

## Bosman, N. INTRICATE OBSESSION in *The Citizen, The Citizen*, Johannesburg, October

In an age of instant gratification where many people don't even stay in the same job for four years, it's almost unheard of for an artist to devote over 1 400 days to one body of work. But Paul Emmanuel is the exception. He sold his project to a buyer "off plan" long before he had finished it, quit his day job and began the project *Transitions*, now hanging in the Apartheid Museum. "It's the most bizarre feeling to be finished," he says. "I have empty nest syndrome. I even used to sleep next to these drawings sometimes when I worked late into the night," he confides. "Of course, there were some moments when I was sick to death of the project, but other days I got so absorbed in the work I couldn't stop." After four years of obsessively copying his own photographic recordings of moments of transition by incising each stroke with the flick of a blade onto exposed photographic paper, the result is five breath-takingly intricate sequences of drawings, fluid in both execution and idea, and a film, *3SAI A Rite Of Passage*, all of which explore moments of shifting and white male identity.

True to the exhibition's title, whether the drawings portray circumcision, head shaving or a glimpse into a Lebanese wedding, they are all moments where the subject is in limbo: neither boy nor man, single nor married, coming nor going. "Transitions is all about liminality," explains Emmanuel. "Liminal spaces are spaces of possibility. My works capture the moments of becoming something else, that in between stage," he says. "In all of the drawings, the person undergoing the ritual is anonymous, yet I show the intimate spaces of their bodies, areas reserved for lovers. The drawings are a little voyeuristic; intimate but not intimate." Just as the short process of photography is transformed into a four-year labour of love, so too does Emmanuel evoke and document the sense of how a short ritual can have such long-term effects. "A photograph is such an instant thing, and I liked the idea of obsessing over something for so long that can take so quick to capture," he says. "Photography is a fleeting moment that we are trying to hold onto, and *Transitions* is about both holding on and letting go."