

# Jessica Webster



## Biography

Jessica Webster (b. 1981, South Africa) is a conceptual painter whose work is complex in range of theme and materiality. From her first solo show *I knew you in this dark* at David Krut Projects in 2009, through to her solo shows at Goodman Gallery *Murderer* (2015) and *Wisteria* (2017), Webster has pursued ideas about traumatic memory and the human predicament for sense-making as having a defamiliarising effect on the almost mundane visual realities of daily experience.

Webster's philosophical approach to painting originated in her PhD in Philosophy (Wits, 2017). Her research was co-supervised by artist Penny Siopis, whose lasting mentorship of Webster led to the development of a close analysis of Siopis's practice regarding trauma, objecthood, and the embodied "sexuality" of the painted surface. Webster's ideas address painting as re-articulations of psycho-somatic events which reveals painting at its most robust: where it lays bare the aesthetic ideals of the enlightenment project as traumatic.

Webster's current painting (2018-2020) exerts itself as a detachment from the traumatic underpinnings of that thesis towards a new experiment with lightness and irony. But for Webster, the theme of each body of work lies adjacent to achieving the unresolvable power that painting has to deeply move the individual and collective. In that way, painting plays a quiet yet containing social role in the arts and for the public. Her work is held in private and public institutions locally and internationally and has been reviewed by critical authors such as Amie Soudien, Same Mdluli and Dave Mann.

## 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

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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

2017 *Wisteria*, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

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

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

## Group Exhibitions

2018 *Of Sovereignty and Safety*, curated by Daniel Rautenbach, Goodman Gallery Video Room, Cape Town, South Africa

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

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

2010 *DKW Monotype Project*, David Krut Workshop Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa