Memorials, landscape and white masculinity: dialogic interventions in South African art

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ABSTRACT

The memorialisation of place and representation of land and landscape is topical in many societies that are dealing with the aftermath of political trauma, such as Post-Colonial or Post-Soviet countries. In such contexts, artists engage with land and notions of place through processes of memorialisation and landscape representation, or very often, the undoing of these traditions as they were entrenched by regimes that are now redundant. In this article we investigate two different artistic agendas that engage with such sites in South Africa, in the work of Paul Emmanuel, and the collective Avant Car Guard. Though separated by a decade, the artworks discussed here share a dialogic engagement with existing memorial sites, or indeed, traditions that memorialise settler belonging, such as the landscape painting tradition or military equestrian monuments. While Emmanuel's work may be understood to employ a dialogic, anti-monumental strategy in response to the statue of Louis Botha at the Union buildings in Tshwane in South Africa, Avant Car Guard insert themselves in spaces where they engage parodically with memorial sites and the tradition of landscape representation. In both cases, white masculinity is called into question through self-representation, engaging with notions of Afrikaner hegemony and white anxiety.

Keywords: Public art, South African art, Dialogic, anti-monumental, Paul Emmanuel, Avant Car Guard.

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Introduction

Land is an emotive topic globally – it encompasses ingrained understandings of ownership, food security, safety, belonging, comfort, love and notions of home. In South Africa this is complicated by a history of colonialism, exacerbated by the imposition of apartheid as a government policy from 1948-1994 (Britannica [Sa]a). This ideology, instituted by a white patriarchal Nationalist Government, disenfranchised the majority of the population for the benefit of the colonisers. Issues of racial segregation thus became inseparable from the fraught discourse around land ownership and belonging, and also underpin the historical landscape tradition in South African art. The artworks discussed in this article approach these issues head on – the problematics of colonialism, land, power, masculinity and race are reviewed and overturned by the selected artists within a Post-Colonial context. They employ anti-monumental and dialogic strategies that challenge the legitimacy of public monuments and the landscape tradition that has helped to entrench the image of white hegemonic power in the country. The interventions of artists, Paul Emmanuel (discussed below in part 1 of this paper) and the collective known as Avant Car Guard (discussed in part 2), embrace the complexities of being white males in a post-apartheid dispensation. They do this by engaging, through self-representation, with historic remnants and significant places related to their heritage.[1] Their approaches differ markedly in execution but they dovetail in their dialogic approach to these contested sites and thereby, arguably, could be said to raise awareness of the urgent need for social healing and restitution.

Part 1: Anti-monumental strategies in Paul Emmanuel's *Rising-falling*

In June 2021 Paul Emmanuel conducted an anti-monumental[2] intervention on the statue of General Louis Botha in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa.[3] Both the site and the monument carry emotive colonial associations that complicate issues of land and ownership in post-apartheid South Africa. Monuments and memorials typically legitimise the ideologies of those in power when they were erected and thus carry loaded 'selective historical narratives' (Bellentani & Panico 2016:29). In this case both site and monument are tainted by the past exclusionary ideology that infused Afrikaner nationalism, limited national belonging and ultimately dispossessed people on the basis of race. There are many diverse debates globally on what to do with memorials, monuments, or statues that might be considered

to have outlasted their "sell-by" date. The most radical is a complete removal of the offending object to be replaced by something referencing the new dispensation, a tactic that was common in post socialist countries, also seen in South Africa during the Rhodes Must Fall movement that began in 2015. This campaign (pertaining originally to the statue of Rhodes outside Cape Town University and begun by a small group of students) was the starting point for a national movement to remove all monuments that pertained to white supremacy and apartheid oppression (Naidoo 2016). It was also supported by the Economic Freedom Fighters, a political party in opposition to the ruling ANC at the time (Schmahmann 2016:90-92).[4] Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico (2016:28) note, however, that such radical responses to Communist monuments and statues were not universally accepted and often led to 'heated political discussion, social tension and conflict'. This reaction suggests that the symbolic interpretation of memorials is more complex than the initiators of them might suppose. The removal and disposal of historic monumental, or other politically invested material culture, has been a point of debate[5] with the rise of the counter-monument or anti-memorial as a more dialogically based alternative. We join this debate by suggesting that Emmanuel's anti-monumental work, *Rising-falling* (2021)[6] engages critically with both the statue itself and the contested nature of its site. We further argue that Emmanuel's intervention is able to complicate the historic content in a way that encourages dialogue and contemplation on the continuing effects of historic injustices, which would not be possible with the mere removal or replacement of one ideology with another.

The edifice chosen for Emmanuel's intervention consists of a bronze equestrian statue of Louis Botha, five meters in height, created by Coert Steynberg (1905-1982) and unveiled in 1946 (Van Tilberg [Sa]). It is placed atop a monumental plinth, four and a half meters high, which is adorned with six bronze plaques depicting Botha at various stages of his life and career – as a young man, or overlooking his troops during the Boer War (otherwise known as the South African War), or standing on the steps of the Union Buildings, for example. Botha was a hero in the Boer War against the British. He subsequently became the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa in 1910, thus unifying British and Afrikaner held territories into one political entity. What makes his statue particularly incendiary in post-apartheid South Africa is that Botha was 'adamantly opposed to granting political rights (either to vote or eligibility as members of parliament) to black South Africans' thus paving the way for the apartheid policies instituted in the twentieth century (Britannica [Sa]b).

The Union Buildings, on the lawns of which this memorial stands in a central position, were designed and built by Sir Herbert Baker, a British architect, from 1908-1913.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Still from *Rising-falling*, 2021. Single-channel, high-resolution digital video, stereo soundtrack. 3 minutes 45 seconds (looped). Photographed by Charl Fraser.

The site was chosen by the architect because it was the highest point geographically in Pretoria – South Africa's capital city. Baker's vision for these buildings was to create a contemporary Acropolis – a nucleus for the city and a place signifying national pride.[7] The buildings are arranged in a huge semicircular configuration with extended side wings, designed in the European Neo-Classical style with Cape Dutch architectural details in carved doorways or wrought iron balustrades, thereby demonstrating in stone and brick the union of two colonial aesthetics. According to the official Presidency of South Africa website [Sa]:

> The buildings represent a decadent layer of South Africa's history. Originally built to house the entire Public Service for the Union of South Africa, it was then the largest building in the country and possibly the largest building work undertaken in the Southern Hemisphere at that time.

Both the site and the memorial thus commemorate National Unity under a colonial ideology, a time of ascendancy for the white people who ruled the country and the beginning of dispossession for the indigenous inhabitants.

In practical terms it may be possible to remove or deface a monument or memorial, but it is less practical to remove 'the largest building work undertaken in the Southern hemisphere at the time' (Presidency of South Africa [Sa]). So the use of the Union Buildings for the seat of government was appropriated and utilised by all subsequent

governments including the ANC when they took power in 1994. Umberto Eco (1997:196) explains this tacit acceptance in terms of the practicality of buildings:

> Buildings are always around and people perceive them as a background… Architectural messages can never be interpreted in an aberrant way, and without the addressee being aware of thereby perverting them…Thus architecture fluctuates between being rather coercive, implying that you will live in such and such a way with it, and rather indifferent.

The Union Buildings, bastion of western architectural pomposity and grandeur, has thus remained and been adapted for the change in power during Post-Colonial times without any attempt to "Africanise" or otherwise modify the external structure. Some of the reasons for its continued acceptance are due to complex social and political events, discussed in an article by Alan Mabin (2019) titled "Persistence of the Past and the here-and-now of the Union Buildings". But one might ask, why has the memorial to Louis Botha remained so prominently center stage? Clearly it was long overdue for some sort of artistic or political intervention.[8]

Mabin (2019:5,6) notes that the outgoing Nationalist Government declared the entire property on which the Union Buildings stand, including all memorials, monuments and statues on the property, to be a National Monument on 31 March 1994. It was one of the last Acts they passed in an effort to preserve their material history in a rapidly changing political and social post-apartheid dispensation. Subsequently the entire site was officially identified as a National Heritage site on Thursday, August 29, 2013 (SAHRA 2013). This was done under the aegis of the ANC government. The significance of these two pieces of legislation, and set out clearly in section 27(18) of the Heritage Act, is that these buildings and memorials are protected. 'No person may destroy, damage, deface, excavate, alter, remove from its original position, subdivide or change the planning status of any heritage site…' (SAHRA 2013). No matter how "offensive" some people may find the memorial to Louis Botha, methods of response for dissenters are now severely limited. This is why Emmanuel's anti-monumental intervention is both timeous and important for the re-imagining of heritage in response to a diverse democracy. In particular this intervention speaks to his primary concern with questioning constructs of masculinity that pertain to historic stereotypes and culturally defined roles which he finds problematic.

As an equestrian statue the Louis Botha monument follows a long history in the western statuary canon of mounted men, usually generals or leaders who were heroic in battle. They date from early Classical history up to the mid twentieth century after which horses in battle became obsolete. Yet they still carry a sense of grandeur and power, as Allison Meier (2019) explains:

Equestrian statues were a sign of cultural status. They were expensive and complicated to design, necessitating an artist to tackle both the human form and the movement of a horse. The imposing statues also physically and symbolically elevated a recent ruler to an ancient paragon.

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Still from *Rising-falling,* 2021. Single-channel, high-resolution digital video, stereo soundtrack. 3 minutes 45 seconds (looped). Photographed by Charl Fraser.

Emmanuel's video work begins with views of the entire Botha statue and its supporting plinth, taken from different angles (east, north and west) during one whole day (15 June 2021) from sunrise to past sunset. He titled the final work *Rising-falling* to refer to the notion of the sun rising and falling over empires through the ages (Emmanuel 2021c), thereby evoking an understanding of how ephemeral our ideals, our lives and our achievements are (one thinks here of the sonnet, Ozymandias, by Shelly[9] with its message of futile hubris and the temporality of power). What the time lapse video does visually is to disrupt the sense of monumental permanence, eroding the stolid physicality of the Botha monument, adding movement and fluidity to what is normally perceived of as imposing stability (Emmanuel 2021c). The final video is a loop of four minutes, so the sun rises and sets repetitively thereby approximating the relentless movement of time and underscoring the insignificant brevity of human endeavour.

Once night falls, a video made by Emmanuel in 2015, *Remember-dismember*, is shown projected onto the plinth, also from east, north and west. *Remember-dismember* consists of successive images of Emmanuel putting on or taking off

FIGURE Nº 3

Still from *Rising-falling,* 2021. Single-channel, high-resolution digital video, stereo soundtrack. 3 minutes 45 seconds (looped). Photographed by Charl Fraser.

nine different uniforms, one after another. Emmanuel (2020b) explains that these are not merely soldier's uniforms but include business suits or diplomatic regalia so that they symbolise the role of white masculinity in South Africa 'from the Union that fought in WWI through the militarised apartheid state of mid-century to today's neo-liberal capitalist democracy'.[10] The scenes with clothing are interspersed with parts of his naked body, revealed in the undressing process.

Each piece of unclothed skin is marked with the imprinted names of soldiers (black and white) who died in conflicts associated with the uniforms.[11] Emmanuel (2021a) explains that he selected this memorial for his work specifically because Botha was the Prime Minister during World War I. Black soldiers were fighting alongside Britain in the war at this time, to try and gain British support to overturn the Land Act; which the Union government, headed by Botha, had signed into law on 19 June 1913. This Act was the culmination of many earlier attempts in law to prohibit black Africans from buying or renting land (SAHO [Sa]). Emmanuel (2021a) notes that the many black volunteers in the War were not allowed to carry weapons, nor were they acknowledged in any official way for their efforts or their sacrifices in the war.[12] In addition, their attempt to overturn the Land Act was unsuccessful and has resulted in many years of dispossession for black South Africans; a fact that is still a political bone of contention even in Post-Colonial times. This piece of information is central to the importance of projecting *Remember-dismember* onto

FIGURE **Nº 4**

Still from *Rising-falling*, 2021. Single-channel, high-resolution digital video, stereo soundtrack. 3 minutes 45 seconds (looped). Photographed by Charl Fraser.

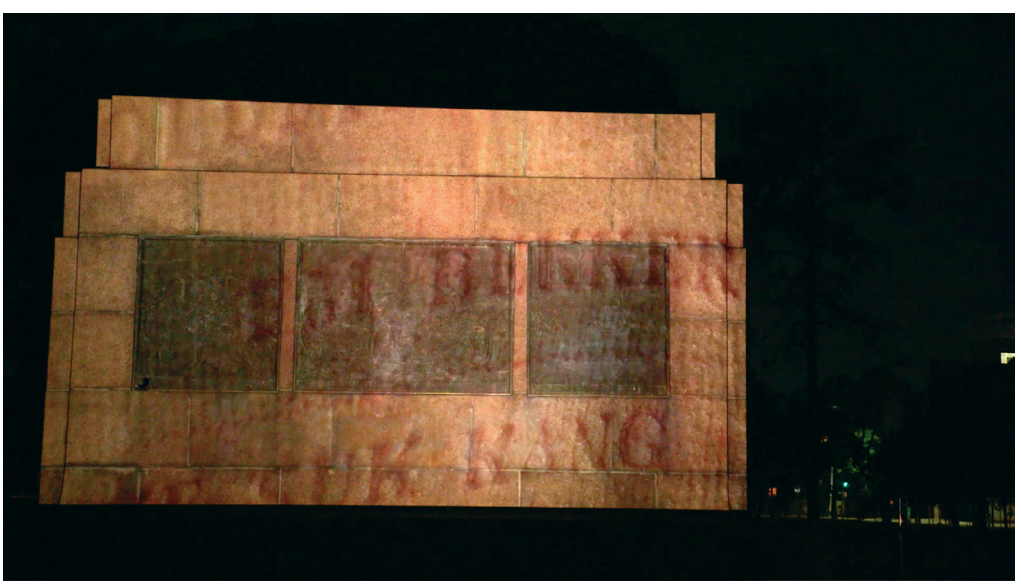

FIGURE **Nº 5**

Still from *Rising-falling*, 2021. Single-channel, high-resolution digital video, stereo soundtrack. 3 minutes 45 seconds (looped). Photographed by Charl Fraser.

Botha's plinth and in this particular site, which carries references to the contested history of land and race relations that have tainted the history of South African politics for so many years.

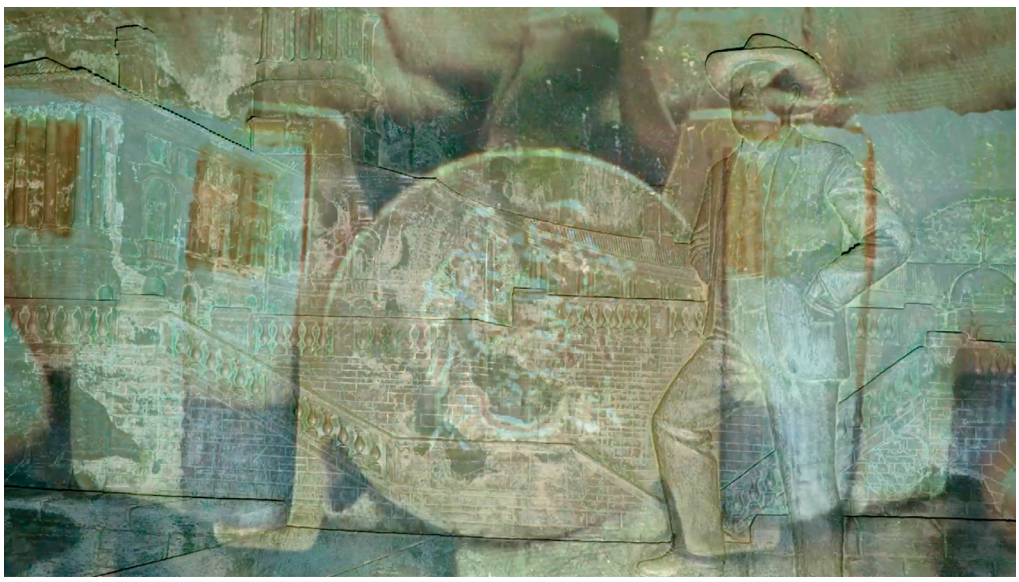

FIGURE Nº 6

Still from *Rising-falling*, 2021.Single-channel, high-resolution digital video, stereo soundtrack. 3 minutes 45 seconds (looped). Photographed by Charl Fraser.

During *Rising-falling* there are several close-up scenes of the central bronze panel on the monument's plinth, with Botha standing in a commanding pose, hands on hips and one foot ascending the steps of power – up to the Union Buildings. It is this form of hegemonic masculine identity that Emmanuel is aiming to disrupt with his intervention. Hegemonic masculinity has been associated with the dominance of masculine behaviour and expectations relating to gendered power relations as well as the power men had over other men, which might include 'oppressive attitudes and practices' (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger 2012:11). In addition, Robert Morrell, Rachel Jewkes and Graham Lindegger (2012:16) identified a specific type of hegemonic masculinity that pertained to Afrikaner society and would be appropriate to the depictions and demeanour of Louis Botha, a hegemony which demonstrated 'a rigidly hierarchical social order, and glorified militarism and the Afrikaner frontier history'. Ironically, overlaid on this vision of Botha's male ascendancy, Emmanuel's naked skin bruised by the names imprinted on it contests the notion of masculinity as strength and symbolises the erosion of white privilege in a Post-Colonial context. As a substitute for the dead soldiers, he epitomises masculine vulnerability. Emmanuel

(2021c) explains 'I wanted to present the male body as something vulnerable and fragile rather than this gallant, victorious, strong, indestructible figure'. The video *Remember-dismember* thus functions to "dismember" the notion of masculinity in South Africa.

Rising-falling as a dialogic form of anti-monumentalism

The statue of Louis Botha demonstrates the qualities listed in Arthur Danto's definition (cited by Young 1993:3) of monuments as 'essentially celebratory markers of triumphs and heroic individuals'. James Young (1992:294) also notes that 'The material of a conventional monument is normally chosen to withstand the physical ravages of time, the assumption being that its memory will remain as everlasting as its form'; the tacit inference here is that the subject memorialised is expected to have lasting merit. Quentin Stevens, Karen Franck and Ruth Fazakerley (2021:951) note however that during the twentieth century, monuments were often criticised for, among other perceived lacks, 'representing values that had become obsolete or objectionable'.[13] Stevens *et al*. (2012:952) define efforts to counter problematic monuments as falling into categories that either encompass anti-monumentality, as in unconventional subject matter, or anti-monumental techniques and design; or dialogic tendencies, as in something that 'critiques the design of a specific, existing monument in an explicit, contrary and proximate pairing'. I have discussed Emmanuel's earlier works, such as his *Lost Men* series, as encompassing both tendencies,[14] but in this instance one can argue for *Rising-falling* as inherently an example of dialogic anti-monumentalism. The fleeting images, the use of video and projection instead of stone and bronze, the lack of permanence in the intervention, all of these are anti-monumental tendencies yet Emmanuel's *Rising-falling* cannot physically exist without the original monument as its substrate – which is what constitutes its 'explicit, contrary and proximate pairing' (Stevens *et al*. 2012:952). His response to the content, however, is what really entrenches its dialogic status. *Rising-falling* directly critiques the notion of the strong, ascendant masculine leader who is heroic, manly, in control and underpinned by colonial ideologies that infer superiority.

Emmanuel (2021b) acknowledges that his whiteness complicates this intervention, inasmuch as he is countering the white appropriation of land and recognising the lack of acknowledgment afforded to black participants in the wars that were fought over land and place. It is his white skin that bears the names of the dead soldiers, and his body that wears their uniforms. He states 'I want to show that I am willing to literally put skin in the game, but to do that I have to continually ask another

question: What are my own assumptions about how the privileged white male body can become a valid site of political struggle in the 21st century?' (Emmanuel 2021b). Emmanuel has made himself vulnerable. He has put his unadorned, slim, fragile body on display as the antithesis of hegemonic masculinity in order to engage directly with the way historic narratives have been imprinted on the landscape. He has made himself publicly vulnerable, has fragmented and "dismembered" himself and his white privilege in the very site where these texts of exclusion and disenfranchisement were, quite literally, writ in stone. Although his work in situ was a temporary intervention, *Rising-falling* persists, in its video iteration, to disrupt the memories visitors may have of this site. The dialogic nature of Emmanuel's work reminds us that there can be a different view of masculinity, race and power, pointing to the need for continuing dialogue in our efforts to engage with practices that will foster redress and healing in our divided country.

Part 2: Avant Car Guard and parodic dialogism

Landscape traditions in South Africa

Paul Emmanuel's intervention at the Union buildings is not an isolated instance of such a grappling with historical notions of Afrikaner-and white settler identity. His work brings to mind the earlier performances of a collective of young white male artists working in South Africa: Avant Car Guard. These artists – Zander Blom, Michael McGarry and Jan-Henri Booysens – were active at the end of the 2000s, and themselves engaged with canonical representations of place and land in South Africa's history. One may think here of their performance of jumping on the grave of the well-known landscape painter J.H. Pierneef (Figure 4), and of their performance at a site of mine dumps (Figure 1), sporting parodic settler costumes and ships *a la* the time of Dutch founding settler figure Jan van Riebeeck. Their work is very different in tone from Emmanuel's, taking the form of parody and ironic, self-reflexive critique of white masculinity and its role in South African art, as well as its imprint on representations of landscape in the country. What their work shares with Emmanuel's is dialogue with canonical images and places in South African (art) history. While dialogic engagements with canonical work such as public sculptures may be current in the context of the Rhodes Must Fall movement and its aftermath, they have an established history.[15] Beezy Bailey's engagement with the Cape Town counterpart statue of Louis Botha in 1999 for example, turned the general into a Xhosa initiate (Williamson 2002:16-17). Aside from political figures, artists who are associated with the nationalist regime, such as Pierneef, have also become the

focus of debate and critique. Kentridge's (1988) essay slating Pierneef as celebrated local artist, and Wayne Barker's 1989 performance of tearing up a painted copy of one of his Station Panels in a bar frequented by black working class patrons are cases in point (Strange Weather… 2011).

While Emmanuel's work engages with the Louis Botha monument, notions of land ownership and landscape representation's role in how this is ideologically constructed as belonging are implicit in both his work, and in the Union Buildings themselves. Its erection around the same time as the passing of the Land Act demonstrates that South Africa was regarded as territory (a resource to be owned) at the time, and the history of landscape representation reinforces this. Pierneef's work, for example, is often seen as epitomising a settler view of the landscape of the country; as empty, ready to be claimed and put to fruitful use by settler farmers and even industry such as mining. In his oeuvre Pierneef constructed a landscape that resplendently evidences the power and potential of nature, but he also saw this landscape, ripe for development, as inherently linked to Afrikaner identity. He regarded the Afrikaner people as 'natuurmense', implying that they had a unique bond with nature, and that they understood their own identity in this manner (Van Robbroeck 2019:53-54).

While black people were thus being dispossessed of their rights to the physical land through legislature, as Sol Plaatjie's (1915) famous text outlines, white settlers were attempting to forge an ideological identity as Africans, partly facilitated through landscape representation (Foster 2003). J.M. Coetzee's (1988) seminal text on the impact of European landscape conventions on how this identity was constructed, investigates the notion of white identity in relation to landscape representation in art and in literature between the 1800s and the 1950s. He considers, for example, how artists turned to the picturesque and idyllic traditions, and found them an uneasy fit with the landscapes of South Africa. He suggests that perhaps the sublime is the only tradition that could have lent itself to forging a new African settler vocabulary with which to capture the landscape. There was very little uptake of this tradition, however. Despite settler artists seeking to reinforce notions of belonging, Coetzee (1988:11) argues that they failed to achieve a legitimate sense of identity linked to the landscape. He puts this eloquently as settlers facing a crisis of belonging; being 'no longer European, not yet African' (Coetzee 1988:11).

This crisis of belonging is implicit in Emmanuel's work, when he says that his own white skin is a point of contention in how he positions himself in relation to white (Afrikaner) masculinity. It is far closer to the surface in Avant Car Guard's work, as they engage specifically with different South African landscapes, and the landscape

tradition in their selecting of landscape painter Pierneef's grave for their performance. While their work has not often been discussed in relation to landscape, one could argue that it is more than a backdrop in their performances from around this time.[16] One may even suggest that the debate around memorials that is currently very important in South Africa was in a sense foreshadowed in art that engaged with the political upheaval and uncertainty at the end of the 2000s. The year 2008 saw widespread xenophobic violence break out in townships and Johannesburg's inner city, many political scandals and allegations of pervasive corruption, and growing fears around crime, along with Jacob Zuma's 2009 election to president despite a case of rape brought against him in the preceding years (Desai 2010, Gumede 2008). Yet, in 2010 South Africa hosted the Football World Cup amid much celebration (Human Rights Watch 2009).

Avant Car Guard, the landscape and white anxiety

Why compare Avant Car Guard's confrontation with Pierneef and with Emmanuel's work? There are several visual correspondences: the setting – Tshwane, and its recognisable landscape elements (along with nearby Johannesburg) – the presence of white men's bodies in relations to monumental structures, and a dialogic approach which makes use of self-representation. Unlike Emmanuel, however, Avant Car Guard is known for the irreverence of their performances. In a more recent review of a group exhibition featuring this artwork, Thuli Gamedze (2016:[Sp]) refers to them as 'our very own successful bad boy trio of white men', and is disparaging of what she sees as the implicit racist joke made by their name, as well as of the efficacy of their performance at Pierneef's grave as having any real subversive power.

The implications of whiteness or white bodies doing the work of subverting symbols of past white power are complex, and need careful analysis, which can only be done here in a preliminary manner. We would like to tease out a few strands of importance in their work, however. The first relates to the notion of landscape. The collective engages ironically with different landscapes in the country, one may even say that these are "recognisably" South African settings, turned upside down: Tshwane's Church Street Cemetery (the so-called Heroes' Acre), the mining landscape of Johannesburg, and Delta Park in Johannesburg. These places are evident in the artworks: *AVANT CAR GUARD at J.H. Pierneef's grave. 1954, Stupid Fucking White Man,* and *AVANT CAR GUARD outside. 1884*. Although this has not been overtly explored in writing on their work – mostly comprised of reviews in popular art publications – their repeated appearance in South African settings could further be read in a fruitful manner against the backdrop of white anxiety,

which is the second strand of importance we would like to focus on.

While land dispossession has blighted the relationship of black people with South African land and landscapes, which is evidenced in the western biases in landscape representation pointed out by Coetzee and scholars such as Elizabeth Rankin (2010), the position of whiteness in relation to landscape is fraught in the post-apartheid context. One may make the argument that whiteness is facing a profound crisis of belonging, as scholars in whiteness studies such as Melissa Steyn (2001,2005), Anthea Garman (2014:211-228), Georgina Horrel (cited by Garman 2014:215), Helene Strauss (cited by Garman 2014:216), and Charles Gabay (2018) have done. 'White anxiety' may be seen as related to this threatened ideological position, with the perceived power and superiority of whiteness being fundamentally questioned (Gabay 2018:1-45). Settler notions of belonging in the South African landscape are tenuous and if one considers arguments made by Coetzee (1988), Jeremy Foster (2003), and Lize van Robbroeck (2019), it is also fragile and constructed. Artists such as Avant Car Guard engage with this crisis of white identity, which is based on place and on the tradition of landscape representation, and which is in turn now often regarded as nationalist, and racist. Like Emmanuel, their dialogue with the spaces in which they place themselves, thus has to take the form of critique, and they combine it with irreverence and humour.

FIGURE Nº 7

Avant Car Guard. 2007. *Stupid Fucking White Man*. Inkjet print. 1072 x 738 mm. Edition of 15. Courtesy Zander Blom.

In the work they produced around the end of the 2000s, Avant Car Guard inscribe themselves in landscapes where they occupy an awkward position, and at times they point this out. In *Stupid Fucking White Man* (Figure 7), they are masquerading as Dutch settlers, in amateur costumes with cardboard ships. They are absurdly "stranded" on a landscape of mine dumps. Mining itself has a colonial history in South Africa, and the landscape of mine waste could be seen as the ecological consequence of colonial and apartheid ravaging of the natural resources in the country. Avant Car Guard's parodic performance points to their own settler heritage as 'stupid fucking white m[e]n'. Their engagement with settler history is performed through their own ephemeral figures appearing in carboard costumes on a deserted mine dump, instead of through the established monumental vocabulary of impressive bronze sculptures such as Jan van Riebeeck's[17] statue on Adderley street in Cape Town (Figure 8).[18]

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Tweed, J. 1899. Jan van Riebeeck Statue in Cape Town. Bronze cast. (Joubert 2015).

The procedural inscription of themselves in these different settings cynically echoes another representational strategy associated with settler art; adopted by Pierneef in the well-known Johannesburg Railway Station panels series. The 32 panels were commissioned by the South African Railways and Harbours (SAR&H), a government corporation established in 1909, for the Johannesburg Park Station in 1929, and hung in 1932 (Coetzee 1992). In these panels, the artist represented different landscapes which includes scenic mountain vistas such as Rustenburg Kloof, and Mont-aux-Sources in the Drakensberg mountain range. These panels present a touristic view of the country, providing the viewer with iconic representations of South Africa's landscapes, but also *making* these landscapes iconic. Pierneef's work is not unique in this approach to landscape. Foster (2003) writes about the SAR&H, which itself had already produced a large archive of photographs of the South African landscape before commissioning Pierneef. The photographic archive was used in advertising material and as décor in trains, and was instrumental in both constructing and conveying a sense of the South African landscape to local and international travellers. This landscape was of course intended chiefly for white travellers, since the cost of such travel, combined with legislation such as the Land Act which assigned so little of the country's land to black Africans, limited black South Africans' access to the railways. Foster (2003) considers the photographic archive of the SAR&H as indicative of the relationship between white settlers and the landscape, reading it as a construction related to their sense of belonging, despite their lack of deep historic links, particularly to the landscape of the South African hinterland. He describes this process as an 'imaginative identification with the country's physical territory' (Foster 2003:659).

When read within this context, one might suggest that Avant Car Guard's work in different "landscape settings" points to their own "tourist" identity as white men in South Africa, and also within the South African art scene. The latter was at the end of the 2000s often described as caught in an unresolved in-between state; not yet evidencing the racial transformation heralded by the end of the apartheid era.[19] In fact, one might regard Avant Car Guard's engagements with landscapes around the country as evidence of their outsider status, and their dialogical engagements with canonical figures in the settler art of South Africa implicates their own capacity in the "new South Africa" as outsiders.[20] In *AVANT CAR GUARD outside. 1884* (Figure 9), their masquerade continues in their posturing as *plein air* artists, drawing from life at the Braamfontein Spruit in Delta Park, one of Johannesburg's largest parks. One might say they are enacting Coetzee's description of the historical mismatch between European landscape conventions and the South African landscape in their parody of Impressionist art practice. The date, 1884,

FIGURE Nº 9

Avant Car Guard. 2006. *AVANT CAR GUARD* outside. 1884. Inkjet print. 1072 x 738 mm. Edition 15. Courtesy Zander Blom.

indicates that they are inscribing themselves into a landscape that parodically predates the founding of Johannesburg, and its mining industry in 1886. They are thus performing the farcical role of settler artists, capturing a previously "undiscovered" landscape. Of further note is the contrast between their awkward act of sketching the spruit as artists in the landscape, and Zionists practicing a religious ceremony in the background, pointing to a racial divide in how the landscape is understood here. The awkwardness of their presence as "artists" in this setting is further emphasised by some details: rubbish in the left foreground, and the bus in the background, signifying the presence of a large group of people, and in effect undermining the notion of unspoiled "veld", which Avant Car Guard are observing for their drawings.

Emmanuel projects his own image onto the space outside the Union buildings, grotesquely enlarged, dwarfing both the Louis Botha statue, and the buildings in the background. In *AVANT CAR GUARD at J.H. Pierneef's grave. 1954* (Figure 10) Avant Car Guard insert themselves into another historic site in Pretoria; the Heroes' Acre in the Pretoria Cemetery, where H.F. Verwoerd's grave and memorial are also to be found. Like Emmanuel, who "moons" the monument, and in effect the viewer

FIGURE **Nº 10**

Avant Car Guard. 2006. *AVANT CAR GUARD at J.H. Pierneef's grave. 1954.* Inkjet print. 1072 x 738 mm. Edition 15. Courtesy Zander Blom.

as he undresses and dresses in the video performance, Avant Car Guard seem subversively in dialogue with the history of whiteness, and its relationship to land, as they drunkenly dance on Pierneef's grave. One may consider that they are doing this in gloating over Pierneef's demise in the South African canon, but also in a darker manner, pointing to their own (necessary) death in the South African art scene. The date that forms part of the title of this performance, 1954, predates Pierneef's death, perhaps indicating that they are inscribing themselves into a history they were not part of but are implicated in as white men. They are re-writing history with themselves in it, casting themselves as canonical white male figures, but ironically as anti-heroes. The year also has a perhaps unintentional significance in relation to land in the country, which points back to the relationship between white landscape traditions and land ownership. In 1954 the Natives Resettlement Act, Act No 19, was passed, which gave the government powers to remove Africans from the area of Johannesburg in preparation for the forced removal of black people from Sophiatown to Soweto. This was one of the largest forced removals enacted during the apartheid years (Nieftagodien & Gaule 2012:19-20).

Conclusion

In engaging in sometimes ridiculous dialogue with South African landscape traditions and the significance of land itself, Avant Car Guard employ a parodic dialogic strategy in the late 2000s, in some ways prefiguring the current engagement with public space, public art and monuments which Emmanuel enters into with his work at the Union Buildings. Emmanuel challenges the hegemonic symbol of white Afrikaner masculine power that is represented in the statue of Louis Botha at the Union buildings in the anti-monumental mode of a transient video projected onto the site. Here he engages in a "dismembering" subversive dialogue with the monument, but also with the site and what it represents: white claims to land ownership and belonging in the country, enforced by colonial and apartheid legislation, as well as the memory of the conflicts that enabled this. In some ways Avant Car Guard adopt a dialogic approach to the language of monumentality as well. Instead of engaging with monuments, they perform themselves "as" statues, and pose in a variety of settings that undermine the tradition of settler monuments in the country. Producing a series of "tourist views" of South African landscapes, they appear on a mine dump, and in a parodic pre-colonial landscape, and they also take on the historical canon of landscape painting by photographing themselves at Pierneef's grave site. Though very different in tone, and working some years apart, the artists point out the 'selective historical narratives' that they are implicated in (Belletani & Panico 2016:29). These narratives legitimise whiteness and white masculine identity in relation to South African land, and landscape. By drawing attention to the contested legitimacy of such claims, Avant Car Guard evoke the notion of white anxiety, while Emmanuel portrays white masculinity in a fragile and intimate manner. In both cases the artists make use of self-representation as an approach to challenging the language of monumentality entrenched in white memorial practices and historical representational traditions in South Africa.

Notes

1. These artists are not alone in using these strategies to subvert white hegemonic masculinity. See for example an article by Leora Farber (2015), which considers the work of black amateur fashion photographers who also use self-representation to reframe their own masculinity within the problematic historical context of the apartheid past, and Álvaro Luís Lima (2012) who discusses the work of artists such as Athi-Patra Ruga who engage queer strategies in refuting hegemonic white nationalism.

2. An anti-monument is not quite the same thing as a counter-monument although the terminology is imprecise and often overlaps or is used interchangeably. Quentin Stevens, Karen Franck and Ruth Fazakerly (2012) have defined the different ways monuments and memorials may be identified in their article "Counter-monuments: the anti-monumental and the dialogic". The authors use the terms anti-monumental and dialogic to differentiate between two very specific approaches that both counter the traditional notion of a monument. The differences will be clarified and applied to Emmanuel's anti-monumental intervention in this paper.

3. The city of Pretoria was formally renamed Tshwane in 2005. This was met with resistance by some white citizens and the political party Afriforum, sparking debate that went on until 2013 (Mudzuli 2013).

4. In 2015 the sculpture of Cecil John Rhodes, by Marion Walgate, was first desecrated with excrement and later removed from the University of Cape Town in response to student protests about the 'racist legacy' of the University (Nordling 2021). Also of direct relevance to our article is the news report on calls for the removal of the equestrian statue of Louis Botha in front of the Parliament Buidlings in Cape Town by Okuhle Hlati and Siviwe Feketha (2020) in the *Cape Times Online News*.

5. Brenda Schmahmann (2016) in her article "The Fall of Rhodes: The Removal of a Sculpture from the University of Cape Town" gives an overview of the effect of removal campaigns in South Africa, comparing them with post-Soviet statue destruction or relocation projects. She furthermore offers suggestions for alternative engagements with offending monuments. This issue is also discussed in the article "Remove or keep a statue? South Africa debates painful legacy" (Associated Press 2019). Further debates on the aftermath of Afrikaner nationalist material culture are raised in Federico Freschi, Schmahmann and Lize van Robbroeck's (2019*) Troubling images: Visual culture and the politics of Afrikaner Nationalism.* Also relevant is the discussion in "Memorial Landscapes: Analytic Questions and Metaphors" by Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman (2008) and "Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow" by Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson (2002).

6. The entire video work is available to watch on the University of Johannesburg Art Centre's Moving Cube at: https://movingcube.uj.ac.za/watch/paul-emmanuel-substance-of-shadows/paul-emmanuel-rising-falling-2021/

7. Herbert Baker chose this site, Meintjeskop, because it 'reminded him strongly of some of the acropolises of Greece and Asia Minor, where he had studied Mediterranean architecture' (The Presidency of South Africa [Sa]). In addition it accorded with the writings of acclaimed British architect Sir Christopher Wren (seventeenth and eighteenth century) who stated that 'a public building should be a national ornament which establishes a nation, draws people and commerce and makes people love their country' (The Presidency of South Africa [Sa]).

8. One contested statue, that of the former third Prime Minister of South Africa, Barry Herzog, was removed from its central position on the southern lawns of the Union Buildings. It was replaced by a huge (nine meter tall) bronze statue of Nelson Mandela with outstretched arms (designed by sculptors André Prinsloo and Ruhan Jansen van Vuuren) on the 16th of December 2013 (Reconciliation day), a mere ten days after Mandela's death. The statue of Herzog was not removed entirely but moved to the eastern parts of the lawn, with the permission of the Herzog family (Maromo 2013).

9. Percy Bysse Shelly wrote the sonnet Ozymandias in 1817. The last five lines are the most evocative pertaining to this discussion:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

10. The uniforms include a World War II gas mask; a contemporary grey cotton tee shirt; a World War I British officer's dress jacket with regalia; 1940s-1970s South African ambassador's dress ensemble; contemporary executive suit (with Rolex wristwatch); contemporary South Africa military regalia; field pants used in the 1980s apartheid military with canvas belt; 1980s apartheid era military boots; World War II (1939-1945) military boots and socks (Allara 2016).

11. To imprint the names onto his skin Emmanuel uses a process of blind embossing, using linotype blocks with letters creating the names which are pressed into his skin as a way of physically "wounding" his body. The inflamed marks were photographed before they could fade. This process was used for all of his Lost Men pieces, to acknowledge the sacrifice of both black and white soldiers in the various wars he was commemorating.

12. A similar state of discrimination pertained in the US Army during World War I where, after heroic deeds resulting in many successful battles during the war, many black soldiers returned to suspicion, an increase in racial tension and anti-black race riots (Bryan [Sa]).

13. James Young (1992:271) speaks of the rise of 'counter-monuments' in post-war Germany in response to the problem of holocaust memorials, where artists and architects faced the incongruous task of memorialising events in which the notion of glorifying a cause has no meaning. Young (1992:271) explains that 'counter-monuments' were designed to inherently undermine the very function of a monument both in structure and purpose.

14. See Karen von Veh (2020).

15. Two recent exhibitions held at the Voortrekker monument in Pretoria, during the 2021 Aardklop festival also come to mind: *Liewe Land!*, a group exhibition where invited artists responded to prints of well-known historical landscape paintings by South African artists, and Johan Stegmann's installation of prints entitled *'n Goeie Dag vir 'n Slag*. These were both curated by Dineke van der Walt, and engage with the monument, its site, and with questions of landscape in the country.

16. See reviews and publicity pieces in popular publications such as *Artthrob* (Panchia 2009), and *Art Africa* magazine (Avant Car Guard 2007).

17. Van Riebeeck, whose image was also memorialised on the currency, the Rand (named after the mining area of the Witwatersrand), was one of the first Dutch governors of the Cape. There has been some historical dispute about whether the face known as Jan van Riebeeck's was actually the portrait of a Dutch official that never even came to South Africa, Bartholomew Vermuyden, however. This is who the portrait on the Rand currency erroneously represents according to Giliomee and Mbenga (2007:42-43).

18. The sculptures of Van Riebeeck and his wife have been the subject of artistic and protest interaction as well. On Heritage Day in 1999, the statues of Van Riebeeck and Maria de la Quellerie were given orange dunce cones by local artists' organisation entitled Public Eye, as a form of subversive interaction with the sculptures (Williamson 2002:17). In June 2020 placards were hung around these sculptures' necks, protesting their presence in the public space of the city (Lalkhen & Roomanyay 2020).

19. See for example articles by Sharlene Khan (2006:56), Lize van Robbroeck (2007:54-56) and Thembinkosi Goniwe (2009:25) in the local journal *Art South Africa* published around the time Avant Car Guard were active, where the hegemonic capacity of whiteness in South African art and art history is bemoaned and interrogated.

20. See Melissa Thandiwe Myambo (2011), Mzwanele Mayekiso (1996), Anthea Garman (2014:222), and Tom Penfold (2012), who are all critical of aspects of this popular designation and its implications for the country.

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