

la galerie

# Berni Searle



LA GALERIE PARTICULIÈRE, PARIS – 16 & 11 RUE DU PERCHE – 75003 PARIS – FRANCE  
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Bernie Searle est une des figures majeures de la scène artistique sud-africaine. Ses images empreintes de lyrisme séduisent d'emblée par leur beauté plastique. Cette beauté ne doit cependant pas faire oublier les interrogations douloureuses qui sont à l'œuvre dans les photos et les vidéos de cette artiste de 48 ans, parvenue aujourd'hui à la pleine maturité de son travail.

Depuis quinze ans déjà, Bernie Searle repose inlassablement la question prégnante de l'identité et des origines dans une société sud-africaine où la couleur de la peau détermine un destin. De ce point de vue, c'est peu dire que Bernie Searle fait corps avec son œuvre. Ce corps ambré, ce corps métis d'une artiste née au Cap d'une mère noire et d'un père blanc, est l'enjeu de toutes ses performances et de toutes ses métamorphoses. "Dans mon œuvre, j'exprime au travers de processus complexes et qui même pour moi restent souvent obscurs des idées sur mon identité. Les problèmes surgissent du fait que dans de nombreux cas, mon "identité" m'a été imposée. Me présenter comme une pluralité d'identités en mutation, c'est résister à la catégorisation: tant au plan personnel qu'au plan politique et historique " confiait-elle déjà en 2001.

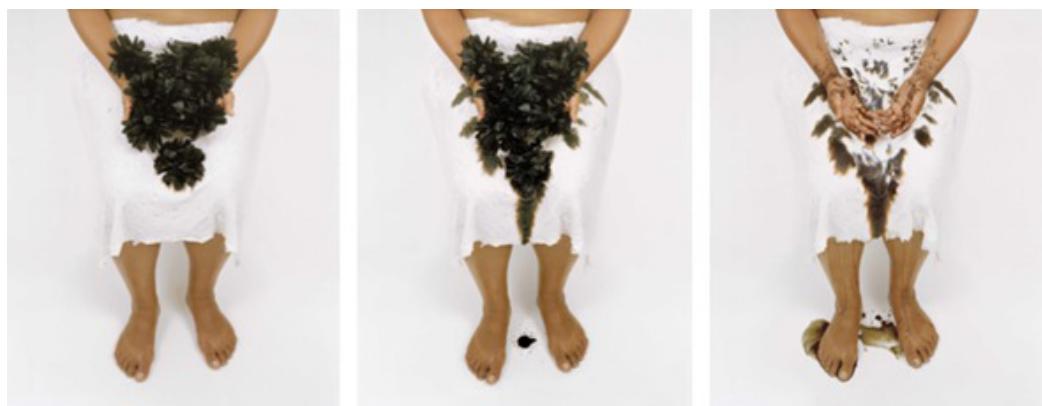
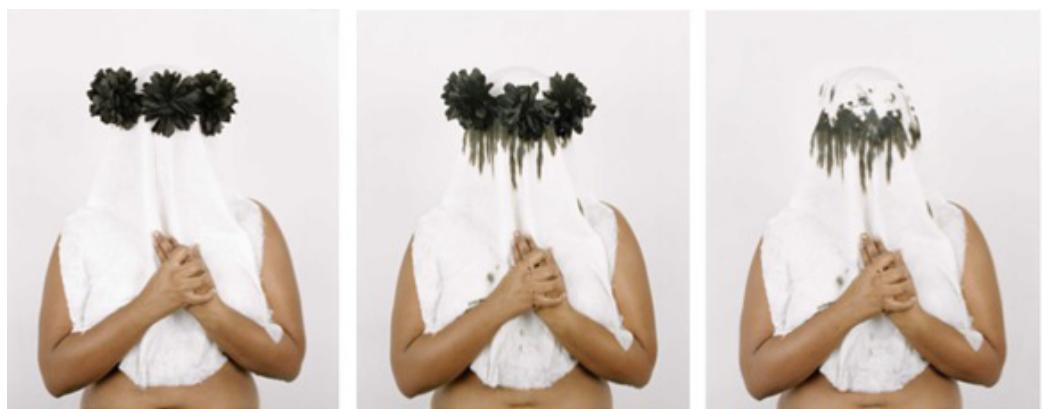
Dans les photos et la vidéo de son dernier travail « Lament » (2011), elle apparaît dans l'église de Bruges, voilée de noir et mains couvertes d'or, incarnant à la fois la figure de la victime et du conquérant, de la détresse et de la prospérité dans une ville qui a construit sa richesse sur la traite des noirs pendant des siècles.

Dans « Seeking refuge » (2008), elle est déjà capée de noir, promenant son exil sur un îlot hostile, hésitant à poser ses pieds nus sur les pans coupés de roches de basalte, finissant, épuisée, par se coucher sur une terre volcanique dont on ne sait si elle sera son tombeau ou le ferment de sa renaissance.

Dans « Room with a View » (2008), elle est toujours serrée de noir, faisant face à la mer sous un ciel laiteux que vient menacer un nuage d'encre qui semble sorti d'un cauchemar hugolien. Des ténèbres ou de la lumière, nul ne sait qui l'emportera mais l'horizon est là, ouvrant à de nouveaux possibles.

Dans le triptyque « Once removed (lap) » (2008), elle tient sur genoux un bouquet en papier crépon de fleurs noires qui se dissipent et laissent apparaître un corps enveloppé dans un tissu blanc. Entre le noir et le blanc, il y a toujours chez Bernie Searle l'épaisseur d'une histoire à la fois personnelle et collective. Histoire tragique et pourtant élégiaque, tant il semble évident que Bernie Searle porte en elle la capacité de se réinventer et par là-même, de produire une œuvre exemplaire qui fait bouger les lignes en émouvant les âmes.

Natacha Wolinski



*Once removed*, Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper, 112 x 95 cm chacun, 2008

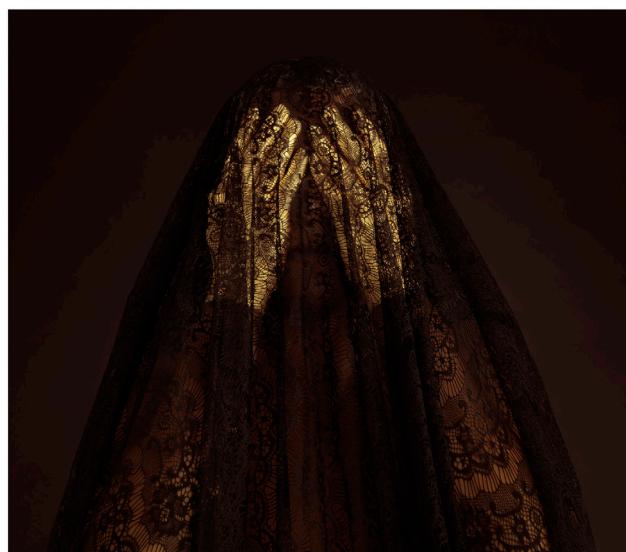
Berni Searle is no newcomer to issues of identity. Often her works are insistently read in terms of racial identity, an interpretation certainly invited by titles such as Discoloured, Colour me, Colour matters, A darker shade of light, Off-White and Snow White, but one that also seems to arrest her work in a certain place and time, specifically that of apartheid South Africa where she grew up categorised as coloured.

Searle in fact questions the very basis of identity by asserting the self as endlessly fluid, indeterminate and complex, always involved in a never-ending process of becoming. Read this way Searle's art is less about identity politics such as race for instance, than about the lifelong process of coming to terms with the estrangement that is the soul of identity.

For Searle identity is never enough. She performs this lack by devising a practice that relies heavily on appearance and disappearance, visibility and invisibility.

This play with invisibility becomes a politics of sorts in the way that performance scholar Peggy Phelan employs the concept when she advocates the power of remaining invisible - unmarked - rather than visible, because through visible representation «contemporary culture finds a way to name and thus to arrest and fix the image of that other.» Phelan is suspicious of the political power traditionally assigned to the domain of the visible and to visibility politics and we may argue that Searle shares this suspicion in works that always posit the marked against the unmarked. Searle's strategy of invisibility enacts her/our struggle for identity by being never completely anywhere. Her form is always changing, hovering between appearance and erasure

It is precisely this aspect of identity as being incomplete, still in formation or somehow «not yet» that finally speaks loudest in Searle's work. As she performs the never-ending struggle to integrate various identities, we are made aware of identity's lacks and identity's excesses. Read this way the art of Berni Searle is not simply about the fluidity of identity, but seems to speak much more urgently about the radical insufficiency of all identity.



*Lament I, IV & V*  
from the video Interlaced, Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper, 91 x 81 cm, 2011

Poétiquement politique, l'oeuvre de Berni Searle parle d'identité, de mémoire et de lieux. Construite autour de l'image – photographique, vidéo, filmique –, elle s'entrelace à l'histoire de l'Afrique du Sud récemment émergée d'un « vivre à part » (apartheid) pour aborder les questions de l'appartenance et du déplacement, ici et ailleurs.

Berni Searle repose inlassablement la question de soi et de l'autre, interrogeant les composants de sa propre identité issue de brassages successifs : une « identité composite » à la base de la « créolisation » chère à Edouard Glissant. Nourrie de mythologies personnelles, elle interroge le souvenir et la mémoire (*About to forget*, 2005), montre la dynamique des relations humaines, la dissolution des liens familiaux, le caractère arbitraire des classifications raciales, religieuses et sexuelles...

Son propre corps est souvent au centre de ses performances filmées, terrain d'impression et d'expression des expériences et souvenirs (*Snow White*, 2001 ; *Mute*, 2008). La violence ou la souffrance sont rarement exhibées frontalement. Elles sourdent d'une image somptueuse dont le lyrisme et l'esthétisme sont habités d'une dramatique intensité (*Vapour*, 2004 ; *Moonlight*, 2010). Sans jamais verser dans le pathos, Berni Searle crée une oeuvre polysémique et troublante, intimement personnelle et profondément universelle ; une ode à l'humanité où chacun est ce qu'il construit.

Berni Searle est née en 1964 au Cap (ZA) où elle vit et travaille.

Elle est diplômée en art de l'Université du Cap (1995). Depuis 1999, son travail a été présenté dans de nombreuses expositions solos et collectives en Afrique du Sud, USA et Europe (MoMA ; Biennales de Venise 2001 et 2005...)



*Flight*, Seeking Refuge series, C-Print, 112 x 154 cm, 2008



Voyage, Seeking Refuge series, C-Print, 112 x 154 cm, 2008



*Enfold*, Seeking Refuge series, C-Print, 112 x 154 cm, 2008



*Parched*, Seeking Refuge series, C-Print, 112 x 154 cm, 2008

# Berni Searle

Born in 1964. Lives & works in Cape Town, South Africa

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS - FROM 1999

2013 - La Galerie Particulière, Paris

2012 - *Black Smoke Rising*, Ron Mandos, Amsterdam

2011 - *Interlaced*. De Hallen, the Belfry Tower, Bruges, Belgium. Travelling to  
Frac Lorraine, Metz, France ; Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem (MMKA),  
The Netherlands.  
Michael Stevenson, Cape Town.

2008 - *Day for Night*. On the Edge, Stavanger 2008 EU project, Obrestad lighthouse, Norway.  
*Across Oceans*. Transit Art Space, Stavanger, Norway.  
*Recent work*. Michael Stevenson, Cape Town.

2007 - *On Either Side*. Mary H Dana Women Artists Series, Douglass Library Galleries, Rutgers  
University, New Jersey, USA.  
*Approach*. Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois.

2006 - Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg.  
*Approach*, USF Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa, Florida.  
*Crush*, Michael Stevenson, Cape Town.

2005 - *To love, to fear, to leave*, Performa05, Angel Orensanz Foundation, New York.  
Berni Searle: Three video works, BildMuseet, Umeå, Sweden.  
*About to forget*, Michael Stevenson, Cape Town.  
*Presence*, Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky.

2004 - *Vapour*, invited artist, Aardklop Festival, Potchefstroom.  
Invited artist, City of London Festival, Royal Exchange Building, Museum of London,  
Docklands Museum, London.  
*Dis/Colour*, Morlan Gallery, Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky.  
*Vapour*, Michael Stevenson Contemporary, Cape Town.  
*Float*, Standard Bank Young Artist for 2003 exhibition. South African National Gallery, Cape  
Town. Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg.

2003 - Residency and solo exhibition, Kunst:Raum Sylt-Quelle, Rantum, Sylt, Germany.  
*Float*, Standard Bank Young Artist award exhibition. Monument Gallery, Grahamstown.  
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum, Port Elizabeth. Durban Art Gallery, Durban.  
South African; National Gallery, Cape Town. Johannes Stegmann Gallery, Bloemfontein.  
Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg. (Cat)  
*A Matter of Time*, commissioned by UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive,  
Berkeley, CA. (Cat)

2002 - *Berni Searle*, Peres Projects, San Francisco

*Berni Searle*, Seippel Gallery, Cologne

2001 - *Still*, Axis Gallery, New York.

*Colour Matters*, Kunsthalle Stadgallerie, Osnabrück, Germany.

1999 - *Colour Me*, Mark Coetzee Fine Art Cabinet, Cape Town. (Cat)

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS - FROM 1992

2012 - *Distance and Desire: Encounters with the African Archive Part II: Contemporary Reconfigurations*, Walther Collection Project Space, New York  
Invited Artist, Galerie Nationale, 10th Dakar Biennale, Senegal  
*Cinema Remixed & Reloaded: Black Women Artists and the Moving Image Since 1970*, 11th Havana Biennale, Cuba  
*Mine - A selection of films by SA artists*, Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre, Dubai;  
University of Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg

2011 - *Figures and Fictions*. V&A Museum, London.

*Space, Ritual, Absence: Liminality in South African visual art*. FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg.

*Mine - A selection of films by SA artists*. Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth, Germany.

*Variations*. Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatchewan, Canada.

2010 - *Dissolve*. SITE Santa Fe, 8th International Biennial, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

*Events of the Self: Portraiture and Social Identity*. Walther Collection,  
Neu-Ulm/Burlafingen, Southern Germany.

*SPace: Currencies in Contemporary African Art*. Museum Africa, Johannesburg.

*Pictures by Women: A history of modern photography*. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

*Life Less Ordinary: Performance and display in South African art*. Fotogallery, Cardiff,  
Wales.

*1910-2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive*. Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town.

2009 - *Summer 2009/10: Projects*. Michael Stevenson, Cape Town. 26 November 2009 - 16

*An Imagined State*. Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Lagos.

*Undercover: Performing and Transforming Black Female Identities*. Spelman College  
Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, GA.

*La modernité dans l'art Africain d'aujourd'hui*, part of the Panafrican Cultural Festival of  
Algiers.

*Rebelle: Art and Feminism 1969-2009*. Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem, The  
Netherlands.

10th Havana Biennial. Havana, Cuba.

*Continental Rifts: Contemporary time-based works of Africa*. Fowler Museum at UCLA,  
Los Angeles, CA.

*Self/Not-self*. Brodie/Stevenson, Johannesburg.

*Beauty and Pleasure in South African Contemporary Art*. The Stenersen Museum, Oslo;  
*Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body*. San Diego Museum  
of Art, San Diego, CA.

*Test Patterns: Recent Video Work from South Africa*, San Francisco Camerawork, San Francisco, CA.

2008 - *Transnational Convergences in African Art*. Dunlop Art Gallery, Canada.

*Alternating Beats*, Rhode Island School of Design Museum's new Spalter Media Gallery.  
*Traversiá*. Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM), Las Palmas, Canary Islands.

*The Messenger*, 19th century Opera house (Stadsschouwburg, 1855), City of Brugge,  
Culturcentrum, Belgium.

*On Reflection: Women artists selected from the collections of Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales*. Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea, Wales *Home Lands - Land Marks*. Haunch of Venison, London, UK.

*Disguise: The art of attracting and deflecting attention*. Michael Stevenson, Cape Town.

*Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body*. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA. Davis Museum, Wellesley College.

*Cross-Currents in Recent Video Installation*. Harn Museum, Florida.

*Darkroom: Photography and New Media in South Africa 1950 – Present*. Travelling exhibition.  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, USA. 2008–2009

*Cinema Remixed and Reloaded: Black Women Artists and the Moving Image Since 1970*,  
Part II. Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, USA.

2007 - *Tapping Currents: Contemporary African Art and the Diaspora*. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

*New Photography*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

*Cinema Remixed and Reloaded: Black Women Artists and the Moving Image Since 1970*,  
Part I. Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, USA. RePrint. Philagrafika, Philadelphia  
*South African Art: Modern art and cultural development in a changing society*. Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Bratislava, Slovakia.

*Bare Life*. Museum on the Seam, Israel.

*Apartheid: The South African Mirror*. Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona.

*Eccentric Bodies*. Mason Gross School of the Arts Galleries, Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

*Darkroom: Photography and New Media in South Africa 1950 - Present*. Travelling exhibition.  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, USA. 2007-2009

*Figuratively Speaking: The Figure in Contemporary Video Art*. QUT Creative Industries Precinct, Brisbane.

*Cape '07*. Cape Town. 2

*The Eye Screen or The New Image*. Casino Luxembourg - Forum for Contemporary Art.

*Global Feminisms*. Elizabeth A Sackler Centre, Brooklyn Museum, New York.

2006 - *Photography, Video, Mixed Media III*. DaimlerChrysler, Potsdamer Platz, Berlin.

Venice-Istanbul. Istanbul Modern.

*Second to None*, South African National Gallery, Cape Town, SA.

*Personal Affects: Power and poetics in contemporary South African art*, The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii.

*2006 Contemporary Commonwealth*, Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) and the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV).

*Cross Currents*, Tufts University Art Gallery, Massachusetts, US.

*Black, Brown and White*, Kunsthalle Vienna.

2005 - *A Kind of Magic - The art of transforming*, Museum of Art, Lucerne, Switzerland.

*Always a little further*, 51st Venice Biennale, Venice.

*TEXTures: Word and Symbol in Contemporary African Art*, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC.

2004 - *Negotiated Identities, Black Bodies*, Johannesburg Art Gallery.

«*Dwellan» - Lingering Images*, Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall, Copenhagen, Denmark.

5th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai Art Museum, China. 28 September - 28 November 2004

*Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art*, Cathedral Church of St John the Divine and Museum for African Art, New York. September - December

*Hang In There, My Dear Geum-Sun*, Busan Biennale 2004, Busan Metropolitan Art Museum, Seoul, Korea.

*Min(e)dfields*, Kunsthuis Baselland, Basel.

*New Identities - Current South African Art*, Museum Bochum, Germany.

*Through the Looking Glass*, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown. July

Artes Mundi Shortlisted Artists exhibition, National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff, Wales.

7 February - 18 April

2003 - *Opzij van het Kijken*, Watou Art and Literature Festival, Watou, Germany.

*2003 NMAC Montenmedio Arte Contemporaneo*, Vejer de la Frontera, Spain. (Cat)

*More than a 1000 words*, Centre for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Anandale-on-Hudson, *Contact Zones: Colonial and Contemporary*, Michael Stevenson Contemporary, Cape Town.

*The Space Between*, Davis Museum and Cultural Centre, Boston, Mass.

*De ce côté du ciel - UNESCO salue les femmes dans l'art*, Salle des Pas Perdus.

2002 - *The Spice Route*, IFA, Stuttgart, Germany. (Cat)

*Intersections: South African Art from the BHP Billiton Collection*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne (Cat)

*The Field's Edge: Africa, Diaspora, Lens*, curated by Rory Bester and Amanda Carlson, USF Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa, Florida (Cat)

*Watching Ocean and Sky Together*, outdoor film projection, Liverpool Biennale.

Familieverhalen uit Zuid Afrika, Tropen Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. (book)

*ID/OLOGY*, Axis Gallery, New York.

*Tracing the Rainbow*, travelling exhibition of South African art in Germany. Kunst:Raum Sylt-Quelle, Rantum.Kulturverein Zehntscheuer, Rottenburg/Neckar, Rottenburg. (Cat)

*Fronteras*, Espacio C, Santander, Spain. (Cat)

*Dislocación*. Sala Rekalde, Bilbao. Centro Cultural De Maia, O'Porto. October

2001 - *Authentic/Ex-centric: Africa in and out of Africa*, curated by Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe, 49th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy. (Cat)

*Encounters with the Contemporary*, curated by Elizabeth Harney, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC. (Cat)

*Dislocación*, PhotoEspaña2001, Madrid, Spain. (Cat)

*Juncture*. The Granary, Cape Town. 7 February 2001. London. (Cat)

2000 - *A.r.e.a. 2000*, Reykjavik Art Museum, Iceland.

*L'Afrique a Jour*, Lille, France. (Cat)

*Returning the Gaze*, billboard for Cape Town's One City Festival. (Cat)

*L'art dans le Monde*, Paris, France. (Cat)

*FNB Vita 2000*, Sandton Civic Gallery, Johannesburg. (Cat)

*Artworks for Aids*, auction of commissioned work, Durban, Washington DC, Brussels, Boston.

*DAK'ART 2000*, Musée D'Art Africain, Dakar, Senegal. (Cat)

*Insertion*, curated by Salah Hassan, Apex Gallery, New York.

*Fresh*, South African National Gallery, Cape Town (Cat)

*Kwere Kwere: Journeys into Strangeness*, travelling exhibition curated by Rory Bester, The Castle, Cape Town. Gertrude Posel Gallery, Johannesburg. NSA Gallery, Durban  
*Distinguished Identities: Contemporary African Portraiture*, curated by Barbara Frank, Staller Centre for the Arts, SUNY at Stony Brook, New York. (Cat)  
*Open Studio*, work produced in two-month residency at Gasworks, London. February - March  
*Afrika Portrat*, House of World Cultures, Berlin. (Cat)  
Work produced in residency, Inova (Institute of the Visual Arts) at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

1999 - *Staking Claims*, curated by Emma Bedford, The Granary, Cape Town. (Cat)  
*Towards-Transit: New Visual Languages in South Africa*, De Blaue Saal, Zurich, Switzerland.(Cat)  
*Postcards from South Africa*, Axis Gallery, New York.  
Lines of Sight. Perspectives on South African Photography, South African National Gallery, Cape Town. (Cat)  
*Truth Veils*, commissioned work for the conference organised by the History Workshop, Wits University and the Centre for Violence and Reconciliation titled 'The TRC: Commissioning the Past', Gertude Posel Gallery, Johannesburg.  
*Isintu: Ceremony, Identity and Community*, six South African artists and selected Australian artists, curated by Tumelo Mosaka, South African National Gallery, Cape Town.  
*Bloodlines/Bloedlyn*, Klein Karoo Kunsteefees, Oudtshoorn, Western Cape. (Cat)

1998 - 7th International Cairo Biennale, Cairo, Egypt (Cat)  
*Emergence* (25th anniversary of the Standard Bank National Arts Festival)

1997 - *Life's Little Necessities*, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, The Castle, Cape Town (Cat)

1995 - *Illusions of Identity - Notions of Nationhood*, MFA graduate exhibition, Good Hope Gallery, The Castle, Cape Town  
International Exhibition of Art Colleges, Hiroshima, Japan

1992 - *Passing Through*, work completed in residency, Canberra Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

## AWARDS

- 2004 Artes Mundi Shortlisted Artist
- 2003 Standard Bank Young Artist for Visual Art
- 2001 Civitella Ranieri Fellow (2001)
- 2000 FNB Vita Award Finalist (2000)
  - DAK'ART 2000 Minister of Culture Prize. Dakar, Senegal
  - DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Contemporary Art Nominee
  - British Council Grant. Gasworks residency
- 1998 UNESCO in conjunction with the International Art Critics Association (AICA) Award,  
7th International Cairo Biennale
- 1992-95 MacIver Centre for Science and Development scholarships
  - DAAD scholarships
- 1992 ASATT Grant. Four-month residency at the Canberra Institute of the Arts,  
Australian National University



## INFORMATIONS PRATIQUES

du mardi au samedi de 11h à 19h et sur rendez-vous

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