Doherty, C. NAVIGATING THE BOOKSCAPE in @ Joburg, Art and Technology, Wits School of the Arts, Johannesburg, October

You have to be on the ball to catch the more interesting exhibitions currently in Joburg. Even quicker than usual was David Paton's fascinating exhibition on the genre of the artist's book in the age of digital reproduction. It was initially staged at the Aardklop Arts Festival in Potchefstroom; and then it appeared briefly in the FADA Gallery at UJ. I caught a glimpse just hours before the entire show was packed up; and it's frustrating not to have the opportunity to return and ponder the works.

Even more frustrating is the un-readabililty of the exhibition website! For a site which should foreground legibility, the unfortunate exhibition site is a hopeless case, with tiny text superimposed over a mosaic background. For those interested, I recommend that you try to lay your hands on the (printed) exhibition catalogue. It's well laid out, beautifully illustrated and has useful essays by Robyn Sassen and David Paton.

Navigating the Bookscape is a small exhibition featuring works from the collection of artists' books owned by Jack Ginsberg, and supplemented by works specially commissioned by Paton. The artists include Kim Lieberman, Giulio Tambellini, Andre Venter, Marc Edwards, Abrie Fourie, and Paul Emmanuel. In this, Paton seems to be making very good use of a National Research Foundation grant and it's a strategy that academically-based curators should be investigating. The NRF seems to be considerably ahead of most Universities in that it recognises creative practice as a legitimate form of research.

Paton notes that the defining characteristics of the digital interface are scrolling and interactivity; but that these are also significant features of the analogue artist's book. What is striking about the exhibition is that the digital works are the only ones which allow visitors to interact directly with them. The paper books are secured inside glass cases and you have to read the exhibition notes and stare at them to work out how they are meant to be read. By contrast, the digital works offer up their interfaces to the curious visitor. In particular, Paul Emmanuel's powerful presentation of his "*The Lost Men Project*" makes use of a touch-screen monitor which allows the viewer to engage with the pages of his "book".

For this project, Emmanuel has transcribed inscriptions from Eastern Cape military grave stones into lead type which he has pushed into the skin on various parts of his own body. The touch-screen interface invites the viewer to touch the very images but with each touch the image dissolves into a different part of the inscribed body. As Emmanuel comments:

I wanted to use the cold unforgiving surface of a glass screen to talk poignantly about intimacy and alienation, the body being soft and warm to the touch.