

# VISUAL ART

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## PONTE CITY

Photojournalism study of a failed apartheid-era housing project

'Live in Ponte and never go out' declaims the mantra on a poster depicting some glossy urban paradise. Alas, for the 54-storey circular folly that still towers over Johannesburg's skyline and which was originally built in 1976 to house South Africa's white elite, things didn't quite work out like that. By the time South African photographer Mikhael Subotzky and British artist Patrick Waterhouse came calling, the concrete monstrosity was largely occupied by black residents who moved in following the collapse of apartheid, although many had subsequently been evicted by predatory property developers.

The result of Subotzky and Waterhouse's five-year study in this international collaboration between the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Paris' Le Bal and Antwerp's Foto Museum is an expansive piece of

impressionistic photojournalism. The project combines archive and found material alongside fresh images and texts documenting a community which survives in spite of assorted social upheavals and financial collapses.

Portraits of residents and their apartments sit next to the detritus found in abandoned units, with news cuttings charting this nouveau-Babel's chequered history. A startled child's face on a tatty postcard sums things up with the caption, 'don't let the future take you by surprise'. This is a damning indictment of how the global conspiracies of gentrification and botched attempts at social engineering are the things which need to be demolished. (Neil Cooper)

■ Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, until Sun 26 Apr ●●●●