



**Neville Gabie**



## Experiments in Black & White

Neville Gabie's critical discourse on place and displacement exemplifies the impulse to understand concepts of identity and belonging, of finding where a sense of belonging is situated.

Born in South Africa in 1959, his visual arts training was in the distinguished British art colleges; Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design, The Royal College of Art, followed by a post graduate fellowship, at Cheltenham College of Art. After a ten year period as a senior lecturer in sculpture, he has pursued his craft full time since 1999, building an illustrious international career.

It was, however, the 2012 *Modern art projects(Map) - South Africa* residency in Richmond, Northern Cape, South Africa, a town with a strong British history, that resulted in a highly personalised dialogue in his relationship with this space and by default, the country of his origin.

Exploring Richmond and its surrounding arid Karoo landscape, using amongst other things, a camera attached to a kite, he became interested in roads, animal tracks and pathways.

Gradually he found himself attracted to marginal spaces that are neither bush nor town, to places belonging to no one but showing evidence of people having lived and operated there.

In wandering, he discovered the foundations of a once semi permanent Eskom road camp. This strong concrete grid of remaining slabs in the landscape intrigued him, but it was the arbitrary fragmented pieces of linoleum, and traces of where linoleum once was laid that strongly evoked his own sense of displacement. This served as a trigger for his installation and unexpectedly related to work he had done in KwaZulu-Natal in 1996/97.

Gabie views linoleum as another layer of covering, an affordable skin which nostalgically ties to a patternmaking and decorative tradition in South African culture. He deliberately sourced yellow and grey linoleum with a grid pattern and architectural feel from Graaff-Reinet and modelled it on traces of a previous application left behind on the foundations. He also covered concrete columns, fragmented walls and rocks with the same material.

"To me it was a kind of reclaiming of that space to find my own kind of connection to it and about my relationship to this country. I am South African and not South African; I am somewhere in between" he says.

With this work Gabie embeds himself in a liminal and transitional space - gently allowing his intervention, in the land art tradition, to disappear once more to a few curled and bleached traces of memory left behind as evidence of the brief interlude of this returning South African with the country of his origin.

Annali Cabano-Dempsey, March 2014.









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