

LAURYN ARNOTT



Migration and Transformation



Crossing over 2004-06 charcoal, charcoal pencil, collage, on Dessin 300gsm paper 171 x 162cm

In 1979 I was visiting Europe through the portal of London when a fellow traveler, a South African, spoke to me about the death of Steve Biko. To my shame I responded with: 'Who is Steve Biko?'

Since that embarrassing moment I have always felt myself to be the political inferior of both black and white persons from the southern nations of Africa. I have certainly felt that I have been privileged to develop as an artist in the considerable political and social security of a relatively safe and stable culture, notwithstanding our own history of racial atrocity.

Lauryn Arnott has not had that privilege and the impact of a lifelong consciousness of injustice and imminent peril has given her work, and indeed her person, a sense of constant intellectual alertness and urgency. It must be quite difficult for Lauryn to present within the Australian arts community without contextualizing her work within the histories of Zimbabwe and in South Africa.

To the attentive audience the content is manifest but the casual observer will certainly benefit from the deeper reading. Amongst the many perversities of her personal history is the bizarre and double-edged experience of having been personally congratulated by President Robert Mugabe for her politically driven artwork while also having been evicted from her home and her homeland under his land redistribution policies.

Lauryn has been quick to respond to ideas that refer to paradox within her own arts practice and that of others and in a number of ways I can identify that this is significant for her and her work. Paradox I find to be quite a beautiful word and I have always resented that the conventional Christian upbringing of my youth never provided me with that word. The binary concept of good and bad, right and wrong, saved and lost, glorified and damned was foremost in too many aspects of my young life. The polemic states were absolute in their opposition and utterly without interface.

Amongst these polarities of course was black and white, and it is deeply ironic that the artists who have so directly experienced this racial agony have a greater alertness to the concept of paradox perhaps than artists from contexts of social equanimity. In the natural world most states of opposition pass through an interval of transition; the day and night pass through twilight and dusk, hot and cold through



Disintegrating container 1980 etching 2/3 35 x 50cm Pelmama Collection. Work on permanent loan to the Pretoria Art Museum Pretoria South Africa



Sister of Mercy 1991 charcoal, clay and pastel on Fabriano paper 144 x 50cm Collection of Iziko, South African National Gallery Cape Town South Africa

coolness and warmth, male and female have their shared attributes and their complementary mysteries.

Paradox suggests that something enigmatic resides at the heart of any definition, that might be its complementary counterpoint. I would suggest that despite and probably because of the injustices that Lauryn has witnessed and experienced, she has an accentuated sensitivity to issues of equilibrium and balance rather than histrionic ideology and didacticism.

I am sure there is color in Lauryn's work occasionally, as there is only rarely in the work of her South African contemporaries William Kentridge and Diane Victor; but for each of these artists the black passing through intermediate greys into white underscores the gravitas of their art making and that the role of art as décor is remote from the primary purpose of their art.

There appear to be signs that Lauryn's work is beginning to address more reflectively on the interior and metaphysical self than on the social and political anxiety of perpetual racial friction and crisis. Though her work has never had a gratuitous aspect, I suspect that a degree of distance or restraint from the shrillness of her former experiences might give her new drawings a refined and an articulate force.

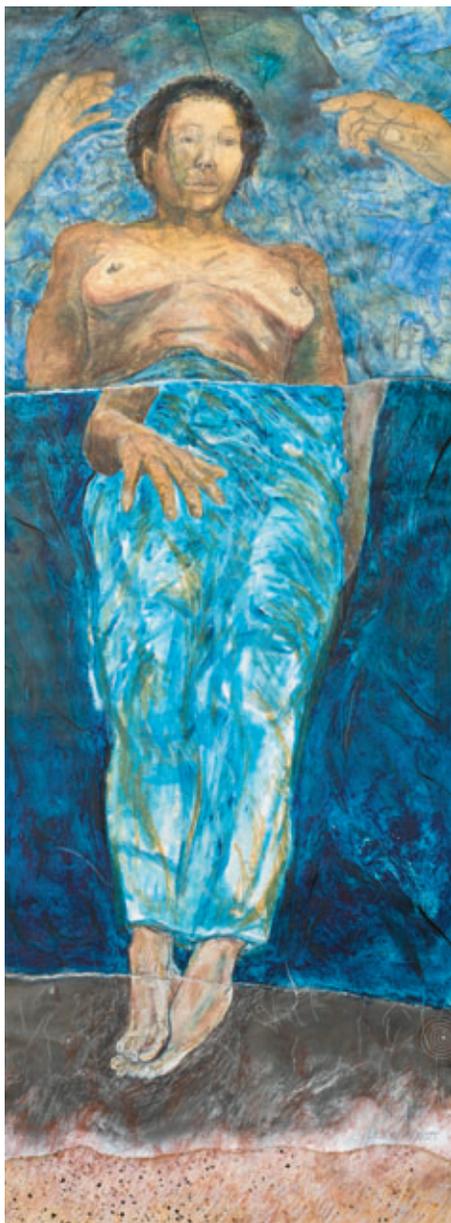
In addition to the conceptual intentions and technical accomplishment of her drawings, I must add that Lauryn brings an energy and immediacy to her work that is almost youthful. In an artist of maturity I consider this a very good sign and a promise that her important work will have continuity.

Lauryn's work has been celebrated in a number of prestigious contexts that I should imagine will be known to the reader through other documentation, and she has addressed the debates and discourse of contemporary art and especially drawing in a number of academic and literary contexts. She comes to her art well equipped to consider issues of migration and transformation and she will do so with a profoundly considered political, humanitarian and artistic integrity.

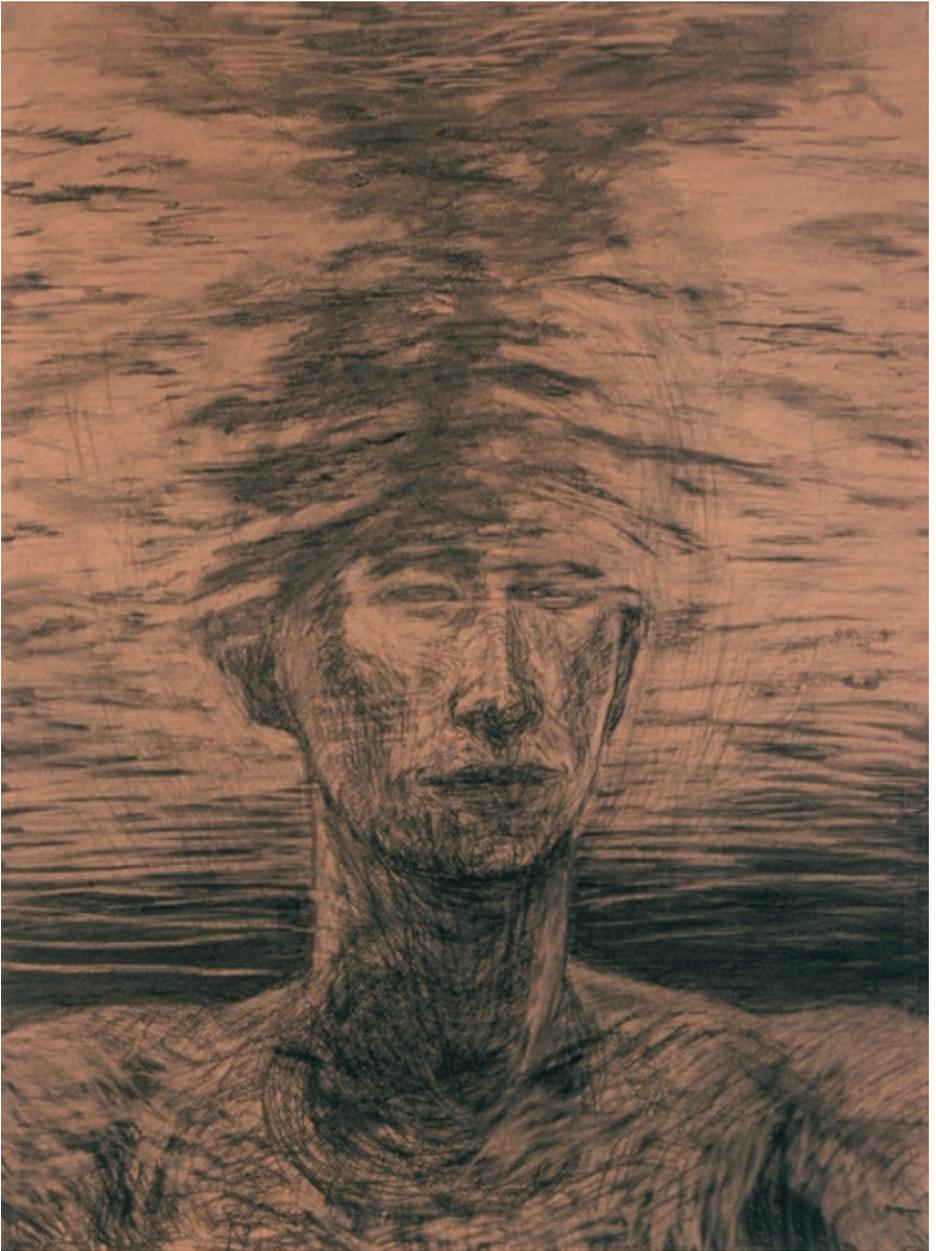
Godwin Bradbeer

www.godwinbradbeer.com

Godwin Bradbeer is an acclaimed virtuoso draftsman, and the recipient of many major drawing awards in Australia. He is a Melbourne based artist.



Nzuzu - above and below 1993 graphite, shellac varnish, powder pigment, pastel and wax on Fabriano paper 129.5 x 50cm



Above and below 2005 charcoal on Canson paper 65 x 50cm



above:

Death is a womb triptych 2006 monoprint and charcoal on Fabriano Rosapino paper 144 x 50cm

cover:

Falling upwards 2011 charcoal and shellac varnish on Arches 300gsm paper 168 x 111 cm

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You can find more information about Lauryn Arnott on the Adelaide Central School of Art website:
HYPERLINK http://www.acsa.sa.edu.au/graduate/documents/LaurynArnott_001.pdf