

THE COMPANYS GARDEN

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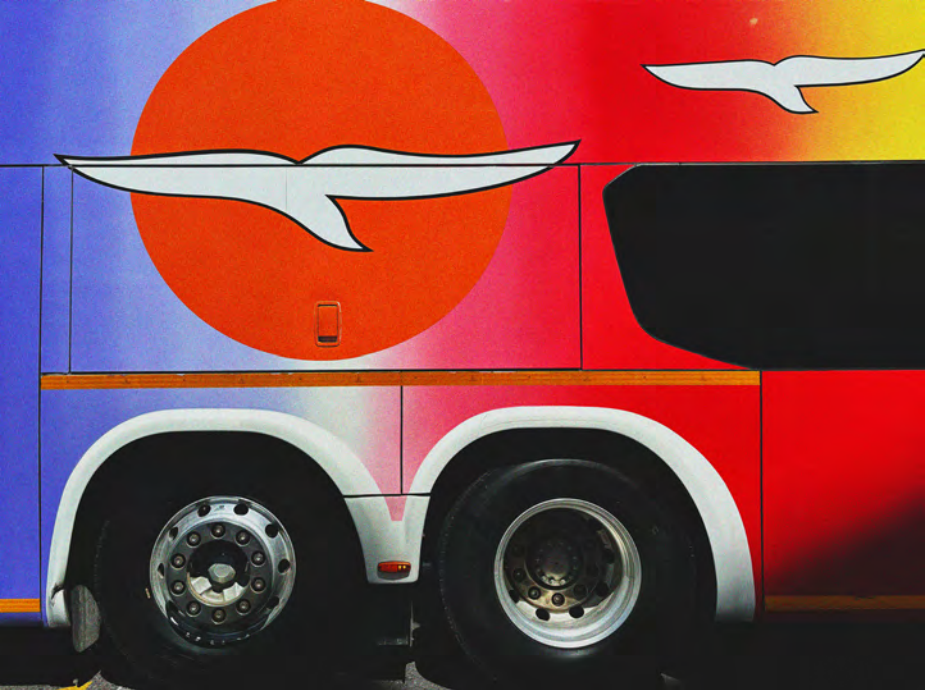
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field of images and symbols
through which the garden
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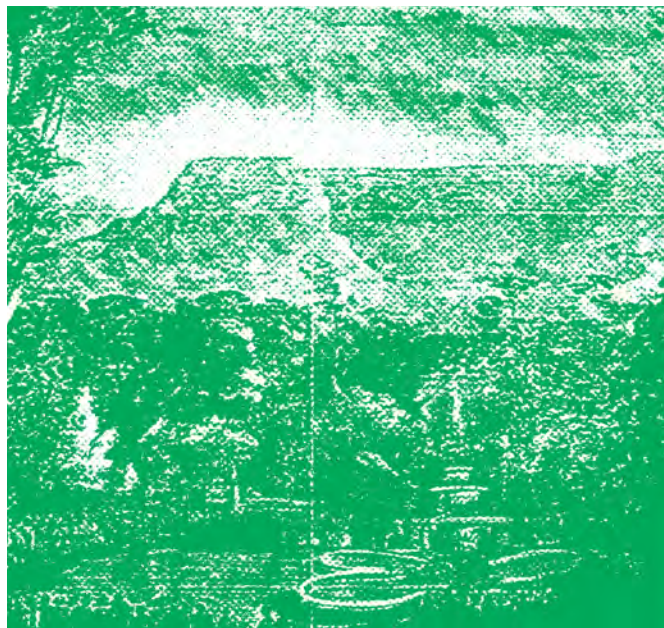
A POETS EYE VIEW





ALL MY LOVE AND GRATITUDE TO
MY PARENTS, BERNARD AND WILMA
CRAIG AND MARINE
MY NEW YORK BAGELS FAMILY
MY CHOSEN FAMILY, TOM AND PETE





THE TEXT

This presentation captures my entanglement with the reckoning and the resplendence, that is, *The Company's Garden*. I have approached the site, charged as it is with profound sociospatial complexity, as a sinister monument to the realities of our nation's past as much as I have it a muse, tormented as she is beautiful. Concerned with historical, contemporary, and interpersonal narratives, my work seeks to engage with the layers of truth about the garden as it continues to unfold amongst trees that themselves must long since have questioned how they came together here. There is one, particularly gnarled and withering within its enclosure, and yet, since 1652 is still productive, symbolically, poetically, psychically. The annual return of fruit escorted by a litany of white blossoms, the garden itself is revealed by this enduring pear tree, as South Africa's original wound.

My relationship with the garden is therefore an intimate one that over several years has been shaped by my sustained interaction with the imaginal and interpretive lens of the *I Ching*¹, the Chinese divinatory *Book of Changes*.

This year's artistic exploration has been facilitated by the encounter with its framework and its elemental nature, and I welcome the text as a conceptual and philosophical companion.

¹ Compiled into its present form during the Zhou dynasty (c. 1100–771 BCE), the I Ching endures as one of the oldest systems of knowledge still in use today. Its earliest inscriptions appeared in archaic, imagistic Chinese— closer to ideogram than alphabet, and relied on deeply embodied cultural, spiritual, and ecological knowledge. In contemporary usage, most Western readers engage the I Ching through scholarly translations— Richard Wilhelm's edition, shaped by Confucian commentary and popularised through Carl Jung's foreword, remains the most widely circulated

Emphasising change, the thematics of the *I Ching* provide a structure for reflecting on the continuum of interior and exterior landscapes, and how impossible they are to paralyse. Looking at relevant background, processes, and materials, what follows is an elucidation of the dialogue between site and a system of insight that my work navigates.

Several years ago, after a painful divorce, I moved sight unseen into a fifth-floor unit in Holyrood overlooking The Company's Garden, where I still live and am resident caretaker. Haunted by the collapse of my marriage and needing, after spending my twenties abroad, to come to terms with where it all started, I would puzzle over how far back the origin of our now goes. Returned as I was to the neighbourhood I grew up in, I became aware that any attempt to locate an answer to the question of how the hell I got here was

met with a confluence of contributors, all worthy of equal contemplation. My arrival at 80 Queen Victoria Street marked the beginning of a prolonged period of rupture and tentative repair as I confronted the personal and sociopolitical realities of my situation. The Garden, in all its dimensions, has become central to my own healing process, offering itself as something of a mirror as it holds together the weight of experience with a natural instinct for renewal.

I became hypnotised by the rhythms of the space outside my window and the way it seemed to breathe as it oscillated with the movement of people, birds, and trees. The avian and pedestrian life moves like clockwork, but on a longer, gentler cycle, the weddings unfold only on Sundays.

From various cultures across the African continent, couples gather in this post-colonial setting, testifying to devotion, community, and futures entwined.

I confess to having found the metronome of romantic ritual on repeat psychospiritually nauseating; every seven days, my grief renewed. To be held hostage by something heartwarming is however, unacceptable, and so I attempted to capture the processions in a pragmatic attempt to face the music.

Soon I came to see that these voyeuristic vignettes, the outcome of a cellphone photograph taken through binoculars, might not only seed the possibility of my own return to self creatively, but that The Garden's original agenda and its imperial rose beds were being grown over by the grace of every single Sunday Bride and the delight of her dedicated little flower girls.

I would say that, in its way, looking out of and then into a wounded place began to offer me a way to integrate the inevitable tension between that which will never heal and the glimpses of flourishing that do eventually transpire.

During this time, it was an ancient oracular text that guided me in reconciling the dynamics of where I found myself in time and place, and several years later, this submission is a snapshot of that process.



The following description captures the *I Ching's* extraordinary scope and the breadth of its influence on my way of seeing:

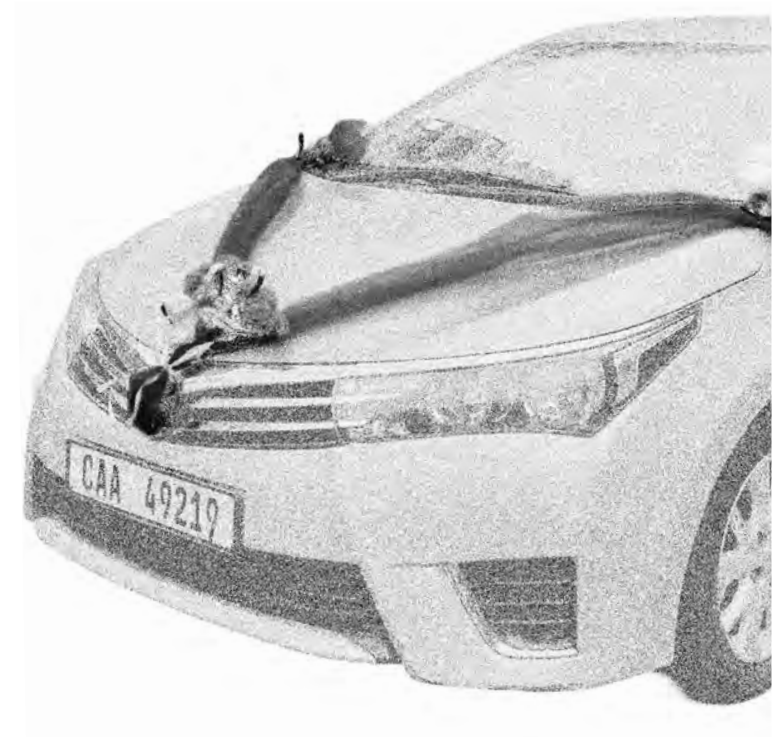
“[It is] An instrument of divination, a text of alchemy, a treatise of philosophy, a metaphorical system, a text of meditation, a symbolic system, a mathematical language where geometry and binary arithmetic come together, a book on social and natural laws, a treatise on psychology, a healing system, a philosophical computer, a calendar, a method of self-realisation, a treatise on the laws of consciousness, a treatise on karma, a treatise on creativity...”²

² —Miguel Ángel Rodríguez-Roselló, referring to the Ritsema, R. and Sabbadini edition, *The Original I Ching Oracle: The Eranos Translation of the Book of Changes*, published in 2005, in London.

The text itself is organised into sixty-four hexagrams, each composed of two stacked trigrams, themselves formed by three broken or unbroken horizontal lines indicating yin and yang energies respectively. There are eight trigrams which correspond to elemental forces and celestial directions: Water (N), Mountain (E), Fire (S), and Lake (W), Heaven (NW), Earth (SW), Thunder (NE), Wind/Wood (SE).

A hexagram sets two of these forces into relationship, between upper and lower, and then brings forth fragments of counsel in a language as cryptic as it is precise. Each one describes a composite situation subject to frictions, flows, and turning points.

For example, albeit overly distilled: Hexagram 9, *Small Taming (Wood over Heaven)*, “Dense clouds without rain



come from my Western alters” speaks of cultivation and restraint in ones assumptions; Hexagram 30, *Clarity (Fire over Fire)*, “Raising female cattle is good fortune” calls for lucidity and the nurture of insight; or the ‘final’ hexagram, 64, *Not Yet Across (Fire over Water)*, “The small fox, almost across, soaks its tail: No direction bears fruit” urges alertness and steadfast intent, but encourages us to remain bouyant in spirit when befallen by setback.

In consultation, one casts yarrow stalks, coins, or in its earliest form, tortoise shells, to generate the lines that comprise a hexagram. Some may appear as ‘changing’, shifting from yin to yang or vice versa, thereby producing a secondary hexagram that reveals the situation’s evolving tendencies.

Together, these create a three-part structure that can be explained in terms of reading a landscape with consideration for the atmospheric conditions.

The first hexagram, for instance, presents the general terrain. It sets the sweeping contours of the situation; the mountain rising, the rivers cutting their course. The second hexagram gives a more located sense of position within that same landscape, like arriving at a vista where you can see the effects of light and the weather shifting in the way things appear to move.

The changing lines then, 1-6, replete with their own accompanying commentaries, are the most specific coordinates within this field. They indicate active thresholds, the finer focal points where evolution is already at play within the scene; something dipped in water reveals

its beauty, a willow can be used to wrap melons, the hard-to-reach ledge where the amaranths grow is, at least, in sight.

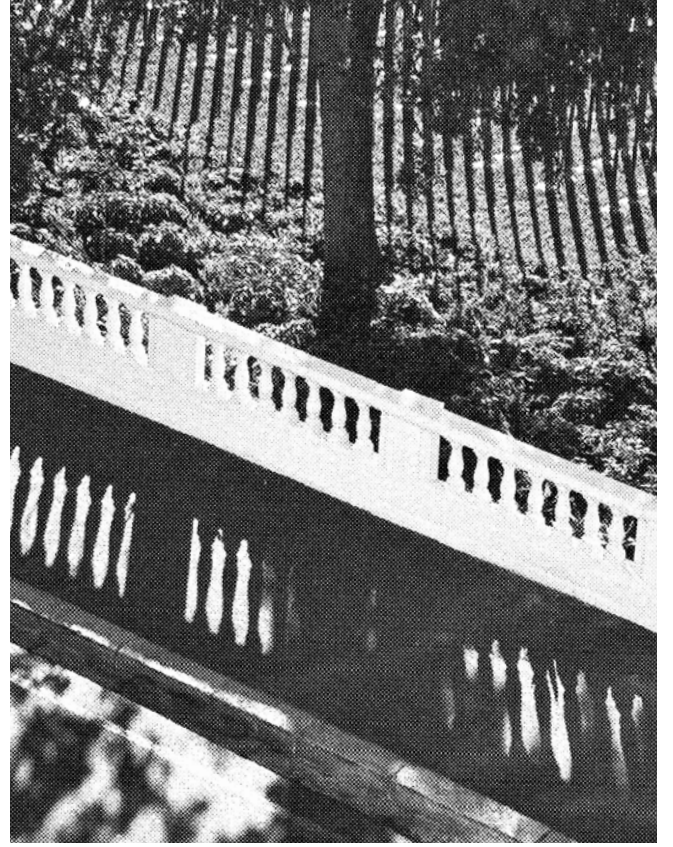
This integrated perspective on scenario encodes the notion that a more absolute truth is only apprehended through systems of relational dynamics. The facilitation the oracle provides, therefore, isn’t about predicting anything at all, but rather it’s about the non-linear faculty of attunement to the chemistry produced between phrases in association.

At its most essential core, and what connects the text so fundamentally to this project, is that it functions on the premise that change itself is the medium through which life becomes intelligible— not, as per the Western assumption that tends to anchor truth in provable sequence, in permanence, and that interprets deviation as disruption and vice versa.

Without any lines dividing subjective and objective domains, an *I Ching* reading offers us the cartography of a process, a guide to inhabiting the landscape of the moment.

Interestingly, architect and Professor Noleen Murray, in her thesis, *The Imperial Landscape at Cape Town’s Gardens* (2001), also speaks about the ‘reading’ of a landscape. She discusses how spatial and material artefacts of a site can be understood as a layered source text that should be interpreted alongside its social strata to extract relevant meaning. Her introduction to the triad conception of space as being ‘perceived’, ‘conceived’, and ‘lived’³, is particularly useful to this textual analogy in the

³ Murray sites geographer, Henri Lefebvre’s concept that bridges what he calls “mental space” (the philosophical realm) and “real space” (the physical and social arenas). His work *The Production of Space* outlines this triadic model which, Murray claims, guided the interpretation of her overall thesis.





way it mirrors the three-part structure considered when feeling your way around parts of a divinatory reading, and offers a similar utility in the art of The Garden's decipher.

With these theoretical armatures in overlap, the analysis of my work can be as broadly led by this formulation as by the configuration of the *I Ching*. When you enact a reading using The Book of Changes, you are engaging the text. You are creatively and carefully articulating an inquiry so that you can meaningfully interact with a system of motifs that will assemble a tensile map as to the quality of interaction between them. The text in Murray's sense also presents one with relational concepts, and thus compelled me to unearth and arrange 'artefacts' from my own research and observation.

This is a site where elemental, spatial, historical, and psychic forces remain in vigorous and constant negotiation, and Murray reminds us, in harmony with the oracle, that it endures as a medium of ongoing and inevitable change.

Aligning my practice with this recognition, this body of work was approached holistically, as an inquiry enacted, and I regard its outcome as a kind of reading; an interpretive field through which the site discloses itself.

Over the course of this year, I've been developing a series of freestanding sculptural flat works that operate as visual and conceptual apertures that frame relationships between the physical and metaphysical layers of The Garden.



Before it was a landscape, it was the wilderness⁴; rockfaces flicker with fresh water flow, the valley, though windswept, is fertile. Considering, as one does, trigrams and hexagram one, the elements and general contours first, while recognising the site in terms of its broadest, ‘perceived’ conception of space, two primary allegories emerge for mention. I have saddled the steadiness of the mountain as a symbol with two energies: Below, it represents the primordial timeline, and stands for existence on its own tectonic terms, aeons before it happened, and well into a future without people at all. Above, the image of a mountain represents the imperial gaze and all its picturesque persuasions.

⁴ Geographers like James Duncan and others argue that what sets ‘landscape’ apart from ‘wilderness’ is its cultural construction— the accumulation of representation and intent layered over time, which can in turn be read and interpreted.

Where the element of wood is present, I have centred Outeniqua yellowwood, the same species as the proudest tree in the garden known to predate the arrival of the Haarlem sailors⁵. I think about its lifetime and what it was forced to witness, and so I have inscribed it into the work’s foundations, emblematic of strength at the centre and expansive awareness.

The images and textures that further constitute the individual pieces should be ascribed to the second hexagram vis-à-vis the ‘conceived’ conception of space, and the changing lines vis-à-vis the ‘lived’ conception of space. This implies that anecdotes from these dimensions, arranged in a particular work, offer the overall ‘reading’ necessary detail through

⁵ The sinking of the Nieuw Haarlem in 1647 catalysed Cape Town’s genesis— a Dutch vessel whose fate would cast a long and irreversible shadow over human history

a series of pictorial and material phrases, to which I have assigned quite distinct inferences. Newsprint gathered like a carriage screen questions whether the traveller was ever worthy of riding in one, a faceless white man’s comb-over imparts its message of integrity lost and inability to surrender, while the albino squirrel appears to remind us that mechanisms of dominance are masters of mutation...

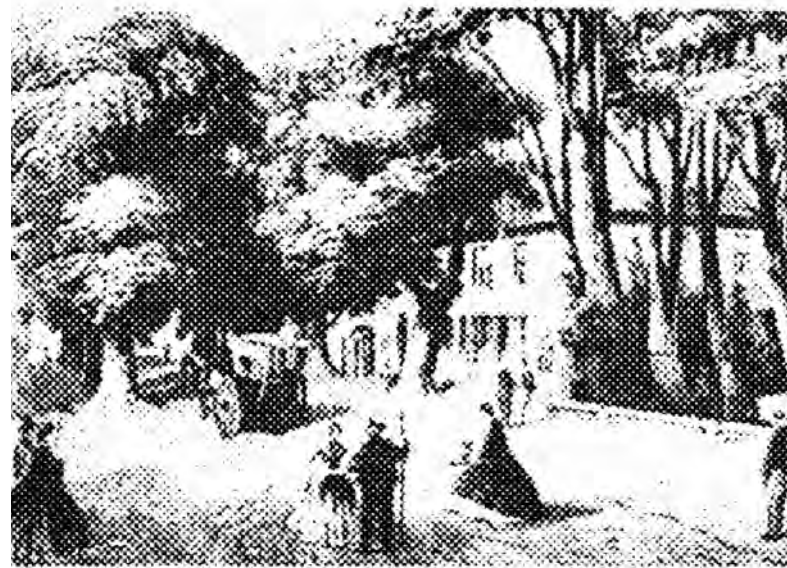
Practically speaking, my practice grows out of collage and bricolage, beginning with the collation and sorting of raw material. This preparatory phase informs a series of experimental compositions that test the relationships between different mediums and ideas, allowing direct links and benign nuance to nudge me toward identifying key convictions for respective project threads. I placed a range of images, including personal photographs and archival imagery, into

circulation, constellating them until something happened that I didn’t expect, and that was attentive to multiple ways of knowing.

Working provisionally in this way, I was able to indulge The Company’s Garden as a more immediate interface, as an archive very much alive. These early gestures kicked off a broader rhythm of deconstruction and reconstruction, demythologising and remythologising. The instinct to de-flatten that sense of historical record, the way it all stands before us as an enduring summary of the past, was duly satisfied by using mostly cardboard and newsprint to generate loose, interim forms and picture pairings.

As manners of identifying and codifying system extracts in the pursuit of essential insight, thinking around curatorial and archival praxes converged early in the year.







Acutely relevant to my own processes; I resonate with the way an ethos of repair functions within the conception of these methodologies. I have held this as my highest concern when taking pictures of people who frequent The Garden, while also knowing that they contribute to its identity as fully as any of its other, less ephemeral attributes.

I embraced this hybridised theoretical approach as a way of creating interpretive space for the effervescence of the present, insisting that our life and times are relevant history too, and that ephemera itself carries archival weight⁶.

I relate very much to the argument for conceiving of archives as a continuum,

6 José Esteban Muñoz introduces his concept of “ephemera as evidence” in his 1996 essay of the same name, and I find the argument for “traces, glimmers, residues, and specks”—for human gesture itself, to register as vital, evidentiary affirmation of [minoritarian] lives, deeply compelling

and not a static repository; most effective when held in a fluid state, calibrated to the nature of collective memory, and of composite truth.

This, in turn, aligns with my understanding that curatorial praxis can also be understood as a modality gestalt, its etymological origin *cura* testifies to this, invoking experiences of both sorrow and love. In this spirit, I am displaying a sample wall from studio, which proposes a new term, “curarchive” as its praxis. It riffs on Sibyl Annice Fisher, Doctor of Philosophy’s concept of *curare*—to care, to curate—and extends it to making use of the curatorial act as a fulcrum to generate coherent, interdisciplinary, atemporal archives.

The first work to emerge in a slightly more durable language, assembled in yellowwood, bamboo, cardboard, and paper, was *Bb Barthelemu > Nizaam Loves Roxy*.

Drawing on strategies inherited from the studio series, it frames a scenario where legacies become layered and fused, and not in brick and bronze, but through communal acts of devotion and ceremony.

The Company’s Garden itself is not the creation of one authorial vision; it has developed over more than three centuries by the assertive forces of shifting political strategy. Within this continuum, monumentality is reformatted by scrambling the statue of Bartolomeu Dias⁷, the archetypal maritime figurehead and his astrolabe⁸, with a portrait I took of an iconic flower girl holding a basket of confetti.

7 The commemorative monument of the first European known to set foot on South African soil was unveiled on the front lawn of the South African National Gallery in The Company’s Garden in 1960 and was later moved to the bottom of Heerengracht Boulevard, near the entrance of the Port of Cape Town.

8 6th - 15th century celestial navigation device.

The technologies of imperial progress depend on an orientation toward a determined destination in a predictable future, and so the epistemic shift implied by her embodiment of futurity⁹ reconceives this worldview altogether, offering a revolutionary, albeit theoretical ‘technology’ with which to chart the presence of pure possibility.

The second work to unfold, titled *Only Bringing Your Needs To The Temple*, offers a view of arrival, both historic and contemporary. On one hand, it pictures the looming arrival of ships in Table Bay, and recalls the shipwreck

9 The term futurity refers to the imaginative and political practice of envisioning futures beyond the temporal, epistemic, and ontological limits imposed by colonial modernity. The concept denounces the progress-based conception of time inherited from dominant empirical faculties, embracing instead a co-constitutive relational temporality. Its core definition is a reconstitution of what it means to dream and world-build, to imagine and enact futures.





that precipitated the breaking of ground at what was about to become The Company's Garden; an act through which the salvaged seeds on board would ultimately grow to sustain colonial establishment at the Cape. On the other hand, the motor vehicle's side mirror speaks about heeding modernity's dangers, and warns that we mind our blind spots vigilantly because not all of them are behind us.

In one aperture, a gleaming and highly destructive implement embodies a reaper-like figure that lurks ominously, like a curse most efficient, and in tandem with two blacked out lioness silhouettes in the other, this parkland is a stage set for predators, by predators—rehearsing the transference of colonial ideals through botany, agriculture, architecture, and the display of 'exotic' animals.

Hiddingh Campus itself occupies an erf within that schema, and was initially founded specifically on the site which hosted the big cat enclosure. Evidenced by the sculptural embellishments on the perimeter wall, it was granted to found the University of Cape Town in the early nineteenth century. On what used to in fact be called Predators Park, the first building to be constructed exclusively for the purpose of higher education in our country, The Egyptian Building, was inaugurated less than a decade after the legal though ineffectual emancipation of enslaved people on the same complex. This triangulation only deepened the sense of inextricable entanglement with my subject matter, as my fourth-year studio came to occupy this very building.

With gratitude for the rich resources available on The Company's Garden, conducting historical research was a process most forthcoming...

My present-day research approach, however, is largely observational and as informal as looking out of the window for hours when I'm at home. I am hypnotised by the carriages of Queen Victoria Street that congest to capacity, only to disentangle and drain along the garden's perimeter. Buses, Ubers, and wedding cars gossip ad nauseam about their passengers, revealing a lot about who makes the garden part of their story and why. The fluctuating tides of vehicles lapping at my attentions would eventually develop into an intriguing metaphorical poetic—the evocative world of automotive panel-beating.

Precursors to this language appear in the side and rear view mirrors from *Bb Barthelemu* > *Nizaam Loves Roxy* & *Only Bringing Your Needs To The Temple*, which, in essence, is how we identify and navigate the things we ought to reflect upon. This work, titled *Safe Distance*, and

the third of the sculptural series, ponders the desire versus the capacity to conceal that which has been struck. It questions what the utilities of constructive repair might be in this life, and whether a collision, or rupture itself isn't the most essential of them.

In Noleen Murray's understanding, the site is never neutral, and the picturesque, the immaculate, she notes, is not a harmless perpetration at all, but a surgical application where meticulously laid lawns and stretches of lily pond function to aestheticise control. What appears to the imperial sensibility as inherent loveliness commonly conceals a sordid saga that lives summarised in the ontology of the systematically dispossessed.



In an irrefutable nod to classic landscapes and the complicated ownership of my vantage point, I devised a painting technique that involves glueing and tearing, glueing and tearing, glueing and tearing tissue paper until a shape emerges that is as abstract as it is articulate.

The surface treatment registers a field of overwhelming disturbance as much as it does a meditation. One, is dedicated to an image of the mountain discussed in a previous passage, and the other acknowledges the Table Mountain streams, whose nature was forever restrained to the agricultural advantage of the VOC and subsequent landscaping ideals. The image you register was initially significantly stretched and then folded to reconstitute its proper proportions, a technique that has developed since the earlier *Studio Wall* stages, and continued to evolve throughout the year.

The desire to digest my position, working with the deliberate deposit and random release of countless layers, and then employing this concertina device that allows what is represented to breathe—to contract and expand—yielded a texture that operates as a relational field for the alignment of inner and outer worlds where I/we/the seeker, must attune to both in order to move forward.

The Company's Garden endures and triumphs as both sombre historical record and beloved public domain. Its grounds are forever inscribed with colonial extraction and marred just as profoundly by cultural erasure. This is where the pain was first planted for the people of South Africa, and we certainly aren't wanting for more evidence of that.

Within this environment, linear temporality is traced by that which can be neatly historicised, but the healing we seek belongs to an atemporal register and emerges through the jostling of people who bring The Garden their excitement and their need for rest.

The memories that are made there, the milestones marked, its lived dimension so to speak, perform a kind of counter-monumentality that is buildable, reparative, and accumulates via participation rather than the stuff of static permanence.

Working with the *I Ching* has taught me how to orientate myself within a landscape layered with realities that need not compete, but rather coexist and negotiate one another.

My practical approach has functioned as an applied methodology of orientation, whereby I could get a topographical

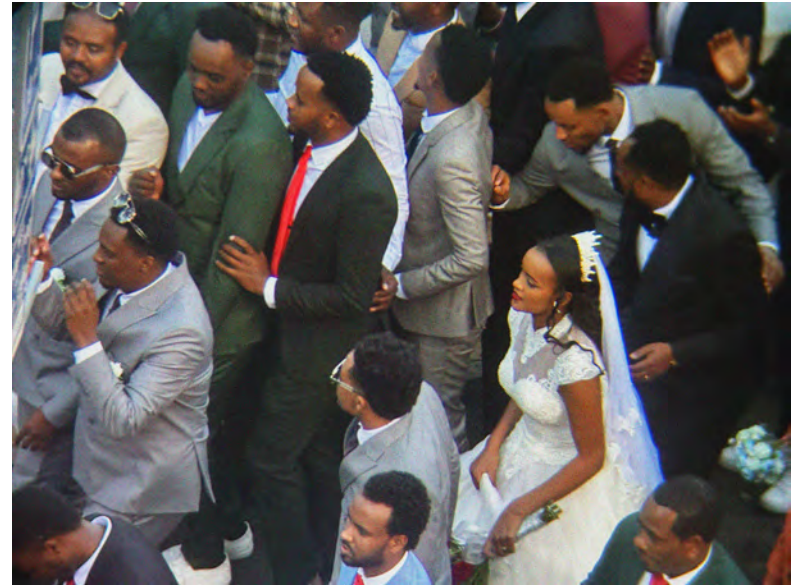
“poet’s-eye view” on things, and test how my relational perspective could become material.

My presentation endeavours to summon something as new as it is true, and to log the interdependence of the material world, symbolic resonance, and social enactment.

Ultimately, my fourth year work is embodied most sincerely as a divinatory gesture, and a healing one. Studio, for me, is where cosmologies of interior and exterior landscapes operate as deeply enmeshed terrains, and where they are most rewarding to model and process. So rather than a question to which the answer requires no imagination, the means of inquiry at play here function to resource our current instruments of interpretation, mapping The Garden as a site of ongoing emergence and vitality—albeit somewhere way away above, the wound that will never heal.



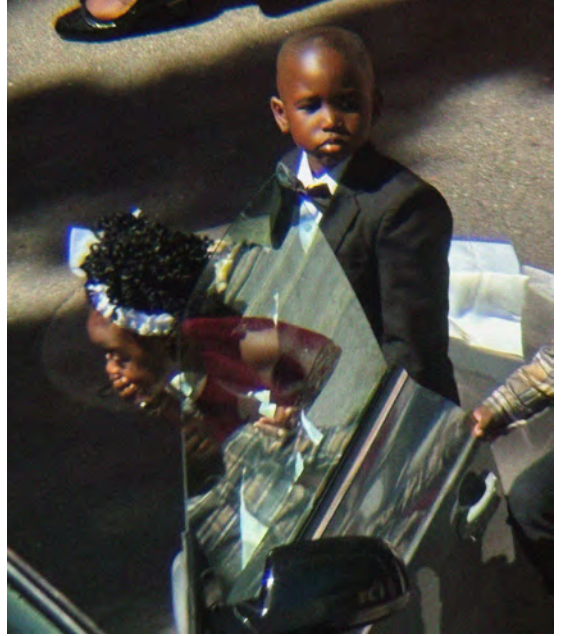


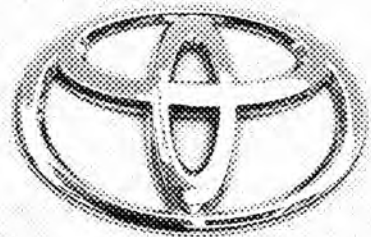












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