

beyond Beyond  
infinite and infinitesimal  
curator: Jackie Ruth Murray  
artist: Kali van der Merwe

by **Vanessa A. Herman**

An Alchemist was someone who had the ability to turn base metal into gold. Someone who can take the ordinary and turn it into something extraordinary. This alchemist is Kali van der Merwe. She is a sculptor, a ceramist, a documentary filmmaker and a photographer. Her entire life's journey has been one of deconstruction, remaking and exploring the parts that make up the whole. She has been fearless in her deep investigation of the invisible and the taboo. However this intrepid traveller of societal and ecological inner workings never gives up her tireless photographic and expressive exposure of what we are often not able to see with our naked eye until her deft skill and creativity illuminates the connection.

Kali's life path has followed many varied trajectories all with a central theme of creativity. In her early school years she changed her birth name to Cally and followed her creativity to attend art school after matriculating. She obtained an honours degree in Fine Art majoring in sculpture and ceramics and began a promising career in the art world.

An unplanned, extended stay in the former east section of Berlin disrupted that path. Renaming herself Kali after the Indian Goddess of creation and destruction, she led a nomadic, anarchistic lifestyle and managed to unravel her art school education. Experimenting with collective creation and radical exhibiting outside of art gallery spaces, she explored a wide variety of mediums from installation to live digital environment manipulation.

Returning to South Africa many years later, Kali's new-found love of the digital medium inspired her to devote herself to documentary filmmaking, marrying her passion with social activism. She co-founded Other-Wise media, a non-profit organisation producing innovative media on gender and social issues while training youth and women participants in the making process. Kali's films have screened around the world to critical acclaim, winning multiple awards both locally and internationally. During this time Kali concurrently pursued documentary photography and made short experimental and erotic films.

Reaching an impasse in her documentary career, Kali went on retreat to discover what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. During this time she uncharacteristically put herself in front of her camera and so began a lifelong creative series she is still actively pursuing.

Presently Kali lives in the middle of nowhere in a place you have never heard of and follows her creative and spiritual path in a quiet rural environment. Her inspiration surrounds her in the elements of fynbos covered mountains, indigenous forests, waterfalls and local creatures that turn up on her doorstep. The Overberg fynbos area has one of the most abundant proliferation of plant and insect species in the world. Sadly thousands of these species are now at serious risk of extinction. On one level Kali is merely

documenting rare and endangered species of plant and insect but on another level Kali is always investigating and commenting and meditating on death and transformation.

In all of Kali's art I have always been awed by her ability to turn straw into gold. She turned physical intimacy and sex between humans into a cosmic breath of swirling galaxies in her last exhibition name at YoungBlood studios last year where she managed to infuse her subject with the pure light of very creation and then threw them into the vortex of a raw blackness that made me gasp. She had succeeded in transcending making mere photographs, she transcends boundaries, frames and norms. She will always break out and head for the cosmic, always veer away from the singular to include the plural, forever wandering away from the mainstream and photographing from the edge. In her own words she says " I am not presenting absolute truth but rather what filmmaker Werner Herzog termed " a poetic ecstatic truth" which is "mysterious and elusive and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylisation."

Her latest exhibition entitled beyond beyond Beyond, infinite and infinitesimal will run from Thurs 8th of October until Sat 7th of November at Cameraland in Long Street, Cape Town. If you want to be transported and at the same time realise that other languages exist between all beings come to beyond Beyond

b e y o n d B e y o n d  
i n f i n i t e a n d i n f i n i t e s i m a l

Artist: Kali van der Merwe  
Curator: Jackie Ruth Murray  
Thursday 8th October 18:00 2015  
Cameraland 68 Long St Cape Town  
parking at Park on Long 55 Hout St  
includes November First Thursdays (5th November)  
Exhibition closing – Saturday 7th November 2015

Opening night includes:  
a 'couch conversation' exploring plant intelligence and consciousness:  
common and endangered fynbos flowers and insects.

conversationalists:

**Kali van der Merwe:** Featured Exhibition Artist

**George Davis:** SANBI Fellow with the CareTakers Biodiversity Film Project

**Virginia Mac Kenny:** Michaelis School of Art Associate Professor in Painting, art critic, and writer with a special interest in environmental issues

**Hanien Conradie:** Fine Artist whose work searches for answers to questions around belonging and uniqueness.

**Gerhard van Deventer:** Environmentalist and educator, Sandberg Fynbos Reserve

sponsors of the exhibition include:  
Cameraland  
ArtLab Fine Art Printing & Scanning  
Out of this Planet Catering