



ALLEN, BUSTER & MOE

KZNSA GALLERY | DURBAN

Siemon Allen, Kendall Buster and Ledelle Moe are artists based in the United States, Allen born in Durban. Buster's *Model City*, installed in the Main gallery, is an undulating landscape of blue children's tents, joined to create a vast membranous wave – particularly evocative in coastal Durban. The interior of the installation is a blue colour field floating like a protective ceiling above the viewer, reminiscent of a child's secret hiding place.

In this interior space the viewer is absorbed by the details of the seams between each tent, the stains on the tents' floors, and the light shining through the surface. From the

exterior the work presents itself as a more solid, architectural volume that fills the gallery space, billowing against the walls and mezzanine. The mezzanine level offers an aerial view of this model city swelling from below, a repetitive, sanitised modular city that is sinister and unsettling.

In the Mezzanine gallery, Allen's *Cards: A collection project* compounds this sense of disquiet. The work is an overwhelming collection of military trading cards released between 1939 and 2001, and traces the mindset of a nation at war. Allen displays the cards in protective plastic covers and arranges them chronologically in a vast grid, confronting the viewer with a wall of information. Searching for a point of access one is drawn to the banal and propagandist details of each card, the irregular ending of each series (according to the number of cards in each pack), and the occasional empty plastic covers, evidence that some of the collections are incomplete.

Cards is a disturbing and ironic examination of how a country images itself – and its military might – through popular culture. Susan Stewart, writing in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1984), suggests that collections function as a desire to hold onto the elusive or disordered. One leaves Allen's work with a dislocated sense of order and safety, far from the devastating chaos of battle.

Moe's sculptural installation, *Memorial (Collapse)*, located in the Park gallery, includes a dispersed map of small, carved cement heads on the wall, and what appears to be an enormous cement boulder in the middle of the space. Closer inspection reveals that it is actually a head lined by seams and scars, a fallen monument to an anonymous hero. Moe refers to her work as a journey and an encounter with obstacles. Her installation suggests a deeply personal mythology and an ambivalent relationship to the heroism of monumentality. The fragmented landscape of small heads recalls archaeological ruins and clumps of earth, and is compellingly tactile.

Moe's fascination with the heroic is unexpectedly fraught with emotion, her work complementing the emotive oscillation and ambiguity evident in the work of Buster and Allen.

Jena McCarthy