

Human rights and human wrongs: public perceptions of Diane Victor's *Disasters of Peace*¹

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Diane Victor's print series, *Disasters of Peace*, pays homage to Goya's revelations about war but addresses the violence of peace in post-apartheid South Africa. The delicate line and tone of her etching processes seduce the eye into a close reading of material that would normally be avoided, and which has shocked even lawyers who should investigate such cases. The works were withdrawn from display in the new building of the Faculty of Law at the University of Pretoria, and became the subject of a special issue of their journal. This paper investigates how Victor exposes the gap between human rights principles in a constitution recognised as the most advanced in the world, and the insidious underbelly of South Africa's human abuses.

Key Words: South African art; Diane Victor; etching; civil rights; human abuses.

Menseregte en die menslike onreg: openbare persepsies van Diane Victor se *Disasters of Peace*

Diane Victor se print-reeks, *The Disasters of Peace*, bring hulde aan Goya se onthullings oor oorlog, maar fokus op die geweld van vrede in 'n post-apartheid Suid-Afrika. Die delikate lyn en toon van haar ets prosesse mislei die oog in 'n beslote lees van materiaal wat normaalweg vermy word, en wat skok selfs prokureurs wat sulke gevalle moet ondersoek. Die werk is onttrek uit die nuwe gebou van die Fakulteit Regsgeleerdheid by die Universiteit van Pretoria, en is die onderwerp van 'n spesiale uitgawe van hul tydskrif. Hierdie artikel ondersoek hoe Victor ontbloot die gaping tussen die menslike regte in 'n grondwet erken as die mees gevorderde in die wêreld, en die verraderlike onderbuik van Suid-Afrika se menslike misbruik.

Sleutelwoorde: Suid Afrikaanse kuns; Diane Victor; ets; burgerregte; menslike misbruik.

Ten years after the freeing of Nelson Mandela, Diane Victor began a new print series, *The Disasters of Peace*. While she did not discontinue the experimental works that challenge the conventional limits of her medium in scale and process, this series moved away from the sense of technical *tour de force* that had characterised much of the work with which she made her name as a printmaker. *The Disasters of Peace* reverted to modest scale and the more familiar processes of etching, perhaps in homage to historical prints such as Goya's *Disasters of War* which inspired the title of her series. Yet these prints were to attract more public attention than any of her earlier works. Moreover, this took place primarily outside the usual channels of communication related to exhibitions and art reviews. To explore the controversy the works provoked it is necessary to set the scene for their public reception.

Architecture and art for Pretoria's Faculty of Law

In 2005 the new Faculty of Law building and the Oliver Tambo Library at the University of Pretoria were formally opened by President Thabo Mbeki. Architects KrugerRoos of Cape Town had been the winners of the open competition, responding to the brief from the Dean of Law that the building should embody the values of the South African Constitution. The Dean had summarised these as transparency, democracy, equality, human dignity, and the achievement of each person's potential. His document "emphasised that law as a discipline presupposes continuous debate and highlighted the role of human rights and the African context in the life of the Faculty." (Heyns 2005: 4) The award-winning building placed its emphasis on transparency, not only literally in the use of glass but in a novel form of circulation on an open multi-storeyed walkway. The citation for the South African Institute of Architects Merit Award in 2006 claimed

that the building embodied “some of the higher ideals associated with the legal fraternity – gravitas and transparency – by contrasting visually weighted solids to lighter steel components and glazing. The innovative use of natural light throughout appropriately strengthens this concept.” (Citation 2006)²

No doubt the Dean had a similar agenda in mind for the artworks which would grace the new building. But it seems that the embodiment of the constitutional principles was somewhat easier to achieve in the abstract forms of architecture – it was certainly to prove less contentious.³ When the building was finished at the end of 2004, the Dean selected the artworks for public areas personally, not by purchase but from a pre-existing collection. Evidently through the connections of Dr Johan van Zyl, Vice Chancellor of the University of Pretoria until 2001 and subsequently CEO of SANLAM, it had been agreed that a selection of works from that company’s collection would be made available to the university on long-term loan.⁴ For the Centre for Human Rights the Dean chose Victor’s *Disasters of Peace*, which at that stage numbered sixteen works.⁵

The Disasters of Peace enters the public domain

As Victor’s series evolved, the etchings had been seen in dealer galleries and had been shown twice in the SANLAM Gallery in Cape Town. On one occasion, the company apparently received a written complaint, reported to the curator Stefan Hundt, who responded not by removing any prints as later curators of more public spaces were to do, but by providing an explanatory text linking the works to their historical precedent in Francisco Goya’s nineteenth-century *Disasters of War*. It can be assumed that in a gallery setting Victor’s etchings had a preselected audience that would be familiar with the conventions of art: viewers may have found some of the prints uncomfortable, as was presumably the case with the SANLAM complainant, but they would generally have accepted the artist’s prerogative to make discomfort her intention. It will be interesting to see if any other premises come into play, and whether the reception of the works is modified by cultural differences, when the etchings are on exhibition at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, which has purchased the series.⁶ But here we are concerned with the display of the works outside a gallery environment, which opened them up to new spectators and new responses. No sooner were the works installed at the University of Pretoria than there was an outcry: as one outraged staff member of the Faculty of Law expressed it: “men with drills entered our premises unannounced and turned the Centre into a chamber of horrors.” (Heyns 2005: 5)

The Director of the Centre, Professor Christof Heyns, responded swiftly: he asked the Dean to have the works removed. In an explanatory document he circulated, Heyns maintained that the Centre had developed a policy for imagery associated with it in posters, publications and the artworks on its walls, and that this was breached by the installation of Victor’s works. It was claimed that, in occupying the Centre’s entire public space, they left no space for alternate messages. He argued further – and this seems to be the nub of the complaint – that the Centre had not been consulted about the works. At this point Professor Christo Botha of the Department of Public Law stepped in with a request that the prints be transferred to the corridors of his Department. But this did not lay the matter to rest. There were protests from those who objected to the removal of the works from the Centre for Human Rights, and others who opposed their new installation in the Department of Public Law, and the Vice Chancellor, who had received some twenty letters, set up a committee to investigate the matter. Its findings were never released, but the Dean was instructed to find a solution.

At a subsequent meeting of the Faculty’s departmental heads, Botha suggested that the

Disasters of Peace should remain in the corridor of the Department of Public Law, but that the two prints that caused the greatest offence should be placed in his office, where they could be viewed on request.⁷ The proposal was endorsed, although there were to be further complaints about these removals. It was ironic that while some felt that their rights were violated by the images which they found offensive, others felt that their rights were undermined by the prints' removal. Whose rights should prevail was something that could not readily be resolved. The only point on which those at either extreme of the reactions to the works could seem to agree was that they had been insufficiently consulted. The debates continued, with a full discussion at a Faculty Board meeting, and the 'Tuks Art Rumpus' reported in the *Mail and Guardian* in February 2005. (Krouse 2005) Later that year a special publication of the Law Faculty was devoted to the topic – Number One of the occasional papers called *PULP Fictions*, PULP being the acronym of Pretoria University Law Press. As the Director of the Centre wrote,

... events in the Faculty of Law of the University of Pretoria illustrate how art and human rights on a university campus can impact on each other, and in the process challenge conventional wisdom and certainties, and be a catalyst for change. (Heyns 2005: 3)



Figure 1
Diane Victor, *In Sheep's Clothing*
(Etching, 28x32cm)

Debating *The Disasters*

Victor professed herself pleased that her works were the subject of open debate and attracting attention from new audiences, saying, “For once I felt that my images had done their work and raised an awareness and reaction in a non-art circle and achieved ... a measure of success in what I had hoped for.”⁸ The works certainly triggered intense discussion in new circles, but whether it was entirely directed at the issues which Victor intended to raise is questionable. The debates were chiefly around who gets to choose what is appropriate to represent a group, and the need for consultation, and the change the Director was referring to related to University

procedures rather than attitudes to the art – or to what it represented. He claimed that, beyond sharing valuable discussions about freedom of expression and censorship, faculty members had revisited processes for decision making in general. “To cite one example: Positions on the faculty journal, that were previously passed on from one person to the other, were thereafter advertised for the first time.” (Heyns 2005: 12)

It could certainly be argued that greater transparency was a positive outcome in the broadest terms of constitutional rights, but this did not address the atrocities that transgressed those rights at a more fundamental level, which were the subject of Diane Victor’s works. The prints themselves, although they certainly sparked the controversy, seem to have received little enough direct attention in the discussions. Indeed, one cannot help questioning how closely they were actually scrutinised by those who were caught up in the debate. My scepticism is fuelled by the fact that the caption for the illustration of Victor’s work in the PULP publication refers to it as painting not etching and, to add insult to injury, the image used on the cover, *Down on the Farm*,⁹ has been reversed. The respondent to Heyns’ article, Professor Karin van Marle (from the Department of Legal History, Comparative Law and Jurisprudence), remarked that most colleagues positioned themselves in relation to “specific difficulties with the procedures (or maybe lack of procedures) that were followed without commenting on the merits of the art.” (Van Marle. 2005: 18) Perhaps law professors are not the best placed to discuss the aesthetic merits of etchings, but some debate around their content would have been apposite. After all, the subject matter, which focused on the breaches of human rights that were occurring in South Africa despite the admirable principles of the new constitution, was not unrelated to the work of the Centre for Human Rights – presumably the reason that the Dean had chosen them in the first place. And it seems highly improbable that there would have been the same debates on processes of selection and display if he had chosen works that were less disturbing.

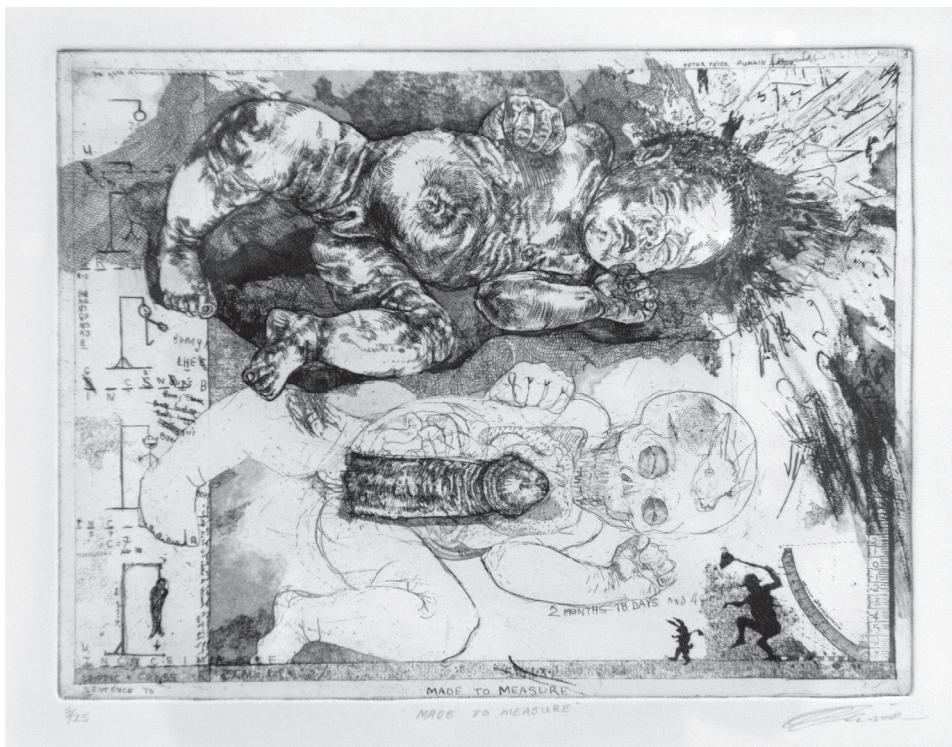


Figure 2
Diane Victor, *Made to Measure*
(Etching, 28x32cm)

Issues of Intention and Interpretation

The driving force behind the series was Diane Victor's sense of revulsion, not only at these aberrations of the law and the wrongs that human beings suffer, but at how little attention was paid to them – often no more than a few lines buried in the inner pages of newspapers. The series was initiated with *Why Defy* which responded to a report of the appalling abuse of a woman who was not only gang raped over three days but disfigured with an iron, its brand name – a gruesome pun – providing Victor's ironic title. The violation of women has been a continuing theme in *The Disasters of Peace: All for the Right Price* relates to the exploitation of defenceless prisoners, for example. That rape became a metaphor of the breakdown of social values in general for Victor is suggested by one of the more explicit etchings made in 2008, ironically entitled *And Justice for All*; it is described by the artist as the “gang rape of the criminal justice system”, referring to the rape of hundreds of children by repeat offenders.¹⁰ She also picks up on news stories that expose the criminal maltreatment of those who are in institutions that should be caring for them, such as hospitals – the rape and subsequent death of a patient in an Intensive Care Unit in *An Easy Wind Up*; the sale of body parts from hospitals in *5000 Rand a Head*. Some of her works that are less overtly violent still have a sense of excruciating vulnerability, such as *Witch Hunt* and *She was Killed like a Goat*.

Drawing on a long heritage of fine printmaking, Victor's processes add a lingering poignancy to these scenes, for the exquisite skill of the etched line is seductive and entices us into closer, more protracted observation. *Down on the Farm*, with its title conjuring up a children's story book about holidays in the country, evokes the gentle naturalism of picturesque rural scenes in Dutch landscape etchings. But closer scrutiny reveals another meaning for ‘down’ in the prostrate victims of a farm killing, lying on the steps and in front of the agitated animals, which ruptures any affinity this work may have with children's tales or seventeenth-century prints. *The Man, the Lion and the Fence* depicts a specific farm incident, the killing of worker Nelson Chisale, who met his death in 2004 when he was thrown into a lion enclosure by his former employer: it is a composition that is strongly reminiscent of some of the scenes in Goya's *Disasters of War*; and relies, like his, on the subtleties of aquatint tones to avoid being visually unbearable.

The powerful imagery and iconic status of Goya's etchings that addressed the atrocities perpetrated by Napoleon's troops in Spain has made them of ongoing interest to contemporary artists. Jake and Dino Chapman, for example, have reworked Goya's *Disasters of War* in many different versions, most notably in *Insult to Injury* (2004), where they defaced an edition of the 83 etchings which they had purchased, ‘improving’ them by over-painting gas masks and clown-like faces onto the prints. Their *Great Deeds Against the Dead* (1994) which reworks Goya's print *Great Feat! With Dead Men!* as a sculpture is possibly more instructive for an understanding of Victor's referencing of Goya. The Chapmans' emphasis is on the subject matter, dead bodies impaled on a tree in a macabre display, which, recreated in three-dimensional form, increases its potential to shock. But Victor does not reproduce Goya's content: her subject matter is of our own world, although it may be equally disturbing: like him, she is a commentator on contemporary events. What she draws from Goya is his use of subtle print processes to capture the horror of human atrocities – challenging viewers with a paradoxical uniting of aesthetic delight and moral revulsion.

Yet, while Victor's works can thus be considered to take their place in a long tradition of fine prints, they do not fit entirely within a historical definition of printmaking. The margins, for example, are often contaminated with graffiti and the images too may spill out of the boundaries of

their format. This was a device that the eighteenth-century Italian printmaker Piranesi sometimes used to provide virtuoso trompe l'oeil illusions to add to the three-dimensional impact of his images; but any texts in the margins of his prints are finely engraved titles and identifications of the subject matter, not scrawled graffiti that provide an informal and often acerbic commentary on the content in some of Victor's prints. Piranesi's monumental architectural forms may be influential too. We find evocations of them in the ostentatious buildings of Victor's *Cluster Complex* which contrasts the extremes of housing developments for the wealthy with the squalor of squatter camps, and exposes with dark humour the vulnerability of pretentious villas.

More contemporary practice is also drawn into play with the use of comic book conventions, which have been deployed for satirical purposes by other South African printmakers in such publications as *Bitterkomix*. Repetitive frames in Victor's prints comment on the endless recurrence of crime, also implied by the title of *Graphic – To Be Continued*, or offer a cynical five-step guide to car hijacking in *As Easy as Pie*. Such compositions have older precedents in the border images of map making, such as we see in the map on the wall in Johannes Vermeer's painting, *Artist in his Studio*. It is a compositional device which enables Victor to frame a life limited to what can be stored in a supermarket trolley by a 'bag lady' with the indulgences of upmarket real estate advertisements, in a work entitled *Mind the Gap*. Victor points out that her inspiration is often drawn from outside the print tradition, as in her quotation from Edward Kienholz's mixed media assemblage, *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, with its merciless visualising of hypocritical politicians with one hand on heart, the other clutching the genitals of whoever follows. In a similar composition, entitled *Memories*, Victor literally 'exposes' politicians repeating the stupidities of the old regime that serenades them on the right. In another print, *Mad Bob*, Robert Mugabe beats his drum in emulation of Nero fiddling while Rome burns. Further corrupt institutions and irresponsible office bearers are the subject of *Blind Justice*, which mocks dishonest and incompetent judges, the protagonist here blindfolded with a hood reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan. *Blind Man's Bluff for Boys in Blue* depicts an ineffectual police force, exacerbating rather than controlling criminal violence. The police fail even to halt the carnage on South Africa's roads, which is the subject of *Keeping Score* and of *Funeral March*, where the intensity of the high profile funerals for political victims that were familiar under apartheid mutates into a funeral procession for multiple road fatalities, crowded into a coffin that is a close relative of lethal minibus taxis.

Victor's concern is always for the victims – the wronged take precedence over the wrongdoers. She refers to the ravages of HIV Aids in *Or Had You Forgotten?* and to the fallacious cures suggested by Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, such as the African potato, *Hypoxis Rooperi*, which Victor depicts growing on mounds that pitifully mark the graves of the fatalities it failed to prevent. Regarding the particular frailty of children, she highlights their vulnerability to drugs in *Glue Boys* and *Fizz Pop* and, above all, to child abuse.

Responses to *The Disasters*

It was Victor's works that addressed child abuse, *In Sheep's Clothing* and *Made to Measure*, that caused particular offence to members of the Law Faculty in Pretoria, and these were the two prints which were removed to the Head of Public Law's office. It might be remembered that works such as *And Justice for All* and *An Easy Wind Up* with their explicit sexuality had not yet been made when the series was loaned to the university, or Professor Botha's office might have been the refuge of further works. Indeed those two prints were amongst those removed from display when history repeated itself at another public venue, the insurance company Hollard's

precinct in Parktown, Johannesburg, some time later. In that context there was an attempt to handle the controversy around the display of Victor's works in a different way, as explained by Sheila Surgey, who is their "head of brand and business development". "Victor's etchings are rocking the boat, and works like *Honest Politician* – a large piece in which a business-suited man's genitals hang out of his trousers – cause consternation in the corridors."¹¹ She clarified that they were placing "a notice next to Victor's work that explains the artist's thinking behind the etchings, and asking the viewer to question their own concerns about life in South Africa and the kind of society we are striving for." (Shaw 2008: 68-69) But ultimately five works were removed from the display of the extended series of *The Disasters of Peace*.¹² Clearly Victor's prints continue to cause offence – and also to heighten awareness beyond the limited audience of the art world, as the artist intended.

Sexual abuse of children is a particularly distressing aberration which probably explains why *In Sheep's Clothing* and *Made to Measure* attracted most attention at Pretoria. Looking at images like these that evoke such profoundly disturbing aberrant behaviour can undoubtedly be upsetting: the potency of images over words for provoking emotion is widely recognised, all the more so when the subject matter is so painful. Yet both words and images can lose their impact when endless repetition in the media blunts the senses.¹³ But reports of incidents like these, whether endlessly aired in the media or scarcely mentioned, lodged sharply and persistently in Victor's memory, and she recounts she has used her art as a way of quite literally drawing the images out of her head in order to cope with them.¹⁴ In giving them visual form, Victor has been accused of sadomasochism. But these were not self-indulgent inventions for the sake of sensationalism: they were based on real episodes in the breakdown of civil society.

Intended to heighten our awareness, the images are intensely invasive, but they are not literal descriptions.¹⁵ *In Sheep's Clothing* does not avoid the repugnance of the gross bulk of the man kneeling in front of the slender child, but it uses metaphorical reference to bring home the implications of the confrontation, such as the transformation of the child's head into that of a lamb, which conjures up helplessness and sacrifice. The young girl's pathos is heightened by the touching details of her room which might suggest a much loved daughter, and by the double meaning of the inscribed nursery endearment 'Daddy's Girl'. *Made to Measure*, which is particularly discomfiting, does not show the actual molestation, but instead makes explicit in visual terms the sickening reality of what such an act implies, through the imagined device of an X-ray. It reveals the form of a phallus filling the interior of an infant body, which provides a highly disturbing counterpoint to the naked baby that lies so plumply unmolested alongside. The concept was made even more abhorrent in the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper report which, in illustrating *Made to Measure*, turned it 90 degrees, making the image all too appropriately erect.

In the light of such press coverage, it seems unarguable that Victor's works can stir up sensationalist reactions. So were the opponents of the works at the University of Pretoria right in feeling that they were inappropriate for public exhibition? Or were their opponents correct in claiming that the removal of the works was an act of censorship that violated human rights in another way? It is of interest to recall that even in the harshest days of censorship under apartheid, works with content that was deemed to be in some way pornographic were the most likely to attract the attention of the authorities.¹⁶ For example, *Slugabed*, a resin sculpture by Michelle Raubenheimer was removed from a group exhibition at the Shell Gallery in Johannesburg in the mid 1980s because its undoubtedly erotic nature was considered obscene. Nor were censorious attitudes altogether set aside in post-apartheid South Africa, as is demonstrated in the outcry about a prizewinning student work by Kaolin Thompson in a exhibition at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1997. Her ceramic piece, *Useful Objects*, representing a vaginal form as an

ashtray housing a discarded cigarette, was all the more contentious because it was interpreted by some as representing black female genitalia, and was in their eyes not only pornographic but racist. As Brenda Schmahmann (1999) points out, those who objected to *Useful Objects* apparently failed to realise that it could be understood as a transgressive work intended as a feminist critique, but rather read it in a reductive and somewhat literal way. While it seems unlikely that any of those objecting to Victor's prints would have misunderstood her critical intention, what is pertinent for a study of their reception is that the censorship advocated in the case of *Useful Objects* by Baleka Kgositsile, then Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, was not aimed at what was exhibited in art galleries, but at the representation of works considered sexually explicit and degrading in the public domain of the media (Schmahmann 1999: 231). The protests about Victor's work arose chiefly as a result of their being encountered outside the art gallery, first at a law school then corporate offices.

The focus on child abuse in the works that were removed from display at the University of Pretoria differentiates them from the more usual debates about censorship which most often relates to the representation of women's bodies. But there has also been debate around subjects that involved children which might be thought of as prurient: Terry Kurgan's photographs of her own sons aroused heated discussion in art circles because a number of the shots showed their bodies naked after bathing. Sometimes such debate may reveal ideas more unwholesome than the works themselves. It seems improbable though that Victor's images could be thought of in this way – there is nothing about them that could be interpreted as titillating in any sense. Rather it is the way that they evoke the horrifying realities of aberrant behaviour that makes them so memorable.

In the end of the day the decision to remove Victor's works from display at the University of Pretoria seemed ironically to trump the act of display as a meaningful action. Removing the works not only gave them and their subject matter increased prominence, it implied not mere prudishness, but a political position on the part of those who supported that removal. It could be seen to represent an unwillingness to acknowledge the challenges facing South Africa in transition, all the more problematic amongst lawyers who would surely be directly involved in the process. In *PULP Fictions* Von Marle commented: "What kind of art we display is not on the same level of whether we want the carpets in the building to be blue or grey. The choice of the artworks, the reaction to them and their removal go to the heart of the Faculty's academic project. The question all of this poses is how we see our role as legal academics in a transforming society." (Von Marle 2005: 23) Von Marle acknowledges that in the past the University of Pretoria "...did not sufficiently object to the atrocities of the apartheid regime. Within the Faculty of Law, legal education, for example, did not in any way address the unfairness in apartheid legislation...." She argues that being involved in current mainstream areas of law and politics "... does not in itself necessarily imply a critical engagement. A critical engagement would mean exposing the limits of rights, the impotence of rights to address many wrongs within society. The Diane Victor series, *Disasters of Peace*, stands in the framework of this kind of critique." (Von Marle 2005: 24)

While Victor's works are clearly addressed to a South African audience, the issues that they raise have a wider significance.¹⁷ What the controversy brought home so keenly is that art is not outside society: it has a role to play, although it is usually symbolic rather than literal. The impact of Victor's prints, even if the response was often negative, shows that they are doing their work of consciousness-raising, whether or not there is any likelihood of their being socially transforming in a literal way. As expressed by Susan Sontag (whom Chris Heyns also quotes):

To designate a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell's flames. Still, I would like to suggest that it is a good in itself to acknowledge, to have enlarged, one's sense of how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world we share with others. Someone who is perennially surprised that depravity exists, who continues to feel disillusioned (even incredulous) when confronted with evidence of what humans are capable of inflicting in the way of gruesome, hands-on cruelties upon other humans, has not reached moral or psychological adulthood.

No one after a certain age has the right to this kind of innocence, of superficiality, to this degree of ignorance, or amnesia. (Sontag 2003: 114)

The role of imagery in conscientising audiences is one that Sontag herself has questioned and re-questioned, arguing in *Regarding the Pain of Others* that, while the high incidence of photographs and movies depicting violence has become a commonplace, this does not necessarily mean that we have become immune to their impact.

Sontag acknowledges that the choice of what to photograph, which may even involve staging the subject, is a potent factor. In artworks that deal with atrocities, it will invariably be the intention of the artist to create works that are in some way unfamiliar, so that they jolt us out of the complacent pragmatism with which we come to view the stream of traumatic images of photo-journalism to which we are endlessly exposed. Diane Victor's strategy has been to make works where the medium seems familiar and unshocking: the nuanced forms of her etchings draw the viewer into a close reading that engenders an intimacy with their content, which can then impact more strongly. If seen in an art gallery which provides a special set of circumstances for viewing, insulated as it were from the 'real' world, it is possible to maintain a sense of privacy in the encounter that does not make it less disquieting but may make it more bearable. The controversy and censorship that Victor's *Disasters of Peace* has engendered suggests that the context of a public place, where the works are no longer shielded by the 'aura' of a gallery, makes such viewing infinitely more disturbing. Fine art in the public domain may be less likely to carry an expectation of aesthetic contemplation, revealing its content all the more starkly. It remains a moot question, however, whether images like Victor's have the power to change attitudes wherever they are displayed, and whether, in exposing ongoing violations of human rights, they can contribute towards a renewal of social values in a post-apartheid South Africa. I would contend, however, that the works are more likely to achieve their consciousness-raising goals when they are displayed outside the domain of art galleries and specialist audiences, in contexts where they will be seen by a wider range of viewers, less prone to viewing with aesthetic disinterest – and where attempts to avoid engaging with them by censoring their display may, ironically, bring their content to even wider attention.

Notes

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| 1 | This article is based on a paper which was read at a conference of the South African Visual Art Historians, held at the University of Stellenbosch in 2008. | | and informed the discussions about the etchings and gave it context and direction. ... While debates raged in the new corridors, meeting rooms and offices of the Faculty, the art of the building entered into its own, less noisy but more powerful dialogue with the art of the etchings." (2005: 15) |
| 2 | http://www.saia.org.za/awards_merit_2006_citations.php accessed 15 March 2010. | | |
| 3 | Heyns defines a proactive role for the architecture: "The design of the building – the open corridors, windows and spaces – guided | 4 | Stefan Hundt, the collection's curator, recounts that SANLAM acquired the initial eight prints from the Open Window Gallery in Pretoria |

- in 2000, and has continued to purchase additional works in the series, retaining the edition number 1 throughout. The more recent etchings have not been added to those already lent to the Law Faculty. (Hundt e-mail correspondence with the author, July 2008)
- 5 Although work on *The Disasters of Peace* still continues, Victor had intended to start a new numbering series after she had reached number 30. But after adding eight further etchings, with subjects that continue to address social issues in South Africa such as recently rampant xenophobia, she has embarked in 2011 on the production of a limited edition artist's book of *The Disasters of Peace*, and decided to include all 38 etchings in the series.
- 6 As suggested below (note 15), *The Disasters of Peace* have more than South African interest and address matters of international concern. It is noteworthy that, in addition to the acquisition of *The Disasters of Peace* by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, where they are currently part of a 2011 exhibition on South African prints, a more recent series by Victor, *Birth of a Nation*, was acquired by the Library of Congress in 2009. Yet, while her work has attracted much attention in the form of reviews, there have been relatively few substantial publications on her work, other than the slim book in the 'Taxi series' by Elizabeth Rankin and Karen von Veh. Victor's recent major exhibition at the Faulconer Gallery at Grinnell College in Iowa, USA, was accompanied by a catalogue available on line at <http://www.grinnell.edu/files/downloads/VictorCatalog.pdf>.
- 7 Viewing conditions in Botha's office were hardly ideal: the works were not hung on the wall, but propped up on top of filing cabinets, where they were at times obscured by piles of papers. When I visited the University of Pretoria in July 2009, the other fourteen prints of the *Disasters of Peace* were still on display on the walls of the corridor, with empty gaps proclaiming the act of censorship that had taken place. It is noteworthy that this corridor can only be entered by those with swipe card access (I had to arrange permission for access), so the works are not really in a fully public context.
- 8 Victor e-mail correspondence with the author, February 2007.
- 9 It is noteworthy that the cover image was not one of the two that were considered most offensive, although they were reproduced in the pages of the publication.
- 10 E-mail correspondence with the author, November 2009.
- 11 It may also be pertinent that this image has been identified by some as Jacob Zuma, although Victor disclaims any intention to create a specific portrait.
- 12 Hollard owns edition number 24/25. In this case five etchings were removed after there were complaints when *The Disasters of Peace* were installed in the staff café area: *Kom Vrou en Bring die Kinders; And Live off the Fatta the Land; Made to Measure; An Easy Wind Up and Justice for All*. It is interesting to note that the first two do not have directly sexual connotations, but may have raised objections because of their inclusion of male nudity. *In Sheep's Clothing* was not amongst those removed in this case.
- 13 Heyns argues the possibility of the same neutralising effect through regular exposure to the etchings, asking whether "portrayals of horror" in the public realm could be "a good thing, because it serves as a prompt to action, by confronting the viewer with reality in all its harshness, or is it always a bad thing because it has a dampening effect, by creating an environment in which the prevailing mood is 'this is how things are and nothing can change it?'" (2005:12) He also recalls that "Hendrik Verwoerd, who had some authority on these issues, wrote his doctoral thesis on 'The blunting of the senses'." (2005: 13). The notion that visual images lose their potency is challenged in Susan Sontag's book *Regarding the Pain of Others*.
- 14 E-mail correspondence with the author, January 2007.
- 15 Heyns writes that "The etchings portray ... specific incidents of child rape and family violence." (2005:5) While they undoubtedly draw on particular events, however, they are not in fact representations of identifiable occurrences.
- 16 Surprisingly, more politically directed art was often overlooked by the censors unless it was in a popular public form that could be widely distributed, such as a poster. A telling example was Gavin Younge's *Hansard Series* which attracted no attention when it was exhibited in a gallery in the 1970s, but one of the screenprints was banned when used for a poster.

17 It is confirmation of their wider relevance that Victor's *Disasters of Peace* excited much interest amongst non-South African viewers when her works were included with those of other printmakers in papers I presented at the IMPRINT International Print Conference at Bristol ('Signs of Subversion: Printmaking

and Politics', September 2009) and a session on 'Art and the Crises of the Contemporary World' at the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand conference in Canberra ('Mediating the Media: the graphic art of Daniel Heyman and Diane Victor', December 2009).

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