

# CREATIVE BOOM

February 28, 2022  
By Katy Cowan

## Haunting wooden sculptures by Claudette Schreuders reveal why we can't escape from ourselves



Public Opinion, 2021 © Claudette Schreuders. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

In *Doubles*, her latest series of figurative painted wood sculptures and works on paper, Cape Town artist [Claudette Schreuders](#) takes a closer look at the double lives we lead, from what we do in private to how we present ourselves in public. Each haunting figure reminds us that we can't run from ourselves, no matter how much we might want to.

On show at [Jack Shainman Gallery](#) in New York City this month, Claudette Schreuders's wooden sculptures feel pretty heavy, laden with a burden we can't see or understand. It's as though the depicted characters cannot escape from themselves, something that has only been heightened during months of restrictions and social isolation.

"The double image can be read as someone trapped with their own company," Claudette tells Creative Boom. "There is such an emphasis on self-love in contemporary society, but being occupied only with yourself is not a recipe for happiness. There has been a lot of polarisation lately. People seem to be uninterested in understanding anybody who does not share all their ideas."



Intruder, 2021 © Claudette Schreuders. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

In our eyes, we see the figures as quite sinister, perhaps hinting at the darker side of humanity, but that's not the intention. "Maybe it's just the realities of how we live now," says Claudette. "One of the most shocking revelations to me when I had just graduated and started working on my own in my studio was how lonely it is to work like that and how hard it is to have only yourself for company. And I think that is something that not only artists and writers have to contend with these days."

The artist's sculpture work is rooted in both African and European traditions. She derives her inspiration from various sources, including medieval church figures, West African carving and Spanish portraiture. *Accomplice*, for example, is inspired by *The Visitation*, a classic sculpture believed to have been made in Germany around 1310 and is now in the collection of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The gestures in this piece – the Virgin Mary's hand tenderly placed on her relative Elizabeth's shoulder, who holds her hand to her chest – are repeated in Schreuders's figures, which are a reflection of each other connected by these same mirrored gestures. In *Intruder*, the figure hovering above and the reposed woman are balanced upon their skirts and conjoined feet.



Accomplice, 2021 © Claudette Schreuders. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



Accomplice, 2021 © Claudette Schreuders. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Also on display is a series of smaller works on paper present Schreuders's other studies and source imagery, such as *The Visitation* and drawings of her earlier sculptures. These drawings are a critical part of her process, living as a record of her work and practice.

Interestingly, the sculptures' titles are drawn from chapter headings in the memoir *Hope Against Hope* by Nadezhda Mandelstam, the wife of the great Russian poet Osip Mandelstam who was arrested and died during Stalin's Great Purge of 1937-38 in the Soviet Union. Consequently, these adopted titles only add to the sense of paranoia and distrust that is felt in the sculptures, whose figures are both alone and observed. We're left with a sense of unease when confronted with these works. There is a type of madness in repetition. Perhaps they're too close to our own truth.



First Person, 2021 © Claudette Schreuders. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



First Person, 2021 © Claudette Schreuders. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

In these latest works, Schreuders follows a familiar theme, recognising the increased polarisation and extremism that has been exacerbated by the pandemic and our isolation when one only looks inwards or at one's own kind. In her work as an artist, Schreuders sees this in stark contrast to her time as a student in newly post-apartheid South Africa, when she felt encouraged to study other traditions and cultural production. It raises how to bridge the racial gap and continue in this current landscape.

"That was the epitome of an intolerant society," she tells us, "something I see society moving towards now. The surprising thing about such a society is that people are intolerant within their group too, and the questioning of ideas accepted by your own group is not tolerated."

Doubles by the South African sculptor Claudette Schreuders is on display at New York City's Jack Shainman Gallery until 2 April 2022. Find out more at [jackshainman.com](http://jackshainman.com).



# ARTFORUM

June 4, 2019  
By Wallace Ludel

## Claudette Schreuders



Claudette Schreuders, *The End*, 2018, patinated bronze, enamel paint, 2 x 11 x 2".

In this gallery's back room, several smaller-than-life-size figurative sculptures by South African artist [Claudette Schreuders](#) stand or lie in various states of intimate repose. The show's title, "In the Bedroom," refers to the air of domesticity surrounding the body of work. Her subjects—carved from wood or cast in bronze—are mostly engaged in private acts, be it brushing their hair, lying in bed, or having spectacularly dull sex.

The brilliantly titled *Little Table*, 2018, shows a straight couple mid-coitus; the woman is leaning forward, bent over the titular item of furniture, while the man mounts her from behind. She wears only a bra, and he an undershirt. The looks of ennui on their faces suggest that they are not enmeshed in the most passionate affair. *Burning Secret*, 2018, one of the few sculptures here to delve steadfast into the world of metaphor, shows a nude figure standing with her eyes closed. Her body is pockmarked by bits of fire. A 2019 bust of South African president [Cyril Ramaphosa](#) is also present. It feels singular because it's not loosely based on someone from Schreuders's personal life, asserting that the political and the personal are inextricably entwined—something we're all too familiar with in the United States.

Included in the exhibition are several prints and paintings on paper. Among them is *Budgie*, 2018, a lithograph depicting a lonely pet parakeet attentively sitting on its perch. As if a caged bird weren't sad enough, a few feet away, a painted bronze sculpture titled *The End*, 2018, shows another parakeet, belly-up and dead on a plinth. What's home, anyway, but a series of small tragedies?

# THE NEW YORKER

June 10, 2019  
By Johanna Fateman

## Claudette Schreuders Shainman

**CHELSEA** In her carefully painted carved-wooden figures and quiet works on paper, this South African artist depicts strangely proportioned and emotionally inscrutable figures, often in moments that are both intimate and oddly prosaic. A naked couple assumes the missionary position in a sculpture titled “In the Bedroom,” embracing in an unpassionate-looking stack. A standing man and a bent-over woman, both naked only from the waist down, staidly demonstrate an alternate coupling option in “Little Table.” The press release notes that a 1917 lovemaking manual is one source of inspiration here, but sly art-historical references also come into play. Complementing Schreuders’s sexual vignettes are such works as a macabrely comic, wall-mounted crucifix, in which Christ is recast as a schoolboy in knee socks, and a teak bust of the South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa. These fascinating wild cards illuminate the artist’s interest in the public function of sculpture—even when its subject is private life.—*J.F. (Through June 22.)*

# NEW YORK

June 10–23, 2019

The CULTURE PAGES

To

# Do



Twenty-five  
things to see,  
hear, watch,  
and read.

JUNE 12–26

ART

## 9. See Claudette Schreuders: In the Bedroom

*Voyeuristic pleasure.*

Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street,  
through June 22.

This gallery veteran from South Africa makes carefully carved and a touch smaller than life-size (think Airedale-terrier size) naked standing female figures, couples making love, and more. The sculptures transport you to imagined but very real worlds of fantasy, memory, high art, outsider art, and something on the edge of visionary. J.S.

# sculpture

May 16, 2019  
By Daniel Kunitz

## Relationships Between Figures: A Conversation with Claudette Schreuders



*Guilty Bystander* (detail), 2018. Jelutong wood, enamel, and oil paint, 51.1875 x 11.8125 x 16.5 in. Photo: Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

Claudette Schreuders is a South African artist based in Cape Town. Her work has been exhibited in many institutions internationally, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Smithsonian Institution, the British Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. “In the Bedroom,” her sixth exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, is [on view](#) through June 22, 2019.

**Sculpture:** What originally led you to begin carving figures?

**Claudette Schreuders:** I started carving figures as an undergraduate at Stellenbosch University. We had a project carving polystyrene covered with plaster, and then my lecturer suggested that I try wood. It was basically a self-taught process—I got the hang of it as I worked. We didn’t specifically have lessons in how to carve wood, but I eventually learned how to use the grain. The first one was a flop, but the second one was fine.

**Sculpture:** Were you looking at a lot of other wood carving at the time?

**CS:** I was looking at copies of medieval sculptures in the art department and also at Colon figures, West African sculptures. And there were quite a lot of black artists in South Africa then, self-taught artists whose work was being seen for the first time. Their works were also carved and painted wooden figures. They were suddenly physical at that time, in 1994.

**Sculpture:** And were they the same scale as the figures that you carve?

**CS:** It’s quite funny, I did a lot of preparation before making my first full-figure sculpture. I did a drawing, I even made a little painting, and it was kind of more realistic proportionally, but then the head ended up much bigger than it would be on a person. A lot was dictated by the wood. You have one solid piece, and then I start carving that block or log.



*Burning Secret*, 2018. Jelutong wood and enamel paint, 25.625 x 11.8125 x 9.875 in. Photo: Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

***Sculpture:* Do you find the figure in the wood, or do you find wood that suits your designs?**

**CS:** I find wood for a figure I have in mind. I know what I want to make before I make it. I do drawings, but not too detailed. I used to work in logs, but that comes with some risks—there's much more chance of cracking. If you take planks and build your block and then carve, it's much more stable. But I used to always work in jacaranda logs, and they were pretty stable. I used to keep a lot and then look for what I could use when I needed one. Now I buy wood and make the size I need.

***Sculpture:* What kind of wood do you use?**

**CS:** I work in yellow tongue and limewood and camphor; I don't work so much in jacaranda anymore because it's not so nice to carve once it's cured, and I haven't been working in logs for a while. I've got a sculpture in teak right now, and that is very, very hard.

***Sculpture:* Your work is characterized as narrative. Do you conceive of narratives for the figures, or do other people just project onto them?**

**CS:** I think a lot of it is projection, but I make them in such a way that you would maybe want to project onto them. It's more that I think of a group and how the relationship between each individual would suggest a narrative. It's relationship between figures—the context gives them a kind of, I don't know if you'd call it a narrative, but a potential to be interpreted in a certain way, because everything is so loaded anyway. I try to keep it quite open.

***Sculpture:* Do you think of your pieces as characters or just figures?**

**CS:** I use references for faces, almost always, because I tend to be a little unspecific if I just think of a face. If I'm trying to make a portrait of someone specific, which I also do, then I use references all the time and make drawings from different angles, so I know how the face is put together. Otherwise I just take a face and have one view, and I use it to help me get the face, but it doesn't have to look like the person, it just has to be a convincing person.

***Sculpture:* When you do portraits, are they commissioned or simply people you want to depict?**

**CS:** I just choose who I want to make. I made a sculpture that's a mother figure, and I used an artist's face, just because I like her painting and I like the face, and I wanted to see if I could get that in the mother's face. You don't need to know that it's her face, it just needs to look like it is possibly someone.

**Sculpture: Do you conceive of whole shows or primarily individual works?**

**CS:** I have two or three ideas, and then I build around them. Often I have one sculpture that gives the show its name, and then I build up around that, first in drawing. I was looking through my notebooks the other day, and I thought, "Oh, I made drawings for this show three years ago." But then lots of the drawings that I made were scrapped, and others were added. Every now and then I think of only one figure, but mostly I think of them in groups.

**Sculpture: Can you tell us how this show, "In the Bedroom," came about?**

**CS:** The oldest piece is *The Guilty Bystander*, one of three single female figures I've shown in South Africa before, the others being *Spent* and *Hair*. After I showed them, I came to feel that *The Guilty Bystander* is a loaded kind of thing. South Africa has a very loaded political atmosphere at the moment, and I thought I'd like to move away from something too political into something more private. And then I thought, "Retreat, retreat, retreat," until I came up with the bedroom. I have a female figure climbing out of the chest of a man, like the creation where Eve climbs out of Adam's chest, and two female figures standing really close together, so you can't see the one behind the other: sex is really like two people being one person. And then, I had drawn this image that I didn't know quite how to resolve technically, how to get two figures out of the same piece of wood, and it's the next step of this thing that interests me, which is a person being part of another person. I think it's always about the relationship between figures, and sometimes they completely become one. So, "In the Bedroom" has all these little domestic scenes, private scenes, scenes with children and animals.

**Sculpture: Do the politics of being a white artist in South Africa affect you greatly?**

**CS:** Yes. I spoke at Princeton recently, and one of the students said, "I see you have all these black figures. Are you allowed to carve black people?" That's an interesting question. Because whites are a small minority in South Africa, is it more unacceptable to depict black people or to completely ignore them? Whatever you do is really loaded, and it's become more so recently. Everything has become quite politicized and confrontational and, really, unpleasant, in part because it's the run-up to an election now. I think it's something that all artists are dealing with at the moment. I know white artists who say that they prefer not to work figuratively at all, it just seems to be a minefield. But, to me, this also makes it interesting. I don't believe you can let people tell you what you can and can't do. It kills any possibility of conversation if there are lots of things you can't do; it just doesn't seem that art is the place for people to say that.

One of the sculptures in the show is a bust of Cyril Ramaphosa, our president, and it's included because it's so jarring, so completely out of place. But it felt right because politics has infiltrated everything, and I thought, "This is where he belongs, in the bedroom, because you can never quite escape politics in South Africa." You'd like to move on, but we haven't been able to.

3 October 2019 by Paul Carey-Kent

## Frieze London 2019

Frieze London – the more contemporary half of the fair – seemed in good health this year. Here are seven works that interested me. We start uncomfortably:

**Claudette Schreuders:** *In the Bedroom*, 2019 at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



The South African artist works mainly in wood, but has cast these figures, on the edge of cartoon and children – in bronze, with the skin painted a pallid grey which heightens the unease they generate. It's from a series which investigates how coupledness has been shown throughout art and broader cultural history. If this is sex, it looks awkward enough to be inappropriate – and carries a political overtone in a nation in which public and private are often inappropriately blurred.

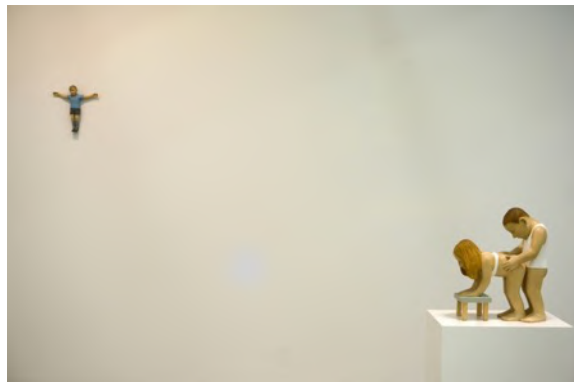


# HYPERALLERGIC

June 17, 2019  
Melissa Stern

## Figural Sculptures That Weave an Enigmatic Story of Disassociation and Isolation

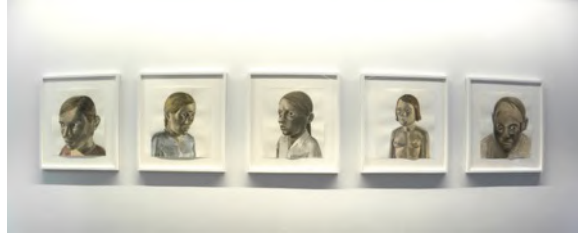
Claudette Schreuders's most recent show at Jack Shainman gallery, *In the Bedroom* is perhaps both her most revealing and most enigmatic body of work to date.



Install shot: "School Days" (2019) Lime wood, enamel paint. 10 x 9.) and "Little Table" (2018) Jelutong wood, enamel and oil paint. 20 7/8 x 8 5/8 x 17 5/16 (all images courtesy Jack Shainman gallery).

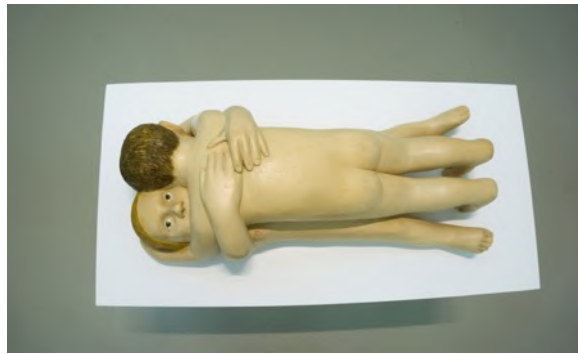
[Claudette Schreuders](#) occupies an intriguing place in the contemporary art world. Born in South Africa in 1973, before the end of apartheid, but in the center of its crumbling, her work has always elegantly danced the line between the personal and the political. Mention is often made of Schreuders's "search for her African identity," but I've always found her work to be firmly grounded in a deeply personal narrative — the political content of her work sneaking in around the sides rather than hitting you full frontal.

Her most recent show at [Jack Shainman Gallery](#) entitled *In the Bedroom* is perhaps both her most revealing and most enigmatic body of work to date. The title hints that viewers will be privy to something intimate. It's a little titillating, a tad seductive. Yet once you enter the gallery the first thing you see is a wall hung with five drawings, displayed closely together. Drawn in acrylic ink on paper, the five create a powerfully ominous narrative (all of them made in 2017). Entitled (in order) "Mingle" — a close-up portrait of a very intense adolescent boy staring intensely to the left, outside of the grouping. Next to him is "Note to Self" — a young woman staring blankly to her right. She is faced by "Anna in Uniform," — a young woman with a traumatized expression staring to the left. She is next to "Loved Ones" — a young girl, topless with pre-pubescent breasts. Her body faces us, but her head turns away looking into the distance. This jovial grouping is punctuated by "The Neighbor" — a middle-aged man grimacing angrily as he stares back at the group, a bloody wound on his forehead. Everyone is avoiding meeting each other's eyes, as well as ours. This is a portrait of intimacy of the most terrifying sort. Whatever psychodrama has happened here feels like the stuff of the morning tabloids.



Install shot of five drawings (all 2017): "Mingle" acrylic ink on paper, 19 11/16 x 17 5/16; "Note to Self" acrylic ink on paper, 19 11/16 x 17 5/16; "Anna in Uniform" acrylic ink on paper, 19 11/16 x 17 5/16. "Loved Ones" acrylic ink on paper, 19 11/16 x 17 5/16; "The Neighbour" acrylic ink on paper, 19 11/16 x 17 5/17.

This show is complex. When I first saw it I thought it looked too small for the gallery. The figures seemed isolated and even a little lost in the big, clinically lit space. But on second viewing I began to understand the almost desperate loneliness that this body of work conveys. The irony of the title is belied by the installation. We may be in the bedroom, but it is a room of emotional loneliness of a primal sort. Even the figures engaged in sex acts (there are two) seem dissociated from one another. This is sad sex. In the show's title piece of sculpture, "In the Bedroom," (2019) a couple lays intertwined. The man has his head buried deep in the woman's neck. We cannot see his expression. She stares upward, her eyes blank. Not a lot of joy in this lovemaking.



Claudette Schreuders, "In the Bedroom" (2019) Jelutong wood. 24 7/16 x 11 7/16 x 8 5/8.

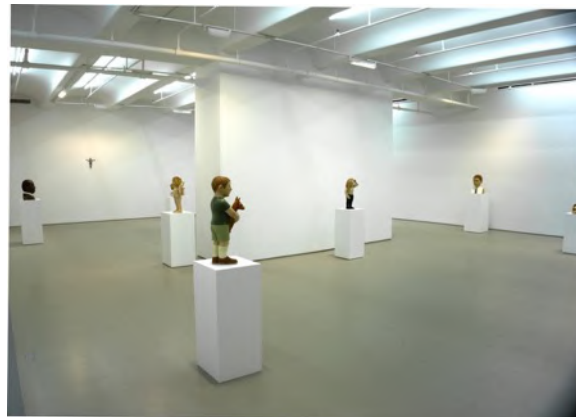
Everything in the show is carefully placed to advance the mysterious narrative that Schreuders is telling. Near, but not too near the loveless couple making love, is a large girl or woman; the ambiguity of age is yet another intriguing element of these mysterious tales. Entitled "Guilty Bystander," (2018) she is the largest figure in the show standing about 51 inches. Alert, she stands, body slightly twisted, looking at us. She seems aware of the couple behind her, but unable or unwilling to look at them, or perhaps they are her dream. She is wearing a jaunty little patterned dress and exquisite vintage shoes. Her ensemble is impeccable. Her painted hair is in a perfect coif. Yet she seems uneasy, unnerved perhaps by what is happening around her. Her eyes seem to follow you around the gallery with a haunted expression.



Install shot: "In the Bedroom" (2019) and "Guilty Bystander" (2018).

Schreuders carves her sculptures from Jelutong wood, a type of rubber tree found in Asia. It's a soft wood, buttery yellow and smooth grained. The carving marks show, but softly, giving the works an air of gentility. The materiality is obvious, but the edges have been smoothed. The sculptures are painted in mellow, muted colors. Everything is just fine ... which to me makes the depth of the psychological content all the more strange and powerful.

The scale of these works is also disorienting. I mentioned the dance that many of them do between ages — girl or woman? Part of this ambiguity is due to most of the pieces being the size of a large doll, or a small child. With adult faces and impassive expressions they can be seen as adults trapped in their childhood memories. Or perhaps they are about the inner "adult" dreams of children. The consistently diminished scale of the figures, with their slightly oversized heads and feet and impeccable attention to small details of dress (beautiful delicate shoes are of particular interest to Schreuders), create a universe of people that seem benign, even toy-like, and yet their dramas are huge.



Install shot of *In the Bedroom* at Jack Shainman gallery.

Another potent relationship is between the pieces entitled "Little Table" (2018) and "School Days" (2019). "Little Table" portrays a man and woman in the act of sex, the woman bent over forward and leaning on a literal, little table as the man enters her from behind. His head lowered, his expression passive, as is hers. The vibe is one of obligation, rather than passion. The piece is set off by a very small sculpture of a crucified little boy that hangs near them on the wall. The lad in "School Days" appears to be wearing a school uniform, Catholic school perhaps? The juxtaposition of these two sculptures creates a narrative that sets up pieces of a story, but each viewer must provide their own ending.

All the figures in the show are of European origin with the exception of a large formal bust of a Black African man. Simply entitled "The President" (2019), it is, according to the gallery, a portrait of the current South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa. It is an odd intrusion of the outside world into Schreuders's

dreamscape. Perhaps this is a brash reality check about the possibility of real intimacy or privacy? (The government is always watching.) This sculpture is carved out of teak and the wood is obviously rougher and darker. The artist's carving is bolder than in the other pieces, the deep gestural carving marks enhancing the beauty of the teak. The artist has left the sides of the bust raw, exposing that this is carved from a large block of wood. The figure sports the same passive expression that permeates this show, but her looser carving imbues the bust with a more robust energy.



Claudette Schreuders "The President" (2019) Teak wood, enamel paint. 15 3/4 x 14 3/16 x 14 3/16.

There is an admirable continuity in Schreuders's artistic vision. Whatever odd world or dream we've wandered into is completely consistent in its logic. I would posit that *In the Bedroom* is a journey into our individual psychic rooms, where memory mingles with childhood, desire and loneliness, a potent cocktail that haunts the viewer long after you've left.

[\*In the Bedroom\*](#) runs through June 22 at [Jack Shainman Gallery](#) (513 West 20th St, Chelsea, Manhattan).

# F L A U N T

May 15, 2019

By Christopher Andrew Armstrong

## In The Bedroom | Claudette Schreuders



Claudette Schreuders invites audiences *In the Bedroom* for a major exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery on show from May 16th until June 22nd.

Inspired by Herbert M. Cole's 1989 book *Icons: Ideals and Power in the Art of Africa* as well as a 1970s publication titled *Love Positions for Married Couples: A Unique Guide to Various Techniques of Sexual Intercourse*, Claudette's sculptures explore the idea of coupledness, and the intimacy and awkwardness which comes naturally with domesticity. The scenes she produces deconstruct the idea of sexual intercourse by separating the sexiness from the act, and leaving the mundaneness which occurs when it transitions into a routine.

Constructed with mostly wood and oil paint, the figures she imagines engage in less imaginative sexual acts, such as the missionary position, with expressionless faces. One striking sculpture, titled "In the Bedroom," shows a man positioned on top of his female partner, both of them in the nude. The act is devoid of any sexuality due to the bored, detached look the woman carries on her face.

*In the Bedroom* by Claudette Schreuders can be viewed at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City from May 16th to June 22nd. The gallery is located at 513 West 20th Street.

# office

June 13, 2019  
By John Martin Tilley

## In the Bedroom

Looking at Claudette Schreuders' sculptures is a study in intimacy. The figures possess an almost spiritual pull—while they are clearly caricatures or fetishes, they seem to be actively thinking, their wheels turning like a live homo sapiens, even when caught in the most intimate act of all. They glance to the side as if avoiding the gaze of our inspection, aware they are being watched, looked upon, evaluated.

This, it would seem, is intentional. The artist, when I spoke with her, expressed an interest in the quivering divide between the public and the private in today's world. Her work has always been autobiographical and introspective, and when she thought about what was the represented the most private act, sex became the most obvious answer—but also, she asked herself what exists in the bedroom beyond sex, centering her work around a domesticity that looks out at the world at large, incorporating the incessant news which bombards us any way it can, the presence of social media intensely blurring the demarcation between public and private, and the presence of children in a domestic sphere that make the sexual act something fraught with layers of desire and anxiety.

Schreuders is a white South African looking at the traditions of European culture as well as those of Africa, both of which clash and collude in her work with simplicity and poise. Her pieces are made by hand from wood, a very time-consuming process—her last show was four years ago. But it is one that also connects her with her material in ways that many other artists may not experience, in a sense that is somewhat reflective of the domestic sphere in which she is interested: her practice is similar to needlepoint, done for hours on end to achieve a brilliantly simple, beautiful result.

The pieces simultaneously reference Medieval European sculpture and African tribal sculptures known as Baulés, fetishes of one's heavenly double, a spiritual other half that is usually of the opposite sex that is used in a ritual as a vessel for the spirit, and which many tribes depicted as white. The layers of sociopolitical implications of this are myriad, but the sculptures were essentially aspirational, and the tribes were viewing the Europeans as something to aspire to because of their status imposed through colonization. There is often talk of the white gaze upon black bodies, but rarely the other way around—Schreuders has tapped into a fascinating note in a geopolitical conversation that has so far gone relatively unheeded.



'Little Table'



June 16, 2019

# Review

ART  
BOOKS  
MOTORING  
TELEVISION

## SECRETS OF A BURNING BEDROOM

When politics intrudes into Claudette Schreuders's private life, it will be spat out in her artwork, writes Sean O'Toole

It is not uncommon nowadays for politicians to sneak into our bedrooms late at night and whisper their outrage. The Twitter utterances of Messrs Malema, Trump and Zille are, however, one of many genres of political bedtime story now available to adults interested in social engagement over intimacy and sleep.

Cape Town sculptor Claudette Schreuders, who is currently showing her work in New York, including a painted wood bust of President Cyril Ramaphosa, is not exempt from this state of affairs. At night, in bed with her partner, artist Anton Kannemeyer, she is prone to scroll through her smartphone. The cul-de-sacs it leads her into will often colour their nocturnal conversations.

"Oh shit, we've moved onto politics again," she summarises when I meet her at her Pinelands studio.

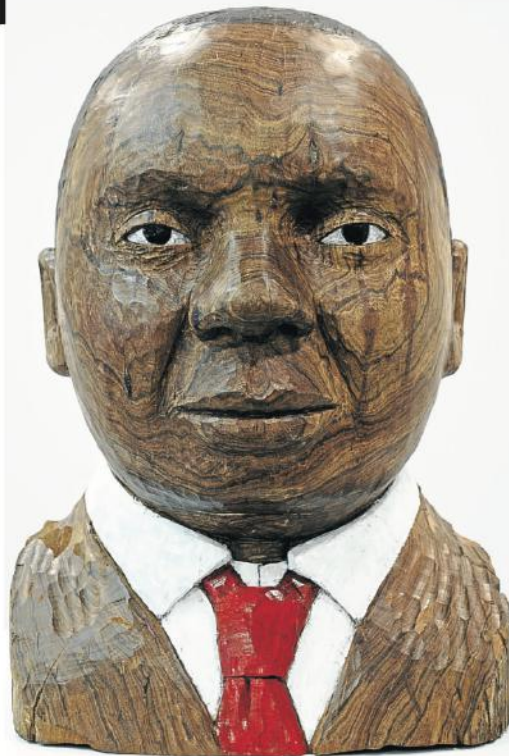
Of course, politics has long intruded on family life. Schreuders recalls her youth in Joburg. "I remember my father sitting on the edge of the chair watching the news. It was the most boring thing, but if you made a sound he would tell you to shut up. Maybe it's a middle-age thing, I'm like that now. Every day I check the news on my phone, and there is nothing satisfying about it."

Viewed from a certain angle, from the vantage of her stoic portrait of Ramaphosa, Schreuders's exhibition *In the Bedroom* (at Jack Shainman Gallery until June 22) offers a meditation on the intrusion of politics on the domestic.

"The show was initially just going to be about the bedroom, a reprieve from politics, and then I realised that he [Ramaphosa] is in the bedroom," says Schreuders.

Apart from the Ramaphosa bust, all the painted wood sculptures on her show focus on the intimate moods and rituals of the bedroom. It is a place of candour, anxiety, banality and sex. The most eye-catching piece on view is a study of partially clothed couple going at it doggy style displayed near a small, wall-mounted work depicting a uniformed schoolboy in Christ-like pose.

The show also includes a teeny sculpture of a dead budgie, as well as various full-length studies of adolescent women, each an unreliable proxy for the artist. One girl-woman sleeps, another introspectively combs her hair, a third poltely stands with her arms behind her back, and a fourth closes her eyes as her naked body is



The President



Burning Secret



In the Bedroom (detail)

engulfed in flames. Each is a family secret encoded in wood.

The artist can't precisely recall when Ramaphosa first wandered into her field of vision. Pressed for a date, she responds: "I guess it was when he bought that expensive buffalo." She is reiterating a popular fiction that continues to haunt the president.

In early 2012, when Ramaphosa was still juggling business and politics, he unsuccessfully bid R19.5 million for a buffalo cow and her heifer calf at a game auction in North West. His political enemies weaponised this display of available wealth a few months later when 34 miners were killed at Lonmin's Marikana mine, in which Ramaphosa owned a stake.

Schreuders's instinctive recall of Ramaphosa as rancher has little to do with Julius Malema's constant carping about it, but owes instead to family stuff. The artist's father now farms near Bela-Bela in Limpopo, very near Ramaphosa's wildlife game ranch.

The jacaranda wood for her presidential bust also hails from Limpopo. Schreuders bought the wood in 2004, at about the time she was busy with a commission of four larger-than-life bronzes of SA's Nobel Peace Prize laureates that was unveiled at the V&A Waterfront in 2005. She says the process of rendering Albert Luthuli, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk was very different to sculpting Ramaphosa.

Commissions have cautious clients and lawyers. Living politicians are busy and have prickly handlers. They are also not immune to vanity. She recalls De Klerk expressing dismay at her cartoonish style when he saw a model at her studio.

The Ramaphosa bust, which was made using only Google as reference, is more representative of the artist's work, which is a marriage of diaristic pieces and reverent descriptions of public figures, notably artists.

One of her earliest sculptures depicted Congolese painter Chéri Samba. Her last New York show, in 2016, included sculptures of Mandela, writer Bessie Head, painters Marlene Dumas, Alice Neel and Balthus, as well as a childhood depiction of her lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch in the early '90s, artist Brett Murray.

Schreuders has only made 115 sculptures since graduating with a master's degree from the Michaelis School of Fine Art in 1998.

Drawing is integral to her method as a sculptor. To better understand Ramaphosa she drew aspects of his physiognomy: his ears, the shape of his chin, the slope of his forehead. But it was a photo of him wearing headphones that clinched it for her.

"He wasn't doing anything with his face and had withdrawn into himself. Politicians never do that. They are always aware of people looking at them. I like to see someone who is not aware of being seen, because then you can really see them."

Restraint might strengthen a work of art but it rarely makes for poor propaganda, which every public sculpture is. Take artist Lungelo Gumede's recent bronzes of SA's four presidents, installed along Durban's M4 highway. The tableaux presents Mandela fist pumping the air and a portly Ramaphosa beaming like mob enforcer. Schreuders purposefully avoids emotion in her work.

"What I want is to present Ramaphosa as neutrally as possible. I want there to be a lot of space for whoever encounters the work to project what they feel on him. I don't want what I project on him to be the only thing that you get out of him."

Of course, lurking behind this restraint is feeling, lots of it. Schreuders likes SA's optimist in chief. "It takes a bit of love actually to make a sculpture." The artist guffily giggles at the admission. ☺



The End



# Art in America



## Claudette Schreuders

at Jack Shainman,  
through Mar. 12  
534 West 24th St.

"Note to Self," Claudette Schreuders's fifth show at the gallery, transports the viewer into an airy and eerie realm via her waist-high painted wooden statues and smaller than life-sized busts, along with wall-hung prints. The South African artist has cited the influence of African sculpture—particularly Colon and Baule Blole carved statues—which she melds with autobiographical subject matter.

A stocky and diminutive school girl, with a blue pleated skirt, no shirt and a ten thousand yard stare, is positioned on a plinth near the front door. She is simultaneously vulnerable and distant. A suite of lithographs, each modeled with a black brushy line, have a watercolorlike appearance. The two dimensional figures appear monolithic, stoic and timeless. One litho, titled *Romance*, features an elegant horse; another, *Great Expectations*, shows a pensive barefoot female figure lying on the ground.

Near the entrance to the back room stands a sculpture of a woman drawing in a sketch book. Paint is splattered on her apron, suggesting a self-portrait of the artist. Arrayed in the room behind this sentrylike figure are carved and painted heads and full figures on plinths, like an album of beloved influencers, family and friends. The panoply includes Alice Neel, Nelson Mandela and Balthus.  
—Lindsay Pollock

Pictured: View of Claudette Schreuders's exhibition "Note to Self," 2015. Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## A Collection of Artists' Portraits, Car Engines and Notes to Self

A show of self portraits, Roger Hiorns and Claudette Schreuders in this week's Fine Art

By PETER PLAGENS

Feb. 12, 2016 6:30 p.m. ET



Claudette Schreuders' 'Loved Ones' (2012-13) PHOTO: @CLAUDETTE SCHREUDERS. COURTESY

### Claudette Schreuders: Note to Self

[Jack Shainman](#)

524 W. 24th St.

(212) 337-3372

Through March 12

As of 2011, South African sculptor Claudette Schreuders (b. 1973) had created six related bodies of work. The first, her graduate thesis show, dealt, unsurprisingly, with being a student. The second concerned the effects of artists' residencies in foreign countries on her sense of identity. Nos. 3, 4 and 5 had to do with, respectively, putting her art out in public, the limitations of domestic life, and the birth of her first child. The theme preceding that of this show was, perhaps predictably, the daunting presence of small children. Here, the uniting thread is Ms. Schreuders's putative reflection on the malleability of an African identity in the wake of apartheid.

To appreciate this exhibition, it's not necessary to know this thematic sequence; indeed, Ms.

Schreuders doesn't really need any backstory for her charmingly poignant work to succeed. She makes small painted human figures that, with their big heads and small, stocky bodies, resemble garden gnomes. The material is jelutong wood (in botany, *Dyera costulata*), which is said to be absolutely peachy for carving. Aside from a couple of self-effacing standing self-portraits, her subjects include fellow South African artist Marlene Dumas and Nelson Mandela (whose stately appearance undermines the otherwise intimate tone of the show).

Ms. Schreuders is a sculptor through and through, and her work is strong enough to survive the presence of some ancillary prints that are decidedly cool and, alas, also cartoonish. They're pleasant enough images, but don't pack the same quiet wallop as her sculptures.

# ARTNEWS

## ‘IT’S ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF CARRYING ON’: CLAUDETTE SCHREUDERS ON HER SHOW AT JACK SHAINMAN

BY *Robin Scher* POSTED 02/11/16 10:53 AM



Claudette Schreuders  
COURTESY JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

The identity of a white South African is fraught with questions of belonging, particularly as a new generation of the country’s previously disenfranchised black majority make their voices heard. For the past 15 years South African sculptor Claudette Schreuders has been grappling in various ways with this issue. At age 28, Schreuders held her first New York exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in 2001, following a showing of her student work as part of a retrospective of South African artists at the Museum of African Art in New York. Her fifth show with Jack Shainman Gallery, *Note to Self*, opened last week and runs through March 12.

In *Note to Self*, Schreuders has carved wooden busts of people who are close to her and to whom she is indebted for artistic inspiration. But the true power of Schreuders’s sculptures—regardless of its overt content—is contained within their forms. Her sculptures reflect both the West African Colon figures in their angular, painted features and the Baule Blole sculptures of the Ivory Coast, which are traditionally tied to depictions of relationships. The Colon figures’ re-appropriation of both African and Western aesthetics negates interpretation by refusing to fit neatly into either category. Similarly Schreuders’s sculptures interrogate her relationships in a way that

is both an acknowledgement of and a refusal to be defined by her identity.

By both confronting her reality and attempting to break free of history's noose, Schreuders's sculptures are imbued with a deep longing for a sense of freedom. In a society where such a thing is still a precious commodity, Schreuders's work reflects South Africa's collective need for a catharsis not yet fully realized. In the conversation below, which has been lightly edited and condensed, Schreuders expands on this complexity in her work.

**ARTnews: What initially drew you to sculpture?**

I was a student around 1994 in South Africa and I just couldn't imagine being part of the art world. I'd look through art magazines and feel like I didn't relate much to contemporary art, so I decided to just do what I really wanted to do with no considerations of outside pressure. I was also looking at a lot of African art objects at the time and thought how emotionally powerful they were, even if I didn't completely understand their function or where they came from. It was similar for me to medieval sculptures that served a religious purpose where they had an emotional charge, like a power.



Claudette Schreuders, *Loved Ones*, 2012  
Jelutong, enamel and oil paint.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN  
GALLERY

**How did you come to connect that with the inspiration you draw from West African carving traditions?**

I'd just finished these big sculptures that didn't mean much to me. Even though at the time I was proud of the technical achievement, afterward I felt I wanted to make something that would be more meaningful. My lecturer showed me the painted Colon figures and by the time I'd finished my fourth year, I had a more specific reference point. It was an interesting journey.

**What specifically attracted you to the Colon and Baule Blolo figures?**

The Colon figures are often misinterpreted and reinterpreted—they're political and quite a hard thing to access. With the Baule Blolo, I love that they are about relationships, specifically love relationships and are a kind of sculpture that serves as a vehicle for sorting out the problems of a relationship.

**Speaking of relationship problems, how have you gone about confronting the expectations surrounding your art in relation to your identity?**

The first time I had a solo show in America it was called "Burnt by the Sun." Thematically, the show was centered around the idea of belonging and being a white person born as a South African. That show became very tied to South African history, so with my next show, I wanted to try to go deeper into the personal, so that the personal became more universal. I want to deal with these issues but I also don't want to be the spokesperson for white South Africans. I want to be able to

do anything I want. As a student when you pen down what your work is about, that becomes your cage and with the next thing, you try to get away from what you've just said about yourself. So every new group for me is a little bit of an attempt to break free. It's about the possibility of carrying on and not becoming trapped in your own work and the outside perception of what your work is about.

**But as a white South African, it's a difficult space because there's a lot of history that must be acknowledged in relation to contemporary society. A lot of that isn't easy to accept and you can see many South Africans who don't want to accept it, but at the same time don't know any other place they can call home. So in a sense then, as an artist, your work becomes an expression of that struggle?**

In a way, yes. After I did my first solo show, I was thinking about being so personal in a public space. I felt exposed, which is why I named my next show "Crying in Public," a title that partly came from crying religious sculptures. I felt that emotion was something missing a bit from contemporary art and that it would be a bit rebellious to go against that. In a relationship you make yourself vulnerable and I think in art you do the same. But instead of it being something you're saying about me, it's something I'm saying about myself, which is tied to that struggle of being.

**When you're making your work, do you think about who you're making it for?**

I think about it less now than when I was doing "Crying in Public" and "Burnt by the Sun." People know me better now and there's more context, so I just do what I do really. South Africa is a hard place to come from and you have to think and grapple a lot with identity. When [South African author] J. M. Coetzee was asked about the political intention behind his work, he said, "You can't say this is the work I have to write, you write the work you want to write and then you know why you had to write it." I love that he said that. It seems like such a simple thing, but that's a real point to get to—to truly do what you want to do.



## The top five New York art shows this week

Check out our suggestions for the best art exhibitions you don't want to miss, including gallery openings and more

By Howard Halle  
Posted: Monday February 8 2016

**Monday, February 8–Sunday, February 14**



[Jack Shainman Gallery](#) , Chelsea  
Tuesday February 9 2016 - Saturday March 12 2016

Born in South Africa in 1973, Schreuders came of age during the period leading up to the end of Apartheid. Accordingly, her sculptures and drawings evoke the difficulty of negotiating an “African” identity in the new South Africa, especially for the country’s white citizens. The folk-art charm of her painted-wood figures, for instance, are shot through with an undercurrent of anxiety reflected in ambiguous facial expressions, diminutive scale and oddly stunted proportions. This show presents the latest examples of her work, including a self-portrait that depicts her lost in thought while holding a notebook.





Claudette Schreuders  
*'Two Hands' at the Met, 2010*  
Jelutong wood, enamel and oil paint  
size H: 80cm W: 47cm D: 30cm

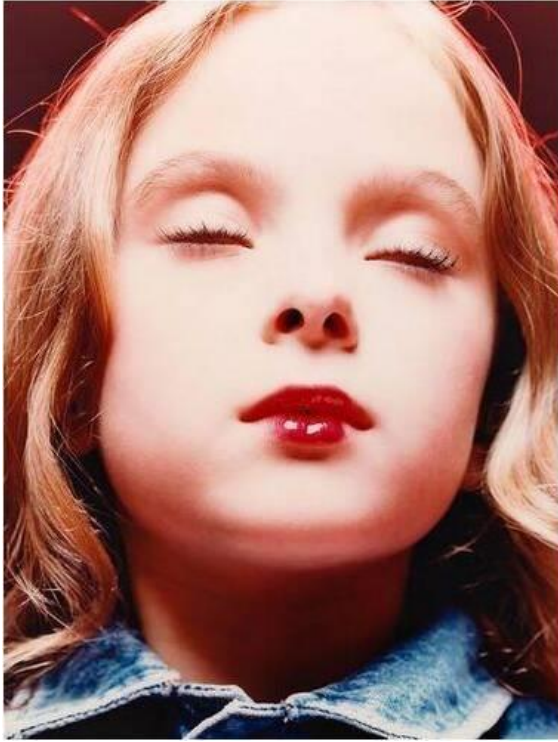
## artthrob news: Schreuders at the Met

By Staff Writer on 14 June 2012

New York's Metropolitan Museum, one of the world's great museums, recently acquired its first sculpture by a South African artist – Claudette Schreuders' *Two Hands* (2010), a classic Schreuders carved and painted wood grouping, this one of a woman with a child in each hand. The piece is currently on exhibition at the Met.

Comments curator Alisa La Gamma: 'The work by Schreuders is positioned prominently on a platform adjacent and parallel to one by El Anatsui. Both are striking but distinctive works that eloquently encourage visitors to think expansively about what the "Arts of Africa" can be. In presenting Claudette Schreuders in this context we celebrate the seriousness with which a contemporary artist has contemplated the historical genres featured in the Metropolitan's collection and how her embrace and mastery of carving in wood has reinvigorated a seminal regional idiom of expression. We also address the artist's personal interest in the subject of motherhood reflected in this specific work and its wider resonance with the iconography of major regional traditions. In order to underscore the richness of those possibilities, on this occasion, a Mother and Child figure by a great Dogon master in the collection is presented in dialogue with *Two Hands*.

I follow the work of contemporary artists whose work I see on the ground when I travel to Africa with interest in relation to long-term opportunities for it to be presented in an array of different contexts at our institution. Last January I saw Claudette Schreuders' most recent body of work at Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town. Given that it was to travel to Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, I recommended to my colleague in Modern and Contemporary Art, Gary Tinterow, that he view the work there. In light of that exhibition and the fact that Claudette Schreuders is a contemporary artist of international standing who lives and works on the continent and reflects upon and responds to its classical legacy as well as her own experience, the timing worked out for the Metropolitan to acquire one of those works. Given that Modern and Contemporary had no immediate plans for its display, I thought we should take advantage of presenting this new addition to the collection in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing on an axis that leads visitors into the Modern and Contemporary galleries.'



Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin. *Kirsten, Star*, 1997  
Pigment print, 39 2/5 x 29 1/2 inches  
© Inez & Vinoodh / Courtesy Gagosian Gallery



## **DISTURBING INNOCENCE**

### **Curated by Eric Fischl**

#### **Exhibition Dates:**

October 25, 2014 – January 31, 2015

#### **Opening Reception:**

Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 6-8pm

**The FLAG Art Foundation is pleased to present *Disturbing Innocence*, a group exhibition curated by artist Eric Fischl, on view on FLAG's 9<sup>th</sup> floor from October 25, 2014 – January 31, 2015.**

*Disturbing Innocence* features 58 historical and contemporary artists whose use of dolls, toys, mannequins, robots, and other surrogates forms a deep and powerfully expressive genre. The exhibition poses profound questions surrounding social constructs of youth, beauty, transformation, violence, sexuality, gender, identity, and loneliness. Inspired by Fischl's own childhood in suburban Long Island, NY, and his early career as an artist working in New York City in the 1980's, *Disturbing Innocence* presents a subversive and escapist world at odds with the values and pretensions of polite society.

**Selected Artists Include:** Morton Bartlett, Hans Bellmer, Louise Bourgeois, James Casebere, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Gregory Crewdson, James Croak, Henry Darger, E.V. Day, Peter Drake, Carroll Dunham, Inka Essenhigh, Eric Fischl, Alberto Giacometti, Steve Gianakos, Robert Gober, Mike Kelley, Charles LeDray, David Levinthal, Roy Lichtenstein, Sarah Lucas, Paul McCarthy, Walter Martin & Paloma Muñoz, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Jim Nutt, Tony Oursler, David Salle, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Wolfgang Stoeckle, Inez Van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin, John Waters, John Wesley, Lucy Winton, Lisa Yuskavage, among others.

Accompanying the exhibition is a fully illustrated catalogue with an original text by **James Frey**, 'A Real Doll' by **A.M. Homes**, and a conversation featuring **Eric Fischl**, **David Salle**, **Cindy Sherman**, and **Laurie Simmons**, moderated by FLAG Founder **Glenn Fuhrman**.

**Eric Fischl** is an internationally acclaimed American painter and sculptor. His artwork is represented in many distinguished museums throughout the world and has been featured in over one thousand publications. His extraordinary achievements throughout his career have made him one of the most influential figurative painters of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Fischl was born in 1948 in New York City and grew up in the suburbs of Long Island. He began his art education in Phoenix, Arizona where his parents had moved in 1967. He attended Phoenix College and earned his B.F.A. from the California Institute for the Arts in 1972. He then spent some time in Chicago, where he worked as a guard at the Museum of Contemporary Art. In 1974, he moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to teach painting at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Fischl had his first solo show, curated by Bruce W. Ferguson, at Dalhousie Art Gallery in Nova Scotia in 1975 before relocating to New York City in 1978.

Fischl's suburban upbringing provided him with a backdrop of alcoholism and a country club culture obsessed with image over content. His early work thus became focused on the rift between what was experienced and what could not be said. His first New York City solo show was at Edward Thorp Gallery in 1979, during a time when suburbia was not considered a legitimate genre for art. He first received critical attention for depicting the dark, disturbing undercurrents of mainstream American life.

Fischl's paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints have been the subject of numerous solo and major group exhibitions and his work is represented in many museums, as well as prestigious private and corporate collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Whitney Museum of American Art, The Museum of Modern Art in New York City, The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, St. Louis Art Museum, Louisiana Museum of Art in Denmark, Musée Beaubourg in Paris, The Paine Webber Collection, and many others. Fischl has collaborated with other artists and authors, including E.L. Doctorow, Allen Ginsberg, Jamaica Kincaid, Jerry Saltz and Frederic Tuten.

Eric Fischl is also the founder, President and lead curator for *America: Now and Here*. This multi-disciplinary exhibition of 150 of some of America's most celebrated visual artists, musicians, poets, playwrights, and filmmakers is designed to spark a national conversation about American identity through the arts. The project launched on May 5th, 2011 in Kansas City before traveling to Detroit and Chicago.

Eric Fischl is a Fellow at both the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Science. He lives and works in Sag Harbor, NY with his wife, the painter April Gornik.

Founded by art patron **Glenn Fuhrman**, **The FLAG Art Foundation** is a non-profit contemporary arts institution that opened to the public in 2008. Its state-of-the-art exhibition space was designed by noted architect **Richard Gluckman**. FLAG organizes 4 to 6 exhibitions a year, each with a different curator. Past curators have included **Chuck Close**, **Lisa Dennison**, **Prabal Gurung**, **Jim Hodges**, **Shaquille O'Neal**, **Linda Yablonsky**, among others. To date, FLAG has hosted over **30** curated exhibitions, providing a platform for **378** established and emerging artists representing over **25** countries.

Our objective is to encourage the appreciation of contemporary art among a diverse audience. FLAG provides a unique educational environment in which visitors can view, contemplate, and engage in active dialogue with the artworks. Curators select and borrow from a variety of sources to include a wide range of work in each exhibition. FLAG is also a resource that facilitates loans of contemporary artworks to museums around the world. An extensive database of available works is maintained and made available to curators.



## **Goings On About Town: Art**

Friday April 1, 2011

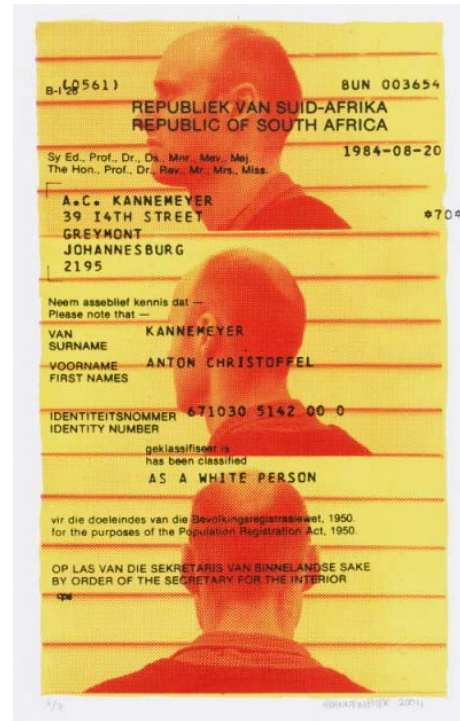
### **Claudette Schreuders**

The South African artist carves and paints small wooden figures with uncannily lifelike eyes. Think of her sculptures, inspired by colonial-era West African statues of Europeans, as the soulful cousins of Stephan Balkenhol's oeuvre. Her latest series touches on domesticity and its alienations. A pregnant woman in white panties gazes into the distance; a uniformed nanny and the infant on her back wear the same resigned expression; a supine couple spoons, his face obscured by her hair. Through April 16.

## Notes from a Transforming Democracy: South African Prints

May 6th, 2011

Sarah Kirk Hanley



*Installation view of "Impressions from South Africa: 1965 to Now" at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Jason Mandella. / Anton Kannemeyer (South African, born 1967), "A White Person," 2004. Screenprint. Composition: 22 3/16 × 13 11/16" (56.3 × 34.8 cm).*

As interest in William Kentridge's work has grown over the past decade, so has interest in South African art as a whole. Printmaking is a central component of the cultural landscape in this country and it is an important form of expression for many of its artists. In general, South African printmaking is characterized by political and emotional honesty and a refreshing fidelity to the technical roots of the medium. Kentridge, of course, is a prolific printmaker (see the November 2010 post of this column), as are Conrad Botes, Norman Catherine, Robert Hodgins, **Anton Kannemeyer**, Cameron Platter, **Claudette Schreuders**, Diane Victor, and Ernestine White, to name a few. The work of these and other artists, who are well known in their homeland, have begun to garner increased attention in the U.S. recently, appearing in art fairs and featured in solo exhibitions at major galleries and museums.

Several exhibitions this year have introduced a wider American audience to the vital printmaking scene in South Africa. Most visible and comprehensive among these is *Impressions from South Africa: 1965 to Now*, a group exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art on view through August 14. Earlier this spring, Boston University hosted dual exhibitions in honor of the 25th anniversary of Caversham Press, the first professional printmaking workshop in South Africa. At the same time, the Falconer Gallery, Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa, launched the first major solo exhibition of Diane Victor's work in this country – an auspicious introduction to this important artist who is becoming better known to an international audience. In March and early April, David Krut Projects mounted "Contemporary South African Prints: DKW and I-Jusi," a retrospective of I-Jusi magazine (an underground art 'zine dedicated to South African identity and politics, founded in 1994), and David Krut Workshop, a professional printmaking studio established in Johannesburg in 2002. Later this fall, Jack Shainman Gallery will host a solo exhibition of **Anton Kannemeyer's** work.

The MoMA exhibition now on view provides "a representative, quality cross-section of contemporary printmaking activities in South Africa over the last five decades," as described by exhibition curator Judith Hecker, Assistant Curator in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books in a recent e-mail interview with the author. Drawn from the museum's collection, the exhibition and accompanying catalogue provide critical insight to role of printmaking in South African culture and politics, presented in terms of the country's recent massive political changes from an apartheid-ruled state to an evolving democracy. In addition to a scholarly essay by Hecker, the accompanying catalogue provides further information and bibliographic citations on each of the artists, collectives, organizations, and workshops represented. It also includes contextualizing photographs and a timeline of printmaking, cultural, and political events.

The exhibition was inspired by Hecker's previous work with William Kentridge's prints (she contributed to the recent traveling exhibition *William Kentridge: Five Themes* and authored a related publication titled *William Kentridge: Trace; Prints from the Museum of Modern Art*) and prompted by a curatorial initiative to "expand the museum's holdings to better represent the breadth of printmaking activities in South Africa" (Hecker in a recent e-mail interview with the author). The first South African artist to enter the print collection was Azaria Mbatha in 1967 but she was the sole representative until the department began to acquire Kentridge's work in earnest in the 1990s. *Impressions from South Africa: 1965 to Now* (and the museum's holdings) were developed over a period of six years; in preparation, Hecker traveled to South Africa for extended periods in 2004 and 2007. As noted in her introduction, this is not the first scholarly examination of the topic (preceded by *Printmaking in a Transforming South Africa*, 1997, and *Rorke's Drift: Empowering Prints; Twenty Years of Printmaking in South Africa*, 2004, both by Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin). However, it is the first to be made widely available to a U.S. and international audience, by virtue of MoMA's visitorship and following.

The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue are divided into five categories, four of which are technique-based – the final category, *Postapartheid: New Directions*, shows the openness and experimentation that characterizes recent print production. Due to the nature of the exhibition, artists are generally represented by only one or a handful of works – therefore, it is best understood as a starting point for exploration. In Hecker's words, "The show, and our holdings, do not aim to be complete or definitive... it reflects

a work in progress; we plan to continue to acquire works by South African artists” (e-mail interview).

The first section focuses on the favored status of linocut amongst South African artists, a tradition that began during apartheid. As discussed by Hecker, its ease of use, affordability, and accessibility made it a natural choice for the community workshops and non-profit art schools that served black artists, who were attracted to its stark graphic power. Early practitioners included Azaria Mbatha, John Muafangejo, Dan Rkogoathe, and Charles Nkosi, many of whom were involved in the Black Consciousness Movement founded by Steve Biko. Their work centered around “themes of ancestry, religion, and liberation” (Hecker, *Impressions from South Africa: 1965 to Now* [New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2011], 12).

In the early 1990s, the country moved through intense political protest and international political pressure into a peaceable – though contentious – conversion to a democratic nation. *Meeting of Two Cultures* (1993), a linocut by Sandile Goje, summarizes the spirit of reconciliation that characterized this period. The image shows two biomorphic homes shaking hands: the structure on the left is in the style of the Xhosa people (who were the original inhabitants of the area), at right is a home characteristic of the European ruling class. The linocut section of the exhibition also includes recent prints of stunning technical achievement by William Kentridge, Vuyile C. Voyiya, Cameron Platter, and others. These are less intensely political in their subject matter, though still grounded in the recent history of the nation.

The second area of the exhibition examines the role of posters in mobilizing the citizenry during the peak years of anti-apartheid protest in the 1980s. Underground organizations such as Medu Art Ensemble (formed by exiles in Botswana), United Democratic Front, Save the Press Campaign, and Gardens Media Project produced bold printed materials in response to harsh legislation enacted by the government that were posted or distributed in the streets.

Intaglio prints comprise the third section of the exhibition. A technically challenging process, the equipment and training necessary for intaglio printing usually necessitates collaboration with a master printer. Caversham Press (now Caversham Centre), founded in 1985 by Malcolm Christian, was the country’s first professional printmaking workshop to provide this service. Robert Hodgins, Deborah Bell, Norman Catherine, Mmapula Mmakgoba Helen Sebidi, and William Kentridge were among the first to be invited to work at Caversham Press. The nation was embroiled in deep political strife at the time and the situation was reflected in a majority of the work produced. Norman Catherine’s *Witch Hunt*, a hand-colored drypoint from 1988, captures the intense and violent presence of military forces in the streets.

In the early 1990s, Caversham changed its name and expanded its mission to provide training and resources to emerging artists and the community. (A dual retrospective and group exhibition of work produced at Caversham over the past 25 years was hosted earlier this year by Boston University College of Fine Arts.) Caversham was joined by several other professional presses over the following decade – including The Artists’ Press, White River; Hard Ground Printmakers Workshop; David Krut Workshop; and Fine Line Press, Rhodes University – making the techniques of intaglio and lithography more available to artists in South Africa.



Also on view in this section are a selection of eight prints by Diane Victor, who has recently garnered well-deserved international attention for her exquisite allegorical intaglios and drawings that mine the psychological ramifications of the nation's history of apartheid. The works on view at MoMA are from her ongoing *Disasters of Peace* series. Like Goya's famed *Disasters of War* series, upon which they are based, this ongoing series of prints calls attention to human atrocities in an allegorical format.

Earlier this year, Victor was the subject of a major solo exhibition at the Faulconer Gallery, Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa – her first in the U.S. (Grinnell College also played an important role in promoting Kentridge's graphic work in this country.) The exhibition, *Of Fables and Folly: Diane Victor, Recent Work*, curated by Kay Wilson, covered the past ten years of the artist's production and featured several intaglio prints, including the *Disasters of Peace* and *Birth of a Nation* series, as well as a number of drawings, some of which were created specifically for this installation. *Birth of a Nation*, a series of ten drypoints completed last year, is an extended allegorical commentary on the legacy of colonial power in South Africa (additional images and further discussion available on the David Krut Projects website). The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue (downloadable pdf [here](#)) with an essay by Jacki McInnes, a South African artist, curator, and writer, who astutely discusses Victor's "searing, uncompromising, and unremitting response" to the severe inequities that are still apparent in her native land.

As seen in the Grinnell exhibition, Victor's has developed two signature drawing techniques that produce haunting effects in service to her artistic vision. Victor's "stain drawings," in which she applies controlled areas of charcoal staining to drawn figures, either evoke the fragility of the body or the corruption of power, depending upon Victor's intention. Likewise, the fluidity of her "smoke portraits," which she produces through manipulation of the carbon by-product of a burning candle, convey a startling and ghostly humanity to the native peoples of South Africa that are her subject (many of whom are prisoners awaiting trial). This technique is extremely delicate and can be destroyed with the slightest contact – a parallel to the transience of human life and individual destiny that she finds particularly satisfying (images are available on the David Krut projects website). In September of 2010, Victor completed a residency at the Center for Contemporary Printmaking in Norwalk, Connecticut, where she was able to translate her smoke drawing technique into intaglio form for the first time with the assistance of Master Printer Anthony Kirk (one example pictured at top). She also completed three drypoints there that are currently in the process of being editioned.

Returning to the exhibition at MoMA, the intaglio section is followed by an area devoted to the use of photographic source material in prints. The works on view demonstrate a range of approaches, from straightforward documentary to manipulated imagery, most of which address social and political issues. To create *For Thirty Years Next to His Heart*, 1990, Sue Williamson scanned each page of an individual's passbook — an "icon of apartheid," (Williamson as quoted in Hecker, 17) that served as an identification document similar to a visa. Non-white citizens were required to carry one at all times and present it to officials upon request; records of employment and location changes were inscribed within. Passbook laws were repealed in 1986, but the owner of this example continued to carry his for several years, out of habit and as a measure of imagined security. Nearby, **Anton Kannemeyer's** *A White Person*, 2004, shows the flip side of these regulations – in this work, the artist enlarged the simple identification card that confirmed his status as a white person (who was therefore free to come and go as

he pleased), superimposed over three photographs of his head at different angles that resemble mug shots.

The closing section of the MoMA exhibition is dedicated to new directions in printmaking by South African artists. As the political climate has cooled somewhat, so has the intensity of political expression in art. Though some artists remain overtly grounded in political issues and critiques of government, others refer to the nation's past and present obliquely, or not at all. *Bitterkomix*, an underground art comic founded in 1992 by Corad Botes (a.k.a Konradski) and **Anton Kannemeyer** (a.k.a. Joe Dog), employs the graphic novel form to satirize various aspects of South African government and culture. (*Bitterkomix 14* and *Bitterkomix 15* can be previewed on Google books – please note that some strips are in Afrikaans and/or contain explicit material). Cameron Platter — who works in sculpture, film, and digital printmaking — combines traditional South African cultural influences (including folklore, linocut, and woodcarving) with the visual language of street life to create playfully provocative commentary on contemporary life in his homeland. Ernestine White — a printmaker and curator who lived in the United States from ages 11 to 26 and trained at the Tamarind Institute in New Mexico (see the October 2010 post for this column) —explores issues of identity and belonging in her experimental prints, some of which are presented in wall installations; recent work has focused on child abuse and children's rights issues. In contrast to the above artists, sculptor and printmaker **Claudette Schreuders** creates doll-like figures that seem to be involved in quiet dramas of a personal nature. Though traditional African art is an occasional referent in her work, the focus is on creating psychologically suggestive scenes. Likewise, Paul Edmunds works in a minimalist and formal vein that is quite removed from the harsh political and social history of South Africa, though it is grounded in the material culture of his country.

As seen in recent museum and gallery exhibitions, international and American art audiences are eager for a deeper exploration and understanding of the prodigious printmaking activity in South Africa over the past several decades. From traditional linocuts to contemporary digital satire, the universe of South African prints provides a wealth of compelling work for the curious. The proliferation of print workshops and professional training schools ensure a rich and varied future for print production in South Africa, which will surely continue to evolve as the nation matures and settles into its status as a free nation.

## Our history, from afar

PETRA MASON NEW YORK, UNITED STATES - Apr 06 2011

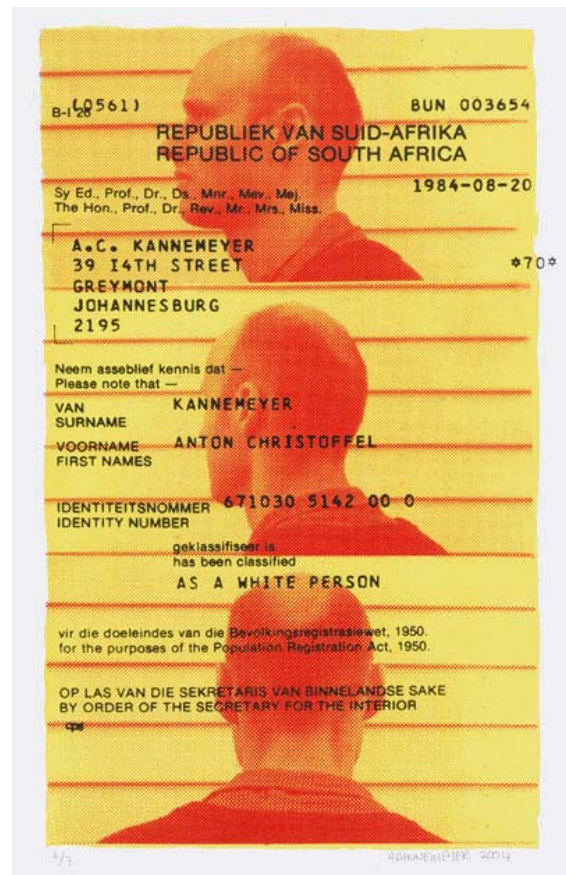
It's supposed to be springtime in New York City, but the weather reports "a wintry mix", which means that in the half-hour it took to get from downtown Soho to the **Museum of Modern Art** (MoMA) uptown, it hailed, snowed and rained.

Typically, MoMA's opening night events are harder to get into than most small countries, and on this opening night MoMA's bouncers are, as always, ready to rumble. Once security had confirmed my ID and my RSVP, I made a beeline to the most well-attended area at all MoMA openings, the open bar, at which a seething mass of expensively dressed people elbowed each other for drinks.

Some headed to *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now* on the second floor, and others took elevators and escalators up to the sixth floor for the opening of *German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse*, an exhibition focusing on a particularly bleak period in history during which virtually all German and Austrian artists took up printmaking with a fervour unparalleled in art history.

Sound familiar?

Michele Senecal, executive director of the International Fine Print Dealers' Association, with whom I walked the show, noted, "Seeing the South African work immediately after viewing the German expressionism show, I was struck by the parallels between the works done during apartheid in the one and the works that German artists were producing immediately following World War I, when there was clearly a lot of cynicism and anger towards the ruling elite.



Anton Kannemeyer. *A White Person* (2004). Screenprint, composition

### OVERT PROTEST

"These works were far more contemporary in feel than I expected, and an overt protest at

the situation [high inflation, abuse of power] confronting the populace at the time. The juxtaposition of slogans within the compositions and use of colour, the raw and urgent feeling of the manner in which they were printed -- there was a surprising correspondence."

Art dealer **Jack Shainman** of Jack Shainman Gallery and I discussed South African artist Claudette Schreuders's new solo exhibition of sculptures and limited edition lithographs titled *Close, Close* that opened just days before at his gallery in Chelsea.

Shainman discovered **Schreuders's** work back in 1999 after seeing an image in the *New York Times*. A major book, *Claudette Schreuders*, published by Prestel, accompanies the exhibit.

**Claudette Schreuders.** *The Couple from Crying in Public* (2003). One from a series of nine lithographs with chine collé, composition

Eight of **Schreuders's** lithographs feature on *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now*, as do more than 80 prints, posters, books and wall stencils produced by about 30 artists and cultural workers during and after the apartheid era.



#### PUNK-INSPIRED CUT 'N PASTE

Organised by Judith Hecker, assistant curator for MoMA's department of prints and illustrated books, and drawn from the museum's expanding South African art collection, the exhibit features linocuts; screen-print and offset lithography; intaglio; photocopies; and punk-inspired cut 'n paste, collaborative silk-screen collages enlarged on a photocopier and transferred to scraperboard and stencilled, a style that was all the rage with underground activists in the 1980s during the State of Emergency.

Hand-printed and hand-painted T-shirts were worn as a form of protest, like wearable graffiti, and occasionally activists were forced to go shirtless if the slogan upset a "kits konstable" who could actually read.

Silkscreened and hand-coloured textiles are surprisingly under-represented at the show: there is just one Freedom Charter T-shirt shown. Perhaps one day Alwyn Petersen's witty *Sun, Sea and Socialism* prints, Jann and Jane's Fabricnation creations and Steven Cohen's late 1980s *Alice in Pretoria* muse will show up in a future *Impressions* exhibit.

In the foreword for the catalogue, Glenn Lowry, the director of MoMA, acknowledges that the project is a starting point for further reflection on South Africa. Thanks to Hecker, the conversation is heating up, and because of this impressive showcase, we're finally talking about more than just the formidable William Kentridge.

In the post-apartheid work on show, a remix of icons show up, as in as Diane Victor's powerful Goya-inspired *Disasters of Peace* (2001) and in Cameron Platter's giant homage to John Muafangejo, *The Battle of Rorke's Drift at Club Dirty Den* (2009).

#### PARTICULARLY RUNTY TIME

The poster boy for the show is Conrad Botes's *Secret Language II* (2005), which features a *kak evil ou* covered in chappies, or prison tattoos, suggesting that "ke nako" comes and goes, as do the bad cops and military men who show up in Robert Hodgins's *Sarge* (2007) or in Zimbabwean Kudzanai Chiurai's *Abuse of Power* (2009).

At this particularly runty time in our shared cultural history, at a point where most artists have something to sell rather than something to say, *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now* makes a strong resistance-art statement that shouts out from most, but not all, of the many workshops, studios and community arts organizations active during and post-apartheid.

But to earn the title *1965 to Now*, more artists need be included to add more voices and depth to the dialogue.

- ***Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now* is on show at New York's Museum of Modern Art until August 14 2011.**



## Claudette Schreuders at Jack Shainman

Greeting visitors to "The Fall," a recent show of polychrome wood sculptures and color lithographs by South African artist Claudette Schreuders, was a female figure that set the serene, symbolically resonant tone of the exhibition. Typically somber and, at 35 inches, average in height for works by this artist, *Paradise*, as the figure is titled, wears a sleeveless pink shift and tenders a small blue-and-white bird with a red bill, perched on her right hand. Schreuders carves her wood—most often, as here, jacaranda—with great sensitivity. The unpainted areas of light-brown flesh were smoothed to bring out the wood's concentric grain, which encircles the calves and elbows and lends a subtle surface animation to the otherwise still figure, as if welling up from a life force kept cautiously contained.

Of the nine sculptures in the show (all but one dated 2006), five, including *Paradise*, have related, vaguely Edenic subjects. *The Fall* is a couple, male and female, standing side by side, with the woman, in shorts and a tee-shirt, cupping a tiny baby in her right palm. *The Beginning* shows the same Adam-and-Eve surrogates, this time nude, with the woman emerging waist up from the belly of the supine man. *Departure* is just the nude woman covering her face with her hands as she stumbles blindly along, adopting the pose of Adam in Masaccio's Brancacci Chapel fresco; and *Arrival* has the woman lying down, with a baby emerging from her stomach. The unlikely looking villain of the group is *Trespasser*, a standing female figure—a "third person" representing the serpent, as the press release informs us—wearing a red shirt and blue pants, her hands sullenly thrust in her pockets. Only the Masaccio reference makes an iconographic leap into Western art history, so it is the titles and press notes that are left to provide the key to this loose tableau. But piecing

together a narrative is unnecessary, as each of the sculptures stands on its own with no greater or lesser mystery than it possesses in the company as a whole.

Based on a type of carving called "colon" (depictions of European settlers by Africans, made throughout the colonial period and adopted in ancestor worship), Schreuders's figures, with their oversized heads and generalized features, have the look of folk art, surreal and chaste. Sometimes, as in lithographs of a woman with sunburnt arms, or of "twins"—seated, cross-legged children, one black and one white—they elliptically address racial identity in South Africa. Dressed in their homely garb, all have the feeling of secularized gods, incorporating as they do elements of religious representations across cultures. One is reminded both of traditional African carving and of the seated, solemn-faced wooden virgins of Romanesque Europe, as well as of sacred effigies in many Catholic societies that are paraded in the streets during festivals.

Schreuders made the fine color lithographs on view here in 2006 at Artists' Press, a rural studio in Mpumalanga, South Africa. Situated against a white background, remote and isolated, are characters based on her sculptures—no less singular and self-contained on paper than they are in three dimensions. This is art that is tacit rather than voluble, respecting the complexities of history and influence and offering no explanations.

—Faye Hirsch

Claudette Schreuders: *The Fall*, 2006, painted jacaranda wood, 37 by 29 by 10 inches overall; at Jack Shainman.



## Personal Affects: Power and Poetics Opens

September 22, 2004



Claudette Schreuders  
*The Free Girl (detail)*, 2004  
Jacaranda wood, enamel paint  
59 x 20 x 20 in.

**NEW YORK.-** The Museum for African Art and The Cathedral of St. John the Divine will jointly host Season South Africa, a major program of contemporary visual and performing arts that runs from September 2004 through January 2005. Produced by the Museum for African Art and Spier, Season South Africa includes a visual art exhibition featuring seventeen South African artists and a series of lyric theater productions by the company Dimpho Di Kopane, as well as a range of lectures and other public programs. Launched during the year that South Africa is commemorating its first decade of democracy, Season South Africa showcases some of the most gifted and acclaimed contemporary visual and performing artists from the country chosen by an international team of curators.

Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art will be on view at two locations in New York City: at the Museum for African Art in Long Island City from September 23, 2004 to January 3, 2005; and, at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Manhattan, from September 24 to December 5, 2004. Performances by lyric theater company Dimpho Di Kopane will take place in Synod Hall at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine from October 27 to November 28, 2004. A free shuttle service will run between the two venues on the weekends to assist in viewing the entirety of the exhibition.

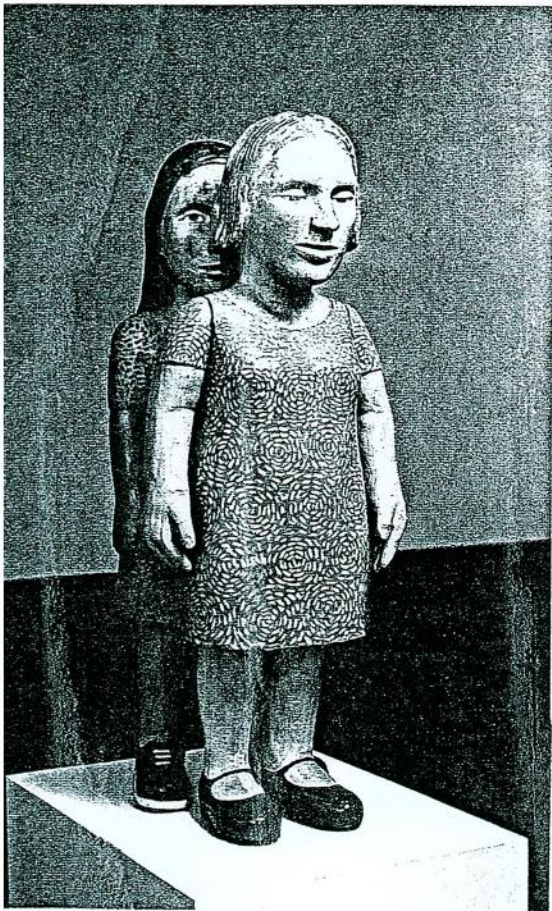
Personal Affects presents newly commissioned and recently produced works by seventeen South African artists. The artworks represent artists' responses to a weeklong stay in New York and visits with a team of international curators. The exhibition features an extraordinary lineup of artists working in diverse media, including sculpture, drawing, photography, painting, installation, video, performance and dance. The common thread throughout the exhibition is the highly personal point of departure of their working methods, informed by their varied experiences as South Africans. Participating artists are Jane Alexander, Wim Botha, Steven Cohen, Churchill Madikida, Mustafa Maluka, Thando Mama, Samson Mudzunga, Jay Pather, Johannes Phokela, Robin Rhode, Claudette Schreuders, Berni Searle, Doreen Southwood, Clive van den Berg, Minnette Vári, Diane Victor and Sandile Zulu.

Running concurrently with Personal Affects at the Museum for African Art will be Glimpses from the South: a Selection of African Art from the Johannesburg Art Gallery. This exhibition constitutes one of the many aspects in which South African institutions have collaborated with the Museum for African Art in New York to create Season South Africa. It includes masterpieces of traditional South African art and will open September 23, 2004 at the Museum for African Art's Focus Gallery, and will run through February 28, 2005.



## Claudette Schreuders: Identity and Belonging

by Paul Edmunds



*The Third Person*, 2002. Jacaranda and avocado wood and enamel, 37 x 27 x 17 in.

tion opened in spring 2004 at the Arizona State University Art Museum and moved to the University Art Gallery at San Diego State University this month.

Schreuders's figurative sculptures situate themselves on a narrative continuum that is at once uniquely personal, specifically South African, and irrefutably universal. Her carved, painted wooden pieces have numerous sculptural precedents—from carved and painted Baroque saints to Spanish and Latin American images of martyrs, to West African Colon figures. Schreuders acknowledges all of these influences but points out that the African reference only became apparent after she had made her earliest student work. Working with uncut timber, Schreuders carves beautiful, solid figures. They are mostly smaller than life size and partially painted. Facial and gestural features are highly refined and exquisitely modeled, while larger, simpler expanses sometimes retain light chisel marks or are painted in a decorative way. Her figures are imposing and occupy physical and emotional space very convincingly. Their faces are largely expressionless, but the figures carry a quiet, melancholic air that makes them vessels for emotions and issues. The juxtaposition of figures with each other is essential to a reading of Schreuders's work, and as such she prefers to exhibit them as a body.

Her first carved and polychromed figure was *Lokke*, an Afrikaans word that translates as “locks.” This refers to the disparaging nickname given to a girl at Schreuders's high school because of her hairstyle. In many ways, this piece became the paradigm for most of her subsequent work. The stocky figure, topped by a slightly enlarged head, recalls the technique of carica-

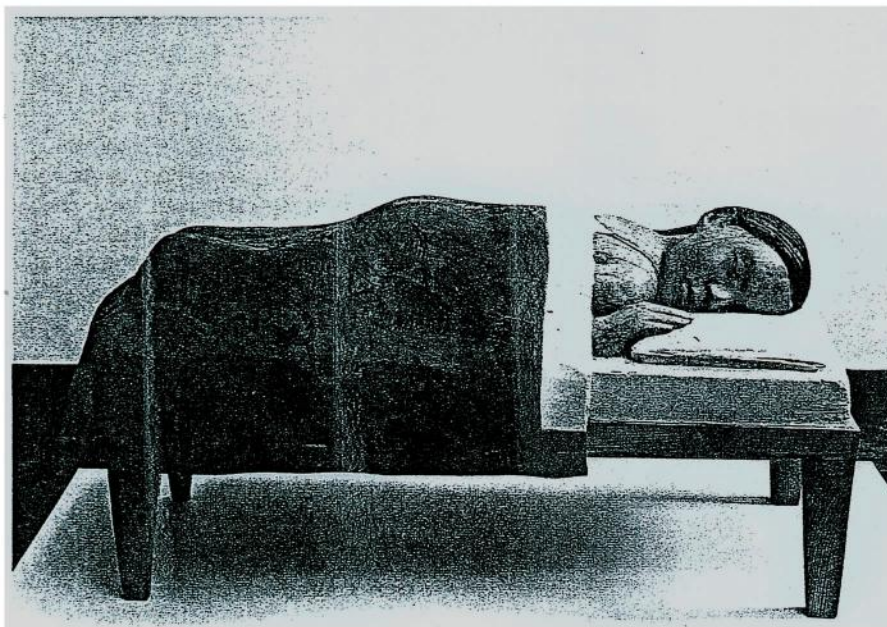
ture as much as the aforementioned Colon figures. However, the degree of pathos with which Schreuders imbues this figure sets it apart from those traditions, tracing a more personal narrative trajectory. The work relates an episode in which the girl in question was made to stand atop a school desk and then ridiculed for her unshaven legs. The subject is clearly an outsider who is not tolerated because of her difference. Schreuders sees this as a metaphor for South African society at the time, which shunned any kind of non-conformity: intolerance at a personal level ultimately manifested itself in the policies and practices of Apartheid.

The “outsider” position is one of the keys to understanding her work in terms of the Colon figures. These painted figures, ubiquitous in craft and informal markets here, usually depict Europeans, who clearly represent an alien presence. Schreuders has developed her exploration of this liminal status, connecting it to the all-pervasive sense of dislocation felt by many white South Africans. At the time of *Lokke's* production, Schreuders was interested in presenting the work as a kind of martyr figure, which has many parallels in the Western tradition of woodcarving. That early body of work, titled “Family Tree,” includes a number of other pieces exploring similar themes and further develops her evocation of the personal and universal.

In *Mother and Child*, Schreuders combines Western mother and child tableaux with a similar African tradition of mother and child icons. In a family photograph album, Schreuders found only one image of a black person. The picture showed her nanny holding her as a child, and this is what the work depicts. The fraught and short-lived intimacy of this relationship runs parallel to the implied story unfolding on the other side of the coin: the nanny's children are raised by someone else in her absence.

In a later body of work, “Belonging,” Schreuders further examined her status as a white South African in a series of quiet sculptures that assume a more





Clockwise from top: *Love Story*, 2002. Jacaranda wood and enamel paint, 26 x 13.3 x 17.3 in. *Show and Tell*, 2002. Jacaranda wood and enamel paint, 21 x 7 x 6 in. *The Narrow Bed*, 2002. Jacaranda wood and enamel paint, 16.5 x 20.5 x 37.3 in.

iconic quality. *Burnt by the sun* is a near life-sized figure of a white woman in a light white dress examining the sunburn that extends halfway up her arms. Relating, in all likelihood, an incident from her own life, the work is a poignant meditation on the relationship between white South Africans and their homeland. As much disfigured by the hostile environment as over-exposed to harsh reality, the figure is immobilized by her predicament. This uncertainty exists at another level for the

artist. Schreuders's father moved here from Holland as a teenager, so although she was brought up as an Afrikaner, she is unable to lay claim to either Dutch or South African heritage.

In "Six Stories" (2002), Schreuders produced a portrait of South African writer Olive Schreiner to dissect the multi-layered issue of identity and belonging. The large, solid bust presents a stoic, unmoving portrait of the English woman who was bold enough to criticize her countrymen for their treatment of Afrikaners in the notorious concentration camps of the South African War. Never quite accepted by the Afrikaners, she was also rejected by the English.

In her newest series, "The Long Day," Schreuders once again examines the idea

of isolation. Here though, the idea of an outsider turns in on itself. The isolation she explores is the result of imprisonment in the home. Living and working now in a Johannesburg suburb, Schreuders has become increasingly aware of the self-imposed isolation represented by high walls and impenetrable perimeters. She relates this to her own experience: "After living in my present house for a year, I only met most of my neighbors when my elderly neighbor (who does not have a high wall) was stabbed by intruders and everybody came out of their houses to see what had happened." The exhibition includes a large *Boyfriend* whose return home from work signals the end of "The Long Day." There is also the small bleeding figure—*The Neighbour*—while the domestic scene is completed by, among others, the *Three Sisters*, who appear preoccupied with thoughts about career, love, and children.

*Paul Edmunds is an artist living in Cape Town, South Africa.*



# art | southafrica

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# Living in Linden

Claudette Schreuders' new body of work, *The Long Day*, makes powerful observations about ordinary lives. By **Rory Bester**

**This page:** Claudette Schreuders, *The Long Day*, Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary Art, installation view with (foreground) *Lady Luck*, 2004, avocado wood and enamel paint, height 63cm  
**Facing page:** Claudette Schreuders, *The Long Day*, 2004, detail, jacaranda wood and enamel paint, length 79cm. Photos: Fotophile, courtesy of Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary Art

Linden is an unassuming neighbourhood on a gentle southeast-facing slope in Johannesburg's northern suburbs. Once a large farm prized for its peaches, the suburb evolved into a series of mostly brown face-brick houses set forward enough on narrow properties to leave unusually large backyards. They offer residents and visitors the opportunity to disappear in the suburb, into large, secret spaces hidden behind homes. Of late the face-brick has become plastered over by renovation, and, for visitors, high and sharp walls have dislocated the forward proximity of these homes on their slender lots. The overwhelming need to secure and feel secure dislocates neighbours within their neighbourhoods and makes living in Linden little different from living in South Africa.

Claudette Schreuders lives in Linden (for now at least). For those who never leave a suburb the familiarity is enormously comforting. For those who leave and never come back the familiarity is uneasy and discomforting. Those who stay are

often nervous of those who leave, and the latter are generally dismissive of those who linger. Schreuders is somewhere in between. She went to green, yellow and a bit of brown Linden High School, left for the better part of a decade, and, much to her surprise, came back again. She's at ease in Linden. And it has informed much of her new body of work, *The Long Day*, a series of new sculptures and lithographs on show in different forms at Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary in Johannesburg, then travelling to Arizona State University Art Museum in Tempe, and San Diego State University Art Gallery.

A long day is usually too long. It's also hard. In *The Long Day* (2004), the title sculpture of Schreuders' latest exhibition, a woman lies on her back, dressed casually in a white vest and flower-patterned panties. At first glance it implies a yogic domesticity, just beyond the view of public scrutiny. But the woman's head is raised ever so slightly. Frozen at that moment, it suggests significant effort. The day is long in









**Left:** Claudette Schreuders, *Melancholy Boy*, 2000, yellow wood  
**Middle:** Claudette Schreuders, *Burnt by the Sun*, 2000, enamel on jacaranda and avocado wood  
**Right:** Claudette Schreuders, *Owner of Two Swimsuits*, 2000, enamel on jacaranda wood

advance of itself. And it proposes a distinct relationship between inside and outside, not only in the sense of belonging to the social structures of personal relationships, families and communities, but also in the sense of what is welcome in the inner sanctum of the home and what remains (we think) distinctly outside of it in a greater unknown. It sets something of an existentialist tone that imposes itself on general readings of the exhibition.

On the surface Schreuders' new sculptures don't seem to be about anything in particular, but each work possesses perspectives and insights into an ordinary existence that is utterly socialised. They are incisive social commentaries of personal ordinariness, establishing quite lyrical links between the personal and social (and even political). From the general use of small solitary figures, replete with the aura of invisible narratives, to the generally expressionless faces that inhabit each of

*Owner of Two Swimsuits* (2000) and *Sun Stroke* (2000) are at once ambiguous meditations on whiteness, and anxious examinations of changing identities. This is most apparent in *Burnt by the Sun* (2000), in which a woman in a white dress brings her hands closer to her face to examine the effect of sunburn. Her face isn't written with pain or irritation, but rather with a slow curiosity, as though the burn had never happened before.

It is a curious combination of ambiguity and anxiety because the artist seems largely at ease with the strongly autobiographical content of her work. In *Show and Tell* (2002) – first as a sculpture, and now as a lithographic document of this sculpture (in *The Long Day*) – a woman opens her white shirt and partially reveals her chest to the viewer. There is nothing erotic about the gesture. It seems matter-of-fact, a necessary part of everyday life. She reveals intimate stories about herself, making public what for most remains private. While she is sometimes anxious about telling more than she should to people she doesn't know, it seems easier for her to make art when she isn't pressured to think outside of her world: "It's important for me to use my reality – rather than leaving it – when making art."<sup>1</sup>

Schreuders' autobiography repeatedly references belonging. In *Lokke* (1994), a student work that is often cited as the one bookend of her current style, a schoolgirl stands on top of a government-issue flip-top desk with her oversized hands slightly upturned. One senses her palms – and her entire being – are about to be exposed to further humiliation. She is anxious and vulnerable. It's not the artist. But it is a vivid memory of a classmate ridiculed for being too different. Similarly, *Melancholy Boy* (2000) – a redheaded boy in Y-fronts that formed part of Schreuders' *Burnt by the Sun* exhibition – has a Swahili inscription just at his waistline: the pointing boy, and the reader, are lost (in melancholy) without the translation of this wisdom of belonging: "The one who wants you to leave will not tell you so".

The identity politics that has fueled the relationship between *Nederlanders* and *Afrikaners* has taken an interesting turn of late with the emergence of a recently emigrated and growing *Afrikaner* community in the Netherlands. The social translation from *Afrikaans* to Dutch is an upstream revisitation

Schreuders' new sculptures don't seem to be about anything in particular, but each work possesses perspectives and insights into an ordinary existence

these bodies, from the overwhelming use of Jacaranda wood – a tree native to the tropical Americas and imported to South Africa during the colonial era – that implies an at once regarded and disregarded skin tone, to the hushed enamel tones with which she dresses most of her wooden figures, Schreuders has established a style that is curiously ambiguous, and overwhelmingly anxious.

No more so than in *Burnt by the Sun*, Schreuders' first solo exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York in March 2001. Inspired largely by her experience during a residency in Kenya – and more especially her pale skin's reaction to the sun, and her fellow artists' reaction to her sunburn – this exhibition is a meditation on fragile identities. *Burnt by the Sun* (2000),





of a long history of forgotten ties. As the child of first- and second-generation Dutch immigrants to South Africa, Schreuders is something of the opposite. Having grown up with Dutch traditions, she's more an Afrikaans speaker than an Afrikaner. The ripple between the language of belonging and the rituals of identity come together in Schreuders' *The Writer* (2001), a memorial to lost belonging, to the way in which Olive Schreiner wrote herself out of English society but was never accepted by the Afrikaner society she so passionately defended in wartime South Africa.

We all shed identities when they lose their fit. *Missing Person* (2004) is a single figure of a girl in a green school uniform, not unlike the one Schreuders wore at Linden High School. It is one of those few occasions in which Schreuders mimics a self-portrait. It is a memory that parents hold of their children more than children hold of themselves. While the title is ambiguous enough to suggest a more sinister narrative, it lingers more in the memory of loss, of growing up and forgetting what you once were. It is a reminder that is often jogged when returning to a suburb – as an adult – that you once grew up in as a child. Old familiar routes become partial reminders of what once was, and new routes become ways of comfortably remembering what was missing.

As a series of stories about the artist's house in suburban Johannesburg, *The Long Day* includes *The Quiet Brother* (2004), *The Three Sisters* (2004) – a sequel to a work included in *Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa* at the Museum for African Art in New York – and *Ben* (2004), a life-size sculpture of her Siamese cat. In bringing together the characters of the long day in a sort of family tree, Schreuders brings a familiarity to this interior world, and also a sense that identity is formed by interpersonal relationships. At the same time the collective effect of these works is a lamentation for a world that seems far away. There is a sense that being in suburbia feels like there is nothing out there. Well, mostly.



Many of Schreuders' individual works gain their initial momentum from viewing other exhibitions of sculpture. Out of an encounter with anguished religious sculpture from Spain came *The Neighbour* (2004). Based on an actual incident – in which burglars assaulted a neighbour across the road from her house – the sculpture shows only the elderly, slouched man, neatly dressed in a short-sleeve shirt and shorts in shades of brown, with a small trickle of blood dripping down the side of his head. He is a single figure of loneliness and like so many of her other sculptures, there is a sense of restraint, even paralysis, in a face that is emptied of expression or reaction (not unlike the resignation that JM Coetzee so deftly laid bare in *Disgrace*). While not a specimen of taxonomy, *The Neighbour* is certainly a photographic moment of the memory of the mind.

In being isolated from those around you by the security of enclosure, neighbours are part of your world, but also always just outside it. In consciousness, they seem quite far away. In a series of sculptures about the long day, about the people who enter and leave the artist's home, *The Neighbour* is an outsider, a momentary guest in a family album. He signifies a release from the isolation of an enclave. It marks a point of contact with surrounding suburbia in which other neighbours also came out into the street to witness the effects of crime in their suburb. The threat of violence keeps people apart and isolated, but the realisation of that threat brings them together as strangers in the street. Crime and violence beget strangeness as much as familiarity.

Unlike some of the installation-like combinations of sculptures in earlier exhibitions, *The Long Day* is made up entirely of solitary figures. It has the combining effect of not only stressing the isolation that has preoccupied much of her exploration of suburban proximity, but also disjoining the narrative that forms the basis of individual works. In carefully mapping the titles of her sculptures, Schreuders set up her figures in

**Left:** Claudette Schreuders, *New Shoes*, 2004, jacaranda wood and enamel paint, height 78cm

**Middle:** Claudette Schreuders, *Lady Luck*, 2004, wall sculpture, avocado wood and enamel paint, height 63cm

**Right:** Claudette Schreuders, *Missing Person*, 2004, jacaranda wood and enamel paint, height 116cm

**Inset:** Installation view of lithographs, Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary Art





expectation of the suffocating unknowingness of narrative context. The overlapping showing of Johannes Segogela's *Revelations* at the Goodman Gallery just across the way from Warren Siebrits Modern and Contemporary is illustrative in emphasising the difference between Schreuders' sense of a figurative moment and Segogela's illustration of social scenery.

Without a referencing sociability, the isolation that is induced by fear inevitably turns to loneliness. And loneliness is a fertile hunting ground for dreams or fantasy. One of Schreuders' earlier works, *The Narrow Bed* (2002), is a suffocating study in such loneliness. A woman lies facedown on a bed, covered by a lightly patterned red blanket. Lying with her back to the world, her half open eyes mark a chafing between sleep and wakefulness, between the reality of loneliness and the fantasy of something else. The bed, barely the width of her body, reinforces the solitariness of her sleep. There is a tension between the quietude of the resting body and the confining size of a bed without shared possibilities. But in marking loneliness, Schreuders – importantly – leaves it without judgment or fear.

*The Narrow Bed* is part of Schreuders' *Crying in Public*, an exhibition that is represented in its entirety as a series of editioned lithographs in *The Long Day*. Each lithograph (dated 2003) is a frank document of the sculptures that made up this exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery in November 2002. Like the original sculptures, the prints explore those often-awkward (and even embarrassing) moments of love and family that commence as a series of fantasies of an emerging adulthood and later become the cumulative realities of growing older. The titles of all of Schreuders' exhibitions are drawn from a single work on show. *Crying in Public* (2002) is a replica of tension and anxiety, from the woman's clenched brow and few glisten-

Without a referencing sociability, the isolation that is induced by fear inevitably turns to loneliness. And loneliness is a fertile hunting ground for dreams ...

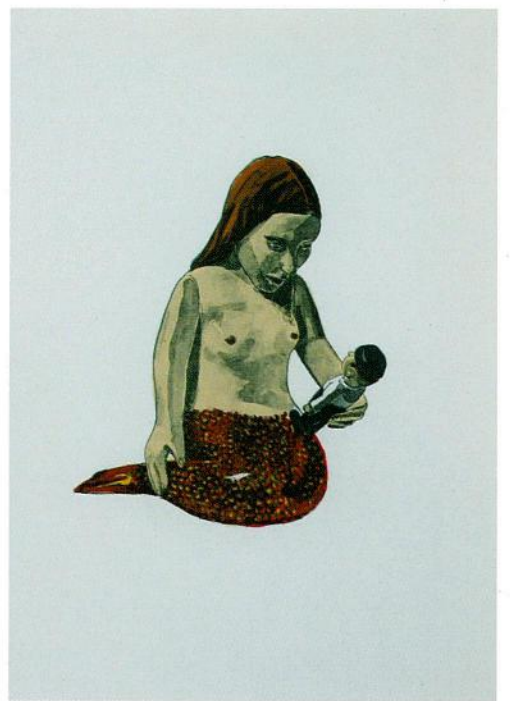
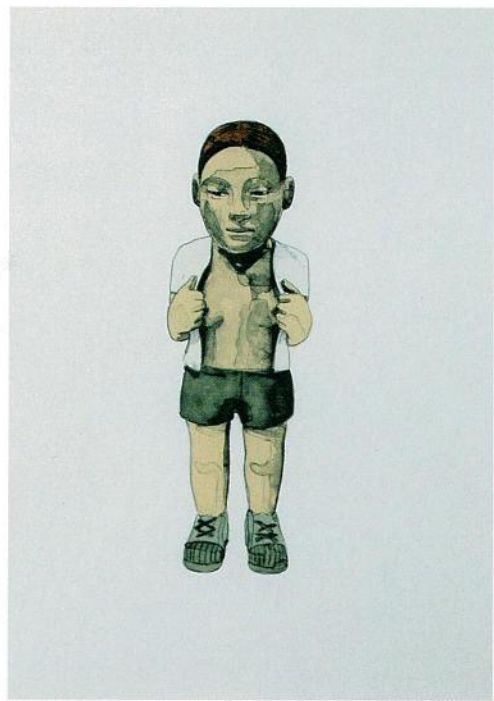
ing tears to the roughly hewn but clearly tight fists.

*The Third Person* (2002) and *Love Story* (2002) are two works from the *Crying in Public* exhibition that capture this sense of growing up and older. The former consists of two female figures uncomfortably close to one another. The closeness is as much the mental as physical presence of another person who hovers at the sideline of an already existing relationship. The latter is of a small sculpture of a mermaid, her face stiff in disbelief as she stares at the tiny man she holds in her left hand. These two works have seen four different iterations: as sculptures, which were then expanded into one-colour comic stories for *Bitterkomix 12*; the comics gained colour in the form of a limited edition lithographs, and were finally contracted back into lithographic documents of the original sculptures.

*Love Story* brings together two influences from African ritual and tradition that featured in much of Schreuders' early work: Mami Wata (and even the more erotic La Sirene) and the colon figure, the former a dual world figure of especially financial prosperity and the latter a material manifestation of a problem in need of some or other solution. Schreuders plays with scale in both the original sculpture and the colour comic in order to not only reference the colon figure (in scale more than

**Above:** Installation view, *Crying in Public*, 2002, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York  
**Facing page, clockwise from top left:** Claudette Schreuders, *Show and Tell*, 2002, jacaranda wood and enamel paint; *Show and Tell*, 2003, lithograph; *Love Story*, 2003, lithograph; *The Narrow Bed*, 2003, lithograph; *The Third Person*, 2002, jacaranda and avocado wood; *The Third Person*, 2003, lithograph; *The Lover*, 2003, lithograph; *The Narrow Bed*, 2002, jacaranda wood and enamel paint









The Boyfriend is also an incidental signal to an art world preoccupied by monumentality. Because you won't find Schreuders' sculptures at any major South African museum (for now at least)

Installation view of *The Long Day*, showing (foreground) *Ben*, 2004, jacaranda wood and oil paint, length 58cm, and (left) *The Boyfriend*, 2004, jacaranda wood and enamel paint, height 87cm

proportions, for the colon figure is traditionally top heavy) – and its suggestion of a problem that the mermaid needs solving – but also establish the mermaid's expectation of love and her disappointment when what is distant comes up close and small.

In what is probably Schreuders' most overt statement of love, *The Boyfriend* (2004) is a monumental – by the artist's smaller-than-life standards – head of her lover. Its sheer size, and lack of painterly effect, has the dual effect of creating the dominant marker of relief in a long day. It makes the rest of the artist's world (and those who inhabit it) seem small by comparison. And it signals the one end of a dramatic (and almost jarring) journey in which the small and "problematic" sailor that is the object of the mermaid's concern in the lithographic rendition of *Love Story* becomes the absolute centre of the artist's attention. There's something fairytale-like about this moment in Schreuders' autobiography, a resolution from which she can comfortably depart on a different journey.

*The Boyfriend* is also an incidental signal to an art world preoccupied by monumentality. Because you won't find Schreuders' sculptures at any major South African museum

(for now at least). And if it's not because her works are awkwardly small, it might be because their New York prices are out of reach of cash-strapped local institutions. But whatever the reason for this absence, Schreuders' oeuvre is a powerful autobiographical statement in flat and plastic arts. And it is here that the unusual use of series of lithographs to document each series of sculptures plays such an important role in defining the complex nature of her autobiography. The real potential and value of her output is going to lie in being able to combine – and never letting go of – these collections of printed autobiographies of *Burnt by the Sun*, *Crying in Public*, *The Long Day* and whatever follows.

**Rory Bester is an art historian and curator based in Johannesburg**

**Endnotes**

1 Interview with Claudette Schreuders, conducted in Linden, Johannesburg, on January 16 2004

Claudette Schreuders' first US museum exhibition opens at the Arizona State University Art Museum in March and travels to San Diego State University in September

# The New York Times

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2002

## **Claudette Schreuders**

*Jack Shainman Gallery  
513 West 20th Street, Chelsea  
Through Dec. 21*

Claudette Schreuders's painted wood sculptures, mostly of stoic women, have healthy amounts of company. Their precedents include Noh masks, Baroque polychrome saints, European dolls and folk art, as well as the squat bodies and enlarged heads of African sculpture. Contemporary competition, in the lead for now, numbers Jeff Koons's polychrome sculptures, Daniel Oates's jocular figures, the portrait figures of the Nigerian artist S. J. Akpan and the coffins of the Ghanaian carver Kane Kwei.

What distinguishes Ms. Schreuders's work is its psychological interior and its intimation of present-day consciousness. Female strength could be the subject of her second New York solo show, judging from the slightly defiant self-sufficiency of the faces in "The Narrow Bed," which depicts a woman lying on her stomach beneath a flowered coverlet, and "Show and Tell," in which a woman with wonderful oatmeal-colored skin glances down and sideways while opening her blouse to expose her breasts.

The problem is that Ms. Schreuders's most engaging faces reduce their accompanying bodies nearly to pedestals, while a better balance usually means toning things down above the neck. This happens with "Crying in Public," an update on the Madonna Dolorosa that shows a woman in a pink patterned blouse and red skirt with acrylic tears running down her cheeks.

The dilemma is avoided completely by the strongest work, a slightly larger-than-life portrait bust of the South African writer Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), one of the first public figures to protest her country's lack of racial equality. With set mouth and grave eyes presided over by a double row of curled bangs, this marvelous work achieves a completeness that eludes Ms. Schreuders when she is working head to toe.

ROBERTA SMITH



# The New York Times

Art In Review

Friday March 30, 2001

## **Claudette Schreuders**

### **'Burnt by the Sun'**

*Jack Shainman*

*513 West 20th Street, Chelsea*

*Through April 14*

The chubby, freestanding wooden people in Claudette Schreuders's first New York solo exhibition have an irresistibly sweet and gently humorous charm. But there is a darker side to the faux-folk sculpture by this young white South African artist, for in variously subtle ways it alludes to the experience of growing up under apartheid.

In "Conversation," for example, the artist herself, in a red skirt, talks to a dark-skinned man in an other police uniform. At slightly less than half life size, with big heads and chunky bodies, the figures have a comical sculptural solidity. Their association, however, evokes a terrible history of racism and violence.

The effects of the sun are a metaphor for politically harsh experience in several works. In "Burnt by the Sun," a near life-size white woman holds out arms painted an alarmingly intense pink; her injury, one understands, is more of the soul than of the body. "Sunstroke" depicts a sick boy in bed, with a Congoese dog fetish at his feet and a crucifix on the wall above; history is a nightmare from which he cannot awake. "Mingle" is a portrait of the young artist holding a wineglass and looking slightly nervous, a shy person at an art opening. Seen against the background of apartheid, however, the imperative of the title takes on a much more pointed urgency and the anxiety of the artist a far greater poignancy.

KEN JOHNSON



Claudette Schreuders: *Untitled*, 2000, enamel and stain on wood, 64 by 19 by 19 inches; at Jack Shainman.

## Claudette Schreuders at Jack Shainman

Claudette Schreuders is a sculptor from South Africa who carves single figures and small group tableaux from wood. The semi-naïve style of these figures has obvious affinities with the portraits—known as “colons”—that African sculptors made of European colonists. Those figures were usually carved in the familiar African format of a small body with a very large head—a style traditionally associated in the West with caricature, but in Africa with ancestor worship. For the Africans, the “colons” must have had an ambiguous satirical edge, but for Schreuders, a white descendent of the colonial settlers, the adoption of a similar genre of expression is fraught with ironies.

The best piece in the show succinctly incorporated all of this political and esthetic history into a single sculpture. Titled *Conversation* (2001), it consists of two figures approximately 2½ feet tall with nearly life-size heads. The figure on the left is a white woman in sandals, a red skirt and a flowered blouse, her hands clasped behind her back. The one on the right is a black man in an olive-green uniform with red pocket flaps, his hands stuffed in his pockets. They stand angled toward each other, staring quietly off into space, not facing but definitely in contact. The tentative yet unembittered sense of communication between the figures is palpable. Schreuders skillfully uses thin washes of paint with the underlying tones of the bare wood to represent warm dark skin or slightly raw white flesh.

None of the other pieces in the show quite reached the level of *Conversation*, but some were notable nonetheless. *Burnt by the Sun* (2000) was the only fully adult-size figure in the show. A white woman standing barefoot in a white slip examines the back of her sunburnt hands which, along with her lower arms, are painted with a sickly pink enamel. At the “tan line” her skin reverts to the bare

wood, nicely encapsulating the vexed questions of who or what is “native” to her homeland.

In addition, some of Schreuders’s sculptures are apparently carved in the wood of trees that were imported to the area by the colonials and are now being rooted out. *Sun Stroke* (2000) is a tableau of a boy asleep on his bed with his dog at his feet and a small crucifixion on the wall behind. The dog’s fur is rendered by driving rusty nails into the wood, as though for an African fetish, contrasting the psychological positions of European and African religious traditions in the mind of a colonial. From such a point of view, Christianity must have seemed exalted but distant, while animism and magic were near but alien. Schreuders powerfully locates her themes of alienation and displacement in the actual materials and facture of her art.

—Robert Taplin



## Claudette Schreuders

Jack Shainman Gallery

Claudette Schreuders's carved and painted wooden figures—each just short of life size, the legs slightly foreshortened, the hands and feet almost comically large—are inspired by both African and European artistic traditions and themes. Many of her figure's features and iconography come from family photographs. But she has also modeled her figures on wooden "Colon" figures, in which African artists depict white colonials in the traditional West African style of representational sculpture. The personal dislocation Schreuders felt growing up up Afrikaner in Apartheid-era South Africa (feelings of shame and humiliation coupled with a hyper-awareness of her own personal identity within a culture intolerant of non-conformity) is effectively expressed through this culturally and artistically specific medium.

An untitled sculpture inspired the title of the show: "Burnt by the Sun." A white teenage girl stands in a slip, her hands and arms burnt bright pink by exposure to the sun. The sculpture also conveys a metaphorical (and political) excess, alluding to an inappropriate degree of exposure for a child of this age. The girl gazes with concentration, possibly even confusion, at her own body, and what the burn may mean.

In *Mingle*, the artist herself stands holding a wine glass, a look of apprehension on her face. She is perhaps at one of her own openings. Yet it is easy to see the figure in another context: an upper-class woman mingling at a whites-only country club.

These works illustrate how national politics can manifest itself

on a personal level. Schreuders's figures—as embodied identities—are displaced: subtly, even stoically, tormented, physically they seem rooted to the earth, their land, with their chunky feet and straight stances.

*Melancholy Boy* draws on African craft and language. According to the artist, the figure's "stance was taken from Dürer's self-portrait

*Melancholy* in which the figure points to a cut on his body." In place of the cut, Schreuders has etched words in Swahili that can be translated as "the one who wants you to leave will not tell you so." The boy's melancholy results from an inability to communicate or understand the people around him. In other works, figures confront each other in silent communication, and African fetish carvings of dogs

and leopards are incorporated into medieval-inspired tableaux. There is a charming sweetness to Schreuders' work that makes it both poignant and terrifying.

—Erica-Lynn Huberty







**Claudette Schreuders, *Untitled* (2001)** (fig. 9), a suite of six hard-ground etchings in an edition of 25 plus eight artist's proofs. Each measures 12x14 in. (paper) and 8x10 in. (image) and was proofed by Maurice Payne and editioned on Hahnemühle Cream paper at Artist Proof Studios in Johannesburg, South Africa. First prints can be an occasion of note when a young artist who has developed a distinctive voice links up with a seasoned printer. In this case it was a visit by veteran printmaker Maurice Payne to Johannesburg that provoked Claudette Schreuders, a young South African sculptor, to turn to her sketchbooks for ideas for an etching project. Mainly, she makes wooden sculptures that recall folk art or the polychrome devotional statues of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance: simply cut, painted figures with frontal, unwavering gazes. What is extraordinary about these superficially stolid characters is the degree to which they are fraught with discomfort and ambivalence: a nude woman, for example, with outstretched arms, partially sunburnt, conjures a host of touchy associations. Based on West African "Colon" figures, "strangers" or "outsiders" that were generally understood to represent white people, Schreuders's sculptures embody the sense of people who, "unwilling to come to terms with their past...wake up and find that they are living in a country that is foreign to them," to paraphrase Antjie Krog, an Afrikaans writer. There aren't many of these figures available, as the artist works very slowly, and a recent show at Jack Shainman in New York sold out. All the more reason to celebrate these very compelling etchings, small works, most with just a few figures. Christianity and the African subcontinent make a complicated mix: a naked figure resembling Christ is accompanied by a thin black man, his "shadow"; a Mary Magdalene, looking at a cross in her hand, is surrounded by six primitivist, disembodied heads. Best are some squat doll-like figures—a crowd of "Colons" on a shelf, many wearing a hybrid bowler and safari hat; and a male and female couple. Such work puts the mystery back in identity, something it is sorely lacking these days. Price: \$2,800; also available individually for \$500 apiece. The artist has recently produced much larger screenprints, more direct transpositions of sketchbook pages, that are also worth a look. All are published by David Krut in London and Johannesburg. Available in New York at Jack Shainman Gallery.

## ARTTHROB

April 2001, Issue. 44  
www.artthrob.co.za

### **Claudette Schreuders' 'Burnt by the Sun' at the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York**

by Laurie Farrell

This is a show not to be missed. By all accounts and considerations, Claudette Schreuders has made a splash in New York City. Hailed by New York Times art critic Holland Cotter back in 1999 as one of the stars of the Museum for African Art's 'Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa', Schreuders recently received another positive nod from the Times for her first solo exhibition at the Jack Shainman Gallery. Add to the mix that the new show has been a complete sell-out, and one can truly say that she is "having her day in the sun".

The installation is stunning and the body of work includes eight major wood carvings and four charcoal drawings. The objects greet and welcome you into Schreuders' world of intimate memories, personal introspection, African and Western icons and referents. All are embodied in ambiguously charming pieces and are presented in an intellectually savvy manner.

Entering the exhibition space, one finds a pair of figures entitled *Conversation* (2000), a self-portrait of the artist and a colonial officer. She wears a short red skirt and white long-sleeved shirt decorated with blue flowers, and her hands are held behind her back. The artist's effigy stands innocently looking at the police officer. The officer's hands are tucked into his khaki pants, suggesting a sense of ease as these figures engage in a friendly exchange. Directly following the conversing pair are a series of four charcoal drawings that depict different wooden colonial figures. The colonial figure, or "colon", is a widely recognizable icon of African art produced for both tourist and indigenous markets in Africa. Perhaps the most well-known colon figures are those by the Baule people of Cote d'Ivoire. Such figures wear European pith helmets and usually have accoutrements which recall the presence of Europeans in Africa. However, according to the late Philip Ravenhill, the term "colon" is also a signifier for traditional African wooden carvings to which industrial paint has been applied. In one drawing, *Untitled* (2000), the colon figure has a series of vertical cracks running throughout his body, emulating those found in wooden sculptures, and is animated through the suggestion of hand and foot movement. The figure wears his military hat, short-sleeved shirt, and shorts that reveal a muscular physique.

Moving further into the exhibition, *Twins* represents another figurative pairing. This time two girls sit beside each other wearing identical green dresses with plain white buttons. Schreuders states that these figures were inspired by a photograph of her sister seated beside a servant's child. Another level of interpretation can be found in Schreuders' reference to Nigerian "ibeji" figures. "Ibeji" are carved wooden twin figures that represent surrogates for deceased twins. This work shares a formal and thematic relationship to the *Twins* (1997) piece that she created as a memorial for the servants' children from her past. Charming

pieces like these complicate notions of complacency embedded in the innocence of white South African childhood during the apartheid era. Schreuders' use of intimate moments from her past and people that touched her personally provides a potent forum for personal reflections on reconciling one's childhood with issues of socialization and survival.

The next two works, *Owner of Two Swimsuits* (2000) and *Burnt by the Sun* (2000), illustrate stories of "excess that involves taking more than you should, or being exposed to more than you can cope with" (Schreuders, press release). *Burnt by the Sun*, the largest figure on exhibition, portrays a white South African woman. Initially, the woman appears to be wearing pink evening gloves, yet on closer examination one discovers that the pink is the result of serious sun overexposure.

Another highlight of this exhibition is *Lost Girl* (2000). As a mermaid figurine with her tail flipping up behind her, a yellow snake encircling the base, and her hands held out suggesting an expression of martyrdom, one cannot help but interpret this piece as a cocktail of various references. One that readily comes to mind is Mammy Wata, or Mother of Water, a charismatic water-spirit introduced to West Africa from Europe around 1900. Usually depicted as a beautiful woman with flowing black hair who controls snakes, Schreuders' *Lost Girl* represents a composite of African and European influences.

*Sunstroke* (2000) is the largest assemblage of pieces in the exhibition. A man, apparently experiencing the intoxicating effects of sun sickness, reclines on a bed with his feet propped up against a nail fetish (or power figure). The power figure, also called "nkisi", is zoomorphically represented as a dog that has been activated (or called into action) numerous times by the insertion of wooden and iron nails. Power figures are found in many Central African cultures where potent medicines and materials are packed into a sculpted form (in this case a wooden dog) which acts as a receptacle. These figures are ritually called into action by driving sharp objects into their surface. An additional layer of interpretation to this piece is given by the presence of a crucified Christ figure (with four rather than three nails impaling the hands and feet, suggesting a Romanesque or medieval antecedent) that hangs on the wall above the bed. The death of Christ on the cross is the central image in Christian art and a visual focus of religious contemplation. Numerous sources have been assimilated into this wooden realm of figures that function as metaphors, or responses to life and religion in Africa.

This show offers numerous points of engagement. The sculptures inhabit individualized spaces and yet cohesively come together as a strong body of work. Additionally, as Jack Shainman states, Schreuders' work is paradoxical in that it appears simplistic at first, yet, on closer examination, the conceptually based and psychologically challenging elements emerge. Schreuders' work fuses elements of medieval sculpture, Catholic imagery and traditional African art with an emotional awareness, intimacy and immediacy that rarely come together so effectively in art. 'Burnt by the Sun' closes on April 14

*Laurie Farrell is an Associate Curator at the Museum for African Art, New York*

**Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 W 20th Street, New York, New York 10011**

ART REVIEW

# South Africans, Isolated No More

By HOLLAND COTTER

Apartheid shaped the course of contemporary art in South Africa. It dictated that blacks and whites had unequal access to museums and schools. It inspired a huge body of protest work in every medium. And it insured that much of that work remained invisible outside the nation itself, which was shunned as a pariah.

After apartheid was dismantled in the 1990's, things changed. Suddenly artists were free to explore new content and to venture into the global marketplace. South Africa began to make an impact in high-profile group shows internationally, and even produced one of its own, the Johannesburg Biennale, in 1995 and 1997.

*Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art from South Africa*, at the Museum for African Art, is an attempt to suggest the range and character of work produced in the post-apartheid years, since 1994. The result is a well-paced, richly textured show of 13

## Artists look back at apartheid and gaze beyond it.

artists that offers a wealth of fresh information and poses some fascinating questions.

Organized by Frank Herreman, curator and director of exhibitions at the museum, and Mark D'Amato, associate curator, the show includes four pieces that directly address the issue of apartheid and its repercussions.

The first, Paul Stopforth's large-scale graphite drawing, "The Interrogators" (1979), depicts three white police officers implicated in the 1977 torture death in prison of Steve Biko, founder of the Black Consciousness Movement. The incident itself drew worldwide attention, and Mr. Stopforth's work became one of the lasting icons of its political moment.

*"Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art From South Africa" remains at the Museum for African Art, 593 Broadway, near Houston Street, SoHo, (212) 966-1313, through Jan. 2. The exhibition will travel for two years, beginning at the Austin (Tex.) Museum of Art, May 13 through Aug. 20.*

The Biko story is updated in a series of small paintings by David Koloane, done in 1998 after a group of men involved in the murder applied for amnesty at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. (Their application was turned down.) The committee itself, fraught with moral and emotional tension, is the subject of a text-and-photo work by Sue Williamson, who, like Mr. Koloane, is an influential artist and writer of the apartheid years.

A fourth artist active during that time, Willie Bester, is also represented here by a vivid assemblage painting from 1994 that incorporates debris and recycled objects — tin cans, bullet shells — to underscore the fact that while black South Africans are full citizens under the law, their social and economic power remains tentative.

Beyond this introductory section, the show shifts gears. Young artists are introduced. Most of them are represented in some depth with multiple works. And political imagery associated with the apartheid era is subtly transformed.

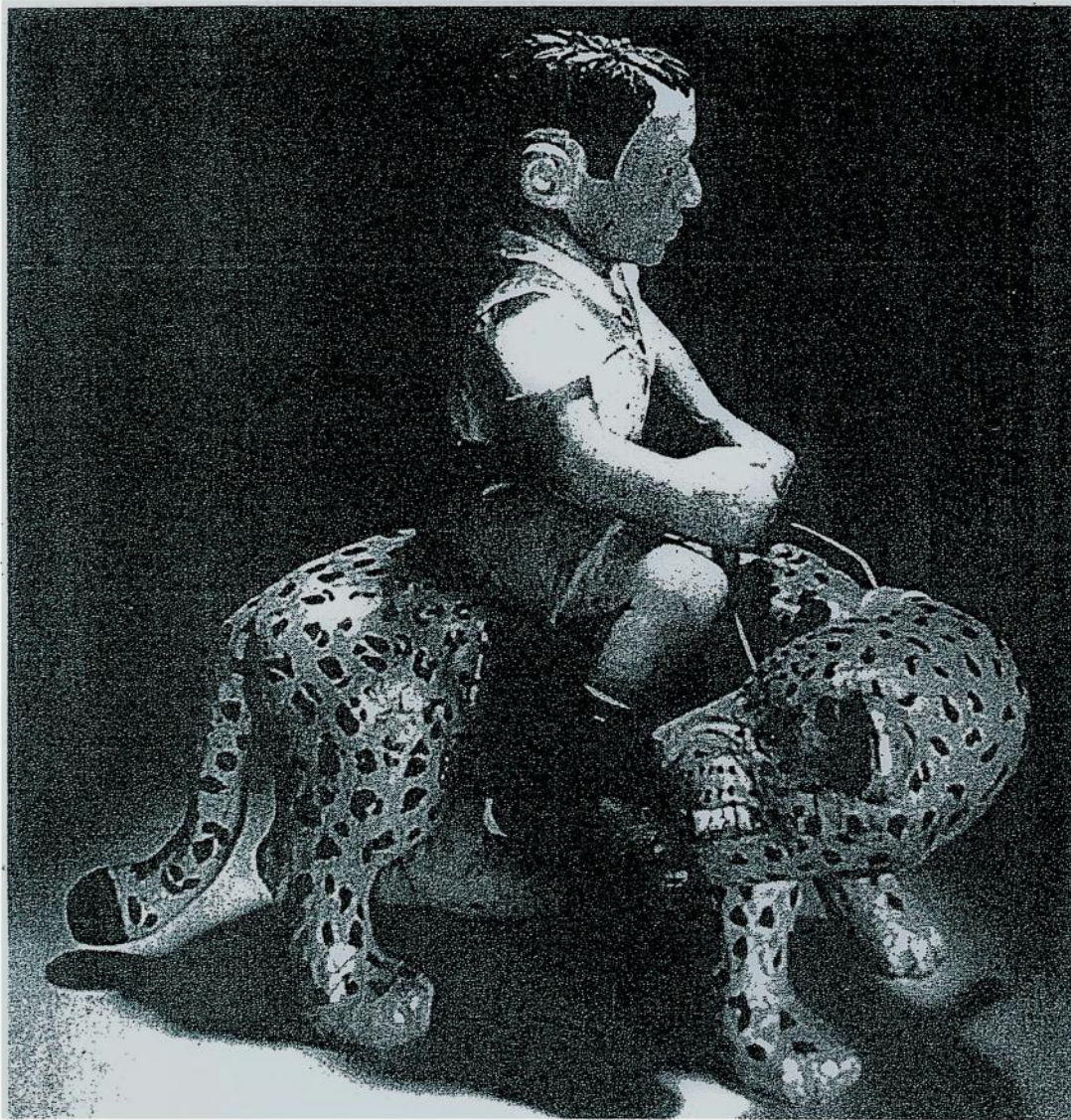
Recycled materials, for example, that symbolize impoverishment in Mr. Bester's work, become sources of formal beauty in the collage-paintings of the Johannesburg artist Mbongeni Richman Buthelezi. Each piece is made from colored plastic shopping bags, ubiquitous as litter in South African cities, flattened, layered and then melted to resemble brushed or stained paint. The results suggest explosive monumental figures but have the translucence of watercolors.

The esthetic potential of throw-away stuff is also evident in Zwelethu Mthethwa's photographs of the interiors of shacklike houses in a black community near Cape Town. The rooms are dim and cramped, but they are brilliantly enlivened with patterned fabrics and commercial packaging labels, and accented with carefully selected objects (a potted plant, a tea-kettle-shaped clock) arranged with the just-so precision of a Chardin still life.

Different found materials, organic for the most part, make up the works of Samson Mnisi and Thabiso Phokompe, artists who studied at the Federated Union of Black Arts in Johannesburg, one of several community centers that provided art training for blacks under apartheid.

Mr. Mnisi's springy wall sculptures are made from fabric stretched over reed frames and are painted with symbols associated with healing. Mr. Phokompe's work, also inspired by indigenous forms





Museum for African Art

Claudette Schreuders's carved wood figure of her father astride a leopard, in a show of contemporary art from South Africa.

but even more abstract, uses branches and burlap rubbed with earth, to which he sews twine-wrapped objects. Interestingly, their work is both the most conventionally African-looking art in the show and the most anomalous.

Sandile Zulu also combines natural elements and abstraction, but to different effect. One recent piece, a triptych of boards covered with a Minimalist-style grid of cut-up newspaper, has been gently strafed with a blowtorch flame — the organic ingredient — to produce an overall tangle of driplike marks. Fire as a painterly medium isn't new, but in this elegant piece it carries implications of destruction and cleansing that feel both wide-reaching and directly pertinent to a South African context.

Mr. Zulu's poetic work deals with expansive, impersonal metaphor. Elsewhere, however, personal identity is a recurrent theme. Such is the case in an installation by Bridget Baker that refers to her childhood, which was both sheltered and, after her father's early death, heavy with loss.

The work's title, "Winter Project," refers to the seasonal regimen of knitting she was assigned by her mother. At the center of the piece is a cardigan, with a distinctive knit pattern that Ms. Baker has made for herself. Ranged on either side is an assortment of pullovers — sweaters, T-shirts — that she borrowed from siblings and friends. Into the fabric of each of the pullovers she has stitched a patch of knitting based on her own sweater pattern, a mark of psychic connection as vivid and physical as a skin graft.

The personal shades into the political in Brett Murray's "Guilt and Innocence, 1962-1990," an installation of 130 snapshots of the artist, beginning just after his birth. Together they tell the story of life in a middle-class white family: affluent, loving, high spirited. But the dates in the title also frame a parallel history: the years that Nelson Mandela spent in prison on Robben Island, just a few miles from Mr. Murray's childhood home.

Similar conceptual elements are at play in the haunting carved wood figures of Claudette Schreuders, in

which autobiography and symbol meet. Ms. Schreuders depicts her father, who came to Africa from the Netherlands on a romantic quest for adventure, astride a leopard, a traditional symbol of African kingship. Her mother, looking as grave as a medieval Madonna, has a bar of soap held at her chest, like a protective talisman carried into the wilderness.

Ms. Schreuders herself appears as a blond infant in the arms of a black nanny, in an image reminiscent of countless maternal figures in African sculpture. She is also one of four children impressively tossing a startled-looking, black-faced rag doll in a blanket, in a game of uninnocent cruelty inspired by Goya.

In Ms. Schreuders's work, the exploration of self-identity, cultural discomfort and a strong if clouded spirituality adds up to a compelling mix. If any of the young artists here can be called a find, she's the one, and the eight pieces on view represent a sizable chunk of her output. (She's a slow worker: 13 sculptures in 4 years.)

But an artist of an earlier generation, Penny Siopis, most memorably

sums up the searching, self-examining spirit of the show as a whole. Ms. Siopis, now in her 40's, was well-known for her apartheid-era allegorical paintings of South African history. In the last few years she has turned her attention to her own history as an African artist of European descent (her background is Greek and British), and that is the subject of the two pieces here.

One, "My Lovely Day," is a 20-minute film edited from home movies made in the 1950's and 60's. Lives are spliced together: Ms. Siopis's mother shot the movies; Ms. Siopis appears in them; her grandmother's words appear as subtitles. And in the pictures themselves, South Africa, Greece and England flash by, barely distinguishable and interchangeable.

The same is true of the thousands of objects that Ms. Siopis salvaged from her mother's house and compiled in the towering installation "Charmed Lives." European flags and African beadwork, racist figurines and Mandela souvenirs, vintage cameras and out-of-date history books, bridal wear and military gear all hang together in a floor-to-ceiling mosaic. The result is both an autobiographical museum and a cultural curiosity cabinet, filled with the public and private remains of generations of South African lives.

The main question posed by Ms. Siopis's grand work is, of course: what exactly does "South African" mean as an identity? And the exhibition asks the same question about "South African contemporary art." Is it one thing, many things, anything? Once narrowly defined by political struggle, what shape, or shapes, will it now take, particularly once it has passed through the homogenizing waters of the global mainstream?

"Liberated Voices" doesn't attempt to answer these questions, nor does it insist that its selection of artists is in any way definitive. (Others might easily have been chosen, as suggested by an exhibition, "Postcards From South Africa" at Axis Gallery in Chelsea through Oct. 2.)

Instead, this show concentrates on presenting fresh information, in the form of art and artists rarely if ever seen in New York before. (Several of the show's participants will be visiting the city in the months ahead. Mr. Koloane and Ms. Williamson will speak at the museum tomorrow at 1 P.M.) The result, like South Africa itself these days, feels energy packed, flawed and provisional, the way history in the making always does.



# Claudette Schreuders: Artist's Statement

Claudette Schreuders

**M**ost of the sculptures selected for this exhibition form part of a body of work entitled *Family Tree*. The "family" of the title refers to the autobiographical content of the work. Thematically the sculptures were inspired by family photographs and childhood memory. They are portraits, but are presented in such a way that they refer to an identity within a specific social circle. In this sense they serve to examine the broader context of the society I grew up in. "Tree" refers to my choice of wood as medium for figurative sculpture. The works are mostly composite pieces, assembled from carved and painted wood, which often include extraneous materials such as iron, leather, and nails. My use of materials consciously evokes an African context, emphasizing the dislocation of the white "family" I examine.

Herbert Cole identifies five icons that represent prevalent themes in African art: the couple, the mother and child, the forceful male, the outsider or stranger, and the leader.<sup>1</sup> Under the category of "outsiders" or "ambiguous aliens," we find the Colon figures of West Africa. These carved and painted figures are widely understood to be depictions of Europeans by African people. As "ambiguous aliens," the Colon can be related to the status of whites within the South African experience. This idea is illustrated by a quote taken from an article written by South African artist Ruth Rosengarten: "I grew up in Johannesburg with an inbuilt sense of dislocation.... I suffered only a little more acutely from what was experienced by many white South Africans: an uncomfortable sense of not knowing who they were. It is not at all insignificant that white people in South African were called Europeans."<sup>2</sup>

This sense of dislocation was not only the result of a European heritage within an African context, but also the marginalization that formed part of a restrictive society that set limits and threatened to reject those who did not conform.

**CAT. 40**

*Lokke.*

By Claudette Schreuders,  
1994. Yelutang wood, steel  
and pine (school desk), oil paint.  
H. 124 cm. (including desk).

*Lokke*, a sculpture completed during my final year at the University of Stellenbosch, is presented in the form of a martyr like those common to the Western tradition of religious woodcarving. The figure is dressed in a school uniform and stands on a desk, this scenario is based on a specific event. On my first day of high school in 1986, a girl nicknamed "Lokke" (referring to her anachronistic hairstyle) was made to stand on a table in front of the school and mocked because of her unshaven legs. She was tormented and teased the entire time that she attended our high school. The highly emotive images of martyrs found in religious sculpture (especially Spanish and South American) reminded me of Lokke's position in our school. While at school I felt relieved that I was not in her shoes, a fate I felt I only narrowly escaped. The oppressive nature of that school, and the way in which it reflected apartheid society of the 1980s, is something I only realized once I had left and then more clearly during the slow and arduous process of carving the figure from a block of wood. The position of an individual within a specific social milieu remains a theme in the work that followed. While all the works can be said to fit into the category of "outsider or stranger," some overlap into the different categories mentioned by Cole.

*Mother and Child* combines the Virgin and Child of Western tradition with the mother and child icons found throughout African art to create a black mother holding a white child. In my own family album, the only image of a black person is my nanny holding me as a child. The title of the work refers to the intimacy of this short-lived relationship, but also to the fact that the nanny is in reality a mother whose own child is being raised by someone else in the townships. Like *Lokke*, *Mother and Child* explores the way in which the divisive nature of South African politics manifested itself on a personal level.

*The Hero* is a portrait of my father who came to South Africa from Holland when he was sixteen. He was part of a program initiated by the South African National Party to enlarge the white population by bringing orphans to the country. Although he was not an orphan, my father had nurtured a dream of living in Africa since he was very young, and convinced his parents to let him leave Holland. *The Hero* is depicted astride a leopard, referring to the West African cultural traditions depicting leaders riding leopards as symbols of power. In this context, the hero image depicts the West's exotic ideal of Africa and also ironically, the precarious position of the white male in contemporary South African society.

In *Speel-speel*, four children play a game where they toss a gollywog doll with a blanket. The formation of three girls and one boy is based on my siblings, and the blanket game comes from Goya's *The Straw Manniken* painting. Translated directly from Afrikaner words, "speel-speel" becomes "play play" and refers to the subtle way in which negative stereotypes (like the gollywog in Enid Blyton's *Noddy* books) form part of popular culture.

Like *Speel-speel*, the sculpture *Marky-Boy* presents an image of compromised and doomed innocence. This schoolboy figure carries a small portrait of his father lodged in his chest. The father's head looks like an older version of himself looming menacingly as the boy is faced with choosing between the "cherished myths" of his father or "standing firmly, yet standing nowhere." The notion of two as one is explored in icons of couples found in African art: two people in a relationship become one entity, a couple. In *The Couple*, the frailty of human relationships is explored in terms of my own experience. I feel that my use of specific individuals as subjects for sculptures lends credibility to the stories that they tell.

Accordingly, David Freedberg notes that devotional images are not generalized and standard types, but their very individuality forms the focus of the beholder's attention, "the more distinctive the better.... We do not extend our empathy to humanity at large."<sup>3</sup>

CAT. 41

*Mother and Child*.  
By Claudette Schreuders,  
1994. Obeckhe-cypress wood,  
enamel paint. H. 91 cm. Lisa  
Brice Collection.



## Claudette Schreuders

### CAT. 46

LEFT, *Marky-Boy*.  
By Claudette Schreuders, 1998.  
Pear wood, enamel paint.  
H. 65 cm. Jerome and  
Ellen Stern Collection.

*Ma-trix* takes the form of a devotional sculpture. The woman figure's hand is held over her chest like the Virgin Mary, but the flaming heart is replaced by a pink bar of soap. The soap signifies a life of luxury, implied also by the brand name LUX, while associations of cleanliness and purity links to the religious theme and to the colonial ideal of bringing civilization to Africa.

### CAT. 47

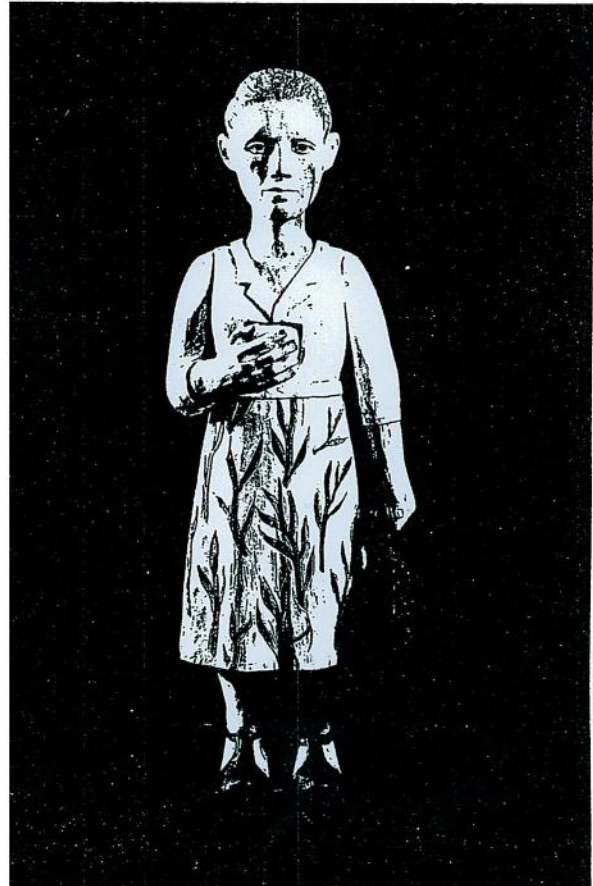
RIGHT, *Ma-Trix*.  
By Claudette Schreuders, 1998.  
White stink wood, enamel paint.  
H. 80 cm. Jerome and  
Ellen Stern Collection.

*The Three Sisters* are my two sisters and myself. The identity of each figure is realized by a juxtaposition of the other two figures, very similar to the way that one's perception of oneself is determined by shared relationships. Like the other sculptures in this group they are portrayed as both individuals and stereotypes. The figure holding the snake recalls imagery of the "treacherous woman," as personified by Eve in Western culture and by the West African cult figure, Mammy Wata. Like *The Hero*, an existing theme is reinterpreted so that the icon becomes a recognizable figure lodged in South African experience and modified by a combination of Western and African symbology.

1. Herbert M. Cole, *Icons: Ideals and Power in the Art of Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), p. 12.

2. Ruth Rosengarten, "Inside Out," *Frieze* (London 1995), vol. 23, pp. 45, 49.

3. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).



Schreuders's work is inspired by the carved and often painted wooden Colon figures of West Africa. In a paper prepared for a 1995 seminar, she wrote, "The Colon figure falls under the category of stranger or outsider," and she then quotes M. H. Cole, "Strangers in any society are anomalous. Sufficiently inside to be identified, to affect and be affected by the host culture, they are identified nevertheless as outsiders who are to some degree alien."<sup>9</sup>

Schreuders has said, "My own preoccupation with the Colon figures of West Africa lies less in wishing to align myself with the meaning and significance of these artistic objects than in their status as strangers or 'ambiguous aliens,'" talking of the "precarious situation" in which she has found herself as an Afrikaan-speaking, white South African. Schreuders quotes black writer Bessie Head in *An African Story* (1972), "South Africa made white people rich and comfortable, but their ownership of the land is ugly and repellent. They talk about South Africa in tourist language all the time. 'This grand and sunny land,' they say."

In practice, Schreuders bases her sculptures on specific people, then situates them within an appropriate frame of reference, working in creamy jacaranda wood cut to size and delivered by the Pretoria municipality. *Ma-Trix*, for instance, is based on Schreuders's mother, a housewife with something of a Virgin Mary hand-over-heart stance. The piece also represents the misguided innocence of the colonial idea of "bringing cleanliness and light and civilization to Africa. I make a type as well as a portrait to avoid sentimentality." Schreuders labors long over her pieces, and has produced thirteen in four years, her hand and eye growing ever more confident and authoritative. The stance of the figures, "the strangers" may imbue uneasiness, but the stockiness of the bodies with their foreshortened legs and large feet seems to suggest a rootedness and determination, a strength of which they may themselves be unaware.

Excerpted from the essay *Looking Back, Looking Forward: An Overview of South African Art* by Sue Williamson, *Liberated Voices: Contemporary Art In South Africa*, Museum of African Art:New York, 1999, p. 39-40