

Artist's Statement for "This was a City"

Gallery Peter Hermann, 2003

Liz Crossley

The first works in the early 1990's, on the theme of 'LAND', were more-or-less directly inspired by a new understanding of and more intensive dealing with the ancient rock engravings and paintings of the Khoi-San People. In these works my interest in mythology, social anthropology, archaeology and geology came into play. The radical political changes which took place at the end of the eighties and start of the nineties, in Germany, where I have been living since 1986 and, South Africa, my country of origin, made a great difference to my work, in that the demolition of the wall, the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners and the first democratic vote in South Africa, shifted my general attitude and mood into a highly positive gear. This very positive phase, perhaps even euphoric, lasted only a short time in relationship to Germany, Europe and the USA. Soon it was clear, that the chance, which, in my mind and in those of many others, there had been for a more open and tolerant world, was being wasted. At the latest, with the talk of the "New World Order" and the "first Gulf war".

South Africa, on the other hand, kept the positive trend in my work flowing, with the first democratic vote in 1994 and the decision to attempt a new way of dealing with the past in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, not a perfect solution, but the best chance we had at the time. In that period the shift in perception others had of one as a white South African was palpable. I didn't do much to make the new dispensation, but it was never-the-less a release to be accepted into the world community as a 'decent citizen' and freed me to delve deeper into the ground from which I come. From those days of high and possibly naïve hope on my part, there has been a shift to critical distance, with a stubborn belief in the power of small daily acts and statements, which push the process of developing a decent world forward centimetre by centimetre. In both parts of the world where I spend my time, there have been too many deep wounds made in a short time. We seem to rush towards abyss after abyss and, like Tinguely's machines, just manage to put our gears into reverse as we are hanging on the edge. But so far, we have, and we do.

AIDS, water and land are some of the factors which all experts tell us are playing and will play a decisive role in the way southern Africa develops. In effect all of these are informing factors in my work. A landscape from around Kimberley, with the earth stretching out like waves in the sea, is, for me, a history of the time when this earth was all under water, then covered in ice, it's striations on the rocks, which were later scratched by myriad animal hooves, engraved by the first humans, covered by thorn tree forests, fought over and died on by various groups of humans, claimed, stolen and reclaimed, dug up for planting, for diamonds, for graves, deforested for the mines, a place where tent cities rose and fell, leaving hardly a trace- now, again, a place of dying, as medication is fought over. This eternally peaceful looking space is a place of permanent and radical struggle - to survive.

That is what all my works 'are about': The work that goes into staying alive - Work against death - against annihilation - against destruction.