

# South African photographer presents 'Drowning World' exhibition at Tiwani Contemporary

Gideon Mendel's exhibition is part of a long-term project documenting flooding in various parts of the globe including the UK, India, Haiti and Nigeria. The exhibition runs in London from 7 June – 27 July

by STAFF REPORTER

Tiwani Contemporary presents 'Drowning World', an exhibition by South African photographer Gideon Mendel, from Friday 7 June to Saturday 27 July 2013.

DROWNING World is part of a long-term project documenting flooding in various parts of the globe including England, India, Haiti and Nigeria. This exhibition, the first in a UK gallery for the artist, features unseen photographs from the Drowning World series, with a focus on Nigeria.

The artist portrays climate change through portraits of flood survivors in the remains of their homes, emphasising the collective experience of environmental disaster, erasing geographical and cultural divides. The photographs suggest the aesthetics of portraiture; yet push the boundaries by staging in unlikely environments.

The selection includes 15 images taken in Nigeria that have never been exhibited, and five photographs documenting flooding in various parts of the globe including England, India, Haiti and Australia.

The exhibition also presents a two-part video of people living amidst floodwaters in Bangkok, as well as video portraits of Nigerian inhabitants returning to their flooded homes. Drowning



Two powerful images from an exhibition that is meditative, stark and timeless in an era of global warming

World is a poignant depiction of climate change through portraits of flood survivors taken in deep floodwaters, within the remains of their homes, or in submerged landscapes, in the stillness of once lively environments.

Keeping their composure, the subjects pause in front of Mendel's camera, casting an unsettling, yet engaging gaze. These images, taken across the globe demonstrate a shared experience that erases geographical and cultural divides.

They invite the viewer to reflect on the impact on nature by

humankind, and attachment to our homes and personal belongings.

Beyond the documentary aspect of this project, Mendel subtly treads on the aesthetics of portraiture, yet pushes the boundaries by staging the photographs in unlikely environments. Each portrait isolates individuals, couples or small groups that would otherwise be represented by statistics. The portraits also reveal personality and status through clothes, style and even elegance.

As well as representing destruction, water also contributes

to the creative process. Washed out pigments create new painterly patterns, damaged films produce soft tones and mysterious haze, while architecture and landscape are reflected in The Sparkling Natural mirror. The selection compiled for this exhibition highlights the confusion of senses between the sight of landscapes of desolation and the attractiveness of colours and compositions. It seeks to examine the tension between drama and picturesque, and the fine line between documentary and artistic imagery.

## About the artist

Gideon Mendel was born in Johannesburg in 1959 and studied psychology and African history at the University of Cape Town.

Following his studies he became a freelance photographer, documenting change and conflict in South Africa in the lead-up to Nelson Mandela's release from prison.

In 1990 he moved to London. He first began documenting the impact of Aids in Africa in 1993, and in the past 20 years his work on this issue has been widely recognised.

## About the curator

Christine Eyene is an art historian, critic and curator. Born in Paris in 1970, she studied History of Contemporary Art at Université de Paris. She has been researching modern and contemporary South African art since the late 1990s, specialising in the story of artists in exile during apartheid and their cultural interactions with the Black Diaspora in France and England. She is currently Guild Research Fellow – Contemporary Art, at the University of Central Lancashire.

**Tiwani Contemporary Art Connect event:** In conversation with Gideon Mendel, 27 June 2013 from 6.30 to 8:30pm. Rsvp to [info@tiwani.co.uk](mailto:info@tiwani.co.uk)



## Brandpunt

CONRAD BRAND

## Dankfees 2013, die Suid-Afrikaanse Fees van feeste!

LAAS naweek was natuurlik weer Dankfees en die sonnetjie het sy kop uitgesteek om die duisende Suid-Afrikaners welkom te heet by die Hop Farm in Kent.

Ons het darem self douvoordag ons koeke en baksels in die motor gelaai en soos meeste, hul bydraes afgelewer voor die massas opdaag. Dit het ons ook die geleentheid gegee om 'n lekker sitplek te kry terwyl daar nog plek was.

Ek het bietjie kopgekramp, maar sommer gou besluit om nie vër van die pannekoek en vetkoek stalletjies plek in te neem nie, ag is wel geneem van die luidsprekers wat nie te vër van ons gestaan het nie, maar nou ja, ten minste sou ons heeldag weet wat, waar

aangaan.

Die Dankfees is natuurlik nie net 'n plek waar jy al die lekkernye van ons land kan koop en nuttig nie, maar ook die perfekte plek om ou kennis te ontmoet en selfs nuwe vriende te maak.

So het ek 'n paar jaar gelede 'n ou vriend raakgehoop wat saam met my sy klerkskap voltooi het. Groot was my skok dat hy toe wel vrou gevat het en toe noggal 'n oulike enetjie daarby. Vandag is hulle nou al paar jaar getroud met 'n pragtige kleinding aan hulle sy en ons sien vreeslik uit na hul kuiertjies in Engeland. (Nee, nie net omdat hy my Klippies "pusher" is nie).

Was dit nie vir die Dankfees nie, sou ek my ou maat seker nooit weer gesien het nie, nie te min, om saam met hulle te deel in hul vreugde as nuwe ouers. Dié jaar het ek aangespreek om 'n dametjie en haar gesin, van my kant van die wêreld daar te ontmoet. Ja ek praat van die Weskus, daar waar ons lekker vinnig en aanhoudend praat, jy moet net mooi luister.

So vertel sy my met smaak hoe sy amper by hul kar uitgeval het oor die mannetjie wat haar sò mooi in Afrikaans gegroet het by

die hek. Dit was glo haar eerste Afrikaanse vreemdeling in die ses maande wat hul saam met ons die reën op dié eiland trotseer. Nog groter was haar skok toe meer as duisend Suid-Afrikaners hulle binne die terrein inwag.

Almal gelukkig en vreedsaam (sommiges letterlik), die plek het gemaak en gedrom van ons Volk.

Ons het gesit en gesels en sommer lekker gelag oor ons skooldae en al die dingetjies van ons wêreld en gou is ou vriende aan nuwes voorgestel, en so gaan ons aan.

Ons kon nie die vertoning van Arno Jornaan, Lianie May en Jak de Priester bewoon nie, maar my gedagtes sal gevul bly tot volgende jaar. Gevul met die manne wat so ernstig met hul kortbroeke om hul potjies sit, die gekraak van die tou toe beide spanne sak vir die finale trek en die amper tasbare geur van braaivleis wat die geluide van 'n onvergeetlike Fees, afrond. My gunsteling egter, buiten vir die rustige gekuier saam met my vriende, is die smaak van daai pannekoekie wat ek vir die dag van more gehou het...

Maak seker jy mis nie volgende jaar uit nie!

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