

Mirage

A coat of arms shows the origins, history and ideals of a family, institution or government at a glance. It is a ritualised statement of order, identity and purpose. As a visual statement it sustains this identity in solid form and affirms its history as rigid and one-directional. It is also often cast in bronze, a substance that is ultimately vulnerable to heat. Political fervour, the flaring up of violence, to be inflamed with ideology - these terms connect the notion of heat with events and phenomena very present in the history of South Africa. Although historical events are commemorated on specific dates, the real transitions in politics, society and individual lives occur over years, times during which individual people and organisations alike, according to their hopes and fears, form widely disparate visions of the future. Mirage deals with vision, heat, distance in time and space. It also refers to the supersonic French aircraft so famously used by the South African government in various military conflicts. Mirage uses the visual conventions of heraldry to impart a sense of ritualised and artificial order, an order that is constantly mutating and is therefore hazardous and unstable - on the brink of a meltdown.

Mirage presents in visual language what I would like to call the "heat of history": events and images coming back to us like a fever, like the flush of heat across your face when you remember something uncomfortable or shameful. A mirage is something insubstantial, illusory, full of promise, delirious, dangerous. Out there on the horizon, it mimics our projection and anticipation of a future that we cannot see, still, this doesn't stop us from visualising and exploring its possibilities. It speaks about the friction and pain of change, and of the illusion of imagined or erroneously represented facts. It speaks about our history; great changes taking place while in many ways things appear to remain the same. It explores the truths and lies of our time and the narratives in between. It represents structures (of society, government, of self) that twist, turn and are dismantled under the pressure of our memory, changing their shape, function and appearance like a mirage in the desert, as time goes by.

Mirage starts with a seemingly static coat of arms with a motto that reads: "HISTORIAE ARDORE IN SPIRITU NOSTRO" (THE HEAT OF HISTORY IS IN OUR BREATH). The illusion of stasis collapses when parts of the image are abruptly substituted with similar, yet different fragments. Legs, arms, heads and other body parts are rapidly exchanged with equivalents taken from local newspapers in a macabre interchange of origin and meaning. The coat of arms becomes increasingly organic as it seems to react to an internal heat, causing it to bulge, contort and quiver with ever increasing urgency, until glimpses of a body in motion are revealed, engaged in obscure acts that suggest discomfort, pain, even autophagia or a sinister parturition. After a peak of searing chaos, the elements seem to solidify into another metallic order, settling into a new coat of arms, its motto scroll bearing the inscription: "MEMORIAE FEBRE IN VENIS NOSTRIS" (THE FEVER OF MEMORY IS IN OUR VEINS).

The first inscription speaks about the fleeting nature of our existence, that which collectively amounts to our various histories - our fleeting breath bears through our time the heat of life, something that is ultimately extinguished and forgotten. On the other hand the second inscription suggests another, more deep seated

heat, the fever of memory that gives history its impetus into the future, gathering our past, present and future into one movement. Memory is a fever that has a life that reaches beyond our own. It is a fever that has the power to inflame and infect others to remember and register their private experiences of historically significant events within their own time. Mirage sets against one another the breathing motion of remembering and forgetting that shapes the way in which we create our histories.

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1999

video animation · dimensions: variable · duration: video 100 seconds; no audio · looped indefinitely