play an important part in my life and in my art. I live on a plot surrounded by greens, and I tend to my Bonsai collection daily – nature with its different shades of green has always appealed to me.

Jan I have, however, always loved bright and luminous colours. For this reason I am inspired by artists like van Gogh, and Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Tom Wesselmann, Andy Warhol and Richard Lindner. My passion for colour has, as you have noticed, been strongly expressed in the *Calendar Girls* (2009) series and in my still lifes, such as *Red Table* (2001) and *Flowers and Fruit* (2006).

Karin What was your earliest art training at school like?

Jan I have hardly any recollection of these early years. Our family returned to South Africa in 1948 and we bought a house in Waterkloof, Pretoria. I was registered at Waterkloof House Preparatory School in 1949 and started art classes there in what was then known as Standard 2. I remember achieving top marks for art throughout. We mostly had to paint figures in domestic and sport settings.

I left prep school in 1952 and then went to Pretoria Boys High, where I followed art classes under the well known artist, Larry Scully. I do, however, not recall much from this period, and was certainly not influenced by Scully at all. I struggled with Mathematics, and did not complete Matric. My father realised that my interest and my talents lay with art, and so he agreed to let me register at the Art School of the Pretoria Technical College in 1958.

Karin That must have been an exciting time art-wise, because during the sixties, as far as I can remember, there was a whole generation of excellent art teachers and artists at this Art School whom you must have met?

Jan Oh yes, there was, of course Robert Hodgins, who had been a lecturer in painting at the College since 1954. We only met in 1959, during my second year at the Art School. He was not around when I entered the School, but, during his sabbatical year, was looking after the Stevenson Hamilton farm in White River, Mpumalanga.¹

Other lecturers at the College were: Zakkie Eloff who taught life drawing, Leo Theron was responsible for anatomy and portraiture, Maxie Steytler taught textile design, Johan van Heerden - sculpture, and Peter Eliastam and Ernest de Jongh - commercial design. I was at the time, thinking of following a career as commercial designer. I also took some classes in photography and ceramics.² The two lecturers who inspired me most were Zakkie Eloff and Robert Hodgins. I admired Zakkie Eloff's portraits and learnt a lot from him, although I remember little of what I painted then.

In the few examples you could dig up from this early period, for instance, *Sitting Figure* (1958/1960) and another figurative oil painting from this period, you have already made use of the strong colours you have mentioned before, and have emphasised the bodily forms of your figures with expressive dark, sometimes luminously colourful outlines. These are still characteristic of your work, and may have been inspired by the French Expressionist, Rouault, and certainly by Robert Hodgins' early work.

Karin But before we talk in greater depth about your work, tell me when and how did your friendship with Robert Hodgins develop?

Jan During my second year at Art School Robert was staying in a flat in Church Street in Pretoria. Together with three or four other students we used to go for tea with Rob and talk about art and literature. Later there were parties and we went on outings with him to Johannesburg. This is when I met, amongst other, Guiseppe Cattaneo and Edoardo Villa.

Karin When did you leave the Art School?

Jan I left the Art School at the end of 1960, when I had completed the three year Diploma course. I stayed in contact with Rob, who left the College a year later and worked as a journalist, critic and sub-editor for *Newscheck* from 1962 until 1966. He was then appointed lecturer in painting at the Department of Art at the University of the Witwatersrand. Here he worked until 1983.

In 1961 I was thrilled to find employment at the first Advertising Agency I applied at for a job. This was at Van Zyl, Schultz, Forsyth and Tredoux in Johannesburg, where I worked until 1962. With a brief interruption in 1964 when I went to America for three months, I worked at advertising agencies until about 1965. Since then I have been a full-time painter.

Karin 1965 is about the time we met?

Jan Yes, you, Rob and I met at the late Carl Rappe's house in Waterkloof in Pretoria. He was a diplomat at the Swedish Embassy and later became the Swedish Ambassador to South Africa. Carl owned several of Rob's works and he was a great lover of music. The evening we met – I recall - he had organised a musical soiree in his garden.

Karin When Rob lived in Brooklyn with your brother Timothy and his family, he used to visit me almost weekly and we read poetry together. I baked my famous *Apfelstrudel*, which he loved, and then we took turns to read to each other poems by Rainer Maria Rilke, George Seferis, Yanni Ritsos, C.P. Cavafy, Nikos Katzantzakis, W.H. Auden and many others. Rob was my fiercest and most respected critic and scrutinised most of my articles before they were published.

¹ Stevenson Hamilton was the first warden of South Africa's Sabi Nature Reserve, which later became the Kruger National Park. He served in the Reserve from 1902-1946.

² Together with Robert Hodgins, Jan Neethling worked for a while at the ceramic studio of Retief van Wyk in Pretoria.

Jan The three of us also had a lot of fun! I recall an end-of-year party that you organised for your Art Department at my house in President Park one year. Everyone had to attend the party as their favourite art work –you came as the Byzantine Empress Theodora, a mosaic from the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy. Your tall and slim colleague, Clinton Harrop-Allin, was a natural Giacometti: There was a Toulouse Lautrec, Ivor Powell arrived as a Duchamp or a Dali, I think, and Keith Dietrich and his wife as Duane Hanson's *Tourists* (1970), there was also a Frida Kahlo, and several others. Rob, of course, decided to disappear every hour or so, to emerge again as yet another art work! We celebrated until the early hours of the morning!

Karin When did you move to the smallholding your father bought?

Jan This was in 1966 when my father bought this smallholding near Fourways. He asked me to live there and improve it, so that he could sell it again. I asked Rob to come and live with me on the farm. This was from about 1967 to 1968.

When my father sold the smallholding, Rob bought his house in Westdene in Johannesburg. I moved in with him for about a year in 1972, while my own house was being built in President Park in Midrand. The well-known artist, Keith Dietrich, was our neighbour at the time.

Karin Jan, your life is very versatile. You always have much to do on your smallholding, with your Bonsai collection, and then, of course, your art. How do you manage to structure your life around all these activities? And how do your interests in music, for instance, and your love for your Bonsai collection, impact on your art? Or are these two entirely separate worlds?

Jan They really are two entirely separate worlds, even though my love for music, for instance, may, subconsciously, have influenced my work here and there. I have only once consciously produced a work that was inspired by a Bonsai. This was done in the cliché verre technique.

Karin Now tell me more about your art making. I am curious to know how you conceive an image in your mind and how you develop it.

Jan Most of the images I paint are inspired by my own photographs, newspaper images and the work of some European artists, especially Goya, Daumier, van Gogh, Toulouse Lautrec, Picasso, Cezanne, Renoir, Degas and, as I have pointed out before, by several Pop artists. I have not been consciously inspired by South African art at all, except perhaps by Pieter Wenning's landscapes, which I love. One of my favourite themes is of nude figures walking through landscapes, which at times faintly resembles Wenning's.





Untitled 1978



Nude and Arcade 1972



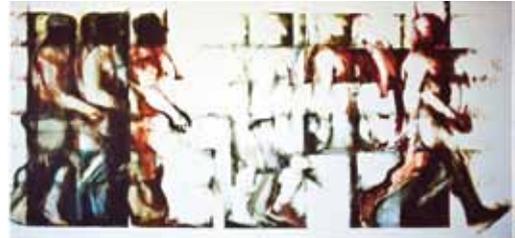
Red Table 2001



Nude 2004



Woman Turning 1970



Man Walking Side 1970

Jan I always need some reference or source to inspire me. The politicians and drug lords, businessmen, rogues and villains, have usually been sourced from magazine and newspaper clippings. As such, the subject matter is unintentionally most of the time, topical and of immediate interest. I rarely depict a specific scene or a specific person. *Hodgins' Opening at Goodman (Ulrich and David)* (2013) and *R.G.H. 4* (2007) are exceptions.

Karin Your nudes, at times still seem to echo Art School life drawing classes, although most of them are inspired by magazine images and pin-up calendars. And, although much more bold and sensuous, they also reflect the influence of Degas and, to some extent, Renoir.

Like Degas, you like to give the suggestion of accidental, spontaneous and unplanned compositions, even to the extent of cutting off parts of figures and using unfamiliar viewpoints. Yet it is clear that, like Degas, you compose your images very carefully. Interestingly, Degas was influenced by the new techniques of photography and attempted to convey the impression of movement – both features which have characterised your work throughout. Images like *Life Class* (2006) and *Nude Lounging* (2009), embody qualities of both Degas and Renoir. *Nude* (2004), rendered in saturated bright, almost phosphorescent colours, has something of the poetic quality of a Renoir.

The girlie calendar series, however, refers directly back to POP art - Tom Wesselmann, Richard Lindner and others who, in reaction to Abstract Expressionism, returned to figural imagery. Thematically based on mass-produced culture, such as movies and advertisements, their involvement with the most brazen characteristics of our culture, comic strips, highway signs, etc. fascinated me.

Your girlie images and nudes are, not as harsh and hard-edged as those of Wesselmann and Lindner, for instance. *Disco Dancer* (2009) and *Nudes Roller Skating* (2008) are much more painterly and poetic.

Jan I must emphasise that I never just copy a reference, but change the original image radically by transforming, abstracting and distorting it.

In order to anchor the image, I start by drawing an outline with pencil or pastel on canvas or board. Depending on the contents of the image I have in mind, I then make use of different methods to achieve what I would call, an expressionist figurative outcome. I chop and change, undo and redo, obliterate areas of the image – each work is determined by its own process. In *Woman Turning* (1970) and *Woman Climbing into and out of a Hammock* (1970), both exhibited at the Lidchi Gallery in 1971, the white areas in the image were obtained by sandpapering through the upper layers of paint to the white paint underneath. Robert Hodgins, with whom I exhibited at the time, and I, used oil glazes on these images, achieving a particular luminosity.

³ England-based graffiti artist, political activist, film director and painter.

Rob and I very often shared processes and techniques we used in order to achieve different end results. Sometimes I would work into blank areas with pastel, acrylic paint or spray paint. Or I might build up an image by dabbing paint onto paper, canvas or board. In *Lady Gaga* (2013) I first sponged in the body with black acrylic paint, and at a later stage, stencilled and sprayed in with black the head and umbrella. This technique was inspired by the work of the street artist, Banksy³. Finally I painted in the coloured areas. At times I continued to work into an image or obscure it entirely.

I change appearances quite drastically, by playing with the format and the composition. In *Metamorphosis* (2007), the walking figure is serialised in a landscape, changing colour and position - thereby emphasising forward movement - an element which has remained characteristic in my work. Or I create floating heads which are detached from the body, as in *Swimsuit Girl with floating Head* (2013) and *Two Nudes with floating Heads* (2013). In the latter image the heads of the two nudes have been detached from their bodies by distinctly isolating them in separate frames. Despite the fact that they belong to the bodies, they almost appear like separate portraits or icons, hovering above their equally framed bodies. Heads and bodies have been treated differently – the heads are painted, while both bodies were sponged in with dabs of black paint. The partly visible figure on the right was added later as a reflection of the figure on the left.

I cannot explain my compositions – they simply evolve, perhaps though the notion of floating heads has some significance. I am not quite sure, but they could refer to the mindlessness or absent-mindedness of politicians. And where they occur in the girlie images, such as *Swimsuit girl with floating Head* (2013), they might evoke flightiness and dumbness. But none of these interpretations were my original intention. For me they have to do with the excitement of a new dimension and an unexpected irrationality.

Karin When I bought *Nude and Arcades* (1972) at the Goodman Gallery for the UNISA Art Collection, I was impressed with its direct and monumental impact. I was also fascinated by the unorthodox manner in which you presented the nude body. Its torso, without head or legs, is portrayed horizontally across the format on a frontal plane. In this and most of your other works, you have broken with the traditional Western perspective according to which the onlooker is gradually led - formally and emotionally - into the painting, from a realistically presented foreground to a background. Spatial and planar ambiguities occur in many of your paintings and result in vibrant spatial tensions. Although the round bodily forms in *A Greek Goddess up to no Good* (2013), have a three-dimensional quality, the white and red background areas appear flat and two-dimensional, preventing entry into a conventional background.

Your viewpoints of figures are frequently unexpected and irrational, and most heads are portrayed with a bold immediacy and an iconic frontality. Torsos tend to fill the format, while heads, legs, and even arms often disappear beyond the edges of the format. This is the case in *A Greek Goddess up to no Good* (2013) and in the nude *Twins* (2007) seen from the back. In *Warrior and Maidens* (2013), four nude bodies are presented in a row, two facing the onlooker and two turning away. But again, one

head disappears partly beyond the upper edge of the format, while the legs disappear behind flat planes of grey and green.

Karin How would you describe your style of painting?

Jan Even though I never intentionally express emotions or feelings, I would call my work figurative-expressionistic. I always use a figurative image which I then distort or abstract in an expressionistic manner. I have no idea why I distort or abstract, perhaps subconsciously trying to express an emotion after all! I agree though that there is, in most of my images a strong vitality and life force, for instance, in *Meter Maid* (1985) and *Struttin* (2009). I hardly ever paint abstract images. *Hammer* (1970) is a singular exception.

I am immensely drawn to radically abstracted nudes like *Black Nude* (2013), *Disco Dancer* (2009) and *Fallen Angel* (2013), possibly because of their emotive power. I seem to detect an – perhaps subconscious - influence of Goya's Black Paintings in these. Colour-wise reduced to black and red, the voluminous black nude and the fallen angel have an ominous quality, at the same time almost evoking a sinister, bold landscape.

Karin *Global Warming/Skull* (2013) includes several images which are faintly evocative of a sinister landscape at the top of the composition. Depicted are what might be trees surrounded by grey clouds polluting the landscape. Below the landscape, in another section of the composition, can be seen a boulder-like figure and a dark skull, wearing a gas mask. I consider this as one of only a few really ominous and threatening images, commenting directly on environmental issues.

Through Robert Hodgins, I am sure, you became acquainted with the work of artists like Daumier, Francis Bacon, George Grosz and others, all of whom inspired him also. *Two Heads* (2009), a present you gave Rob, shows distinct similarities with the work of Francis Bacon, although the image does not appear nearly as tormented as Bacon's works are. The severe distortion of the two heads and their dark colourful painterliness do, however, resemble Bacon quite strongly.

Others like *Demagogue* (2009) and *Crime is dragging down the economy* (2013) faintly recall the work of Daumier. But whereas you are more inclined to paint, tongue in cheek, the prototype of a *Professor* (2001); a typical *Chairman* (2008), a *Demagogue* (2009), a *Syndicate Chief* (2013) or a *Drug Lord* (2004), your work, on the whole, lacks Daumier's social and political satire and sarcasm. In works like *Streetwise* (2004) and *Drug Lord* (2004) though, there is a sinister undertone and you have consciously attempted to comment on street kids and the drug scene in general.

Jan It is true that in my paintings I rarely commented directly on social and political issues, but was nevertheless always acutely aware of issues like corruption, the drug scene and those forces which destroy nature and the environment.

Karin How did Rob, as an individual, inspire you? And how does his work influence you? Several people have criticised you for painting very much like Rob. How would you respond to such criticism?



Nudes Rollerskating 2008





R.G.H. 4 2007



Old Seaman 2009



Demagogue 2009



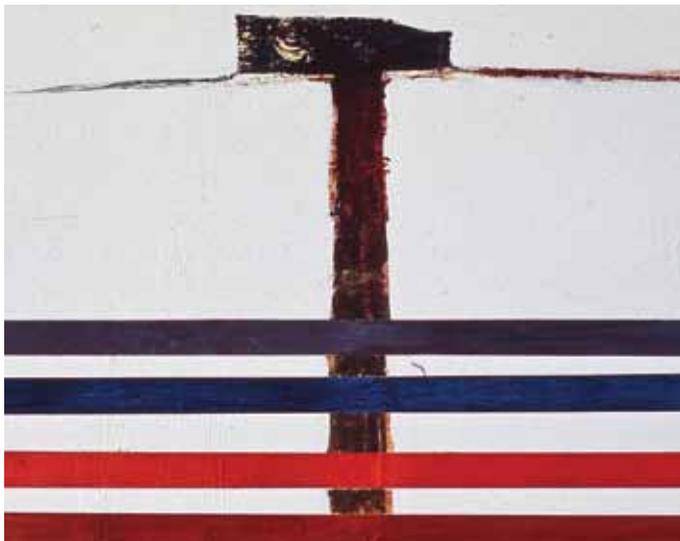
Prof 2001



Untitled 2006



Two Heads 2009



Hammer 1970



Untitled (Male Figure) 1978



Untitled (Red Tie) 2001



Untitled (Female Figures) 1978

Jan I can't really answer this, but I have total belief and conviction in what Rob said and what he taught me in art. He was my mentor and muse from the word go. Later I developed an incredible kindred spirit with Rob. I found that I had much in common with him in music and art, *guffy* novels⁴ and even serious literature. And yes, I was strongly influenced by his art, although I never copied his style. I was also hardly ever quite as inspired as he was with literary source material. Interestingly, he said so himself. I suppose the ugly faces of his tyrants and businessmen are, in fact, comparable with the ugly faces of my own drug lords and politicians.

Karin Works like *Old Seaman* (2009) and *Informers* (2009) I would describe as more topical and immediate. An image like *Holy Shit – Envy* (2013) illustrates, in a humorous and satirical way, one of the seven deadly sins. This work, as well as *Domestics* (2007) and *Marriage of Convenience* (2008) distinctly bring to mind the work of George Grosz. But whereas Grosz's caricatures in particular, were biting satirical, your images are usually more humorous and humane. They are never quite vicious or aggressive, and I even detect an element of caricature in some of them.

They may, on the whole, not appear aggressive, but they do, at times, reflect a dark undercurrent. In this regard they probably resemble Robert Hodgkin's Ubu paintings, for instance, *Central Africa? East Africa?*⁵ and *South Africa 197?-Interrogator*⁶.

What were some of the creative devices Rob taught you?

Jan Apart from painting techniques and processes we shared, Rob always told me: "Use the accidents and mistakes you make in your work" - and when I followed his advice, I found that my painting improved and gained vitality. Rob also advised me: Exploit the irrational and unexpected in your work and develop it. If it works, leave it. It adds to the mystery of the work." I liked and understood what he said.

The pictorial irrationalities and ambiguities are thoroughly exploited in some of the *Calendar Girl* (2009) series. These were painted from images that I cut out from magazines. In *Calendar Girl 2* (2009) the girl is depicted, hugging herself with her two arms, while a third hand appears – quite unexpectedly – on her naked hip. In the original magazine image, the third hand belongs to a man standing behind the girl. I deleted the image of the man and cut out the image of the girl, leaving the man's hand on her hip, thereby creating a kind of collage. In *Two Nudes with Floating Heads* (2013) an abstracted arm floats next to the voluptuous torso on the left. *Meter Maid* (1985), for instance, is another strong example of my love for an almost irrational assemblage of body parts, displaced, cut off and floating. The bright colourfulness of this work, its lively rhythm and lush painterliness, add to the vitality of the image.

From Rob I also learned to be more experimental and to watch and make use of spontaneous marks and accidents. He believed that subconsciously an artist intends

accidents, and advised me to always go with the unexpected and unpredictable result. In works like *Nudes passing through landscape* (1970) and *Maiden strolling through landscape* (2008) accidental brush strokes and the odd dab of paint, I feel, contribute to the mysterious quality of the images. Similarly, in some of the still lifes, such as *Still Life* (2008) accidental mishaps have definitely contributed towards the rich and sensuous quality of the painting. The inverted or distorted perspectives of the tables in my still lifes derive from an intuitive and an almost haphazard approach to the composition.

Like Rob I also liked titling my images only after having completed them. Rob believed that the mistake a lot of artists make is painting towards a title. They labour too much to conform to what the title means. In doing so, they tend to neglect the quality of the finished work – it ends up looking overdone and too self-conscious. In works like *Lady Gaga* (2013), for instance, as in all my other images, I had completed the image before I titled it.

Karin In this interview we are concentrating on your painting, drawing and sculpture⁷, so we shall have a closer look at some of your works on the three collaborative exhibitions you have held with Robert Hodgins at the Lidchi -; the Goodman-; and the Market Gallery; as well as your major solo shows at Erdmann Contemporary and Obert Contemporary.

Did the 1970 exhibition at the Lidchi Gallery which was then run by Harold Jeppe, have a theme?

Jan No, I don't think there was a title, but in the oil paintings we showed, Robert Hodgins and I explored the concept of serialisation, conveying movement of an idea or a figure/s, sequentially, from one frame to another. We were, at the time, both inspired by the brilliant and eccentric 19th century photographer, Eadweard Muybridge, who sequentially captured human and animal movement which is almost imperceptible to the human eye. He was fascinated by the human form in movement, within fractions of a second. Robert and I worked out sequential ideas for our paintings, each in our own way.

In *Man Walking Front* (1970), *Man Walking Side* (1970) and *Woman Turning* (1970), for instance, I have depicted the male and the female figure in different postures, evoking forward or sideward movement. *Woman Climbing into and out of a Hammock* (1970) was directly inspired by an image by Muybridge⁸. Different motions by one or more figures have been depicted within mostly horizontal compositions, which emphasise forward movement. Even spiralling movements are shown, as in *Dancing Women* (2009).

Karin The theme of movement and inner motion seems to have intrigued you, even though you did not consciously attempt to depict inner motion or emotion. Images such as *Nude Walking through Landscape* (2013), with its Wenning-like landscape in the background, is much more realistic, earthy and picturesque than the serialised almost automated Muybridge figures. *Nudes Roller Skating* (2008) and *Dancing Women* (2009), for instance, have been slightly abstracted, and movement is evoked by displaced limbs and by blurred and overlapping layers of paint.

⁴ Robert Hodgins' word for engaging but slightly shallow novels
⁵ 1980's from Ubu Centenaire: Histoire d'un Farceur Ornnal. 1996. A Lasting Impression: The Robert Hodgins Print Archive, Wits Art Museum, 2012, p.184
⁶ From Ubu Centenaire : Histoire d'un Farceur Ornnal? 1996. op.cit., p 272

⁷ Wilhelm von Rensburg has written about your graphic work in his essay entitled, *Young Men in Garage Trousers: The Human Figure in Motion, Eadweard Muybridge*, 1955. Dover Publications Inc., New York, plate 174

The brushwork in most of your paintings is vigorous and the colours you use, although reduced in range, are strong and luscious. Are you sure that you are not trying to express emotion or inner motion in your work? *Demagogue* (2009) depicting a coarse-looking man with raised fists, speaking through a microphone, is definitely most expressive and emotive, as is *Crime is dragging down the Economy* (2013). While creating metaphors for certain concepts such as greed, corruption, political power, you are also expressing these notions through very bold and expressive gestures and gesticulation.

Jan What fascinates me is physical movement. I am visually very alert and aware of people's habits and movements – perhaps motion and emotion are automatically contained within the movements I depict.

Karin Tell me about the 1975 Goodman Gallery show. Was there a theme?

Jan Not as far as I remember. I painted for this show, when I was staying with Rob in Westdene. Both Rob and I depicted the human form. In my works I used strong colours. Otherwise I don't remember much about this exhibition except that Linda Givon, when seeing the works on the wall, exclaimed: "How on earth am I going to sell these?"⁹

Karin Interestingly, the 1978 Market Theatre Gallery exhibition included not only paintings, but also some of your sculptures and drawings.

Jan At the time I was very much influenced by the work of the sculptor, Jean Robert Ipoustéguy¹⁰, who constructed some of his sculptures in sections, to be reassembled later at the venue where it was set up. I was inspired by this assembled look, and made plaster casts of human figures. The body parts of different figures were assembled and reassembled and eventually did not resemble the original body cast at all. I transformed the casts entirely and suspended them from the ceiling with wire. Thus they hovered above the gallery space. The plaster fragments were rough, untreated and unpainted. They were later smoothed down with sand paper. Some of the sculptures expressed movement, such as the life-size walking male nude *Untitled* (1978), and another gesticulating, marching male figure which is half in action and half in repose. I was, at the time, also very much inspired by Henry Moore's works and Frank Gallo's sculptures cast in resin.

From this exhibition I gave Rob a male head, cast in bronze. Moore's influence can possibly be detected in my use of positive and negative spaces in the work. We called this head *Benito*, because it made us think of the arrogance of Benito Mussolini!

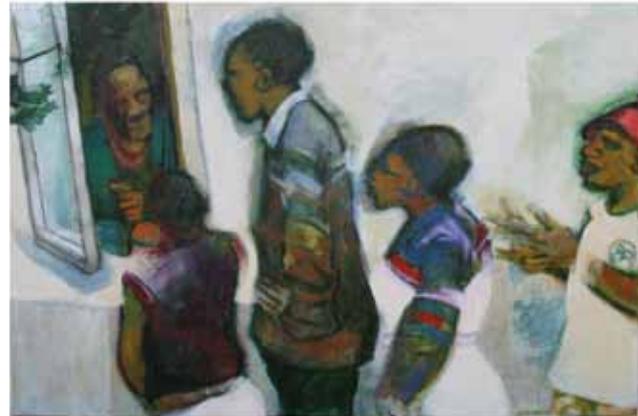
I have never made sculptures again after this exhibition.

Karin What about the drawings, which you also exhibited only once?

Jan They were mostly drawings of female nudes, executed in pencil and conté. Some



Warrior and Maidens 2013



Informer 2009

⁹Unfortunately, the Goodman Gallery could not help us with this exhibition either.

¹⁰Born Jean Robert, in Dun-sur-Meuse on 6 January 1909, the artist later added his mother's name to his own, Ipoustéguy. He died in 2006. Ipoustéguy's work was most varied, but he is known mostly as a sculptor.



Calendar Girl 2 2009



Hodgins opening at Goodman (David and Ulrich) 2012/13



Lady Gaga 2012/13



Amazon 2007



Holy Shit - Envy 2012/13



Flowers and Fruit 2006



Drug Lord 2007



A Greek Goddess up to no Good 2012/13



Srutin 2009

are depicted fairly realistically, standing or static, while others are seen in motion, and might have been sketches for some of the paintings exploring movement. The sketches were made after Muybridge's photographs.

Karin Your 2008 exhibition at Erdmann Contemporary in Cape Town was entitled *Uncle Six Fingers*, and was a mixed bag of paintings, as you have described them.

Jan Yes, the title was inspired by a record with comedians Mike Nichols and Elaine May. It was an ad-lib take on a conversation between father and daughter. Black comedy, kind-of, because tragically, the father tried to explain to his daughter that he was going to prison – yet again – as a result of an argument between himself and Uncle Six Fingers. Uncle Six Fingers being one of the rogues portrayed in my paintings.

Again the images for this exhibition are very figurative and painted in acrylic on board. The main theme was the nude walking through a landscape – resembling a bit the Lidchi exhibition images dealing with serialism.

Unlike Robert, whose paintings very often were absolute figments of his imagination, my work is based on images I see, and which I paint and adapt as my subconscious dictates. While you might imagine looking at a drug lord, he could be a politician. You might think that I am lamenting the state of politics in this country or commenting on corruption! But I don't like to give a definite interpretation to my works and to dictate to viewers what my work is saying. I like people to interpret it as they will and if, at face value, they appreciate it and it reflects something important to them, then I am content

Karin Thank you, Jan, for your candid and inspiring input into this conversation. Although I have known you for more than forty years, I have learned so much more about you and your work during these past months. Our friendship came about through Rob, and the bond between the three of us has, through this conversation been forged even more strongly.

Having known Rob I believe that he may have wanted me to end this conversation with the following words from a poem by W.H. Auden:

*Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
Let the winds of dawn that blow
Softly round your dreaming head
Such a day of welcome show
Eye and knocking heart may bless,
Find our mortal world enough;
Noons of dryness find you fed
By the involuntary powers,
Nights of insult let you pass
Watched by every human love".*



Uncle Six Fingers 2008



Crime is dragging down the Economy 2013



Drug Lord 2008



Sailor 1972

Prof Karin Maria Skawran

Former Head of the Department of History of Art and Fine Arts at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. She was trained as an art historian at the universities of Pretoria and Munich, Germany.

Chapter Two

Young Men in Garage Trousers

Wilhelm van Rensburg



Young Men in Garage Trousers

Four decades of printmaking collaboration between Jan Neethling and Robert Hodgins.

Neethling and Hodgins met at art school and Robert's tongue-in-cheek comment about Jan at the time was to enquire what a young man was doing at College wearing *garage trousers* - denim jeans - when the dress code was strictly *suit-and-tie* for both students and lecturers. This detail of dress indicated something of the irreverent attitude towards convention that became the hallmark of both artists throughout their artistic careers. Their irreverent attitude, captured in the phrase *young men in garage trousers*, evokes the slice-of-life ethnographies typical of social science research in America of the late 1950s and early 1960s. This generation of ethnographic researchers gave a voice to society's underclass, drawing on the canonical text, *Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School* in which the author records the transition in young, predominantly male medical practitioners from student life to internship at medical hospitals. These young researchers were cultural romantics, valorizing mainstream society's villains and outsiders as heroes. They imagined society through a tragic shade, but at the same time believed in the emancipatory value of deviating from conventions. Neethling and Hodgins were like these young men personified in the rather conservative South African art scene. Their emergence as a collaborative artistic force was as impertinent as Jan's arrival at College in denim jeans. Their innovation in the field of printmaking in South Africa transgressed the rigorous stylistic and formal codes that were associated with the medium at the time.

Jan and Robert's imagery in printmaking can be positioned in the figurative tradition of European post-war Expressionism, represented by the work of such artists as Francis Bacon and Jean Dubuffet. An extant monotype Neethling pulled at College is a good example of his emerging skill as printmaker and an indication of his favored subject matter, the female nude that became ubiquitous in Neethling's work throughout his life. The nude, male and female, was also one of the earliest subject matter in Hodgins' art. Their work at the time drew on the iconography of British pop artists such as Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake. Hamilton's famous collage, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, for example, was described by Lawrence Alloway (who is credited for inventing the term Pop Art) as an inventory of popular culture: muscle men, nude girls and Jazz singers among other things, inhabiting symbol-thick spaces full of television sets and vacuum cleaners, criss-crossed with the tracks of human activity. Neethling and Hodgins' multilayered prints are, in similar ways, collages of human activity.



Untitled 1960



Stockings I 1975



Stockings II 1975

Neethling and Hodgins's first endeavours in printmaking as a collaborative team in 1971, exhibit an assuredly classical figurative style (drawing on figurative studies of the nude that has been an integral part of the visual repertoire of many such British pop artists as Allen Jones and R.B. Kitaj, and New York pop artists such as Tom Wesselmann and Mel Ramos.

Hodgins' prints utilized classical figures, in Greek kouroi mode, while Neethling's series, *Bikini Girl I, II & III* is a perfect foil for the iconic nudes of these Pop artists.

Equally innovative as these two artists' iconography was the printmaking technique of cliché verre that Jan and Robert employed as early as 1971, resulting in a two-person exhibition at the Lidchi Gallery in Johannesburg, their first collaborative show. At the time, screen printing was favoured in South Africa, probably as a reflection of the growing status of printmaking internationally. The printmaking studios of Egon Guenther and Fred Schimmel can be mentioned in this regard. Neethling and Hodgins chose cliché verre, a printmaking technique that utilizes glass, instead of say, a lithographic stone, copper plate, or piece of linoleum as matrix. This technique entails drawing a design/image on a sheet of glass and placing it on top of a piece of sensitized photographic paper, and then exposing it to the direct sun. The glass is usually covered with an opaque ground and the design/image is drawn with a sharp instrument, resulting in fine, exposed lines through which the sun will burn the lines on the paper, resembling an etching. These glass prints were frequently produced in the 1850s by etchers such as Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, Charles-Francois Daubigny, Jean Francois Millet and Theodore Rousseau. Even Eugene Delacroix preferred cliché verre to lithography in his early career in the early 19th century. The inspiration of the School of Barbizon and its preoccupation with depictions of the Fountainebleau Forest is evident in many of the cliché verre landscapes of Jan Neethling.

In 1980 Jan and Robert mounted their second printmaking collaboration exhibition at the Market Theatre Gallery, Johannesburg. Their printmaking experiments centred on a series of monotypes and one-off screen prints. The subject matter of these prints shifted dramatically, from classic figures and landscapes, to portraits of one very notorious American 1930s Depression era gangster, Charles Arthur Floyd, better known as Pretty Boy Floyd (a villain of note, who, in spite of numerous murders was well liked by the American public, as a Robin Hood figure. He was later declared America's Public Enemy No. 1 by J Edgar Hoover). The artists found a newspaper article and photograph of this villain and used this image



over the Easter weekend of that year as basis for numerous explorations of visual possibilities using a silkscreen technique and mixed media to embellish this image.

Their *Pretty Boy Floyd* exhibition subtly referenced the controversial 1964 Andy Warhol exhibition *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* momentarily installed on the façade of the State Pavilion at the World's Fair in New York of the most dangerous criminals of the time. They had to be summarily covered up soon after its opening. Warhol succeeded in valorizing the underdog, in the same manner as those ethnographic researchers did for the working class. In the same manner Neethling and Hodgins also valorized the villain by the forthright gaze of their *Pretty Boy Floyd* Portraits. The title of Neethling and Hodgins's exhibition also seems to echo the double entendre regarding same sex desire invoked by Warhol's *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, but inadvertently perhaps.

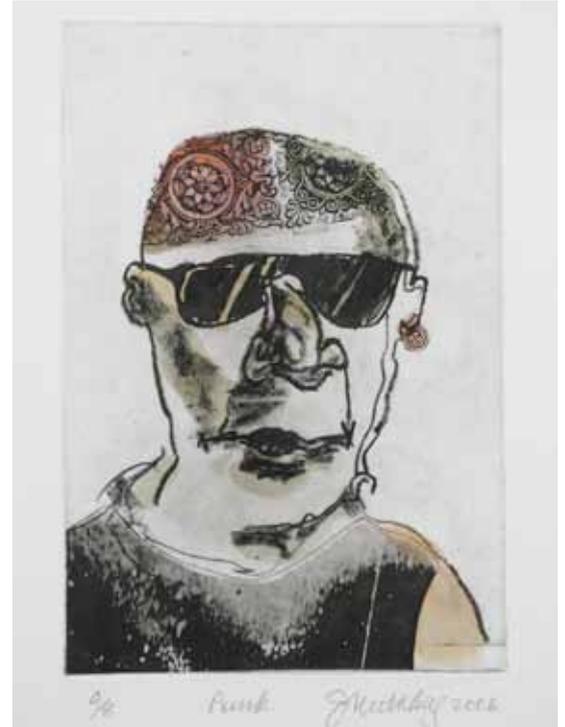


Pretty Boy Floyd 1980

Twenty-one years after *Pretty Boy Floyd*, Neethling and Hodgins recreated the experience that started their collaboration of 1980, again over Easter, this time using photographs of each other. They used four photographs as basic images to create a series of portraits of each other, themselves, and of the two of them together. Their previous two-person show was based on an image of a criminal, Charles Arthur Floyd. In this exhibition at Gallery Art on Paper in 2001 and titled *One-Off*, Hodgins quipped at the time: "You have two criminals to contend with." The result was not unlike that of the collaboration between Gilbert and George, but unlike these two living sculptures Neethling and Hodgins rejected the formality and respectability of these two suits of the arts, Gilbert and George's pseudonym, and donned the more daring attire of the urban hip hop cowboy. Neethling pulled a particularly striking cowboy self-portrait for this exhibition, depicting a confident, charming and handsome young man, again, still wearing garage trousers!

The title of the 2001 exhibition, *One-Off* has an interesting origin. The silkscreen process Jan and Robert used proved to be quite cumbersome. Said Robert: "The trouble with silkscreen is that it's a terribly dead, in-your-face medium. I've never quite managed to crack it. Jan and I were going to do an edition, but after about three prints, I said *bugger that for a lark* – they are so boring. So we decided to make each one different, hence the title *One-Off*."

Their next exhibition, also at Gallery Art on Paper, in 2005, was titled *Two weeks in the Country*. It referred to the time spent with master printer Mark Atwood at his studio The Artists' Press in its idyllic setting near White River, Mpumalanga - where the prints were produced. Neethling made extensive use of a polymer photogravure technique - the prints of which



Punk 2006

he hand coloured. The titles of this series are significant: *Baldy, Ol 'con, Prof* (2005), and so on, because they constitute a veritable rogue's gallery of outsiders and eccentrics. Neethling was not interested in portraying any likeness of a specific sitter, if there was any model at all. He seems to be creating a similar attitude in these portraits than, say, the earlier urban cowboy self-portrait.

Of their working relationship and of the prints they produced until Robert's death in 2010, Hodgins once said: "Jan's are very pop and jubilated; mine are more Dr Jekyll and Mr Hodgins." Jan Neethling's are indeed very assured and accomplished, signaling an ironic frame of mind in terms of his subject matter, and an innovative experimental stance to conventional printmaking techniques.



Torso I 1971



Jan No.9 2001

Wilhelm van Rensburg

Research Fellow VIAD (Visual Identities in Art and Design) research centre, FADA (Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture), UJ (University of Johannesburg).

Chapter Three

Disarmingly Honest Observer

Neil Dundas



Jan Neethling's surprisingly animated figures dominate his canvases. He is an accomplished painter of life on the move, and even the occasional landscape or still-life he produces will seem as much concerned with the human absence, as they might with a table leg, objects in a room, trees or the lie of the land. They display the same brushstroke and sense of living presence that we see in the figurative pictures.

It has always seemed to me that he has been distinguished by two characteristics in his approach to image-making: he is a wide-eyed and impressionable recorder of human activity, but also a skilled and formal technician, hardworking and disciplined in his approach to his materials and subjects.

Neethling grew up in a close and cultured family. Due to his father's diplomatic career he learned early to observe and react to a new green land when they lived in Canada in the first few years following World War II. He cites this exposure at an impressionable young age as fostering his first wanting to draw and paint, and he later excelled in art at school back in South Africa. His high school and arts college education encouraged the figurative element of his work and instilled the discipline ways of the period: specialist teachers taught different media, it was required to learn a solid foundation in each, as well as develop rigorous standards in the preparation of materials, surfaces, and the techniques required before evolving a personal style. He acquired skills not only in painting, sculpture and drawing but also in graphic processes including silkscreen, then very much a new way of working. He made acquaintance who provided access to a social context of arts, literature and music, and also developed his interest in photography. All this provided the basis for experimenting with combinations of medium, becoming open to new processes, and being willing to use his own photographs, and the images of popular culture, as the basis for his paintings.

While he has painted and exhibited since the 1970's, this was mainly in collaboration with, or alongside his lifelong friend and mentor, the late Robert Hodgins, and only in more recent years has Neethling painted regularly, and exhibited consistently for himself. I believe I am one among many who believe this career was long overdue for a steeper trajectory. Long self-effacing and modest in promoting his own work, he has frequently been seen as self-sacrificing in his stalwart support for Hodgins' career.

Yet the artist himself sees the long development as having been necessary, a steady evolution of his main cast of characters in what we like to call his



Syndicate Chief 2013

"theatre of life." It is true that he and Hodgins actually inspired one another, and that each learned from the other as their years of working together went by. He ventures that he has only recently found and exercised his own artistic voice but that this was always strongly encouraged by Hodgins.

I believe that few really know to what extent Jan Neethling influenced Hodgins, mostly assuming the process was more one-way. In fact, I have for many years known him to be Robert's most trusted sounding board, adviser, and respected critic, just as the reverse was true of Hodgins for his own work. Neethling credits Hodgins with inspiring him to leave the commercial graphics and advertising world for the fine arts in the 1960's, also with helping him through what he has termed his "drought period" of the 1990's and pushing him to be more productive, develop his confidence, and trust in the abilities he had honed for so long.

Jan truly began to reclaim a solo approach to his painting in the 2000's. The archive of his images shows that all the groundwork was there over many years. He revisited his early luscious female nudes, returned to further explore the depiction of figures in movement through interiors and landscapes, which he and Hodgins had experimented with from images of early photography and film.

From this time onward he is evidently fully confident of his own expressive, graphically edged and Pop-inflected imagery. Stylized lines and dramatic colours suggest a theatrical take on his motifs of interest. The ambiguous figures seem to take on curious combinations of admiration and fearful fascination, of threat and warmth. Like Hodgins, but distinct from that influence, he reveals himself to be unafraid of sudden shifts in palette, or experiments with medium. He will play with spraypaint, text and stencils, hard lines which simulate cut-and-paste, bright - even violent - colour juxtaposed with monochromatic flat shapes and photographic elements and borrowings from mass media. He uses graphics in unusual ways, and in series which are bursts of production (see the long series of photogravure works each time he works together with Mark Attwood of the Artists' Press). Largely he has focused on painting, but his own camera is always with him, and his photography often informs his content.

Neethling has remained concerned with the human figure as a subject which can reveal "the good, the wicked, the lovely and the ugly" in one work. His chosen subjects are seldom young, but rather appear caught unwittingly on camera, in harsh flashlight, revealing the wear and tear of lives lived at full

throttle. Some are seen with tolerance and sympathy, but acknowledge their frailties, some with amusement as just a little wicked; but many more as a collective of evil, menace and latent violence.

Hodgins commented that while he would seek to achieve a "translucent ground, gradual and transparent layering, screens of smokiness, darkness or even veils of fabric in which to seat the deeds of the dastardly", he saw Jan always as "tougher in his approach, direct, he does not try to soften the dark side of his characters. Neethling is always tougher than me, more keen to show the brutal. Jan likes the harder, expressionist edge of the graphic in his paintings. He takes a no-mucking-about attitude to thugs and seductresses alike. What you see is what you get, old boy!"¹

The paintings emerged strong and glowing. Building from the drawings at the Market Theatre exhibition of 1978, there is a clear line of development to the *Greek Goddess up to No Good* of 2013 at Erdmann Contemporary. Neethling's female nudes are always fleshy, impudent and confident in a voluptuous sensuality which is paralleled in the use of colour and painted gesture. They are strong figures, dominant actors in the scenes they inhabit, even when they flit, surprisingly lightly, across rooms or pastoral landscapes in motion reminiscent of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912). He steadily shakes off the attitude of an innocent abroad in the 60's, influenced by Tom Wesselman or Richard Lindner. His female figures do owe allegiance to that emerging permissiveness of the Pop era, commercial images from album covers, magazine shoots, page three girls in the tabloids, advertising hoardings; but he tempers the sense of admiring the model in life-drawing class with frank desire, an open understanding and appreciation of the nude body. This is the honest Neethling, as his treatment of the subject moves further from being homage to the masters he studied, such as Bonnard, Degas, or Bacon. While *Large Yellow Nude* (circa 1960), painted while at art school, is monumental and powerful, the painting is also variously derivative of the styles of Rouault, de Kooning and even Hodgins at that time. Ten years later the works *Woman Bending*, *Woman Turning* and *Women Climbing into and out of Hammock* (1970) show the artist breaking away, and seeking the difference in revealing the female nude which comes to distinguish his own voice.

It is our first encounter with the disarmingly honest observer. These are almost confessional paintings, still careful in brushwork and pursuing his style, but what is most striking is the feeling revealed for the subject. These figures grow



Untitled 1972



Fallen Angel 2013

¹Robert Hodgins in an informal interview with the writer at Neethling's studio on a Sunday afternoon prior to their two men show *Two Weeks in the Country* at Art on Paper, 2005



Cop 2005



Of con 2005



Prof 2005



Rogues gallery 2005

over time and other works to be more attainable, more human, and are lustily appreciated. Less idealized than some of the early nudes, the later female figures are seen through the eyes of an experienced observer.

They persist to this day, and gradually are added to with an element of humour, and a gentler edge [as in the aforementioned *Greek Goddess up to No Good (2013)*], and sometimes a touch of satire and disillusionment. Neethling frequently matches the medium, background treatment and particular style of line to the specific lady of interest.

Sadly rare are his sculptures: the bronze head Neethling gifted to Hodgins after their joint exhibition at the Market Theatre in 1978 has always impressed. It is a tough but grand and noble head of a power figure. Masculine, reduced to spare lines, but full of heft and purpose, it conveys a sense of the loneliness of the mighty. On this only exhibition in which he showed sculpture there were also two plaster figures, a striding man, and a headless dancing man. They are very distinct in their attitude to the body from the paintings then and now, and capture strength in motion and vitality. I have often hoped these will not be the last foray into three dimensions.

"Something wistful, longing for what might have been" is the reaction I expressed to the artist when I saw the etching *Years Ago (2005)*. It reflects the tender acceptance of an aging beauty. She is on a soft ground, pale colour washed on to the photogravure surface. This type of depiction is in contrast to *Strutting (2004)*, or the *Calendar Girls (2009)* series of paintings which present the power of femmes fatales in bold areas of strident colour. The same observer is here wiser, but no less frank with the viewer. He openly shows the pangs of loss of innocence that these temptresses represent, but is more technically confident and able to wield the realization of cynicism in exposing them. Even the titles begin to show the openness about character: see *Dumpling Nudes (2009)*, and *Dubious Marriage (2009)*, of the same year.

The male figures we see by the 2000's have also revealed their tough characters, yet always seem more archetypes than the more specific personalities of the female figures. I think of Damon Runyon's writing, and the popular movie images of Prohibition-era gangsters when I look at what Neethling calls his "rogues' gallery". There is an etching by that name from the 2005 series, which looks back to the *Bodybuilders (1971)*, and a painting of a man in a striped shirt from 1972. From the beginning, the men in Neethling's images are harsher, heavier in atmosphere and intent. This persists to the recent politicians and thugs, but again often tempered with more sympathy

and humour, as are the females. The current rogues are sinister, but have also evolved. They still are made with that hard graphic line in black paint, embody evil and warnings of danger which deal with serious problems of the day: drug dealing, criminal corruption in the echelons of power and the threat of violence in the street. Yet there is a dose of satire, and a feeling that these characters are also more honestly understood. Bold strokes and stripes of colour, heavy, dark delineation of gross bodies make very strong paintings. There is always a latent threat embodied in these figures. Overweening pride, arrogance, corruptibility and brutish nature are revealed in works like *Drug Lord* (2007), *Street Wise* (2007/08), and *Arm Wrestling* (2008). We recognize, (or do we?) politicians, ne'er-do-wells, gangsters and criminals, half-remembered from the television news, or old newspaper accounts, but they are types, representative of a whole group of men. They remain deliberately nameless, or generically titled such as *Politician* (2004). It is true that exceptions should be named, where a particular person is rendered as a true portrait.

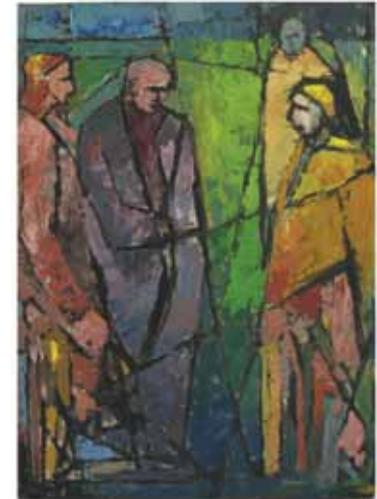
The *Pretty Boy Floyd* works are an early example of treating a specific male subject. There are also portraits of Hodgins, self-portraits and a notable 2013 depiction of rock star Mick Jagger. Titled *Good Knight Mick Jagger* (2012/13), the picture wears that knighthood with a scowl. It is a face too well lived-in to escape the irony of the title.

Those deliberate portraits do, however, demonstrate some affection or understanding acceptance of the subject, even though the common thread is that in all these men, there lurks a rogue. They are sometimes accorded the treatment we see in the female characters, a little caricature, softer lines in drawing their features, a more humane expression. The photopolymer etching *Lust* (2005) is as honest and cheeky about the memory of desire as the work *Years Ago* (2005). This old fellow has no illusions, but good memories of what once was, and just like other rogues is not to be trusted! *Performance I* and *Performance II* and the *Ultimate Chairman* from 2008's exhibition *Uncle Six Fingers* at the Erdmann Contemporary are also inspired by real life characters such as Sir Ian McKellen, and a tycoon who best remains unnamed. Naggingly almost recognizable, they are still mainly concerned with the depiction of a type of man with talent and power, who might disguise the true intent of the roles he plays.

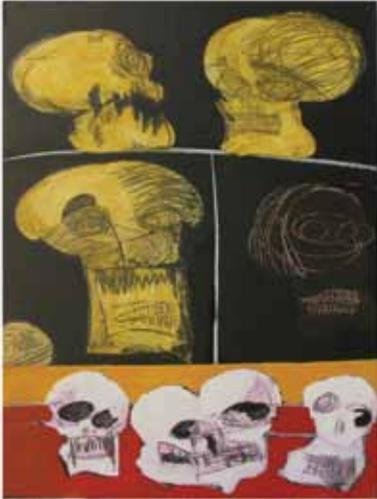
Jan Neethling has hit his stride as a painter over this past decade. Assertive gestures, and new life inform the work. Keenly observed men and women people his pictures with great presence, generally darker beneath their surfaces than first we imagine. The team of *Nudes Roller Skating* (2008) are formidable



Untitled (Benito) 1969/70



Untitled 1958/60



Eight Skulls 2012



Swimsuit Girl with Floating Head 2012/13



The Reprimand 2009

though comic. The *Demagogue* (2009) is absurd yet dangerous, the trapped figures in *Ice Bound* (2009) are disarmed but barely conceal frustration and fury. *Eight Skulls* (2012) are damaged, grimacing, displayed on trophy shelves. No reliquary this, these are the debris of unfettered violence. This is dramatic theatre, life in all its rudeness on vigorous display, and painted with empathy and a critical eye.

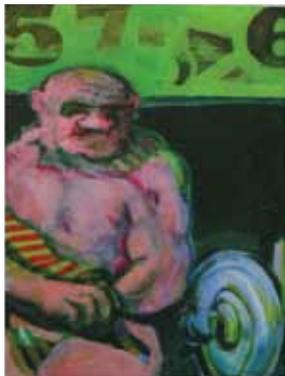
In this period, the two friends also returned to collaborating, equals in a process which allowed each to explore their strengths. Graphics such as *Rob*, silkscreen (2011), *A Bit Sentimental, Gossip and Ol' Codger with Hostess* (all 2006), admit a more light hearted take on this theatre of life. Neethling and Hodgins take evident pleasure in their portraits of one another, and their self-portraits. The collaborative *Rob and Jan*, (2001) photogravure has them confronting the viewer, determined, intent, a little grim but faintly amused... much like the way in which I think the disarmingly honest observer regards us all.

Neil Dundas

Senior Curator, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg



Three Maidens 2009



Old Body Builder 2009



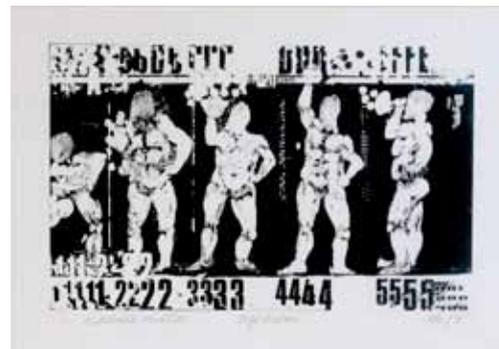
Head 2009



Scrutiny 2007



Politician 2004



Body Builder 1971

Chapter Four

Exhibitions list

1970 Lidchi Gallery: Johannesburg
Two person exhibition with Robert Hodgins

1971 Lidchi Gallery: Johannesburg
Two person exhibition (graphics - cliché verre) with Robert Hodgins

1975 Goodman Gallery: Johannesburg
Two person exhibition (painting) with Robert Hodgins

1978 Market Gallery: Johannesburg
Two person exhibition (sculptures and drawings) with Robert Hodgins

1980 Market Gallery: Johannesburg
Pretty Boy Floyd - two person exhibition (graphics) with Rob Hodgins

1984 Market Gallery: Johannesburg
Group exhibition with Robert Hodgins, Deborah Bell, Paul Stopforth, William Kentridge, Frank van Schaik and Joachim Schonfeldt

2001 Art On Paper: Melville Johannesburg
Two person exhibition (graphics - one-off silk-screens) with Robert Hodgins

2001 Carol Lee Fine Art: Melville Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2002 Carol Lee Fine Art: Melville Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2003 Carol Lee Fine Art: Melville Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2004 Carol Lee Fine Art: Melville Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2005 Art on Paper: Melville Johannesburg
Two weeks in the country - two person exhibition with Robert Hodgins

2006 Carol Lee Fine Art: Melville Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2006 Art On Paper: Melville, Johannesburg
Young Men In Garage Trousers - two person exhibition with Robert Hodgins

2007 Carol Lee Fine Art: Melville Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2008 SMAC Gallery: Stellenbosch
Group exhibition (painting)

2008 Erdmann Contemporary: Cape Town
Uncle Six Fingers - solo exhibition

2008 Carol Lee Fine Art: Melville Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2009 Obert Contemporary: Johannesburg
Seventies Onwards – solo exhibition

2009 Carol Lee Fine Art: Melville Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2009 Erdmann Contemporary: Cape Town
Fifty...Sixty...Seventy...Eighty...Ninety...RIP - group exhibition

2010 Carol Lee Fine Art: Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2010 Erdmann Contemporary: Cape Town
Recent and New Works - group exhibition

2011 Art On Paper: 44 Stanley Road, Johannesburg
Thirty Five Years Of Graphics - Robert Hodgins, Jan Neethling & Sam Nthlengethwa

2011 Carol Lee Fine Art: Johannesburg
Group exhibition – various artists (painting)

2011 Erdmann Contemporary: Cape Town
Present History II - group exhibition – various artists

2012 Carol Lee Fine Art: Johannesburg
Group exhibition various artists (painting)

2013 North-West University Gallery: Potchefstroom
A Drawn Conclusion - group exhibition - various artists

2013 Erdmann Contemporary: Cape Town
A Re-Drawn Conclusion - group exhibition - various artists

2013 Carol Lee Fine Art: Johannesburg
Group exhibition various artists (painting)

2013 Erdmann Contemporary: Cape Town
A Greek Goddess up to no Good - solo exhibition



Chapter Five

Acknowledgements

Heidi Erdmann

Gallery Director and Curator

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Jan Neethling

Robert Hodgins - my life-long friend, mentor, motivator, moral supporter and critic.
Heidi Erdmann - my gallerist who proposed the book, my friend and supporter. Hosted my first and third solo exhibitions.
Karin Skawran – my dear friend and supporter, contributed an essay in this book.
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Thank you to all of those who have supported me by acquiring my work and going to my exhibitions over the years.



Untitled 1981

Chapter Six

Directory



Moby Mail
Acrylic on board
112 x 77cm
1985
Private Collection



Pulsation with Floating Head
Acrylic on canvas
70 x 90cm
2012/13
Private Collection



Sitting Figure
Oil on board
61 x 40 cm
1957/60
Artist Collection



Untitled
Faster of parts
Oil size sculpture
1978
Artist Collection



Red Tails
Acrylic on board
61 x 60cm
2001
Artist Collection



Nuclei and Aerosols
Oil on board
75 x 161 cm
1972
Museum Collection



Nude
Acrylic on board
Size unknown
2004
Private Collection



Women Turning
Oil on board
80 x 162 cm
1970
Private Collection



Man Walking Side
Charcoal on board
1 200 x 2 200 cm
1970
Private Collection



Nude Rider Skating
Oil x 75cm
Acrylic on board
2006
Private Collection



Males walking through
landscape
Acrylic on board
122 x 94cm
2006
Private Collection



R.G.H. 4
Acrylic on board
no size
2007
Private Collection



Old Seaman
Acrylic on board
41 x 35 cm
2009
Private Collection



Prof
Acrylic on board
50 x 33 cm
2001
Artist Collection



Untitled
Dressed on paper
30 x 42 cm
2006
Artist Collection



Demagogue
Acrylic on board
68 x 104 cm
2008
Private Collection



Two Heads
Acrylic on board
35 x 72 cm
2009
Private Collection



Baner
Oil on board
40 x 60 cm
1970
Private Collection



Untitled (Male Figure)
Charcoal on paper
85 x 64 cm
1978
Artist Collection



Untitled (Red Tie)
Charcoal on paper
45 x 60cm
2001
Private Collection



Untitled (Female Figure)
Charcoal on paper
85 x 64cm
1978
Artist Collection



Warner and Madiera
Acrylic on board
122 x 55 cm
2013
Private Collection



Informal
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 150 cm
2009
Private Collection



Calendar Girl 2
Acrylic on board
100 x 93cm
2009
Private Collection



Hedgins opening at Goodman
(David and Uwey)
Acrylic on canvas
130 x 80cm
2012/13
Artist Collection



Lady Gaga
Acrylic on board
60 x 125 cm
2011
Private Collection



Amazon
Acrylic on board
Size unknown
2007
Private Collection



Holy (St) Erny
Acrylic on board
58 x 43 cm
2013
Private Collection



Flames and Fruit
Acrylic on board
48 x 79 cm
2001
Private Collection



Drug Lord
Acrylic on board
80 x 60 cm
2007
Private Collection



A Deek! Goddess Up to No Good
Acrylic on board
74 x 40 cm
2013
Private Collection



Strutin
Acrylic on board
94 x 79 cm
2006
Private Collection



Uncle Six Fingers
Acrylic on canvas
90 x 90cm
2001
Private Collection



Crisis is dragging down
the economy
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 70cm
2012-13
Artist Collection



Drug Lord
Acrylic on board
75 x 71cm
2008
Private Collection



Sally
Acrylic on board
45 x 30 cm
1972
Private Collection



Stinkings I
Silkscreen
42 x 34 cm Edition #/R
1975



Stinkings II
Silkscreen
42 x 34 cm Edition #/R
1975



Taco I
Clay and
43 x 33 cm
1971



Pretty Boy Floyd
Silkscreen, ink and oil paint on paper
50 x 60 cm
1980



Pretty Boy Floyd
Silkscreen, ink and oil paint on paper
50 x 60 cm
1980



Punk
Photopolymer gauze
40 x 20 cm Edition 2/5
2005



Riffed
Mixed media
41 x 60 cm
1980



Jan No. 8
Silkscreen
66 x 90
2001



Syndicate Chief
Acrylic on board
60 x 60 cm
2013
Private Collection



Untitled
Acrylic on board
Silk silkscreen
1972
Private Collection



Fallen Angel
Acrylic on board
50 x 57 cm
2013
Private Collection



Dip
Photopolymer gauze
30.5 x 33 cm
2005



Of Dip
Photopolymer gauze
25 x 14.5 cm
2005



Puf
Photopolymer gauze
30.5 x 33 cm
2005



Rope's Gallery
Photopolymer gauze
67 x 28 cm
2005



Untitled (Sinking
Stone)
48 cm high
1969/1970
Private Collection



Untitled (Figures)
Oil on board
76 x 53
1958/60
Artist Collection



Eight Skulls
Acrylic on board
70 x 53 cm
2012
Private Collection



Swimmed Girl with Floating Head
Acrylic on board
81 x 61 cm
2012/13
Artist Collection



The Reprimand
Acrylic on board
22 x 68 cm
2009
Private Collection



Three Males
Acrylic on board
61 x 60 cm
2009
Private Collection



Old Body Builder
Acrylic on board
60 x 40 cm
2009
Private Collection



Soulful
Acrylic on board
50 x 80 cm
2007
Private Collection



Portrait
Acrylic on board
60 x 80 cm
2004
Private Collection



Head
Acrylic on board
46 x 30.5 cm
2009
Private Collection



Body Builder
Clay and
Silk silkscreen
Size Unknown Edition 2/3
1975
Private Collection



Untitled
Silkscreen
50 x 46 cm
1981
Private Collection



I dedicate this book to my
dear friend and mentor
Robert Hodgins

(Jan Neething)

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