

PAUL ©

SOME STRANGE ALPHABET
4 September - 2 October 2008

Graham's Contemporary Fine Art Gallery
Johannesburg South Africa
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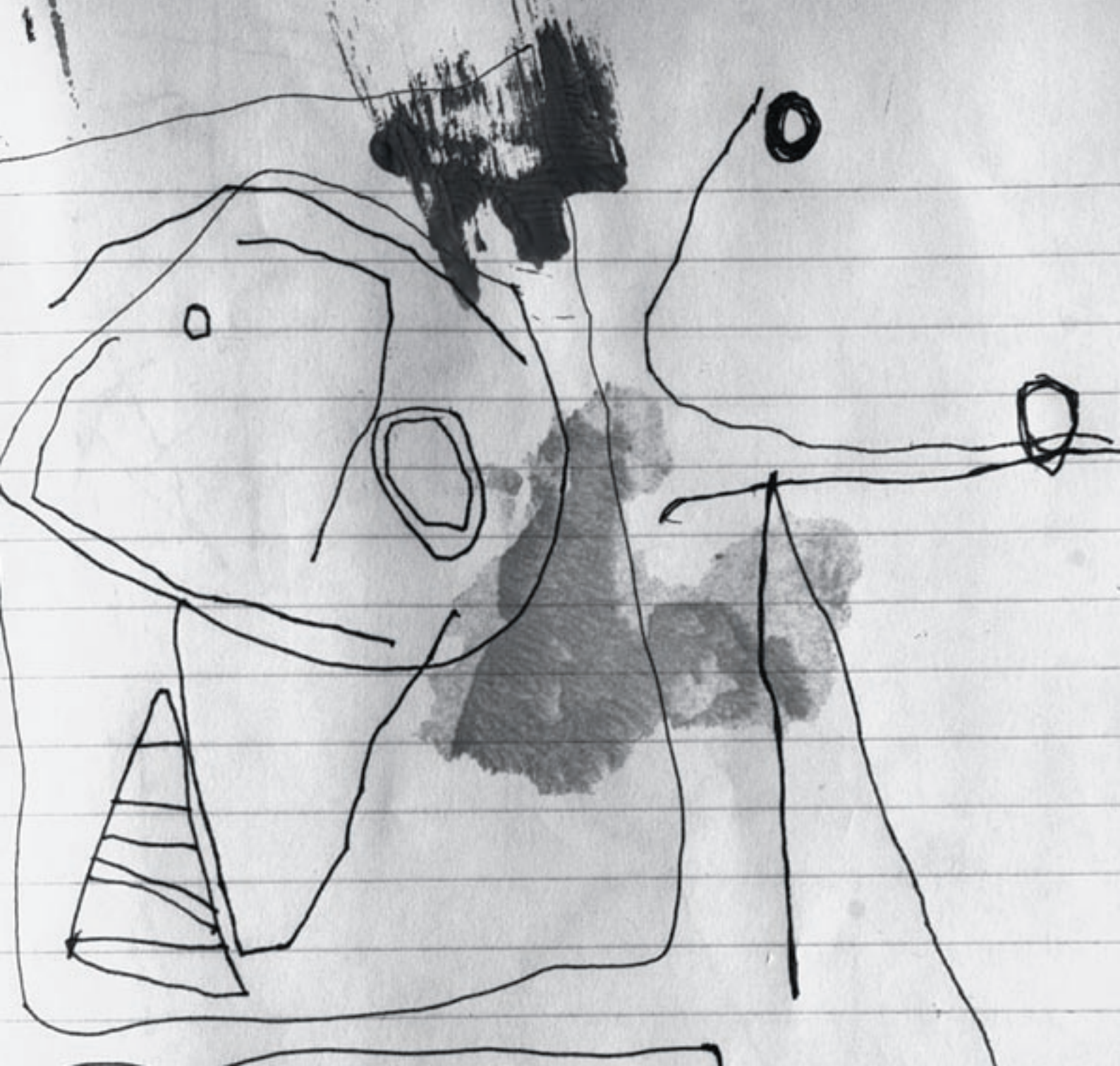
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Cover	Sparkle 2008 (detail)
Inside cover	notebook image 2008
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Some strange alphabet

Paul comments that a vague concept for **Some strange alphabet** had been fomenting in his mind for a long time when the illuminating moment he had been hoping for happened unexpectedly during his first visit to China. Observing effective communication between people from different cultures lacking a common spoken language by finger gestures and scrawls in sand or in hand palms, he was struck by the ease with which a simplified pictorial shorthand could take over when words failed. A primal connection between language, essentially linear and time-bound, and an underlying, more elemental ability, essentially symbolic and instantaneous, became clear. A strangely inviting new light was cast on his own artistic idiom.

He found literature on the historical development of Chinese script, which intensified his interest. He became more and more convinced of a primal human understanding with no spatial or chronological limitations underpinning the symbols and signs with which we communicate. Paul showed his work to curators and to other artists in China, who confirmed this by spontaneously pointing out elements which reminded them of symbols used in their languages, some in current use, some ancient and obsolete.

Paul habitually mentions 'my alphabet, my awkward scrawls, my own graffiti', when he speaks about the enduring substratum of visual metaphors which have sustained his years of visual research and experimentation. Those remain the core of his work, but shifts in colour, line variation, textural nuance, rhythms of density and sparseness are appearing as he proceeds.

He acknowledges these as ongoing evidence of a deepening awareness of the universal poetry of harmony in language into which he taps for his inspiration.

He welcomes the changes, regarding them as the outcome of constant interaction between cognitive consideration and physical experience. 'I analyze my work constantly' he says, 'I experiment constantly. Lines and pictograms I like, I use again and again. Ones I don't like, I also use again. I work with them ceaselessly to fathom what it is that draws me to some symbols and not to others. I repeat them, I change them, I play with them. By staying with them, figures that initially appear unappealing sometimes become the most delicate, the most meaningful to me. Perhaps because they challenge me, they engage with me as I do with them'.

Of particular interest is Paul's expanding understanding of black as much more than line and symbolic confinement, visual direction and silent explanation. It makes new appearances as the colour of night, of nothing, of shadow and beautiful obscurity. Variations in blackness add strange new contrasts to Paul's work. He uses it in new combinations, some strong and unequivocal, others nebulous, even tentative. Another transparently oriental influence, an internalisation of Eastern thinking, where colour, in particular light and dark, encapsulates the inexplicable contradictory nature of human understanding. Paul explains: 'As line gets busier, colour has to change. I have partially let go of primary colours, which were uplifting and unifying to me when my line was less complex. Now I use colour in subtle layers, superimpositions, textures. Unintentionally, space creeps in, and I allow it. Oil stick and crayon add complexity and ambiguity. New ways to create marks suggest themselves everywhere, even stains left on rags after cleaning brushes. Flatness, once so crucial to my work, has been linked to depth, its twin. The result is a quivering, shimmer-

ing additional difficulty which pleases me strangely.'

Despite the obvious fact that Paul's work deals with the human form virtually exclusively, one might even say obsessively, he has long left behind any notion of verisimilitude. He sees no contradiction in this. 'Rather than depiction of a single subject, I use my forest of symbols. My collection of awkward scrawls seems to me humanoid, composite, more true than outward appearance'. Perhaps this non-representational truth comes about because the limitations of time are circumvented. When time disappears, there is no stasis; no fixed points, nothing but pure form; a metaphor for the constant flux of human existence.

Paul finds the art of children, another area of research which continues to interest him, analogous to his own: 'Looking at the work of four-year olds enchants me most. They draw what they think, not what they see, which is exactly what I do. I store images and fractions of images away in my memory to be used as starting points for painting and sculpture. I often think about drawing a line for the first time and I force myself to be clear-headed when I start a new work. I use my weak hand at times or grasp the tool, paint brush or drawing instrument in awkward ways. This leads to unexpected new discoveries'. Paul's old tradition of working on canvas placed on easels has been replaced. He now works on horizontal planes, tables or the floor, discarding the idea of direction by moving around the format. This is also something children do before they acquire language, before thinking acquires the linearity of speech.

'I also look at and study graffiti when travelling. Street art is currently undergoing unprecedented development. It makes every city new, especially

the old ones. Simple line graffiti done with markers I relate to most, because line is central to my work and my spontaneous instant drawings. I know many people hate graffiti, but I love it. I have a different take on it. When people used to live in caves, they drew on the walls of their caves; for me drawing on buildings is no different. What a magic history to tap into! I let children draw on the glass panels of my studio with crayons when they visit'.

Some strange alphabet includes sculpture, an old love. No longer purely derived from his painting, his sculpture has become an independent journey into a universal language. Previously he made editions, but now Paul finds the momentary, 'timeless' aspect of one-off pieces more appealing. The fragility of materials like glue, paper, wax, things that do not last, metaphorically invoke their opposites: durability, stability. Negative spaces point to what exists, or is believed to exist, or is dreamed into existence.

Paul makes a connection between his interest in metaphoric paradox and the fact that his first solo show in a commercial Johannesburg gallery is the result of collaboration between two different galleries from two different cities. Traditionally a world of competition rather than collaboration, old notions of art dealing may be changing too. Could **Some strange alphabet** be a better demonstration of new affinities, similarities, meeting points?

Antoinette du Plessis





Sparkle 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and
acrylic on canvas
900 x 800 mm
(35 x 31 inches)



Traditional character 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
1320 x 495 mm (52 x 19 inches)



Suspended freely 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
675 x 1030 mm (27 x 41 inches)

Zen intuition 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
1195 x 845 mm (47 x 33 inches)







Freeform 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
1000 x 2555 mm
(39 x 101 inches)



Turn of phrase 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
1320 x 995 mm (52 x 39 inches)



Clearly defined 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
1200 x 845 mm (47 x 33 inches)



Primary form 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
1320 x 1100 mm (52 x 43 inches)



Between rays of light 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
1520 x 895 mm (60 x 35 inches)



Set of symbols 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and
acrylic on canvas
900 x 795 mm (35 x 31 inches)



Unicode 2008

Oil, oil paint sticks and
acrylic on canvas
900 x 795 mm (35 x 31 inches)



Informal sign 2008

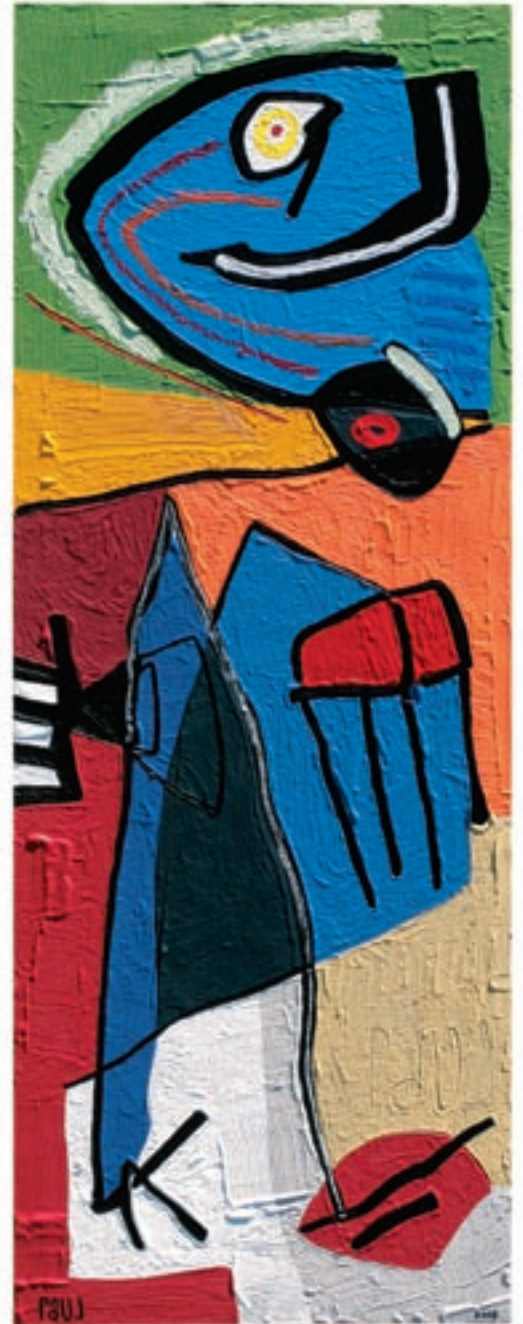
Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
1000 x 300 mm (39 x 12 inches)



Uniting signs 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
1000 x 300 mm (39 x 12 inches)



Real character 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
995 x 1320 mm (39 x 52 inches)



Carved symbols 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
1320 x 495 mm (52 x 19 inches)



The combine 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
295 x 1000 mm (12 x 39 inches)



Capital letter 2008

Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
1320 x 995 mm (52 x 39 inches)



Conceptual unit 2008
Oil and acrylic on canvas
700 x 500 mm (28 x 20 inches)

Integral segment 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
700 x 500 mm (28 x 20 inches)





Phonetic alphabet 2008
Oil, oil paint sticks and acrylic on canvas
700 x 500 mm (28 x 20 inches)



Cluster series 2008
 (#00808031, #00808032)
 Mixed media canvas collage
 395 x 175 mm (16 x 7 inches)



Cluster series 2008
 (#00808033, #00808034)
 Mixed media canvas collage
 395 x 175 mm (16 x 7 inches)



Cluster series 2008
 (#00808035, #00808036)
 Mixed media canvas collage
 395 x 175 mm (16 x 7 inches)





Paper monster series 2008
(#00808043)
Painted bronze
Height 375 mm (15 inches)
Unique cast



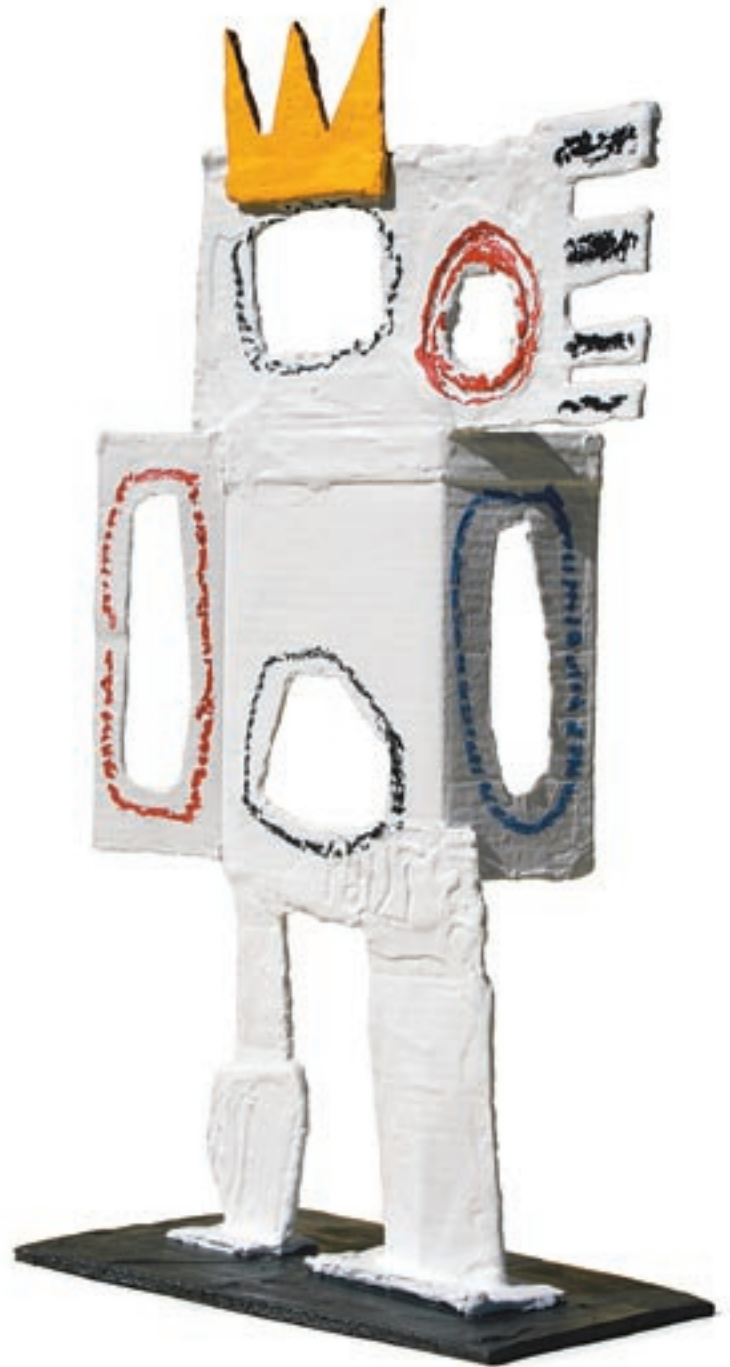
Paper monster series 2008
(#00808044)
Painted bronze
Height 450 mm (18 inches)
Unique cast



Paper monster series 2008
(#00808045)
Painted bronze
Height 450 mm (18 inches)
Unique cast



Paper monster series 2008
(#00808046)
Painted bronze
Height 445 mm (18 inches)
Unique cast



Paper monster series 2008
(#00808047)
Painted bronze
Height 655mm (26 inches)
Unique cast







Ligature series 2008

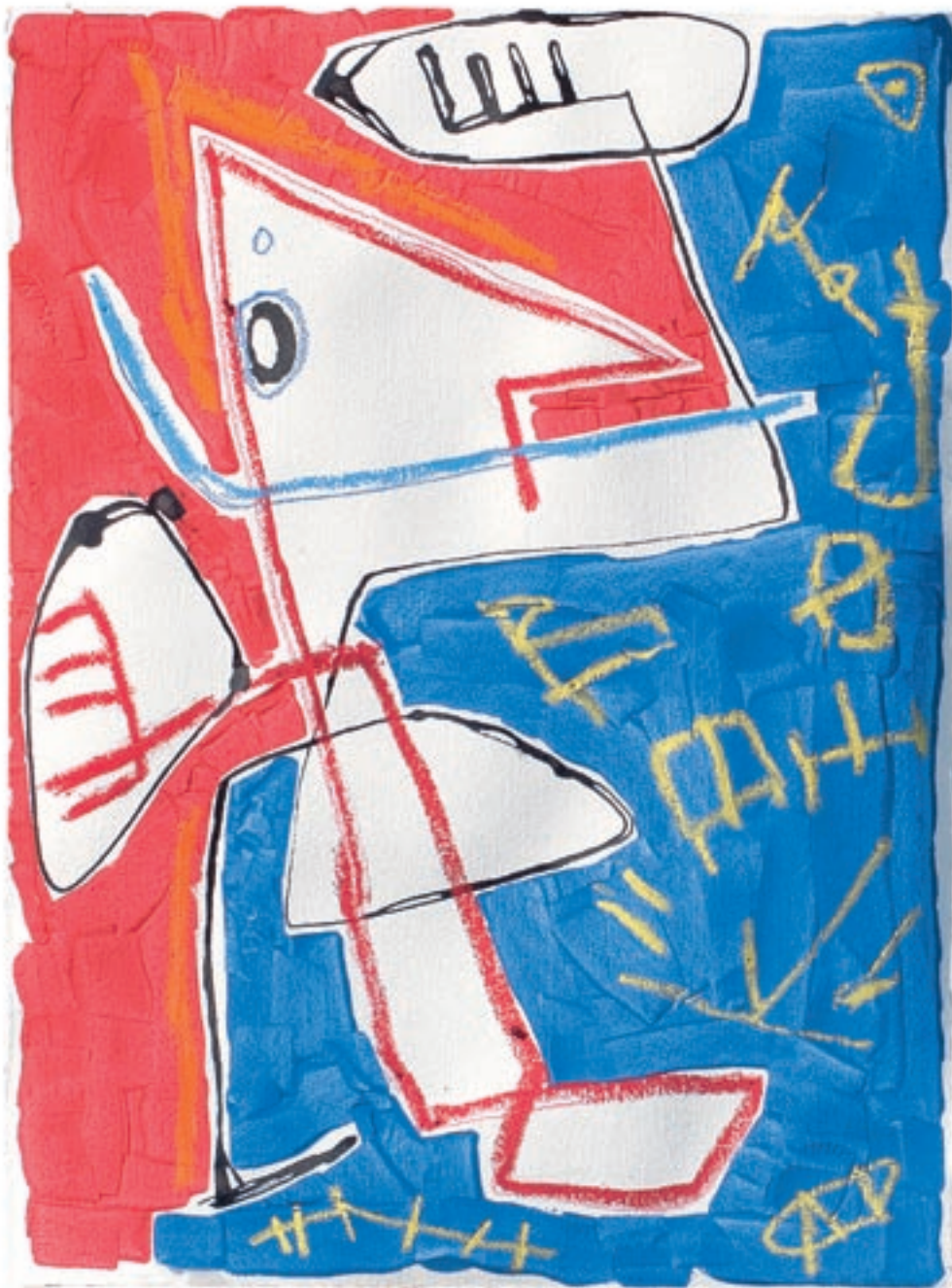
(#00808037)

Mixed media on 300g Aquarelle Arches paper
760 x 560 mm (30 x 22 inches)



Ligature series 2008
(#00808038)

Mixed media on Aquarelle Arches paper
760 x 560 mm (30 x 22 inches)



Ligature series 2008

(#00808039)

Mixed media on 300g Aquarelle Arches paper
760 x 560 mm (30 x 22 inches)



Ligature series 2008
(#00808040)

Mixed media on Aquarelle Arches paper
760 x 560 mm (30 x 22 inches)



Ligature series 2008
(#00808041)

Mixed media on Aquarelle Arches paper
760 x 560 mm (30 x 22 inches)



Ligature series 2008
(#00808042)

Mixed media on Aquarelle Arches paper
760 x 560 mm (30 x 22 inches)

Exhibition history

2008

Kyle Kauffman Gallery
New York City, NY, USA
Solo exhibition

Dieu Donné Papermill
Annual benefit auction
New York City, NY, USA

'Some Strange Alphabet'
Graham's Contemporary Fine Art Gallery
Johannesburg, South Africa
Solo exhibition

Open Art Fair
Utrecht, Holland
Solo exhibition

'Regeneration'
Kyle Kauffman Gallery
New York City, NY, USA

'Face 08'
34 Long Fine Art
Cape Town, South Africa

'Lustre, dots and more'
34 Long Fine Art
Cape Town, South Africa

2007

Winwood Art District, Miami, USA
Solo exhibition

Kee Club
Hong Kong
Solo exhibition

Art Now Fair
Kyle Kauffman Gallery, New York
Miami, USA

Dieu Donné Papermill
Inaugural exhibition and auction
New York City, NY, USA

34 Long Fine Art
Cape Town, South Africa
Solo exhibition

'Face'
34 Long Fine Art
Cape Town, South Africa

Sculpture by the Sea
Bondi Beach, Sydney, Australia
Cottesloe Beach, Perth, Australia

2006

Dieu Donné Papermill
Creation of paper pulp paintings
New York City, NY, USA

University of Johannesburg
Johannesburg, South Africa
Solo exhibition

Erdmann Contemporary
Cape Town, South Africa
Solo exhibition

KKNK, Bell-Roberts
Contemporary Art
Oudtshoorn, South Africa

'Twogether'
34 Long Fine Art
Cape Town, South Africa

'Review'
34 Long Fine Art
Cape Town, South Africa

'Recent Arrivals'
34 Long Fine Art
Cape Town, South Africa

2005

Association for Visual Arts
Cape Town, South Africa

Dieu Donné Papermill
Creation of paper pulp paintings
New York City, NY, USA

Erdmann Contemporary
Cape Town, South Africa
Solo exhibition

2004

13th Art Salon, Camps Bay
Cape Town, South Africa

Association for Visual Arts
Cape Town, South Africa

University of Stellenbosch Gallery
Stellenbosch, South Africa

Galerie Plett
Zeist, Holland
Solo exhibition

Bell-Roberts Contemporary Art
Cape Town, South Africa

Artiade 2004
Athens, Greece
Represented South Africa

Association for Visual Arts
Cape Town, South Africa

'PlanetPaul'
New York City, NY, USA
Solo exhibition

2003

12th Art Salon, Camps Bay
Cape Town, South Africa

Bell-Roberts Contemporary Art
Johannesburg, South Africa

2002

11th Art Salon, Camps Bay
Cape Town, South Africa

PaKua Gallery
Sandton Convention Centre
Johannesburg, South Africa
Solo exhibition

Toronto International Art Fair
Toronto, Canada

2001

Florence Biennale
Florence, Italy
Medal Award

Holland Art Fair
Netherlands Congress Centre
The Hague, Holland

10th Art Salon, Camps Bay
Cape Town, South Africa

Bell-Roberts Contemporary Art
Cape Town, South Africa
Solo exhibition

Galerie Plett
Zeist, Holland
Solo exhibition

Johannesburg Art Museum
Johannesburg, South Africa
Nomination for the South Africa
DaimlerChrysler Sculpture Award 2002

70/2000 Touring Exhibition
Oxford Brookes University, UK

2000

Bell-Roberts Contemporary Art
Cape Town, South Africa

9th Art Salon, Camps Bay
Cape Town, South Africa

Galerie Plett
Zeist, Holland

Edinburgh City Art Gallery
Edinburgh, Scotland

Art Museum Potchefstroom
Potchefstroom, South Africa

PaKua Gallery
Cape Town, South Africa
Solo exhibition

Stanley Picker Gallery
Kingston, United Kingdom

1999

8th Art Salon, Camps Bay
Cape Town, South Africa

A3 Gallery
Moscow, Russia

Liberman Room
South African National Gallery
Cape Town, South Africa

Gallery 88
Sasolburg, South Africa

1st Edinburgh Internet Festival
Celtica Gallery
Edinburgh, Scotland

Millennium Gallery
Pretoria, South Africa
Solo exhibition

Windsor & Newton
Millennium Exhibition, Sandton
Nominated as a finalist

1998

Bang the Gallery
Cape Town, South Africa
Solo exhibition

7th Art Salon, Camps Bay
Cape Town, South Africa

Galerie Apart
Paris, France
Solo exhibition

Bang the Gallery
Cape Town, South Africa

Sara Pearce Fine Art
Bond Street, London

Gallery 88
Sasolburg, South Africa

Augsberg City Hall
Augsberg, Germany

South African Virtual Gallery
Solo exhibition

1997

Groot Constantia Art Gallery
Cape Town, South Africa

1994

Association of Arts
Bellville, Cape Town

Awards

2001

Florence Biennale, Italy
Medal award for sculpture

Finalist for the DaimlerChrysler Sculpture
Award

1999

Windsor @ Newton Millenium exhibition,
Nominated finalist

1994

Association of Arts, Bellville, Cape Town
Awarded 1st prize for best artist with no formal
training

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