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Keith Dietrich

*MEMORIES IMAGINED
IMAGINED MEMORIES*

5 June - 15 July 2021
(Gallery 2)

The exhibition opens on Saturday 5 June 2021 at 12pm.
Walkabout with the artist and Dr Annemi Conradie, Senior Lecturer at North West University
Please join us for refreshments.

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Keith Dietrich, Lindale Re-
memories, 2020-2021.
R2580 each
\$185.00



Keith Dietrich, Lindale,
2019. Bookwork. R30000
\$2,163.00



Keith Dietrich, Airborne,
2021. Bookwork. R30000
\$2,163.00

Bio

Keith Dietrich is a Professor Emeritus at the Department of Visual Arts, Stellenbosch University. He has participated in exhibitions and biennials in Belgium, Botswana, Chile, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Namibia, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the USA, and has held 31 solo/duo exhibitions in South Africa. He has published six artist's books, has co-edited one book, and has contributed chapters to five books. He has participated in over 30 community interaction projects in southern Africa and curated 13 exhibitions. He has held 31 Solo/Duo exhibitions in South Africa and has participated in over 60 group exhibitions and biennials in Belgium, Botswana, Chile, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Namibia, the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the USA. His work is represented in 37 corporate and public collections in South Africa, the USA, Germany and the UK. He has been the recipient of 27 awards, grants and scholarships for his creative and academic work. His artist's books are represented in the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Collection, Washington DC; Smithsonian Libraries, Washington DC; the Library of Congress, Washington DC; Yale University, New Haven; the British Library, London; the Jack Ginsberg Centre for Book Arts, Wits Art Museum; the Unisa Collection; and the Stellenbosch University Library Special Collection.

Artist statement

Memories Imagined / Imagined Memories comprises two bookworks and associated photographic works and installations. The works arose from oncoina research around my family and address complex tensions between memory, loss of memory, trauma and a phenomenology of

hauntedness’.

Lindale, reverie in monochrome; passages through troubled sites, a short tale in 41 Acts (2019) is based on memories of my childhood ‘heimat’, my maternal grandparents’ farm Lindale in the Schoemanskloof valley in Mpumalanga (former Eastern Transvaal).

Lindale was the place where I spent countless holidays during the first decade of my life. On my grandfather’s death in June 1961 the farm was immediately sold, ending one of the most enchanting and happy periods of my life. Since then, Lindale has returned to haunt me in the form of memories of people, places and events associated with the farm. The expression *madeleine de Proust*, a poetic reference to Marcel Proust’s ‘In Search of Lost Time’ (from his novel *Du côté de chez Swann*), best describes these memories—smells, tastes, sounds or other sensations reminding one of or bringing back childhood memories from long ago. Memories resurface and announce themselves when we least expect them. Sometimes, in seemingly random flashes, memories rise to the surface and we can ‘see’ past events unfolding themselves in the present.

In August 2017 I undertook a journey with my sister to Lindale from the house in Johannesburg where we grew up, along the roads we had travelled so many times with our parents. Armed with my father’s old Kodak Brownie Box camera, I took photographs of places I remembered along the way and on and around the farm. Toni Morrison aptly calls the practice of revisiting suppressed memories ‘re-memorizing’, which involves the relocation of events from the past through pictures and text fragments in the physical world of the here and now. A ‘re-memory’ is a memory that is revisited, a memory with an autonomous existence of its own. It is an act of excavating and confronting memories that have been submerged for a long time.

‘Re-memorizing’ highlights the importance of confronting, reclaiming, and transforming the past, which, in turn, points to the healing potential of memory and mending the troubled relationship between past and present. In his novel *Austerlitz*, W.G. Sebald unravels the porous nature of the divide between the past and the present, between the living and the dead. ‘The past becomes suddenly present, and the present seems mediated by the long passage of years.’ The spectral not only unhinges place from the self through ghostly memories, but also the present from itself.

These ‘re-memories’ are hinged to those of other spectres—to the ghosts of racial segregation that continue to haunt our country. In this book I interlace my enchanting memories of Lindale with the first decade of Apartheid legislation which, as a privileged child, I was oblivious of at the time. Thus, concealed behind pages of black tracing paper I placed 41 Acts promulgated between the time I was conceived (in September 1949) and the death of my grandfather 17 days after South Africa became a Republic on 31 May 1961.

The past can be difficult to process, and it is these unprocessed memories that return to trouble me. These memories have also become infused with other reminiscences—memories of past events that I did not live through—imagined memories of someone else’s past, such as my father’s experiences during WW2.

Airborne (2021) is based on my father’s activities as a bomber pilot in Italy during WW2. Lieutenant Barnard (Bill) Dietrich trained as a pilot in the South African Air Force (SAAF) between 1940 and 1943. After his final training at Shandur in Egypt, he was posted to the Royal Air Force in Italy in April 1944, first to RAF 13 Squadron, and then to RAF 55 Squadron at their bases at Campomarino Biferno on the Molise coast and San Severo in the province of Foggia.

Like the majority of airmen my father never really talked of his wartime experiences—he simply could not talk about them; he was unable to discuss these experiences because they were too difficult to articulate. These airmen had to accomplish a service to their respective countries, and even if they survived, many were never the same again. Most struggled to come to terms with the things they saw and were ordered to do. Many were haunted by thoughts of what their bombs had done to civilians on the ground, and many experienced terrifying flashbacks

and nightmares brought on by guilt. This form of psychological trauma is now referred to as 'moral injury': trauma arising from one's helplessness to prevent the death or suffering of civilians—from witnessing actions that transgress one's values and moral beliefs. Neurobiological research on memory suggests that painful memories can be erased and even replaced with alternative memories. Toni Morrison calls this inability of the subject to consciously and voluntarily recall memories 'disremembering'. To disremember is not to forget but to deny memories and remembering. This self-imposed silence prevents the inevitable effect of these traumatic memories on the present. Nicolas Abraham and Mária Torok talk of locking the phantom of trauma in the 'inner crypt', where it is hermetically sealed off and preserved within the unconscious.

I envisaged visiting all the places my father and his crew bombed with a view to making an artist's book based on my findings. My visit to Italy was planned to take place in 2020. Regrettably, Coronavirus struck and the world was isolated under quarantine and all travel prohibited. I decided to use my time to embark on a 'virtual' online tour of these places and instead of sauntering through the streets of these sites and taking photographs with my camera, I conducted my walks virtually by strolling through the streets in Google Maps' 'street-view' function and took screenshots of selected details that interested me.

I have used my father's part in the aerial bombing of Italy during WW2 as an allegory for the Covid-19 pandemic that has wreaked havoc on the Italian population and the rest of the world. Considering that Covid-19 prohibited me from visiting Italy, I insert myself as a contemporary phantom voice commenting on Covid-related anecdotes I gleaned from the Internet corresponding to the places and dates of my father's aerial visits 70 years previously.



BUSINESS HOURS: Online gallery 24/7; special open hours as advertised; and by appointment

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