

Performing WoMan

Curated by Derek Zietsman in 2016

Performing WoMan was based on the premise that transgressive visual interpretation of the influences upon the ways that South African men and women perform their identities can provide a strategy for artists to engage with a perceived crisis in post-apartheid performances of gender identity. The term 'perform' refers to Judith Butler's concept of gender as performed identities, of seeing identity as a free-floating construct, unconnected to an 'essence'. Identity theorists, such as Stuart Hall and Butler, contend that identities are not something that already exists, but a construct that undergoes constant transformation; a fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times.

This exhibition related to a discourse of social commentary. A key focus of *Performing WoMan* is the examination of how societal structures and influences affect how we present and adapt our gender identity performativities (which include social classifications such as gender, sexuality, status and race). The exhibition explored reconceptualising identity performances in post-apartheid South Africa, and negates the concept of identity as static and unchanging 'who-you-are'. *Performing Wo/Man* comments on how a changing post-apartheid socio-political environment is causing South African men and women to create new conceptions of identity, on how South Africans are breaking down and reconceptualising previously imposed preconceived identities.

In the context of Butler and Hall's concept of seeing gender as a series of performances that undergo constant transformation, the exhibition presents different artists' visual investigations, explorations and comments on issues such as, *inter alia*, the historic and contemporary construction of South African identities; masculinity; femininity; patriarchal hegemony; sexual identity; social identity; racial identity; social expectations for post-apartheid gender performativities; political and social change and its effects on gender performativity; sexual abuse and violence in South Africa; as well as abuse of power by role models and politicians.

Participating artists: Allen Laing, Anton Kannemeyer, Bambo Sibiyi, Bevan de Wet, Christiaan Diedericks, Collin Cole, Daandrey Steyn, David Paton, Derek Zietsman, Diane Victor, Doris Bloom, Gerrit Hatting, Gordon Froud, Grace da Costa, Helena Hugo, Izanne Wiid, Jaco van Schalkwyk, Janine Allen-Spies, Karin Preller, Kevin du Plessis, Kim Berman, Paul Mantzios, Pauline Gutter, Richardt Strydom, Shonisani Netshia, Sybrand Wiechers, Tanisha Bhana, William Kentridge, Yannis Generalis and Zanele Muholi.

Janine Allen artist statement:

Wielding the lantern explores through play movements the dwindling relationship between impoverished communities and mining industries. This conceptual photomontage in *Performing Wo/Man* documents a 2015 performance that took place in the city of Kimberley in front of the diamond mining heritage site and head office of De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. The performance is an output of *The Eureka Project*, a project run

by Janine Allen (the Brusher) and the community health specialist, Dr Andre Rose in conjunction with the National Union of Mineworkers. The cloaked Brusher performs by swinging a heavy mine lantern at the building's street side. The swinging motion is a 'to and fro' play-act, a warning to current mining companies that artists visually and textually explore the effects of mining on the psyche of mineworkers and the local communities. The warning comes embodied in a swinging and swaggering posture, that of a fool. Many members of the local impoverished communities argue that current mining companies follow the De Beers pattern to only leave holes and old buildings, without long-term investment in the communities. Thus, the Brusher tilted the head office in a vertiginous and strange, triplicating art process of combining three performative photographs, with the purpose of extending the performance's impact to the secondary viewers – the viewer looking at the conceptual performance photograph in an exhibition space.