

***BLOODLINES* Georgia Papageorge Diane Victor 8 March - 12 April 2014**
Fried Contemporary Art Gallery, Pretoria



Paintings, drawings and photography by Georgia Papageorge, assisted by photographer/adventurer, June Liversedge, as well as a film by Papageorge, edited by Catherine Meyburgh.

The exhibition also includes recent work by Diane Victor on the theme of *Bloodlines*.

Opened by Christopher Spring, curator of the Department: Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the British Museum in London. He is responsible for the Sainsbury African galleries, developing the collections of contemporary African art and the collections from eastern and southern Africa.



Georgia Papageorge, *Displacements*, 2014

Georgia Papageorge was born in 1941 in Simonstown, but has lived and worked for most of her life in Pretoria. In 1979 Papageorge obtained a BA (FA) from UNISA, she went on to study a Higher Diploma in Graphics and also furthered her studies through the Slade School of Art in London. In 2004 Papageorge received the National Award for the 'Awaiting Trial Basement' commission in the New Constitutional Court, Old Johannesburg Fort, Johannesburg. She has had a number of solo shows, including the *Africa Rifting series* at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum (Port Elizabeth) in 2008/2009, and the *Kilimanjaro/ColdFire* 2010 solo at the Art First Gallery, London. Current projects include *The Shepherd Principle, culminating in* simultaneous solo shows during 2014 at both Fried Contemporary in Pretoria and UJ Art Gallery, Johannesburg. Papageorge has shown at a vast number of group shows both locally and internationally; more recently *Body of Evidence* (2006) at the National Museum of African Art in Washington; *Tapping Currents: Contemporary African Art and the Diaspora* at the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City- USA in 2008/9; and the 2009 *Continental Rifts: Contemporary Time-based Works of Africa* at the Fowler Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles, USA. In 2011 she participated in *Environment and Object in Recent African Art* in New York at the Skidmore College as well as *Water: the Delicate Thread of Life* at the Standard Bank Gallery, South Africa. In 2013 Papageorge participated in the *Earth Matters* exhibition at the National Museum of African Art in Washington.



Diane Victor (b. 1964 Witbank, South Africa) received her BA Fine Arts Degree from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1986. Known for her sardonic humour, Victor is a printmaker who in recent years has been drawing with ephemeral media such as smoke, stains and ash. Exhibitions include showings at the Goodman Gallery; Fried Contemporary Art Gallery; Johannesburg Art Gallery; Michael Stevenson Gallery; David Krut Projects, South Africa and New York, USA; Faulconer Gallery at Grinnell College, Iowa, USA; and many others. In addition to graduating with distinction and winning various awards, Victor became the youngest recipient of the prestigious Volkskas Atelier Award in 1988. She received, for instance, an Ampersand Foundation Fellowship (New York, 1997), a UNESCO Residency (Vienna, Austria, 1998), a Vermont Study Center Residency (Vermont, USA, 1999), a Gold Medal Award for Visual Art from the South African Academy of Arts and Sciences (2005), and recently this year an award at the 4th Guanlan International Print Biennial in China. Victor's works are included in many collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Museum of Modern Art, NY, New York Public Library, NY, Baltimore Museum of Art, MD and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, MN. Diane Victor has been a part-time lecturer at the University of Pretoria since 1990.





CURATOR'S ESSAY ON GEORGIA PAPAGEORGE

For many years now, as arguably South Africa's most notable land artist, Georgia Papageorge has been obsessively involved with the preservation, conservation, healing and nurturing of her home, her land, the continent of Africa. In 2012 Papageorge became aware for the first time that a major commercial highway was planned to cross the Serengeti to provide the most direct route to the coast for raw materials leaving Africa. A visit to Musoma on Lake Victoria where the road was due to begin confirmed that its construction would destroy the greatest migration on Earth and all natural and social treasures in its path: the flamingos at lake Natron were due to become a soda ash plant; it would imply the removal of large numbers of Maasai along the Eastern Serengeti borders; and destruction of the ancient stone town of Bagamoyo with all its traditions as *the* major Chinese port on the East Coast of Africa. The symbolic vehicle Papageorge chose to create in Botswana's vast Makgadikgadi Salt Pans as a protective healing ritual, was a scientifically accurate image of the Southern Cross Constellation - the vehicle through which due South is calculated - and which has guided travellers through the millennia. Migrating daily across Southern Hemisphere skies it shines upon all that troubled land. Older work dealing with global warming and the conceptually layered new work become symptomatic of environmental loss throughout the world today. The body of work on exhibition has been filmed and photographed from a helicopter and interpreted through a visual vocabulary of blood red cloth markers, GPS readings, Google and mathematics.

The Shepherd Principle, 2012, a Southern Cross installation that already explored the happenings in the Serengeti, expressed a distinct lament for the land and its inhabitants, especially in terms of the implications to the indigenous the resident wildlife and the migrating ungulates. The Serengeti is believed to hold the largest population of lions in Africa, due in part to the abundance of prey species, in addition to the African leopards, elephants, rhinos, buffaloes and other species. At the same time the work signifies a new conceptual turn in terms of the artist's addressing of the implications of global expansion and economic imperialism of a very different kind. This work seemed to be mutating towards an altermodern sense of self where the postcolonial self versus other is not at stake any longer, but instead displayed an articulation of the self in relationship *with* others and the self as a nomadic entity extending its boundaries

transnationally.

The *Kilimanjaro/Coldfire* project, 2009 - 2010, dealt with global warming in terms of cataclysmic melting ice and deforestation at tropical zones. The Tanzanian mountain, *Kilima 'njaro'* (Mountain of Greatness) is the tallest freestanding volcanic mountain in the world with a unique, self-contained ecological system that makes it an ideal barometer of climate change. Christine Kreamer of the NMAFA in Washington describes Papageorge's renderings of Kilimanjaro - in which she applies vertical striations of poured volcanic ash - as running tears for an irreparable loss transformed into an iconic act of African mourning. The work recalls Anselm Kiefer's works such as the alchemical *Aschenblume* (*Ash flower*) of 2004 that harks back to his early postwar depictions of transmutation sensibility through both volatile and stable materials such as lead. Materials fire and its ash residue have played a major role in his conceptualisation, similar to the fiery red *Inferno* (2010) from Papageorge's Kilimanjaro series.

Although engaging with real histories and places, Papageorge relentlessly expresses opinion, voices her discontent and cautions against irresponsible damaging acts to nature, the land and its people. With good teleological purpose in mind, Papageorge's works as such become dystopic texts that criticise the content and consequences of colonial, global, political, economic and other imperialist projects that are supposedly utopian in premise and intended to bring a better world about.^[3] It is here that the brilliance of the artist's massive interventions differ from most other site-specific works. Her land art works are never decorative in character and neither do they serve as mere markers or recordings; they fundamentally express a desire for change and reform, driven by a sense of belonging to the African soil and 'home', as eminent geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (2004:165) argues: "Home that can be directly experienced – not just seen, but heard, smelled, and touched – is necessarily a small and intimate world. It is this direct experience that gives home its power to elicit strong emotional response." Whilst functioning as expressions of belonging, identity and sentiment, the site-specific works of Papageorge continue to reflect a poetic orientation of landscape-as-text in which the engagement with land and site acquire specific ideological signification. Over the last fifteen years, her work has explored the relationship between the socio-cultural and the geo-ecological dimensions of land and site, but has emerged far more as representations of the imagined, utopian dimensions thereof. Although the artist in part engages in 'green' acts of fostering the environment, her site-specific interventions are distinctly more concerned with a passionate, personal relationship with ecologies of place created by actions and processes (Lorimer 2005:83). Intimately linked to the artist's ideological^[1] projection on the land is her utopian^[2] orientation in the sense of articulating both 'eu-topos', denoting a region of happiness and perfection, and 'ou-topos', a region that exists nowhere since the perfection can never be attained. No matter how the word is pronounced, there is a pun: one ends up referring to or (involuntarily) meaning an imagined, 'good place', with emphasis on *imagined*.

The artist's dystopian works are however antithetical to utopian teleology in that they never promise 'good endings'; instead they express cosmic anxiety, fear of catastrophe and cataclysmic disaster ending in extermination and annihilation, as well as devastating impact on human scale. On one hand previous works such as *Africa Rifting - Lines of fire* (2001) pointed to a nightmarish past in reference to the blood lines of a horrendous slave trade across the Atlantic, depicted through the use of red cloth installations on specific dates during 2001 and amplified through the significance of a ritualised cross, circle and line format.^[4] In this instance there were far more losses than gains in the utopian keystone of the project aimed at progress through human labour. On the other hand, the work issued a warning to future societies and, although there might be suggested redemption through post-facto penitence and remorse, the possibility of history repeating itself in future remains a constant threat.

Papageorge's dystopian works are vanguard in that they purport to improve and advance the present. In Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* Hythloday poses the question of what gain there will be in serving a prince if no one listens to him, let alone understands him? The question speaks of impotence in the wake of the realisation that the ideal model and the brute reality are (mostly) irreconcilable. It speaks, too, of a 'chosen one' - the artist - with the knowledge of the 'good', but it is one who stands alone.

Elfriede Dreyer, Pretoria.

Sources quoted

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^[1] In general, visions of the ideal society have taken on two guises: on one hand a type of ideal construct that is a descriptive, dramatic portrayal of a way of life that is intrinsically 'good' and fulfils profound longings; on the other hand a more rationalistic kind of idealistic thinking in which the underlying principles of an "optimum society" are argued (Manuel 1973:vii).

^[2] The English lawyer, social philosopher, author, statesman and celebrated Renaissance humanist, Sir Thomas More,

coined the concept of 'utopia' in his 1516 publication *De optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula utopia* (translated as "Of a republic's best state and of the new island Utopia"). More derived 'utopia' from the Greek in tongue -in-cheek fashion, meaning 'no place' or 'land of nowhere'.

[3] Utopian projects propose good teleology at the outset and in this respect dystopic texts show similarity with utopias, since they also propose 'better' endings through the criticism of the utopia-gone wrong.

[4] Derived from the Judaic/Christian *Chi-Rho* iconography used widely in the 2nd and 3rd centuries