Against the picturesque: Christine Dixie’s Bloodspoor (1997)
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Abstract
Christine Dixie’s Bloodspoor (1997), an installation comprised of two framed photographs, two chairs and nine prints, was the artist’s first sustained engagement with the politics of landscape representation. Identifying the ways in which Dixie explored the potential culpability of her 1820-settler ancestors in the violence and dispossession that took place in the Eastern Cape, the authors also reveal how Bloodspoor provides an engagement with the ways in which frontier policy has left traces of barriers, fortresses and structures of surveillance on the landscape. The article develops out of brief observations by David Bunn and Brenda Atkinson that Bloodspoor focuses on the ways in which an idea of the desirable landscape – manifested in picturesque paintings – was intricately linked to endeavours on the part of colonialists to negotiate a foreign terrain marked by conflict, trauma and violence. Through a detailed analysis of its various components, the authors suggest that Bloodspoor offers both a subversion of picturesque conventions and an exploration of the psyche of settler forebears who – for all their attempts to manage their new abode – could never quite adapt it into ‘home’.

Introduction
The year 2007 was significant in the career of the South African printmaker Christine Dixie. In addition to new work exhibited at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown and the Durban Art Gallery, Dixie held her first retrospective show, entitled Corporeal Prospects, at the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg during August and September. Corporeal Prospects provided opportunities to see Dixie’s recent output along with prints and installations made since she graduated with a Master of Fine Art degree from the University of Cape Town in 1993.

Amongst the works shown in Johannesburg was Bloodspoor, an installation completed in 1997, when Dixie was living in the small town of Nieu Bethesda. Including a pair of photographic portraits of the artist’s ancestors who had settled in the Eastern Cape in the 1820s, a couple she believes were named Philip and Emily Dixie (1),[1] Bloodspoor also contains two wooden chairs which the artist acquired from a church and which are placed immediately below these images (2). Directly opposite the portraits and chairs is a block of nine prints made through techniques such as...
etching, woodcut, mezzotint and collagraph, and incorporating some ‘found’ elements – two small photographs and a mortgage bond (3).

Bloodspoor had been shown previously in Dixie's third solo exhibition, FrontTears, which premiered at the Ibis Art Centre in Nieu Bethesda in December 1997 and was remounted in the Thompson Gallery in Johannesburg in 1998. Acquired in complete form by the Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2 versions of its print components would also enter the MTN Collection. Bloodspoor appears, however, to have received little or no public exposure since 1998 – and it was only through its inclusion in the retrospective exhibition that one was able to discern its formative importance within Dixie's overall output. As Corporeal Prospects made evident, Bloodspoor initiated some later large-scale works such as Unravel (2001) (13) and Albany Gold I & II (2002), and was the artist's first sustained engagement with a politics of landscape.

Brenda Atkinson wrote a review of the FrontTears exhibition in 1997, where Bloodspoor was considered along with Dixie's Thresholds, a series comprised of eleven etchings which were also included in the show – and the latter would subsequently be examined in depth in a study of self-representations by women artists (see Schmahmann 2004). FrontTears is mentioned in an insightful short essay by David Bunn (2007) included in the catalogue accompanying Corporeal Prospects, but only prints from Thresholds are identified specifically, and more focus is given to a 1998 installation No Angels and works from Dixie's later Track and Hide exhibitions. Despite the fact that Bloodspoor was the work that initiated Dixie's focus on issues around landscape and colonialism, no detailed examination of its various components has hitherto been undertaken – a gap that we address in this article.

In the caption accompanying the installation at her retrospective show, Dixie noted how Bloodspoor has an autobiographical underpinning: 'Through this work I explore my family's history in the Eastern Cape landscape.' A Dixie family, who arrived aboard the Aurora, was amongst a settler party consisting of sixty-six families from the same parish. After disembarking in Algoa Bay, this group founded the small community of Salem (Nash 1987:114–118). But Dixie's ancestors – like so many other 1820 settlers – would find themselves ill equipped to cope with the demands of establishing and maintaining a farm in a remote area in South Africa with an unpredictable climate, harsh and intractable soil, and no developed infrastructure. Relocating to Grahamstown, some twenty kilometres away and the city where Christine Dixie currently lives and works, they opened a haberdashery store in Bathurst Street. 3

While stemming from fragments of Dixie's familial history, Bloodspoor also engages more broadly with histories of colonialist settlement and how they shaped the Eastern Cape landscape. As Dixie explained: 'I was thinking about my place within that history.
and of how my 1820-settler ancestors were to some extent responsible for the violence that took place in the region. Intended to show how ‘frontier policy leaves its traces on the land’, Bloodspoor also focuses on the ways in which such indexes mark a history of conflict, trauma and violence. Simultaneously, however, Dixie explores how the idea of the desirable landscape – one which manifested itself in picturesque paintings – was intricately bound up with colonial attitudes towards, and the management of, Eastern Cape geographies. As Brenda Atkinson (1997) commented in a review of FrontTears, Dixie ‘engages the politics of vision and desire as it played out in “picturesque” representations of the Eastern Cape – a region fraught with and scarred by frontier wars of ingenious brutality’. Observing this focus in Dixie’s works in his address at the opening of FrontTears at the Ibis Art Centre, David Bunn identified ‘the South African picturesque’ as of central importance to settler communities:

For the white communities of the Eastern Cape, the idea of ‘landscape’ was a key way in which the settler self accommodated itself to foreign terrain. Like its British counterpart, the South African picturesque found a way of managing contradictions inherent in violent land practices: peasant labour, prior occupation, and traumatic land clearances are all effaced by an image of distant vistas that open up accommodatingly to the enlightened landowner.

If the South African picturesque has ‘found a way of managing contradictions inherent in violent land practices’, it might be argued that a concerted subversion of its conventions could serve as a mechanism for exposing the slippages and anomalies that those tropes sought to negotiate. Through a brief discussion of some ways in which concepts of the picturesque played out in representations of the Eastern Cape landscape followed by analysis of the installation’s various components, we argue that Dixie’s Bloodspoor operates at precisely that level of refusal and transgression. Invoking reference to, but undermining the efficacy of picturesque conventions, Bloodspoor also explores the psyche of settler forebears who – for all their attempts to manage their new abode – could never quite adapt it into ‘home’. Their traces on the landscape, the work suggests, mark not only the violence that ensued from their endeavours to assert their ownership of it but also their own sense of loss.

The picturesque and the Eastern Cape

There is no straightforward answer to the apparently simple question: what is ‘the picturesque’? As Malcolm Andrews (1989: vii) observed: ‘When we describe something as “picturesque” we usually have very little sense of how that adjective differs from “beautiful”, “pretty” or “quaint”’. Indeed, as Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (1994:1–2), have stated, the picturesque is ‘a notoriously difficult category to define’. But while it has many semantic mutations, the concept can be traced to its origins in the intellectual, artistic, philosophical and psychological climate of Europe in the late 1700s and early 1800s – the age of Romanticism. It also appears that the picturesque was as much a determining force in this climate as were Edmund Burke’s foundational concepts of the sublime and the beautiful. Perhaps even from its inception, it was understood that the notion of the picturesque occupies two levels of discourse: that of aesthetic philosophical enquiry as applied to nature and to art, and that of the pedestrian (male) bystander in search of such sights in the wilds as would conform to his sense of what a picture of nature should in fact be. Indeed, by tracing the etymology of the word it is found that ‘picturesque’ is derived from the Italian pittoresco, or ‘from a picture’ – in Clarke’s words, ‘a term which, when first applied to the forms of nature, denoted an object or view as worthy of being included in a picture’ (2001:186–187).

Simon Schama (1995:6–7) comments that ‘although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is a work of the mind’. Being in the first instance ‘a work of the mind’, the art of landscape is in fact a mode of making that is informed by not only what its makers perceive as appropriate but also the various ideological assumptions that might underpin those ideas of appositeness. As numerous studies have revealed, the art of landscape painting has often served as a mechanism for negotiating social forces which impact on access to land or the ownership thereof, such as those of
industrialisation or colonialism, for asserting the legitimacy of tenure at historical moments when it may be open to question, or indeed for constructing messages about identity (whether on the basis of class, nationhood or gender) in circumstances when such markers may have particular resonance. Hardly surprisingly, various writers have examined the ideological underpinnings of the picturesque specifically, exploring the ways in which its characteristic tropes might be bound up with social imperatives and orientations in the contexts where they are deployed (see Andrews 1989; and Bermbingham 1986 for two such examples).

Work in this vein has included studies of picturesque representations of the Eastern Cape landscape, such as paintings and sketches by Thomas Baines who spent the years 1848 to 1852 in the region, and acted as official British artist during the Eighth Frontier War. As Jane Carruthers and Marion Arnold indicate, Baines simply accepted that ‘the British and colonial forces were right and the Xhosa were wrong’ (Carruthers and Arnold 1995:35), and here, as in his other works, he ‘looked on the landscape with nineteenth-century imperialist eyes, directing his gaze at spacious terrain which he considered available for British occupation and exploitation’ (Carruthers and Arnold 1995:92). Often deploying the term ‘picturesque’ to describe his own responses to the landscape, an entry from his diary on 2 December 1851 reveals the extent to which a focus on pleasurable views became a method of constructing this war as a manifestation of ‘nature’ and thus deflected focus away from its political and imperialist implications:

Starting at 5 a.m. we skirted the base of the south-eastern range; the rising sun tinting its rugged peaks and glancing through its ports upon our long line of men and vehicles, imparting, even to the dust along the line of march, a golden radiance, and investing the scene, already picturesque, with a thousand charms that vanished as the day advanced. (Quoted in Carruthers and Arnold 1995:94)

Here, one might argue, is an extreme example of the use of the picturesque to manage a landscape characterised by violent confrontation. Through displacement, the dust of vehicles and marching men takes on a charming golden radiance, and the trail of the advancing army seems like it might simply be a gently curved pathway leading the eye into distant vistas.

Even more focused on the ideological implications of the picturesque than the book by Carruthers and Arnold is a catalogue essay by Elizabeth Delmont and Jessica Dubow that accompanied an exhibition of representations of landscape in South Africa, curated by Clive van den Berg. The two writers explore the ways in which picturesque traditions deployed by various artists – amongst them Baines and Thomas Bowler – were bound up with the assertion of ownership over an alien space. The empty landscape, for example, presents 

... the colony as tabula rasa, a virgin space waiting and willing to admit fantasies of domination. As such the empty landscape is a tactic of power, a kind of visual ideology. It is empty precisely because to extract indigenous communities out of history, out of economy, to deprive them of agency, is to absent them from representation. (Delmont and Dubow 1995:12)

Indeed, the imperialist artist who empties the land of all signs of indigenous inhabitants conveys that idea that, apart from the geography being available for possession, he is the first to have discovered it.

In another study of the South African context published a year before the Carruthers and Arnold book, as well as the Delmont and Dubow essay, David Bunn focused on a literary picturesque as evident in the poetry of Thomas Pringle, a British colonialist present in the Eastern Cape during the early 1800s. Bunn observed how inherited representational conventions acquired particular complexity in the poetry Pringle wrote about the Albany frontier because, unlike ‘the consciousness typically manifested in British landscape poetry and painting, for which landscape is an effect of the present that may also call up memories of the past, the colonial subject must negotiate between two worlds: the recently lost metropolitan home, and the uncoded Otherness of the present’ (Bunn 1994:138). As he also observed, the African landscape was, to the colonial subject, ‘a liminal zone between the self and savagery, and rendering things visible [was] a necessary prerequisite to administrative control’ (Bunn 1994:128).

These are just three of the studies which Dixie examined and which created a theoretical
framework for the development of a work which engages with colonial perspectives and, more especially, the implications of constructs and tropes associated with the deployment of the picturesque in representations of the Eastern Cape. Alert to writings which focused on the ways in which nineteenth-century representations of landscape were bound up with imperialist agendas, Dixie would also explore how the Eastern Cape was, to the colonialist settler, a liminal space between a lost past and an alien present. Further, she would reveal how, to a colonialist imagination, the geography of the region constituted a terrible ‘otherness’ which, for the settler who was not mindful, might facilitate regression from civilisation, yet paradoxically also suggested the possibility of superseding the limits of a class identity and thus facilitating potential access to a life of prosperity not possible at ‘home’.

There was, however, one further historical form of landscape representation that had a bearing on Bloodspoor. Some reminiscences of the picturesque can be found in the works of the Grahamstown Group of painters, most especially those of its founder, Brian Bradshaw, who was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Fine Art at Rhodes University in 1960. Esmé Berman (1983:73) observes that Bradshaw had ‘consolidated a forceful style during a long phase of solitary work in Wales’ but then, ‘suddenly he was in Africa, engulfed in sunlight, surrounded by opulent, vibrating colour’. His first exhibition in Johannesburg, she suggests, ‘reflected the disconcerting impact of the change’: in contrast to his earlier works, the new works were ‘startling, almost vulgar canvasses’ which ‘revealed the conflicts of transitional adjustment to the local environment’. Bradshaw’s approach presumably involved a negotiation of his new milieu that was – no less than for Thomas Pringle – embroiled in the drawing of ideological boundaries between a lost British home and a new, somewhat alien, African abode. It was an orientation that would underpin his future works as well as his Manifesto of the Grahamstown Group, finalised on 15 May 1964 (see Clark 1976) – a document which seemed to confl ate precepts of the picturesque with a primitivism associated with early twentieth-century modernism. Bradshaw’s position was to remain that of the white settler in South Africa. Detached from repressive land policies.
instituted via the 1913 Native Land Act and indeed the 1950 Group Areas Act which had already resulted in the forced removal of black populations from a number of urban areas, he – and the colleagues he influenced – made works in which the Eastern Cape landscape seems to be conceptualised simply as elemental nature amenable to shaping by a visionary modernist.

Well aware of this legacy, Christine Dixie framed Bloodspoor in such a way that it offered an alternative perspective on the Eastern Cape landscape:

I knew that the Rhodes art school had a long tradition of painting these un-peopled exotic landscapes. I think there was a part of me that was challenging that aesthetic – these male painters who did these big landscape paintings that everyone thought were so amazing. I wanted to do these small subversive etchings to counteract that.  

Christine Dixie's Bloodspoor (1997)

The gaze, the controlling and possessive look which the colonial subject directed at a foreign clime, is constituted as a central trope in Bloodspoor. Dixie's relatives, who settled in the Eastern Cape in the 1820s, are implied to be focusing their gaze on the nine prints which face them (1, 2, 3). Placed above well-worn empty chairs which confirm their absence but simultaneously serve as haunting reminders of their prior presence, these strange spectres establish an unsettling dialogue with images which mirror the effects of their vision. As Dixie explains it, this placement worked to convey a sense of 'the absent presence of those ancestors who could be sitting in those chairs looking at these nine prints and reflecting on the history that they had in a sense created'.

Lost Surveillance (4), a mezzotint placed centrally in the block of images, was the first of the prints that Dixie produced after completing her Thresholds series. Staging 'a dark narrative of compulsion and forbidden desire' in a Nieu Bethesda homestead, Thresholds was a reworking of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex which also invoked reference to the Oedipus complex in Freudian theory (Schmahmann 2004:89).

But Lost Surveillance marked the start of an interest in the ways in which surveillance and prohibition are associated with 'a political rather than a psychological state'. Oedipus' blinding, alluded to in Thresholds, is taken up but reconceptualised in Lost Surveillance: loss of sight becomes in fact the 'loss of a particular way of life, or a particular way of looking at the world' rather than operating in terms of the Oedipal narrative.

The print represents the torso and arms of a male who, wearing a deep red garment that is suggestive of blood, holds out his hands which are imprinted with eyes in the manner of stigmata. Invoking reference to a black Christ, the figure is a martyr for the sins of others – more especially those of the settler couple whose dispassionate gaze has quite literally transmuted into wounds which are offered back to them as testament to his sacrifice. Dixie's ancestors, appearing in the two photographs immediately opposite the print, find themselves obliged to confront a gaze that is at once a mirror of their own vision and a holy reminder of their culpability.

The violence of this political history is made explicit in No… (5). Dixie had heard that ears were collected as trophies during the border wars, and in this mezzotint she sought to convey the idea of them as 'specimens that are being examined and categorised'. The print marks the introduction to Bloodspoor of a further association within the overarching trope of the gaze: if re-managing the land through the deployment of picturesque principles is a metaphor for dispossession enacted through colonial occupation, asserting ownership also depended on a scientific scrutiny that subjected the troublesome uncertainties of foreign terrain to systematic categorisation. The title of the work, while alluding to the abbreviation for the word 'number', is also the marker of a refusal – 'no' – of the terms of that management, one that is as defiant as the hands imprinted with stigmata/eyes in Lost Surveillance.

The reference to the act of collecting initiated in No… is developed further in Home (6) where Dixie explores how the violence of scientific collections found its domestic parallel in the family album. As in her Thresholds, where Dixie made five of the etchings by pressing a part of the body into the soft ground on the matrix, Home has some indexical components. The work represents a page of a photographic album and it includes two actual photographs, eight old-fashioned mounts which hold them in place, as well as a cord that would be used to bind together pages of an album.
Photographs, which are recognised as indexical traces, are here ghostly but nevertheless fully palpable evidence of the colonial presence of the artist’s family in the Eastern Cape. Dixie’s paternal great grandmother and her two sons (her grandfather and great uncle) are presented in the left-hand image, labelled ‘Cradock’, in accordance with the conventions of Edwardian photography. The professional photographer, who was doubtless its author, has positioned mother and sailor-suited sons in a carefully balanced composition which suggests not simply the stability of their family unit but also, like a Renaissance painting of the Holy
Family, that its member are icons of virtue and domestic serenity. Counterpoised to this is a photograph labelled ‘Graaff-Reinet’ which shows Dixie’s grandfather as a boy. Posed in the manner of a sentry and holding a toy rifle he is positioned in front of a series of potted plants – as if he were somehow assuming to guard this site of nature domesticated.

In a study of her own family photographs, Annette Kuhn observed how the memories prompted through such images ‘make it possible to explore connections between “public” historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and “personal” memory’ (Kuhn 1995:4). These observations are pertinent to the process of exploring memory that Dixie undertook in the production of this work. Through her inclusion of the left-hand photograph, Dixie makes clear how a new elevated class status shaped the world of her grandfather. The desk, the curtain and the exquisitely fashioned garments of the two youngsters mark the family as prosperous, indeed *haute bourgeois*, and somewhat removed from the hardships experienced by their tradesmen forebears who appear in the framed photographs opposite the block of prints. Equally, its signifiers of Edwardian sartorial styles and domestic accoutrements reveal that the self-conception of this family was as Britons displaced into an Eastern Cape landscape and, even more fancifully, as gentry introducing civilisation to a recalcitrant and savage terrain. Finally, in keeping with many of Dixie’s other works (See Schmahmann 2004, 2007a and 2007b), signifiers of gender identities are highlighted: the poses and dress of the boys along with the toy rifle wielded by Dixie’s grandfather in the right-hand photograph, allude to a process of acculturation into a masculinity that is aggressive and exteriorised – the counterpoint to a domestic space naturalised as feminine.

In *Watchtower, Fort Frazer* (7), *Stone wall, Compassberg* (8) and *Grave, Nieu Bethesda* (9), Dixie turns her attention to a landscape that bears traces of the violence of settler occupation. The fort is a rendition of a structure in the landscape between Grahamstown and Fort Beaufort, while Compassberg is the highest mountain visible from Nieu Bethesda. The nineteenth-century gravestone in Nieu Bethesda, while marking the final resting place of an individual unconnected to the artist, is implied nevertheless to be that of a witness to – or participant in – the warfare on the frontier during her ancestors’ lives. If *Home* makes the objects it represents quite literally palpable, so too do these three etchings which each have collaged elements within them, by applying household...
wall and crack filler to the matrix, Dixie created textures and surfaces which invoke the tactility of stone in an immediate and tangible form. Most crucially, all three prints draw reference to barriers and fortifications, as Dixie explains:

The fort and the wall were about creating boundaries and elements in the landscape that were delineating space or defending space, and the grave was almost an outcome of those elements in the landscape. One could think of the fort itself as a tomb: soldiers must have died there and the space is tomb-like in the sense that it had only little windows to look out of – slits for guns.18
Against the picturesque: Christine Dixie's Bloodspoor (1997)

Such boundaries and divisions were connected to acts of not simply surveying but also surveillance. Adopting a Foucaultian interpretation, Bunn notes that 'a new topographical need' emerged in the Eastern Cape for 'chains of forts and signalling posts ... barricaded churches, panoptic prisons, the grid-like quartering of the ground in military maps'. Dixie invokes this idea explicitly through the inclusion of the word ‘watchtower’ in Watchtower, Fort Frazer (7). The low angle used in the work and the two slit-like windows (one of which is blockaded) increase a sense of the structure as an ominous mechanism for asserting control over potentially subversive populations by rendering all activities in its surroundings visible. As Dixie puts it: ‘It is almost as if these windows in a way become slightly eye-like, as if they are looking down on one – and they would in fact have been used to look down on people.’ Echoing the motif of eyes-as-stigmata in Lost Surveillance (4), they in a sense displace the wounding vision of the settler couple opposite them onto the architecture they have created.

This sense of the landscape providing obstacles and divisions is especially clear in Stone wall, Compassberg (8), where Dixie brings to the foreground of the picture and the viewer’s attention just such a barrier. Crucial here is not only the work's allusion to structures of surveillance, but also (and simultaneously) its disturbance of traditions associated with the picturesque. If the picturesque might 'help to locate the colonial self in a new context', such a strategy is fully dependent on 'the metaphor of the unimpeded excursion of the eye' (Bunn 1994:140). Here, however, a fence pressed up against a stone wall, with a distant receding hillside and a brooding sky beyond it, is a categorical refusal of such panoramic vision. Stone – represented in physically palpable form – suggests a deliberate blocking of sight. The (colonial) self, unable to locate itself in this landscape, might recognise that beyond the wall are two hills which rise and fall, but the eye is impeded and the way is barred.

Another critical response to a picturesque mode of representation can be found in Request, Nieu Bethesda (10). Based on a photograph taken by the artist, it represents a
wall and window of an abandoned farmhouse on the outskirts of Nieu Bethesda. Looking out at a landscape from a homestead enables the terrain to be ‘picturesquely appreciated from a bounded place, a place of one’s own’, and it thus speaks of ‘space possessed and a view possessable’ (Delmont and Dubow 1995:14). In Dixie’s print, however, messages about spatial ownership implicit in such a pictorial construction are in fact actively undermined. Tacked onto the surface of the print, and thus as tangible as the actual photographs included in Home, is an etched rendition of an engraving implied to be pinned on the represented wall. Depicting, Dixie notes, an engraving of ‘an idyllic British landscape’ that shows a “farm with cows in the foreground and a mansion in its background”, this image invokes reference to the aspirations of 1820 settlers to achieve aristocratic comforts through the establishment of country manors when they settled in the Eastern Cape. These dreams, like those of her own 1820-settler ancestors who abandoned farming in Salem and retreated to Grahamstown where they assumed the role of haberdashers, were shattered by the ‘much harder and harsher landscape’ that turned out to be their reality.

In a second-hand bookstore in Grahamstown Dixie found an engraving of an Eastern Cape landscape that had been reproduced in the Illustrated London News in the nineteenth century. First published in 1842, the Illustrated London News was, Dixie observes, ‘the newspaper of the day in England’ which offered report-backs from the colonies that were underpinned by a colonialist bias. The background of The Great Kei – the image that would have been sent home to Britain from the frontier – shows a gently curving river, lined with just a hint of indigenous bush, in a tranquil valley. Depicting neither forts nor warring amaXhosa, it instead includes two tranquil ‘natives’ who, rather than actively occupying the landscape, are simply passive manifestations of it.

The newspaper’s imaging of the colonies tallied with its bias toward a picturesque mode of landscape representation in its art reviews. In a review of a Royal Academy Exhibition in 1843, for example, the author praises a certain ‘Mr. Roberts’ (presumably the Scottish painter, David Roberts), describing him as ‘the greatest painter of his time’ due to his painted ‘ruins – the falling columnn, the broken temple, the marble shining in decay’ – in contrast to Turner’s contribution to the exhibition which is described as follows: ‘It is pitiable to see art so deformed into madness’ (Quoted in De Vries 1967:22). Each of the elements in Roberts’ painting seems just another ingredient in a recipe for achieving the picturesque: ‘Medieval ruins, country cottages, partly kept woodland – all motifs found in profusion in the English
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countryside – were typical picturesque subjects’ (Clarke 2001:187). Dixie invokes precisely such a picturesque bias here – albeit with the modifications it assumed to domesticate an exotic terrain.

Imitating the engraved landscape in terms of etching, Dixie placed in front of it a figure posed by her father (himself of settler stock) who – in an approximation of the colonial subject, the beholder through whom the picturesque is created – holds a pair of binoculars to his eyes, surveying the prospect. In an inversion of a Romantic painting where the figure confronts a sublime and overwhelming landscape, the male figure – wielding his phallic instrument – is the prospector who sees feminised vistas that are amenable to his potential acquisition and management. Reinforcing Bloodspoor’s focus on the colonial gaze, the binoculars are also a parallel to the windows in Watchtower, Fort Frazer (7) in the sense that they facilitate voyeuristic pleasures: as Dixie puts it, they enable the prospector to ‘hone in on a landscape and to almost secretly look at people’.25 Also suggestive of strategies for ordering visual information by adopting a selective focus, they resonate against No… where the potential violence of such scientific inquiry is made explicit.

There is a print in Bloodspoor which reveals the extent to which Dixie’s engagement with settler histories involves a self-critical reflection of her own family’s culpability for the dispossession and violence that followed the arrival of settlers in the Eastern Cape in the 1820s. Dixie re-used the bottom right-hand corner of the London Illustrated News landscape source that had featured in The Great Kei River, and Moni’s Kop, from the North in a print entitled Mortgage Bond (12). Working this time in woodcut, she printed this image on an original mortgage bond certificate that had been used by the Dixie family to procure land in Bedford in the Eastern Cape in 1885 – a farm that continues in fact to be owned by relatives. Dixie had found this mortgage bond in a box of memorabilia and family records in the possession of her father, and – having obtained his permission to do so – used the original in the work.26 The choice of a section of the London Illustrated News image which included the two indigenous inhabitants as marginal figures, was deliberate. Dixie has in effect printed the image of people who had prior access to the land, but who were rendered invisible during the transaction between the Dixie clan and the Registrar of Deeds in the Cape of Good Hope, on the very document that served to blot them out. And by ‘defacing’ a rare historical document by printing over it, she not only refers to – but actually indexes – an act of violation.27

Conclusion

Art that engages with and subverts such past historical conventions of representation as the picturesque has the potential to do far more than challenge the standing of an aesthetic category. As Christine Dixie’s Bloodspoor makes evident, it has the potential to question and defy the ideological assumptions which underpin such an aesthetic and to reveal the ways these have been embroiled in historical inequities.

But while it engages with nineteenth-century history as well as an historical aesthetic category and its ideological underpinnings, Bloodspoor is also bound up with its own historical moment. Completed one year after South Africa adopted a new constitution aimed at ensuring human rights denied during colonialism and apartheid, the installation is underpinned by a consciousness of the need for land reform that formed part of that legislation. While the constitution aimed only to ensure the restitution of property that had been acquired through racially discriminatory laws and practices subsequent to the implementation of the Native Land Act in 1913, Bloodspoor engages with practices of dispossession from some ninety years earlier and offers – in effect – a metaphorical restitution of the Eastern Cape to the groups who had occupied it prior to the arrival of the 1820s settlers. Bloodspoor is also intricately bound up with the import of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings which were being televised while it was made. If the hearings provided a framework for suppressed information to be revealed to the South African public, they also placed emphasis on individual experiences and stories. In a context where there was an impetus to reflect on a troubled history through personal narratives, there emerged recognition that an individual autobiography – indeed an archaeology of familial records and histories – is resonant with political import.

Dixie would shape some of the ideas explored in Bloodspoor into new form in
subsequent works. One of these would be *Unravel* (13) from 2001, where the same extract from the engraving in the *London Illustrated News* would be included – this time in a linocut rather than etched form. But instead of her father, as in *The Great Kei River, and Moni’s Kop, from the North*, Dixie herself appears as the figure looking out on the landscape. And instead of holding binoculars which set up the landscape as a target for speculative scrutiny, she holds up a ball of string which, in its reiteration of the undulations of the vista, effects a more intimate connection between the figure and the Eastern

Cape terrain. ‘I am Ariadne, unravelling the landscape’ she observes. Such unravelling was surely also at play in Bloodspoor – the difference being only that Dixie would, in her 2001 print, make pellucid that intent.

Notes
1 The photographs, which are in their original frames, were passed down the line to each eldest son in the Dixie family. Christine Dixie acquired them only because she is the eldest of two daughters and has no brothers. Dixie (interview 12 December 2007) comments that the couple arrived in South Africa when they were still young, probably in their twenties. She suspects that her female relative (Emily?) did not lose her teeth in old age but had them removed in England. This was evidently a commonly deployed prophylactic practice amongst those who feared suffering toothache in foreign lands where they might find themselves unable to secure remedies or assistance.
2 Dixie included the actual portraits with their original frames in her retrospective exhibition. The version in the Johannesburg Art Gallery includes copies of these photographs in old frames that she purchased for them, along with the original chairs she acquired for the piece. She purchased an additional pair of chairs for her retrospective exhibition.
3 Interview with the artist conducted on 12 December 2007.
4 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
5 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
7 Delmont and Dubow make this point in relation to Baines’ View of Durban from Currie’s Residence (1873) in the Local History Museum, Durban.
8 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
9 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
10 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
11 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
12 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
13 Dixie has noted: ‘In my fourth year of study I did a mini-thesis on the representation of the black Christ. How much is conscious? How much unconscious? I think maybe those images played a role in the skin tone of the figure.’ (Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.)
14 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
15 Interview with the artist conducted on 12 December 2007.
16 Dixie indicates that she has not found out where her two ancestors in the photographs are buried (interview conducted on 12 December 2007).
17 Collagraph is a technique in which the matrix is prepared in relief through the securing of various objects or substances to its surface prior to printing. The block is then printed, with or without the inking of this surface.
18 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
20 Delmont and Dubow make this point in relation to Baines’ View of Durban from Currie’s Residence (1873) in the Local History Museum, Durban.
21 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
22 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
23 Interview with the artist conducted on 14 August 2007.
24 The author of this particular article is unknown. This passage was found amongst the collected articles selected and reproduced in De Vries.
25 Interview with the artist conducted on 12 December 2007.
26 Interview with the artist conducted on 12 December 2007.
27 The version discussed here is in the MTN Collection. For the version in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Dixie used another original component of the bond which had writing on only one side. She scanned in writing on its other side to enable it to imitate the first version (interview with Christine Dixie, 12 December 2007).
28 Interview with the artist conducted on 12 December 2007.

References