

## Oracle (artist's statement)

Recent South African history has shown that a cohesive notion of the past can only be forged from within the intricate maze of individual recollection. In my work memory appears as a document under revision, an uneven patchwork of information that is never complete. Recollection renders the perceived facts of a history into a narrative, the re-telling of which inevitably interferes with the plot: this is the way of language. Hence remembering is an act that requires the human faculty for representation - this suggests moments of appropriation and of editing which could amount to an over-writing or, less kindly, an act of erasure. Therefore a narrative always speaks firstly of the position of its speaker, and only then of what is understood as the content. The rendering also rends: at times the pain of remembering shows us the grim weight of our desires and our losses.

Art renders. I am always redrawing the limits of my understanding of the world, making up alternative narratives along the way, translating the visual agendas of contemporary media and drawing conflicting histories of this place and time into discomfiting proximity of each other. Art also rends. Through my work I tear at the fabric of different realities, severing images from their origin and cleaving apart the logic of their familiar rhetoric. When practised as an impetus against the forgetfulness of history, the strategies of art become volatile and impatient. Considering the socio-political imprint that this place and time has left on me, I choose in my work to bring the peculiarities of a mutating subjectivity to bear on the specificities of its historical context. The matter has become increasingly personal as I come to know more and more about my country of birth.

To acknowledge the gaps in our memories and to reconstruct the missing parts of a history is almost as frightening as staring an apparition in the face, daring it to show itself while knowing that one couldn't stand the sight. Often the things we can't bear to face are the most telling witnesses of our personal and ideological origins. My new work constitutes a kind of ghost-hunt, tilling over the soil of public and private recollection to find the phantoms that could help to form a composite portrait of an itinerant 'self'. My aim is to determine a sense of future by giving voice to the unmentionable and form to the unimaginable. Because I believe that what one presents as artist can be looked upon as a way of divining our individual and shared destinies.

The shadow past is shaped by everything that never happened. Invisible,  
it melts the present like rain through karst. A biography of longing. It  
steers us like magnetism, a spirit torque. This is how one becomes  
undone by a smell, a word, a place, the photo of a mountain of shoes.  
By love that closes its mouth before calling a name.

(Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Pieces*, 1997)

## Eating history, devoured by time

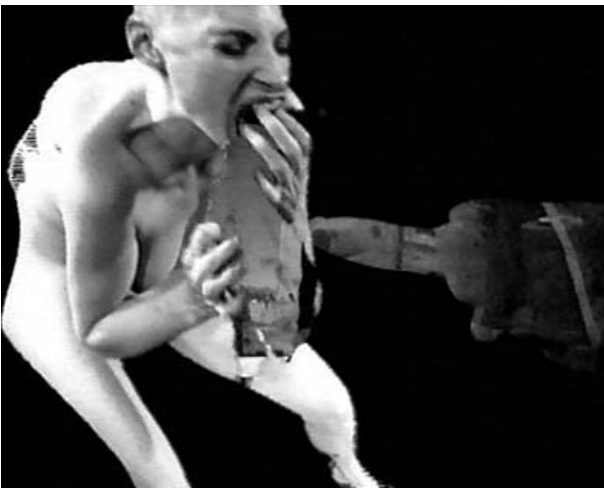
In Oracle I become a maniacal golem, cramming all the conflicting histories of present-day Africa into my mouth, in a fit of hunger that makes me gag. To re-incorporate the disparate truths into one body, to make it whole again, is an excruciating task.

Unlike Saturn (or Chronos), the god of time who, in an attempt to evade his fate, devoured his children, the figure in Oracle wants desperately to hasten her fate, to bite into, over and beyond time. As in Oswald de Andrade's *Cannibalist Manifesto* this figure becomes a metaphor for postcolonial identity, a craving to assimilate every fragment of information into one hybrid body.

The proliferation of information about a history as active as South Africa's has been, can sometimes prove too much, and one reaches saturation point. Unable to deal with the influx of information, unable to digest all the different versions of reality, the figure in Oracle must reject mouthfuls of it, spitting pieces out, despite the forceful urge to ingest more.

In my research for this work, I have taken as a starting point Francesco de Goya's painting of Saturn devouring his children, and looked into the identities of the children of this mythological figure. I have found that each of these gods and goddesses had specific powers, duties and areas of concern, such as death, agriculture and the wellbeing of women. I have chosen footage from the media in accordance to these characteristics, and wound up with a portrait of South Africa at a certain point in time. It is this portrait that becomes the setting for a more personal interrogation of the history that has shaped who I am.

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## ORACLE

1999

video animation · dimensions: variable · duration: video 2 minutes; audio 6 minutes · looped indefinitely