

**Smokey Signals
from the Groot Karoo**



Smokey Signals from the Groot Karoo

Art interactions in South Africa tend to concentrate in urban centres Johannesburg and Cape Town. But what about the space in between? That endless stretch of tarmac flanked by an ever-changing landscape, which connects these two cities?

The rural town of Richmond is exactly midway between HERE and THERE. It's a quiet space that carries the memories of many generations—personal memories, and also those of a broader, historical nature.

This location served as starting point for *Smokey Signals from the Groot Karoo*, an incubator of sorts for a group of diverse creative practitioners. Participants were selected for the quality of their art initiatives, as well as their ongoing commitment to dialogue and collaboration across physical borders. Most work was process-driven and produced in conversation with the landscape, but participants also delved into the emotional presence of this historically loaded space. Projects ranged from dance performances to sound experiments and oil paintings, and resulted in numerous collaborations that highlighted the interconnections between different geographic locations—a localised attempt at creating a denser cultural fabric.

These investigations within Richmond took place over two weeks and are recounted by the group on the following pages.

Liliana Garcia Cuellar

The skies in the Karoo desert are exceptional; filled with sunsets and wind. The sounds of the trees made me feel as if I were in a Tarkovsky movie. Each day showed us different inexhaustible landscapes: double rainbows, an oasis in the middle of nowhere, a starry sky.

My project developed outdoors, an experience beyond process or completed work. I was inspired to dance in the landscape; to feel the wind, touch the earth, feel the sun in the sunset. To enjoy the silence and connect with my deepest self, knowing I'm only a small part in this universe, here but for an instant.

Part of the piece developed inside a desolate house within a vast, open field. It reminded me of how we sometimes feel destroyed inside, unable to see the wonders around us. Later, I found a circle of black ground set against the intense blue of the sky and the gold of the landscape at sunset. I happened upon some local girls and invited them to dance with me. To find each other was a treasure —language did not matter, we just danced. Of these girls I take their smiles, the most honest I've ever seen.

Liliana Garcia Cuellar has studied various dance techniques, including contact technique, improvisation, feldenkrais, physical theatre, technical lemon, yoga, ballet and performance art. Her focus is on process over product, with a preference for cross-disciplinary projects.





Liza Grobler

Richmond was a dream that willed itself into a physical form. I had a desire to dwell in this space with friends and acquaintances from different times and places —artists I admire for their talent, and for their knack for living. The Karoo staged infinite spectacles of nuanced light and colour. Nienke recorded the tumble weeds and us—always searching. Endless routes: Object not found.

We did discover maps and others' memories in the local book stores. I bought a weathered orange FAK (Afrikaans songbook) which became drawing paper for a visual novel of refrains, songs I unwillingly recalled from my seventies, middle-class, Afrikaans upbringing. So many invisible borders.

Chibuikwe worked fervently as if to defy time. In the afternoons, Liliana danced against the setting sun. At night, the skies cried. For many days.

Caoimhghin and I drew outdoors, while Liz and I played with thorns. My landscape abstractions became audible mutations in João's sound experiments.

All of these fragments of experiences that relentlessly cut through concepts.

Bleep-bleep. Andrew and I sent mirror signals to the multiverse.

All I'm left with is the process. The endless becoming and unbecoming, repeating itself.

Liza Grobler's work explores the tangible qualities of materials and the connections between people, artworks and the world around us; her installations creating dialogues with the spaces in which they are displayed.





Liz Lessner

My work focuses on gesture, so I began the residency with some sculptural gestures made in clay. These were inspired by a book I was reading—The Story of an African Farm—which is set in the Karoo.

Adjusting to the vastness of the Karoo took some doing. The broad sky, the humbling and immense expanse of stars, the sweeping landscape—I felt cosmically small while immersed in these things. But it was not a depressing feeling; it was strangely comforting to feel part of a part of a part of a vast whole. These effects encouraged an openness to the landscape and a desire to work with the materials it provided (like barbs and rushes), as well as an appreciation of the other artists' processes and solutions. Nienke and Caoimhghin taught me to weave, and I also worked with natural materials I had seen Liza use. As I started incorporating these techniques, my sculptures reached completion. Collaborations arose naturally as common themes appeared in the course of making. Future plans for performances with Liliana and sculptural collaborations with Liza have their roots in this openness to place and people.

Liz Lessner is a sculptor and installation artist whose work stems from a framing of resonant gestures. She uses materials like scent, micro-controllers and clay to craft sensory and interactive objects.





Caoimhghin Ó Fraithile

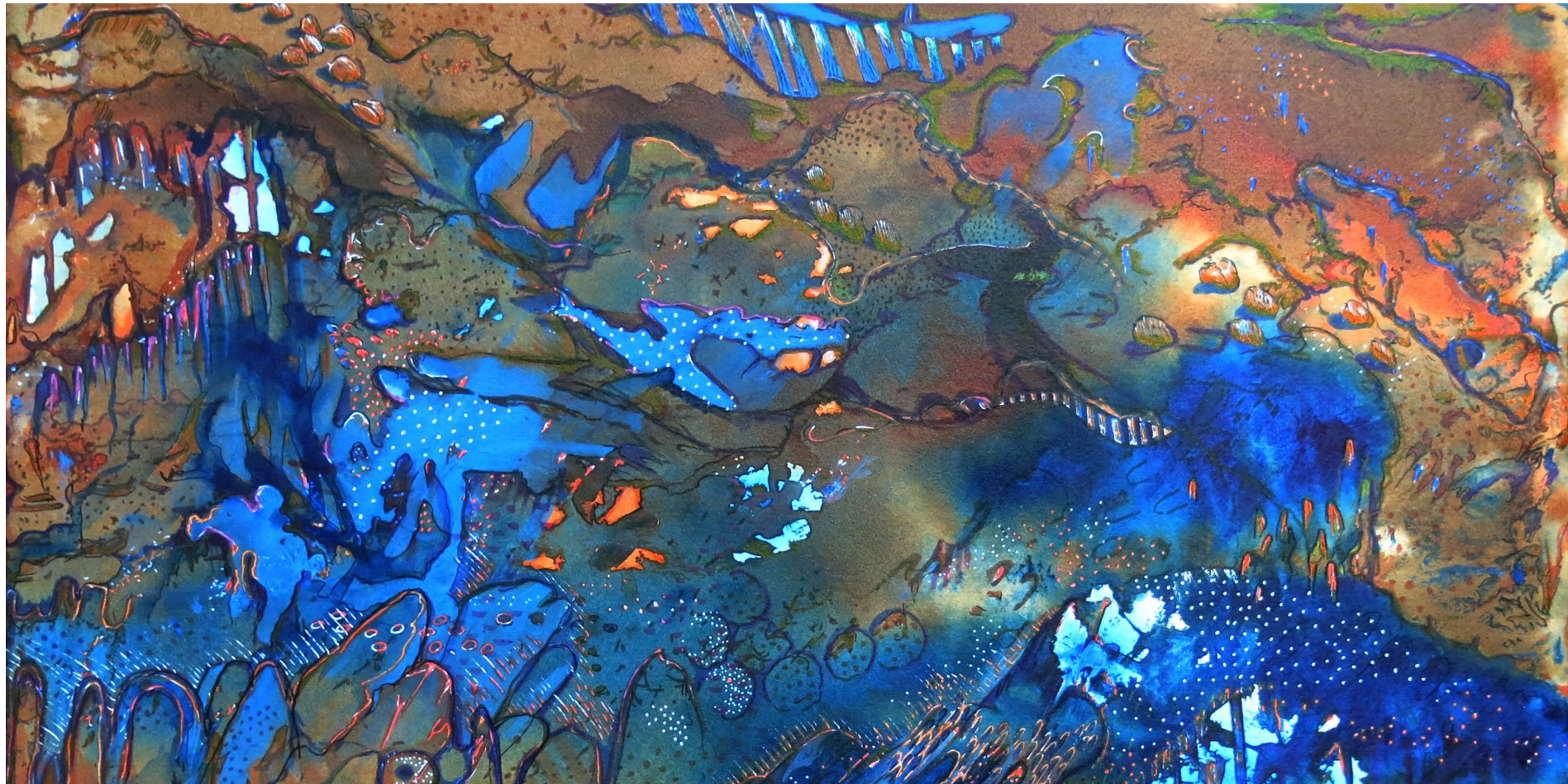
On the way to the Karoo we drove through a land that seemed to have been recently pushed out of the seabed. It was as if we were transversing a different world, one where the prehistoric was ever-present. Coming from Cape Town where the eight of us had met, we were open to what time in Richmond would bring.

Off the beaten track, we were afforded the perfect opportunity to get to know each other, and to make new work that reflected the complex nature of this country. South Africa, with all its history and suffering, also offers something unexpected — its wide open spaces and red rock formations returned me to abstraction, as if the land itself demanded an intuitive response.

Turning north, south and south again, there is something wild and almost forgotten here. The remnants of a colonial past, the outskirts littered with broken glass, contrast the facade of a once prosperous place. This desert in its early winter is full of surprises, hidden below the surface. We searched for rock art and dinosaur tracks, a gorge that hosts wild figs, running water and the remains of birds of prey.



Caoimhghin Ó Fraithille makes miniature drawings and large scale, temporary, site-specific works. His work reflects the transient nature of the world and humanity, and encourages an evaluation of our role within society, our place within nature, and our relationship with the physical structure of the land.



João Renato Zúñiga Orecchia

Knock knock.

Who's there?

The Land.

The Land who?

(Deafening Silence)

The silence deafens with a thousand voices at once. I try to understand, to decipher the codes without politics. But there are so many fences. Separations. Denials.

I walk into the veld to photograph the land from a small hill. Returning to the road, I'm confronted with a red, shouting face threatening me with bodily harm and death by shotgun for squeezing through a fence and placing my feet on the earth. Mine. Not yours. Not theirs.

Land Van Ons Vaders.

Trying to look deeper and drown out the noise, I wander the landscape, attaching contact microphones to objects: bridges, trees, large rocks. One telephone pole in particular emits a magical song, vibrating loudly with infinite tonal beauty and variation, from the hundreds of kilometres of wire attached to it, swinging with the changing wind.

Wondering if a step back might bring me closer, I turn to Liza Grobler's interpretations of the landscape on paper. Dissecting these images, I begin a process of translation—a technical yet intuitive analysis which feels like charting a map. It finds form as a graphic score for electronics, field recordings and piano.



João Renato Zúñiga Orecchia is a sound artist and performer. Through experimentation and improvisation, Orecchia investigates the materiality of sound, seeking a balance between computer technology, handmade electronics, and real-world sounds such as the human voice and traditional instruments.



Chibuike Uzoma

Leaving my residence for Richmond, I was a little nervous and uncertain as to what to make while on this short residency. Normally, I try to keep an open mind so that my ideas don't get too narrow, but was I willing to go where the wind would take me? Richmond is a vast landscape of possibilities—I knew I couldn't walk the complete length and breadth of her body in just a few weeks, but I could let the Landscape know that "Chibuike was here".

The Self Portraits and Obedience paintings made in Richmond were responses to vibrations and stimuli I could perceive and respond to—within this short time in the vast Karoo. The photographs I took explore my current struggle with my background. Working with a lot of personal narratives in my work, and using most of the day for spontaneous processes, made for quite an intense experience.

Chibuike Uzoma is a multidisciplinary artist who engages a range of social issues, from contemporary African politics and colonialism, to immigration and unemployment. He adopts a conceptual process, analysing a situation within a closed (g)locality, and then draws, paints and stages photographic performance images to unveil his findings.





Andrew Ananda Voogel

I was told that in Richmond, you live on your knees.

Though the allure of the incredible open sky grabs the attention—it's on the ground where the minutiae of this landscape's reality flourish. After weeks of wandering through the desert, I eventually trained my camera away from the pinks and theatrical oranges of the sky, and towards the dust.

If you let the dust from your footsteps settle, pausing long enough for your presence to fade into the backdrop, the magic of Richmond begins to unfold.

Slowly, rocks begin to shift, the brush starts to dance and the red dirt begins a choreography of the various creatures that live close to the ground.

The ground has as much depth as its evening sky, encapsulating an archive of time that stretches out far past the horizon. Besides the desert's diverse creatures, I came across a countless array of things: rubbish, forgotten objects, bones, animal remnants, weathered glass, and eventually, a dim and dusty reflection of myself: worn down by the heat, crushing the red dust beneath my knees, asking myself the most brutal of questions about my own personhood.

Andrew Ananda Voogel is a multidisciplinary artist working at the intersection of video and installation. His practice involves rigorous investigations into history, geography and personal narrative, with his primary research centred on the indentured labour trade from India to the Caribbean.







From left to right Liza Grobler, Liz Lessner, Chibuike Uzoma, Andrew Ananda Voogel, João Renato Zúñiga Orecchia, Liliana Garcia Cuellar and Caoimhghin Ó Fraithile. Richmond, May 2017



Modern Art Projects South Africa • PO Box 39 Groenkloof 0027 South Africa
info@map-southafrica.org

Published in 2017 in South Africa by Modern Art Projects South Africa.

All rights reserved.

© 2017 Modern Art Projects South Africa

© images Nienke De Wet

© text the respective artists

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission by the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-9946884-5-3

Special thanks to all the participating artists and Nienke De Wet, Donello Louw, Ricky Marshall Meyer, Morné Ramsey, Harrie Siertsema, Albert van Heerden, Emma van der Merwe, George Williams, Tiema Williams, Valentino Williams, and Yellowwoods Art.



Údarás na Gaeltachta



Culture Ireland
Cultúr Éireann

EVERARD READ

CAPE TOWN | JOHANNESBURG | LONDON CIRCA



Cullinan - Gauteng



Dullstroom - Mpumalanga



Graskop - Mpumalanga



Pretoria - Gauteng



Richmond - Northern Cape