

Cohn, T. PAUL EMMANUEL, OLD FORT, CONSTITUTION HILL in Art South Africa, Volume 3, Issue 4, Bell Roberts Publishing, Cape Town, June

"Men all over the world are experiencing an identity crisis, struggling to redefine their masculinity," says Paul Emmanuel. "We are still defined by ideas of manliness, militarism and patriarchy, which confines men to live out pre-determined gender roles and limits emotional expression."

*After-image*, Emmanuel's third solo show and a follow-on from his recent installation, *The Lost Men*, has as its focal point a 2 x 4,8 m landscape for which the exhibition was named. It depicts an expanse of land that forms part of the Cradle of Humankind, a site (north of Johannesburg) identified as the locus of our earliest ancestors. A discarded staff sergeant's uniform lies uncomfortable and obsolete in the foreground of the picture, the backdrop a textured black and white landscape.

*After-image* began its life as a sheet of exposed colour photographic paper. The almost hyper-real image, of striking detail, was incised into this high gloss black support with the fine edge of a blade. Each incision or line is no broader than would be made by a pin.

The contrast between the miniature mark-making, the scale of the support, and the highly structured composition, speaks of the artist's obsessive involvement with the repetitive process used to make the work. The technique sets up a dialogue with the military imagery. It draws on a long history of organisational ritual and structure, a history that creates expectations according to which men are expected to act out defined values and behaviours based on rigid traditional gender definitions. As the quote at the outset highlights, Emmanuel believes that these definitions are being challenged within modern society.

The use of photographic technique and visual constructs in the work is the artist's way of, "capturing the romance of photography, and using its language to talk poignantly about memory and overwhelming loss".

Other works on the exhibition include photographic and video documents of *The Lost Men* Project, a traveling public memorial to "the politics of power and its relationship to personal identity", as well as an edition of the artist's book, *Cathexis*, a hardbound book of original etchings produced over nine years. Overall, the exhibition is a useful overview of an artist and print-maker of exceptional technical skill and innovation, whose output consistently embodies a sound conceptual integrity.

Taryn Cohn is a writer and arts administrator based in Johannesburg.