

Chutzpah and a solid plan, to realise a dream

PAUL Emmanuel has reason to feel pleased with himself. As a result of a groundbreaking funding plan, the 38-year-old visual artist is able to give up his day job — for the next four years at least — and focus on a cherished ambition: the creation of an art film that, along with five major drawings, will form the basis of a travelling exhibition entitled *Transitions*.

Emmanuel's benefactor is businessman and art patron Dick Enthoven who has prepurchased the proposed new body of work on behalf of the Spier Contemporary Collection, making Emmanuel the first artist to have an exhibition pre-bought in its entirety by a major South African collection. The deal is estimated to be worth just under R1m and provides for the prefinancing of all the costs anticipated in producing the body of work as well as bridging finance to make the film.

This sort of advance is virtually unheard of in the visual arts community unless it is a commission — which, Emmanuel states emphatically, *Transitions* is not.

"Funding is a perennial headache for artists, never mind artists who want to do something conceptual and out of the box such as an eight-minute art film," says Emmanuel's project manager and agent extraordinaire, Les Cohn. "The National Film and Video Foundation turned us down on the basis that they don't fund art (besides, they were looking for the next Tstotsi), and the National Arts Council turned us down because it was film, not art.

"There was nothing for it but to raise the finance ourselves."

The plan was to sell a limited series of editioned works to fund the film. In order to create the set of lithographs that Emmanuel had in mind, though, he would need to work on them full time for the next four years — which raised the tricky question of how he would survive financially in the interim.

The only solution was to sell them "off-plan" to investors who would see the value of prebuying Emmanuel limited editions at just under current market value.

Says Cohn: "Art buyers fall into several categories: some buy for image, others buy purely for a return on investment and a far rarer percentage buy for posterity and to protect national treasures.

"Accordingly, we structured three proposals that could be accessed by buyers looking for small, medium and large investment opportunities, beginning at R20 000 for one triptych and going up to R100 000 for one of only four unique boxed suites of limited-edition, hand-printed stone lithographs, comprising a suite of five triptychs."

Cohn then prepared a prospectus and targeted investors she thought might be interested in purchasing Emmanuel's works on a buy now, enjoy later basis.

As investors would have to wait up to four years to take delivery of their lithographs, a professional approach was called for. "There's a binding legal document where each party's commitments and undertakings are clearly spelt out and every eventuality accounted for. In the event of death, disability or desertion, the investors have to know that they are covered," she says bluntly.

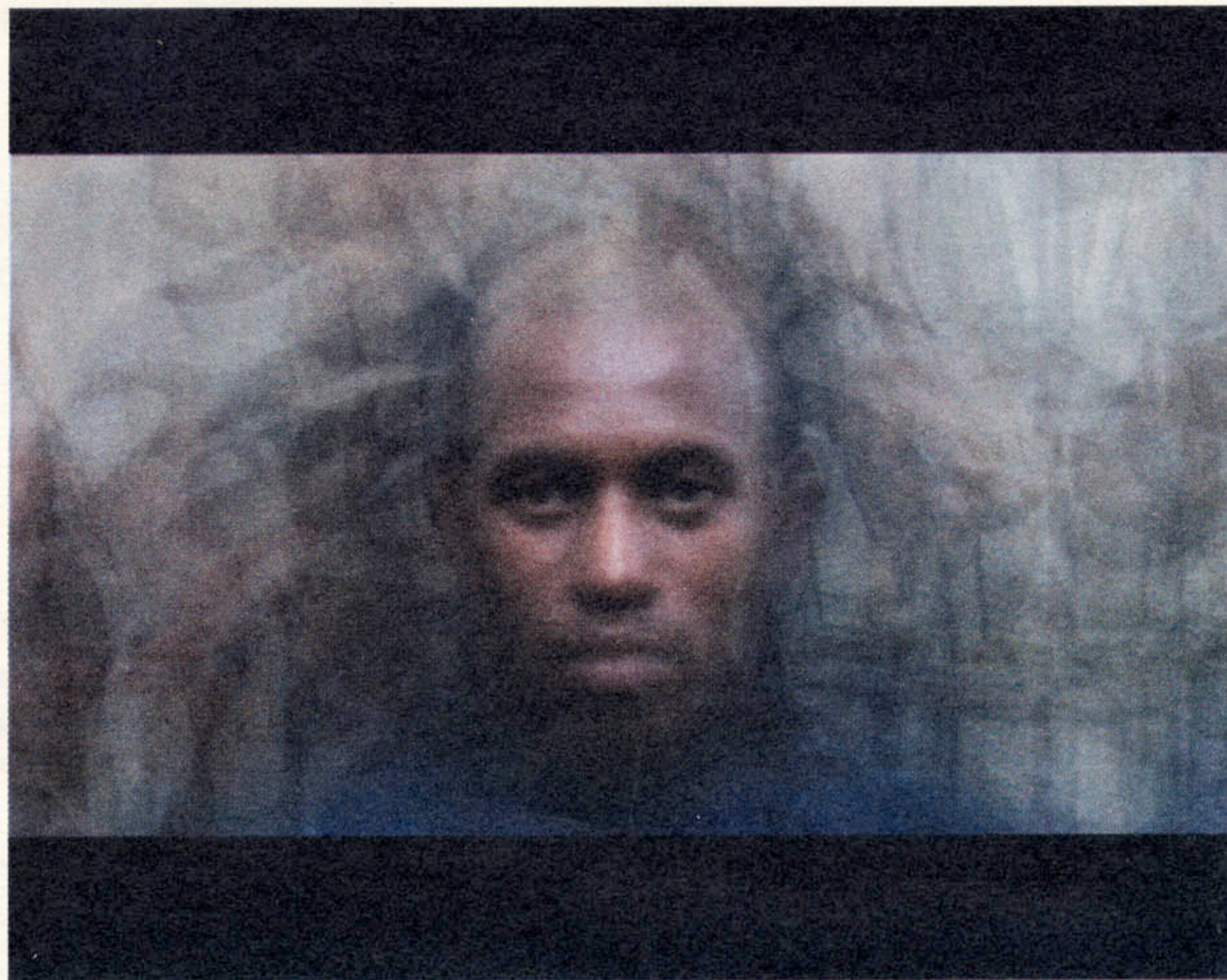


Image from the cover of the visual treatment for *3-SAI A Rite of Passage*, Paul Emmanuel 2007.

Based on the prospectus, Emmanuel was fortunate enough to get five minutes to pitch his concept to Enthoven. "I told him the truth: 'I want to make this film but I need money to survive and it's going to take me four years to complete the full project. If I don't get it I'll starve,'" he quips wryly.

Enthoven studied the sample drawing, the first of the *Transitions* series, and with characteristic brevity told Emmanuel that the entire body of work ought to stay together and that he'd get back to him.

The result of Enthoven's visionary approach was not just an offer to purchase one of the larger investment packages Cohn had devised, but also to prepurchase the exhibition, covering almost 80% of the project's funding requirements.

Jeanetta Blignaut, who represented Enthoven in the deal, says a motivating factor behind the offer

was to ensure that the work was not broken up after the exhibition, and so to retain its conceptual integrity.

Cohn is confident that the balance of the financing will come from other like-minded investors who see value in supporting a rising contemporary artist who has already caught the eye and pocket of a patron such as Enthoven.

So, given that he finally has the funds to embark on his dream project, what keeps Emmanuel awake at night?

"I am acutely aware of the tipping point on this project. Because it is so labour intensive there comes a point where, if I fall behind, I can never catch up. For this reason, both the project and I need to be ruthlessly project-managed. Fortunately I have just the woman for the job," he grins.

Gail Strauss

THOSE who want to see what Enthoven has bought will have to wait until late 2008 when the body of work debuts at the Apartheid Museum in Joburg, after which it will tour four South African art museums, as well as the prestigious Centraal Museum in the Netherlands, before coming home to Spier.

The *Transitions* exhibition comprises an eight-minute film and five major two-dimensional works, hand incised onto exposed and processed photographic paper.

The theme is capture and loss in male rites of passage, exploring emotionally charged issues such as male initiation, the impact of patriarchy and the role of social institutions in shaping traditional notions of masculinity.

Limited-edition stone lithographs on related themes are being presold for fundraising but do not form part of the exhibition.