

INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although not associated with the artists of the Italian Arte Povera movement (1967 – 1972), Lucio Pozzi, who emerged as an artist at about the same time, shares their refusal to be bound by a single medium or style. While considering himself a painter, Pozzi blows the doors off of the medium, reducing it to a set of essentials called "translation mechanisms," which has the effect of expanding painting into a practice that includes under its umbrella such improbable activities as video, photo-work, and installation.

For Pozzi, the core of painting is an elaborate system that sometimes seems arbitrary enough to qualify as a work of art in its own right. In 1969, Pozzi made his first step in what would become the translation mechanisms, which are so called because they establish connections between works that do not obviously relate. The system's basic idea is that painting – divorced for more than a hundred years from its former functions of propaganda, communication, and spectacle – can now be framed with a set of banal and simplistic mechanisms including *texture*, *the four colors*, *dualism*, *remove and relocate*, *gravity*, and *imitation*. These mechanisms have recurred in Pozzi's work for more than three decades, binding together a radically heterogeneous array of works into a whole that is expressive of one artist's ideal of creative freedom.

In his Anderson Gallery installation, Pozzi has brought to bear a selection of the translation mechanisms – most notably *duality* and *four colors*, but also *gravity* and *texture*. The gallery installation is a single multi-part work consisting of panels painted red, green, blue, and yellow (which are the four primary colors as Goethe conceived them) and photographs of babies on one side of the gallery facing photographs of war on the opposite side (the doubling suggesting *duality*). These rather blatant uses of the mechanisms are ac

Cira Pascual Marquina
Director

NEWSPAPERS HISTORY

Newspapers (Post/Times)
FUSEBOX, Washington, DC
September 14, 2002 – October 27, 2002
110 papers of each of *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Times* were selected and exhibited opposite each other in a kind of face off. Collection period: August 2001 to September 2002.

The American Effect: Global Perspectives on the United States 1990 – 2003

Curated by Lawrence Rinder
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
July 3, 2003 – October 12, 2003
40 papers of each of *The Washington Post* and *The Washington Times* were selected from January 2003 to May 2003.

A Fiction of Authenticity:

Contemporary Africa Abroad

Curated by Shannon Fitzgerald & Tumelo Mosaka
Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, MO
September 20, 2003 – January 4, 2004
140 selections of *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* from April 2001 to July 2003

Newspapers (Register)

Curated by Cira Pascual-Marquina
Drake University – Anderson Gallery, Des Moines, IA
January 17, 2004 – February 2004
164 selections from *The Des Moines Register* from November 2002 to January 2004.

BIOGRAPHY

Siemon Allen was born in Durban South Africa where he was also a founding member of the an artist initiative, the FLAT gallery, from 1993 to 1995. His work has been shown in a number of venues including the South African National Gallery for the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale, the Renaissance Society in Chicago and the Whitney Museum in New York. He is currently an adjunct professor in the Department of Sculpture & Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia.

SIEMON ALLEN NEWSPAPERS

JANUARY 16 – FEBRUARY 22, 2004



Universally it is admitted that the press is the chief means of contact with the unseen environment.

WALTER LIPPMANN, 1922



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THE IMAGE OF SOUTH AFRICA

In 1992 I saw the film *Manufacturing Consent* at the annual film festival in Durban, South Africa. It was a three-hour documentary on the life and work of the linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky. In order to show some filmic equivalent of concepts described by Chomsky in his writings, the filmmakers had produced a number of effective visual analogies. One particularly memorable example addressed *The New York Times's* quantitatively unequal coverage of the concurrent political situations in Cambodia and Timor. Two narrow rolls of paper were shown placed side by side. Both had been constructed by placing the column inches of articles from *The New York Times* archives end to end. The roll representing coverage of the situation in Timor traveled only a couple of feet, while the other, covering the war in Cambodia, stretched out the length of a football field. The short scene dramatically illustrated how the news coverage in the United States had defined what was of importance in distant regions of the world, and it communicated this in a manner that was concise and clearly readable. It struck me at the time that 1975 to 1979, Chomsky's research period for these articles, were the same years that brought to South Africa the Soweto uprisings, heightened police oppression, the expansion of separate develop-



Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media (film stills), 1992. Directed by Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick, Necessary Illusions Productions/National Film Board of Canada Co-Productions, Zeitgeist Films.

ment, and the death of many activists, including Steve Biko. At the time I wondered what an equivalent roll of South African articles would have looked like. Later, I asked myself how the presentation of articles dealing with South Africa from any given U.S. periodical might operate if organized indexically in a way similar to those shown so graphically in the film. What might this presentation say about South Africa, and, reciprocally, what would it reveal about the extent and nature of U.S. media coverage of South Africa? How is the South African image projected, interpreted, and received? What is represented or misrepresented? What exactly is the image of South Africa?

As a South African artist living and working in the United States, I have been particularly interested in the dynamics of how a country is imaged and how it in turn participates in a kind of imaging of itself. This notion of the importance of imaging became even more significant when I came across a speech by South Africa's minister of environmental affairs and tourism, Valli Moosa, on a government website. His office made a highly published call for a positive "branding" of South Africa internationally and included the recruiting of "non-government South Africans living overseas" to act as "ambassadors" for the country. I was at that time beginning a project that later developed into the exhibition *Stamp Collection* (2001) and for me, this direct (and official) articulation of the need to "brand" South Africa echoed the ways in which an image on a stamp also operated in the construction of a national identity. In light of Moosa's declarations, the presentation of a complete collection of South African stamps in the United States seemed particularly significant. With *Stamp Collection* I sought to explore the political history and shifting identity of South Africa through the collection, cataloging, research, and display of postal stamps released in the country. I intended to look at how the country, over time, had chosen to represent itself both within its borders and internationally. The stamps were sorted and configured chronologically, and I produced an accompanying guidebook that operated as a kind of subtext of concurrent and often contradictory historical events. I was aware of the fact that in spite of what I observed as an intense interest



Newspapers (Post-Dispatch), 2003. (*A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary Africa Abroad*, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis)

in the phenomenon of the New South Africa, it was a place that seemed to be accessible only through a small number of familiar media images. I wondered if the stamps might provide a record of how radical the change in voices had been that sought to define South Africa. I also wondered if I might discover for myself and somehow present in the work lesser known events or aspects of South African culture and history. Admittedly, the final narrative was a fragmented one. It spoke not only through what was shown but also through what was not, and so a careful look at the artifacts required one to bring to the task a certain degree of criticality. Given that the stamps presented an official history, much of what was revealed was unintentional, and much was concealed as well. In this light I saw the presentation of the *Stamp Collection*, particularly in Washington, DC, as both a subtle critique and a kind of covert participation with the minister of tourism's stated agenda. *Stamp Collection* was first shown at the Corcoran Gallery, just one block from the White House. The exhibition design mimicked a historic museum display. I presented the stamps with the admission that they are carriers of images that most often mask or remain silent on much that is officially unacknowledged. Yet I was compelled to devote such care to the arrangement and display of the precious artifacts, and I approached the conveyance of the historic information with such detachment, that I wondered if the exhibition did not ultimately operate with a kind of feigned complicity in the

dissemination of the stamps' propagandistic messages.

Newspapers, like *Stamp Collection*, developed out of what I regarded as a continued investigation into this idea of imaging South Africa, but in a way that also looked at the news media. Like *Stamp Collection*, *Newspapers* is an ongoing collection, realized through the gathering of cast-off ordinary items. As was true for the stamps, the individual newspapers are of questionable value once they have been used. In the case of the newspaper, its currency is spent when the information that it carries has been transmitted. The newspaper project differs, however, in that it has been the most methodical of all the collection projects. My collecting of U.S. papers began during the coverage of the *UN Racism Conference* in Durban (my hometown) in late August 2001. I initially bought various papers in an attempt to follow whatever coverage there was of the conference. But with the events of September 11, which occurred a couple of days after the closing of the conference, I was compelled to continue. From that time I collected, on schedule, daily newspapers (looking for articles on South Africa) from a number of selected U.S. cities: Washington, DC, New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Baltimore, and Richmond. I was interested in how the media produced in each place would reflect how each of those communities constructed (or received a construction of) an image of another place—in this case, South Africa. Given that the

collection displayed was the result of a very methodical daily action of buying and cataloging, it was as if a common routine had been made self-conscious. The newspapers were for me operating as a complex carrier of information, a diary, and a potential future archive. As the project developed, the reach of my collection expanded to include newspapers from the cities where the project was scheduled to be presented: St. Louis, Houston, and Des Moines. It seemed significant that the collections began with the Durban *Racism Conference*, a controversial event in which the United States did not fully participate. When the events of September 11 do occur, they do so within a chronology that has already been set in place. The events of that day and their aftermath have continued as the dominant narrative in the U.S. media, but in the collection they are actually part of a different story. It is as if the collection is about an attempt (and the impossibility of such an attempt) to shift the gravitational pull to a different center—from the perspective of the United States to that of South Africa. For me, the collection represents a type of counter-narrative, and perhaps, in some sense, it could be interpreted as a kind of counter-nationalism.

South Africa is a place that I have experienced, albeit in a very limited and personal way. It has an image that I have constructed and reconstructed through memory, which is now presented back to me through the filter of the U.S. news media.

Stamp Collection presented an image of

South Africa that was and is constructed by the official voice of the government and was therefore, for me, an internal construction of image. Such a collection is a kind of autobiography of a nation and says much about how the country perceives itself, or, even more important, about how it seeks to construct an identity for itself. *Newspapers* presents another image of South Africa, but one that is constructed externally. This external media image presented in the newspapers, unlike the internal image constructed by the South African government in the stamps, is not only manufactured in the United States but also exhibited there. With *Stamp Collection*, I had asked myself whether I was complicit with or critical of the South African government's propaganda. In terms of the newspaper project, I now ask myself: if the newspaper images displayed in my work are constructed by the U.S. media for a U.S. audience; by re-presenting these images, do I not then perpetuate notions of the country that may be stereotypical or limited? Conversely, I also wonder if, by presenting these images, I might allow the audience to refocus on important issues from South Africa that they might have overlooked on any given day's news coverage.

For me, the work addresses the profound implications behind the simple act of reading the newspaper. It is about the everyday experience of "the world in your living room," or, as Walter Lippmann has said, "the world outside and the pictures in our heads."

Simon Allen, 2003



Stamp Collection, 2002 (*Detourism*, The Renaissance Society, Chicago)