

Emmanuel, P. PAUL EMMANUEL: ARTISTS AT WORK in Creative Feel magazine, DeskLink Media, Johannesburg, South Africa. April.

The only thing we can be certain of is change. We try to hold onto memories in the hope of maintaining some coherence and continuity, but our memories are largely inventions, and they too change over time. We commemorate our invented pasts in an attempt to fix them in the present. We even impose them on the generations that come after us, linking them to the past through anniversaries, memorials, pilgrimages and rites of passage, in an attempt to bind their lives to ours. Ultimately, we know more about the grand narratives we create about the past than the past itself. We cannot hold onto the substance of the past. It has been recycled and re-purposed into new forms. Our memories are poor, distorted, sentimental and superstitious copies.

This proposed exhibition (title still to be decided) is a collection of works scratched by hand onto delicate carbon 'paper' or film that continue to explore my fascination with the tenuous nature of memory. These carbon 'shadows' are all metaphors for carbon copies and products of one of life's greatest narratives – the Carbon Cycle.

'In 2014, I pursued a deep interest, researching the shadows of people that had been etched onto city ruins by the heat and light of the atomic blasts on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that ended World War Two,' says Paul Emmanuel. 'Here were carbon shadows, ghosts of the past, fixed onto ruins in the present. This research led me to the Pelindaba Atomic Research Facility north of Johannesburg, South Africa. There are rumours that the enriched uranium used for these bombs originated there. These rumours enhanced my sense of connection between South Africa, as a South African artist, and Hiroshima. I later had a dream, perhaps linked to this, in which I saw myself peeled from my own skin, as if I was discarding a burnt, blackened outer covering. This stimulated my ideas of scratching away a thin black layer from a piece of diaphanous, skin-like carbon "paper" or film.

'Carbon film's obsolescence speaks to me of a generation that is perceived to have little remaining validity and yet continues to influence our present digital age with their carbon copies and their part in the carbon cycle. I found the only remaining manufacturer of carbon film in South Africa and obtained the last roll of black film ever produced in this country, as limited demand for this product remains. I conducted an experiment to see if the technique of gently scratching an image into the carbon layer worked, practically, creatively and conceptually. The carbon film was left unrecognisable, looking as if the image of a saint had been imprinted on a delicate shroud. This resonated with me and my Catholic background and it felt as if I had conjured my own carbon Hiroshima shadow.

'Some of the Hiroshima shadows borne on the bodies of survivors, were the patterns on the clothing they were wearing, burnt onto their skin. Unlike the decorations a soldier might wear on his or her body to commemorate heroic performance, these were un-asked-for "decorations". ' CF