

## **Unframed Genius at Youngblood Gallery - A Must See**

**Vanessa Herman**

Cape Town has been awarded the status of 2014 Design Capital of the World! Part of the city's official program is The Cape Town Month of Photography (MOP). Jenny Altschuler curates and directs the 6th edition of this dynamic photography festival. It covers over 100 bodies of photographic work in solo and group shows during this year. These exhibitions and installations are showcasing in art galleries and museums in the City Bowl, Salt River, Woodstock, Rosebank, Newlands, Muizenberg, Stellenbosch and online in virtual galleries and archives. Altschuler is presenting MOP6 under the title "Designing Destiny: Power Within and Outside the Frame".

I attended the exhibition at Youngblood gallery in Bree Street which features a huge variety of works by South African and international photographers, encompassing all three floors of the Beautiful Life building, and ranging from photographs to projections and installations.

The works on display are: Silken Threads by Tom Ang, We All Fall Down by Niklas Zimmer, Mirrored by Tara Mette, Reconciliation Day by Dale Yudelman, Platfontein: The Hip Hop Bushmen by Thom Pierce, A Step Into The Past by Tristan Chaillet, Monoliths by Gaelen Pinnock, Intimacies With Women by Alexandra Dietz, Coniunctio by Kali van der Merwe, Brothers In Crime by Thuli Moso, Quiet by Jodi Bieber, Office Politics by Inge Prins, Selfie by Hentie van der Merwe, Infertile Grounds by Sandra Vitalijic, and In Our Skin by Michelle Sank.

Personally I found all of the photography compelling and thought provoking indeed, especially, Jodie Bieber's Quiet and Alexandra Dietz's Intimacies with Women. Bieber's series featuring well-known and not well-known men naked except for their underpants, shown in intimate environments, like their bedrooms, living rooms and one even one on a shower floor. The portraits are vulnerable and sometimes raw the camera seems to be a portal for their tired or torn bodies. Not one man is smiling or being seductive in any shape or form In fact these men seem the last bastion against a world that says 'I must not cry' and but my body instead will speak instead. Bieber certainly challenges the popular stance that Men are macho and impervious to vulnerability.

Dietz achieved a similar raw openness with her photographs of women but the vulnerability was expressed as strong in silence and loud in sexuality. Albeit the sexuality appears brazen, it is also lost and forlorn simultaneously. These women are also partially clothed and the connections between them are unusual as their mere presence and composition asks the viewer to challenge the normative projection of what it is to be a woman in today's world? She presents a lesbian couple in a state of semi-naked Sunday morning lounging on the sofa with their children. A young cheerleader type woman in her early twenties is shown being coveted by her very territorial testosterone fuelled date. Another portrait of a waif-thin woman dressed in a bikini

leaning against a truck-the feeling is of 'hippie-meets lost sex for favours' female. Each portrait is shot in a different part of the world which further brings home the universality of these themes and further proves Marshall McLuhan's prophecy that the world will become ".a global village"

However, Kali van der Merwe's installation stood head and shoulders above everything on display and other viewers seemed equally as mind-blown as I was as we expressed our awe and joy at what we were witnessing. I think that Altschuler's aim to be transgressive and migrate across boundaries to have a forum of how we 'design our destiny and to illuminate power within and outside the frame', succeeds admirably. Although many images are framed they are shot in ways that seem as if they are not being photographed at all and there is no posing or composing as if the photographer just walked past and snapped their image so 'power outside the frame' is achieved.

Kali's work appears deceptively to be stylised and composed but its achievement is anything but. The human real life figures are translucent and have the effect of being porcelain or marble and yet we know they are not. I kept having the image of Ancient Roman plates that often had naked figurines on them in relief compositions when I looked at her photo back-lit framed display. Kali's background in ceramics and sculpture is very evident, she has an honours degree in both. Kali muses that "Something mysterious happens when we passionately lose and find ourselves in one another." She encapsulated this mystery of loss and retrieval, this dance of death and life. Her male and female couple are not shown 'coupling' but rather frolicking and when they fuse they seem to do so embryonically. They are floating in the womb of union and they are being fired from earthly passions that transmute them into human constellations that exist individually and mutually. Kali's work could have been born from her very name which is that of the Indian Goddess of creation and destruction. The realm that Kali's light photographs embody is other worldly, it is the place where myth meets metro sexual. She has honed her art until it is alchemy and much like the Renaissance man Leonardo Da Vinci she has transformed something functional into a transcendent experience.

"In alchemical language, Coniunctio is the union of opposites, the hieros-gamos or holy, mystical marriage. In union is the birth of new possibilities. Unity points to the ultimate nature of the universe beyond duality. Through dissolution of separateness we move towards wholeness and transcendence".- Kali van der Merwe."

I urge you that if you do nothing this weekend or until Oct 31st, treat yourself to the pleasure of being transported by Kali van der Merwe's Dark Light Continuum - Coniunctio and Jenny Altschuler's vision of 'illuminating power within and outside the frame with her awesome juxtaposition of 'designing destiny'.

Written By Vanessa Herman.