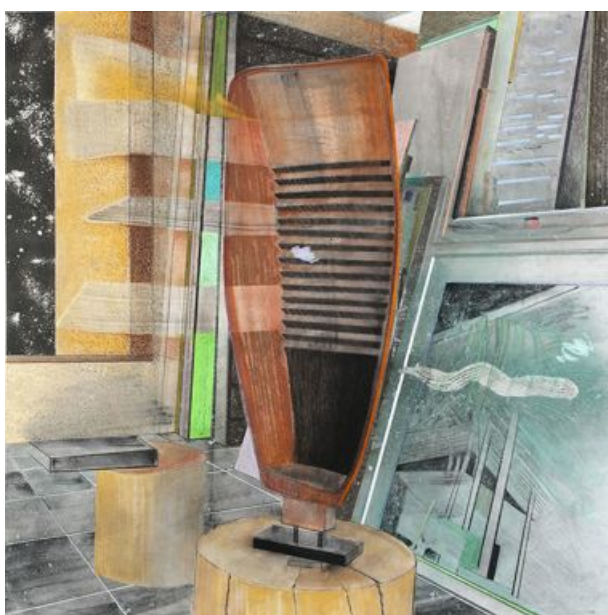


CURRENT EXHIBITION

Until 14 November 2015

MAIN GALLERY:**KAREL NEL - Observe***New drawings*

This set of magnificent complex drawings is based on two distinct spaces. The familiar one is Karel Nel's studio - both his home and host to his fascinating collection of Southern African, Oceanic and Asian artefacts. A few of these objects appear in the drawings themselves moving freely in and out of the picture space. There are additional presences, implied, or suggested by weightless, un-graspable thought forms.

The other space belongs to the circular structure of Helsinki's historic 19th century Observatory which Nel visited in his role as resident artist for the COSMOS Project. *Stepping up to the Speed of Light* with its brilliant colour spectrum, evokes the revelations of the night sky observed through telescopes positioned on the observation platform and reached by ascending steps. Sculpturally shaped trap doors drawn in acid greens, with props to keep them open, appear in *Orbicular Presences*.

Studio as Observatory fuses both spaces metaphorically. From the stacked works leaning against studio walls one image faces us: the divided square of shimmering night skies references the Two Square Degrees being measured by the COSMOS Project, streaming in the kind of information about galaxies familiar to scientists. Precisions of measure and record eschew the photographic but Nel's materials - pastel, rubbed pigment, carboniferous and metallic dust - create a sensuous equivalence.

The central dialogue is a focus of observation. For the artist, his studio is HIS observatory and the exhibition is a mediation on the capacity to look both outwards and upwards and inwards. Nel presents a visual case for the intimacy of scientific exploration of the universe, of which we are inescapably a part, and of the internal seeking after the nature of what can be understood.

Karel Nel is Associate Professor of Fine Art at the Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg. A fully illustrated catalogue and details of his exhibition history and collections where he is represented are all on the gallery website.

CURRENT EXHIBITION
Until 14 November 2015

AF PROJECTS:

JONI BRENNER – At The Still Point

New paintings and sculpture



Illustrated: *Lucid Stillness / Os*

Joni Brenner takes the title for this exhibition from T S Eliot's *Burnt Norton*, the first poem in his *Four Quartets* (1943).

Explorations of deep time and a constant consideration of time passing remain the focus of Brenner's studies of skulls and portraits. While the portrait series brings to mind the 20th Century existential wrestle with human presence and its serial rendering in paint or bronze undertaken by Giacometti, Auerbach and Freud to name a few, Brenner's work with skulls is rooted in Africa, where she has access to the phenomenal, profound paleo-anthropological discoveries that keep making society stop and re-consider itself as a species.

Only last month the most recent *Homo Naledi* finds on the site outside Johannesburg known as *The Cradle of Mankind*, were shared with the world. Brenner's small dense watercolours from the *Skull Series* are part of her daily practice and they have a vitality that engages thought, rather than any grim association with death. The new departure is the arresting trilogy of large watercolours of skulls on canvas, *Os*, *Cranio* and *Shadow*. A mixture of control and unpredictability of the medium on this scale makes for radiant images of shadow and light, evoking landscapes of the mind.

The sitter in the contemplative portrait series is Brenner's husband. Shaped within a strict set of parameters – the same sitter, similar modest dimensions, a limited range of bony off-whites, and the same frontal view, 'these presences are eloquent and silent', Elizabeth Burroughs points out in the catalogue essay.

In an earlier essay titled *Intimacy and Strangeness* (2002) Jessica Dubow notes that, 'if portraiture is always an encounter between artist and sitter, then Joni maintains that relation as always only imminent, never realised..... And when at times a 'sitter's' face does appear, it erupts only as a 'flash' - like a fugitive memory - and so remains always on the edge of vision. Unclaimable, ungraspable, indeterminate, 'invisible', we are held by these faces but cannot possess them.

Born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Joni Brenner is Principal Tutor in Art History at Wits School of Arts, Johannesburg. Her fully illustrated catalogue and exhibition history is on the gallery website.

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITION

FIGURE

17 November 2015 – 20 February 2016

Works by: Güler Ates / Christopher Cook
Eileen Cooper / Machiko Edmondson
Bridget Macdonald / Jack Milroy / David Price
& Partou Zia



Illustrated: Partou Zia – *Green Breath*, 2006

David Price – *Doppelgänger*, 2015

“*The Figure Is Back, Baby! At MoMA PS1’s Greater New York, Artists Vanquish Zombie Formalism With People Art*” - so reads the headline of a recent www.Artspace notice (11 October), which nicely bolsters Art First’s understanding that art incorporating the figure has never ‘gone away’.

Art First’s history and personality can be traced through this collection; our long relationship with **Eileen Cooper** is marked by her *Play Dead* 1991, with its iconic universalism. Meanwhile **Jack Milroy** contributes new pieces: one a 21st century re-make of Arthurian myth and the other, a self-referencing double-take on the show’s theme.

Partou Zia’s extraordinary *Green Breath*, where figure and landscape combine implying ethereal presences, is a tribute to the unique magical narrative of her art and life. Art First has been privileged to present her exhibitions and advise her estate. **David Price** makes unashamedly figurative work in which detail, colour, scale and space are variously distorted from reality sometimes referencing fifteenth to seventeenth century north European painting and printmaking and also questioning our constant cultural hindsighting.

Art First has supported Bridget **Macdonald’s** practice since its inception, with a particular format of meticulous drawing, literary sourcing and gathering from the past. This is brilliantly embodied in *Pitcher Bearers*, an edit of the Parthenon frieze. Another draughtsman moving between current and art historical sources is **Christopher Cook**. He shows new work from the now signature monochrome graphite ‘drawings’ with dramatic borrowings from the figures of Caravaggio.

Women and their cultural surroundings appear in the gorgeous palace settings of **Güler Ates’s** *Indian Series* photographs which emerged from a residency in Rajasthan. Fully veiled in saris, the figures enact particular dances to unheard music.

AF PROJECTS / THE POSTCARD PROJECT

Proceeding to the AFP space, *Figure* continues as a theme in recent photographic series by **Liane Lang**, **Graeme Williams** and, for the first time, South African photographer **Gideon Mendel**. In the second AFP space, intimate paintings by **Joni Brenner**, **Kate McCrickard** and **Margaret Hunter** complete the collection, leading to a seasonal presentation of the **Post Card Project**. This is an enticing selection of post card sized works by gallery artists all available at the uniform price of £400.

FORTHCOMING ART FAIRS

ART FAIR – MIAMI

Pulse Miami – Booth #S-211

1 – 5 December 2015

Indian Beach Park, 4601 Collins Av. Miami Beach



Art First returns to Miami for the 2015 edition of the Pulse Art Fair. We will be exhibiting works by two artists: **David Price** – spanning his 2012 'Close of the silver age' series (his first main gallery exhibition with the gallery) and new, dynamic works from the 'Dreamland' series, and from **Christopher Cook** a group of exquisite new & recent graphite works on canvas, paper and aluminium.

ART FAIR - PARIS

AKAA - Also Known As Africa

3 – 6 December 2015

Carreau du Temple, 4 Rue Eugène Spuller, 75003



AKAA – Also Known As Africa - is the first art fair devoted to contemporary art and design from Africa to be held in France.

Art First is exhibiting at AKAA's inaugural edition, and will be featuring recent works by gallery artists **Joni Brenner** and **Karel Nel**, as well as important works by **Louis Maqhubela** and photographic works from **Graeme Williams**, who recently exhibited in AF Projects, and exciting design pieces by **Aaron James**.

ART FAIR – LONDON

LONDON ART FAIR

20 – 24 January 2016

Business Design Centre, 52 Upper Street, N1 0QH



At the 2016 London Art Fair Art First will present a group of major cut paper constructions by **Jack Milroy**, accompanied by selected works by other gallery artists.

For this edition of the fair Art First will return to the main fair, with a prominent stand on the mezzanine level.

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