

MJ Lourens





Peninsula

**A solo exhibition of paintings by MJ Lourens
29 March - 12 April 2012**

MJ Lourens's evocative paintings of the Cape Peninsula are at once familiar and strangely foreboding. Suffused with the quality of light at dusk, the landscapes are permeated by stillness, devoid of human drama. They speak of absence and emptiness, of isolation and alienation. Yet the distance effected by the panoramic viewpoints and the fading light is simultaneously disrupted by evidence of human intervention – railway power lines that cut across the view of Simonstown; the concrete structure of the incomplete motorway in the city center; harbour cranes etched against the sky; walls that partly obscure our vision.

Lourens refocuses the viewer's attention, not only by means of the light that both reveals and conceals, but also by the emphasis on elements of the landscape that are normally screened out, that exist only on the periphery of vision. The landscape becomes estranged, the very familiar suddenly defamiliarised. At the same time, the juxtaposition of the natural landscape with details that define everyday existence registers the landscape as a particularly layered space. Pristine and unchanging forms are set against the inevitability of change and development, making visible the fleeting and ephemeral nature of human activity.

The arresting tension that Lourens sets up between human absence and presence disrupts the order of the image. It changes the way in which we look at the paintings, and by implication, at the landscape. The uncanny beauty of industrial structures, captured just as day turns into night, becomes sanitised and safe. Yet an undercurrent of unease is ever present, the transitory and the permanent becoming metaphoric of the ambivalent interaction between nature and the markers of human presence. The meaning of Lourens's work therefore lies as much in what falls outside the frame – in what is not depicted – as in the image itself.

Ultimately the striking images are not only about the landscape, but also about the artist's engagement with the substance of paint. The painted surface becomes the site where the compelling tension between paint and the image is played out. From a distance the image asserts itself, in places almost photographic, though not quite, but up close there is nothing but paint. The artist's hand is visible in the brushstrokes, either controlled or loosely scumbled; in the minute dots that dissolve into distant electric lights when one steps back; in the eerie refraction of light that conversely dissolves into paint when one goes up close. The painted surface itself shifts the viewer's focus. It draws the viewer in, creating the tension and ambiguity that are part of the work's allure, so that the shock of recognition lies as much in the places depicted as in the viewer's encounter with the painted surface.

Karin Preller

Viewing a landscape from a distance has always fascinated me in terms of how one considers oneself geographically. The visual experience of the distant lay-out of a town or city, depicted through its lights and urban sprawl underlines a certain human condition to me.

The landscape and in particular that of the Highveld, has shaped me as a painter. My surroundings and vast stretched out vistas became my language. Clouds brooding dramatically, particularly at dusk, became a regular feature in my work.

Since moving to Cape Town two years ago where I now live and work, my paintings has continued on the same trend, but with a renewed appreciation for this southern tip of Africa.

Although I grew up in the Cape Province many years ago, I now look at the Town and the peninsula with a new regard. By blending the mysteriousness of the ever looming mountains with the bustling formalistic energy of the harbor, my work forms a new vocabulary.

My paintings reflect the nostalgic and the naturalistic elements that the Cape peninsula has to offer.

M/Lourens, Cape Town, 2012



"Dusk return I", acrylic on board 30 x 35 cm



"Return desk", acrylic on board 30 x 35 cm



Lourenço's striking and atmospheric cityscapes have always been driven by the sombre beauty of the urban landscape at dusk. These landscapes serve as an expression of the way in which people organise and plot their existence. His juxtaposition of majestic skies and dimly-lit urban landscapes lends a unique perspective on how human intervention has changed our world.

"Harbour / Sunday", acrylic on board, 37 x 57cm



"Walk 1", acrylic on board 78 x 90 cm



"View II", acrylic on board 70 x 90 cm.



"City Outskirts", acrylic on board, 80 x 200cm

On a metaphorical level, his paintings hint at one of the central human dilemmas of the 21st century, evoking contradictory emotions in the viewer: familiarity and foreboding, nostalgia and estrangement.



"Ride", acrylic on board 70 x 90 cm



"En route Simons town", acrylic on board 25 x 75 cm



"En route Simons town B", aryC on board 20 x 35 cm



The comforting twinkle of our electrified cities, celebrating human technological advances, might finally be the source and signifier of a conquered environment and crumbling civilization.

"City Outskirt IV", acrylic on board 140 x 180 cm

MJ Lourens



CREDITS

All artwork photographs: Guto Bussab (www.gutobussab.co.za)
Portrait: Louis Vorster (www.louisvorster.com)

Design and Lay Out: Guto Bussab (www.gutobussab.co.za)

Special thanks: Karin Preller

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1998 "NIGHT" - Milestone Gallery, Pretoria, SA.
2000 "NIGHT 2" - Gallery RR, Swellburg, SA.
2006 "BROWN/BLACK/WHITE" - The Sluiken Gallery, Pretoria, SA.
2007 "DURBAN AT DUSK" - Gallery 415, Durban, SA.
2008 "DUSK" - Everard Read Gallery- Cape Town, SA.
2009 "STATES IN SPACES" - Everard Read, Cape Town, SA.
2011 "VERWAGTINGE / EXPECTATIONS" - Gallery Grande Provence, Franciskhoek, SA.
2011 "AGO / GELEDE" - ArtSpace Johannesburg
2012 "DINGSULA" - Christopher Muller Art

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1996 "DIVING, LOVING, PURGING" (with Diane Vorster and C. Diedericks) - Open Window Art Gallery, Pretoria, SA.
1997 "DIVING II" - Golden Globe Gallery, Cape Town, SA.
1999 "PRESENT CONTINUOUS" - Open Window Art Gallery, Pretoria, SA.
2002 "GERBAAN" - Open Window Art Gallery, Pretoria, SA.
2003 "EXTENSIONS" - Bronze Age Foundry, Cape Town, SA.
2003 "BLACONS/BAKENS" (with Louis Vorster) - Upstairs @Zambo, Johannesburg, SA.
2004 "PROPERTY/GEINDOM"(with Louis Nel) - Upstairs @Zambo, Johannesburg, SA.
2005 "PREFORM" - Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, SA.
2006 "TRACE" - Carol Lee Fine Art, Johannesburg, SA.
2006 "ICON" - Carol Lee Fine Art, Johannesburg, SA.
2007 "SMALL WORKS" - Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, SA.
GROUP EXHIBITIONS (cont)
2007 " - Gallery 415, Durban, SA.
2007 "EVIDENCE" - Carol Lee Fine Art, Johannesburg, SA.
2007 "FLESH/SCAPE" (with Lionel Smit) - Maggie Gallery, Irene, SA.
2008 "DSW" - Saronsberg-Dorpstraat Gallery, Stellenbosch, SA.
2009 "THE CITY" - Everard Read, Cape Town, SA.
2009 "METROPOOL" (with Jaco Genade) - SAAA, Pretoria, SA.
2009 "SOX POWER MONDY" - Everard Read, Cape Town, SA.
2010 "VIEW FROM THE SOUTH" - Everard Read, Cape Town, SA.
2010 "FLOW" - Carol Lee Fine Art, Johannesburg, SA.
2010 "WHERE?" - Gallery Grande Provence, Franschoek, SA.
2010 "ES/CAFE" - SAAA, Pretoria, SA.
2011 "ICON" - Carol Lee Fine Art

AWARDS

- 1995 Winner of the Best New Signatures Competition / Pretoria Art Gallery, Pretoria, SA.

COLLECTIONS

- British Airways Lounge - Cape Town International Airport
Unisa
Telkoms SA
Wepmaak Collection
Webber and Wenzel Attorneys

Christopher Møller Art

www.christophermollerart.co.za