

KEITH DIETRICH

Fourteen Stations of the Cross

1 December 2007 - 2 February 2008

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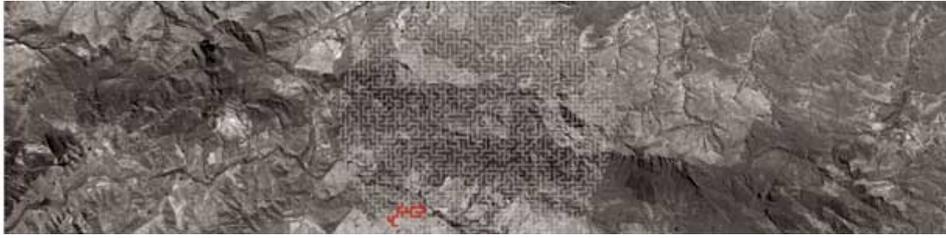
Fourteen Stations of the Cross is an exhibition and limited-edition 'book object' or 'artist's book' which explores the initial journey or pioneer period of Christianity into the interior of southern Africa. It is informed by the first fourteen mission stations that were established between 1736 and 1813 in South Africa and the southern region of Namibia across the Gariiep (Orange) River. Although the title of the book makes a direct reference to the popular Roman Catholic devotional Stations of the Cross that commemorates the passion and death of Christ (where each station or 'halting place' stands for an event which occurred during Christ's passion and death at Calvary), there is no direct correspondence between the devotional Stations and the fourteen mission stations. Instead the stations stand as a metaphoric journey or passage transcending the past and present rather than a devotional journey.

Fourteen Stations of the Cross comprises three books that are contained in a single slipcase. The thirteenth-century Roman Catholic hymn the *Stabat Mater* serves as a thread that provides a structure to the three books. The first four verses introducing the four sections of Book One act as a prelude to the fourteen mission stations that are contained in Book Two, and correspond with the entrance hymn for the initial prayers of the devotional Stations. Each station commences with a verse from the *Stabat Mater*, beginning with verse 5 (the first mission station at Baviaanskloof/Genadendal) and ending with verse 28 (the fourteenth mission station at Hoogekraal/Pacaltsdorp). *Fourteen Stations of the Cross* closes with Book Three where the last two verses of the *Stabat Mater* correspond with the farewell hymn for the concluding prayers of the devotional Stations.

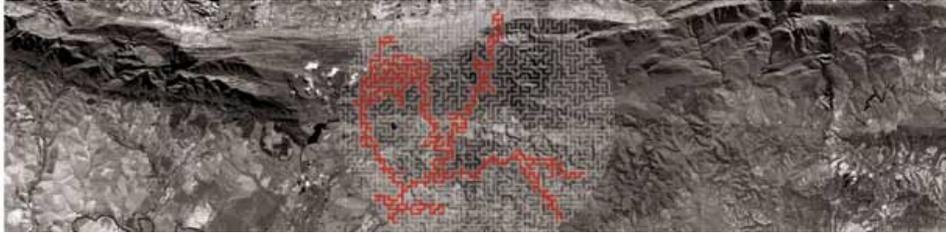
Fourteen Stations of the Cross is framed against the background of the colonial enterprise in southern Africa and the ways in which the region was transformed and 'civilised'. The 'wild' and 'formless worlds' of what Europeans saw as 'primitive' African life lay open to travellers, illustrators, artists, naturalists, missionaries, hunters, and colonial administrators whose mission was to awaken and convert what they considered to be a dark and unrefined world. This systematisation of 'formless worlds' calls up the image of Adam moving through his domain, mapping, classifying, picturing, and naming. David Livingstone was indeed one of the 'Adams' of the British empire in southern Africa, 'penetrating' and opening up new regions to the process of civilisation, trade and commerce, and with the other explorers, prepared southern and central Africa for Cecil John Rhodes' dream of British colonial expansion stretching from the Cape to Cairo. The Christian church cannot, therefore, be separated from the broader discourse of colonial political and economic imperialism. To secure its power and to ensure its survival as 'the one true religion', Christianity had to create its antithesis, a world of darkness, and it was Africa that was to become the representative of the antithesis by means of which Western Christianity defined itself during the nineteenth century.

Fourteen Stations of the Cross approaches the initial journey of Christianity into the interior of South Africa as an allegorical narrative of redemption, reconciliation and healing. The book explores the paradoxical and ambiguous interplay between histories, textures and nuances where the interaction between images and text offer the opportunity to create a rich variety of compound meanings through playful and interactive poetic interactions.





Station 1: Genadendal



Station 12: Pella



Artist's book: *Fourteen stations of the Cross* (2007)