Anatomy of an Archive
the secret history of a material body

Mozambican born, Chicago based artist, Jose Ferreira is in residency at the Hyde Park Art Center until the end of February 2009. The public is invited to interact with the artist in a research project called, “Anatomy of an Archive - the secret history of a material body”. Between the 5th and the 22nd of January participants are welcome to accompany the artist in constructing a large scale landscape and to discuss his ideas. The project dissects the Battle of Isandlwana that materialized on the 22nd of January, 1879, in South Africa and explores it as a pivotal locus of contestation.

The project interrogates the inherent subjectivity of historical interpretation. It considers the role of individual histories, emotion and story telling as significant vectors of reference. It is a compelling revision of history as a process of constant reconfiguration. Originally, much of the Zulu version of the war was not popularized as it remained marginalized within an unknown oral history. Since the 70’s, the context of the battle has been re-written not from the British point of view of defeat but as a Zulu victory, which relied on brilliant military tactics. This is a key point for South Africa as it emerges from its colonial history. The socio-political ramifications in that act of territorial emancipation emphasize space and power as intimately intertwined concepts, which are as significant today.

The project explores the implications of history borne out of family identity. It postures the idea that what happens in the world is an extension of our own histories, that memory lies deeply embedded within our cell tissue as a phenomenon which remains constantly active and in flux. Histories are re-written and new perspectives of events emerge, evident in Susan Griffin’s evocative narrative, “Am I trying to write off the sufferings of my own mind and of my family as historical phenomena? Yes and no. We forget that we are history... We are not used to associating our private lives with public events. Yet histories of families cannot be separated from the histories of nations. To divide them is part our denial.”

The installation functions as an environment that is disproportionate to the human scale. It is a miniature landscape that remains larger than life as an installation - too large to interact with directly and inaccessible to the public as it occupies the entire project space. The edges of the sculpture become part of the walls of the project room, blurring the edges of space in the ‘gallery’. As in memory these edges, interstices and liminal spaces have come to stand in for an obscure ‘border’. Today, we are beginning to see these areas as closely connected, fused to one another; the edges of separation barely distinct.

Susan Stewart observes that, “Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it ‘surrounds’ us. Our position here is the antithesis of the position in relation to the miniature; we are enveloped by the gigantic, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow. Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially. We move through landscape; it does not move through us. This relation to the landscape is expressed most often through an abstract projection of the body upon the natural world. Consequently, both the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment – the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container.”

PROJECT RECEPTION
February 8th, 2009, 3 - 5 pm
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