

LEDELLE MOE
Forecast of Human Trembling II (After Hermanides)
March 18, 1994

With this work, Ledelle Moe continued the “Forecast” series and like Hermanides, chose to use ‘real people’ in her installation. At that time, she had been in conversation with Hermanides about doing an installation that would in some way be a ‘response’ to his. Where he had tackled the issues of repressed sexuality, she chose to deal with the broader topic of violence and security in South African society.

Both installations revealed what was then a growing need for young South African artists to offer a political critique of their own white colonial experience. This required the invention of new art forms. The question facing us then was how to speak sincerely from our own personal experience, and yet still address our social concerns? This was a departure, in some ways, from the protest art of the previous generation, which out of political necessity spoke for those who were silenced in a more readable rather literal ‘pictorial narrative’.

In his essay for the 2nd *Johannesburg Biennale*, Clive Kellner writes about the problem of how white South Africans of colonial heritage can speak now with a politically active voice and yet not speak for the ‘other’. He quotes Linda Peckham, who “puts forward a succinct expression of how contradictory the white intellectual’s voice is”. (Artist could be substituted here for intellectual.) Peckham says:

What is the position of the White South African intellectual who is critical of apartheid? It is inherently contradictory for as soon as I speak against I find myself speaking for, on behalf of... For White South African intellectuals to criticise apartheid means to examine our own position, our own two tongued/tweetalig selves.⁸⁸

Kellner raises here the question of representation of a black subject by white artists, and proposes that critique is possible by speaking through the complexity of one’s own experience:

⁸⁸ Clive Kellner quotes Linda Peckham in ‘Cultural Production in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *Trade Routes – History & geography*, Catalogue 2nd *JHB Biennale*, Johannesburg, 1997, p. 29 – 31.

...speaking from one's own position, not through that of the Other, will contribute to a heterogeneous, yet cohesive, social politik. Perhaps one should speak of the self rather than the other.⁸⁹

As young artists we struggled then to develop new forms, new means to reconcile the contradiction of speaking to political concerns; and yet not speak 'for' other South Africans with experiences that we could not presume to know.

In considering the issue of violence in South Africa, Moe was led to confront the complexities of privilege combined with those of the aged. On a visit to her Grandmother, who resided in a home for the elderly, she took a number of individual portrait-like photographs of elderly people that she would subsequently use in the installation. Contrasting ideas about safety, protection and vulnerability all came together in a work that combined photography and performance.

The FLAT room was still blue from Hermanides' display, and Moe chose to make it into a kind of 'waiting room' for the viewer/audience. But for two benches the room remained empty. Moe had kept her room free after the curators visit the previous week, and so she had an extra space to use. She installed a blue felt curtain that echoed Hermanides installation, around the entire room to form a room-within-the-room and a very dark space.

The seven photographs, taken of residents at an old age home were each framed in impermanent baroque wax frames, and suspended each with its own dim light bulb, along the blue felt wall. The ambiance in the room was dark and forbidding, and as the viewer entered the space, these small portraits required a close view. While looking, however, one got the distinct feeling of being watched. Turning around one would be faced with the 'live sculptures': three security guards with loaded guns.

Hired by Moe for the evening, the three arrived without the knowledge that they were hired for an 'art event'. Moe had only specified that three come and so it was a coincidence when one black, one coloured and one white guard appeared. It was indeed a significant feature that the guards represented three 'races' and the elderly pictured in the photos were all white. This could not have gone unnoticed in race obsessed South Africa. It spoke to the vulnerability of the elderly, protected by force and by guns, and perhaps also to the obsolescence of aging South Africans as well as their regime. It was a loaded metaphor, indeed, in a society where the largest industry is

⁸⁹ Ibid.



LEDELLE MOE
'Forecast of Human Trembling II
(after Hermanides)'
1994
Andrew Verster in the installation.

security and where violence levels are the highest in the world. Frost addresses this issue in our interview:

Allen: I remember you were shocked when you saw this exhibition.

Frost: Well, talking about shock, you have to remember the time. I remember at that time almost being on the verge of a nervous breakdown with regard to the proliferation of violence. Indeed now, in relation to the levels of crime in South Africa, what was beginning there was the start of an industry - an industry that was already tinged with the past. The notion of security guard had everything to do with the apartheid era and yet we had moved into this supposedly new era. And here was a bald dragging in of both the past and the future. If I am saying I was shocked, I suspect I was reading that - especially in that very confined space. Also in relation to Durban; our engagement with art as object and not person... if you look at this person with hairy arms and breathing chest, yet rendered as object, was doubly shocking. I would say that I was shocked.⁹⁰

The event was notorious in Durban art circles and along with Hermanides' previous "Forecast" installation, generated a great deal of publicity. Both were examples of a new format, but both had thematic connections as well. MacKenny had this observation to make about the connection between the two:

But I think what is quite interesting is that it came directly after Adrian's, because in a way this is the next step, literally. The "school boys" become the "men with guns". And you say the cocking... [laughter]. It might be coincidental, but the fact that you had your gran's friends from the old age home and so on... the whole notion of the 'Woman', the 'Mother', the white vulnerability... What is happening in my head is a bounce off between this exhibition and Adrian's exhibition... its like it has grown on either side... You have the schoolboys, they come from somebody, they become something. When they grow up and become something, what they became moves away in this direction back into the past, the old ladies. The old ladies were at some point closer to the schoolboys, if you like. And now the schoolboys grow up and become part of the system and they also protect the system. Do you know what I am saying? And so I think there is something incredibly fragile, vulnerable, and brutal at the same time happening here. I actually really like the piece.⁹¹

Moe later discussed with MacKenny, Buster and myself some of her motivations for the work and events that led up to the installation:

⁹⁰ Frost, Allen; Interview 12, Richmond, Feb 18, 1999.

⁹¹ MacKenny, Moe, Buster, Allen; Interview 9, Washington, Aug 1998.



Moe: I think it was a retaliation at that time against making objects. It was more like “What is my idea and how can I express it in an exciting way? How could I shock Durban, through the use of this space?” Ja, I hated (high) school – I remember Adrian and I talking about the idea of the uniform and how weird uniforms are but how sexy they could be in a funky way. And so he wanted to go back to his school, find younger boys like himself, dressed in their funny little tight-arse blazers and ties and just displace them. And have this poetic thing happening. It was a complete result of sitting around bars drinking and talking about it. What I was talking about with him was the idea of security in South Africa and how gross the old age home was that my grandmother was staying in. We kind of ‘essenced’ down the ideas and reformatted them. So instead of making a sculpture of...it was a much quicker, immediate solution.

MacKenny: The FLAT Gallery seemed to encourage that. It seemed to encourage a lack of preciousness; an immediacy – the fact that you did not have to make something that would last; that it could be something that you would not find in any other circumstance. It seemed very direct.

Moe: So you would walk in, it was really dark. And you would be having a look at the old pictures...and suddenly, after a while, you would hear a cock of a gun, or notice the security guards standing behind the door.

Allen: They didn’t really cock their guns all the time, I heard it only once or twice. They just stood there on display. They were hired security guards.

Moe: I paid them R80 each for twelve hours. And they got dropped off by this high-security van. And their job was to guard the place.

Allen: I thought that it was quite interesting in terms of the situationist idea of interacting with “everyday life”. That is Ledelle contacting a security firm and employing people (guards) to be used as art was taking something out of its context. There may be a lot of problems there, but at the same time it transgresses boundaries.

Moe: These men were not lit up, they were all in the dark.

She goes on to discuss the symbolic references in using the guards and their reaction to the performance as well as some observations about her connection to Hermanides’ work:

Moe: Adrian and I had been discussing the uniformed people that had been looking after these old women. Uniforms were definitely a huge conversation piece between us.

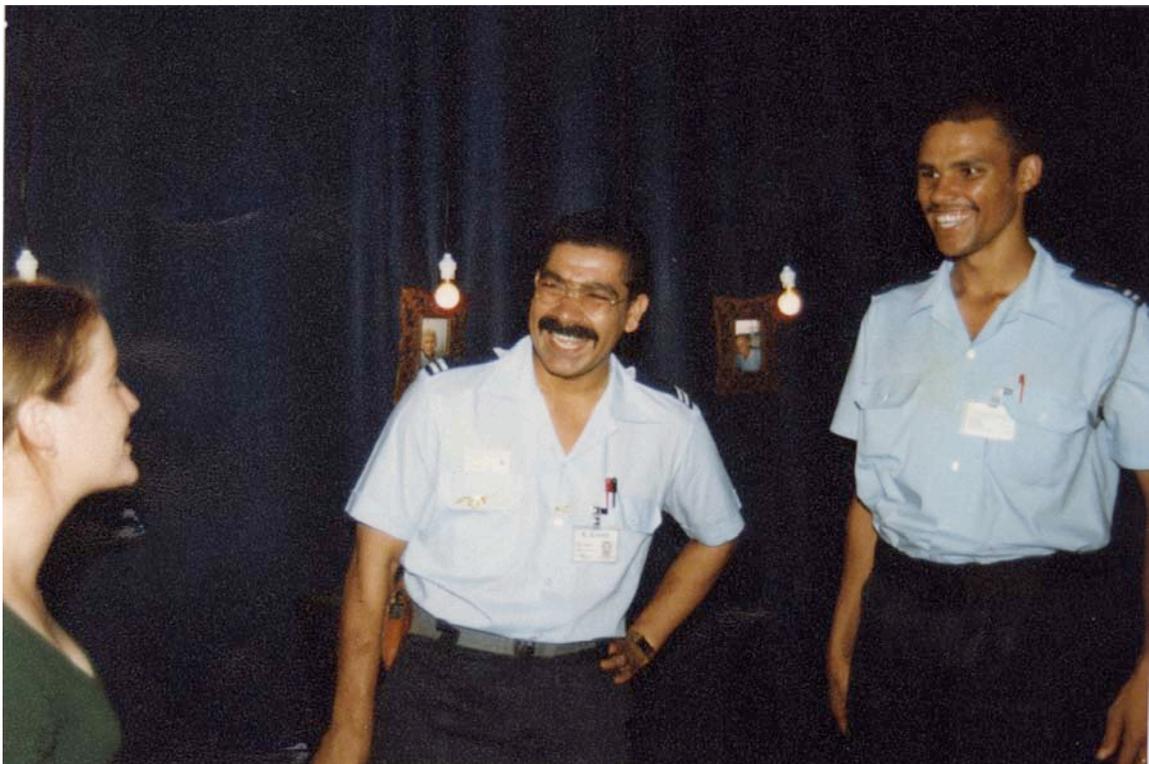
Buster: So you and Adrian had a conversation, not so much about the piece that you were going to do, but your experience in this home, or your experience of confronting a kind of institution. I think what is interesting is Adrian’s institution is his memory of school while yours was more recent in the old age homes.

Moe: I would say Adrian's has a lot to do with sex, sensuality and male repressed desire. Mine was more the frail white person, the really obscure policeman, security guard. Navy blue, big gun... And how each of us could articulate those ideas in a poetic way.

Buster: Strength and vulnerability has been a recurrent thing in your work for a very long time. The appearance of strength, the fact that it is a cardboard strength. These three men look very vulnerable to me. Even though I have an idea of a South African policeman or security guard that is such a stereotype, when I see these guys, the first thing I think is: "God, how did they feel?" They are being objectified. I think that is really interesting.

Moe: They were there for about two hours and I had hired them for twelve. They said when we sat them down and gave them a beer afterward, that they were very uncomfortable that Moonlight and other black people were around. Although one was a black guy, one a coloured guy, and one white, they were from that 'other side' of Durban... go to marquee weddings and threaten to shoot anyone who comes near. They are the dudes. They are part of the security business. They arrived in this big, high-security van and jumped out saying: "OK we are here". I was so disorganized - I ran down the stairs telling them that I was the one that hired them..."So come up!"

MacKenny: And they had no idea what they were getting into?



Moe in discussion with the security guards after the performance, 1994

Moe: No, and they went back down to their van and loaded up their shotguns. They told us later that when they are unsure about the situation that they are going into, they load up their guns. They came back up, sat down on the bench and said: “You are the boss, you tell us what to do.” I told them to go into the velvet room, stand behind the door and do not respond to anybody. They should not talk to anybody. At the most, I told them to cock their guns. All of a sudden they were in this really hot, tiny, fabric cube, and they waited and waited there for about two hours throughout the entire performance. Later they came out, had a beer, and said: “What was that?” I said that it was an artwork. They said: “We were art?” I said yes, and they said that they had no idea that they could ever be a part of art, and what kind of art was it anyway. They stayed for a while.

Allen: We have photos of them hanging out in the FLAT afterwards, which is quite funny.

Moe: They were laughing nervously. Though, they were happy to get off the full twelve hour shift; only doing about three of them.

MacKenny: I’m sure!⁹²



Moe, in the days that followed, packed up and moved out of the FLAT. She had won a generous grant of R 25 000 from the Emma Smith Scholarship for her artwork, and was going to be flying to the USA (where she would remain for the next few years.) At that point Barry who had been living with us on and off for the last few months, decided to move in and take her room as a full-time, paying occupant of the FLAT Gallery.

⁹² Ibid.