



COFA 5 : DR J THOM

Title: Selfportrait as an ass (2016)

Artist: Johan Thom

Medium: Found objects (donkey's head in Material One courtesy Dsw Dionysus Sculpture Works); Concise Oxford dictionaries, signed by my maternal grandfather J.F. Besselaar, 1979; reproduction full-scale human skeleton; casts of my hands and feet in Material One & mixed media

Dimensions: 210 x 125 x 185 cm (approx. - dimensions variable)

Exhibited:

FOUNDATIONS AND FUTURES the 25th Anniversary Exhibition of the The Bag Factory Artists' Studio, 28th October 2016 - 10 December 2016 curated by Aysha Waja.

In the Public Domain, group exhibition of the Fine Arts Department of the University of Pretoria, Pretoria Art Museum, curated by Avi Sooful

Johannesburg Art Fair as part of Kalashnkikov Gallery, Sandton Convention Centre, 6-9 September 2018





Annotation:

The work is a wry comment on my history as a modern day Afrikaner and my complex linguistic and cultural heritage.

My grandfather was often forced to wear donkey ears at primary school because he 'spoke Dutch' (as opposed to English). He hated the English with a passion. Rather than joining South Africa's war effort on the side of the Allies during the second world war he chose to hide out in the Orange River Canyon for two years with three other young men of German descent. Put in context, both his parents were placed in internment camps during the First World War in South Africa and their health and welfare suffered greatly - they both contracted tuberculosis in the camps.

In 2008 I was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship to complete my PhD at the Slade School of Art, UCL, London. I ended up spending five years in the UK and the kindness of my English patrons, academic supervisors and friends will never be forgotten.

During my years as a studio artist at the Bag Factory I rediscovered Afrikaans as a poetic language - largely owing to the insistence of the artist Pat Mautloa (a black South African colleague at the Bag Factory) who regularly forced me to speak Afrikaans to him. Pat loved the language and wanted me to teach him how to speak it well. I had largely given up on the language already at high school, that is, other than it functioning as a home-language. This rejection ironically relegated it back to its marginalised historic status as a 'kitchen language' in my life.

In Afrikaans they say 'Nie eers n ű donkie stamp nie sy kop twee keer teen dieselfde klip nie' (A donkey does not bump its head on the same rock twice). But I keep bumping my head and now refuse to identify as anything but an Afrikaner - it makes things so delightfully difficult for everyone else including my fellow Afrikaners.

History is a winding road.