

Jessica Webster

Biography

Jessica Webster is a Joburg-based painter and writer. Born in the Free State in 1981, she is fascinated by the disjunctures and elisions manifested in interpretation of South African society and artistic identity through a Western discursive framework.

'Making sense' of experience, particularly in and through painting, has led to a current and profound yet ironic affiliation with practices of abstraction and the probing of figurative tensions theorised precisely within the last 100 years of European and American discourses on aesthetics and in the main.

Aware of the contradiction, she nevertheless attempts to escape the doctrinaire while avoiding any literal orientation to Afro-neoexpressionist form.

To break with the affective heterogeneity of the painted medium entirely and its historical scopic regime (in all its violence) feels too much like a sterilizing cop-out, and so like many South African creatives living and working in a fraudtly exhilarating period, she balances on the hinge between the mundane and the uncanny, the profane and the sacred – in life as much as in her painting.

Artist Statement

As an emerging painter in the South African art scene, I recently exhibited my first solo show at David Krut Projects (July 2009) to great success, with the Johannesburg Art Gallery acquiring a centrepiece of the show. Previously, I did my undergraduate degree at Michaelis School of Fine Arts in Cape Town, where I finished winning the Judy Stein Painting Prize (December 2005).

In between these auspicious events, I had the poor fortune of being shot in a household robbery, from which I emerged paralysed from the waist down. During my show at David Krut Projects, my injury generated a lot of interest in the extent to which my trauma has influenced my art-making.

It is a question that I ask myself too, and I have reached the conclusion that it is yes, and I perceive this horrific but invaluable life experience in the following way: I have come to see the stream of events that make up the routine and trajectory of life as full of holes.

Through these holes, one is subjected to a strange awakening of the impossibly intense nature of the moment; a moment in which conscious and subconscious realities seem to collide in devastating and wondrous simultaneity. I feel that my trauma has made me particularly alive to these holes; a hyper-awareness of the moments, both good and bad, that rupture the daily life-bubble. It is these moments which I aspire to recreate or project onto canvas.

Therefore, my injury does not affect or direct my subject-matter so much as it provides an empathic source for interpretation of my subject-matter. My interest in painting is therefore less on the subject of pleasure or suffering that life experience has to offer.

Rather, my concerns are based on what may lie between these subjective outcomes – the products of restless exchange between inner and outer worlds, fantasy and reality, private and public spaces.

I see my paintings as functioning in this terrain for the manner in which the painted surface may evoke these relationships, as an embodied relationship between surface and materiality.

It is through this ever-evolving and performative process that I feel my paintings may visualize the delimiting, or as often the overwhelming vagaries that penetrate the more 'normal' sense of the everyday, and 'speak' about the underlying currents through which life revolves.

Solo Exhibitions

2015 *'Murderer'*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2009 *I Knew You in this Dark*, David Krut Projects, Johannesburg, South Africa

Group Exhibitions

2016 *New Revolutions: Goodman Gallery at 50* Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

2013 *[WORKING TITLE] Catalogue Launch*, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

2010 *DKW Monotype Project*, DKW gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa