

Annotation_NESTING

Hundreds of bristling hives occupy the walls, floors and ceilings of The Centre for the Less Good Idea's Second Space. The installation, part of The Centre's 6th Season, is visual artist Usha Seejarim's mediation on work, domesticity, and the migratory forms of labour we encounter in city and home spaces alike.

It's the sheer volume of these 'hives' that stands out, initially. Comprised of grass broom heads – the kind sold in and around the Johannesburg CBD – Seejarim's network of vespiaries, apertures, or nests are first encountered on the stairway up to the second floor where they proceed to multiply. Close your eyes and it's the smell that greets you: dry, prickling grass hinting at vast, open landscapes, but refined or restricted to a tool of domestic labour. The nests are both home, security and nurture as well as body, orifice, mouth.

A similar incongruity sits outside in The Centre's atrium space where a warped, dissected, and elongated broom handle hangs. It is a tool, undoubtedly so, but it has been rendered unusable through the manipulation of its form. At its highest point, arched over and pointing towards the ground, the top of the broom handle is poised like the sting of a scorpion's tail – a warning, or perhaps a reminder, of the poisonous possibilities of an overworked tool, or an exploited form or labour. References to a witch's broom are inevitable, stretched to a twelve-meter length broom, it draws on our imagination and sense of wonder. Its human scale perspective is distorted, its function is removed and perhaps re-newed, its form is estranged and its metaphors are numerous. It sits mid air, suspended, almost ready to take flight. Several performances were held amidst this piece, thus creating multi-disciplinary and overlapping narratives.

Seejarim's work is not without its playfulness and magic, however. While the relationship between pre-existing materials and repurposed tools in her practice is not all that distant, it is the odd and softly provoking experience of viewing these transformed objects that makes for the magic of NESTING.

An example: Two irons sewn together at the helms and welded to the legs of an ironing board. Again, the tool's purpose is immediately recognisable, but its function has become corrupted or shifted through its new form – a Frankenstein's monster lurking amidst the household, unable to carry out its chores, or perhaps simply refusing to.

"Nesting" was conceptualized for the Season 6 at the Center For Less Good Idea. Subsequently, it was shown virtually at this year's Klein Karoo Festival and in September, a substantial segment of the installation will show as part of my solo exhibition titles, "Vessel of the Fish" at Witte de With in Rotterdam, Netherlands. In 2021, "Nesting will feature in another solo exhibition at Smac in Cape Town.

The installation comprised several pieces; the focus being "Nesting" interspersed with several other pieces including "Affairs of the Home", "Long Broom", "Family" and "United by Stitches". While the performative elements of Season 6 took place between 23 and 27 October 2019, the art installation was on view until mid-November 2019.