

Dodd, A. TRANSITIONS PAUL EMMANUEL in Business Day Arts, Business Day,  
Johannesburg, December

[...] with texts by André Croucamp and Robyn Sassen, Art Source South Africa, 2008

One of the strongest, most affecting exhibitions to take place on the Highveld this year has to be Paul Emmanuel's *Transitions* at the Apartheid Museum (runs until 30 December) and this is the elegant little publication that was produced to accompany that show, which is set to travel locally and internationally as part of a larger ongoing project. Engaging with public and private loss, memory and questions around the construction of male identity, *Transitions* comprises a series of five ostensibly 'photographic' sequences of images which, when examined closely, are revealed to be drawings which have been sensitively hand-incised into photographic paper with a blade. The drawings are hung on a circular wall encompassing a projection room in which Emmanuel's unspeakably poignant 12-minute film, *3SA! A Rite of Passage*, is screened. The film documents the head shaving of new recruits at the Third South African Infantry Battalion in Kimberley, one of two national military training camps, which still performs the obligatory hair shaving of new recruits. This small square-format book features an honest and free-wheeling discussion between the artist and André Croucamp around the idea of the 'liminal' – a word, says Emmanuel, that changed his experience of life. 'I understand that liminal moment as a moment when the individual straddles a threshold ... standing in two different realities simultaneously ... male/female, waking/dreaming, power/vulnerability, healing/suffering, life/death,' he says. The discussion goes on to explore Emmanuel's unbelievably painstaking method of 'scratching away at exposed photographic paper' to uncover the image. 'There is something about your work that is like sculpting in marble or in rock... the image you are left with is a result of the loss of something rather than the addition of something,' says Croucamp. I also enjoyed reading Robyn Sassen's essay, which, thankfully, like the earlier text, is not a dull and detached treatise, but an original, heartfelt engagement with the meanings at play in Emmanuel's work. Sassen explores rituals of initiation as they are embodied by religions and cultures. 'So a penis is signifier, as are hair and clothing,' she writes. 'It is what we do to these things that give us a sense of belonging. How does one slip the boundaries of liminality and shift from being a foreigner, a stranger, a creature in exile to one who belongs within a society?'