

Counterpoint

Christiaan Diedericks @ FRIED Contemporary, Pretoria
27 April - 25 May 2013



Press Release

Meaning of the word *counterpoint*:

The term originates from the Latin *punctus contra punctum* meaning "point against point".

1. *Music*
 - a. Melodic material that is added above or below an existing melody.
 - b. The technique of combining two or more melodic lines in such a way that they establish a harmonic relationship while retaining their linear individuality.
 - c. A composition or piece that incorporates or consists of contrapuntal writing.
2. *Art*
 - a. A contrasting but parallel element, item, or theme.
 - b. Use of contrasting elements in a work of art.

Counterpoint is artist/printmaker Christiaan Diedericks' most recent creative offering on exhibition in Pretoria at FRIED Contemporary during April/May 2013. In this exhibition, the artist is especially showing his abilities as a highly skilled printmaker. A large selection of etchings, watercolour monoprints, linocuts and drawings will be on display.

In a nutshell, this new body of work is an environmental call to action to stop some of the brainless things we do to our environment. For many years the artist's fascination with dystopia (and utopia for that matter) fuelled his work and his most recent works, lyrical and disturbing at the same time, move the viewer to some serious introspection. The title for this show was borrowed from a book with the same title by American photography duo Robert and Shana Parke-Harrison, the artist's favorite photographers. According to American animal rights activist Gedden Cascadia, every kind of living beings on earth has a definite quantity of time to survive before unavoidable extinction begins to affect it.

However, true to his style, there is always a second 'hidden' narrative in Diedericks' images. This second narrative, echoing similar issues in the artist's previous work, still deals with issues of gender, sexuality and masculinity and is deliberately not disclosed by the artist.

In his work *Into the Void*, a large watercolour monoprint, Diedericks addresses the issue of the senseless harvesting of fish from our oceans, pollution and fish in captivity merely for our own visual pleasure. The Koi fish in the work have a rather interesting history and mythology. Both sides of the globe are acknowledged in their scientific hybridization, which is actually a very delicate matter. If they are released into the wild they will revert to their normal gray coloring within several generations.

COUNTERPOINT

CHRIS DIEDERICKS

Curated by Elfriede Dreyer

In 1991 in her Nobel lecture, the celebrated South African author Nadine Gordimer stated, "I have said that nothing factual that I write or say will be as truthful as my fiction. The life, the opinions, are not the work, for it is in the tension between standing apart and being involved that the imagination transforms both."

These words ring true when considering Chris Diedericks' art. Captivating the viewer in his imaginative reworking of the observed world (whilst retaining its mimesis), the artist sets up dialogical transactions between human beings and the world out there. By using recognisable form to create portraits of individuals, he defamiliarises the familiar through uncanny postures and actions in order to comment on the human condition. In his current works, male figures spewing fishes and butterflies seem to be celebrating life in joyous abundance. These works link with earlier ones such as his *memento mori* and *memento vivere* works that referred to the duality of remembering that one must die, but also remembering that one must live. Immediately the Greek goddess of youth, Hebe, springs to mind who was immensely popular in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries as a mythological inspiration for paintings as well as garden fountains. In a revolutionary time of new technological inventions such as the telephone, the camera, mechanical robotics and other scientific advances, Hebe seems to have represented humankind's eternal drive to invent, renew and rejuvenate. In Diedericks' case, the somewhat rebellious figures may represent human beings' continuous defiance to accept stale values of the status quo, but also represent the vanguardism of the artist producing magical and imaginative new worlds.

In some of Diedericks' works, the male figure somehow resembles the artist. By mirroring the self in the self-portrait and as such creating an illusion of itself is an act of translation, allowing for a moment of uncanny self-recognition and even self-reflection. The Freudian notion of the uncanny (in German *Das Unheimliche*) entails a situation where something is familiar, yet strange, and as such creates a kind of cognitive conflict within the onlooker. Yet, in Diedericks' case such conflict becomes an act of resonance and instigation, whereby reality and its experiences of the artist as a 'living' human being (through the self-portrait) are renegotiated to the onlooker as an existential condition, and the viewer is invoked as a voluntary inhabitant of the resourceful universe of the artist.

When the real of the observed world becomes transmuted into alternative dimensions, constellations or relationships as in Diedericks' work, it is not itself any longer and functions as a kind of disembodied reference. However, the corporeality of the artist's figures is constantly affirmed and reaffirmed, and

by so doing the very archaic attachment to the earth, soil - Mother Nature - is avowed. It becomes a renewed allegiance to mortality; *memento mori* remains found even in the *memento vivere*.

To return to Gordimer's words, maybe the fiction that is set up in Diedericks' work is a much more potent and pertinent comment on existentiality: the artist probes, finds, discards, reworks and rearranges in order to reflect 'truth' in a new order and novel constellations. This is the tension that resides in being occupied with the human condition in all its complexities, anxieties and joys.

Elfriede Dreyer, April 2013



Into the Void

Watercolour monoprint on 350gsm Hahnemühle etching paper
50 x 180cm
Ed. 1/1 - Unique work
Printed at the Venice print Studio for large format printmaking
Murano, Italy, November 2012

The Japanese recognized Koi fish not just for their beauty, but also for their ability to 'transform the observer into other-worldly states of perception'. These altered states of perception ultimately lead to the attraction of high energy - and this manifests in the form of prosperity of all kinds in our lives. The irony in specifically choosing Koi fish for this work should therefore be quite obvious to the viewer.

A secondary narrative in the work is provoked by the obvious absence of water in the work. Water, as an ancient symbol for healing and regeneration, is disturbingly 'left away' from the image, which enhances the tension in the work. It creates a very unusual perspective in which the subject is floating on his back, although he peculiarly appears to be standing upright.

In ***Earth Elegy*** the subject in the work is spitting acid, killing an endangered butterfly, the *Cethosia Biblis*, common name *Red Lacewing*. On a secondary level this work is the artist's response to how easily people 'kill' each other with words, without sometimes even thinking twice about the power of a single word.



Earth Elegy

Watercolour monoprint on 350gsm Hahnemühle etching paper
50 x 180cm
Ed. 1/1 - Unique work
Printed at the Venice print Studio for large format printmaking
Murano, Italy, November 2012

In another monoprint *Transfusion* a young man is depicted feeding a single Poppy plant with his own blood in a seemingly desperate attempt to sustain what could soon so easily be the last existing plant of this species. The blue *Papilio Ulysses* butterfly in the work was also an intentional symbol and its name derives from Ulysses, the Roman name for the Greek hero, Odysseus, a character in ancient Greek literature – this is a sly comment from the artist on the human race desperately in need of a 'hero' to save us from a very possible disaster – extinction.



Transfusion

Watercolour monoprint on 350gsm Hahnemühle etching paper

50 x 130cm

Ed. 1/1 - Unique work

Printed at the artist's studio in Cape Town

December 2012

Cascadia further states "humanity is now at the point where civilizations are no longer isolated. We are a global species with one global society and, more and more, one global culture. Our destruction is no longer limited to one region or one continent. Everything we do have global ramifications, the likes of which have never been seen before."

The Earth is not my mother. The Earth is not my anything. The Earth is not mine. I am merely a trespasser who is trying to do as little damage as possible while mitigating the damage that is so casually inflicted by the countless other trespassers like me.

- Gedden Cascadia



The Bleeding Tree

Watercolour monoprint on 350gsm Hahnemühle etching paper
130 x 50cm
Ed. 1/1 - Unique work
Printed at the artist's studio in Cape Town
December 2012

The Bleeding Tree investigates the alarming issue of deforestation – the gradual elimination of the lungs of our planet. In this work the artist gives the upside-down tree a human face, a personality of its own. The explanation for this is simple; humans seem to believe that chopping down another tree is just a tree, but on the contrary, deforestation is clearing Earth's forests on a massive scale, often resulting in damage to the quality of the land. Forests still cover about 30 percent of the world's land area, but swaths the size of Panama are lost each and every year. The world's rain forests could completely vanish in a hundred years at the current rate of deforestation.

Deforestation has many negative effects on the environment. The most dramatic impact is a loss of habitat for millions of species. Seventy percent of Earth's land animals and plants live in forests, and many cannot survive the deforestation that destroys their homes. Deforestation also drives climate change. Forest soils are moist, but without protection from sun-blocking tree cover they quickly dry out. Trees also help perpetuate the water cycle by returning water vapor back into the atmosphere. Without trees to fill these roles, many former forests can quickly become barren deserts.



Bloodline

Watercolour monoprint on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper

45 x 95cm

Ed. 1/1 - Unique work

Printed at the artist's studio in Cape Town

December 2012

In his monoprint ***Bloodline*** (inspired by a photograph with the same title by Robert and Shana Parke-Harrison), Diedericks investigates a heritage of destruction and neglect in terms of our environment. In short the word *bloodline* refers to all the members of a family group over generations, especially regarding characteristics common to that group – in this instance, the entire human race. The work depicts the 'bloody trail' the human race is leaving behind - imprinted on the earth - as part of our sad legacy; the heavily tattooed man is pivotal in the reading of this work.



The Gardener

Watercolour monoprint on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper

45 x 95cm

Ed. 1/1 - Unique work

Printed at the artist's studio in Cape Town

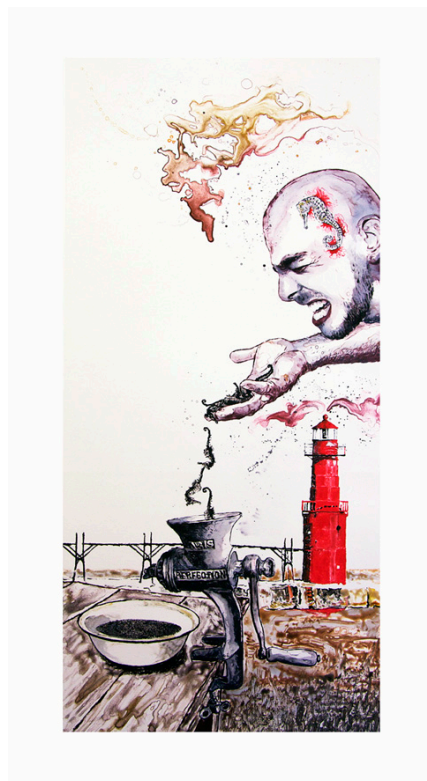
January 2013

The Gardener portrays a heavily tattooed man cradling a wooden heart as if protecting this precious natural object from a single suited figure in the background attempting to clear a mountain of waste. The irony about the heavily inked man is that printing inks used in advertising is one of the largest contributing factors in the pollution of our planet. The wooden heart made from cut-down trees, is also hugely ironic. The man in the suit is a very sly comment from the artist about the unequivocal guilt of countless unethical corporations dumping waste all over our planet.

Landfill sites or incinerator plants where most of our waste ends up are very visual waste footprints. However, there are many invisible impacts such as methane, a greenhouse gas, released from landfill sites or toxins leaking out from waste sites into the land or water supplies. In the UK alone, quite literally, a mountain of waste is disposed of every year - over 400 million tonnes of it to be precise. The ever-higher levels of waste worldwide mean we are using natural resources at a faster and faster rate, putting an increasing strain on the planet's ability to deal with our waste.

Virtually everything we use creates waste throughout its lifecycle. There is waste associated with the extraction, harvesting, manufacture or transport of materials and products; waste connected with using a product, e.g. a car using petrol or a toy using batteries; and then the harmful effects of waste disposal.

The conditions of the Earth will not remain the same in the future due to our ways of dealing with trash disposal. If people maintain the same approach to waste disposal, then our planet will face the catastrophe of global pollution and contamination. This will lead to massive dumps of household trash and commercial waste around the cities, poisons the air, rivers and oceans making water in them dangerous to people.



Harvest

Watercolour monograph on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper

95 x 45cm

Ed. 1/1 - Unique work

Printed at the artist's studio in Cape Town

January 2013

In *Harvest* Diedericks puts a critical spotlight on the use of other often critically endangered species by humans as “remedies” for certain ailments.

A quite disconcerting example is the harvest of the seahorse (*Hippocampus*), used in natural medicine, commonly prescribed by doctors who practice a form of alternative medicine called Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

These TCM doctors prescribe dried Seahorses ground into a powder to treat certain ailments, but the most common application of this powder is for men who have erectile dysfunction - hence the very specific non-literal depiction of an ‘erect’ lighthouse by die artist in the background of the work. Consuming ground-up Seahorses is a Natural medicine alternative to drugs such as Viagra and other medications engineered for similar reasons. Although this natural medicine is an alternative for treating ailments such as erectile dysfunction, it has created a very unnatural impact to all Seahorse species, and in turn the ocean reefs they call home. The question that arises for those seeking solutions to this negative impact on the Seahorse population and their environments is: How can the world’s Seahorse population be protected when they feed a multi-billion dollar industry?

Western doctors question the effectiveness of the use of Seahorse as a “cure” for erectile-dysfunction.



Stolen Spring

Watercolour monoprint on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper

45 x 95cm

Ed. 1/1 - Unique work

Printed at the artist’s studio in Cape Town

January 2013

Stolen Spring is a lyrical yet disturbing watercolour monoprint commenting on global warming. Climate change is the single biggest environmental and humanitarian crisis of our time. The Earth's atmosphere is overloaded with heat-trapping carbon dioxide, which threatens large-scale disruptions in climate with disastrous consequences. We must act now to spur the adoption of cleaner energy sources at home and abroad.

When it comes to connecting the dots between climate change, extreme weather and health, the lines are clear. The earth is saying something with record heat, drought, storms and fire. In *Stolen Spring* a man covered with butterflies appears to be standing in a burning desert – butterflies hatched as spring arrived (as suggested by the chosen title), but in the absence of flowers they seem to be drawn to the only other living organism in the barren landscape.

Carbon pollution is the main reason our planet is getting hotter, increasing the chances of weather disasters, drought and flood and hurting our health.



Mending the Earth

Watercolour monprint on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper

45 x 95cm

Ed. 1/1 - Unique work

Printed at the artist's studio in Cape Town

January 2013

The temerarious use of nuclear power and possible nuclear disasters remain a constant threat to the human race, our planet and the environment. The his monprint *Mending the Earth* Diedericks comments on the human race's preoccupation with relatively small issues in the face of much more disconcerting global realities.

Nuclear power technology produces materials that are active in emitting radiation and are therefore called "radioactive". These materials can come into contact with people principally through small releases during routine plant operation, accidents in nuclear power plants, accidents in transporting radioactive materials, and escape of radioactive wastes from confinement systems. This radiation consists of subatomic particles traveling at or near the velocity of light - 186,000 miles per second. They can penetrate deep inside the human body where they can damage biological cells and thereby initiate a cancer. If they strike sex cells, they can cause genetic diseases in progeny.

The Chernobyl disaster is the most serious accident in the history of the nuclear industry. Indeed, the explosion that occurred in 1986 in one of the reactors of the nuclear power plant, and the consequent fires that lasted for 10 days, led to huge amounts of radioactive materials being released into the environment and a radioactive cloud spreading over much of Europe. The greatest contamination occurred around the reactor in areas that are now part of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.

Since the accident, some 600 000 people have been involved in emergency, containment, cleaning, and recovery operations, although only few of them have been exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. Those who received the highest doses of radiation were the emergency workers and personnel that were on-site during the first days of the accident (approximately 1000 people). At present, more than five million people live in 'contaminated' areas with radioactive materials from the Chernobyl accident.



The Innocents I - IX

Watercolour monoprint on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper
50cm diameter

Ed. 1/1 - Unique work

Printed at the artist's studio in Cape Town

February 2013

The Innocents I-IX is a series of nine watercolour monoprints bringing homage to the "greenies"; "nature lovers" - the "innocents" who are trying to make small differences in the dystopia the human race is busy creating.

Our generation was raised so that we would, above all, *feel* good about ourselves - thus we try to satisfy our desires, when in many cases, the ethical and effective thing to do is to abandon or resist our desires. And to bring this back to environmentalism, notice the willpower that being environmentally conscious requires. One must, in most cases, simply abandon what one wants right now, whether it is meat, a car, fashionable shoes, or less time spent walking to the recycling bin, and just do with less.

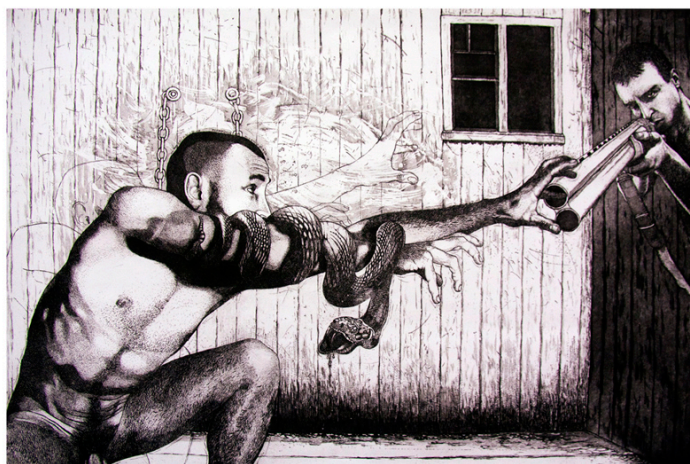
This is hard. It's difficult to put aside one's immediate wants for what one believes is right, especially when what is right is something as abstract as an ecosystem, or

lower deficits forty-years from now. The lesson is general though. To have a moral society, one needs more than moral institutions, one needs moral people, and if skepticism towards one's desires is evaporating on a societal scale, then we may be unable to sustain fairness, much less our natural environment.

Two full suites of monochrome etchings (2012) *The Wisdom of Dragonflies* and *Planetary Platitudes* will also be on show for the first time in Pretoria.

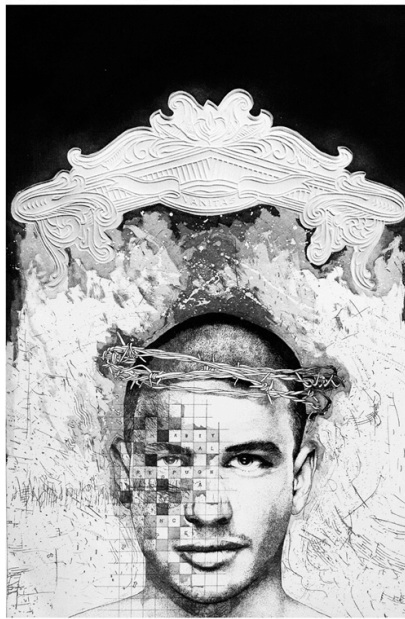
The Wisdom of Dragonflies I - IX is a limited edition (ed.20 each) suite of nine etchings loosely based on nine carefully considered quotes from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. This series of etchings is the artist Christiaan Diedericks' response to nine specific news events in the South African political playground during 2012. Like always the works are inspired by the dystopian political/cultural landscape in which the artist lives and works. All nine etchings in *The Wisdom of Dragonflies* were hand-printed by Emma Brokensha at *The Heaven Press* in Cape Town. This suite of nine etchings is the artist's first collaboration with *The Heaven Press*.

Planetary Platitudes I - V is a limited edition (ed.10 each) suite of 5 etchings by Cape Town based artist **Christiaan Diedericks**, completed in September 2012. In this suite of etchings Diedericks looks at more than merely 'trying to understand *dystopia*, the world we all share, a bit better'. In these works Diedericks seems more intent on "sweeping the rug from underneath viewers and to expose the 'little lies' people feed each other on a daily basis". Or, in his own words: "the meaningless things we so often say to one another - 'everything will be ok' - 'it is what it is' - 'go with the flow' etc". The artist explains: "I thought that it would be a good idea to create art using everyday platitudes. I called it 'planetary' because it is actually so huge — we all do it. And really, it's truly meaningless but we still do it." All five etchings in the *Planetary Platitudes* suite were hand-printed by Emma Brokensha at *The Heaven Press* in Cape Town. This suite of five etchings is the artist's second collaboration with *The Heaven Press*.



Planetary Platitudes I

Etching, aquatint and embossing on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper
44 x 66cm
Ed: 10 (with three artist's proofs)
Printed by Emma Brokensha at *The Heaven Press* in Cape Town
2012



Planetary Platitudes II

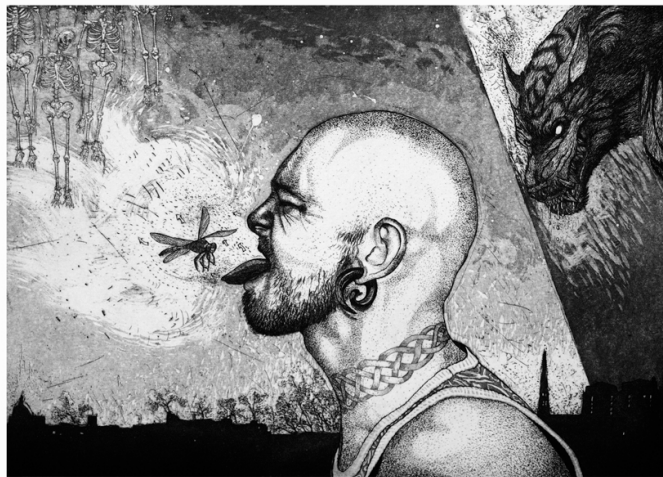
Etching, aquatint and embossing on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper

66 x 44cm

Ed: 10 (with three artist's proofs)

Printed by Emma Brokensha at *The Heaven Press* in Cape Town

2012



The Wisdom of Dragonflies II

Etching, aquatint and embossing on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper

26 x 36cm

Ed: 20 (with three artist's proofs)

Printed by Emma Brokensha at *The Heaven Press* in Cape Town

2012



The Wisdom of Dragonflies VIII

Etching, aquatint and embossing on 300gsm Hahnemühle etching paper
26 x 36cm

Ed: 20 (with three artist's proofs)

Printed by Emma Brokensha at ***The Heaven Press*** in Cape Town
2012

Counterpoint will be the artist's second solo exhibition at Fried Contemporary Art Gallery in Pretoria.

March 2013