



Buzz, 1998
Acrylic and acrylic paste on canvas
11 x 11 inches (30 x 30 cm)
Private collection

Paul ©



‘Drawn to Abstraction’ at Dieu Donn  Papermill, New York City, NY

K  an Jeff Baysa

PlanetPaul’s April 2004 debut in the Manhattan art world was an auspicious and solid first landing. Presenting his paintings and sculptures in the former Jack Tilton Gallery in SoHo, New York, artist Paul du Toit enjoyed enthusiastic support from his collectors in South Africa, the South African Consul in New York, and Cape Classics, the US importer of outstanding wines from South Africa. His guileless and spirited paintings use a visual language that is reminiscent of the renowned CoBRA artists of the late 1940s. During his Manhattan residency at Dieu Donn  Papermill in October 2005, du Toit created a remarkable and fresh body of work that propels his art into new, exciting, and previously unexplored territories.

To create these new images, du Toit drew upon the moist surface of unpigmented paper pulp with variously pigmented linen pulps in individual squeeze bottles with tips of varying sizes. When the wet drawing was complete, the layers were then compressed under tremendous pressure to expel the water, and the resultant sheet was placed on drying racks. The unique characteristic of this technique, with its consolidation of pigment, ground, and image, is that it not only allows artists to work on handmade paper, but also in it.

At a later stage, Paul then further worked the image by applying marks and pigments by hand, using pens and oilsticks. His imprimatur is seen in the color schemes and bold strokes, but with unique variations resulting from his quick study and skillful use of this new medium, that in his hands, transcends its materiality. States du Toit, ‘The technique suits my style, and the freedom of creating from start to finish was exhausting and challenging in a good way.’ The medium also reflects the artist’s eco-consciousness, because recycled and organic materials are used, and no trees are sacrificed in the making of the paper pulp.

Smiles abound on visits to PlanetPaul, created by self-taught artist, Paul du Toit who quips, ‘Because I live in my head most of the time, I created this space or planet to which I can return and fill with images.’ Tracking an unconventional orbit that has drawn considerable attention, du Toit was confined to a wheelchair with symptoms of juvenile rheumatoid arthritis for three of his teenage years. With an indomitable spirit that typifies how he deals with life’s challenges, du Toit catapulted into the limelight aided by incisive strategies from computer programming and the brilliant management skills of his spouse Lorette. These strong components are annealed with the soul of a confident and capable artist determined and destined to create joyful art to share with the rest of the planet.

Participating in the notable traveling exhibition ‘70 over 2000 on the Road to Meikle Seggie’ and the Firenze Biennale Dell’Arte Contemporanea 2001, he was short-listed for the DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Sculpture 2002, and represented South Africa at the Toronto International Art Fair in 2002. His paintings and sculptures have been placed in major corporate collections and successfully auctioned at Sotheby’s with resultant placement of works in notable private American collections in Denver and New York. A popular South African website listed him as one of the most collectible South African artists along with Willie Bester, Norman Catherine, and William Kentridge.

At the 10-year retrospective exhibition of Paul du Toit’s oeuvre at the University of Johannesburg in September 2006 the artworld will again experience PlanetPaul’s formidable gravitational pull.

K  an Jeff Baysa
New York City, NY
2006

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In October 2005 Paul created works in paper pulp at the Dieu Donné Papermill in New York City
© photograph by Lorette du Toit



Off the Wall, 2004
Oil, oil paintstick, acrylic and acrylic paste on canvas, 61 x 94 inches (155 x 240 cm)
Private collection



In order to reposition historical connotations it will take a variety of individuals including artists, critics, academics and theorists to explore the boundaries, transgress borders and discover redefinitions that will ultimately alter the art world's bar codes. 'One must understand however, that forming a clear perspective of Africa's place in contemporary culture requires a level of self-definition and self-representation, and even more so when others are unwilling to take that reality as a given.'⁶ Paul du Toit is striving to do this, operating in uncharted territory as an individual, working to dissolve the restrictive boundaries that continue to predominate in the current local and global contexts. The trail that du Toit is emblazoning has created an example of an avenue for previously marginalised artists to discover themselves in the global art market and aspire to an unknown level of creative freedom that is without stigmas and labels. His art possesses an expressive authenticity that is an accurate portrayal of his personal values and beliefs.⁷ Du Toit has earned legitimacy and emits an authority that warrants recognition within South Africa and the international art scene.

Kresta Tyler Johnson
Arts journalist and critic
London, England
2006

Kresta Tyler Johnson is an arts journalist and critic currently based in London, England. The curator and author of numerous international art exhibitions, collections and catalogues, she was previously the news editor for an online publication, Artthrob, in South Africa.

Notes to pages 12-13

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6. Hassan, Salah M., Olu Oguibe. 'Authentic/Ex-Centric at the Venice Biennale: African conceptualism in global contexts', *African Arts*, Winter 2001, Los Angeles: James S. Coleman African Studies Center.
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Bar Codes: Deconstructing Labels and Their Boundaries

Kresta Tyler Johnson

In a supermarket each product is identified with a barcode. This label possesses the pertinent information regarding a specific item and becomes its true form of identification. A label will follow an item from its inception and arrival into the commercial world through to its purchase and eventual consumption. Ironically, art produced outside the West often becomes a similar commodity. Upon creation, the art will enter the global art market with a label that will determine if the work is viewed as authentic with the expected aesthetic qualities. The challenge, even in the 21st century, is how to overcome these preconceptions? If a comparison is made of critical writing on contemporary art, European and American artists do not necessitate labels as qualifiers of their identity to the extent African artists do. The quest to transcend this limitation is fraught with complications. Paul du Toit is an example of a South African artist who has been able to propel himself out of the restrictive structures of South African art and overcome Western stereotypes regarding the appearance of South African art. David Koloane writes that the result of colonial influence in Africa is ‘evident in that aesthetic education standards are still based on the British model ... (and that) this influence has not waned or become an exception after independence in most African states but rather the general rule. This influence has become the criterion of aesthetic realization in the visual arts.’¹ This is exaggerated further when the non-western country, in this case South Africa, possesses insular, academic ideals that may alienate artists who do not ‘fit’ the particular rhetoric and preconceived categories. An artist must contend with the internal, national complexities before even attempting to launch onto the world stage.

Paul du Toit is a South African artist who has carved a unique niche in the international arena. Beyond being able to access and be exhibited globally, du Toit has simultaneously continued to create a very personal form of art that has not adjusted itself to the demands of a commercial art market. Simply said, du Toit has also been able to create art for art’s sake. The cliché may be tired, but it is truly applicable in his case. Du Toit’s art is his own; a linear, phantasmic world that he has created from his mind and experiences. This is his art.

From his earliest creations, du Toit has focused on a personal interpretation of the human form and visage. Creativity was flowing from du Toit’s fingers as early as age five.

When he was ill at age 11 with rheumatoid (juvenile) arthritis, distraction and consolation came in the form of books on Miró and Picasso. In the hospital where du Toit was confined, he found validation of his portrait renderings through the work of these masters. Accepting and recognising his own style at an early age allowed du Toit to create in a realm free from the constraints of more mature artists preoccupied with trying to conform to accepted norms. Throughout his stay in the hospital, art was a form of escape from the endless hours of lying motionless. Du Toit’s eye became attuned to the subtleties and movements of the human figure. He studied the motions of people around him, drawing incessantly even after his departure from the hospital. Du Toit had discovered an outlet for exploring the images that prevailed in his mind. It was during this period that du Toit studied his portraits and developed his signature style of limiting all expressions to line drawings.²

Not adhering to the expected, du Toit’s paintings, drawings and sculptures deserve comparisons with artists such as Dubuffet or Basquiat. Similar to these artists, the term ‘primitive’ may be used in critical analysis of du Toit’s work, but I believe he has surmounted this descriptive barrier. It is impossible to identify du Toit as either a formally trained, academic South African artist who participated in resistance art or as an artist who is relying on the kitsch of reproduced visions of Africa. He is part of ‘... the intervening space ‘beyond’, (which) becomes a space of intervention in the here and now.’³ Du Toit is a borderline artist who is creating the new and working to reposition the stereotype of a contemporary, South African visual artist. The theorist and writer Homi Bhabha engaged with the idea of borderlines and boundaries when he wrote, ‘Borderline artists may have fragmented narratives ... memories that are potent ... but their experience of survival gives them a special insight into the constructed, artefactual, strategic, and contingent nature of those events that are memorialised, by the powerful, as being the ‘facts’ of life ... The borderline work of art demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present; nor is it a ‘newness’ that can be contained in the mimesis of ‘original and copy’.⁴

‘Newness’ is a seductive characteristic that dominates demanding western art markets. Artists on the periphery may be tempted to compromise their creations hoping to gain access to this unfamiliar but besotted locale. Remaining abreast of these temptations is essential for an artist. Du Toit seems to be navigating these spaces and unknowingly entered a realm that deserves further investigation in a critical framework.

Media and the ability to harness this rapidly expanding area of technology is another facet to Paul du Toit’s work. From the internet’s infantile moment to a life-changing career commitment it has been a driving element in du Toit’s success. Initially art was a hobby while du Toit worked as a software engineer in the early 1990s in Johannesburg. Du Toit became a master of the intricacies of the new technology in South Africa and quickly realised a way forward for his own art. The Web provided a forum that du Toit exploited to the fullest extent and he reaped great rewards. His first exhibition as a professional artist in 1998 was a result of a gallery in Paris extending an invitation to exhibit after its owners saw five works du Toit had laboriously scanned and uploaded onto his website. The internet served to level the artistic playing field for du Toit by allowing him to promote and publicise his art, gain an international audience and not be solely dependent on an acceptance by the South African art establishment.

Paul du Toit has once again leapt forward using the power of podcasts, the new broadcasting phenomenon, to share his art with the public. Du Toit is ultimately concerned with facilitating an education and communication of his personal method of creation. He has found the ability to exceed limitations with his resourcefulness, utilising his power of determination coupled with technology to achieve a label-less existence. One review of du Toit’s show in New York said ‘Paul du Toit, a South African artist ... ’ when in reality the caption should have read, ‘Paul du Toit, an artist, who lives and works in South Africa ... ’⁵ Clearly du Toit has found a way to exist without predetermined labels and should be recognised accordingly. Unfortunately, even in the minds of established Western critics, an easily applied label will often prevail.

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Back cover: *Varying Degrees*, computer manipulated, 2006
Frontispiece: *Paul du Toit* at PlanetPaul Studios, 2006
© photograph by Lorette du Toit
Front endpaper: *Dieu Donne Paper Pulp Series*, computer manipulated, 2006
Back endpaper: *Dieu Donne Paper Pulp Series*, computer manipulated, 2006
Page 160: Du Toit Family: Joshua, Lorette, Danielle and Paul, Hout Bay, 2006
© photograph by Josie Borain



Dusk till Dawn, 2005
Oil and acrylic paste on canvas, 68 x 94 inches (175 x 240 cm), Private collection



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PlanetPaul Studios, Hout Bay, Cape Town 2005
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