

Johan Thom

STERRETJIESKOMBUISVENSTER

· THE TITLE...

The Afrikaans concept of a *sterretjies-kombuis venster* literally translates into English as 'small-star-kitchen-window', a concept that makes no sense whatsoever. Basically, it refers to the practice of fitting a skylight in the kitchen. Through this window one can gaze at the stars whilst preparing food or just *kuiering* (defined in English as an 'informal visit'...perhaps 'idly sitting around chatting and having drinks and snacks' is a better description). The *sterretjies-kombuis venster* acts like a gateway to the stars, from the kitchen to the cosmos, so to speak.

Also, Afrikaans was negatively viewed as being a *kombuistaal* - a language only spoken at home and not fit for use in any official capacity, including the courts, church or our early South African educational institutions. After two disastrous wars between the Afrikaners and the British (the First and Second Anglo Boer wars of 1880 and 1899 respectively), the British Colonial powers finally handed power to the white settlers of South Africa in 1910. This ensured the rapid growth of Afrikaans as a bona fide national language. Unfortunately this also signaled the rise of Afrikaner

Nationalism that would eventually lead to the implementation of Apartheid and the complete negation of other indigenous languages and cultures in the region.

In the mid to late 20th century Afrikaans became viewed as the 'language of the oppressor'. For example, the tragic events of 16 June 1976, where several Soweto school students, including Hector Pieterse, were killed by Apartheid police forces, are directly linked to the imposition of Afrikaans as the national medium of instruction in the so-called 'Bantu Education' system.

For interest sake, *Liewe Heksie*, the well-known character from the Afrikaans television series of the same name, had her dream of having a *sterretjies-kombuis venster* fulfilled only when the roof of her kitchen was totally destroyed in one of the episodes.

· THE MAPS...

I have used two antiquated maps in the work. The first is a map of Africa illustrating the legacy of colonialism via the continued use of colonial languages (English, French, Portuguese, German, Italian) in the various contemporary African nation states.

The second is an ancient Greek map of the world. Of course neither North nor South America appears in it. Africa seems to be divided into two islands named North Ethiopia and South Ethiopia (shown on the map as 'Afrique' and 'Content Austral' respectively). Until Copernicus, a 16th Century Polish astronomer, produced a workable model of the solar system with the sun in the center it was believed that the world was literally *so plat soos 'n pannekoek* (in English, 'as flat as a pancake'). In fact, many scholars found themselves branded as heretics by the Church for suggesting otherwise (*Liewe Heksie* indeed). Thus, for centuries the early seafaring explorers thought they would fall off the (l)edge of the world if they traveled far enough in one direction. In this regard, seafaring instruments weren't simply useful - they were absolutely essential for safe traveling.

It is also no coincidence that the Afrikaans word for 'map' is *kaart*, and for 'menu' is *spyskaart* ('spice map' when literally translated from Afrikaans to English).

• THE RULERS AND PENCILS...

The rulers and pencils are combined to form ambiguous shapes that remind of the celestial bodies and also of various forms of seafaring equipment such as compasses,

rulers etc. that are used to navigate the correct course.

The wooden rulers are everyday instruments used to measure correct distances, draw straight lines and generally to structure our chaotic thoughts into neat mathematical increments. The discerning handyman can find wooden rulers exactly like these in any hardware store around the world.

A pencil is a loaded symbol. In art it is used to make drawings/ pre-sketches and in the education system it is normally given to young children to use when they start writing. Its marks are easily erasable and as a medium it is cheap and widely available. Also, it is rarely used to make 'final marks' - it is seen as being transient and for the most part not used as a serious art medium.

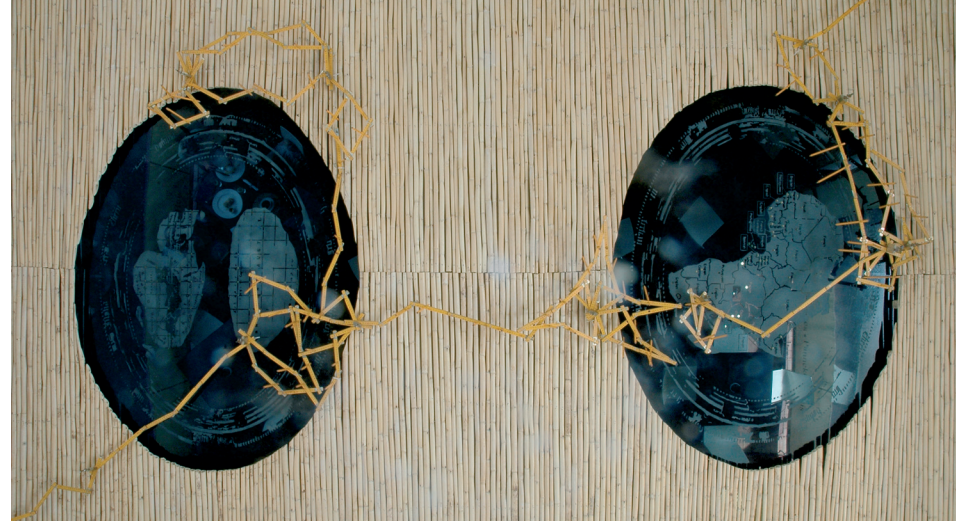
All the pencils used in the work have been part of performance artworks done by myself in various parts of the world (Cape Town, Johannesburg, Soweto & Switzerland).

Images: (following pages installation view & detail)

STERRETJIESKOMBUISVENSTER 2005

Medium: Found materials

Dimensions: 450cm x 450cm



Map - South Africa

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