

Pamela Allara

**Paul Emmanuel: The Counter-memorial in the Age of Permanent War**

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At the outset, I must confess that the work I am about to discuss may better fit the category of restorative rather than aesthetic justice. But through this one example of a contemporary artist who addresses historical wars in his work, I want to put forward the rather obvious argument that the practice of aesthetic justice should put history in dialogue with the present in order to open a path to an imagined future.

South African artist Paul Emmanuel's work engages questions of masculinity, especially as it is constructed through the ideologies surrounding war. In 2004, Emmanuel installed the first of his Lost Men series "Lost Men Grahamstown," near the site of the 1820 Settler's Monument in that colonial city. This and subsequent Lost Men installations began with intensive archival research to exhume the names of those left out of history, in this instance, the original inhabitants, the Xhosa.

After devising a technique of impressing the Xhosa names along with colonials on his naked body, images of his body were transferred to banners that returned to the battle sites the names of those missing from the memorials, beginning to visualize a inclusive national history. Installed during the 10th anniversary of the coming of democracy to South Africa, it also marked the recent conclusion of the controversial restorative justice project, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was criticized by the family of Steve Biko and others precisely because the hearings did not result in legal justice. Emmanuel's project for this first of his counter-memorials addressed this optimistic yet fraught context, suggesting a just future, but acknowledging its fragility.

From July to October, 2014, Emmanuel installed the third in the series, "The Lost Men France", a series of 5 silk banners, on a farm road adjacent to the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. As part of the Somme Circuit of Remembrance marking the Centenary of WWI, it constituted a counter-memorial to the monumental marble structures throughout the region that perpetuate masculine concepts such as courage, sacrifice and heroism, concepts that serve to obscure the reality of war: a struggle waged by the powerful for control of people and property during which masses of human bodies are destroyed. (For instance, on the first day of the battle of the Somme, July 1, 1916, 57,000 combatants, i.e. human beings, were slaughtered.)

Again, Emmanuel's banners depicted sections of his naked body impressed with the names of black Africans—in this instance throughout the continent, corralled by the Colonial powers to fight in the 'white man's war' but whose names are, as one might expect, missing from the lists chiseled onto the circuit's marble monuments. Talk about 'under-representation!' This important aspect of his 'aesthetic justice' project gives new meaning to the concept of a living memorial.

The second aspect of course is the vulnerability of his body and indeed of the fabric on which the images are printed. Gently floating overhead, the imaged body fragments become a resurrection of sorts for the men long buried beneath the earth: the delicacy of the silken shrouds contrasting with the pretentious, outsized architecture of the Thiepval Memorial. After three months, the shrouds, like the bodies they memorialized, had been reduced to shreds, creating a powerful metaphor for physical and emotional suffering—and the sine qua non of war: the violation of the human body and the destruction of human decency. Does this oppositional articulation constitute a sort of restorative justice—for the descendants at least?

And how about now? What do these resurrected names mean to us at present and how are they implicated in the idea of aesthetic justice? Emmanuel has said, “I am, as many are, affected by these terrible historic battles. A war has lasting psychological effects that are passed from generation to generation; we lose humanity, gentleness and vulnerability, feeling, empathy and sensitivity. We lose dignity, treasured relationships, potentiality, hope and the future. We become defined by ideologies that can confine and define our world-view.”

Many on the Circuit of Remembrance disapproved of Emmanuel’s installation. The online blog, The Great War Forum, posted a number of responses to *The Lost Men France*, the most vehement of which was Seadog: Seadog comment:

“Ok let me stop being polite and say what I really think, this ridiculous piece of unexpurgated garbage is an insult to all those who fought, suffered and died in this historic area. The whole appalling mess is a blight on the landscape and relates in no way, shape or form to what happened here in the Great War.”

But more telling is the dialogue that emerged from this screed, which remained civil and permitted the participants to examine their ideas about war memorials and war in general, with the majority finally siding with the artwork’s message. I should mention that the work was very well received by the residents nearby villages as well.

But for those of us here, who have not seen the work, the message has to do with the painful relevance of Emmanuel’s examination of masculinity and its relation to not just war but to contemporary culture and art in general. As Hito Steyerl has written, “The production of art presents a mirror image of post-democratic forms of hypercapitalism that look set to become the dominant political post-Cold War paradigm...The traditional conception of the artist’s role corresponds all too well with the self-image of wannabe autocrats...Post-democratic government is very much related to this erratic type of male-genius-artist behavior. It is opaque, corrupt and completely unaccountable...Rule of law? Why don’t we just leave it to taste? Good governance? Bad Curating! You see why the contemporary oligarch loves contemporary art: it’s just what works for him.” (“The Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy,” in *The Wretched of the Screen*, 2012, 94-95). When installed in the former Cadillac showroom, now the 808 Gallery at Boston University, *Remnants* also served as a counter-memorial to hyper-capitalism.

Hence the urgency to understand just what Aesthetic Justice might be in practice. We live in an era of Permanent War, and our current oligarch will have us embroiled in another war or two by the end of the year, as oligarchs maintain power by waging war. Scar, a photogravure from The Lost Men France series, depicts the region near Delville Wood where farmers still today turn up bones of the missing from WWI. The heaving landscape demonstrates that the past is present---an urgent call from the grave, in this instance the land itself, for justice for those who are dying now and who will die soon.