



Specialised
Security Services



MIKE BOLHUIS:
THE FLAMINGO PROJECT
PART 16

EXHIBITION : HELENA HUGO



Helena Hugo Legacy

The William Humphreys Art Gallery cordially invites you to the upcoming Exhibition of Helena Hugo titled: Legacy

Opening: 30 January 2020
Time: 18:30
The exhibition will be up until 13 March 2020

A Walkabout will be presented by the artist
30 January 2020 from 15:00 - 16:00

 Find us on facebook.

• RSVP sepadi@whag.co.za or call 053 8311724 • A security guard will be on duty

William Humphreys Art Gallery

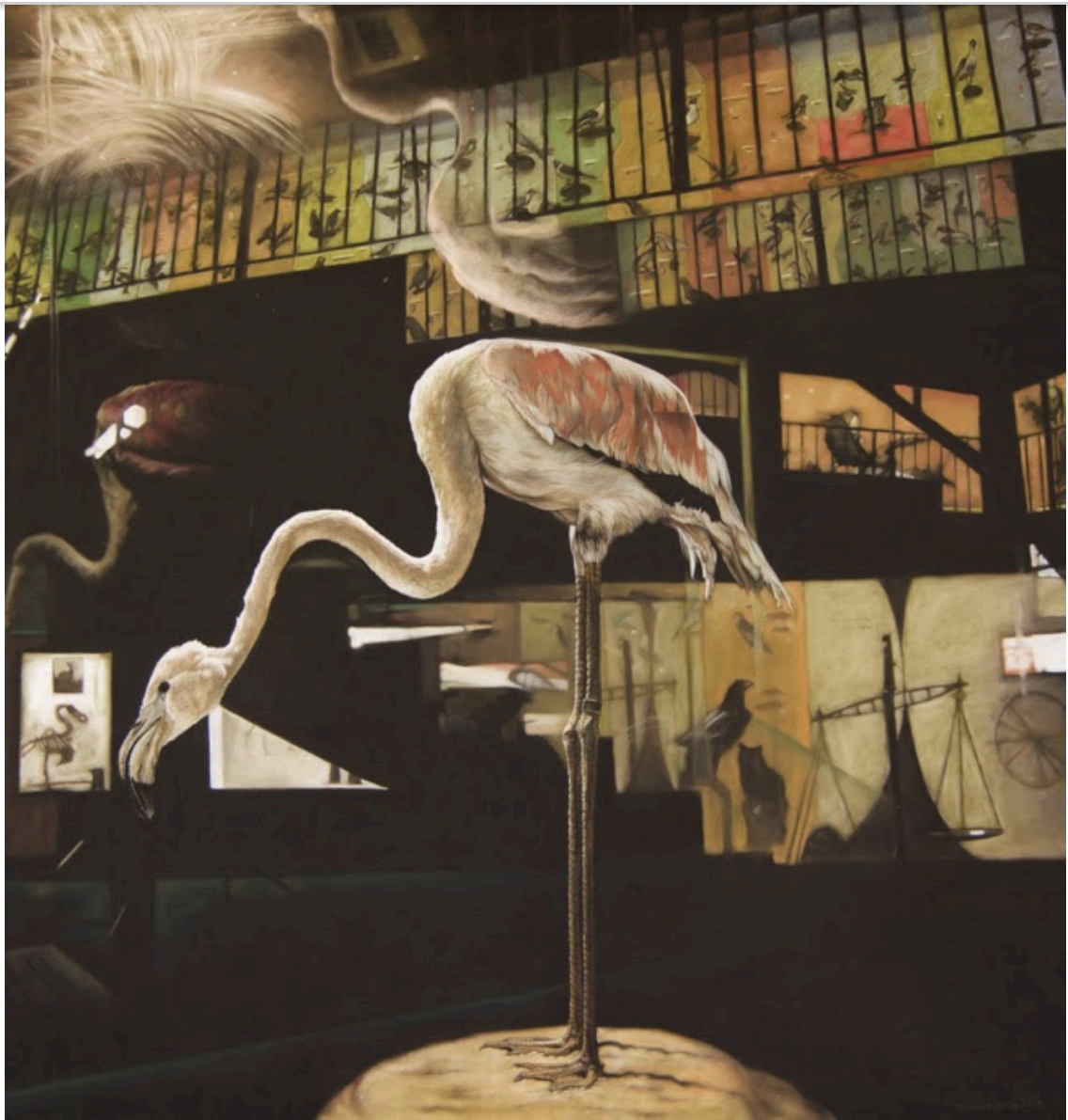
an agency of the Department of Arts and Culture



WILLIAM HUMPHREYS ART GALLERY

LEGACY ART EXHIBITION

30 JANUARY 2020 at 18:30





LEGACY

Legacy explores the unease we as humans experience with the idea of the loss of “self” which can be equated to the fear of death and how it sometimes manifests in destructive behaviour towards other humans, animals, and nature.

It is often revealed in our need to dominate, change and rule over or separate ourselves from other humans and nature or to possess money, things, land or property, knowledge, prestige, and even other humans.

It also becomes apparent in our need to be remembered or to leave a legacy.

The idea for this body of work began with a 3 months artist's residency sponsored by SAFFCA on Entabeni Farm in Knysna at the end of 2018.

In Knysna, Helena was surrounded by the beauty and resilience of nature recovering from the 2017 Knysna fires, yet it was also there, in her direct environment, where she was constantly confronted with habitat destruction and the working of humans against nature.

Furthermore, on the 24th of October, the Outeniqua mountain fires broke out and destroyed over 68 000 hectares of vegetation in 10 days, 4 times the area of the 2017 Knysna fires.

Helena is known for her highly detailed, expressions of people, especially South African and migrant hand labourers, people who are often overlooked, but who play an important role in our economy and society. In Knysna, she made a definite shift from focusing exclusively on people to a more nature-related focus and her work also began to reveal a more conceptual tone.

years Hugo has, through art, exploring the frailty and transient nature of human life. With this exhibition, she begins to explore the even greater precarious fragility of nature.

Soon after her return from Knysna, she was made aware of the flamingo crisis, which started in Kimberley and soon became a national rescue effort to save the baby flamingos of Kamfers dam. She began as a volunteer to help raise the flamingo chicks. Born from her proximity to these near-threatened birds and because of the similarities of the themes and issues explored during her Knysna residency, and that which became apparent from the flamingo rescue effort, she decided to add to her Knysna work, ideas which related to, and were developing from, her time as a volunteer. The relevance of the flamingo situation to her exhibition concept was obvious. The Kamfers dam situation in Kimberley was essentially a problem of habitat scarcity, habitat threats and habitat loss both directly and indirectly caused by humans. Even the severe weather conditions and droughts were indirectly caused by human activity causing global warming and abnormal weather conditions.

She started to gather reference material in the form of photographs, sound recordings and materials used during the rearing process and took impressions of the juvenile flamingo's feet using non-toxic, fast setting "alginate", used in the dental industry and matching and cataloging these with the flamingo's micro-chip numbers.

The result was a conglomeration of work exploring our natural heritage or legacy and that aspect of the ownership of land and nature, which is linked to habitat destruction.

She began to question the word "legacy", a much-used word and one she often heard used during her residency stay.

What do different people consider to be the definition of "a legacy".

Is it material wealth and property or something that will make future generations remember the "I" in me? But in trying to achieve this, what happens to our natural heritage which belongs to future generations as much as to us?

By piling up short term comforts, excesses, and artificial possessions during a single short life span and, yes, perhaps even being able to leave these behind for our own children, how much of nature's precious and irreplaceable natural inheritances are being disregarded, damaged and permanently lost to coming generations in order to satisfy our short term goals?

But, when Helena speaks of these human tendencies she includes herself because to be human is to possess ego and to be trapped in a system for which the only perfect solution would be a total and global paradigm shift in the way we think about our relationship towards nature.

Rescuing the flamingo chicks of Kamfers dam was an enormous effort and many sectors worked together to aim for success. By attracting the Lesser Flamingo to a man-made dam and island in an effort to increase their breeding capacity, we as humans had a special responsibility towards these birds breeding at this specific site. The rescue effort not only saved the life of a number of near-threatened birds but with extensive media attention had the effect of exposing local municipality irregularities, which could not be overlooked or ignored anymore and caused reparations to be made regarding the neglected dam and nearby sewerage works.

and doing something good on a larger scale. But would there have been as many volunteers who would be willing to work towards saving an endangered amphibian or fungi, for instance?

A definite carbon footprint of its own has been left by the rescue effort. Shrimps, fish, eggs and other food, medical supplies wrapped in plastics, sheets and towels, electricity and petrol for planes and cars... all unnecessary stuff for a mother bird raising her chick in the wild.

Keeping all of this in mind, such a rescue effort may, unfortunately, have its own negative aspect, impacting other species on the planet and even the very future of the Lesser Flamingos themselves. Not so much a vicious, but a, not so successful, the circle comes in view when looking at it on an all-encompassing global scale.

Nobody can do it better than mother nature and it will behoove us to remember that prevention is better than cure, that everything is connected and every single day of our lives offers us endless opportunities to make positive contributions towards the well being of all species. We do not need to wait for the next flamingo crisis, we can make our mark every day to help the Lesser Flamingo of Kamfers Dam and all remaining species.

Back to art and we see that visually there are two important symbols to be found in the exhibition, clothing and the human skeleton. Also, algae, the staple food of the Lesser Flamingo, is used as material in some of the works and most of the work take on a greenish hue.

Clothing forms a very strong personal bond with the owner's life - it is close to the wearer's body and it shares the owner's life for a time and it shares their work. Clothing, therefore, becomes a metaphor for a person's life and at the same time here, it becomes a symbol for possessions.

Helena has an interest in creating new objects with new meaning from old and withering or discarded objects, thereby imitating life cycles. She often uses clothing obtained from migrant labourers. The clothing for the fibre art pieces in this body of work was obtained from migrant sugarcane cutters and the piece of clothing used as subject matter in the paintings was obtained from a migrant farmworker on the Entabeni farm residency premises.

The human skeleton is a metaphor for death, heritage and legacy, which ultimately will be left of us, by us, and for us, in the physical world and that which we may also be forced onto our environment and fellow sentient beings. Green is life. Algae, our main oxygen supplier and an important role player at the beginning of life on earth.

Shadows, reflections, and imprints are more vehicles that are frequently used in the artworks to convey impermanence.

None of the work on the exhibition portrays living breathing things. The images in the artworks are that of long-dead or recently deceased people and animals or reflections and shadows, which is but a fleeting moment in time. The flamingo footprint impressions come nearest to portraying life, but even those are fourth-generation copies of the living original and some of the footprints were taken from deceased birds. Even the realistically drawn flamingo with a semblance of a living animal is nothing more than a stuffed animal in a museum.

we see unearthed graves of recent or long-deceased people and animals. The process of obtaining the flamingo footprints also had the ambience of archaeology. All the alginate feet imprints were translated into plaster and carefully stored and catalogued in drawers for later reference and use. Helena reminds us of the fleetingness of our own lives and of other life forms. A lifespan of 90 years is but a shadow here on earth.

Leaving our own transient and short lives behind and taking into account the history of man in general, cause the importance of our lives to dwindle even further. Homo sapiens have only been on the earth for the last 200 000 years. Measured in a 24 hour day, we "modern humans" history can be counted in 1 second. We are but an afterword in the epic history of life on earth.

Yet, in the last 70 years, we have caused the change at a rate and scale never seen before in our planet's history. Homo sapiens received a world to live in, which has taken mother nature billions of years to bring to perfection, yet we are destroying her legacy at an alarming rate.





PREVIOUS PROJECT REGARDING HELENA HUGO AND HER INTERACTION WITH THE FLAMINGOS

<https://mailchi.mp/8faac2169188/mike-bolhuis-the-flamingo-project-part-11>

PREVIOUS PROJECTS

<https://mailchi.mp/a0d5c4bf4114/project-the-mike-bolhuis-flamingo-project>

You may forward this information.

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