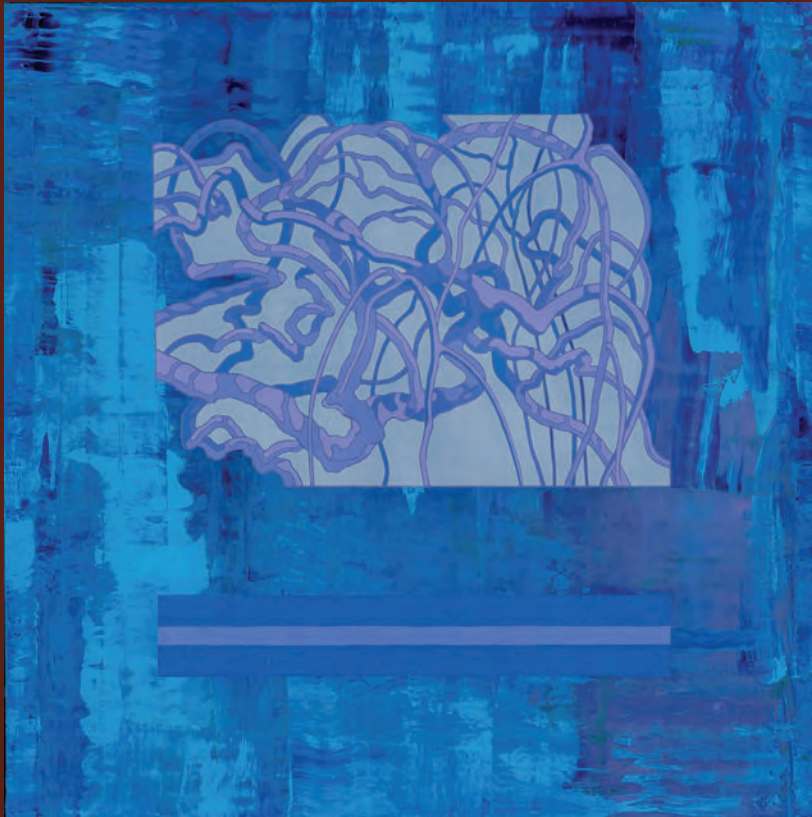


BETHESDA, BREAKWATER, BRIDGEWATER

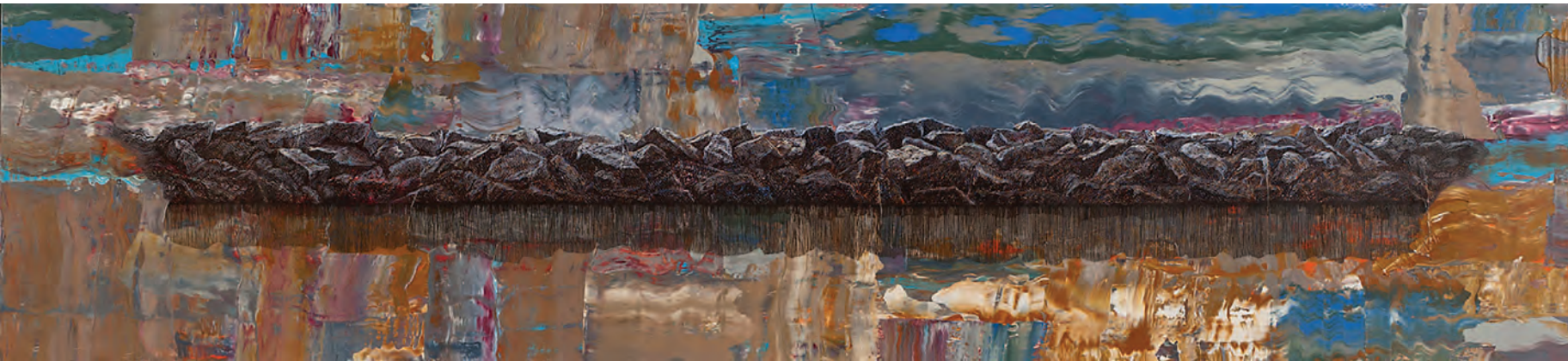


Jonathan Shirland



BETHESDA, BREAKWATER, BRIDGEWATER

Essay by: Jonathan Shirland





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Essay

BETHESDA, BREAKWATER, BRIDGEWATER

“After a number of years I began to feel a connection that bridges the southernmost tip of Africa with the East coast of America. From the tidal pool called Bethesda, place of healing, situated at the rock-strewn edge of Robben Island to the breakwater in Provincetown I began to paint a thread”

(Paul Stopforth)

BETHESDA

13.9 km from Cape Town, Robben Island has been used to isolate political and physical undesirables for centuries. Lepers were moved to its windswept shores from 1845 and seawater flowing into the pool at one end provided some relief for the afflicted, earning the biblical epithet “Bethesda”, from the Aramaic for “place of flowing water” or perhaps “house of mercy”. The original “Pool of Bethesda” is in the Muslim quarter of Jerusalem, and according to the Gospel of John, the site where Jesus miraculously cured a paralytic man. Robben Island became a site of miracles of human resilience, and is now a place of sacred relics and pilgrimage.¹ Paul Stopforth was invited to be artist-in-residence on the island in 2003, 15 years into his self-imposed exile from South Africa.² Living on the exposed low-lying landmass proved to be a profound spiritual homecoming for the artist. It did not provide a miraculous cure for the suffering of exile, but it did offer some healing and catharsis, and the source of a body of work as resonant as his ‘Death and Detention’ series produced at the height of apartheid (which are



Elegy for Steve Biko

enshrined in every textbook commemorating South African “Resistance Art”).³ Christian references are embedded in many of Stopforth’s famous anti-apartheid works, such as *Elegy for Steve Biko* from 1981 which shows the charismatic leader of the Black Consciousness Movement stretched out naked on a mortuary tray after his horrific death on 12 September 1977 from brain damage suffered during police detention.⁴ The picture cannot be reduced to the inflections of the many “Dead Christ” paintings it brings to mind (including iconic paintings by Holbein and Mantegna), but the associations help to cement this visualization of Biko’s martyrdom. Christian symbolism is an important thread in anti-apartheid art

for a variety of reasons: providing a familiar iconographic vehicle for ‘struggle’ commentaries; raising awareness of oppression via a framework potentially able to avoid censorship; fusing with the Black Theology movement of Desmond Tutu, Manas Buthelezi and others; and condemning the abuse of Christianity as a mechanism of control.⁵ Bethesda picks up on this thread as do other works in Stopforth’s Robben Island series, including *Trinity*.



Trinity

Three simple stools, dignified by the care with which they were fashioned in the prison workshop, span the composition. They seem to float free yet remain suspended in each other’s orbit, at once weightless and heavy, like 3 martyred bodies hanging on adjacent crosses (the shapes of the “T” and “Y” behind further evoking rigidly splayed body parts). The stools seem infused with the bodily traces of use; they are softened by residues of skin, hair, oil and sweat, just as traditional African headrests are, bringing the animate body and ancestral presence into intimate proximity as the wooden supports channel dream-like communication. They also elevate the body, yet remain close to the ground. They are undecorated but at the same time are illuminated by stippled dots, an allusion to the dense

patterns of Xhosa, Zulu and Ndebele beadwork that has become a central element of Stopforth's technique since 1988.⁶ Most importantly, the three stools convey human companionship even in the incarceration of Robben Island. They resist isolation, bringing together Nelson Mandela, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe and Govan Mbeki in a manner reminiscent of a meeting of elders, able to work through and eventually triumph over conflict through consensus borne of patient, dignified debate. They become a 'Trinity', a mysterious union of personhood and identity through relationship and community. It is such a difficult (theological) concept, of three separate equals yet an indivisible singular unity, that the stools explain 'Trinity' in a way the seven black letters looming behind them cannot.

The figure/ground relationships held in tension in the work are themselves a tripled palimpsest of visual knowledge as the stools and the letters are gravitationally tethered to the extraordinarily varied, liquid ground that stains the wooden support. This is milk paint, a medium Stopforth stumbled across when staining raw wood bookcases. Made from milk and lime, and sold in powder form, it can be clotted as well as smooth, and can be opaquely textured or softly transparent depending on the mixing with water.⁷ Milk paint is evocative of a range of traditional African artistic practices that use casein (the protein in milk) as a binding agent, and Stopforth often then works with charcoal in it, tracing drawings through the liquid flow of the paint.⁸ The result is a shifting, restless surface where colors run like metal fissures in rock and the traces of the artist's hand are transcribed as profoundly human actions, just as the relics of Robben Island, found and recorded by Stopforth, are analogues of the extraordinary through the medium of the mundane.⁹

BREAKWATER

Trinity's format evokes the horizontal, panoramic proportions of traditional landscape art. This shape affirms the moral equality of the prisoners, with hierarchical power defused compositionally. But this format is somewhat ironic given that Stopforth's efforts to directly paint the landscape of Robben Island during his stay were confounded by the powerful wind that swept across the exposed terrain. Ultimately, he took photographs and mixed and applied the paint back in his studio in Jamaica Plain, Boston. The (dis)position of the exile that has colored Stopforth's work for 30 years is thus active in *Trinity's* very manufacture, where memory and direct observation coagulate. *Breakwater* shares *Trinity's* horizontal format and exilic experience, and also the color palette Stopforth used in his paintings of the Bethesda Tidal Pool. But we are now positioned on the East Coast of America, not the southern tip of Africa, for this is the Provincetown breakwater, a mile-long barrier composed of 1,200 massive uneven boulders (quarried in Quincy) stretching out into the Atlantic Ocean. Completed in 1915, the breakwater was designed to protect Provincetown harbor from the shifting sands of the dunes, and has become an iconic component of the town.¹⁰ The west-end breaker has also become a literal bridge, as countless people have clambered over the stones to reach Long Point lighthouse at low tide. It can be a treacherous trip but panoramic vistas of the town, the singing of water through rocks, and the arrival at secluded beaches are the rewards. Whether barrier, bridge or contour, the breakwater brings (the end of the) land and water into greater dialogue. It conjures another mysterious form of unity, born of breaking and interrupting the flow of the ocean. The harbor it helps to protect is not quite a "house of mercy" providing cures through immersion in its salty tidal pools, but it has long drawn exiles and outcasts to it looking for temporary threads to distant homelands and tentative strands of new communities.¹¹

That Stopforth was drawn to Provincetown following his fraught decision to settle in Boston with his wife Carol is hardly surprising given its rich artistic history, as much cultural center as barren edgeland. It is tempting to imagine the spirit of Hans Hofmann pulling Stopforth magnetically to the end of the land and the tectonics of the breakwater given their similarities as inspiring artist-teachers whose pedagogical and creative innovations are partly survival strategies of the artist-exile dyad.¹² Certainly, Stopforth has expressed visual empathy with other influential artist-teachers displaced in New England including Josef Albers (Stopforth's



Homage

vibrant work *Homage*, dominated by bougainvillea is partly a richly colored dedication to him).¹³ Given the saline-soaked similarities of East Coast America and South Coast Africa, Stopforth's janus-looking from Robben Island to Provincetown and back again brings to mind the 'salty' slang of Afrikans that the artist shared with me over coffee. A "sout piel" usually refers to an expatriate with one foot in England and the other in South Africa, leaving another important part of the anatomy dangling in the ocean between; permitting a shift in compass points to a less acute angle, Stopforth becomes a different kind of "sout piel" straddling America and Africa (he also playfully delights in the fact that he possesses a different kind of 'African-American' identity too, following his securing of US citizenship in 2007).



Breakwater

However, Stopforth's *Breakwater* still resonates with his intense struggles adjusting to life in Boston.¹⁵ It stretches across the panel, compositionally more a barricade between than a bridge connecting spatial and temporal islands. It threatens to disappear at the edges, overwhelmed by the visual fissures that surge around it, generated by the dragging of gouache across the wood in a manner evocative of Gerhard Richter's squeegee works.¹⁶ The jagged, uneven rocks are not for the faint-hearted; attempts at crossing will be treacherous. Nonetheless, there remains an aqueous correspondence either side of the breakwater and this barrier seems permeable as well as imposing, submerged in, but also suspended between, passages of paint that pulse with the thrill of abstract mark-making. Ultimately, this work is not reducible to confinement or isolation, there is still visual dialogue here, even if not in the form of coherent narrative. Heavy with the congealing of observation and memory just like the milky grounds of the Robben Island series, this shifting chimera of insubstantial reflections and rocky outcrop does offer hope of a kind of passage, a hard-won journey across time and space.

Breakwater also dramatizes the seductive pleasures of colored pigment and gestural mark-making for their own sake that Stopforth was only able to experience after his move to the United States. Under the constrictions of apartheid, such enjoyment felt anathema to politically-engaged artists, even

a betrayal of the struggle and its martyrs. Similarly, an interest in the traditional arts of Southern Africa is something Stopforth has only really been able to develop in exile. The ability to “become a painter” as he puts it, together with tentative explorations of both traditional Southern African and Cape Cod imagery is encapsulated in *Dreamer* of 1991, where horseshoe crabs and a lizard from the Namib desert share the shimmering red surface with a smiling facial outline.



Seasonal Fire



Sunday in Savannah

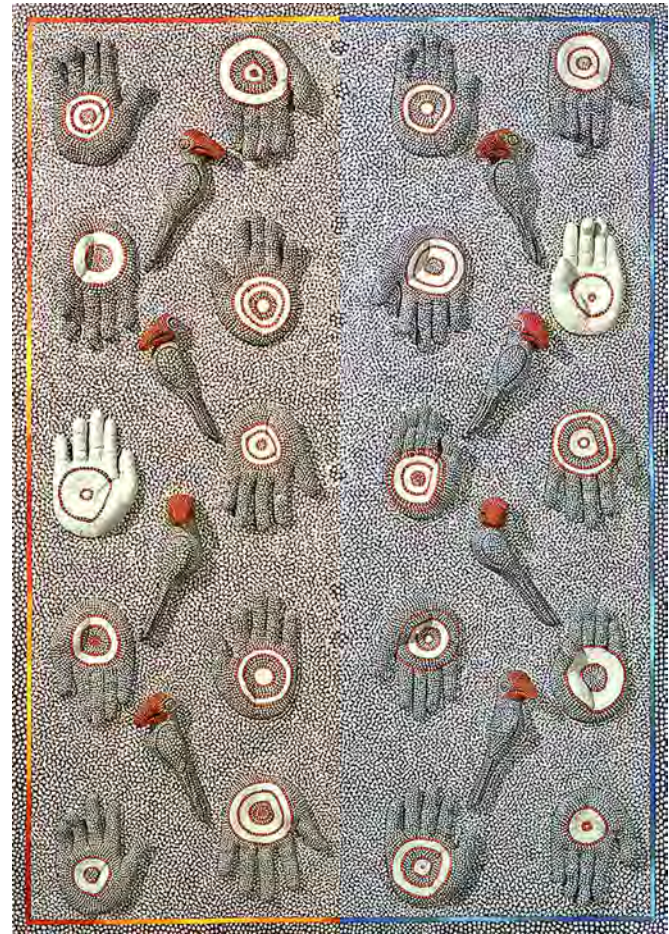
Many of his recent works use the formal structure of trees as an organizing element for complex, joyful explorations of fields of variegated color. In *Sunday in Savannah*, *Seasonal Fire*, *Moonrise* and *After the Flood: Morning*, a rich gouache ground, framed outlines of trees and mysterious oblongs of opaque color are juxtaposed. They relate to his stated interest in three layers of abstraction – representational

image, organic abstraction and geometric abstraction. These elements seem wholly disparate and yet deeply related to one another, another mysterious kind of pictorial 'trinity'. Sandra Klopper argues that Stopforth has explored tensions in figure/ground relationships throughout his career, "because it introduced uncertainty both in the reading of the image and in the creative process. His sense that the disparate elements of his images take on a life of their own appeals to the artist in part because....it seems to confirm for him the presence of the transcendent within the material world".¹⁷ "Uncertainty" is important to him, it is the essential counter to liberated play, the necessary leavening of too much emancipation through artmaking. Certainly, if the actual making becomes predictable then a fear of imprisonment through calcification seems to haunt Stopforth and drives his technical experimentation on. This creative commitment relates to Tacita Dean's comments about Roni Horn: "to know categorically what you are going to do is to be fixed upon the outcome but blind to the journey. Journeying is where the work takes place: without the travel, the destination looks much like where you started from". At the same time, it is hard to detach from the motif of trees thoughts of rootedness, a desire for stability and a yearning for 'home'.¹⁹ In this respect Stopforth's recent works bear comparison to the innovative use of trees by so many displaced artists over the last century – including Piet Mondrian and Ibrahim el-Salahi - where the potential for exploring abstraction through formal structure never completely erases imbedded arboreal symbolism. It is tempting to tether this dialectical tension back to the perpetually unresolved state of exile, in which comfort and security are inevitably yearned for and yet constantly to be guarded against. This is the message Edward Said draws from Theodor Adorno's maxim that, given the horrors of the 20th century, "it is part of morality not be at home in one's home".²⁰

BRIDGEWATER

Thanks to the generosity of local residents Lawrence and Katherine Doherty, Stopforth's works are now part of the environment of BSU; they donated four important pieces by the artist to the permanent collection in 2013. They are exemplary of Stopforth's practice in the United States in that they are complex, deeply considered, technically daring pieces, that also dazzle and thrill in their luminosity. They carry the burdens of exile with them but also the "pleasures" identified by Said: "the pleasure of being surprised"; a "double perspective, never seeing things in isolation"; a tendency to "look at situations as contingent, not as inevitable"; a "sort of freedom" borne of doing things according to your own pattern through disconnection from conventional footsteps; and a liberation "from having always to proceed with caution".²¹ It is hard to think of a better set of principles to guide Bridgewater's communities today. This is not to romanticize the position of the exile, nor diminish the terrible sufferings it brings about, but it does, as Said puts it, "lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity". Given the ever-increasing numbers of exiles, refugees, and emigres experiencing a "nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal" existence recognition of the benefits in "juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgement and elevate appreciative sympathy" need to be nurtured.²² Stopforth has always stressed that America has made him more "generous", opening him up to wider possibilities – creative, intellectual, spiritual. As he put it in a talk he gave in 2010, "America is big enough to provide people with the opportunities to live out their lives regardless of how they feel connected to, or are affiliated to, the countries that they were born in".²³ Stopforth's works on the BSU campus embody this optimistic vision; they are also profoundly global in outlook, bringing together diverse world cultures and religions in ways that should guide Bridgewater's mission to pursue a generous, open-minded policy of international engagement.

Look at *Initiate*, a bas-relief made of sculptamold (a paper and wood adhesive compound) from 1994. Could any artwork be more appropriate for the BSU Welcome Center (where it is currently installed)? Out of a densely dotted surface flickering with energy that was inspired both by African beadwork and by Aboriginal Dreamtime paintings, a rhythmic yet balanced grid of hands and birds move slowly out into our space, greeting the viewer/ initiate as if at a threshold. The birds, universal symbols of migration, may be oxpeckers because of the red heads, grey bodies and long tails. These birds are famous for their symbiotic relationship with rhinos and are thus emblematic of mutually beneficial affiliation. The hands reaching out towards the viewer, meanwhile, suggest affirmative mudra gestures and are a product of Stopforth's intense study of Buddhism and Hinduism, another armature of his search for healing after moving to Boston. The circular patterns are reminiscent again of the concentric circles composing



Initiate

Aboriginal dreamtime paintings, but also evoke body paint and other markings used throughout Africa to mark rites of passage. They are meaningful signs of new membership but also new responsibility accompanying a change in life status.

Hands are also important elements in the three Stopforth works installed outside the Moakley Auditorium. In *Malagasy Mourner* painted in 1995, the pink outline of a hand reaches across the panel and illuminates the rocky ground behind. This is one of Stopforth's most enigmatic works in which a man in modern clothing is ambiguously positioned astride/beside a long-horned cow, grasping it by the ear. Arms, legs and bodily contours overlap, an



Malagasy Mourner

allusion perhaps to the centrality of cattle/human involvement to many cultures including Sepedi, Zulu and Xhosa, often described as the "African cattle complex". Symbols of material wealth, status, and familial ties as a unit of bridewealth, cows are also beasts of providence and repositories of memory and history, particularly regarding migration. Cattle are also critical to rituals and ceremonies, particularly cleansing and funerary rites, and are thus central to the appeasement of, and contact with, ancestral spirits. The title of the work alludes to the extraordinary funerary traditions of the Malagasy people of central Madagascar known as "Famadihana" or the "turning of the bones", and identifies the figure/cow as the upper fragment of a tall graveyard marker. During these celebrations normally held every seven



Alchemist

years, the remains of the dead are exhumed, lovingly wrapped in new shrouds and danced with in a form of family reunion, wherein the deceased can experience the joys of life again before an elaborate re-cleaning and re-burial. The practice is based on the belief that final passage to the spirit world remains incomplete until the body decomposes completely, so Famadihana helps the process along. Grief is part of Malagasy mourning but so too is communal celebration. Stopforth has been drawn to bones since his early assemblages and used them in innovative teaching exercises that involved students completing one another's' drawings, so this Malagasy rite, alluded to in a work again made using milk paint, seems particularly fitting. For the artist-exile still pursuing healing through creative acts, a ceremony concerned with aiding spiritual passage on one hand and leavening grief through transcendental familial reunion on the other has special resonance.

Bones as relics and guardians of spiritual passage are literally central to *Alchemist*, but this time it is the skull of a baboon that interacts with expressive outlines of hands and a dazzling stippled surface.²⁴ The skull is a reference to the ancient Egyptian God Hapi, whose baboon head adorns the stopper on the canopic jar responsible for the preservation of the lungs of the deceased. As Kate McCrickard explains, Hapi is thus the divine guardian of “the air and the universal elixir that is breath, and guard[s] over the alchemical transfer of states from one world to another”.²⁵ The hands interwoven with the skull are playing an invisible flute, probably the oldest and most widespread instrument in the world, able to transform the ‘universal elixir that is breath’ into music. Its portability, and ethereal, mournful sound make the flute an ideal medium for the musician as exile. The flute is associated in many cultures with the voice of the Gods; ancient Egyptians believed that Isis spoke through its notes. In classical mythology, the flute is most strongly associated with Pan’s pining for the nymph Syrinx, whom the Gods turned into reeds to save her from his lustful pursuit. Mournful Pan binds some reeds together and blows through them in order to hear Syrinx’s voice again. But perhaps the most important allusion for Stopforth is to



Bodhisattva

the Hindu God Krishna, whose flute playing can erase separateness and generate unconditional love. In classical Indian dance, there are a series of mudras that delineate flute-playing positions, and many poets have connected the holes in the instrument to the sorrows of the human heart. It is through suffering that the heart is made hollow; yet it is only through such hollowness that it can be transformed into a flute, an instrument for the God of love to play upon. Throughout

Alchemist's stippled ground are red outlines of lotus blossoms, another symbol of transformation, one of Buddhism's central allusions to the progress of the soul. Alchemist shares identical proportions with three other paintings from 1992 – *Guardian*, *Bodhisattva* and *San*. This group of works all use hand gestures, luminous decorative surfaces and a joyful syncretic blending of diverse spiritual beliefs to celebrate both being in the world and our spiritual passage through it. All the works, despite giant hands, minutely worked grounds and complex symbolic allusions feel light and airy, hovering above the weight of human doubt and intransigence.

Diviner, the other Doherty gift to Bridgewater, is an apt symbol through which to sum up Stopforth's rich artistic practice. He turned to the use of cut-out birch wood supports once the process used

to make *Alchemist* was becoming too predictable; the half-inch thick irregular shapes also begin the move out into the space of the viewer that *Initiate* develops further. It shares much with the other large cut-out piece he made at the same time – *Freedom Dancer (The South African)* which now hangs in the Constitutional Court of South Africa after Stopforth donated the work in 2003. Made on the cusp of South Africa's first democratic elections, the energetic leap of the worker in gumboots evokes the act of jumping on the devil familiar to South Africa's independent churches and embodies the joyful anticipation so many people shared at this threshold moment in the country's history. The man's liberation is protected by the four golden hands that frame his body and that his own outsized trailing hand reiterates. In contrast, *Diviner* is more measured and thoughtful. The crouching figure is assured and focused, safe in the palms of the four wing-like hands around him. Instead of his hand trailing behind his body in a daring leap into freedom, it reaches out in a gesture close to that of the quartet protecting him. This hand position is that of the diviner, whether casting sacred nuts or bones, reading tracks made upon the ground, recording results of mystical numerology, or consulting an ancient text. It is also the hand gesture and bodily disposition of the painter. Both professions can diagnose afflictions, decode seemingly random patterns, serve as repositories of memory and wisdom, and bring insight into the human condition. Alchemists, diviners, Malagasy mourners, and the welcomers of initiates into symbiotic mutualism: Bridgewater's quartet of works by Stopforth comprise a compassionate community of guides willing to aid others in the pursuit of knowledge, safe passage and enlightenment. They are dwellers on thresholds, attuned to the liminal double-perspective of the exile, guardians of relics, and sensitive to the invisible threads linking continents. So too is Paul Stopforth.



Diviner

Notes

¹ The history of the pool is uncertain, but the low sea wall around it was probably built by the Governor of the Island to provide safer bathing areas for the British families living there. Stopforth has eloquently discussed how Robben Island has become a quasi-religious space for those wishing to honor the political martyrs of the apartheid era. For a sophisticated analysis of ‘relics’ on the island see, Leora Maltz-Leca, ‘The Logic of the Relic: Traces of History in Stone and Milk’, in Masson et al., *Paul Stopforth, 2010*, pp.50-76.

² Stopforth left South Africa in 1988 as it seemed inevitable that the country was heading towards disaster. Many of his activist friends had been arrested and his close friend David Webster was assassinated on a Saturday morning in broad daylight having gone to buy groceries at a local supermarket.

³ “Resistance Art” in South Africa normally refers to the period 1976-1990. For an influential analysis of the range of practices this term encompasses see Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa*, David Philip, 1989.

⁴ Stopforth was given access to the autopsy photographs by the lawyer working for Biko’s family, and he produced a series of haunting drawings that culminated in *Elegy*. For an analysis of the range of images made in response to Biko’s murder see Shannen Hill, ‘Trauma and Representation in Africa: Iconic Autopsy Post-Mortem Portraits of Stephen Bantu Biko’, *African Arts*, Autumn 2005.

⁵ See Karen von Veh, ‘The Intersection of Christianity and politics in South African art: A comparative analysis of selected images since 1960, with emphasis on the post-apartheid era’, *de arte*, no.85, 2012, pp.5-25 and M. Mduduzi Xakaza, ‘Christianity as a Site of Struggles: An Interpretation of the use of Biblical Sources in South African Art’, in Mario Pissarra (ed), *Visual Century: South African Art in Context*, vol. 3 1973-1992, Wits University Press, 2011 pp.60-81.

⁶ Ndebele and Zulu beadwork became more colorful and intricate as a form of protest designed to increase visibility during Apartheid. Migrant workers who were forced to wear ‘western’ clothes covering from the shoulder to the knee would also add beadwork to the cloth as a means of transforming oppression into the agency of bricolage. See John Giblin and Chris Spring, *South Africa: the Art of a Nation*, Thames & Hudson, 2017, pp.172-205.

⁷ The exploration of unconventional materials that generate visual space between the material and the spiritual and which are unusually effective in capturing ‘traces’ has been a feature of Stopforth’s works throughout his career such as the use of liquid wax, medical bandages and bleached animal bones.

⁸ Leora Maltz-Leca has also connected Stopforth’s choice of medium to Mandela’s recollection that milk was used as an improvised “invisible ink” to circulate messages, using the solvent cleaner distributed to prisoners as a means of revealing the milky letters otherwise invisible on paper. See Maltz-Leca, ‘Relic’, p.57.

⁹ Other mundane items transcribed by Stopforth that he found on Robben Island include dustbins, a neatly folded prison blanket, a hinge, bars of soap, a beautifully hand-fashioned blanket-pin made of scavenged high-tensile wire, wall cabinets (the only furniture in Mandela’s cell), and a mounted siren.

¹⁰ There are actually two breakwaters in Provincetown: the east-end breakwater was built 1970-1972 and stretches 2,500 feet out from MacMillan Wharf. Its existence is a product of many years of lobbying by the “Provincetown Harbor of Refuge Committee”, concerned

specifically with the fishing community.

¹¹ One could connect the burnt orange passages of paint that seem to bleed from out of the breakwater and into the water to the patches of ochre in the Bethesda works. In each case, the colors could symbolize minerals leaching from rock that led to the attribution of curative properties in the water.

¹² Hans Hofmann ran an influential summer school in Provincetown from 1935 to 1958. Among his many students was Lee Krasner, who introduced Hofmann to Clement Greenburg, the latter becoming a great champion of the German painter's work. Stopforth taught at the University of Natal and the University of Witwatersrand, before working at Tufts University in 1989. He then taught in the Visual and Environmental Studies Department at Harvard University for 10 years as well as at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

¹³ Stopforth was awarded an artist residency at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in Bethany, CT in 2000. For an analysis of how Albers' experience of exile in the United States shaped a deeper understanding of material and color see, Megan R. Luke, 'The Trace of Transfer' in Frauke V. Josenhans (ed), *Artists in Exile: Expressions of Loss and Hope*, Yale University Press, 2017, pp.129-141.

¹⁴ Stopforth has exhibited regularly at the Schoolhouse Gallery in Provincetown since 1999, and he lectures seasonally at Provincetown's Fine Art Works Center. He is showing some of his new portrait series at the Schoolhouse Gallery from August 31-September 19 2018 which in their playful representation of a series of 'types' familiar to Cape Cod residents – 'Anthropologist', 'Writer', 'Visionary Beach Boy' etc. – can be placed in dialogue with his earlier series of terrifying portraits of perpetrators of the Apartheid system (*The General, The Leader, The Little Fascist*) he produced after a year studying at the Royal College of Art in London. The earlier drawings, influenced by the artists of Weimar Germany, were a form of "self-imprisonment" according to Stopforth.

¹⁵ Stopforth was artist-in-residence at Tufts University for a semester in 1989. After their visas expired, he moved with his wife Carol Marks to Paris, before returning to America after being hired by Don Gray, head of continuing education at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. In the their mid-40's, adjustment to permanent residence in Boston proved incredibly difficult. Stopforth underwent Jungian therapy and benefitted greatly from the friendship of Jo and Morrie Simon, whose brother Barney had founded the Market Theatre in Johannesburg where Stopforth had established and ran the Market Gallery. His 'Death and Detention' series was first installed at the Market Gallery in 1978, and it became an important center of resistance art.

¹⁶ Richter is an apt point of comparison to Stopforth's practice given the German artist's intense meditations on slippages between memory and observation, exile and displacement, and the space between abstraction, history painting and pictorial narrative. This link is testimony to the fact that Stopforth's practice has always been informed by a range of important modern Euro-American artists, even during his time working in South Africa. For example, the 'Death and Detention' series strike a compelling comparison to George Segal's exploration of figures composed of plaster bandage, whilst Stopforth's early assemblage works were inspired by Robert Rauschenberg. These connections are important because they challenge widely held views that South African art was completely cut off from international communities during the period of the cultural boycott (1968-1991). The experience of isolation and rupture was far more complex than this. For an excellent analysis of the relationship between artists in South Africa and the rest of the world during the era of "Resistance Art" see, Mario Pissarra, 'Isolation, Distance and Engagement: South African art and artists in the international sphere', in Mario Pissarra (ed), *Visual Century: South African Art in Context*, vol. 3 1973-1992, Wits University Press, 2011, pp. 180-203.

¹⁷ Sandra Klopper, 'Sacred Fragments – Looking Back at the Art of Paul Stopforth', *African Arts*, Winter 2004, p.73.

¹⁸ Tacita Dean, 'Roni Horn: Doubt', in Tacita Dean, *Selected Writings 1992-2011*, 2011, p.84.

¹⁹ *After the Flood: Morning* is particularly interesting in this respect since Stopforth painted this in response to Hurricane Katrina. The patches of red intruding into the blue color palette could be related to blood, whilst the title is a play on the words morning/mourning.

²⁰ See Edward W. Said, 'Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals', *Grand Street*, No. 47, Autumn 1993, p.120.

²¹ *ibid*, pp.121-123.

²² Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, 2000, p.186.

²³ Paul Stopforth in conversation at the Firehouse Center for the Arts, Burlington. June 26 2010.

²⁴ The baboon skull takes on the character of a relic as it recurs in other paintings by Stopforth such as *Offering* from 1992. In this work, exhibited at the Akin Gallery Boston in March 1993, it rests in the palm of another giant hand and is again surrounded by lotus blossoms, but this time is placed in mysterious juxtaposition to a dice and a bulging sack.

²⁵ Kate McCrickard, 'Exile on Main Street: the American Works of Paul Stopforth, 1989-2009', in Masson et al., *Paul Stopforth*, 2010 p.80.

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Acknowledgements

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Jonathan Shirland has provided an essay characterized by the clarity of prose and depth of understanding in detailing the life work of Paul Stopforth. This catalogue is the first in a series of which will delve thoughtfully into the collections held by Bridgewater State University.

Paul Stopforth has produced a body of work that inspects some of the darkest moments found within humanity. Throughout, he has always sought a fluidity of color and light as a vehicle in the expression of these social critiques. The progression of works over a lifetime of an artist does not often display a singular continuity of idea and object. Paul Stopforth is an exception. Each drawing, sculpture and painting is a demonstration of an unfaltering connectedness to the pulse of creativity and morality.

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