

Casting Light

Alex Lowery & Graeme Williams: Painting West Bay, Photographing South Africa.

Silent home exteriors, empty of human form but fully suggestive of occupancy and the man-made is the subject matter of both artists, working in two completely different contexts and mediums.

For Alex Lowery, Dorset's West Bay and the island of Portland have been leitmotifs in his practice for over two decades. The marine light pervading all his work suggests the sea, while describing the forms that exist at its edge; piers, jetties, warehouses and sea front houses. His reductive, modernist approach creates a distinctive meditative beauty, tinged with poetic melancholy and subtlety.

Lowery's formal precision links him to the work of American realists, Alex Katz and Edward Hopper (his acknowledged influences) but analogies have also been made to the Italian Futurist artist, De Chirico, and in the way he simplifies and flattens motifs to become urban still lifes, Morandi also comes to mind. This may be why Lowery has exhibited in Italy on several occasions – most recently in a group exhibition in Bergamo at the Galleria Ceribelli.

Graeme Williams, on the other hand, has worked on an extensive series of photographic essays recording the rapidly changing landscape of South Africa following the end of Apartheid rule in 1994. *Painting Over the Present* and *Scratching the Surface* are the titles of essays from which this group of photographs has been selected, and in which Williams focuses on peoples' homes in environments occupied by some of South Africa's poorest people.

"The bright colours act as visual trinkets to distract the viewer from harsh external realities and the pain of a life of subsistence. However, although they encourage denial, they are also suggestive of resilience and hope, and a sense of humanity that is retained in these poverty-stricken communities. These photographs were taken in small towns, townships and cities throughout South Africa. It has been surprising to find that although the areas differ in many ways, there are almost always individuals who seemingly refuse to be subsumed into their surrounding starkness." GW.

There are unexpected formal analogies between the paintings and photographs. The quality of distilled, silent observation, the purity of light, the tenderness that is removed from any sentimentality, the subject matter that is subsumed into pure form, the sense of deep familiarity with the subject....all these elements make for a fascinating dialogue, a conversation about looking, about responding and then subjecting the subject to the purifying, reductive process of composition and formal selection. Both artists have exhibited at Art First over the years and we are delighted to bring them together for the first time, hosted by Emma Hill of the Eagle Gallery in Clerkenwell, where we have had the pleasure of being guest exhibitors over the past three years.

Between 1989 and 1994 **Graeme Williams** covered South Africa's eventful transition to democracy for Reuters and other international news organizations. His courageous photographic work from the 90's has also been exhibited, notably in the monumental exhibition *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* curated by Okwui Enwezor at the **Haus der Kunst** in Munich (then toured). In 2011 Williams' work featured in the *Figures and Fictions* exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London curated by Tamar Garb. His work is held in permanent collections including Cape Town University, the South African National Gallery, Duke University, USA, the Finnish School of Photography in Helsinki and the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

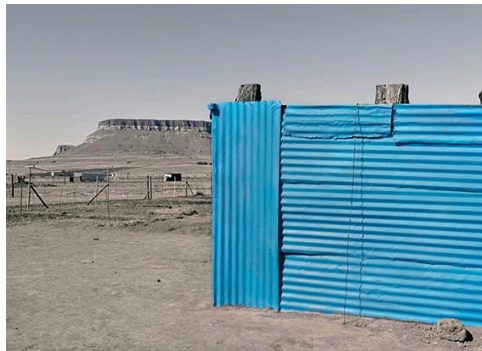
Alex Lowery has exhibited with Art First since 2000 and he shows regularly at Sladers Yard gallery close to where he lives in West Bay. In association with a small group of fellow artists he has exhibited at Galleria Ceribelli in Bergamo and at the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art in Islington. His work is held in private collections and in the Fidelity International Collection and appropriately, in two hospital collections, the Great Ormond Street and St George's Tooting collections.

Art First in residence @ Eagle Gallery, 159 Farrington Road, Clerkenwell, London EC1R 3A

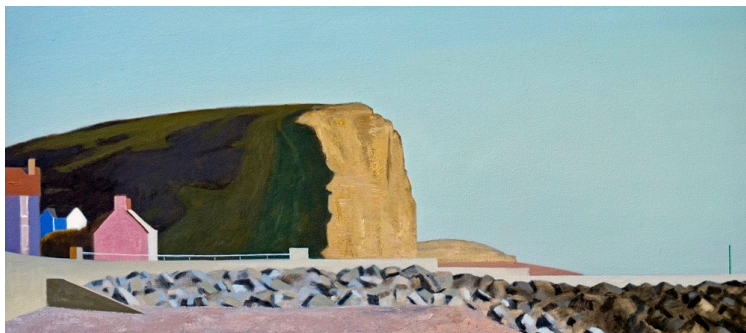
Hours: Wednesday – Friday 11 – 6pm, Saturday 11 – 4pm or by appointment.

For further information please visit www.artfirst.co.uk

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Graeme Williams *Intabazwe Township, Harrismith, South Africa*, 2011, archival digital print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag, 47 x 61 cm, edition of 3



Alex Lowery *West Bay 309*, 2019, oil on canvas 45 x 100 cm

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