

Basie Yssel



Shadow following Memory by Shane de Lange

How would you like to die?

I don't think I would like that very much at all. (Tom Waits in an interview with Vanity Fair).

Most people like to believe that life can be controlled and ordered, and that it can be an experience that will hopefully develop into a long and meaningful journey. Unfortunately, things do not always turn out the way people might like, and we often find out that we have very little control over our lives. Basie Yssel is an artist who finds these variables intriguing. Having recently almost died from hepatitis, and a sufferer from diabetes, one might say he has a special insight into this enigma.

Yssel's art is about the unpredictability of life despite efforts to predict it. He emphasizes the points of convergence and disappearance that form the various experiences that constitute life. This process of splicing reveals a hyphenated space wherein preservation and loss implode, or

Image: Mirror #20
Medium: Inkjet Print on Hannemeule
Dimensions: 42cm x 29cm
Edition: 1/5



in Yssel's words, where shadows follow memory. I see this transformation of documents into monuments as expressive of the virus of history. Documents freeze and record memories for posterity. Monuments manifest memory's entropy. Yssel attempts to capture his angst and awe in the face of this flux. His working method and understanding of existence comprise a spiritual and systematic synergy.

Quantum physics is an important influence on the development of Yssel's art. Most of the time we tend to see only the things that matter to us at a specific moment in time, but life tends to exceed the sum of its parts. Yssel attempts to transcend petty views of the universe, emphasizing the ways in which fate, chance and serendipity affect the imagination and inspire creative tendencies.

We are continually presented with choices, meetings, and happenings that inevitably change the outcome of our lives. The embrace of chance and accident in Yssel's work derives from his interest in Abstract Expressionism. Yssel draws inspiration from artists like Jackson Pollock and

Image: Mirror #9
Medium: Inkjet Print on Hannemeule
Dimensions: 42cm x 29cm
Edition: 1/5

Cy Twombly, who employed chance incidents in the art making process, not only because they propagated the unpredictable, but also because they emphasised formal elements, such as texture, plasticity, and juxtaposition, which underlie, and often become, the subject matter of an artwork. Often these formal elements are mixed with transcendental ideals, thus merging the physical and the metaphysical. Using this as a point of departure, Yssel introduces the element of figuration into his work. This figuration is always suggestive and vague, primarily allowing the viewer to construct her/his own image.

While serendipity is central to Yssel's work, he also makes recourse to a more controlled and objective use of symmetry, balance and harmony.

Yssel has been using computer technologies as a tool for art making for many years, and he is probably one of the first artists in South Africa to have done so successfully. From as early as the late 1980s, Yssel has used computer programs such as Photoshop to construct elaborate gray-

Image: Mirror #7
Medium: Inkjet Print on Hanneemeule
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Edition: 1/5





scale images that are made up of various scanned objects and computer drawn dynamic elements to form intricate digital collages. Recently, Yssel has begun to introduce more traditional media, such as ink and wash, pencil, and charcoal, into his digitally altered images. He begins by drawing, painting, and scribbling out a satisfactory image, which he then proceeds to scan into the computer for further manipulation. The end result communicates resistance and attraction, raising both epistemological and ontological issues, specifically pertaining to the processes that structure reality, knowledge and existence. For Yssel, the lyrics of Tom Waits exemplify these oscillating influences, which Waits expresses as follows:

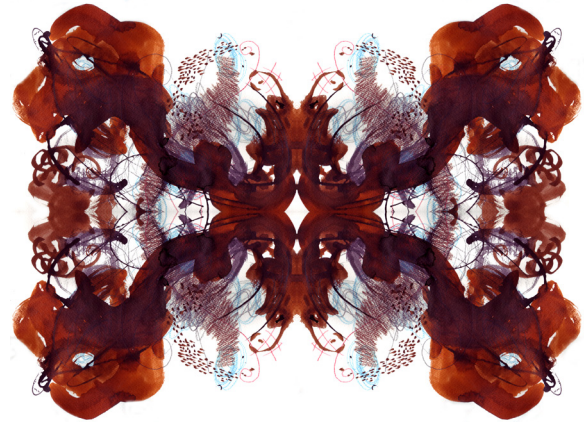
My wife's been great. I've learned a lot from her. She's Irish Catholic. She's got the whole dark forest living inside of her. She pushes me into areas I would not go, and I'd say that a lot of the things I'm trying to do now she's encouraged. And the kids? Creatively they're astonishing. The way they draw, you know? Right off the page and onto the wall. It's like you wish you could be that open.

Image: Mirror #19
Medium: Inkjet Print on Hannemeule
Dimensions: 42cm x 29cm
Edition: 1/5

Yssel's work delves into the labyrinths of the mind, insinuating itself into the subconscious. The images themselves are reminiscent of Rorschach inkblot tests, which morph mirror-like into one another, hinting at ambiguous forms that often render our observational skills numb. Psychologists use these tests to evaluate the personality characteristics and emotional functioning of their patients. Such tests are very suggestive and lead to multiple interpretations. A plethora of possible images hover in the mind's eye, teasing personal associations from the subconscious mind. Working within the ambiguous parameters of concrete and abstract, known and unknown, Yssel creates an interplay of opposites and parallels; schisms and unions.

Chaos and expression, uncertainty and confidence, pattern and symmetry, balance and harmony are all dissected in his images. Consciousness and intent can be found alongside uncertainty and vagueness in Yssel's particular point of view. This is an artist trying to come to terms with the eccentricities of existence and the absurd formulations

Image: Mirror #11
Medium: Inkjet Print on Hanneleule
Dimensions: 42cm x 29cm
Edition: 1/5



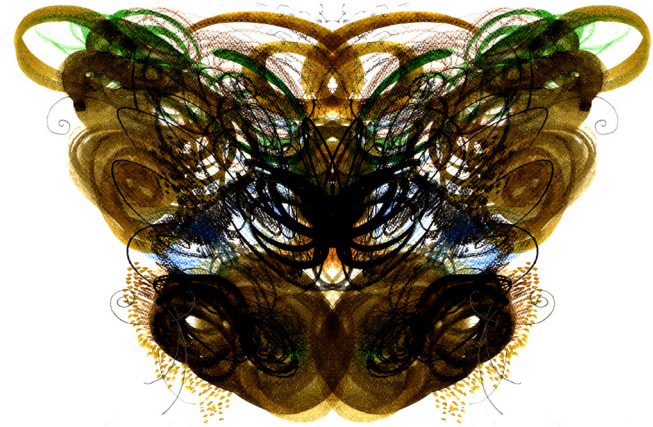
that accompany attempts to understand it.

In this way, Yssel explores traditional Cartesian dualism, focusing on issues of mind and body, inside and outside, experience and understanding, waking and dreaming. However, he takes these concepts further by placing them in a contemporary technological context through his use of digital media, thus emphasising further oppositions between virtuality and reality, representation and simulation.

These images, digitally printed on paper, allude to a continual state of evolution; yet they have a strong sense of stability and symmetry. From a formalist perspective this alters our view of what a painting or a drawing can be: if a pencil line is scanned, is it still a drawing? If a brushstroke is manipulated in Photoshop, is it painting?

Yssel's art probes into the vanishing points of life and along the mind's horizon line. The area of convergence cannot exist without the splitting point. He makes traditional binary oppositions and dualistic distinctions

Image: Mirror #13
Medium: Inkjet Print on Hanneemeule
Dimensions: 42cm x 29cm
Edition: 1/5



unclear and morphs them into a digital aesthetic that is indicative of how the media and technology have become a dominant factor in the way we live our lives, physically and metaphysically. By delving into the psyche, Yssel's work blurs the boundary between the observer and the observed, destabilising the relationship between subject and object, allowing viewers to stop and look into themselves. Between the picture and the mental projection, the viewer's own interpretations are engaged. One becomes conscious of one's own subconscious thoughts. The artwork gazes at you, or rather turns your gaze towards you.



Image: Mirror #17
Medium: Inkjet Print on Hanneemeule
Dimensions: 42cm x 29cm
Edition: 1/5



Image (previous page): Mirror #15
Medium: Inkjet Print on Hanneemeule
Dimensions: 42cm x 29cm
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Image: Mirror #4(detail)
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Edition: 1/5

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