

**Kim Berman** is associate professor in the Department of Visual Art at the University of Johannesburg and the founder and executive director of Artist Proof Studio, a community-based printmaking centre in Newtown. She received her BAFA from the University of the Witwatersrand and her MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Art/Fufts University in 1989. She initiated the Paper Prayers campaign to promote HIV/Aids awareness through the visual arts in 1997. Berman received government funding in 2000 to implement a national poverty alleviation programme, Phumani Paper, which supports small enterprises nationally in handmade paper and craft. She has lectured and exhibited widely in South Africa and internationally. She completed her PhD at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2009 with a thesis entitled 'Agency, imagination and Resilience: Facilitating Social Change through the Visual Arts in South Africa'.

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*Alien Landscape, White River I – IV 2009 etching edition 15 435X526mm*



IV



I



III



II

*Rifle Range I, Roodepoort 2009 monotype 782X1075mm*



*Rifle Range I, Roodepoort 2009 monotype 782X1075mm*





Kim Berman

*Dislocated landscapes*

12 August – 2 September 2010

In May 2008 South Africa erupted in a wave of xenophobic violence. Black African people from countries other than South Africa were designated as 'other' using the pejorative term amakwerekwere. The extreme violence, which included burning victims alive, killed sixty two people and displaced thousands. The authorities responded by rounding up foreign nationals and moving them, 'for their own protection', into tented encampments in outlying areas. After six months the inhabitants of these camps were forced back into the communities that had ejected them so aggressively, where they again faced marginalization and the thread of violence. Many were deported back to their countries, others simply 'disappeared'.

For many South Africans the devastating attacks, and the State's response, was a painful reminder of the opposition and violence of the apartheid era. It re-opened the wound of that trauma in the national psyche, revealing it as unhealed. It dashed the notion of a 'Rainbow Nation', a trope introduced by Archbishop Desmond Tutu that was so often quoted in the immediate post-apartheid period to celebrate the principle of inclusionary community: togetherness despite difference. It betrayed the ideal of ubuntu ('I am because of you'), and diverted South Africans away from the democratic society imagined in the writing of the Constitution.

Over the past two decades across the globe, genocide resulting from policies of ethnic cleansing has provided the world with its most difficult lesson since the holocaust: the loss of our humanity. South Africa tasted this bitter, de-humanizing experience during the xenophobic violence in 2008, which damaged the dream of a society that promised to protect and safeguard human rights for all its people.

Like many of my fellow citizens, I was devastated by the destruction of ideals that were struggled for, at such cost, for so long. As an artist I sought visual metaphors through which to process the trauma. I turned, as I have done in much of my work, to landscape in order to explore disconnection and the concept of the alien or 'other'.

First I created a series of etchings comprising a landscape constructed from splicing together of two unconnected spaces into a co-joined but disjunctive space. The United Nations white refugee tents temporarily provided for the dispossessed on the edge of South African cities became a stark symbol of the nation's failure to accommodate diversity.

The etchings, drawings, and monotypes in the second series of work were inspired by seemingly unrelated landscape images that I photographed around the time of the xenophobic violence. In June of 2008, rural areas close to the town of White River in Mpumalanga province were consumed by vast forest fires. It was necessary for farmers to revive their badly damaged

exotic fruit orchards by drastically pruning down the trees and painting them white with lime in order to protect the exposed bark from the sun and possible disease. For me the fields of white amputated trees in regimented rows visually enacted the predicament of the alien; the shameful drastic marking and control of the other. Exploring this imagery through a range of visual art techniques offered me a way of processing and exploring both the fragility of South African democracy, and of integrating and accommodating radical dislocation into a deceptively ordinary landscape.

In my work, landscapes have always provided a metaphor for South Africa's transitions as a country: even in a poisoned, burnt, or smoke-filled landscape, the light on the horizon sparks the energy and hope for the cycle of change and imperative of renewal. Both of these series are set in the winter of 2008: they speak of a stark, sterile, dry, cold, empty, white, regimented aftermath of earlier fire, violence and chaos. But winter is part of a cycle, and its moment does pass.

*Alien Invader* 2009 monotype 782X1075mm



*Stripped, Lowveld Plantation II* 2010 monotype 574X768mm

