

Artist Statement – Johann van der Schijff, “Spot on...DAK’ART”

Growing up in apartheid South Africa and living in a society notorious for the conflict of ideologies and cultures, questions of power relations in society underlie much of my work, forcing the viewer into a position of choice in their engagement with my artwork, ("shall I hit the blow-up doll / punch bag or not?").

Applying interactive principles gained from my involvement with new media teaching, scale is of great importance as the works relates to human size. A punch bag hanging on lubricated bearings encourages the viewer to thump it, and speed bags hanging at just the right height invite participants to spar. Facilitated by computer-aided design and manufacturing techniques, used in making for example riot control vehicles, the workmanship and finishes are meticulous, and aim to emulate and appeal in the same way as objects in designer-lifestyle shops or motorcar display floors.

Being part of a generation of artists whose childhood and youth were marked by consumerism and the growing influence of the media (Brehm 2002:10), my iconography was further also informed by the bright colours of township sculptures, Zulu beading and Xhosa fabrics. In addition to the obvious connection to children’s toys, a direct lineage can be traced from the tractors, lorries and aeroplanes made from blue wire and discarded Coke and Nugget polish tins on my uncle’s farm in Ventersdorp, to the bright enamel paint applied by hand to my sculptures.

Slaansak / Punch Bag initiated the punch bag theme as part of my iconography and led to *Hangbal (Hanging Ball)* as well as *Peerbal (Pear Ball)*. Influenced by African masks, the cult of Janus, photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe as well as boxing folklore, participation with the sculptures by exhibition visitors encouraged me to pursue this interactive direction. The viewers did not simply view and reflect on the work; they took part in it with their whole body and by doing that, "made the viewer the subject", to paraphrase the American sculptor, Richard Serra (McShine 2007: 32).

Pear Ball, made out of a combination of black and ivory leather, in turn initiated the *Pear Ball Series* of sculptures: ebony & ivory; light brown & ivory; red & ivory; yellow & ivory; white & ivory; dark & light brown; seven in total. The *Pear Ball Series* represents a satirical commentary on South Africa’s obsession with racial classification and underlying xenophobia.

Johann van der Schijff, Cape Town, 2 February 2009

References

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McShine, K. 2007. *Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years*. New York. The Museum of Modern Art.

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