

**DIEK GROBLER: AN ARTIST'S MONOGRAPH
WITH INTERACTIVE CATALOGUE**

PART I

by

JORIKE LANGERMAN

submitted in accordance with the requirements for

the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject of

ART HISTORY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF BMR VAN HAUTE

SEPTEMBER 2011

Student number: **34909605**

Declaration

I declare that Diek Grobler: an artist's monograph with interactive catalogue is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



(Jorike Langerman)

1 September 2011

Date

Summary

Title:

Diek Grobler: an artist's monograph with interactive catalogue

Summary

This is a monograph on the South African artist Diek Grobler. The aim is to contextualise the artist's oeuvre up to 2009 and to explore the visual metaphors in his art.

Grobler has a fascination for stories. He blends tales of traditional Western mythology, African mythology, Christian religion, folklore and magical realism into narrative artworks. Through visual metaphors the artist comments on the everyday human dramas that surround him – be they political, social, psychological or cultural. Furthermore, he adds an element of surprise to his sketches of human drama, by infusing them with irony and humour.

My research reflects the diverse nature of Grobler's oeuvre as it investigates works from various artistic genres such as painting, sculpture, illustration, performance art, avant-garde theatre and animation. It also examines a blend of different artistic media such as ceramics, oil paint, gouache, pastels, scraperboard, earthenware, 2D computer animation, puppetry, and stop-motion animation.

List of key terms:

Grobler (Diek); Monograph; Life-and-work model; South African art; Apartheid; Stories; Folklore; Mythology; Performance art; Stop-motion animation; Metaphor; Identity; Poststructuralism; Reception aesthetics; Magical realism.

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Preface

The aim of this monograph is to document and contextualise Diek Grobler's life and oeuvre. Grobler has been contributing to South African art for the past 22 years. He has been actively promoting performance art among local audiences and his groundbreaking work in stop-motion animation has earned him wide acclaim.

Fascination with the manner in which Grobler applies magical realism and the complexity of his oeuvre inspired my choice of research subject. Grobler paints from memory and the imagination, expressing his own experiences and emotions through visual metaphors and stories. In some instances his descriptive titles serve to decode his artworks. However, in most cases the metaphors are open-ended and left to the viewer to read and unravel. Grobler often bases his themes on existing narratives, myths or folk tales linked to specific moral lessons or social comments, which he subtly twists in order to alter their meaning, or to assign relevance within his own modern day environment. Some of his artworks, while grounded in the objective world, are not mere simulations of it. He searches for the sacred, the spiritual and the hidden dimensions beneath the surface of the everyday and the mundane in an effort to uncover an element of magic.

Grobler's life journey unfolds through his artworks. On the one hand his stories sometimes deal with events and experiences, social or political, within his own life's context and on the other hand he often presents himself as either an actor or an observer inside his visual narratives. This monograph aims to provide an accurate account of Diek Grobler's life story and his oeuvre.

Within the time frame covered by this monograph (1964-2009) Grobler experimented with, and mastered diverse media from various artistic disciplines. In order to trace the development of his personal style in

different media, the monograph is divided into four chapters, based on identifiable turns or shifts in his life journey. This structure aims to simplify the complexity of Grobler's oeuvre. Three appendices list the solo and group exhibitions as well as the collections housing Grobler's art, the accolades he has received to date, and provide a user's guide to the interactive catalogue.

In order to accommodate the diversity of Grobler's oeuvre, a catalogue of 638 artworks – including two dimensional drawings and paintings, stop-motion animated video and video recordings of performance art productions – has been assembled in an interactive multimedia DVD. The interactive catalogue forms the second part of this dissertation.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude toward the people who have been instrumental in my studies. Firstly I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof Bernadette Van Haute, for sharing her knowledge and critical insight with me. She has provided me with invaluable guidance and support throughout this endeavour. Secondly, I would like to thank the artist Diek Grobler for the extensive time sacrifices he made throughout the personal interviews and for sharing his stories. Thirdly, I would like to thank Dr Eunice Basson and Prof Frikkie Potgieter for their enthusiasm, support and input during my studies. I would also like to thank my husband Louis Langerman, who assisted me with the coding of the interactive catalogue and my family, who always believe in me and support my dreams.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge some individuals who have assisted and supported me in my research. My gratitude to Mr Dawid Malan, Subject Librarian in Art History at the University of South Africa (Unisa) and Ms Nandi Hilliard, the Gallery Manager at the Pretoria Arts Association. I would also like to thank Unisa for awarding me a study bursary.

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List of abbreviations

ATKV	Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging
CEPF	Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
FLV	Flash Video
Fopspeen Live Art	Fopspeen Live Art Company for Performance Art
HED	Higher Education Diploma
JAA	Jong Afrikaner Anargiste
KKNK	Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees
NFVF	South African National Film and Video Foundation
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University
SAAA	South African Association of Arts
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAFTA	South African Film and Television Academy
SANAVA	South African National Association for the Visual Arts
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
TED	Transvaal Education Department
TOM	Theatre of Mind
Unisa	University of South Africa
UOFS	University of the Orange Free State
UP	University of Pretoria
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
VAW	Verklarende Afrikaanse Woordeboek
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

Introduction

This dissertation presents a monograph on the South African artist Diek Grobler. It aims to contextualise the artist's oeuvre¹ and to unravel some of the complexities therein. This is the first scholarly study devoted to Grobler's oeuvre, set within the broader artistic and historical contexts in which he operates. It traces the threads linking the artist and his work to his society and his times.

Writing a monograph on a living artist is not an uncommon practice.² However, there can be no clearly defined, all-inclusive sense of oeuvre, until the artist's activity is completed. Regardless of this limitation, the monograph aims to contemplate the artist's work as a whole, and to provide a thorough overview of the first 22 years of Grobler's career as a South African artist. Due to the size constraints of this dissertation, it was necessary to make a selection of seminal works which best illustrate Grobler's artistic development and the major shifts therein. The scope of this dissertation also limits comprehensive discussions of philosophical discourses in application to the subject at hand. However, it aims to discuss the main theoretical tenets relevant to the art historical genre of the monograph.

In the pursuit of outlining Grobler's artistic and biographical identities, this study draws on various sources. These include firsthand studies of Grobler's artworks and written sources pertaining to these, personal interviews with the artist,³ published and unpublished artist's statements and media publications. Guercio's book *Art as existence: The artist's monograph and its project* (2006) and Lent's article *Life as art/art as life: dramatizing the life and work of Frida Kahlo* (2007) serve as key references on the art historical methodology and evolution of the monograph. With regard to magical realism, I rely on various insights from *A companion to magical realism* (Hart & Ouyang 2005) as well as *Magical*

realism and the postcolonial novel (Warnes 2009). My personal interviews with Grobler provided me with insight in certain aspects of his oeuvre. Although the artist prefers his art to be non-prescriptive and is therefore not keen to assign absolute meaning to his visual narratives, we discussed some elements of his personal iconography such as the paper jet, paper boat and bowler hat, and characters like the hadeda and the Ananse. The significance and meaning these images hold for Grobler might not necessarily be obvious to the viewer. I wanted to reveal some measure of insight into the artist's intention in order to promote a better understanding of his art. This is especially valuable due to the absence of existing academic publications on the subject. However, most of the readings of artworks are based on my own impressions and insight gained through close examination of the artist's oeuvre. I follow a biographical method of organising the major shifts and turns in the artist's personal and artistic development into time segments, and identify visual themes and motifs in the art from each period. Through a contextual approach I examine social, historical, political and religious influences and tendencies, with the aim to gain a deeper understanding of his art.

The methodology and main premise of this dissertation is informed by the life-and-work model associated with the monograph as a genre of writing within the literature of art.⁴ The life-and-work model suggests a double equation of art as life and life as art. Guercio (2006:23) explains the corresponding link between the artist's life and work as follows:

The monograph construes the otherwise distinct works of an artist as a mutating whole, ascribing to them the ability either to bear witness to life by offering models for living it or to embody life by uniting objective and subjective components. As such, the monograph interlocks the dimension of the living with that of the nonliving and radically reinterprets the objecthood of artworks through its refusal to look at them as if they were confirmed within an autonomous realm.

The term monograph was first used in the late eighteenth century to signify a written account on a single topic in the field of natural history. According

to Guercio (2006:3-4), the monograph as an art historical construct denotes the most basic publication dedicated to a single artist. The monograph was preceded by the biographical narrative, which Lent (2007:69) describes as “the mode to illustrate how artists' innate genius inspired their creativity, giving a literary form to the construct of genius”. Giorgio Vasari’s (1511-1574) *Lives*⁵ can be viewed as a seminal advocate of this humanist tradition. Since Vasari’s *Lives* the monograph has undergone a gradual metamorphosis, shifting its focus from the static artist’s biography, to a scholarly analysis of the artist’s oeuvre and the addition of the *catalogue raisonné*, to various heterogeneous approaches and a more dynamic dialectics between artists, artworks and reality at large.⁶

By the mid 1900s the traditional monograph’s focus on the individuality of the artists was brought into discredit by the ideas of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939),⁷ Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)⁸ and Friederich Nietzsche (1844-1900),⁹ and proven to be based on an outmoded metaphysical understanding of the human subject. The concepts of human subjectivity, identity and interiority, formed throughout the history of Western metaphysics since Plato, were scrutinised and deconstructed in the second half of the twentieth century. Bocola (1999:272) explains:

The magic dimension of the artistic process is no longer interpreted in religious terms, or attributed to the genius of the individual artist, but understood as an essential, “natural” and necessary aspect of the human psyche. This shifting of perspective marks the beginning of the integration of the incomprehensible – the unconscious – into the enlightened Modernist concept of self and the world.

Guercio (2006:9) maintains that the concept of the artist as a unitary and fixed subject or essence lost credibility and was replaced with a post-Freudian metaphysical subject, engaged in a “dynamic process of coming into being”. Jean-Luc Nancy (quoted by Guercio 2006:72) ascribes to the monograph the role of illuminating “the condition of human plurality and the open-ended process of a birth to presence”.

Although the culture of modern identity provides valuable direction for reconsidering the monograph's approach, the genre's evolution considered different forms of co-dependency between art and life, artist and works and the role of the artwork as a dialectical object. Instead of viewing an artwork as a mirror of the world by means of mimesis¹⁰ and the artist as a genius who ultimately determines the meaning of an artwork,¹¹ philosophers of hermeneutics,¹² like Heinrich Wölfflin¹³ (1864-1945) and Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997) have provided valuable insight into the creation and reception of meaning.

Jauss advocates a theory of reception whereby a literary work contains "an ever unfolding potentiality of meaning" (Adams & Searle 1986:161). The reception theory emphasises the role of the audience which reads or decodes a written text.¹⁴ Similarly Berger (1995:24) draws a parallel between reception theory and the deconstructionist view of the reader who creates meaning by reading the system of signs embedded in a text or an artwork. Furthermore, post-structuralism posits that the reader's experience or understanding of the world is not immediate, but mediated by language. Degenaar (1987:3) explicates:

By introducing language as the necessary condition of understanding, philosophy has succeeded in overcoming three myths: the myth of given, the myth of the innocent eye, and the myth of the immediacy of understanding. ... It enables us to look at a work of art as a text that has to be interpreted in a historical context, which itself is a text, by a reader who himself has to be considered as a text.

This dissertation subscribes to the post-structuralist concept of reading the artwork as a text, made up of a complex system of signs¹⁵ and symbols, which Degenaar (1987:5) describes as "an interweaving of differences and traces of differences". The reading of Grobler's oeuvre is done through a deconstructionist process of signification and differentiation, which is part of an ongoing, open-ended process of writing and re-writing.¹⁶ Grobler employs the metaphor as a stylistic device in his artworks to allow for open-endedness, and to facilitate the communication of plurality of

embedded meaning. In Gadamer's view the horizon of understanding¹⁷ cannot be limited by the creator's intention or by the horizon of the person to whom the message was originally addressed. Moreover, there cannot be only one interpretation that is correct in itself. Meaning proliferates as new assimilations and interpretations are made (Adams & Searle 1986:850-851). Although Grobler's visual metaphors do not represent unquestionable truths and are saturated with meaning, I consider the visual metaphors identified and discussed throughout the first four chapters and comment on the recurrence of specific metaphors as a basis of Grobler's art.

Apart from the monograph's evolution in terms of the dialectical role of the artwork and the reception thereof, the twentieth century transformed the monograph's definition of artists and artworks in response to, *inter alia*, feminist thinking and gender theories, and the postcolonial critique (Guercio 2006:22). The monograph's exclusive focus on white, European male artists was deemed inadequate, as it marginalised 'others', such as female and non-Western artists. However, the monograph's life-and-work model has potential value in postfeminist and postcolonial times. According to Guercio (2006:12-13), the model has the potential to uncover gender and race related issues and offers a means of comprehending a multiplicity of artistic and biographical identities and histories.¹⁸ This proves of particular value to South Africa with its social and political history of colonisation and apartheid.

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I was mindful of the known pitfalls and shortcomings associated with the art historical monograph. Lent (2007:70) cautions against the monograph's conceptualisation of the artist as "one whose inborn talent - his genius - reveals itself by chance in childhood and predestines his future greatness, rendering him godlike; genius was the engine that drove him to work in a frenzy of inchoate activity called divine madness or artistic ecstasy". I endeavoured to

present this monograph as an unromanticised, scholarly study. The structural division of Grobler's oeuvre into four periods is based on shifts and turns in his life journey and artistic development. According to Guercio (2009:5), the monograph's formal and conceptual approach should be adjusted according to the unique requirements of an artist's life and oeuvre. Guercio (2009:5) states:

[J]ust as examining the artist's life and work tends to highlight the artist's uniqueness and his or her artworks, so the recognition of these qualities sustains the eclectic vocation of the monograph, inspiring diverse approaches to expressing who an artist is and the nature of his or her works.

The first chapter of this dissertation deals with the artist's formative years from 1964-1989. It discusses his childhood, schooling, early influences and artistic training. This chapter highlights Grobler's love for narratives, play-acting and storytelling. Furthermore it discusses some of his early pastel illustrations and his politically motivated ceramic sculptures.

The second chapter, covering the period from 1990-1997, is set against the backdrop of social and political change at the end of the apartheid era in South African history. In this period, I examine Grobler's journey in terms of the development of his personal and artistic identities. The chapter highlights diverse narrative themes and visual metaphors in selected artworks produced by the artist during this period. Moreover, it shows Grobler shedding some of his self-beliefs and others' expectations for his career path in pursuit of his passion for both the visual and performance arts.

Chapter Three covers the period from 1998-2003. The discussion centres on a shift in Grobler's focus from conventional fine arts to performance art and avant-garde theatre. This afforded him the opportunity to develop his own existing metaphors through performance art and avant-garde theatre, and enabled him to expose larger audiences to these art forms. Grobler also became involved in local arts festivals which led to the founding of the

Jong Afrikaner Anargiste (JAA), a mouthpiece through which the artist challenged the contemporary Afrikaner's identity and perception of the arts. During this period Grobler shifted his focus a second time – from performance or live art towards traditional collage, digital collage and eventually motion art.

The fourth chapter traces Grobler's artistic development from 2004-2009 in the genre of motion art. It discusses seminal works in 2D animation and stop-motion animated film, and highlights some instances where Grobler combines conventional scraperboard illustration and motion art. In this chapter, as in the preceding three chapters, his development of visual metaphors through diverse artistic languages, mediums and genres is illustrated through examples of his work.

Grobler classifies his art in the aesthetic genre of magical realism.¹⁹ The term magical realism became popular in Europe in the 1920s through the writings of the art critic Franz Roh,²⁰ the philosopher Ernst Jünger and the Italian writer, Massimo Bontempelli.²¹ According to Warnes (2009:3), magical realism can be defined as a “mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural; ... a mode in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural, are coherently represented in a state of equivalence”. In Ouyang's view, magical realism involves the blending of “anything that defies empiricism, including religious beliefs, superstitions, myths, legends” into a reality which is “outside the matrix of what is by now disdained conventional realism” (Ouyang 2005:14).

Various applications of magical realism are found throughout Grobler's oeuvre. However, it is my belief that his in-depth study of the genre in the period from 1990-1997 provided him with valuable insight and enabled him to refine his own views about the importance of magical realism in his artmaking. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to comprehensively unpack all the theoretical complexities associated with

this genre, I will highlight selected aspects manifested in Grobler's art in each of the four periods covered by this monograph.

The academic value of this monograph is enhanced by the recording of Grobler's oeuvre in an interactive catalogue format. The diversity of his oeuvre necessitates a catalogue with the functionality to showcase artworks from various artistic genres, allowing for interaction with both static and animated visual artworks. The monograph therefore comprises two separate components: a written dissertation and a digital, interactive catalogue in DVD-ROM format. The two components are linked with interactive catalogue numbers, allowing for easy cross-referencing. Selected examples of artworks highlighting aspects of Grobler's artistic style or specific themes are illustrated in the written dissertation. Each of these illustrations has a figure number as well as an interactive catalogue number. Similarly, additional examples of artworks listed in endnotes but not illustrated in the text have catalogue numbers, enabling the reader to locate the artwork in the interactive catalogue, where all collected artworks are documented and illustrated. Due to the size constraints of this dissertation, the interactive catalogue does not include a comprehensive review of each documented artwork. However, the dissertation includes discussions on selected artworks.

The creation of the interactive catalogue involved the collecting, digitising,²² sorting and documenting of photographic material and slides of two-dimensional artworks. All slides, video material and animations were sourced from Grobler's own archives.²³ Animated films were converted from broadcast format to Flash Video (FLV) format for multimedia purposes. The interactive catalogue conforms to the same structural layout as the written monograph. All artworks can either be viewed according to the four periods, or sorted and viewed according to various categories in the index.

Grobler has actively contributed to South African art during the course of his artistic career, and his work has steadily been gaining recognition both locally and internationally. The first of three appendices accompanying this dissertation lists the solo and group exhibitions Grobler participated in, as well as the collections housing his art. A comprehensive list of South African and international awards is included in the second appendix. The third appendix provides a user's guide to the interactive catalogue.

My research is based on the assumption that the artist's oeuvre is influenced by, and to a certain degree a reflection of, the artist's life journey. According to Salomon, Watson and Smith (quoted by Lent 2007:70), "the monograph posits that an artist's life and art explain each other, creating a feedback loop where the artwork can be explained only through biography, which simultaneously provides evidence for the veracity of that narrative". By outlining and documenting Grobler's life alongside his artistic development, and identifying visible shifts and turns in his oeuvre I aim to trace the possible effects of mutual dependency and influence between his life and art.

Notes: Introduction

- 1 Of the more than 20 monographs published on the life and work of the artist Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, 1483-1520) between 1800 and 1830, Guercio (2006:75, 91, 93) singles out Johann David Passavant's (1787-1860) monograph *Rafaël von Urbino und sein Vater Giovanni Santi*, published in 1839, as pivotal in promoting the paradigm of the artist's oeuvre. Here, the paradigm encompasses "a nonstatic space within which all works by the same artist can be contemplated in sequence and can exist both individually and collectively" (Guercio 2006:93). Moreover, Guercio (2006:111) asserts that the concept of the oeuvre allows the monograph to "counter the notion of art as autonomous activity and to overturn the sense of artworks as objects severed from the world and from life".
- 2 According to Guercio (2006:228, 350), the monograph has been applied throughout the twentieth century, to promote and acknowledge a wide range of modern and avant-garde artists, both living and dead. He identifies Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) as examples of artists who were still alive during the publication of monographs on their lives and artworks. Incidentally, both Picasso and Duchamp were also involved in the writing of monographs on their own lives (Guercio 2006:22). Recent monographs on South African artists who were still alive at the time, include people like Norman Catherine (1949-) in 2000, Steven Cohen (1962-) in 2003, Willem Boshoff (1951-) in 2005 and Marlene Dumas (1953-) in 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2006 (<http://www.sil.si.edu/>). Further examples are found in The Taxi series of monographs on contemporary South African artists such as David Koloane, Noria Mabasa, Lien Botha, Steven Cohen, Willem Boshoff and Diane Victor (<http://taxiartbooks.com/about-2>).
- 3 I conducted six interviews with Diek Grobler between 31 October 2009 and 1 January 2011, which form an integral part of the research into the artist's biographical and artistic history. Due to the sheer volume of these transcripts, they are not included in this dissertation. However, the original Afrikaans quotations are included in notes whenever a selected excerpt is referred to.
- 4 Adams (1996:101) provides further insight into the biography as an art historical approach.
- 5 Vasari's work, published in 1550, is titled *The lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors, and architects by Giorgio Vasari, painter and architect of Arezzo*. See Adams (1996:109-110) and Vasari (1987:21).
- 6 See Guercio (2006) for various case studies illustrating his thesis on the development of the life-and-work model associated with the monograph. During the 1800s the monograph combined critical, art historical and biographical knowledge with fiction and utopian ideas. According to Guercio (2006:5), the monograph could not be categorised as purely biographical, the practice of connoisseurship, or art history proper. Through this mode of writing the lives and works of old and modern masters were widely recorded across Europe by scholars, critics, art historians, friends of artists, connoisseurs and artists themselves. The late 1800s witnessed the absorption of the monograph into popular literature, through a boom in the publication of multi-volume series on artist's life and work. These volumes did not necessarily include new and original research or scholarly, critical enquiry, thus undermining the complex dynamics involved in the development of the life-and-work model. Consequently this led to stagnation and decay in the development of the life-and-work model

(Guercio 2006:3-4).

- 7 See Adams and Searle (1986:235-236) on Freud's theory of art, and Bocola (1999:242-257) for an overview of Freud's contribution to the development of psychoanalytic theory. Bocola (1999:257-258) states: "Psychoanalysis placed the human self-concept of the Modernist era on a new foundation just as physics did with the general view of the world. ... [Psychoanalysis] took away the illusion of human godliness; but it also connected human beings, in a new and irrevocable way, spatially and temporally, physically and mentally, with all of existence."
- 8 See Guercio (2006:7-9).
- 9 See Bocola (1999:56-58).
- 10 See Berger (1995:11-12) for an overview of the history of literary theory and mimesis, or the process of imitation, within the theory of art.
- 11 See Adams (1996:116) and Lent (2007:70) in regard to the concept of the artist as genius.
- 12 Hart (1982:295) describes hermeneutics as "the art of understanding".
- 13 According to Hart (1982:295), Wölfflin viewed understanding as an "ever-widening, never-ending spiral" - a dialectical process whereby past and present viewpoints are continuously compared. Furthermore, understanding is attained through a sequential and never-ending circular movement between parts and whole while taking context and history into account.
- 14 See Berger (1995:22-26).
- 15 Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) posits that the relationship between the signifier and a signified, as principle parts of the linguistic sign or symbol, is metaphoric and arbitrary (Adams & Searle 1986:647). This implies that no meaning is absolute or complete.
- 16 See Degenaar (1987:5-6; 8-9).
- 17 According to Adams and Searle (1986:829), Gadamer claims that "all acts of interpretation are embedded thoroughly in history, and no interpretation can escape its own 'horizon' of understanding". See Vedder (2002:196-198) in regard to Gadamer's theory about the fundamental metaphoricity of language.
- 18 Similarly Degenaar (1987:14) suggests that the deconstruction's open-ended process of writing and re-writing creates the opportunity "to overturn hierarchies, to expose power-relations, to unmask prejudices based on the privileging of race, class, sex, culture and ethnicity, to emphasise issues that have been marginalised, to challenge canonisation and to become the voice of the silent cause of history".
- 19 See Grobler's artist statement at <http://www.art.co.za/diekgrobler/cv>
- 20 According to Zamora (2005:29), the term was published by Roh in his 1925 publication titled *Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei*, "in celebration of the Post-Expressionists' return to realism after a decade or more of abstraction".
- 21 See Warnes (2009:20).

- 22 The digitisation process involved colour correction, cropping, removal of dust and scratches, and the re-orientation of all photographic material, using Adobe Photoshop CS5.
- 23 Additional photographs of artworks in private collections were taken by myself or provided by the owners.

CHAPTER 1: FORMATIVE YEARS (1964-1989)

1.1 Childhood and early influences

Georg Diederik (Diek) Grobler was born on 2 April 1964 at the St Vincent Hospital in Bela-Bela,¹ in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. He grew up on his family's farm in Settlers, near Bela-Bela. His mother supervised most of the day-to-day farming activities, managed a small turkey farm and raised Diek and his four siblings. Grobler's father was both a farmer and a senior officer in the South African Defence Force (SADF).² He spent long periods away from home, presenting training seminars at various military camps. Consequently, Grobler never really had a relationship with his father until his early twenties. His upbringing was rooted in the Christian, Protestant values of a middle class, conservative, patriarchal, white, Afrikaner³ society. He spent his formative years during the height of the apartheid⁴ era of South Africa's political history.

Grobler is the middle child, with two older and two younger siblings. He found kindred spirits in his oldest brother Piet, and his younger sister Hannelie who are also artistically talented. Piet was Grobler's role model and childhood hero. They shared their love for drawing, reading and storytelling. Grobler recalls how he and Piet used to draw on every available bit of paper in the house, mainly inside popular household magazines such as *Die Huisgenoot* and *Landbouweekblad*.

Growing up on a farm, the Grobler children often played in and around abandoned buildings, sheds, and silos with feeding-troughs. These structures would later surface as a metaphor in Grobler's work. His *Landskap met swembad* (1990) (fig 1/DG059) is an example of an early work in which Grobler portrays a feeding-trough and an abandoned structure in a desolate landscape.

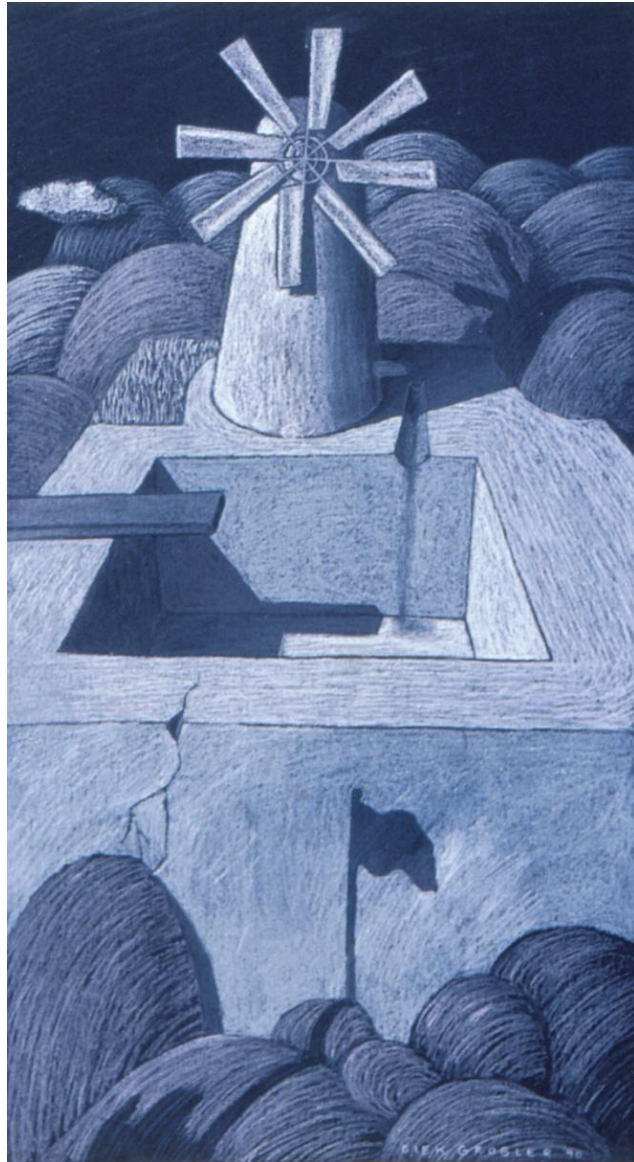


Fig 1/DG059. Diek Grobler, *Landskap met swembad* (1990).

The sole sign of life is found in the shadow of an angel in the foreground, waving a flag.⁵ Grobler often includes images of angels in his artworks.⁶ Van Wyk (1983:93-94) describes these as motherly figures who appear frequently, in order to change the world for the better. Grobler (quoted by Van Wyk 1983:94) maintains that angels always have good intentions.⁷

Grobler is intrigued by the nostalgia of abandoned structures and empty landscapes. These images function as a metaphor for the traces humanity

leaves on the landscape, erecting buildings, and then abandoning them to deteriorate.⁸ Grobler's *Chevron* (1988) (fig 2/DG022) displays an example of this metaphor.

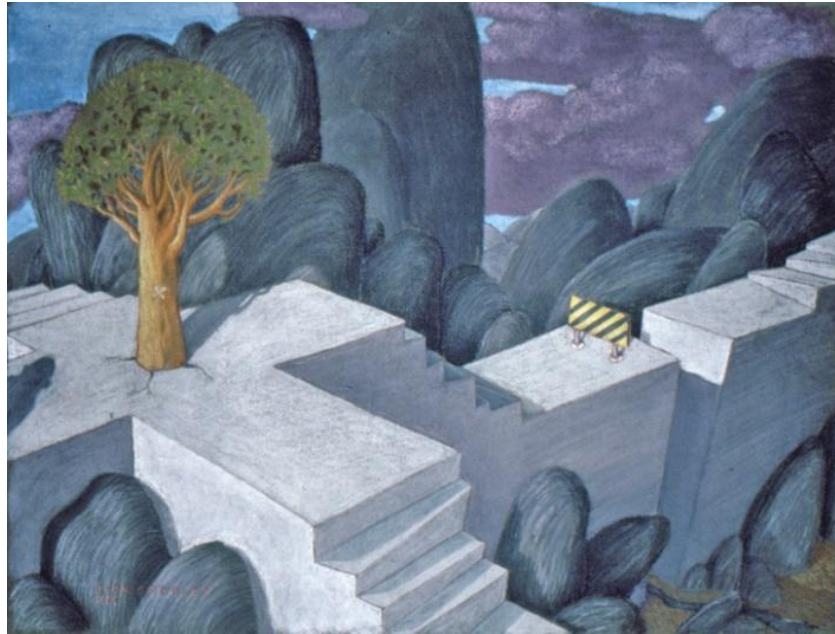


Fig 2/DG022. Diek Grobler, *Chevron* (1988).

Grobler always wanted to become an artist. As a young boy he created his own art studio inside a storage shed, in the middle of the chicken-coop. This is where he spent hours drawing and painting. His earliest recollection of a significant drawing is the day he managed to draw Mickey Mouse in his first year in elementary school. Referencing a comic book belonging to one of his Dutch cousins, he skilfully rendered the Disney character. This earned him admiration from his teacher and peers and gave him confidence to pursue his artistic talent.

Although he was not a very outgoing child, Grobler has always had an enquiring mind and a very lively imagination. He remembers acting out stories and making up bedtime tales for his sister Hannelie. From an early age stories formed an integral part of Grobler's world, and later manifested as a signature element in his art. In Grobler's words: "I tell stories:

Parables or myths that deal with various aspects of [the] human being” (<http://www.trans-end.org.za>).

Grobler loved to read and was fortunate in that his mother regularly took him to the library in Settlers, during his pre-school years. His grandmother on his father’s side had a great interest in literature and she often read the children stories by Eugene Marais. Grobler recalls one particular teacher from elementary school, Mr van Deventer, who was an animated storyteller. He narrated stories from the Bible and the Apocryphal Gospels⁹ to his class. These narrations made a deep impression on Grobler, and his fascination with Biblical stories would later become a prominent source of symbolism in his work.

Related to his love for stories, is Grobler’s affinity for the stage and performance. The Theunissens – two teachers at the farm school Grobler attended – had an impressive puppet theatre and a collection of hand-made puppets. In the evenings they staged regular puppet shows at the primary school Grobler attended. Piet was the first to start making his own finger puppets and Grobler followed suit. Initially they used the heads of dolls as a basis for their puppets. However, they soon started making their own puppets using toilet rolls.

When Piet, who is four years older than Diek, left home to attend the high school in Bela-Bela, Grobler continued to make puppets from *papier-mâché*. From time to time he staged puppet shows for Hannelie and her friends. Even though acting would not figure early in Grobler’s artistic career, the development of his oeuvre would see him return to the stage, writing, performing and directing industrial theatre productions, and performance art pieces. This would eventually also lead to his return to puppet making and the production of stop-motion animated films.

1.2 Artistic training

After completing his formal education at Hoërskool Warmbad in 1981, Grobler was keen to pursue further studies in Pretoria. He hungered for the excitement of the city, exposure to new ideas and the possibility of meeting interesting people.

Grobler's mother accompanied him to a specialist at the University of South Africa (Unisa) for career guidance. This was a very traumatic experience as his expressed interest in the arts was interpreted by the career guidance counsellor as a sign of a personal, sexual identity crisis. Strong objections were raised against pursuing a career in the arts and Grobler was advised to rather opt for a more masculine and responsible career like that of a teacher or a cleric. He therefore registered for a Bachelors degree at the University of Pretoria (UP) in 1983, with the intent to complete a Higher Education Diploma (HED) and to become a teacher. This was a tumultuous time for the artist, as he was faced with a new environment, feelings of disillusionment with his own personal beliefs about society, religion and politics, as well as inner conflict about his study choices. He rejected anything to do with the arts, in the fear of being labelled and judged. However, this only made him miserable. His brother Piet, who was studying to become a church minister at the time, shared Grobler's misery and encouraged his younger brother to follow his dream of becoming an artist.

In the second year of his BA degree, Grobler decided to take up acting as a first year subject, simply to afford himself some creative outlet. Piet was still encouraging Grobler to pursue his art and even spoke to his parents on Diek's behalf. Eventually, Grobler's parents gave their approval, and he changed his study course to a four year Fine Arts degree. He graduated with a Bachelors degree in Fine Arts in 1987, and completed a Higher Education Diploma the following year, as part of the conditions of his study bursary from the Transvaal Education Department (TED).

Grobler was introduced to ceramics as a sculpting medium during a lecture by the artist Minette Zaaiman-Van Rooyen at UP. Zaaiman-Van Rooyen demonstrated the process of sculpting a ceramic horse. This left a profound impression on Grobler. Until the 1980s in South Africa, clay was associated with the decorative and applied arts, and not really considered as a medium for 'serious' art.

He was drawn towards the malleability and versatility of clay as a sculpting medium. The effect of glazes on the clay did not appeal to Grobler, who rather preferred painting his sculptures with oil and acrylic paint, and Deka colours and stains as post-firing treatments. He was more concerned with the subject matter of his work than developing a unique personal style or artistic mark.¹⁰

Grobler's oeuvre contains only one example of a bronze sculpture.¹¹ He preferred the directness of clay as a sculpting medium to the more onerous process of casting in bronze. Grobler states: "I use ceramics because it is direct. There are no winding roads of technicalities between what you create with your hands and your message."¹²

The subject matter of Grobler's sculptures at this stage was mainly concerned with political issues. Having come from a secluded, conservative Afrikaner background, he started questioning his own preconceptions and learned beliefs about the social and political status quo, as well as the identity of the Afrikaner. This inner turmoil was not only a personal struggle, but was in line with the general political turmoil in South Africa in the late 1980s, before the end of apartheid.¹³ According to the artist his work at this point reflected his state of mind¹⁴ and dealt with various black/white racial issues. The connection between the subject matter of Grobler's art and his social and historical contexts affirms the premise behind the work-life methodology, on which this dissertation is based. Questioning private and ethnic group identity recurs as a theme

throughout the artist's oeuvre. Grobler (2009e:21) maintains that he never raised political issues in a rebellious or aggressive manner. He rather used veiled references. He "dressed things up" by using metaphoric references in the form of Biblical stories or African folklore.¹⁵ The use of visual metaphors, narrative references, humour and irony in combination with magical realism to "dress up" or subdue the confrontation of sensitive political, religious and gender related issues became a signature of his artistic approach.

Grobler's ceramic sculpture *Die afgevaardigdes* (1988) (fig 3/DG030), is an example of a visual metaphor laden with social and political comments.



Fig 3/DG030. Diek Grobler, *Die afgevaardigdes* (1988).

This sculpture depicts three blind characters standing on the back of a crocodile, with a fourth figure between its jaws. This work may be viewed as a reflection on the political situation in South Africa during the last years of apartheid. The leader of the apartheid government at the time, PW Botha, was commonly nicknamed the great crocodile.¹⁶ The three chosen ones are blindly following a political course. They might be unaware of the danger lurking below. However, similar to all Grobler's visual metaphors, it

does not represent unquestionable truths. His metaphors are open-ended, layered and saturated with possible meanings.

Grobler's *Anansie and the hadeda* (1989) (fig 4/DG047) and *Tien tokkelossies* (1989) (fig 5/DG048) are further examples of ceramic sculptures rich in political symbolism. In both of these works Grobler blends imagery from African folklore with magical realism to negotiate issues of cultural differences and identity in his South African milieu.



Fig 4/DG047. Diek Grobler, *Anansie and the hadeda* (1989).

From the title it may be assumed that the male figure is Grobler's interpretation of Ananse, the trickster spider in African folklore.¹⁷ He titles the artwork in a mixture of Afrikaans and English words, using the Afrikaans spelling for Anansie. Vecsey (1981:161) describes Ananse as "a paradoxical figure whose antics mock the seriousness of rules, the

sacrality of beliefs, and the establishment of rituals. He is a vagabond, an intruder to proper society, an unpredictable liar who throws doubt on the concept of truth itself". This artwork shows the trickster dancing with the docile bird woman. However, this seemingly peaceful union is laden with mistrust and hidden agendas. Behind his back Anansie is holding a knife and concealed in the hadeda's hand is a can of insecticide.

Cruise (1991:86) identifies the hadeda as a significant character in Grobler's own private mythology – a naive and submissive bird woman who serves as a metaphor for "entrenched Afrikaner beliefs".¹⁸

In *Tien tokkelossies* (1989) Grobler weaves his tale around the mythological African monster, the tokoloshi.¹⁹



Fig 5/DG048. Diek Grobler, *Tien tokkelossies* (1989).

He gives the artwork an Afrikaans title and depicts the mythic, African creature through the eyes of an Afrikaner. In this story there are various tokoloshi creatures hiding under and around the terrified little girl's bed. The creatures are a mixture of goblins, dragons and toads.

A little green monster, peering over the headboard is perched on the head of the two-headed Janus.²⁰ Janus is another central character in Grobler's private mythology,²¹ which often represents a dual gaze into the past and future.²² Within the context of this artwork it might mirror the pivotal point in South Africa's history with the end of the apartheid era and the beginning of a new political dispensation.

The title suggests the presence of ten tokoloshi creatures. However, there are only nine of these mischievous monsters, which (according to Cruise 1991:86) may unmask the little girl as the tenth tokoloshi, and therefore not the innocent victim. Cruise views this inclusion of the seemingly innocent victim as part of the perpetrators as a political statement. She explains: "The 'innocent' [in] South African society in fact have a tenuous claim to their state of guiltlessness" (Cruise 1991:86).

Grobler (2011:4) identifies the little girl as Alice, from Lewis Carroll's 1865 novel, *Alice in Wonderland*. He strongly relates to both her character and her fantastic journey of discovery. According to the artist, Alice symbolises the European intellectual tradition and the embodiment of naiveté and innocence. Within the African context, Grobler's Alice represents the colonial past. She does not signify apartheid.²³ Similar to the two-headed Janus, Alice is a recurring character in Grobler's oeuvre.²⁴

Grobler's student work was exhibited at the Sasol New Signatures exhibition at the South African Association of Arts Gallery in Pretoria in 1985-1987. At the 1987 exhibition he received a merit award for his work. His ceramic work was included in the Clay+ exhibition held at Unisa in

August, 1988. He was one of more than 50 artists chosen from over 200 entries. The aim of this exhibition was “to collate innovative work, made in clay that was felt to move beyond traditional expectations” and more importantly, it aimed to redress the “entrenched misconceptions²⁵ enforced by years of ‘modernist’ aesthetics” (Du Plessis 1988:1).

1.3 Becoming an artist

In September 1988, Grobler started his career as an artist with his first professional exhibition. The Aleta Michaletos Gallery in Pretoria offered to host this exhibition. In the two-person exhibition with the artist Marna Schoeman, Grobler showcased some of his ceramic sculptures and pastel drawings.

Shortly after his first exhibition, Grobler and Schoeman started preparing for a second exhibition which would take place in January 1989 at the Gallery on the Market in Newtown, Johannesburg. Due to time constraints, Grobler decided to exhibit pastel drawings instead of sculptures. Shortly before the opening of the exhibition, Grobler was called to perform two years mandatory national military service. His second exhibition opened while he was at a military camp in Oudtshoorn. Grobler’s *The muse* (1988) (fig 6/DG027) and *Van Hunks and the devil* (1988) (fig 10/DG026) are representative of this second exhibition.

The muse (1988) shows the artist on the lap of his larger-than-life muse, surrounded by party animals. The application of hierarchic scale emphasises the importance of the muse.²⁶ Her direct gaze meets that of the viewer and her hand is resting protectively against the artist’s back. The snake and the apple, as visual references to the Biblical paradise story, are subtle, yet popular motifs throughout Grobler’s oeuvre.²⁷ These motifs might represent temptation or serve as a reminder of man’s inherent sinful nature. The motif of the crocodile is also found in this artwork. However, in this instance it is disempowered and adorned with party

masks of fake horns with elastic bands, creating an air of foolishness. Although Grobler reuses some of his motifs, like that of the crocodile, they do not necessarily convey the same symbolism. Different contexts might influence the assigned meaning or the possible interpretation of a motif. For example, where the crocodile in *Die afgevaardigdes* (1988) might be interpreted as being representative of a specific political figure, the crocodile in *The muse* might simply signify a dangerous animal that is dressed up in a foolish manner or a child's toy.



Fig 6/DG027. Diek Grobler, *The muse* (1988).

Grobler recognises the influence of the Colombian figurative artist Fernando Botero (1932-) on his early work.²⁸ Botero depicts the female figure as stylised and rotund, often with small breasts, as seen in his *Young girl* (1977) (fig 7). Grobler adopts a similar stylistic treatment of the female figure, evident in his *Breakfast in paradise* (diptych) (1989) (fig 8/DG035) and *Ophelia* (1989) (fig 9/DG038).



Fig 7. Fernando Botero, *Young girl* (1977).



Fig 8/DG035. Diek Grobler, *Breakfast in paradise* (diptych) (1989).

The female figure in *Breakfast in paradise* (1989) visually resembles that of the muse. However, in this artwork she is reduced in stature. Similarly, this composition resembles a modern day Biblical paradise. Both the male and female figures are naked, except for the slippers on their feet.²⁹ The snake is coiled around the leg of a chair and a tiny tree, bearing a singular fruit is within easy reach of the female figure. A strelitzia – a native South African flower commonly known as the bird of paradise – and a zebra skin patterned table cloth lend a local, South African feel to the picture. Grobler's modern-day *Ophelia* (1989), resembling Millais' *Ophelia*,³⁰ has strelitzia flowers scattered all around her.



Fig 9/DG038. Diek Grobler, *Ophelia* (1989).

Apart from Botero's influence on Grobler's stylistic treatment of the female figure, the artist also adopted other imagery from Botero's work such as cigarette butts and smoke puffs. *The muse* (1988), *Breakfast in paradise* (1989) and *Van Hunks and the devil* (1988) are examples containing such imagery.

In *Van Hunks and the devil* (1988), Grobler narrates the South African legend behind the cloud cover over Table Mountain in Cape Town.



Fig 10/DG026. Diek Grobler, *Van Hunks and the devil* (1988).

According to legend, Van Hunks – a retired sailor who lived in the shadows of Table Mountain – used to hike up to the top of the mountain to smoke his pipe under an old tree, overlooking Table Bay. One day he was surprised to find a stranger all dressed in black sitting under his tree. The stranger greeted Van Hunks by name. This astonished Van Hunks. He sat down next to the stranger and started talking. Van Hunks took out his tobacco and boasted about its strength and his ability to smoke large quantities of it. The stranger claimed that he could easily outdo Van Hunks.

A furious Van Hunks challenged the stranger to a contest and the two started smoking. They smoked all day long and the clouds around them billowed until the whole top of Table Mountain was covered. Van Hunks was getting tired, but persisted. Suddenly the stranger leaned forward and his hat fell off to reveal his true identity. It was the devil himself! Unable to

continue smoking, the devil lost the contest to a human. This infuriated him and with a thunderous clap both of them vanished in a puff of smoke. When the South-Easter blows and Table Mountain is covered in clouds, legend holds that Van Hunks and the devil are smoking again.³¹

Behind Van Hunks and the devil a slightly flustered angel, wearing only red high-heeled shoes is hurriedly approaching. As with most of Grobler's angels, she shows good intentions. Armed with a fire hose, she is ready to assist if a fire needs to be extinguished. The mountainous landscape is interrupted by a concrete path in the shape of a cross. All the characters are positioned on top of the cross-shaped path, perhaps suggesting a hidden Biblical subtext of good versus evil.

Apart from the local origin of the myth, animal print patterns are visible on the garments of both Van Hunks and the devil. Grobler's personal artistic vocabulary at this stage of his development is permeated with culture-specific references which reflect his South African origin. His rendition of characters like the Ananse and the hadeda, the tokoloshi and the great crocodile support this observation.

After having spent four months at the military camp in Oudtshoorn, Grobler was transferred to Pretoria in May, 1989 where he worked in the Shows and Exhibitions Division until June 1990. During this time he produced various minor sculptures of soldiers on horseback. His *Ruiter 1* (1989) (fig 11/DG032) is an example of works produced in this period.



Fig 11/DG032. Diek Grobler, *Ruiter 1* (1989).

Furthermore, he created a series of works called *The invisible circus*, which makes metaphoric reference to the absurdity of his military training at Oudtshoorn, supporting the thesis that events in his life served as a direct source of his art. At military camp he had no interest in learning to shoot and openly defied the status quo by refusing to accept a firearm. He felt that the enemy they were trained to fight was an invisible one, making the whole situation absurd.³² Consequently, Grobler was interviewed by military authority figures, a psychologist and reverend who tried to persuade him to view the role of a soldier as his Christian duty. This caused Grobler to further question both the religious belief system he grew up with, and the political views it informed. As a final resort, Grobler had to obtain written consent from his father to refuse a firearm. In an effort to spare his father possible embarrassment among his military peers, he relented. In my view, this incident was not an act of rebellion in which the artist tried to influence other people's convictions, but rather an outward reflection of his inner struggle to come to terms with his own political and religious beliefs at the time.

Grobler included *The invisible circus* series in his next exhibition, held in December 1989 at the Gallery on the Market in Newtown, Johannesburg.

Megaphone man (1989) (fig 12/DG040) and *The criers* (1989) (fig 13/DG041) both form part of *The invisible circus* series. *Megaphone man* (1989) is a comic depiction of a soldier set on getting his voice or message heard.

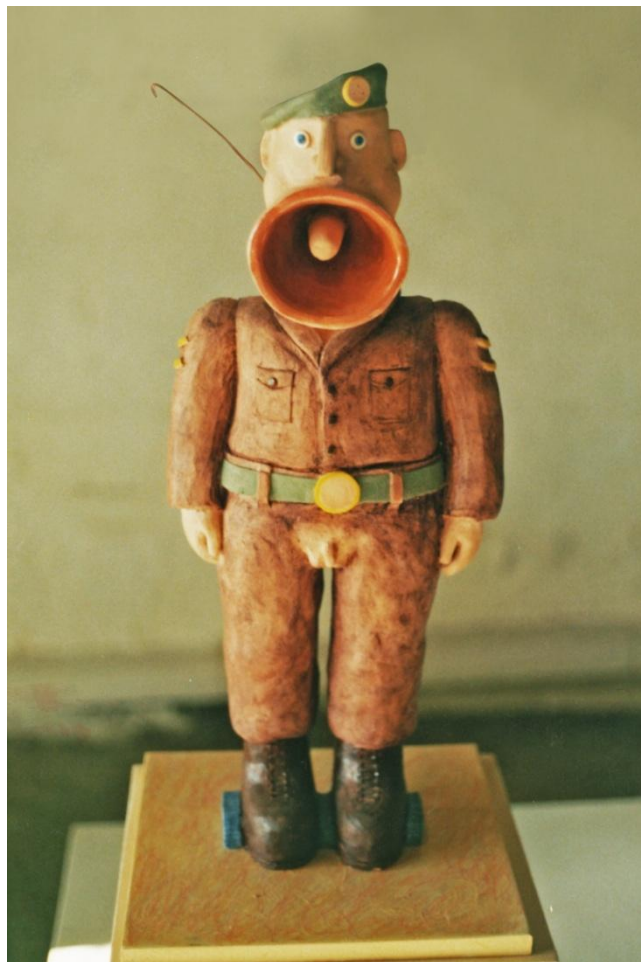


Fig 12/DG040. Diek Grobler, *Megaphone man* (1989).

The criers (1989) illustrates the fruitless propaganda of the two criers in the tower, adorned with the flag of the former Transvaal province of South Africa.³³ The flag is held upright by a fish. In Grobler's personal iconography the fish is sometimes applied as a symbol of the subconscious.³⁴ In this instance it might point towards the presence of an unintentional or intuitive apartheid consciousness. The tower rests on wheels. However, with each wheel going its own way there is no progress in any direction.



Fig 13/DG041. Diek Grobler, *The criers* (1989).

Grobler was invited to take part in the 1989 FNB Vita Art Now³⁵ exhibition in Johannesburg, which took place in April-June 1990. His *Tien tokkelossies* (1989) was one of two works³⁶ chosen for this exhibition. In Grobler's artist's statement, published in the exhibition catalogue (Carman & Scholtz 1990:20), he describes his art as follows:

My work is a reaction to observations made from the strange society we live in. South Africa is a satirist's paradise. ... I am also inspired by real-life situations which I translate into my own idiom, making the absurdities thereof larger than life ... I create a mirror of society.

Grobler completed his national military service in the middle of 1990. From 1990-1994 South Africa went through a politically and socially volatile time, culminating in the end of the apartheid era. During this time Grobler

continued producing ceramic sculptures and pastel illustrations as a vehicle for his politically inspired metaphors and visual narrations.

This chapter highlighted Grobler's childhood love for stories, play-acting and storytelling, which formed a basis for his narrative artistic approach. It briefly considered some examples of his early pastel illustrations and influences of the surrounding landscapes in these artworks. I discussed the artist's schooling, artistic and military training, and identified Fernando Bottero as an influence on his art. Selected examples of politically motivated ceramic sculptures, illustrations and paintings were referenced as part of a discussion on Grobler's iconography inspired by African mythology and South African folklore. Recurring motifs, such as the Ananse, the hadeda, the crocodile and the angel were also identified.

The next chapter covers the period between 1990 and 1997. During this phase the artist not only journeys through new territory in his personal life, but also artistically, developing his own visual language for the various new artistic media he pursues such as oil paint, gouache, and scraperboard.

Notes: Chapter 1

- 1 During Grobler's childhood the town was known as Warmbaths, situated in the Transvaal province. In 2002 Warmbaths was renamed Bela-Bela, meaning "boiling-boiling", with reference to the hot springs in that region (<http://www.southafrica.net/sat/content/en/us/>).
- 2 After South Africa's first post-apartheid national elections and the adoption of the new constitution dates from 1996, the South African Defence Force (SADF) was restructured and renamed the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) (<http://www.info.gov.za>).
- 3 Throughout this dissertation, the term Afrikaner will be used in reference to the white, ethnic minority in South Africa. According to Stultz (1974:2) an Afrikaner is a "white South African (or 'European') who speaks Afrikaans as his home language".
- 4 The apartheid era refers to the period from 1948-1994 in South Africa's political history, which was based on a system of legal racial segregation and the oppression of non-white racial groups (<http://www.apartheidmuseum.org>).
- 5 Grobler (2009e:17) says: "Dit is soort van 'n *mysterious presence* in die ruïne. Ek dink dit is 'n engel wat die vlag vashou."
- 6 Grobler's frequent inclusion of angels is visible in artworks such as *Die aankoms van Lady Godiva in Tafelbaai* (1991) (DG084), *Narcissus* (1993) (DG131), *Die intog van Jesus in Jerusalem* (1994) (DG137), *Die Passie: Gethsemane* (1993) (DG141), *Salome's dream 2* (1993) (DG150), *Madonna met koolkop* (1994) (DG164), *Woman searching for her guardian angel* (1995) (DG210) and *Mitologiese karakters oor 'n Afrika landskap* (2005) (DG502).
- 7 Van Wyk (1993:94) writes: "Engele bedoel altyd goed, beweer Diek: al maak dit somtyds seer."
- 8 Grobler (2009e:17-18) elucidates:

Ek het 'n fasinatie met die nostalgie van verlate strukture soos damme wat gebars is en veekrippe – van kindstyd af ... Die nostalgie van goeters wat vergaan en die skoonheid van 'n kuilvoertoring. En wat 'n kuilvoertoring was ... deesdae word daar net 'n plastieksak uitgehaal. 'n Kuilvoertoring is ... 'n regte rapunzel tipe van toring. Dit het daardie tipe van konnotasie vir my gehad ... Jy kan dink as 'n kind daar speel raak dit 'n kasteel ... In baie van my *paintings* en veral my gouache *paintings* het ek geplaveide areas wat gekraak is ... Dit is daardie ingryping van die mens. Goed wat mense opgerig het wat nou verwaarloos is en vergaan. Die nostalgie daarvan.
- 9 The Apocryphal Gospels consist of over a hundred ancient writings related to the life of Jesus. The Christian churches have not considered these writings to be canonical, thus excluding them from the New Testament of the Bible. The Apocryphal Gospels contain many myths about the early life of Jesus and of his mother, Mary (*Oxford Companion to World Mythology* 2010).
- 10 Grobler (2009e:17) states: "[O]p 'n manier is konsep seker vir my belangriker as vorm. Vorm is vir my 'n manier om by die konsep uit te kom."
- 11 Grobler's bronze sculpture *Eva* (1987) (DG013) is included in the interactive

catalogue accompanying this monograph.

- 12 See Grobler's artist statement in Carman and Scholtz (1990:20).
- 13 See Mouton (1996:197-198) on the political climate in South Africa at the end of apartheid.
- 14 Grobler (2009e:20) affirms:
Ek het dinge bevestig. Ek het agtergekom grootmense praat nie altyd die waarheid nie. Ek was baie naïef. So, ek het alles bevestig: Godsdienst, politiek ... alles. Die goed waarmee my kop besig is kom nog altyd in my werk uit. Dis nog altyd redelik biografies sonder dat ek doelbewus dit so gekies het.
- 15 Grobler (2009e:21) states: "[D]eur al die politieke *awareness* en alles wat ek gehad het was ek nog steeds baie *subdued*. As ek politieke kommentaar gelewer het was dit altyd deur 'n storie, hetsy Rooikappie of 'n Bybelstorie. Dit was altyd opgedress as ietsie anders."
- 16 Pieter Willem Botha was Prime Minister of South Africa from 1978-1984, and President from 1984-1989. During his period in office as the last president of the apartheid era in South Africa, he was nicknamed "the great crocodile". According to Mouton (1996:189), this nickname reflected his reputation as "a feared and ruthless politician ... who led the country to the brink of disaster; a perception strengthened by occasional attacks he makes from retirement on FW de Klerk for allegedly selling out the Afrikaner". Grobler (2009e:3) comments: "Die krokodil is die onbekende gevaar. Die drie afgevaardigdes staan in 'n ry. Hulle verteenwoordig die mense, maar hulle weet nie regtig waarop hulle ry nie. ... Dis die idee van 'n gevaar wat jy nie regtig die omvang van weet nie."
- 17 According to Vecsey (1981:162), trickster tales are some of the most common forms of prose told throughout Africa. Depending on the region in which the story originates, the trickster might take the form of a hare, tortoise, spider or even a human being. Ananse, the spider, is the trickster in the folklore of the Akan people of Ghana, in West Africa. These tales about Ananse are also called Anansesem (Vecsey 1981:162). According to Mazzucco (2010), the trickster tales of Africa can be divided as follows: "In Bantu Africa (east, central and Southern Africa) and the western Sudan, the trickster is the hare; in West Africa (Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone) it is the spider; and in Benin, Nigeria the trickster is a tortoise".
- 18 Grobler (2009e:28-29) describes his view of the hadeda as follows: "Die hadeda was vir my 'n simbool wat ek gebruik het vir die Afrikaner. Ek dink dit het gekom van die bygelowe rondom die hadeda. As die hadeda oor die huis vlieg kom daar dood. ... [D]it het my ook 'n bietjie laat dink aan 'n ou tannie met 'n Voortrekkerkappie... ."
- 19 The mythical figure of the tokoloshi (in Afrikaans pronounced as tokkelossie), has many different guises in African folklore. Lillejord and Mkabela (2004:259-260) list some of these:
In Southern Africa, it is commonly known to be a small creature. While the Nguni describe the tokoloshi as a short man (a dwarf or a gremlin), it is among the Shangaans in Mozambique depicted as a hairy creature resembling a monkey, with black eyes and small ears. ... The 'humanised' tokoloshi of the Nguni live in the woods near a river, and the 'monkey' tokoloshi live in small caves on mountain sides or among stones near a river. It is easily scared and afraid of people. While the tokoloshi is invisible to adults, it can be seen by children and enjoys

playing with them. In exchange for any services, the tokoloshi expects to be given sour milk or amasi, his favourite food. If not treated well, the tokoloshi can be a mischievous creature; it can break things or steal food in a homestead.

- 20 Grout (1997) terms Janus as the “Roman god of passages, both topographical and temporal”. He is often depicted having two heads, one gazing into the past and one into the future.
- 21 Examples of Grobler’s artworks featuring the figure of the two-headed Janus are *Die tweekoppige Janus* (1989) (DG054), *Die profeet se moeder* (2003) (DG445), *Mitologiese karakters oor ’n Afrika landskap* (2005) (DG502) and *Die profeet* (2005) (DG520).
- 22 Grobler (2009e:30) comments: “Soms maak ek hom [the two-headed Janus] met een lyf en twee koppe. Die figuur met twee koppe in die mitologie is Janus. Sy koppe kyk in verskillende rigtings want hy kan die toekoms en die verlede sien”.
- 23 Grobler (2011:4) describes his impressions of Alice as follows:
Alice is soort van ’n simbool van die Europese herkoms. ... Ek identifiseer baie sterk met haar en haar hele storie. Sy is vir my verteenwoordigend van wit naïwiteit en onskuld. Alice is ’n baie ou storie. Dit kom uit die Viktoriaanse era van eksplorasië uit. Sy is definitief vir my ’n simbool van dit wat was. Maar nie op ’n negatiewe manier nie. Sy verwys definitief nie na apartheid of die hele politieke sisteem nie. Dit is meer positief en meer filosofies. ’n Simbool vir die Europese intellektuele tradisie wat, in die konteks van Afrika, baie naïwiteit en onskuld verteenwoordig.
- 24 The figure of Alice is found in artworks such as *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (triptych) (1993) (fig 18/DG143), *Queen Alice* (1993) (DG154) and *Die ontmoeting* (1993) (DG155).
- 25 It is not within the scope of this dissertation to present a comprehensive overview of the art versus craft debate. However, the Clay+ exhibition was conceived in the light of the debates around the “redefinition of traditional utilitarian clay works, and the so-called ‘sculptural’ use of clay” (Du Plessis 1988:1). The works chosen for this exhibition were thought to transcend the traditionally defined categories of art and craft.
- 26 When asked why the artist is so small, Grobler (2009e:4) commented: “Ag die muse is net so groot! ... [M]y muse was maar altyd Mari gewees. My muse het altyd rooi hare.” Mari van Niekerk was Grobler’s wife from 1990-2006.
- 27 The paradise story is found in the Bible, Genesis chapter 3. Motifs such as the snake, the tree and the piece of fruit are seen in Grobler’s *Fool’s paradise* (1988) (DG025), *Passion in a treetop* (1993) (DG153) and *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (triptych) (1993) (fig 18/DG143).
- 28 See Grobler (2009e:5) where the artist states: “Kunstenaars wat ek al fassinerend gevind het as ’n student, was Magritte en Botero. Bietjie later was dit Stanley Spencer en Paula Rego.” Grobler does not recognise any specific South African artists as influences on his artistic style.
- 29 Throughout Grobler’s oeuvre he often portrays naked figures - mostly female - wearing shoes. Examples of this can be seen in artworks such as *Naak op ’n wolkie* (1987) (DG003), *Eva met ’n piesang* (1987) (DG011), *Nude with shoes*

and a hat (1989) (DG056), *Godiva* (1991) (DG087), *Salome's dream 2* (1993) (DG150) and *Draped Madonna and child* (1996) (DG263). Grobler (2010:6) recalls an incident where his mother questioned the nudity in his art. He then decided to start adding shoes so they won't be naked. Perhaps this humorous anecdote indicates a regard for the conservative Afrikaner's puritan outlook on nudity, which is founded on a Christian association between nakedness and shame. According to the paradise story (Bible, Genesis 3:7) Adam and Eve became aware and ashamed of their nakedness after they had committed the sin of eating the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

- 30 *Ophelia* (1989) (fig 9/DG038) is Grobler's interpretation of a Pre-Raphaelite work by John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Ophelia* (1851-1852). Oil on canvas, 76,2 x 111,8 cm. Tate Britain, London. Catalogue number: NO1506. (Illustration and data: <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=9506>, accessed 28 July 2010.) The subject of Millais's work is Shakespeare's Ophelia who fell into the river while she was picking flowers and slowly drowned, singing all the while. She is holding flowers which symbolise death (poppy), innocence (daisies) and love in vain (pansies) (<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=9506>). Grobler created a second artwork with the same title and theme in 1998. See *Ophelia* (1998) (DG358).
- 31 See <http://library.thinkquest.org> in reference to the legend of Van Hunks and the devil.
- 32 Grobler (2009e:27) explains: "Op daardie stadium was daar nie meer 'n oorlog nie so die wyand het verdwyn. So al daardie offisiere en onder-offisiere se wêreld was besig om te verkrummel. Nou moet hulle ons begeester vir hierdie swart gevaar maar daar is nie meer 'n swart gevaar nie. Alles het net meer en meer absurd gelyk."
- 33 The flag, also known as 'Die Vierkleur' or Quadri-colour, consists of three horizontal stripes of orange, white and blue and a vertical green stripe at the hoist (Maake 1996:146).
- 34 Grobler (2010:8) remarks: "Die argetipiese simbool van die vis is soort van *life and rejuvenation*. Hy swem in die *unconscious* ... die water is die *unconscious*. Die vis swem die *streams of the unconscious* ... maar my vis is gewoonlik 'n baber wat so soort van in die modder van die *unconscious* rondswem. Amper soos 'n *underdog*".
- 35 Enwezor (1996) describes the FNB Vita Art Now annual exhibition, held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, as "South Africa's version of the Turner Prize" and "a forum for art that promises better things". A panel in Johannesburg selects the best work exhibited by artists during the previous year.
- 36 The second artwork was Grobler's *And the ship sails on* (1989). Painted ceramic, wood, cloth and wire, 60 x 52 x 36 cm. Signed on side of ship. Private collection. (Data and a black and white illustration are available in Carman & Scholtz 1990:20).

CHAPTER 2: DOCUMENTING A JOURNEY (1990-1997)

2.1 Exploring themes of marriage and myth

After completing his military service in 1990, Grobler accepted a position as substitute teacher at the Pro Arte School for the arts in Pretoria. At the end of the year he was appointed permanently. He lectured in painting at Pro Arte for the next three years, while working on his art after hours.

Teaching was not Grobler's preferred profession. He always wanted to be an artist, but as mentioned previously, he was pressured into following a "more responsible" career path. His TED merit study bursary compelled him to work as a teacher for a minimum of two years. He was very fortunate to start his teaching career at a school specialising in both the visual and the performing arts. As mentioned in Chapter One, both of these genres interested Grobler since childhood and would feature prominently throughout his oeuvre.

Grobler was a popular teacher. He aimed to inspire individual students to explore different media in order to find the option best suited to their own personal style, rather than simply teaching basic techniques to the group as a whole. Incidentally, this philosophy would manifest throughout the artist's own personal oeuvre, as he would experiment with and master various artistic media and develop his own visual language best suited for each medium.

During his first year of teaching in 1990, Grobler married Marí van Niekerk. He was very much in love and also inspired by the idea of being in love. The institution of marriage and the notion of love would feature as themes in his work during this period, along with the motif of the bride.



Fig 14/DG088. Diek Grobler, *Untraditional wedding* (1991).

In *Untraditional wedding* (1991) (fig 14/DG088) Grobler uses the wedding theme as a political metaphor. The approaching end of apartheid in 1994 promised a union between segregated racial and cultural groups within the South African community. The hadeda is hidden under the bride's Western style wedding veil. The Ananse – dressed as the groom – is approaching the hadeda while grasping the snake, which is trying to destroy the bridal bouquet.

In *Marriage of inconvenience* (1992) (fig 15/DG107) Grobler sculpts the wedding cake for the Ananse and the hadeda, elaborating on his theme of the marriage between divided cultures resulting in a post-apartheid South Africa. The title of the artwork might suggest a forced union which is perhaps undesired and uncomfortable.



Fig 15/DG107. Diek Grobler, *Marriage of inconvenience* (1992).

Early in 1991, Grobler started experimenting with small pieces of scraperboard and found the medium highly suitable for his style of drawing, using fine lines and intricate detail. As his confidence with the medium increased, he started working on larger boards. Between 1991 and 1993 Grobler completed various A2 sized scraperboards. In these narrative works he meticulously carved out intricate stories, laden with symbolism.

Initially Grobler worked on commercial scraperboards. However, he soon found the medium too restrictive. He therefore started making his own scraperboards by covering a wooden panel with various layers of white

paint, followed by a thin layer of black paint, literally polished onto the wooden surface. This resulted in a grey board, instead of the standard black surface of a commercial scraperboard.¹ The grey board provided a surface that could be manipulated in various directions. Instead of merely removing the black layer, working from black to white, he could now remove the grey layer and work towards white, or darken certain areas by adding more black.

This type of scraperboard allowed the artist more freedom when manipulating the board. Instead of carving fine lines into the surface of the board, he started by making broad, loose strokes and shapes with sanding paper, steel wool or a commercial sander. He then added detailed line work and applied oil paint to add shade and depth to certain sections.

Grobler created three sculptures with scraperboard-like surface qualities. He covered the sculptures with black oxide and removed parts of the surface with a fine etch needle. *Swart skaap, wit skaap* (1992) (fig 16/DG122) and *Self-portrait* (1992) (fig 17/DG121) are two of these sculptures.²

In *Swart skaap, wit skaap* (1992) he covered almost the entire surface of the sculpted figures with intricate, rhythmic lines of various lengths. According to Grobler (1997:69-70), the scraperboard technique “allows for a heightened sense of detail through the possibility of minute mark-making and hatching as well as the high contrast in tonal range”. The theme of the sculpture possibly suggests a political scenario where both black and white parties are stuck on the same merry-go-round, aimlessly circling each other.



Fig 16/DG122. Diek Grobler, *Swart skaap, wit skaap* (1992).



Fig 17/DG121. Diek Grobler, *Self-portrait* (1992).

In *Self-portrait* (1992) Grobler portrays himself as a man in a suit wearing a bowler hat.³ The bowler hat is perhaps one of his most widely recognised personal metaphors. For Grobler the derby hat, or bowler hat, denotes rank in society. Dressed in this attire, he represents the middle class working person in society.⁴ Grobler relates the wearing of different hats and assuming of different personae to the stage and to popular actors such as Charlie Chaplin. When he takes part in performance art or an avant-garde stage production he usually dons the iconic bowler hat.

Throughout the artist's oeuvre there are many figures that visually resemble Grobler, but which I believe should not be regarded as self-portraits. While some artworks display the artist's private identity,⁵ others such as *Self-portrait* (1992) depict a stage persona. From his childhood staging of puppet shows to his later involvement in performance art, Grobler has performed the role of mythic and Biblical wanderers like Odysseus and Jonah, the two-headed Janus and a multitude of other, lesser-known characters from his own private world of magic realism. Many artworks show the artist in character, rather than as the man himself.⁶ Atkins (1990:108) suggests that narrative artworks are "especially well suited to psychological self-examination and the investigation of the role-playing that is so conspicuous an element of late twentieth-century social interaction".

In a later phase of Grobler's artistic development he would take the concept of role-playing even further, by maintaining online Facebook identities and writing regular Internet blogs for some of the lead characters in his animation series *Uit die bloute* (2009) (DG621), as well as his stage persona Kropotkin Pretorius.⁷

Grobler did not explore the combination of sculpture and scraperboard techniques further, but rather chose to perfect his technique with traditional scraperboards. By 1992, he was well versed in the artistic medium of

scraperboard. In 1993, he received a Merit Award in the ABSA L'Atelier Competition with his scraperboard triptych titled *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (1993) (fig 18/DG143).



Fig 18/DG143. Diek Grobler, *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (triptych) (1993).

These intricate A2 sized panels illustrate a myriad of small narratives, mixing imagery from Biblical stories, popular myths and legends. By arranging narratives from different genres on one picture plane, Grobler erases any perceived hierarchical distinction between sacred stories, folk tales, true stories and mere flights of the imagination. Apart from removing traditional distinctions, Grobler also creates an alternative, magical reality. According to the artist (Grobler 1997:69) the medium of scraperboard not only “lends itself to the layering of images and symbols”, but also to the creation of different levels of reality. Grobler (1997:70) explains: “The dramatic qualities of light and shadow obtainable in this medium make it ideal for the construction of an alternative reality.”

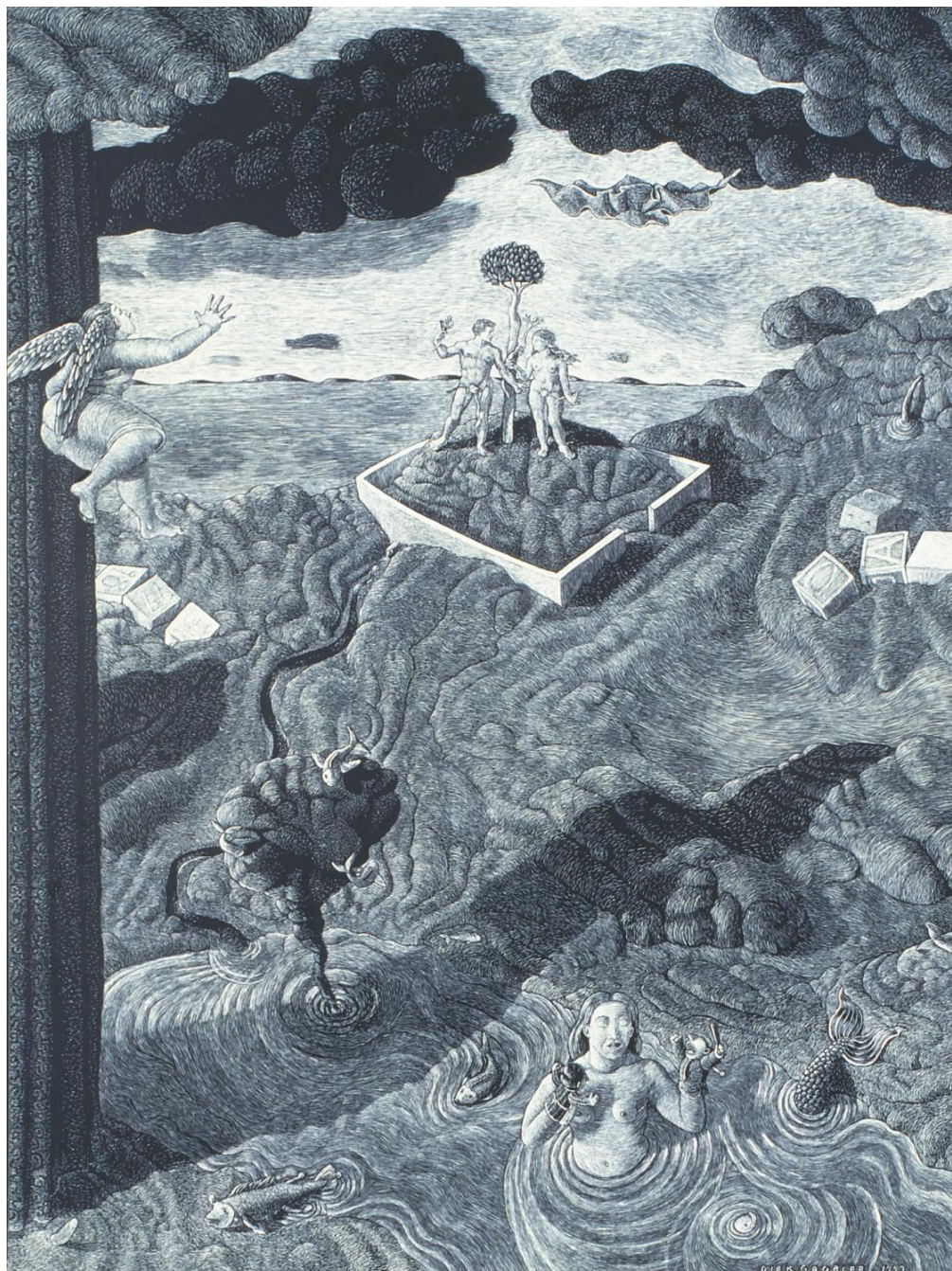


Fig 19/DG144. Diek Grobler, *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (left panel of triptych) (1993).

The complex play of metanarratives seems to be arranged on a large stage, spanning all three panels. The sides of the stage are flanked with heavy stage curtains, which are being held open by Grobler's familiar figures of angels. Once again, the angels display good intentions.⁸ In the

left panel of *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (1993) the angel leads the viewer's gaze into the composition. It is poised by the curtain, one hand outstretched towards the Biblical Garden of Eden, as if desperately trying to prevent a disastrous act from happening.⁹



Fig 20/DG145. Diek Grobler, *Myths and legends from the Promised Land*, (central panel of triptych) (1993).

The angel in the central panel of the triptych is chasing a rooster. According to Grobler (2001:3) this is the rooster described in the Biblical story of Peter's denial of Jesus.¹⁰



Fig 21/DG146. Diek Grobler, *Myths and legends from the Promised Land*, (right panel of triptych) (1993).

The third angel, depicted on the right panel is pulling at the curtain, trying to hide something from the viewer's gaze. The angels in this triptych are dressed in robes as if the magnitude of humanity's sins is so great that it has likewise covered them in shame.

In my view, Grobler's large scale commercial scraperboards such as *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (1993) represent some of the most exciting illustrations in his oeuvre to date. The medium has proven to be highly suitable for Grobler's signature application of regular, rhythmic cross- and contour hatching. The entire surface of the board is covered with an astonishing amount of fine lines, forming intricate narratives that invite the viewer to read and decipher them.

The three panels of the triptych are visually unified by the continuous landscape and ominous, dark clouds emulating the unevenness of the landscape below. Alphabet- and numbered blocks in the left panel might serve as symbols for the childhood stories and folk tales used to teach children the fundamental principles of right and wrong, good and evil. The viewer's gaze is pulled away from the walled Garden of Eden, following a tiny stream towards a pond in which a mermaid is narrating a story. Mermaids are recurring figures, depicted in various scenarios throughout the artist's oeuvre.¹¹ In this instance, the mermaid is using two glove-puppets to act out a domestic dispute.

Grobler (2011:3) identifies the glove-puppet characters as Judy and Punch.¹² According to Crone (2006:1055), the two classic characters were popular in England in the nineteenth century:

[D]uring the first half of the century, the Punches' marriage had both reflected the continuing popularity of the early modern theme of the 'struggle for the breeches' and encapsulated familial tensions that resulted from the pressures of industrialization and urbanization. However, from 1850 the middle classes attempted to reshape the relationship into a moral tale in order to teach their children valuable lessons about marital behaviour. Yet, at the same time, the maintenance of violence in the portrayal

of the Punches' conjugal life exposed crucial patterns of continuity in attitudes towards marriage, masculinity, and femininity in Victorian England.

The mermaid's eyes are closed, which might suggest that she is unable to interfere in the conflict or simply refusing to intervene. Some of the fishes in the pond are being sucked into a tiny whirlpool, while others are trying to escape. As mentioned previously, Grobler often uses the image of a fish as representative of the human subconscious.¹³

The most prominent figure in the central panel is that of the Minotaur.¹⁴ The masculine, mythic creature is dressed in a decorated military coat with red high-heeled shoes. It is busy exposing itself to some female figures, who display diverse reactions and expressions. According to Grobler (2011:4), the Minotaur itself is vulnerable and exposed. Although the act of indecent exposure is brutal and perverse, the onlookers are not in any real danger. The Minotaur is making a fool of itself. Grobler adds that as a personal subtext the Minotaur resembles his own beliefs about morality, politics and religion that were exposed and questioned during this particular stage in his life.¹⁵

The central panel is set against the backdrop of a deserted battlefield. The foreground shows clear remnants of war. There are half-buried muskets, hand grenades, assault rifles, bullets, scattered arrows and a white flag in the front left hand corner. In the middle ground, at opposite sides of an abyss stand an abandoned battering ram – in the shape of a fist – and a catapult. Both represent ancient weapons of war. Smoke on the horizon might indicate a battle further afield. The billowing clouds spill over into the panel on the right, where the hand of God is pointing towards the central panel. Grobler (2011:3) surmises that even the hand of God is quite small as if even He is unable to do much about the chaotic state of affairs.¹⁶

The panel on the right portrays a slightly less oppressive and volatile landscape. Below the hand of God stands a make-shift stage with an

abandoned Trojan sheep. Sofa chairs are scattered over the hills. Some are sunken into the ground indicating a passing of time. Groups of confused and lost sheep dot the landscape on the left waiting for a shepherd. The landscape between the stage and Alice is lined by neat potted trees. As previously mentioned, Alice is Grobler's representation of the European intellectual tradition. She is balancing an apple on her head and there are arrows lying on the table and carpet in front of her.

In my opinion, *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (1993) provides fragments of Grobler's world at the end of apartheid. The idea of a Promised Land might be linked to the prospect of a new and better South Africa, associated with the end of apartheid. The myths and legends displayed in the left panel could be representative of the Biblical and classic narratives that individuals like Grobler grew up with and which had shaped their beliefs. The central panel could read as a metaphor for the political struggle associated with apartheid, and the unmasking of learned beliefs and political views. The right hand panel shows the impressions colonialism left on the landscape. Traces of Western influences have been left on both the physical and the intellectual landscape.

While experimenting with scraperboard, Grobler continued working in other artistic media, seldom focusing on one medium exclusively. He often explored a specific theme or motif through various media simultaneously. For example, the motif used in a sculpture might inspire a performance art piece, or a whole series of gouache paintings.

The various motifs drawn from fairy tales, religious stories and Greek mythology, seen in *Myths and legends from a Promised Land* (1993), were further explored in gouache and pastel works such as *Narcissus* (1993) (fig 22/DG131). In light of the reading of *Myths and legends from a Promised Land* (1993), the mythological figure of the Minotaur in *Narcissus* (1993) might serve as a metaphor for learned beliefs. Its

masculine physique might be an indication that the beliefs are related to gender sensitive issues. Similar to Narcissus in Greek mythology, it is vainly admiring itself in a mirror.¹⁷



Fig 22/DG131. Diek Grobler, *Narcissus* (1993).

Although the Minotaur is looking ridiculous, it does not realise this. It is absorbed with its own image. The angels are curiously observing the creature. The angel on the right hand side seems puzzled by the absurdity of the Minotaur's ignorance.

The meeting of two incompatible myths (1993) (fig 23/DG134) might be read as a comment on conflicting and obsolete perceptions of gender

related issues. Two mythological creatures represent beliefs around the male and female gender roles.



Fig 23/DG134. Diek Grobler, *The meeting of two incompatible myths* (1993).

The voluptuous mermaid has her tail curled around the masculine Minotaur's torso, while he is grabbing her breasts. It is unclear if this is a battle for dominance or a sexual encounter. The broken water fountain testifies to the intensity of the struggle, but might likewise serve as a representation of antiquity, indicating that this is an ancient dispute.

Additional elements of Grobler's personal iconography revealed in this artwork are the paper aeroplane and the baboon. The paper jet sometimes refers to discarded knowledge¹⁸ that might no longer be accurate or valid. In the background, behind a well-lit screen, a paper jet is being held by a human hand. This might indicate the artist's presence in the artwork, thus implying a personal interest in the encounter. Alternatively, it might be an inconspicuous stagehand launching the paper planes into the foreground, as part of a stage performance.

Grobler (2009e:25) identifies the baboon as an omen of death in African folklore.¹⁹ In this work the baboon is staring at its reflection in a mirror, while the battle is raging behind its back.

The judgement of Paris (1993) (fig 24/DG135) is Grobler's satirical interpretation of the mythical story of Paris judging a beauty contest between the goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite.²⁰ In Greek mythology, the judgement of Paris was one of the events that led to the Trojan War. Snodgrass (1994:xii) aptly elaborates: "The sufferings of two nations – Greece and Troy – hinged on the questionable fortune of Paris, an outcast royal son turned shepherd, whom Olympian gods selected for a trivial task, the judging of a beauty contest." Grobler depicts Paris as a blind man, emphasising his inadequacy to perform such a vital task.



Fig 24/DG135. Diek Grobler, *The judgement of Paris* (1993).

In a similar vein, Grobler satirically twists Greek mythology in *Leda and the Swan* (1993) (fig 25/DG136). In Greek mythology, Leda was the mother of Helen of Troy. Her myth inspired the popular theme, often depicted throughout art history. According to legend Leda, the queen of Sparta, was seduced by Zeus, disguised as a swan. She also had intercourse with her husband Tyndareus the same night. The consummations resulted in two eggs, from which two sets of twins hatched. The one set was Helen of Troy and Clytemnestra and the other set Castor and Pollux.²¹



Fig 25/DG136. Diek Grobler, *Leda and the swan* (1993).

Whereas most artists portray the theme as Helen with a swan on her lap or next to her,²² Grobler depicts Leda waiting for Zeus to seduce her, not knowing that she has accidentally cooked him as the main course.²³ Needless to say, this would have made a profound impact on the course of history.

Apart from practicing visual art, Grobler started venturing into performance art. His childhood affinity for the stage was a natural extension of his love for stories and storytelling. Grobler's first performance art piece *Trout* (1993) (fig 26/DG626), was performed at the IGI Life Vita Dance Umbrella, Fringe²⁴ at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) Theatre in March 1993.



Fig 26/DG626. Diek Grobler, *Trout* (1993).

This performance piece featured a woman standing in a plastic bath, singing Schubert as human fishes²⁵ swam by. Alongside Grobler's performance, Pinto Ferreira's experimental Theatre of Mind (TOM) dancers were performing a techno dance piece. The media described these joint performance art pieces as "multi-layered, visually gratifying intellectual flights of the imagination" (Jenkins 1993:19).

Grobler joined TOM in various Basement Theatre performance art events from 1993 to 1997. Through these events they aimed to educate and expose South African audiences to the genre of performance art.

During Grobler's three and a half years of teaching at Pro Arte School for the arts, he exhibited his work at various galleries. Apart from the annual ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibitions in 1991-1998, he also participated in the Love, Landscape, and Lonely Escape exhibition at the Gallery on the Market in Newtown in 1991, staged a two-person exhibition at Gallery 709 in Cape Town in 1992 and displayed his work at the Gallery on Tyrone in Parkview, Johannesburg in 1993. At the end of 1993, Grobler left his teaching position at the Pro Arte School for the arts.

2.2 In search of inspiration

Early in 1994, Grobler departed on a two-month sabbatical journey through Europe. The aim of this journey was to view some of the artworks

he had studied during his Fine Arts degree. Visiting cities like Paris, Berlin, Barcelona, Antwerp, Amsterdam and London inspired many new artworks, such as *Our Lady of Compassion* (1994) (fig 27/DG170), *The puzzle builders* (1994) (fig 28/DG157) and *The scream* (triptych) (1994) (fig 29/DG158).

Grobler's ceramic sculpture *Our Lady of Compassion* (1994) is based on a sculpture he saw in an art museum during his visit to Berlin.²⁶

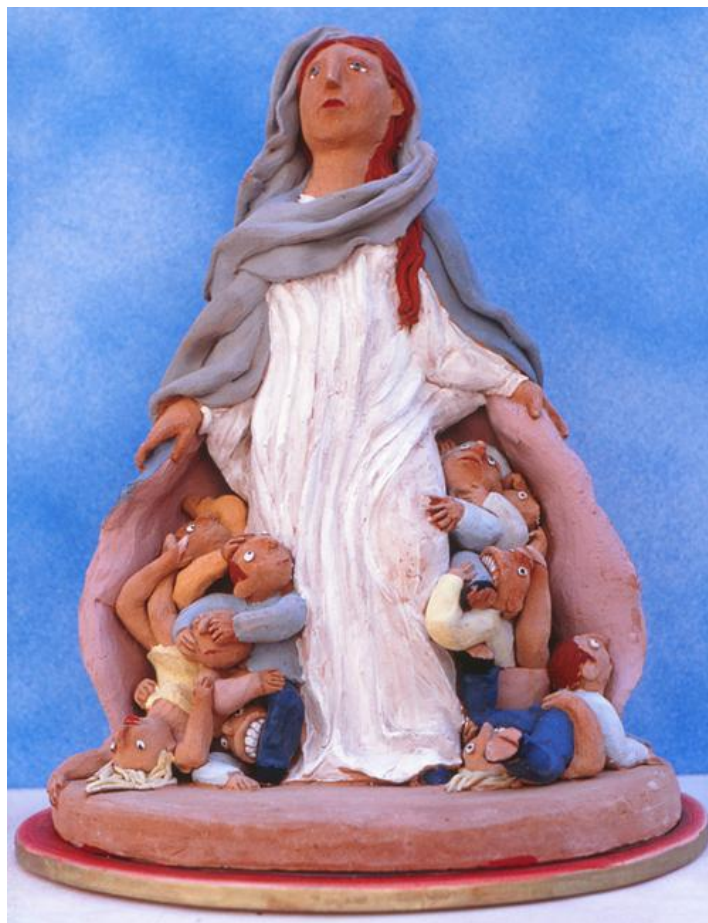


Fig 27/DG170. Diek Grobler, *Our Lady of Compassion* (1994).

This work explores the contrasting emotional states of greed and generosity, humility and pride. The holy Lady is compassionately shielding the multitudes of sinners under her cloak. The sinners comprise human figures eagerly staring up at her face, while stepping on, biting, pushing

and pulling at each other, in the hope of getting into closer proximity to the Lady. It is almost as if humanity is so occupied with its own struggles that it is unable to reach a higher plane of generosity and kindness.

The second example of an artwork inspired by this journey is *The puzzle builders* (1994). While strolling along a waterway in Amsterdam, Grobler came across puzzle pieces scattered over the road. When he looked up he saw an old age home. His first thought was of a cruel matron throwing the puzzle pieces out the window, leaving the elderly in the predicament of being unable to finish building their puzzles! This incident inspired him to paint *The puzzle builders* (1994).²⁷



Fig 28/DG157. Diek Grobler, *The puzzle builders* (1994).

This artwork highlights an important aspect of Grobler's artistic approach whereby he finds inspiration in seemingly random or ordinary events. By isolating and depicting these events out of their usual context he adds an element of mystery.²⁸ An artwork such as *The puzzle builders* (1994) might entice the viewer to read and unravel the visual narrative.

The third example shows two variations on a theme, which was inspired by an incident in Europe. During the time of South Africa's General Election in 1994 – which marked the end of the apartheid era – Grobler was travelling in France. While waiting in a voting line in Paris, he saw three women standing on a street corner, shouting for no apparent reason. This peculiar incident led him to paint a triptych and sculpt a ceramic work both titled *The scream* (1994) (fig 29/ DG158 and fig 30/DG171).²⁹



Fig 29/DG158. Diek Grobler, *The scream* (triptych) (1994).



Fig 30/DG171. Diek Grobler, *The scream* (1994).

2.3 Finding magic in the mundane

When Grobler returned from his European journey in 1994, he registered for a Master's degree in Fine Arts at Wits in Johannesburg, which he successfully completed at the end of 1996. From 1994 Grobler focused solely on his art and participated in various exhibitions.³⁰

To supplement his income, he gave weekly drawing classes for a year at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in 1995. Furthermore, he illustrated children's books.

His brother Piet, an established illustrator at this time, introduced Grobler to a business woman named Ann Walton. Grobler illustrated numerous children's books for Walton between 1994 and 1995. In addition to illustrating, he authored and co-authored children's books. In Grobler's view both teaching and book illustrating were mere parts of his journey, rather than a destination. His main focus was still on his development as an artist.³¹

Grobler created his last ceramic sculptures in 1994. The majority of his sculptures up to this point were concerned with political issues at the end of the apartheid period. After 1994, these metaphors were beginning to lose their impact. However, the 1994 elections in South Africa inspired Grobler's painting titled *Victory boogie woogie* (1995) (fig 31/DG178).³² Through this work he captures contrasting emotional reactions to the elections.



Fig 31/DG178. Diek Grobler, *Victory boogie woogie* (1995).

Victory boogie woogie (1995) was exhibited as part of Grobler's MA Fine Arts exhibition at the Gertrude Posel Gallery at Wits. Between 1994 and 1996 Grobler created a large body of artworks for this particular exhibition. Some examples of these artworks are the *Deadly sins* series (1995) and *Storyboard for a documentary* (1995) (fig 35/DG183). Grobler's studies

contributed towards his artistic development. In addition to the practical component, his Master's dissertation focused on magical realism in the art of Stanley Spencer (1891-1959).

In my view, Grobler's research on Spencer's construction of an alternative reality helped him to define and evaluate his own artistic views. Grobler (1997:69) related certain aspects of Spencer's approach to his own art:

I also present everyday situations in my paintings and scraperboard drawings which reflect on conventional views of religion. ... [I] also depict traditional religious images associated with devotional meditation such as biblical themes, depictions of saints and the Madonna, and series relating to the life of Christ. While adhering to traditional religious conventions of portrayal of such subjects, I also deviate from them in order to subvert the conventional reading or function. This also pertains to the reading of a narrative within images through the use of fragmentation, serial composition, scale and the inclusion of ambiguous references.

For example, the *Deadly Sins* series, consisting of eight separate oil paintings,³³ illustrates the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and sloth. Yet, Grobler added an eighth sin, speeding, signifying that the list of sins is incomplete and expandable. Grobler (1997:77) describes this series of works as a "reappraisal" of a traditional religious theme". His objective was to ridicule the "traditional pictorial convention of the seven cardinal sins as an opportunity for devotional reflection on the seriousness of transgression" (Grobler 1997:77).

In *Deadly sins: Pride* (1996) (fig 32/DG218) a self-important diva is seated in front of a mirror in a dressing room. Clearly unhappy with her appearance, she has tried on several wigs, some of which have been thrown on the floor. She is surrounded by different garments, shoes and cosmetics.



Fig 32/DG218. Diek Grobler, *Deadly sins: Pride* (1996).

Deadly sins: Gluttony (1996) (fig 33/DG219) depicts a single male figure seated at a table, leaning on his elbow as if asleep. To his left is a stack of empty plates while the platter in front of him contains a few bits of leftover food.



Fig 33/DG219. Diek Grobler, *Deadly sins: Gluttony* (1996).

Some more pieces of food are scattered on the floor and tables. The overturned chair and forgotten handbag suggest that a social gathering has taken place. The seated figure does not appear to be gluttonous or excessively overweight. Grobler is subverting the traditional notion that the deadly sins are the most severe and offensive transgressions which should be depicted accordingly. He approaches the theme with the assumption that these sins are being committed all the time, by ordinary people.³⁴

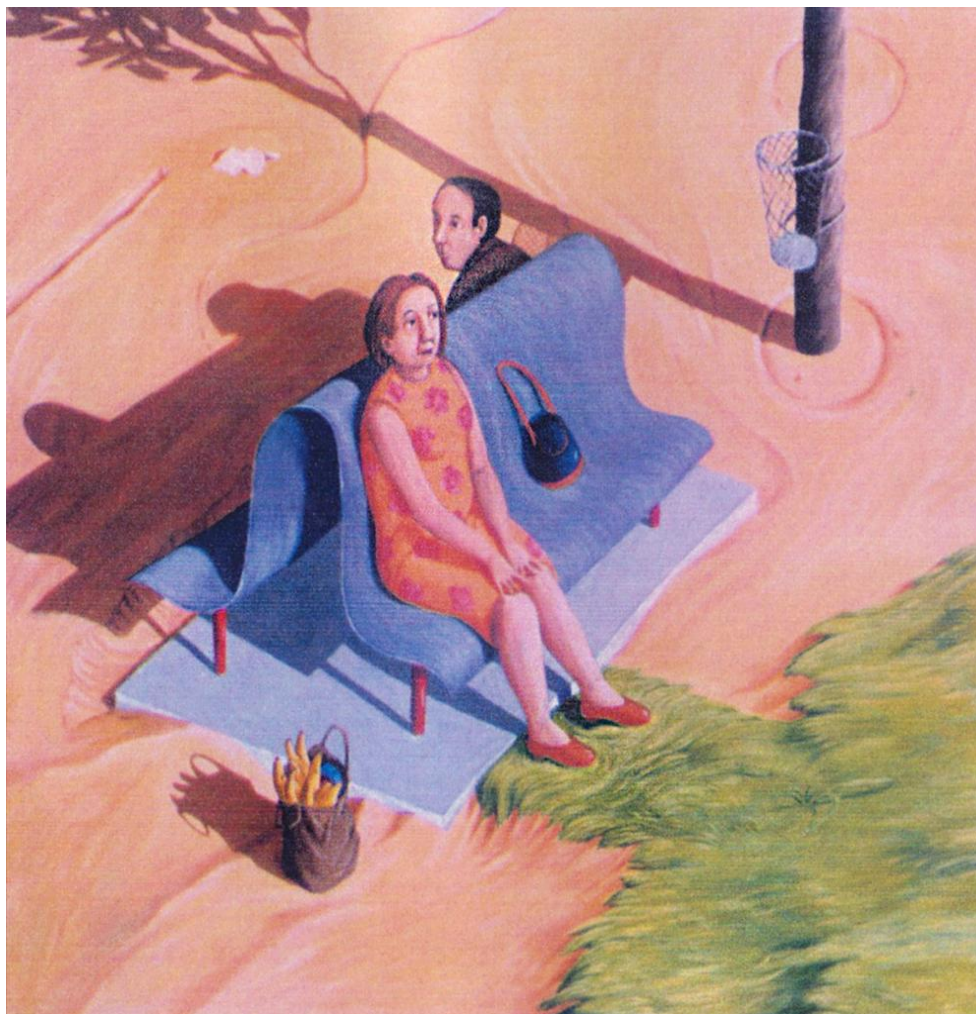


Fig 34/DG220. Diek Grobler, *Deadly sins: Lust* (1996).

Similarly, the two figures seated on separate sides of a park bench in Grobler's *Deadly sins: Lust* (1996) (fig 34/DG220), do not exhibit an overwhelming display of lust. Grobler (1997:79) elucidates: "The scene implies that they are not acquainted but their sideward glances suggest them contemplating a liaison. The image contains obvious sexual references, e.g. the bag of bananas, the phallic shape of the bench and the handbag, the empty waste bin and the incisions in the ground."

Grobler uses both oil paint and gouache as artistic media. The *Deadly sins* series serves as an example of his oil paintings. According to the artist, he uses oil paint on large scale works that unfold over a period of time.

Grobler (1997:73-74) explains: “[M]y compositions are not fully realised before painting commences. A general plan is sketched onto the canvas in brush before large areas of colour are filled in ... This procedure allows me to make changes or overpaint where necessary as the work progresses.” Gouache is Grobler’s preferred medium for the creation of small-scale artworks, enabling him to quickly capture intuitive ideas. *Storyboard for a documentary* (1995) exemplifies his application of gouache.

Grobler started creating the *Storyboard for a documentary* series in 1994 and completed the first storyboard in 1995 and a second storyboard in 1996.³⁵ He describes these “snap-shot renderings of narrative ideas” as “an ongoing sequence of small images in the form of a visual notebook executed continuously ... since 1994” (Grobler 1997:71).

Originally *Storyboard for a documentary* (1995) (fig 35/DG183) consisted of 16 gouache paintings presented as a single unit. Yet, there was no central theme or sequential narrative. In Grobler’s view, the background landscape functioned as a unifying feature which tied the otherwise disparate ideas together into an ongoing narrative (Grobler 1997:71). Moreover, the series documented ideas for possible further development in other media. After exhibiting the work at the Annual Wits Masters in Fine Art exhibition at the Gertrude Posel Gallery in Johannesburg in 1995, Grobler separated the series, titled each painting, and sold them as separate artworks.



Fig 35/DG183. Diek Grobler, *Storyboard for a documentary* (1995).

Each of the paintings tells its own story. Some stories reinterpret classic texts from English literature, such as *So much depends on the red wheelbarrow* (1995) (fig 36/DG193),³⁶ some comment on seemingly random, everyday events and challenges,³⁷ like *Juggler in peril* (1995) (fig 37/DG190); and some capture the subject of culture and identity, as seen in *Walking a line in Africa* (1995) (fig 38/DG188).³⁸



Fig 36/DG193. Diek Grobler, *So much depends on the red wheelbarrow* (1995).

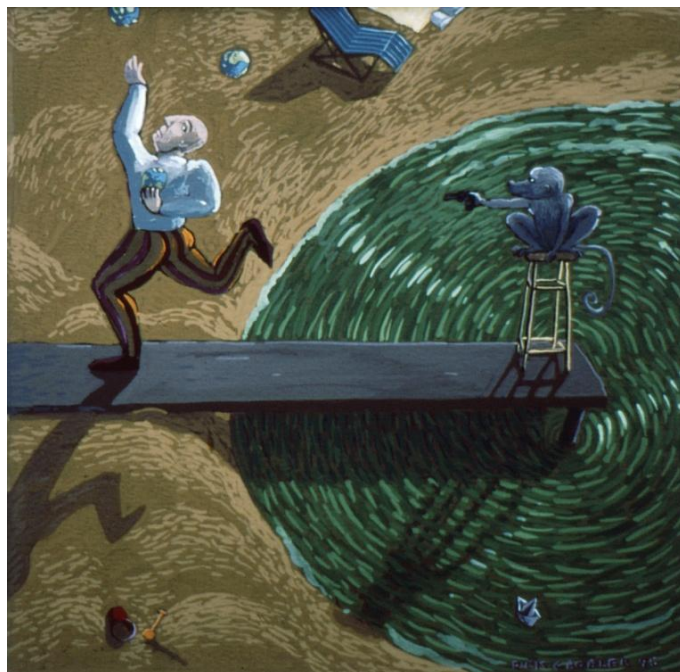


Fig 37/DG190. Diek Grobler, *Juggler in peril* (1995).



Fig 38/DG188. Diek Grobler, *Walking a line in Africa* (1995).

At this point in his development, Grobler was influenced by the work of the Portuguese artist Paula Rego (1935-)³⁹ and the British artist Stanley Spencer (1891-1959).⁴⁰ He was drawn towards the narrative quality of Rego's work and was stylistically influenced by her treatment of the female form, as seen in her *Dancing ostriches* (1995) (fig 39). Grobler (1997:9) describes Rego as an artist whose figures and landscapes depict features that reflect her Portuguese origin. In my view, Grobler's work is similarly reflective of his South African culture, depicting characters like Anansie and the hadeda, and narrating scenes from his immediate social and political environment.

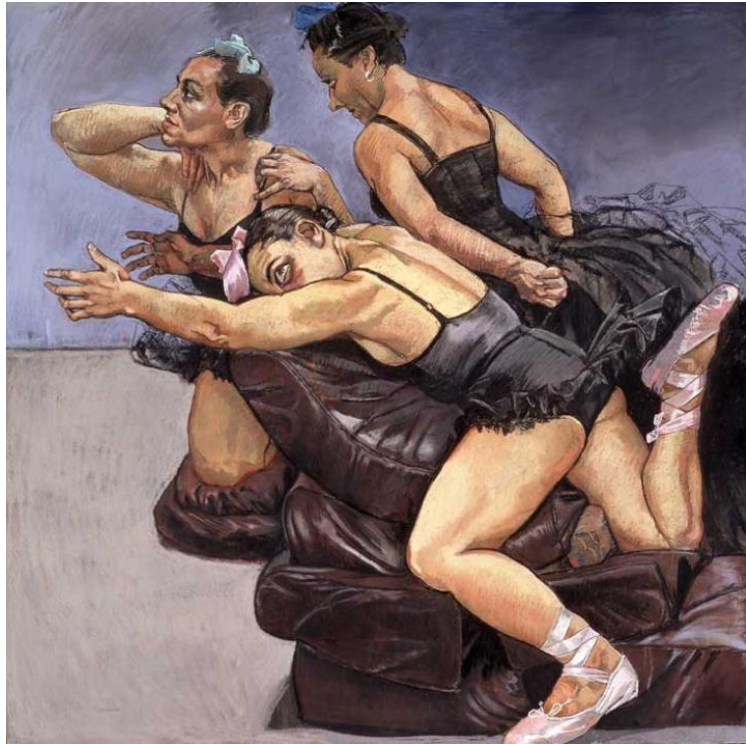


Fig 39. Paula Rego, *Dancing ostriches* (1995).



Fig 40. Paula Rego, *Little miss Muffet* (1989).

Grobler also related to the way Rego often reinterpreted established literary sources and narratives. Moreover, he was drawn to her application of hierarchic scale as demonstrated in *Little miss Muffet* (1989) (fig 40).

Grobler's fascination with Stanley Spencer's art was centred on the application of allegory in Spencer's depiction of religious themes, such as *St Francis and the birds* (1935) (fig 41)⁴¹ and *The Last Supper* (1920) (fig 42).



Fig 41. Stanley Spencer, *St Francis and the birds* (1935).



Fig 42. Stanley Spencer, *The Last Supper* (1920).

According to Grobler (1997:23), Spencer uses allegory as “a means of identifying correspondences between the physical and spiritual worlds”. Furthermore, he identifies a private subtext underlying the immediately recognisable narrative. He also surmises that due to the personal nature of the subtext Spencer’s allegory is often not easily understood.⁴² In my opinion, these assertions apply to Grobler’s own depictions of religious stories of saints and other Biblical narratives. He repeatedly explores the relation between spirituality and reality through Biblical narratives.⁴³ Grobler (1997:74) states: “In my religious paintings I do not place the subjects in a contemporary setting merely to add a contemporary relevance to them, but rather discover in contemporary events a religious significance.” His own version of *The Last Supper* (triptych) (1996) (fig 43/DG249) similarly portrays a recognisable Biblical theme. However, on closer inspection and with knowledge of the artist’s intentions a more personal subtext can be revealed.

Even though the titles of Grobler's artworks provide clues as to the origin of his central theme, it should not be assumed that the artist ascribes specific meaning to the work, or that the meaning is in any way related to an existing interpretation of a familiar theme. Grobler invites the viewer to interact with the work and to engage in a dialogue.⁴⁴



Fig 43/DG249. Diek Grobler, *The Last Supper* (triptych) (1996).



Fig 44/DG251. Diek Grobler, *The Last Supper* (central panel of triptych – detail) (1996).

The title of the work refers to Jesus' last meal with his 12 disciples, before his death. During this meal, Jesus instated the Lord's Supper by praying a blessing over, and serving the wine and bread to his disciples.⁴⁵ Although Grobler's rendition includes the Eucharist symbols of the wine and bread these are depicted on side panels, removed from the central scene with the 12 seated figures. The absence of Christ as the thirteenth figure might suggest that the people are awaiting His return, yet they are refraining from partaking in the Lord's Supper.

Grobler (1997:77) reveals a more personal subtext underlying his interpretation of the theme:

The idea of painting the religious theme was prompted by an encounter in a Dutch bar in which a group of elderly tourists had assembled around an oval table for refreshments. The moment of waiting for the beverages to arrive presented a scene of joyous gathering which contrasted to the spectre of their age and mortality. ... While the figure of Christ is absent, a suggestion of spiritual presence may be read in the strong central, but invisible light source. The scene is set on what seems like a frozen lake, on which the figures are clearly waiting, clutching worthless little attributes such as a stone, a bus ticket, a cigarette butt, a feather. ... [T]he side panels in my depiction suggest an unattainable moment. This reading is supported by the different perspectives used in the panels as well as the contrasting landscapes. The central panel, in its tipped perspective, achieves a claustrophobic effect in its limited and flattened space, while the view beyond the tables with the bread and wine in the side panels, plunges into deep landscape. ... The scene presents the viewer with a 'pregnant moment' in which the religious theme of the Eucharist with its ritual significance of communion is frustrated. ... [T]he 'pregnant moment' presents a moment in the action that reveals al [sic] that had led up to it, and all that would follow. ... [T]he suspended poses of the figures give no evidence that any significant action preceded the portrayed moment or will follow it, implying an eternal waiting.

Based on this subtext, the artwork may serve as an example of the artist's ability to uncover the sacred in mundane, everyday happenings.

Grobler often combines Biblical narratives with stories from other literary sources. One of his most widely used metaphors⁴⁶ combines the Biblical journey of Jonah⁴⁷ with the mythic Odyssey of Homer's Odysseus.⁴⁸ Both

stories reflect on the unfortunate wanderer's struggle to reach his destination. In the case of Jonah, he is deterred by a storm, thrown overboard, swallowed by a fish and released back on land after three days. In Odysseus's case, the wrath of the sea god Poseidon causes him to wander for ten years, in an effort to reach his home in Ithaca. Odysseus' journey is filled with obstacles such as Cyclopes, monsters and sirens. For Grobler, the Odyssey is a universal tale of the journey home, without knowing where home is, or being able to reach it even if you think you know your destination.⁴⁹

Grobler's *Opdrifsel*s (1996) (fig 43/DG224) shows Jonah and the fish being washed up on shore. The metaphor of the lonely wanderer's perilous journey surfaces throughout Grobler's oeuvre in different media including paintings, scraperboards, performance art productions, and stop-motion animated films.



Fig 45/DG224. Diek Grobler, *Opdrifsel*s (1996).

In 1997, Grobler organised and curated the Artwall Metrorail Art Gallery project. For this public mural project he commissioned various local artists to decorate Metro stations throughout South Africa. The project was highly successful and received two Business and Arts South Africa awards in 2000 for Best Use of a Commission of New Art, and Increasing Access to the Arts.

This chapter examined Grobler's journey in terms of the development of his personal and artistic identities. It illustrated how major events in the artist's life, and his immediate social, cultural and political environment influenced his art in terms of his choice of themes and metaphors. Furthermore, it revealed elements of Grobler's artistic vocabulary and his use of visual metaphors, highlighting the artist's appropriation of diverse textual references such as Biblical stories and classic mythology. This chapter also showed Grobler's first involvement in performance art, through TOM and various Basement Theatre performance art events. Grobler's sabbatical journey through Europe was discussed with reference to various examples of artworks. I considered the artist's pursuit of further education in fine arts and how this contributed towards the shaping of his artistic style. This chapter also accentuated the influences of artists like Stanley Spencer and Paula Rego on Grobler's application of magical realism and his narrative artistic style. The next stage in the unfolding of Grobler's oeuvre, 1998-2003, represents a shift from fine art to performance art and avant-garde theatre.

Notes: Chapter 2

- 1 To distinguish between the two mediums, I have documented the latter as oil on wood. The earliest example of an artwork on this type of surface is *The man who would be king (up)* (1994) (DG167). In contrast to the controlled linework visible in Grobler's traditional scraperboards, the oil on wood allows for a more spontaneous brush stroke effect and permits the artist to work with volumes rather than lines (Grobler 2010:40).
- 2 The third sculpture, titled *The Minotaur* (1992) (DG123), is available in the interactive catalogue.
- 3 Grobler (2009e:4) explains:

Die mannetjie in die *bowler hat* is so soort van my persona. As ek *performance art* doen, dan het ek altyd 'n *bowler hat* op Dit is hoe ek myself uitbeeld in 'n skildery. Ek verteenwoordig maar eintlik *every man*. Dis nie my lewensverhaal nie. ... Charlie Chaplin het 'n *bowler hat* gehad en Magritte het die man met die *bowler hat*. Wat ek hou van Charlie Chaplin, is die *Little Tramp* karakter wat die *down and out every man* is. Jy kan vir hom lag as jy identifiseer met hom, maar jy sien 'n bietjie neer op hom. Jy is bly dis nie jy nie.
- 4 The derby or bowler hat was invented in 1850, for the British game warden, James Coke. He required a durable hat to wear while on horseback, looking for poachers on his property. Soon, all types of people from every social and economic class wore bowler hats. The bowler is noted as being the first hat that was mass produced to be affordable to all men and women (<http://www.hatlife.com>). Grobler (2009d:23-24) likewise comments:

Die *bowler hat* was 'n middelklas simbool. Dit was die middelklas kantoorwerker wat *bowler hats* gedra het. Dit is nie 'n *grand* man se hoed nie. Ook nie die laer middelklas nie. Net middelklas: die onderwyser en die versekeringsverkopers en die bankklerke, en dit is maar wat ek is.
- 5 Examples of self-portraits reflecting Grobler's private identity are *Selfportret* (1987) (DG016), *Self-portrait* (1988) (DG029), *Can you hear the ringing in my ears (self-portrait)* (2005) (DG165) and *Self-portrait with red* (2004) (DG471).
- 6 See artworks such as *Frontier* (1995) (DG202), *Mining area, no entry* (1995) (DG203), *Oorblyfsels* (1997) (fig 48/DG264), *Meeting at the border* (1997) (fig 51/DG277), *St Denis feeding the birds* (2001) (fig 65/DG417), *The geographer* (2003) (DG463), *In the garden* (1998) (DG332), *Slay of hands* (2005) (DG501) and *Die profeet* (2005) (DG520).
- 7 An example of these Facebook identities is that of the lead character, Jakobus van Alleman, better known as Seun (available at: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/profile.php?id=100000184596609>). Furthermore, Grobler regularly writes an online blog as Seun van Alleman (available at <http://seun-van-alleman.blogspot.com>). The online identity for Kropotkin Pretorius is available on Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/profile.php?id=569323945>
- 8 Grobler (2011:3) observes: "[D]ie engele is ook 'n bietjie hulpeloos. ... [Hulle] probeer red wat daar te redde is. Al hierdie goed gebeur en hulle kan net eenvoudig niks hieraan doen nie."
- 9 See the fall of man described in the Bible, Genesis chapters 3-4.

- 10 See Bible, Matthew 26:34, 69-75.
- 11 See Grobler's *The voyeur* (1989) (DG039), *Mrs Neptune I* (1990) (DG066), *Lorelei* (1991) (DG075), *Die aankoms van Lady Godiva in Tafelbaai* (1991) (DG084), *Mermaid in a classical setting* (1991) (DG092), *The meeting of two incompatible myths* (1993) (fig 23/DG134) and *Beached* (2005) (DG515) as examples of artworks depicting figures of mermaids.
- 12 Grobler (2011:3) remarks: "Die handpoppe is Punch en Judy. Dit is klassieke poppekaskarakters. Dit is 'n baie *violent* storie van die man wat die vrou slaan."
- 13 See Chapter One, Note 34.
- 14 Bulfinch (1979:927) describes the mythological Minotaur as a "monster, half bull and half man".
- 15 Grobler observes:
 Die Minotaur is *abusive* maar hy is ook *exposed*. Ek het hierdie gemaak toe alles in my wêreld besig was om uitmekaar uit te val. Die kennis en *attitudes* waarmee ek grootgeword het-het ek begin bevraagteken. Die Minotaur *expose* homself. Dit is 'n baie brutale en perverse *act* maar die vrouens is nie regtig in gevaar nie. Dit is asof daardie brutaliteit ontmasker is. Hy is eintlik *vulnerable* maar hy besef dit nie. Ek meen die *campness* van die hoëhakskoene wat hy aan het ... Hy is eintlik *ridiculous*.
- 16 Grobler notes: "Selfs die hand van God is maar 'n klein handjie. Dis asof Hy nie regtig baie magtig is nie. Ek weet nie of Hy eintlik raad het met hierdie besigheid nie."
- 17 Narcissus, the son of Cephisus in Greek mythology, fell in love with his own reflection in a fountain. He did not recognise the reflection as his own. In his mind it was a beautiful water spirit living in the fountain. He never left the fountain, but kept trying to reach, touch and kiss the image in the water's surface. Eventually he pined away and died (Bulfinch 1979:102-103). Grobler (2009e:24) interprets his image of Narcissus as a Minotaur as follows: "Dit is ... hierdie vreeslike manlike figuur, maar dan het hy hoëhakskoene aan. Ek dink dit gaan basies oor 'n *mistrust* van die tradisionele en *appearances*. Hierdie ou is nog in 'n *armyjas* ook met die sterretjies ... "
- 18 Grobler (2009e:25) describes the paper jet as "knowledge that is being discarded". Moreover Grobler (2009d:22) provides the following detailed explanation:
 Jy maak 'n vliegtuigie van papier waarmee jy klaar is en jy gooi dit weg. *It is not something that you regard as precious*. Dit is 'n aksie van weggooi. Jy gaan hom nou-nou optel en net in die asblik gooi of jy gaan hom weer gooi, maar sy einddoel is om weggegooi te word. Die manier waarop jy hom weggooi is *beautiful*. Hulle is perfek *ge-engineer*. Daardie kennis wat jy weggooi kan nog steeds vlieg. ... Ek dink nie enige kennis is oorbodig nie of dat jy jou tyd mors om kennis bymekaar te maak nie. ... Dit gaan verder oor goed waarin 'n mens geglo het wat verkeerd bewys is. Soos kennis wat nie meer relevant is nie, maar dit is nie oorbodig nie. Dit is soos die Griekse mites. Dit was die wetenskap van die tyd. Die feit dat ons wetenskap dit verkeerd bewys het of onttoon het beteken nie dit het minder bestaansreg nie want dit bou aan jou verwysingsraamwerk en jou wêreldvisie. Die feit dat dit 'n voorloper was beteken nie dat dit nou moet verdwyn nie. Dis vir my

altyd tragies as kennis verlore gaan.

- 19 Grobler (2009e:25) describes the meaning assigned to the image of the baboon as follows: “Die bobbejaantjie beteken die dood vir die Zulus. Hy sit homself en beskou in die spieël. So hy wag dat die *battle* hom uitwoed.”
- 20 See Snodgrass (1994:331) and Bulfinch (1979:211-213) for a complete rendition of the Judgement of Paris, according to Greek mythology.
- 21 See Powell (1998:504) in reference to the myth of Leda and the swan.
- 22 An example of such a rendition is Antonio Allegri Correggio’s, *Leda with the swan* (1531-32). Oil on canvas, 152 x 191 cm. Staatliche Museen, Berlin (Illustration: <http://www.antoniodacoreggio.org/Leda-with-the-Swan-1531.html>, accessed 12 July 2010.)
- 23 Grobler (2009e:26) observes: “Leda is ook een van die meisies wat Zeus bygekom het so jy sien gewoonlik ‘n prentjie van ‘n meisie en ‘n swaan wat haar bykom, maar hier het sy hom nou teruggekry.”
- 24 The Vita Dance Umbrella is an eclectic, multicultural festival, which presents original choreography and dance productions from all over South Africa. The festival was founded by theatre journalists, Marilyn Jenkins and Adrienne Sichel. Jenkins and Sichel were sympathetic towards the struggle of local choreographers in Johannesburg and Soweto, and recognised the difficulties involved in staging a production. During the apartheid era Phillip Stein, director of the Vita Arts Awards courageously backed the Vita Dance Umbrella. In 1994 First National Bank (FNB) took over the sponsorship (Sichel 1994).
- 25 Some of Grobler’s students from the Pro Arte School of art, music, ballet and drama acted out the role of the fishes. Grobler involved his students in many of his performance art pieces. Even though teaching was not Grobler’s vocation of choice, it is interesting to note how this particular teaching position contributed positively towards his performance art endeavours.
- 26 Grobler (2009d:5) notes: “Hierdie werk is gebaseer op ‘n middeleeuse hout beeldhouwerk wat vir my een van die mooiste dinge is. Ek het dit in ‘n ou boek in die biblioteek gesien en ek het net geweet dit is in Berlyn. Dit was so ‘n ou boek, die verwysings was baie swak. Toe ek Europa toe was in 1994, het ek in Berlyn van museum tot museum geloop totdat ek uiteindelik haar gekry het.”
- 27 Grobler (2009e:30) describes: “Ek het in Amsterdam langs ‘n grag gestap en skielik sien ek hier op die grond lê *puzzlestukkies*, die hele wêreld vol ... en toe ek so opkyk toe sien ek dit is ‘n ouetehuis. Toe dink ek: “die blêrrie matrone.” Die arme *puzzle builders* kan nie hulle *puzzles* klaargemaak kry nie want die susters gooi al die stukkies weg! Dis nou waar die idee vandaan gekom het.”
- 28 Grobler (quoted by Du Plooy, 2005:26) explains: “Ek probeer in my werk ‘n geloofwaardige illusie skep, nie van die werklike wêreld/realiteit nie, maar van ‘n metaforiese wêreld – een waarin ek my stories kan laat afspeel.” He describes the way he approaches his art as follows:
My work is inspired by common occurrences which seems [sic] insignificant in terms of global social or political issues, but when scrutinized, contains [sic] the essentials of human drama. I place these everyday ideas in new and unusual contexts, thus heightening ... [their] impact due to the ‘strangeness’ of the resulting images (<http://www.art.co.za/diekgrobler/cv>).

- 29 Grobler (2009e:29) describes: “Al my bruide was maar half Marí [his wife]. Ek was oorsee die jaar nadat ek ophou skoolgee het. Dit was tydens die verkiesing en ek het in Parys gestem. Ek het hierdie vrouens gesien staan en skree op ‘n straathoek in Frankryk.”
- 30 See Appendix 1 for a list of solo and group exhibitions Grobler participated in between 1985 and 2009.
- 31 As the illustration of children’s books is not considered part of Grobler’s artistic oeuvre, this dissertation does not include a complete list of books illustrated and authored by the artist to date.
- 32 Grobler (2010:27) regards *Victory boogie woogie* (1995) (fig 31/DG178), as a witty reference to Piet Mondrian’s *Victory boogie woogie* (1942-1944). Oil paint, pieces of paper and plastic, and black chalk on canvas, 127 x 127 cm, vertical axis 179 cm. Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, Amsterdam. (Illustration: <http://www.gemeentemuseum.nl/index.php?id=31845&langId=en>, accessed 10 July 2010.)
- 33 Through my research I have been able to locate five of the eight paintings, depicting pride, gluttony, lust, greed and speeding. All of these artworks have been included in the interactive catalogue. The artworks representing themes of envy, anger and sloth belong to private collections of which the owners are not known.
- 34 Grobler (2011:9) comments: “Die hele idee het ontstaan toe ek na Otto Dix se doodsondes gekyk het op daardie stadium. Hierdie mense val uitmekaar van al die seksuele siektes en alles. Hulle lyk regtig sleg. Maar toe dink ek niemand lyk so nie. Die *greedy* ou *next door* is normaal. Ek wou die doodsondes uitbeeld as sulke klein sondetjies. Ons pleeg hulle almal. Ons is almal so ‘n klein bietjie *greedy*.”
- 35 View Grobler’s *Storyboard for a documentary* (1996) (DG223) in the interactive catalogue. This collection of works has since been disassembled, titled and sold as separate artworks.
- 36 *So much depends on the red wheelbarrow* (1995) (fig 36/DG193) is based on a poem. Grobler (2009e:36) elaborates: “Dit is ‘n *poem* van William Carlos Williams wat my gefassineer het. Ek het dit gelees in Engels een, in my eerste jaar op Universiteit. Die hele *poem* lui: “*so much depends upon a red wheelbarrow glazed with rain water beside the white chickens*”.”
- 37 Grobler (2009e:33) elaborates:
Die hele idee was dat dit sulke half absurderige momente is, jy weet, sulke klein *magic realist moments*. Die hele idee van die documentary is, *fact is stranger than fiction*. In my persoonlike opinie is alle stories waar, so enigiets fantasties kan as sodanig [die waarheid] gedokumenteer word.
- 38 *Walking a line in Africa* (1995) (fig 38/DG188) depicts an African woman walking in a landscape where she comes across remnants and traces that previous inhabitants have left behind. She is following a white line, which might be symbolic of white colonists.
- 39 Grobler (2009e:5) describes his fascination with Rego’s work:
Paula Rego ... maak fabelagtige *paintings*. Wat ek hou van haar werk is die verhalende aspek. Sy vertel sulke *plays*. Sy het byvoorbeeld ‘n hele reeks gedoen – in die jaar toe film 100 jaar oud geword het – en sy het

Fantasia van Walt Disney gevat en die *scene* met die dansende volstruise gevat en dit terugvertaal na mense toe. Sy het sulke robuuste Portugese ballerinas gemaak. Die mooiste figure. Ek het redelik vroeg al vir my 'n lekker dik boek van haar werk aangeskaf. Hier in 1994 rond. Haar eerste werk was vreeslik ekspressief en half semi-abstrak, en op 'n stadium het sy net so omgeswaai. Ek dink mens kan stylistiese ooreenkomste tussen my en haar vormgewing sien. Wat ek ook by aanklank vind in haar werk is die manier hoe sy baie keer letterkundige werk vat en dit herinterpreteer. Van haar werke van die mid-negentigs is half, baie meer realities. Die gesigte is streng. Die werk waarvan ek meer hou is waar sy vreeslik speel met skaal. Ek dink byvoorbeeld aan *The bull fighter's mother*, waar die matador groot is, maar die ma is klein. Amper daardie middeleeuse element van skaalgebruik waar die belangriker goed groter is.

- 40 In the abstract of Grobler's dissertation (1997:iv), he writes: "Through the use of a naturalistic style, Spencer is able to mirror as well as deviate from a straightforward copy of events to arrive at a visual expression of his idiosyncratic views. I will examine how his belief in the redemptive power of art underlies his transfusion of ordinary situations with his orthodox religious views ... I relate my own work to the above concerns." In the fifth chapter he outlines his approach to the construction of an alternative reality. See Grobler (1997:59-81).
- 41 Spencer's work inspired Grobler to create two artworks based on the Biblical story of Jacob's struggle with the angel, found in Genesis 32:22-32 and Hosea 12:2-68. These works are *St Francis relating the story of Jacob and the angel to his flock* (1991) (DG074) and *St Francis relating the story of Jacob and the angel to his flock* (1992) (DG096). He also created a ceramic sculpture titled *St Francis preaching to the fish* (1992) (DG113), based on Spencer's artwork of St Francis.
- 42 See Grobler (1997:23).
- 43 See <http://www.art.co.za/diekgrobler/default> where Grobler comments on his exploitation of Biblical narratives to portray the relation between spirituality and reality.
- 44 Grobler (2009e:19) asserts: "Ek voel glad nie ek het die laaste woord oor die werk nie en ek wil nie die laaste woord hê nie. Dan is dit nie 'n dialoog nie. Dan is dit 'n monoloog en niemand stel belang in 'n monoloog nie."
- 45 See Bible, Matthew 26:26-30 for a description of the Lord's Supper.
- 46 Examples of artworks portraying this metaphor are *Opdrifsele* (1996) (fig 45/DG224), *Preparing for a journey I* (1998) (DG328), *Le Voyage* (2002) (fig 62/DG431), *Ark* (2004) (fig 75/DG473), *Noag* (2004) (fig 76/DG474), *Bou 'n boot* (2004) (fig 77/DG487), *Armada* (2005) (fig 89/DG510), *The crossing I* (2005) (fig 90/DG511), *Asturias* (2007) (fig 91/DG546), *The Odyssey (again!): The monster Scylla* (2009) (fig 106/DG598) and *The Odyssey (again!): 99 red balloons* (2009) (fig 107/DG599).
- 47 See Bible, Jonah 1-4 for the complete narrative about Jonah's perilous journey.
- 48 Homer's *Odyssey* is an epic poem about the adventures of Odysseus during his voyage at sea, after the Trojan War (Homer, books 4-12 1946:139-202). Grobler often refers to the Greek hero Odysseus by his Roman name, Ulysses (Bulfinch 1979:952).

Grobler (2009d:24) describes this metaphor as follows:

Die Odyssey is vir my soos die Bybel, soos Adam en Eva. Dit is ...'n universele storie van hierdie reis om by die huis te probeer kom en jy kom nie by die huis uit nie. ... Odysseus was op pad van Troje af huis toe. Hy probeer by die huis uitkom en dan blaas die wind en ... so dis vir my maar bietjie van 'n *journey to your destination*. Jy kom nooit daar uit nie want daar is altyd iets wat jou verhoed. ... Ja, dit is daardie *relentless journey* en jy weet nie waarheen jy eintlik oppad is nie. Jy dink jy weet. Dan is daar natuurlik *spectacular monsters* ...

CHAPTER 3: ART ON STAGE (1998-2003)

3.1 From performance art to activism

The Italian theatre director, Romeo Castellucci's (1960-) stage productions had a great influence on Grobler as a performance artist. Hagendoorn (2007) captures the essence of Castellucci's work:

Somehow it all sounds familiar, yet none of it makes sense. This is the strength of the theatre of Romeo Castellucci. His work borders on sense, from both sides, that is, from non-sense or the non-sensical on the one hand and from over determined symbolism on the other. As a viewer you are left to piece the different elements together into a coherent whole. Questions remain. There are always some symbols left over, while others are missing.

It is this use of symbolism and the absence of logical interpretation that inspires Grobler. He greatly respects the aesthetic impact of Castellucci's stage productions, and is of the opinion that this type of work needs to be appreciated as an experience in itself, instead of being analysed and explained.¹

Since his first participation in the FNB Dance Umbrella in 1993, Grobler had been working closely with TOM in promoting performance art in South Africa. Grobler (quoted by Jenkins 1994) defines performance art as "art for the new South Africa, because it breaks down barriers and uses every facet of the different disciplines within every art form" and further considers it "a wastebasket term for anything called avant-garde, which slightly pushes the limit". This medium allows for the combination of various artistic disciplines such as architecture, painting, literature, storytelling, poetry theatre, music, dance, film, video and slides.

Goldberg (2010) refers to performance art as a "permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established art forms and determined to take their art directly to the public".

Grobler similarly accentuates the importance of an immediate audience. He writes: "As a time-based medium, an audience is needed to witness the process of creating the work as well as to give some purpose for creating it" (Cohen & Grobler 1999:63). Involving and educating audiences would prove to be one of the most challenging and frustrating aspects facing Grobler as a performance artist in South Africa.

In 1997, Grobler compiled his first performance art piece titled *Boe of Baa!* (1997) for the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK) in Oudtshoorn. This performance consisted of four separate, short performances by Grobler, Marinda du Toit, Leon Potgieter and Jorina Botha. These performances portrayed themes ranging from the purpose of life, to life in the new South Africa and involved a combination of theatre, dance, poetry, music and visual imagery. Grobler's performance piece, titled *Klaaglied van my skoen*, tells the story of the Afrikaner of the 1990s, who returns to his cultural roots in an effort to find his identity. The combined performance art piece emphasised the visual potency of everyday situations.² Grobler extended his exploration of these themes through other media such as pastel illustrations and gouache paintings.

Baken (1997) (fig 46/DG265), *Skuiling/shelter* (1997) (fig 47/DG266) and *Oorblyfsels* (1997) (fig 48/DG264) form part of a series of pastel drawings dealing with selected aspects of the post-apartheid identity. In these works Grobler weaves traces of the Afrikaner's colonial history into the landscape. These traces take the form of human body parts and miscellaneous objects. In *Baken* (1997) two hands pressed together in a gesture of prayer and a beacon, are half buried in the soil. Although the title of the artwork might draw attention to the physical beacon or landmark, it might also emphasise the hands as a symbol of the religious beliefs guiding and shaping the Afrikaner's cultural values and norms.



Fig 46/DG265. Diek Grobler, *Baken* (1997).

All three drawings display Grobler's signature application of short, rhythmic lines, tracing the contours of the landscape and the objects embedded therein. Although the linework creates a feeling of unity within the composition, the warm brown and yellow colours juxtaposed with stark white, grey and black tones emphasise the unusual presence of human elements in the landscape.



Fig 47/DG266. Diek Grobler, *Skuling/shelter* (1997).

In *Skuling/shelter* (1997) a human hand becomes an extension of a fence. A single black-and-white sheep is poised next to the fence as if unsure whether to wander outside the perimeter of the partial encampment. Similar to *Baken* (1997), this work contains imagery of half-buried body parts and ruins signifying the imprints left by the colonial people on the land as they established human settlements in different regions.

In *Oorblyfsels* (1997) Grobler's male figure with the bowler hat searches for something of value amongst the forgotten and lost knowledge – in the

form of the discarded paper jet – and the scattered remnants and traces of his ancestors.

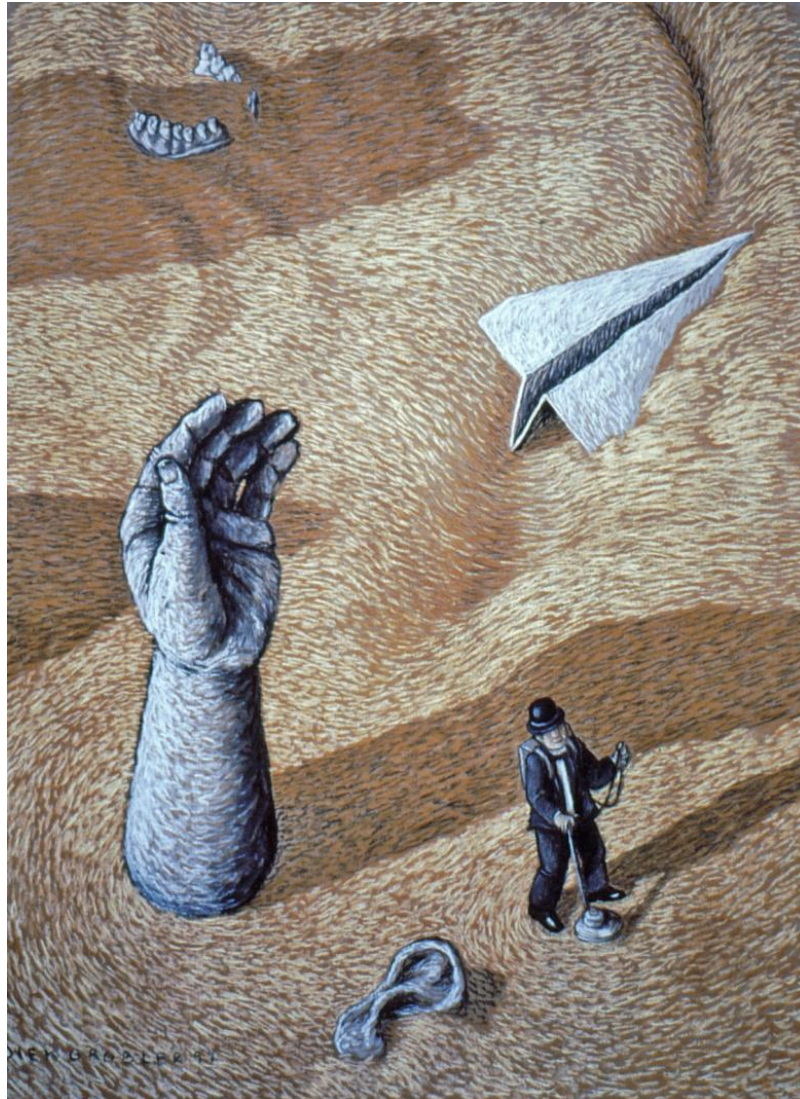


Fig 48/DG264. Diek Grobler, *Oorblyfsels* (1997).



Fig 49/DG271. Diek Grobler, *Neo-colonist* (1997).

Grobler's gouache rendering titled *Neo-colonist* (1997) (fig 49/DG271) comments on the political state in South Africa after the end of apartheid. Colonialism was replaced with neo-colonialism.³ *Neo-colonist* (1997) portrays the former colonial power eagerly scouting for the opportunity to forge neo-colonial relationships.

The visually potent everyday situations acted out in *Boe of Baa!* (1997) are taken a step further in Grobler's *Household ceremonies* (1997) (fig 50/DG275), *Meeting at the border* (1997) (fig 51/DG277) and *Household rituals 1-4* (1997) (fig 52/DG278, fig 53/DG279, fig 54/DG280 and fig 55/DG281). Here they become household rituals,⁴ imbued with comments about gender roles and personal identity.

In *Household ceremonies* (1997) the viewer's gaze is drawn into the artwork by the shadows of three figures with their hands raised upwards as if making an offering, leading the eye towards a seated female figure. She has her hands crossed in her lap, holding a feather duster like a

sceptre. A colander is tied around her face like a mask. She has the air of royalty presiding over an important ceremony.

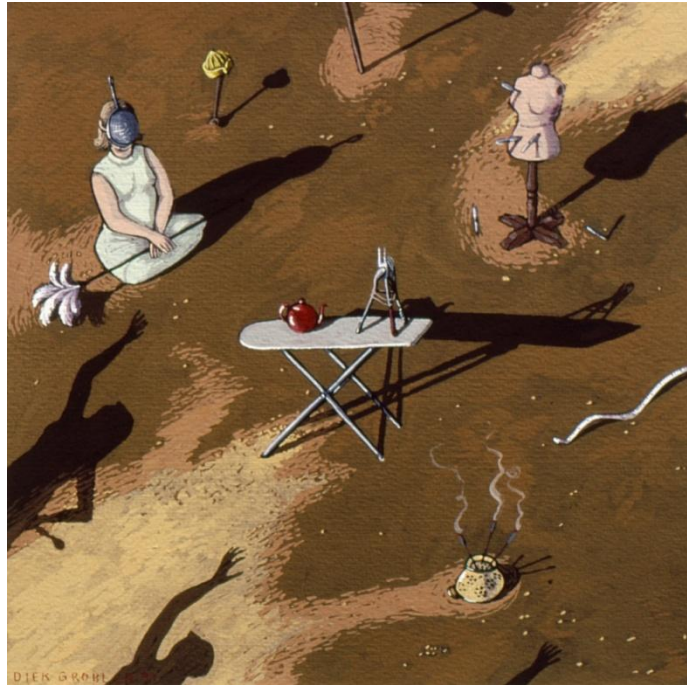


Fig 50/DG275. Diek Grobler, *Household ceremonies* (1997).

In the middle of the composition, an ironing board with a red tea pot and an unusual totem-like sculpture made of a fork and serving spoons tied with a piece of string becomes an altar. A solitary dressmaker's dummy with knives embedded in its breast and torso is positioned in the upper right hand corner of the picture. A small vessel with three burning incense sticks and a measuring tape are visible to the right of the ironing board. In this artwork Grobler combines various symbols related to the traditional role of the woman as homemaker, cook, cleaner and seemstress into an unusual ritualistic ceremony.

Meeting at the border (1997) shows two male figures facing each other from opposites worlds bridged by an ironing board. The iconic bowler hat identifies the suited man with the umbrella as the artist in the role of the

business man, while the nude figure might represent various gender roles associated with the man as husband, lover and ruler of his household or domestic castle. An assortment of household objects, also seen in *Household ceremonies* (1997), such as the red tea pot, totem-like constructions, and rocks form a pitiful fortification.



Fig 51/DG277. Diek Grobler, *Meeting at the border* (1997).

The naked male figure is holding a pitchfork as if it is a ruler's sceptre or a symbol of authority. A dinner plate and an old-fashioned alarm clock are balanced on top of the pitchfork. His head is covered with a headpiece resembling either a bee-keeper's veil or a bird cage. Around his neck he is wearing a telephone with its cord and mouthpiece loosely draped over his outstretched arm. The two figures are standing face-to-face in the same attitude forming a mirror image, which might imply an underlying comment on the conflict of identities or gender roles imposed on men by society.

Household rituals 1-4 (1997) is a series of four separate oil paintings. Each painting depicts a person adorned with unusual objects acting as

metaphors. The first painting shows the head and uncovered shoulders of a female figure. She is wearing a head piece, resembling a shelter, made of wooden sticks, spoons and animal hide, and a necklace made of a piece of string and a stone. She appears demure, yet uncomfortable as she is staring out of the picture to her right. It is almost as if she is trapped by the gender roles imposed on her inside a domestic environment.



Fig 52/DG278. Diek Grobler,
Household rituals 1 (1997).



Fig 53/DG279. Diek Grobler,
Household rituals 2 (1997).

The second painting shows a male figure whose eyes, nose and mouth are covered with stones. The stone surface behind his head is filled with hieroglyphics, possibly indicating a primitive form of communication while the stones might be metaphors for an inability to see, smell, speak or communicate in general.

The third painting depicts the head and shoulders of a female figure with short blonde hair held in place with hair pins. Her vision is obscured by the smoke of her cigarette. There are two stones resting on her shoulders, which might serve as metaphors for minor burdens. The red stage curtain behind her might suggest that she is on display or being placed under the spotlight. Around her neck are tightly wound garden hoses. This artwork

might be read as a comment on external pressures and ties imposed on the female without her knowledge or consent.



Fig 54/DG280. Diek Grobler,
Household rituals 3 (1997).

Fig 55/DG281. Diek Grobler,
Household rituals 4 (1997).

The fourth household ritual is of a male figure buried under a pile of stones, with only his head visible. His almost lifeless eyes are confronting those of the viewer. He is wearing a head band with three onions nailed to it, faintly resembling the crown of thorns Jesus wore during his crucifixion. Tears or sweat drops are streaming over his face and parched lips. In my view he is a martyr or is being oppressed by responsibilities as provider of the household.

In 1998 Grobler established the Fopspeen Live Art Company for Performance Art (Fopspeen Live Art). This step marked a turn towards life or performance art. In my view Grobler established the company as a more permanent vehicle to stage his performance art productions at local arts festival. Fopspeen Live Art consisted of Grobler and his wife Marí, their domestic worker Bettie Maluleka, Leon Potgieter and Neels Britz. Together with Marinda du Toit, Helena Fourie and Theodora Michaletos, the company presented Grobler's *Sewe dae in Babel* (1998) (fig

56/DG374) at the KKNK in 1998. This was one of two pieces Grobler introduced at the festival. The second piece was a commercial play for children's theatre, titled *Trane*, written by Grobler's brother, Piet. The name, Fopspeen Live Art, was originally intended to fit this children's theatre production.⁵



Fig 56/DG374. Diek Grobler, *Sewe dae in Babel* (1998).

Sewe dae in Babel (1998) is a visual cabaret that extends the artist's investigation into post-colonial identity in South Africa. Grobler performed the role of the contemporary Afrikaner, in search of his identity. He came to Africa as the coloniser, but has since become part of the new, post-apartheid South Africa. The piece questions the Afrikaner's identity by asking if this person should be considered an African from European descent, or a European visitor to Africa.⁶

Sewe dae in Babel (1998) was originally written to be presented over the course of seven days at an exhibition in London, England.⁷ It would have portrayed seven actual days of Babylonian confusion, in an effort to pin down the Afrikaner identity. However, the actual performance that was staged at the KKNK lasted a little over an hour. Grobler applied the Biblical narrative of the tower of Babel⁸ as a metaphor for the confusion surrounding the identity of the Afrikaner in the post-apartheid South African context.

Pienaar (1998) labels *Sewe Dae in Babel* (1998) a "performance art cum dadaistic cabaret", and describes it as follows:

Its centrepiece is a hilarious weather forecast, a long jeremiad about drought and floods. As endgame it has a *Laaste Avondmaal*, where members of the audience become the 12 apostles watching an earthenware mug being dissolved by wine.⁹ Along the way there is a woman shedding litres of tears when her baby gets taken away, and an aja¹⁰ [sic] doing the housework while dragging a collection of orange baby dolls behind her in a box. This is a deeply intelligent work, a much fuller engagement with the milieu - from school hall, to apartheid town, to semi-desert

The figure of the African nursemaid mentioned by Pienaar is also found in a gouache painting titled *Wash-day in Babel* (1998) (fig 57/DG316), created by Grobler as an extension of the theme explored in *Sewe dae in Babel* (1998). As mentioned previously, Grobler often creates multiple artworks in different artistic media, portraying similar themes or motifs.



Fig 57/DG316. Diek Grobler, *Wash-day in Babel* (1998).

The following year, he attempted to make his performance art more accessible by adding a clear storyline to *Die lang pad na Ninevé* (1999) which was performed by Fopspeen Live Art at the KKNK in 1999.

Die lang pad na Ninevé (1999) references the Biblical narrative of the prophet Jonah's fateful journey to Nineveh.¹¹ However, Grobler infuses this story with excerpts from Ulysses' mythological journey to Ithaca.¹² As briefly mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the fusion of Biblical and mythological stories centred on the theme of a perilous life journey towards an unattainable goal, recurs throughout Grobler's oeuvre.

Die lang pad na Ninevé (1999) tells the story of the lonely Miss Visser who makes herself a companion from old clothes. She keeps him in a cupboard or in her waste basket and seats him at the breakfast table every morning. One morning, while eating her breakfast, she receives a message from God on the inside of her Bokomo Weet-bix box, commanding her to take a journey. She rather wanted to wash her hair that day, so she decides to send her ragdoll, Jonas on her behalf. Jonas drifts along in his boat, not

sure about his destination. Suddenly a storm comes up, blowing the boat off course. Jonas is attacked by Harpies who steal his map, removing his last hope for direction in his journey. He comes across a boat with Ulysses in the whirlpool of Charybdis, and also the monster Scylla. Ulysses recognises Jonas as Jonah from the Bible and commiserates with the fact that people doubt the truth of his tale, whereas Ulysses' own story is so fantastic that no-one doubts it. Jonas comes across an island with three Sirens. The Sirens' sophisticated song has no effect on Jonas's untrained ear. He rows further until nightfall. That night he catches a tiny fish and holds it to his ear to listen for a message. The fish grows and swallows almost all of Jonas. Jonas's feet are sticking out from the fish's mouth. He puts his arms through the fish's gills and continues rowing. Jonas's next stop is the beach of Amanzimtoti where three Cyclopes, dressed as news reporters, storm him. They are elated to find a prophet on the beach of Amanzimtoti. The story ends where Jonas is returned to the waste basket and Miss Visser dries her hair.¹³ *Die lang pad na Ninevé* (1999) portrays a metaphoric life journey, and the search for an elusive higher purpose. It tells the story of people who either fail to find their calling in life, avoid it altogether, never realise that they have a higher purpose or who are constantly unhappy with their predestined purpose or calling.¹⁴

In addition to *Die lang pad na Ninevé* (1999), Grobler introduced the Jong Afrikaner Anargiste (JAA)¹⁵ at the KKNK. The JAA, an anonymous anarchy collective wearing balaclavas, fake noses, glasses and other facial disguises, promoted an anti-theatre campaign. They designed and printed posters (fig 58/DG388) advertising fictitious productions by well-known artists like Breyten Breytenbach, Antoinette Pienaar, Reza de Wet and Cutt Glass. These posters were displayed and sold at the festival.



Fig 58/DG388. Diek Grobler, JAA posters (1999).

Eporia, a play by Antoinette Pienaar from the previous year's KKNK, was renamed Egoria and advertised with the subtitle: "Tant Betsie Verwoerd was 'n meermin!" Pienaar was infuriated¹⁶ by the JAA's campaign, and threatened them with legal action. Even though the information displayed on the posters was outrageous, members of the public tried to purchase tickets to these shows. Grobler describes this event as a form of concept art that explores the way the Afrikaner views, and thinks about, art. Furthermore, it was aimed at illustrating the importance of the poster as

artwork.¹⁷ He argues that people look at the posters without reading the information or thinking about the things presented to them as art. They are likely to purchase a ticket to a show, based on a celebrity associated with the event. According to the mysterious spokesperson for the JAA, Kropotkin Pretorius, the poster campaign questioned the Afrikaner's obsession with heroes and celebrities, inherited from the United States of America and Hollywood.¹⁸ While the JAA accuses the Afrikaner of acting without thinking,¹⁹ it also questions the intentions of the performers themselves, likening them to con artists and opportunists.²⁰

Pretorius (quoted by Burger, 1999b) identifies and explains the questions around Afrikaner identity, arts and culture, which form the basis of the JAA's plight. He starts by accusing the Afrikaner of being unwilling to confront issues. The JAA rejects traditional cultural Afrikaner organisations such as the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging (ATKV) which allegedly formulate the identity of the Afrikaner and prescribes what should constitute Afrikaner culture. At the same time the JAA reproaches the Afrikaner for relying on these institutions to tell them what to think. Moreover, the JAA is of opinion that structures like the ATKV are set against new and innovative ideas and are not in touch with developments in the arts in the rest of the world.²¹

The JAA's poster campaign and Pienaar's threats of legal action received considerable media coverage. Pretorius stood by his arguments. However, he did publish a public apology about the incident in the KKNK newspaper *Krit* (Burger 1999a:1) stating that he would like to apologise for the fact that Pienaar got hurt and that hurting her was not intentional.²² Pienaar did not follow through on her legal threats. A live debate between Kropotkin Pretorius and Antoinette Pienaar was led by Susan Booyens and broadcasted over the Internet at 24.com, on 26 March 1999. When asked about his disguise, Pretorius replied that we all wear masks, but that his is visible because he chooses not to become a celebrity.²³

In my view Pretorius' statement about the wearing of masks and his choice to disguise himself in order to remain anonymous, revealed the artist's personal intentions. In the preceding chapters, I have highlighted Grobler's use of magical realism, visual metaphors, humor and irony to mediate his confrontation of sensitive issues. Now Grobler focuses on performance art as a means to address sensitive issues around the identity and culture of the Afrikaner. Although he has approached this theme from various angles through different artistic media, his creation of the JAA represents a more direct attempt to invoke reaction. This might indicate a mounting frustration based on his perception of the Afrikaner and fuelled by his exposure to local arts festivals. Grobler distanced his personal reputation²⁴ from the public controversy by assuming the role of Kropotkin Pretorius.

In addition to the poster campaign, the JAA performed what Pretorius termed "a theatre of objects, written by a serious young man" at the KKNK Rimpelfees. The production contained no actors, emotion, metaphorical meaning, hidden meaning or humour. There was no mediation between the audience and the artwork. The artwork itself was created by objects, machines, lights, projections and stage props.²⁵

The JAA received the Dekat Herrie Award for groundbreaking work at the 1999 KKNK. *Die lang pad na Ninevé* (1999) was also staged at the Capitol Theatre in Pretoria, and at arts festivals in Durban and Potchefstroom.

Ararat, Fopspeen Live Art's next avant-garde theatre production, was performed at the KKNK in 2000. In this production, Grobler translated the Biblical story of Noah's ark²⁶ into a metaphoric journey through the human psyche. The great flood acts as a metaphor for the waves of technology and information covering the world at the turn of the century. Like Noah in the Bible, "Noag Van Alleman", the proverbial modern man needs to journey through the technology flood into the new millennium (Le Roux 2000:5).

Grobler, acting as Noah's psychologist, repeatedly asks the question: "What does this all mean?". Apart from its relevance within the context of this performance, this question reflects Grobler's own frustration with the way South African audiences view and analyse art. In my view, this frustration is centred on the audience's inability to appreciate art without being provided with an explanation for every symbolic act or image in the artwork. However, audiences might be reluctant to explore performance art or avant-garde theatre if they find it inaccessible or impossible to comprehend. In a review of *Ararat* (2000) on Artthrob (Smith 2000), Grobler's avant-garde theatre piece was criticised as being inaccessible. Smith (2000) writes:

[T]he performance art avant-garde as defined by the festival leaves much to be desired: Diek Grobler, winner of last year's Herrie prize, and his performance art company Fopspeen, delivered up a bizarre and utterly pretentious piece called *Ararat*, dealing with Noah's dual pathologies of a fear of water and words (apparently the Biblical figure stuttered and the water part is self-explanatory). Not even great digital technology and a superb soundtrack could save it from itself. This was unfortunate as it was one of the few pieces on the main programme that actively engaged with local talent, pulling in dancers and a choir from the coloured community of Oudtshoorn.

Elsewhere in the media (Diek gets everyone talking. *Pretoria News*, 30 March 2000), *Ararat* (2000) was described as a "weird but wonderful experience ... [that] attacks you with a number of ideas". These opposing views emphasise the reality of the problem facing artists like Grobler, working with live art and performance theatre in South Africa. Grobler identifies a "local intolerance for performance art" in audiences, due to a fear and prejudice toward the new and unfamiliar (Cohen & Grobler 1997:63). Grobler's performances are based on unexpected events that provide an element of surprise. Cohen and Grobler (1997:64) state: "Attention and interest is captured by means of the unconventional portrayal of concepts, the display of unusual images, or the presentation of challenging ideas".

Grobler rejects the premise that comprehension should be a prerequisite for enjoyment or appreciation.²⁷ He urges audiences to stop fretting about finding meaning in a work and invites them to embrace the experience.²⁸

His efforts to promote performance art at local arts festivals also met with resistance from festival organisers. Quoting one of the organisers of the KKNK, Grobler (Cohen & Grobler 1999:63) writes: "Local arts festival organisers ... feel it their responsibility to protect the audiences from these unpredictable spectacles ... [and would] rather consider productions which will create work in the long run ... than a once-off happening." Moreover, Grobler (quoted by Burger, 1999b)²⁹ is of the opinion that local arts festivals do not necessarily promote serious art. He distinguishes between cultural festivals, linked to profit, marketing, leisure and tourism, and arts festivals that aim to promote the arts in all its forms. Based on this distinction an arts festival like the KKNK should be supporting his art instead of censoring it.

In 2000, Grobler was granted a four month stay at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, France.³⁰ In my opinion, this opportunity proved a timely diversion from the artist's tumultuous involvement in the local arts festivals. This journey was the first step towards the next turn in his oeuvre.

In an effort to accumulate funds, Grobler started teaching design and technology at the Crawford College in Pretoria in January 2000. He remained in this teaching position until October 2003.

3.2 Embarking on a Parisian sojourn

Grobler left for his four month long Parisian sojourn in October 2000. He used this opportunity to absorb new ideas and to expose himself to a diversity of arts and culture. Inspired by the myriad of visual stimuli, tastes and sounds, Grobler started creating collages. Although he had experimented with the medium before, this was his first real success by his

own standards. This could be viewed as a pivotal moment in Grobler's journey as an artist as it marks the beginning of a turn towards digital art and animation.

His experiments with traditional collage techniques led to further experimenting with digital collage. Grobler's *Man under construction* (2001) (fig 59/DG403) is representative of the traditional collages he created, while *Angel of mercy* (2001) (fig 60/DG402) serves as an example of digital collage.

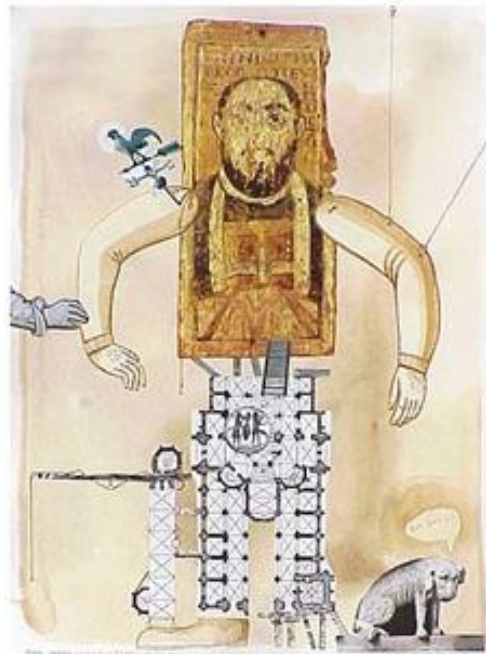


Fig 59/DG403. Diek Grobler, *Man under construction* (2001).



Fig 60/DG402. Diek Grobler, *Angel of mercy* (2001).

The creative process involved in constructing a digital collage greatly appealed to Grobler. Moreover, he conceptualised his first short animated films, *Idea* (2001) (fig 61/DG422) and *Le Voyage* (2002) (fig 62/DG431) during his stay in Paris. In both films he applies a process of collage/cut and paste animation, which he refers to as Monty Python animation (Grobler 2007).

Grobler (2007b) describes his animated film *Idea* (2001), as “a tale of a melancholy man, trapped in a tower, who frees his mind by sending his ideas out into the world on the wings of a paper jet”.



Fig 61/DG422. Diek Grobler, *Idea* (2001).

His next animated film *Le Voyage* (2002) is a variation on his metaphoric life journey. This journey is never-ending, and focuses on people sharing in each others' journeys.³¹



Fig 62/DG431. Diek Grobler, *Le Voyage* (2002).

Furthermore, Grobler's Parisian sojourn inspired a collection of artworks in oil and gouache, commenting on issues of religion/spirituality, sexual politics and social concerns. *St Genevieve's testimony* (2001) (fig 63/DG414), *The daily ascension of St Genevieve from the Luxembourg Gardens* (2001) (fig 64/DG415) and *St Denis feeding the birds* (2001) (fig 65/DG417) form part of a series of works depicting some of the saintly figures he encountered in artworks throughout the city.

St Genevieve is the chief patron saint of Paris.³² She was admired for her piety and devotion to charitable works. She also displayed the gift of prophecy.³³ Grobler's *St Genevieve's testimony* (2001) portrays the saint sitting with her eyes closed, holding a pencil and writing paper. She basks in the glow of a bright light and seems to be waiting to receive a prophecy. Scattered around the figure are pieces of discarded paper.



Fig 63/DG414. Diek Grobler, *St Genevieve's testimony* (2001).

The Parisians often call upon St Genevieve to mediate in times of crisis and need.³⁴ In *The daily ascension of St Genevieve from the Luxembourg Gardens* (2001) Grobler portrays the saint's ascension from earth at 16:00, after having completed her good deeds for the day.³⁵ The saint is hanging from a rope tied to a harness around her upper body. A small child is witnessing the miracle of her ascent. Both the spotlight shining down on the female figure and the painted backdrop behind her create the impression that the event is staged. In my opinion St Genevieve is considered a central religious icon, but at the same time she is also being

manipulated like a marionette. She is only summoned whenever a crisis arises.



Fig 64/DG415. Diek Grobler, *The daily ascension of St Genevieve from the Luxembourg Gardens* (2001).

Both *St Genevieve's testimony* (2001) and *The daily ascension of St Genevieve from the Luxembourg Gardens* (2001) display Grobler's visual language when painting with oils. The distinct appearance of fine lines which characterise his scraperboard drawings³⁶ and some of his gouache paintings,³⁷ is less prominent in his oil paintings. Smooth, even brush strokes blend the oil paint to create an almost moulded appearance. In *The daily ascension of St Genevieve from the Luxembourg Gardens* the stark contrast between the evenly modelled figure in the foreground and the roughly painted backdrop behind it serves to accentuate the staged appearance of the composition.

St Denis feeding the birds (2001)³⁸ is Grobler's gouache depiction of the patron saint of France. This artwork displays a combination of smooth surfaces and intricate linework.



Fig 65/DG417. Diek Grobler, *St Denis feeding the birds* (2001).

According to the ninth century legend, St Denis was sent to France by Pope Clement I with the intent to bring faith to the French. The rate at which he converted people to Christianity alarmed the pagan priests. This led to him being beheaded on Montmartre (Martyrs' Hill) in 258 AD. He walked four kilometres to his burial place, carrying his severed head while preaching a sermon. In altarpieces the saint is often depicted holding his head in his hand.³⁹

St Denis feeding the birds visually narrates Grobler's modern-day story of St Denis. The artist, dressed in a business outfit, performs the role of the saint. He is distributing food to the birds, resembling the martyred saint who provided the Parisians with spiritual food.

The dual (2001) (fig 66/DG418) and *Explaining modern art to a dead hare* (2001) (fig 67/DG419) are further examples of work Grobler created during his stay in Paris.

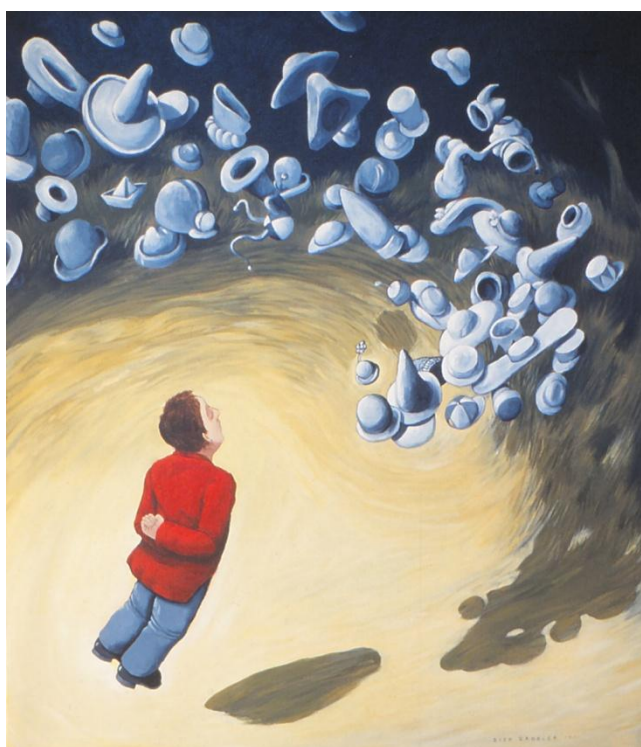


Fig 66/DG418. Diek Grobler, *The dual* (2001).

In *The dual* a floating male figure is confronted by a variety of hats, which might symbolise various identities. According to Grobler (2010:19), *The dual* illustrates a type of “battle with your thoughts” or inner conflict. In my opinion this work might also reflect a personal subtext related to the artist's own inner struggle with issues of identity.

Grobler's *Explaining modern art to a dead hare* (2001) shows influences of the artists Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and Giorgio De Chirico (1888-1978).



Fig 67/DG419. Diek Grobler, *Explaining modern art to a dead hare* (2001).

Beuys staged a performance art piece titled *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in Cologne in 1968. He explained this performance as follows:

This was a complex tableau about the problem of language and about the problems of thought, of human consciousness and of the consciousness of animals, and of course the ability of animals. This is placed in an extreme position because this is not just an animal but a dead animal ... Even a dead animal preserves more powers of intuition than some human beings with their stubborn rationality.⁴⁰

In Grobler's *Explaining modern art to a dead hare* the artist depicts himself seated with a dead hare. His iconic bowler hat lies on the floor, surrounded by scattered pieces of paper. Judging by the amount of cigarette butts in

the ashtray and half-empty glasses on the table, the discussion has been going on for a while already. The artist's expression seems despondent. In my opinion the presence of the bowler hat might point towards the challenges Grobler faced in his efforts to promote performance art to local audiences in South Africa. Moreover, it might symbolise a personal outcry against the stubborn rationality preventing human beings from intuitively exposing themselves to the aesthetic impact of new or unfamiliar artistic experiences.

The tailor's dummy may represent gender related issues that are highlighted through modern art. The dummy is reminiscent of De Chirico's iconography. Martin (1978:349) observes that De Chirico's stuffed dressmaker dummies represent the artist's concept of a modern human symbol.

After his return from France in 2001, Grobler exhibited a selection of work from his Paris sojourn at the Chelsea Gallery in Wynberg, Cape Town. In March of the same year, he opened the Mind's i Art Space in Pretoria, together with artists Michelle Nigrini, Retha Buitendach and Hanneke Benade. He was involved in this business venture until 2003.

In 2002, Kropotkin Pretorius and the JAA made another appearance at the KKNK, parading as a rock band (fig 68). Kropotkin promoted himself as an Afrikaans rock star who had gained enormous popularity since winning an ATKV competition with his hit track "Wat vertel jy my nou?" in 1970. In the 1980's, he went through a dark, introspective spell, questioning his own greatness. This ended in him dramatically collapsing on the stage. In 2002, he returned to the stage in all his glory, singing songs he composed while finding his roots during a recent European trip (Van Zyl 2002:3).

Pretorius's colourful tale of his career as a rock star pokes fun at the ATKV. However, Grobler (quoted by Van Zyl 2002:3) again expresses his

disapproval of alleged opinion leaders. In his view, they sponsor local arts festivals and view art as a mere hobby, promoting “Sunday painters” instead of serious art that challenges conventional ideas.⁴¹ By only promoting a certain type of art these institutions encourage artists to refrain from pushing the boundaries of convention.



Fig 68. Kropotkin Pretorius and members of the JAA rock band (2002). From left to right: unknown JAA member, Marí Grobler (now Van Niekerk), Leon Potgieter, Kropotkin Pretorius (Diek Grobler), Marinda du Toit, Kobus Rossouw, Charles Badenhorst, Bettie Maluleka.

Grobler curated the Absolut Insig Animation Festival at the KKNK in Oudtshoorn, and at the Aardklop Arts Festival in Potchefstroom, in 2002. He screened his digital short films *Idea* (2001) and *Le Voyage* (2002), a new animated short film, *Die onmerkwaardige reis van Juffrou Visser* (2002) and an animation for a commercial music video, produced for the South African artist Karin Hougaard, titled *If we only have love* (2000).⁴²

In 2002, he showcased his art at group exhibitions by the Korean Society of Illustrators in Prague and Peking. The Mind's i Art Space hosted the

Solar Eclipse Exhibition, in collaboration with the Foundation for Education, Science and Technology.

In 2003, Grobler participated in various local art exhibitions. These include The Art Space in Johannesburg, the Hope Box/Weather Report International Art Project organised by the Dutch artist Rienke Enghart in the Mind's i Gallery in Johannesburg as well as the *Om die Bosch gelei* exhibition, the Fine Line drawing exhibition and Edition printmaking exhibition at the Mind's i Art Space in Pretoria. Grobler won the Graphic Arts Section of the South African leg of the International Olympic Committee Art Competition.

Examples of the artworks Grobler created for these exhibitions are digital collages such as the *Brave new world* series. This series consists of *Morning walkies* (2001) (fig 69/DG439), *Travelling towards the light* (2001) (fig 70/DG440), *Preparing for the evening performance* (2003) (fig 71/DG441), and *Beauties in a baobab forest* (2003) (fig 72/DG442). These collages were shown at the *Om die Bosch gelei* exhibition which was held at Grobler's Mind's i Art Space in Pretoria in May 2003, and featured artworks by Grobler, Michele Nigrini, Retha Buitendach and Gustav Vermeulen. The four artists referenced the art of Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) as inspiration for a diverse range of artworks. Throughout Grobler's oeuvre there are some artworks that differ from his usual artistic style or that do not contain any of his signature motifs. These are often created for specific exhibitions, following a set theme.⁴³

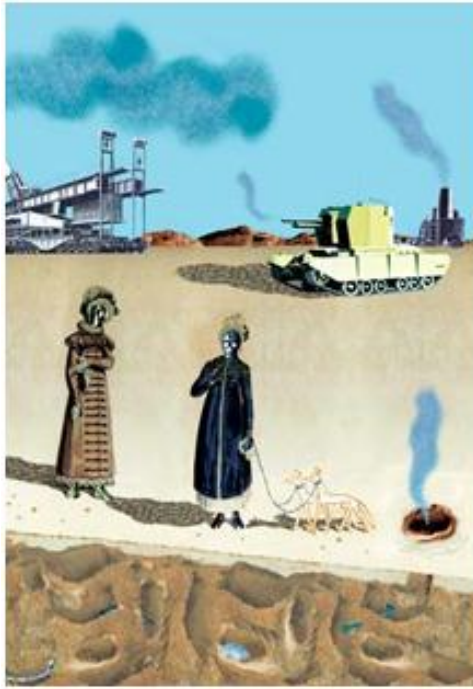


Fig 69/DG439. Diek Grobler,
Morning walkies (2003).



Fig 70/DG440. Diek Grobler,
Travelling towards the light (2003).

The *Brave new world* series does not display Grobler's usual playful or tongue-in-cheek approach to serious or sensitive subjects. His imagery of industry, war, death, religion, beauty and destruction is contrasted in darker and unmediated way. The exhibition highlighted surreal elements of Bosch's art such as "the workings of the subconscious by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtaposition of subject matter" (<http://www.arthrob.co.za>). In *Morning walkies* the women walking the dogs are corpses dressed as aristocracy. They seem to be oblivious or indifferent to the destruction and rot surrounding them. *Travelling towards the light* shows a pious, plastic Madonna travelling on the back of a buffalo towards an artificial light source. With her back turned to the destruction behind her the artwork might question the sincerity of her religious mission.

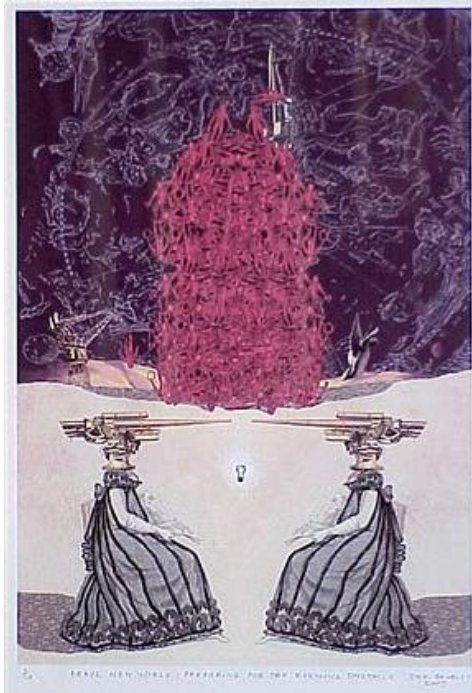


Fig 71/DG441. Diek Grobler,
*Preparing for the evening
performance* (2003).

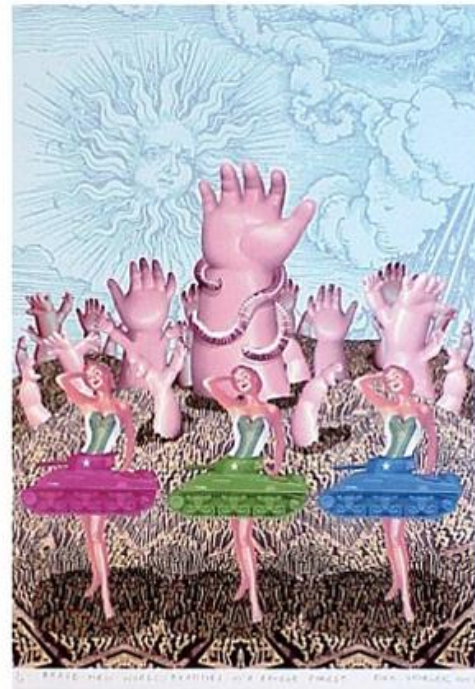


Fig 72/DG442. Diek Grobler,
Beauties in a baobab forest
(2003).

Both *Preparing for the evening performance* (2003) and *Beauties in a baobab forest* (2003) contrast images of beauty and aesthetics with symbols of war and destruction.

This chapter explored Grobler's involvement in performance or live art, and his efforts to further local audiences' exposure to and interaction with the medium. It highlighted selected themes in Grobler's art such as life journeys, gender politics, household rituals, religion and the identity of the post-apartheid Afrikaner, the latter which he fervently pursued through the efforts of the JAA. Furthermore, I discussed the artist's Parisian sojourn, highlighting a shift in Grobler's focus from performance art towards other media such as traditional and digital collage, and eventually his turn towards motion art. The next chapter in Grobler's journey, from 2004-2009, will be concerned with the artist's work in 2D animation and stop-motion animated film.

Notes: Chapter 3

- 1 Grobler (2009e:8) explicates:

Sy [Castellucci] goed is net so gelaai, jy kan nie alles gaan probeer verstaan nie. Baie daarvan is om skoonheid te skep. Nie elke liewe beweging het 'n betekenis nie. Dis soos om dans te probeer verstaan. Wat beteken 'n *pirouette*? ... Dit is soos om musiek te probeer analiseer en betekenis te probeer vind in elke noot. Ek weet nie hoekom probeer ons dit met *paintings* doen nie. Partykeer is dit net mooi.
- 2 See Poësie in die skil van 'n aartappel (1997), for a summary of this performance.
- 3 According to Anghie (2006:748-749), colonialism shaped the international law that fuelled the suppression of the Third World. This oppression is continued through another form of imperialism, known as neo-colonialism. Anghie (2006:748-749) explains:

The end of formal colonialism ... did not result in the end of colonial relations. Rather, in the view of Third World societies, colonialism was replaced by neo-colonialism; Third World states continued to play a subordinate role in the international system because they were economically dependent on the West, and the rules of international economic law continued to ensure that this would be the case.
- 4 Grobler (2010:14) explains his concept of household rituals: "Dit gaan oor die mens se behoefte aan 'n ritueel, maar dat die ritueel eintlik uit pas is met civilisation en ... die kultuur waarin ons leef. Dan raak die rituele eintlik absurd en belaglik."
- 5 Information based on a personal interview with Grobler (2009d). The word fopspeen means pacifier or dummy. According to Grobler (<http://www.fopspeen.co.za/content/aboutUs>), art can act as a "pacifier for life".
- 6 This description was sourced from a press release written by Diek Grobler prior to a performance of *Sewe dae in Babel* (1998) at the Town Hall in Pretoria. The release is dated 12 October. The following excerpt references this unpublished press release, written by Grobler (1998):

"Sewe Dae in Babel" is 'n *Performance Art* Kabaret deur Diek Grobler wat geskep is op uitnodiging na die multi-dissiplinêre uitstalling in London. Dié uitstalling beoog om die invloed van die kolonialisme op die identiteit van die individu te ondersoek, en "Sewe Dae in Babel" handel oor die kunstenaar se beleving van sy post-koloniale erfenis. ... Grobler beskou die produksie soos dit tans daar uitsien slegs as een van vele moontlike weergawes van "Sewe Dae in Babel". Vir hom is die proses van uitvoering deel van die skeppingsproses van die stuk, en gevolglik is dit onvermydelik dat die werk 'n voortdurende evolusie sal ondergaan. Ideaal gesproke moet die werk dan ook oor 'n fisiese periode van sewe dae afspeel, maar uit respek vir redelike eise wat aan enigiemand se aandagspan gestel kan word, duur die produksie net langer as 'n uur. ... Die vertoning bestaan uit 'n kombinasie van elemente uit al die kunstedisiplines: Die verhaal/idee/konsep word vertel/oorgedra/gedemonstreer deur die gebruik van visuele beelde, teks (gesproke en geprojekteerd), klank/musiek, sang, beweging/dans, sowel as fisiese objekte: maskers, beeldhouwerke, kostuums, en rekwisiete.

- 7 According to Grobler (2009d:15) this production was originally commissioned to be displayed at the Empire and I exhibition, showcasing artists from various Commonwealth countries, to be held in London. Grobler and Fopspeen Live Art received financial aid from the National Arts Council to produce the performance art piece. However, they were not able to raise sufficient personal funds to stage the performance abroad. The production was first staged at the KKNK in South Africa 1998, and thereafter at the Pretoria City Hall in October of the same year. The second staging was made possible by additional financial support from the National Arts Council, in conjunction with the Department of Culture and Recreation.
- 8 See Bible, Genesis 11:1-9 with regard to the narrative of the tower of Babel.
- 9 The motif of the disintegrating wine vessels, mentioned by Pienaar, would later be repeated as a separate installation artwork. See *Laaste Avondmaal* (1998) (DG375).
- 10 According to the *Verklarende Afrikaanse Woordeboek* (VAW 1972. Sv “aia”), the word aia means nursemaid. The term was commonly used by the colonial Afrikaners in reference to older black women who acted as nursemaids to their children. The box full of white dolls which the African nursemaid drags along might serve as a symbol of her identity, based on a role she assumed during apartheid.
- 11 See Bible, Jonah chapters 1-4 in reference to Jonah’s journey.
- 12 See Homer (books 4-12 1946:139-202), also described in Note 45 of Chapter Two in this dissertation.
- 13 This summary of the storyline is based on an unpublished script for *Die lang pad na Ninevé* (1999) performance art, written by Diek Grobler.
- 14 In a promotional leaflet for *Die lang pad na Ninevé* (1999), Grobler writes:
 Die Lang Pad na Ninevé is 'n metaforiese reisverhaal wat ietwat van 'n kruising is tussen dié van die Bybelse profeet Jona en die mitologiese held Ulysses. Die verhaal begin toe Juffrou Visser in opdrag van God haar selfgemaakte lappop, Jona(s), op 'n lewensreis stuur. Hy word deur 'n storm van koers af gedwing en een na die ander avontuur val hom te beurt. Die stuk handel daaroor dat mense hul roeping in die lewe misloop, dit doelbewus vermy, nooit besef dat hulle dit het nie, of knaend ontevrede is met die roeping wat hulle gekry het.
 Furthermore, Grobler (quoted by Van Rooyen 1999:36) asserts: “Met Ninevé probeer ons om performance art meer toeganklik te maak’ ... ‘Jy weet, Afrikaners dink mos nie eintlik nie. Ninevé is visuele kommentaar op die mens se onvermoë om sy lewensroeping te verwesenlik’.”
- 15 Grobler founded a secret society named the Jong Afrikaner Anargiste (JAA). He wrote a manifesto for the society and invited people to become members. He took a membership list from the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging (ATKV) and sent letters to half of their members refusing them membership of the JAA, even though they had no idea what the JAA was, or had never applied for membership (Grobler 2009e:29-30).
 The j.A.a Manifesto (an unpublished document written by Grobler 1999):
 Die j.A.a. is 'n hoogs geheime organisasie wat beoog om hom te beywer vir die behoud en heropbou van regte Afrikanerwaardes. Dit sluit veral die Afrikaner se beweerde pioniersgees, waagmoed en dapperheid in, wat volgens die j.A.a. laas met die rebellie ten toon gestel is.
 1. Die j.A.a. het geen leier nie.

2. Enige lid van die j.A.a. mag uitsprake namens die organisasie maak.
 3. Die j.A.a. is nie 'n organisasie nie.
 4. Indien die j.A.a. 'n organisasie was, sou enige lid daarvan as spreekbuis, mondstuk en woordvoerder daarvan kon funksioneer. Die opinie van enige j.A.a. lid is noodwendig die opinie van die organisasie. (sien punt 4).
 5. Die j.A.a. stry vir die behoud van die Afrikanerhart.
 6. Die j.A.a. dink Stellenbosch is lelikerig.
 7. Die j.A.a. verwerp die institutionalisering van kuns.
 8. Die j.A.a. verwelkom die institutionalisering van alle politici, vername Afrikaners en KKNK feeskomiteelede.
 9. Die j.A.a. dink nie die Afrikaner dink nie.
 10. Die j.A.a. meen die woord 'kunstenaar' word ter plaatse grootliks misbruik om te verwys na halfgebakte rymelaars, tokkelaars, pseudo-intellektueles en ander opportuniste.
 11. Alle vroue wat nie aan Jong Dames Dinamiek behoort nie, mag lede van j.A.a. wees.
 12. Die j.A.a. glo nie in die oorronding van die [a] nie.
 13. Die j.A.a. is van opinie dat die sjarme van klein Afrikaanse dames a-capella groepe met Engelse name landwyd oorskot word.
 14. Die j.A.a. meen die ATKV is net vir moffies.
 15. Die j.A.a. dink Egoli is 'n pot veramerikaanse, kapitalistiese kak.
 16. Die j.A.a. dink Bienkie gaan in Amerika vir JR ontmoet, 'n affair met hom hê, en 'n negeling baar.
 17. Die j.A.a. is 'n voorstander van 'n vakbond vir kunstenaars, deur kunstenaars en hoop iemand stig een. Gou!
 18. Die j.A.a. handhaaf die opinie dat koeksisters te soet is.
 19. Lede van die j.A.a. laat hulle koppe in skaamte sak by die blote gedagte dat "Maak 'n Las" 'n akkurate weerspieëling van die Afrikanerpsige mag wees.
 20. Die j.A.a. meen die Musiekfabriek verdien die valbyl. Noudat ons daaraan dink kan dieselfde gesê word van nog minstens vier-en-dertig ander Afrikaanse musiek-en sanggroepies.
 21. Die j.A.a. meen Helmut Lotti is die antichris.
 22. Die j.A.a. ondersteun Bienkie heelhartig, aangesien sy die Afrikanerdroom uitleef.
 23. Die j.A.a. is 'n nie-geweldadige organisasie.
 24. Die j.A.a. het geen verbintenisse met PAGAD, die nuwe NP, VF, ACVV, SALU, VVO, SAWU, COSATU, AWB, CSV, POPCRU, SASKO, SAMRO, POLSTU, UFO, die WVK of die KWV nie.
 25. Die j.A.a. meen die vorige regime is te blameer vir alles.
 26. Die j.A.a. [meen] die huidige regime sou aan heelwat dinge skuldig gewees het indien die vorige regime nie reeds daarvoor geblameer was nie. (Sien punt 26).
 27. Die j.A.a. meen die nuwe millennium het op 29 Augustus 1997 begin.
 28. Die j.A.a. hou van Fen Shui. Veral op mieliepap en met baie pietersielie.
 29. Die j.A.a. beveg geldgierigheid, materialisme, onetiese besigheidsstrategieë en alles wat lelik is.
 30. Die j.A.a. beywer hom vir meer subsidies vir ware kunstenaars¹, die verbanning van gevaarlike wapens en maltese poedels, die herdekorasie van die monument en alles wat mooi is.
 31. Die j.A.a. hou altyd van 'n ietsie anders.
 32. Die j.A.a. haat alle "ye olde ... shoppe's".
- ¹ Die j.A.a. sal natuurlik besluit wie en wat ware kuns is, want niemand weet beter as ons nie.

16

The reasons for Antoinette Pienaar being upset, published in a newspaper article (Pienaar wil anargiste nek omdraai. *Die Burger*, 27 Maart 1999:3), are the following:

Pienaar bied van vandag vyf vertonings aan van Johanna, waarin hulde

gebring word aan mense wat swaargekry het in die Tweede Anglo-Boere Oorlog. Die vertoning word aan haar twee oumas opgedra. "Die anargiste beledig my ouma en my voorvaders ... Hulle spoeg op hulle," het Pienaar gister ontsteld gesê. "Ek het vir Johanna stories by oumense in dieselfde ouderdomsgroep as mev. Betsie Verwoerd gaan kry. In my program bedank ek hulle dat hulle dit so oophand gedoen het ... Dat Eporia nou by 'n politieke kwessie en mev. Verwoerd betrek word, is 'n belediging." Sy het verduidelik dat sy juis nie met Hendrik Verwoerd se sienings saamstem nie. "Hoekom moet mev. Verwoerd nou boet vir sy nonsens?" wou sy weet. Ek probeer Hendrik Verwoerd se verkeerd maak, reg maak". Sy het bygevoeg dat sy dit onaanvaarbaar vind om aan anargiste gekoppel te word. "Met hulle moet jy in die hof gaan staan dat die wet met hulle praat." Volgens Pienaar het sy nie publisiteitsfoefies nodig om mense te trek nie. "En om dit Egoria te noem! As die anargiste my gekontak het, kon ek 'n beter woordspeling gekry het wat snaaks is, nie aanstootlik nie".

- 17 Grobler (quoted by Burger 1999b) explains: "Die plakkate self is kunswerke. Die mediareaksie was ontlokkend en word deel van die kunswerk. Dit is 'n kunswerk waar die gehoorbetrokkenheid van kardinale belang was."
- 18 A press article titled Pienaar wil anargiste nek omdraai (*Die Burger*, 27 Maart 1999:3) published the following comment by Kropotkin Pretorius, quoted from an interview with Pretorius and Antoinette Pienaar. The article states:
 Kropotkin Pretorius, een van die anargiste, het aan *Die Burger* gesê hulle wil ondersoek instel na die manier waarop Afrikaners dink en na dinge kyk. Oor die feit dat feesgangers kaartjies vir die fiktiewe vertonings wou koop, was sy reaksie: "Mense kyk nie na wat aangebied word nie, hulle kyk na die naam.'n Bekende kunstenaar kan vir 'n uur lank op haar kop staan en mense sal steeds die vertoning bywoon." Hy het bygevoeg dat dit vir die j.A.a 'n kompliment is dat 'n gesiene kunstenaar só ontsteld kan raak as sy gratis publisiteit kry.
 Furthermore, Burger (1999b:6) comments: "Hy [Grobler] beskou feesgangers wat op die KKNK geprobeer het om kaartjies vir die j.A.a. se vals produksies te koop as 'n 'tragedie'."
- 19 See the JAA's Manifesto listed in Note 15 of this chapter. The point under discussion is listed as number 9.
- 20 See the JAA's Manifesto listed in Note 15 of this chapter, number 10.
- 21 Pretorius (quoted by Burger, 1999b) explains:
 Die Afrikaner wil nie met *issues* gekonfronteer word nie. Die Engelse sêding *ignorance is bliss* is amper *ge-coin* vir die Afrikaner. As jy nie vrae stel nie, is jy gelukkig". Dit hang ... saam met Afrikaner-identiteit en die Afrikaner se belewenis van kuns en kultuur. "Ek is net nog 'n Afrikaner wat gatvol is vir die identiteit wat ander Afrikaners, wat hulle as leiers van die Afrikanerdom beskou, aan die Afrikaner opding. My groot krisis om die Afrikaner-identiteit is dat die groot gros Afrikaners hulle steeds beroep op die amptelike strukture wat daar is om vir hulle te sê wat hulle identiteit is. Hulle bemagtig mense soos die ATKV om te bepaal wat Afrikaner-kultuur is en wie die Afrikaner is." ... "Hulle is bevooroordeeld teenoor enigiets wat innoverend is. En ook teenoor kuns wat strook met wat in die res van die wêreld gebeur. Dit wys vir my die onverdraagsaamheid en ongeligtheid van die publiek word net versterk deur die openbare spreekbuis.
- 22 Pretorius states: "Ek wil verskoning vra oor sy seergekry het. Ons doel was nie

- om haar seer te maak nie” (Burger 1999a:1).
- 23 When asked about his disguise, Pretorius replied: “Ons dra maar nog almal maskers. Myne is net sigbaar. Ek wil nie 'n *celebrity* wees nie” (Burger 1999a:1).
- 24 Despite the degree of anonymity provided by Kropotkin Pretorius, his controversial statements at the KKNK caused some marital friction for the artist. Grobler (2009c:28) explains: “[M]arí het vir my gesê ek moet daarmee ophou want dit kan haar posisie in die Bank beïnvloed. Ek kon dit nie verstaan nie... *speak your mind*. Dat die reg van spraak net bestaan tot op 'n sekere punt en dan kan jy jou werk begin verloor want jy is te opinionated ... Dit het vir my net te veel geklink na die ou Suid-Afrika.”
- 25 Kropotkin Pretorius describes the production (from an unpublished press release by Pretorius) as follows: “Die verhoog word gestroop van akteurs: Die aksie, konsepte en idees word verbeeld deur objekte, outomata, ligte, projeksies en rekwisiete. Geen emosie, metaforiese interpretasie, verskuilde inhoud of versagende humor staan tussen die direkte boodskap van die kunswerk en die gehoor nie.”
- 26 The story of Noah and the great flood is recorded in Bible, Genesis 6-8.
- 27 See Grobler’s comments (2009e:8), quoted in Note 1 of this chapter.
- 28 Grobler, (quoted by Van Rooyen 1999:36) says: “Ons wil hê mense moet net kom kyk. Hulle moenie heeltyd *worry* dat hulle nie sal verstaan nie.”
- 29 Burger (1999b) writes:
 Hy moet leen, sê Grobler, en haal Richard Demarco ... aan: “Art and culture are poles apart. Culture is an industry linked to profit and marketing, leisure and tourism. Art is there to remind you of the limits of pain, sorrow, joy and pleasure ... [it] allows you to live as bravely as possible for the next twenty minutes.” As hy dit van toepassing maak op die KKNK, sê Grobler, is sy slotsom: “Dit is 'n kultuurfees en nie 'n kunstefees nie.”
- 30 Since 1957, the Cité Internationale des Arts foundation has been granting residence for professional artists who want to develop their art in France (<http://www.citedesartsparis.net>). As a member of the South African National Association for the Visual Arts (SANAVA), Grobler applied for, and was given the opportunity to live and work in Paris for a few months. SANAVA offers this opportunity to “those who had already shown proof of their artistic merit” The purpose of this visit is to enrich the artists and expose them to other cultures and artistic influences (<http://www.sanava.co.za/paris>).
- 31 See <http://www.stellenbosch.co.za/kunsmus>
- 32 St Geneviève (c 422–500) consecrated herself to God at the age of seven and lived a life of humility. Her intercession is said to have diverted the Huns under Attila from Paris in 451 AD (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 2010).
- 33 See Kaplan (1980:142-186).
- 34 *Ibid.*, p145.
- 35 Grobler (2010:20) explains: “Sy styg uit die tuine uit op elke middag om vier uur. Dan is haar werk vir die dag klaar. Dan gaan sy hemel toe om te gaan slaap.”

- 36 View *Self-portrait* (1992) (DG120) as an example of Grobler's scraperboard technique.
- 37 Grobler's *Narcissus* (1993) (fig 22/DG131) and *Walking a line in Africa* (1995) (fig 38/DG188) display intricate lines rendered in gouache.
- 38 Although Grobler dated this artwork "2000 + 2001", I have included the date of completion in reference to this artwork.
- 39 St Denis is sometimes referred to as the founder of Parisian Christianity. See Serchuk (1999:41-42). See also *The Hutchinson Dictionary of Symbols in Art* (1995 Sv "Denys, Saint") for an account of the legend of St Denis.
- 40 Information and quotation referenced from <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern> Beuys' performance is available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4ZkR1X6s7E>
- 41 Grobler (quoted by Van Zyl: 2002:3) says: "Hulle propageer *Sunday painters*. Ons kunstenaars is besig om te peuter, nie om te werk nie."
- 42 The music video titled *If we only have love* is available at: <http://www.karinhougaard.co.za/Video>. Grobler was responsible for the directing, animation and the creation of all artwork.
- 43 Further examples of artworks that were created with a specific exhibition in mind are *Koekie* (1997) (DG273) and *Tottie* (1997) (DG274) which had been created for an exhibition of erotic art and *If I was a girl 2* (2009) (DG606) and *If I was a girl 3* (2009) (DG607) created for an art exhibition in commemoration of Women's Day.

CHAPTER 4: MOTION ART (2004-2009)

4.1 Facing the challenges of stop-motion animation

At the end of 2003, Grobler left his teaching position at the Crawford College Pretoria. He renamed Fopspeen Live Art Company for Performance Art to Fopspeen Moving Pictures, changing its focus from performance art to animation and film. Charles Badenhorst, who performed as Kropotkin Pretorius's guitarist at the JAA's rock music performance art show at the KKNK in 2002, collaborated with him in this new venture. Grobler views his transition from performance art and avant-garde theatre to working with computer aided 2D animation and stop-motion animation, as a natural evolution. He explains: "My paintings were always narrative, so it was a natural progression from painting. In a film I can explore my narratives further than in the single frame of a painting. And I prefer animation to live theatre for the distance it affords: The audience can't throw things at me anymore".¹

At the end of 2003, Grobler started conceptualising a stop-motion² puppet animation for children, which he titled *Sanna's garden* (2003-2005) (fig 73/DG488). This was the beginning of an educational series on the conservation of the succulent Karoo.³

Grobler and Badenhorst started designing and building the various puppets for *Sanna's garden* (2003-2005). These handmade puppets were much more advanced than the finger puppets he created as a child, in his chicken coop studio on the farm. Creating a stop-motion puppet involves "the fabrication of a body that is imbued with articulation points [joints] and given surface features" (Tillis 1999:191). Grobler constructed his puppets out of wood, with plastic engineering conduits as joints. Surface textures of artificial fur or cloth were added and painted.⁴ *Sanna's garden* (2003-2005) furthermore afforded Grobler and Badenhorst the opportunity to hone their skills in stop-motion animation.



Fig 73/DG488. Diek Grobler, *Sanna's garden* (2003-2005).

Sanna's garden tells the story of Sanna, a bat-eared fox living in the succulent Karoo. Sanna and a group of indigenous animals build a garden to protect the endangered plants of the region. An uncomplicated storyline addresses various conservation themes such as the introduction of unusual species of animals and plants and the prevention of bushfires and littering. The aim of the series is to promote awareness of conservation in general and more specifically, in the succulent Karoo.⁵

Grobler meticulously developed the animal personae to ensure a balance between accurate animal traits and quirky human personalities. He carefully assembled a cast of diverse characters who would refrain from eating each other. Furthermore, he assigned identities to the characters, which would be representative of South Africa's cultural diversity.

Sourcing sufficient funds to develop this animated series was a constant challenge. He was fortunate to secure a \$7000 grant from the Critical Ecology Partnership Fund (CEPF)⁶ for the development of the first episodes of *Sanna's garden*. By November 2004, Fopspeen Moving Pictures had completed the first three episodes. Grobler applied for additional funding to complete the series, from the South African National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF). However, the NFVF rejected his request, describing the animals as being too “white” and “upsettingly Afrikaner”⁷ According to Nieuwoudt (2004:1), the NFVF further rejected the use of a tortoise as a wise animal as this portrays white people as superior in knowledge.⁸

Despite the criticism and challenges to secure sufficient funds locally, Grobler's first stop-motion animation film received favourable responses from the international arts community. *Sanna's garden* was screened at the Festival of Animated Films (AniFest) in Třeboň, Czech Republic; The International Animated Film Festival KROK, hosted by Russia and the Ukraine; the Zlín International Film Festival for Children and Youth in the Czech Republic; the International Working Animated Film Festival (RFAF) in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and at the Cartoons on the Bay International Festival of Television Animation in Positano, Italy in 2005. According to Grobler (2008) this was the only animated film representing South Africa at any of these festivals at the time.

By November 2005, Fopspeen Moving Pictures had completed the next three episodes of *Sanna's garden*. Grobler and Badenhorst built and animated all the puppets.⁹

While working on *Sanna's garden*, Grobler produced various artworks in traditional media such as charcoal, gouache, oil paint and scraperboard. In 2004 he showcased some of this art at various local and international exhibitions. Among these are the Tina Skukan Gallery in Pretoria, the Nine

Dragon Heads International Environment Art Symposium in Cheongju City, South Korea, at Gallery 88 in Sasolburg and at the International Olympic Committee Art Exhibition in Geneva, Switzerland. He continued to experiment with visual interpretations of his metaphor of life as a journey. His *Small saint for those of little faith* (2004) (fig 74/DG469), *Ark* (2004) (fig 75/DG473), *Noag* (2004) (fig 76/DG474) and stop-motion animation *Bou 'n boot*¹⁰ (2004) (fig 77/DG487) offer various interpretations of the Biblical journey of Noah's ark.



Fig 74/DG469. Diek Grobler, *Small saint for those of little faith* (2004).



Fig 75/DG473. Diek Grobler, *Ark* (2004).



Fig 76/DG474. Diek Grobler, *Noag* (2004).



Fig 77/DG487. Diek Grobler, *Bou 'n boot* (2004).

Grobler's *The plague doctors* (diptych) (2004) (fig 78/DG470), *Self-portrait with red* (2004) (fig 79/DG471), *The geographer's wife* (2004) (fig 80/DG472), and *The last waltz* (2005) (fig 81/DG499) depict personal journeys and universal, everyday challenges. These works were created at a time when Grobler and his wife Marí were struggling with marital difficulties, between 2000 and 2005. In my opinion, these works may contain subtle subtexts of a personal nature.



Fig 78/DG470. Diek Grobler, *The plague doctors* (diptych) (2004).



Fig 79/DG471. Diek Grobler, *Self-portrait with red* (2004).



Fig 80/DG472. Diek Grobler, *The geographer's wife* (2004).



Fig 81/DG499. Diek Grobler, *The last waltz* (2005).

*Perseus en Andromeda*¹¹ (diptych) (2005) (fig82/DG492) and *Opdrifsel* (2005) (fig 83/DG496) continue Grobler's exploration of heroic journeys in mythology, peppered with challenges and obstacles, as a metaphor for life.



Fig 82/DG492. Diek Grobler, *Perseus en Andromeda* (diptych) (2005).



Fig 83/DG496. Diek Grobler, *Opdrifsel* (2005).

At the end of 2005, Grobler spent another month working in France and exhibited his art at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. He also exhibited locally at the Gordart Gallery in Johannesburg and was part of the South African delegation to the Delphic Games 2005 in Kuching, Malaysia, where he won a gold medal for painting.

Upon his return from Europe in the beginning of 2006, Grobler and his wife Marí separated, and divorced later that same year. He moved his residence and the Fopspeen Moving Pictures animation studio to a venue in Arcadia, Pretoria.

4.2 Stirring up a *Little Bang*

Due to their international exposure with *Sanna's garden* (2003-2005), Badenhorst was invited to spend some time at an Academy Award-winning British animation studio, Aardman Animation¹² in Bristol. This proved to be a valuable learning experience. Upon his return to South Africa in May 2006, Badenhorst and Grobler acquired a new camera and professional stop-motion computer software and started working on their next stop-motion animation, titled *Little Bang* (2006) (fig 84/DG523). They completed and exhibited this animated film in September 2006.

According to Grobler (2007g), *Little Bang* (2006) is "... a suburban creation myth about a strange, small god who travels around at night creating worlds in other people's garden sheds". Fopspeen Moving Pictures collaborated with the South African artist Marinda du Toit (1964-) in the creation of this work. Du Toit sculpted characters from scrap wood and metal, found objects, antique kitchenalia and jewellery. Grobler (quoted by Phillips 2010) observes that animating the junk sculptures was very challenging, as these were not designed and constructed with stop-motion animation in mind.



Fig 84/DG523. Fopspeen Moving Pictures, *Little Bang* (2006).

Little Bang (2006) was filmed in a garden shed over the course of five weeks in the winter of July, 2006. It premiered at the Platform on 18th Gallery in Pretoria in September 2006 and was exhibited at the University of Johannesburg Art Gallery in February 2007 as part of The Moving Art Image Exhibition. The film was selected and screened at various international events.¹³ Moreover, *Little Bang* (2006) won a Merit Award at the Thami Myele Fine Arts Awards in South Africa, and was nominated for a South African Film and Television Academy (SAFTA) award for Best Short Film in 2007.

Throughout 2007, Fopspeen Moving Pictures produced various commercial projects for corporate and private clients.¹⁴ They also collaborated with Marinda du Toit on their second stop-motion animation short film, titled *Agenda* (2007) (fig 85/DG545 and fig 86/DG545).



Fig 85/DG545. Fopspeen Moving Pictures, *Agenda* (2007).

4.3 Putting narratives in motion

Agenda (2007) is based on an installation artwork, conceptualised and created by Du Toit. The installation consisted of a group of almost life-sized, sculpted figures, representing the Chamber of Commerce in Du Toit's hometown, Groblersdal, in the 1970s. The board members were seated around a boardroom table, ready for their weekly meeting. Du Toit constructed the 13 colourful, small town characters from an array of discarded junk such as broken dolls, metal, pieces of old furniture, pots, doorbells, brooms and old kitchenware.¹⁵



Fig 86/DG545. Fopspeen Moving Pictures, *Agenda* (2007).

Grobler wrote, produced and directed *Agenda* (2007). He included Du Toit's sculpted characters, but amended the story to display a more universal, dreary, boardroom scenario. He also added a lead character to the plot, in the form of a tea lady.

According to Grobler (2007c), *Agenda* (2007) portrays the story of the tea lady who performs the mundane task of serving tea to a boardroom full of extremely self-important committee members. The meeting itself is a dull, humdrum affair, with the only excitement being the serving of the tea. The endless droning of the chairman's voice is momentarily broken by the entry of the tea lady. Even though the pompous committee members look down on the lady, her presence provides a welcome distraction. In contrast to the committee members, the tea lady is a cheerful and carefree character, who whistles and dances while performing her tasks in the kitchen. She selects her favourite biscuit before serving the tea.

Agenda was filmed in July and August of 2007. The boardroom scene was filmed in the Rosendal Theatre in the Eastern Free State town of Rosendal, using the life-sized sculptures. The kitchen scene was shot at the Fopspeen Moving Pictures studio in Pretoria. For this scene, they used a much smaller sculpture of the tea lady, and constructed the set to scale.¹⁶

Agenda won a SAFTA Special Mention Award for Best Animated Short Film in 2009. Furthermore, it was awarded the Africala Vote Film Festival Award in 2009, and was shortlisted for Best African Short Film at the African in Motion film festival in Edinburgh, in the United Kingdom. The film was selected for screening at various international festivals and events.¹⁷

In addition to Grobler's involvement with Fopspeen Moving Pictures, he created two motion artworks in his own artistic capacity in 2007. In both animations Grobler incorporated digitised images of some of his custom

created scraperboard artworks to classical music, performed by the renowned South African pianist, Wessel van Wyk.¹⁸ *The island of the day before* (2005) (fig 87/DG507), *The cave of Polyphemus* (2005) (fig 88/DG509), *Armada* (2005) (fig 89/ DG510), and *The crossing I* (2005) (fig 90 DG511) are examples of the artworks used in these animations.



Fig 87/DG507. Diek Grobler, *The island of the day before* (2005).



Fig 88/DG509. Diek Grobler, *The cave of Polyphemus* (2005).



Fig 89/DG510. Diek Grobler, *Armada* (2005).



Fig 90/DG511. Diek Grobler, *The crossing I* (2005).

The first of the two animations titled *Asturias* (2007) (fig 91/DG546), is named after a composition by the Spanish pianist, Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909). This melancholic film is a further development of Grobler's recurring metaphor of the Odyssey, and more specifically the helplessness of man against the forces of destiny. The visuals follow the ebb and flow of the music. A storm raging turbulently through the landscape and scattering traces of human existence along its path is contrasted with a calm and menacing sky.

In addition to *Asturias* (2007), Grobler created various digital artworks as an extension of the theme.¹⁹

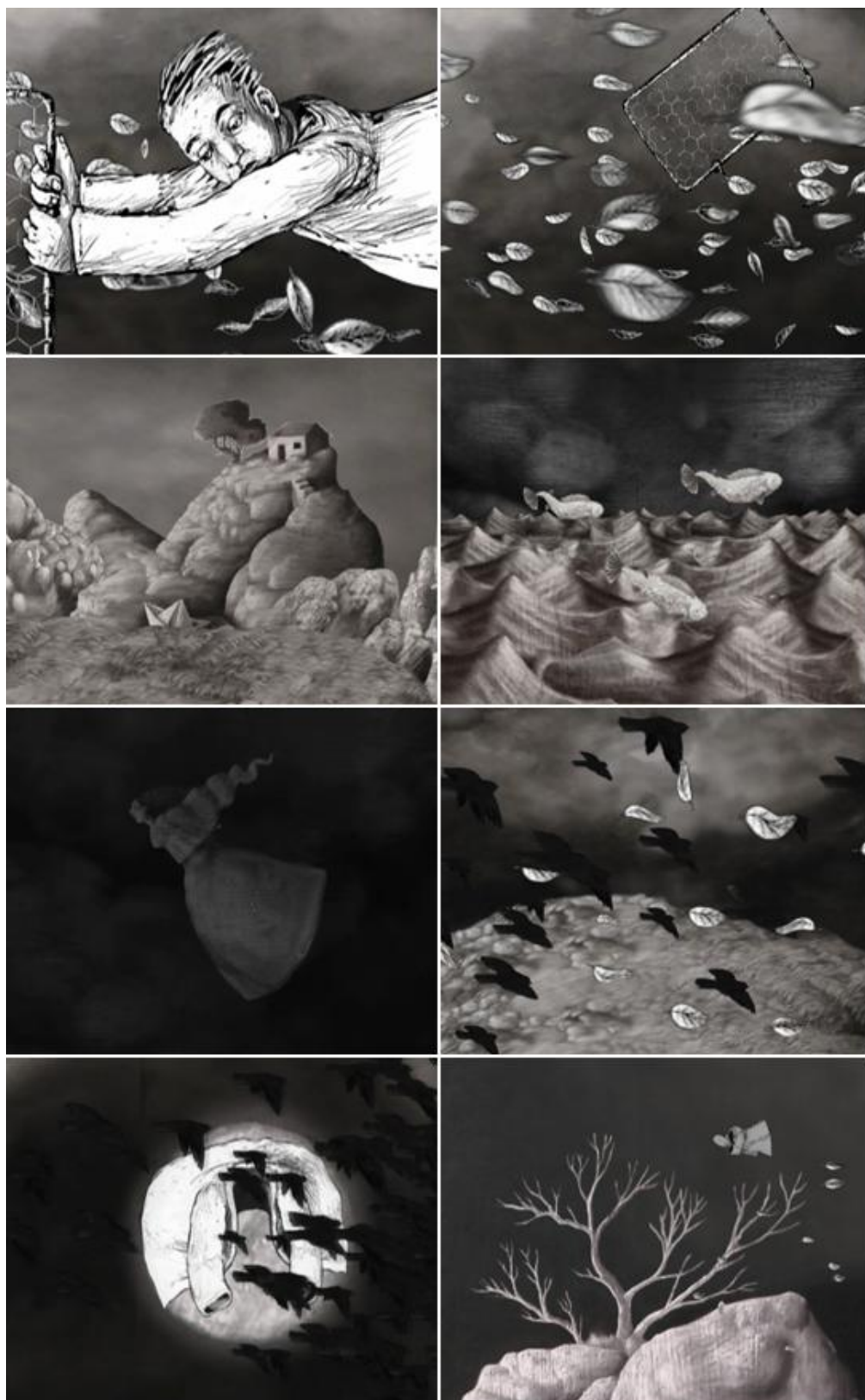


Fig 91/DG546. Diek Grobler, *Asturias* (2007).

In the second animated film, *Bee's wedding* (2007) (fig 92/DG547) Grobler animated 2D digital imagery to Felix Mendelssohn's (1809-1847) *Songs without Words* Opus 67 no 4, titled *Spinnerlied* or *Bee's wedding*.²⁰

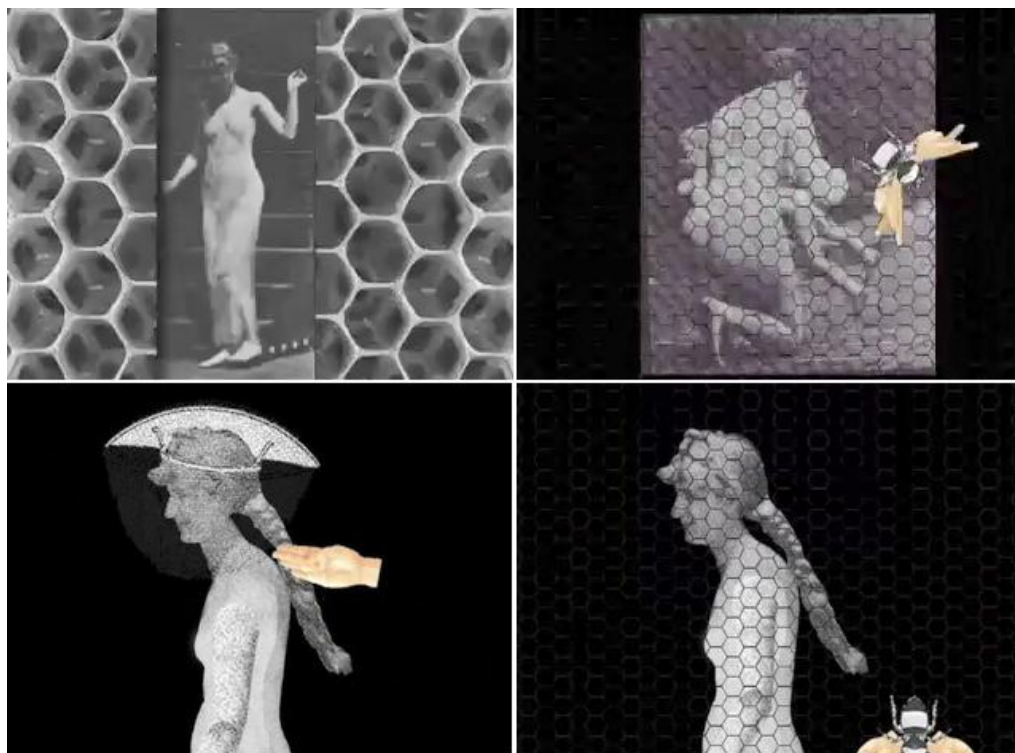


Fig 92/DG547. Diek Grobler, *Bee's wedding* (2007).

Grobler (2007d) describes *Bee's wedding* (2007) as a non-narrative, “fun exploration of found imagery and digital doodles to the fast pace of the music”. He combined collage techniques and a process of doodling to create a playful film with swarms of bees, a bride in a beekeeper's veil and the matrimonial union of a bee and a flower.

Bee's wedding (2007) inspired a host of digital collages and –prints, such as *Gemini* (2007) (fig 93/DG535), *A little love never hurt nobody* (2007) (fig 94/DG537) and *Never look back (never surrender)* (2007) (fig 95/DG541).

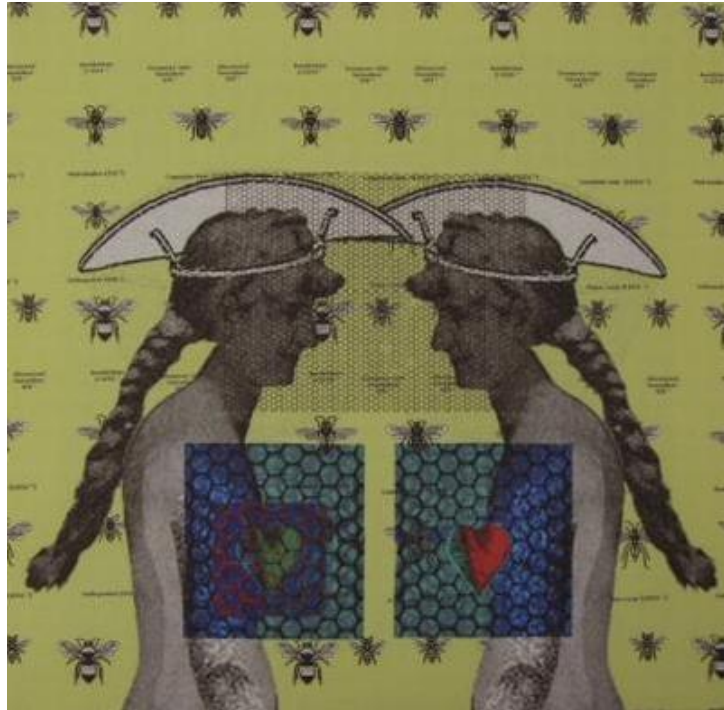


Fig 93/DG535. Diek Grobler, *Gemini* (2007).



Fig 94/DG537. Diek Grobler, *A little love never hurt nobody* (2007).



Fig 95/DG541. Diek Grobler, *Never look back (never surrender)* (2007).

In 2007, Grobler exhibited his art at the Association of Arts in Pretoria, the Tina Skukan Art Gallery in Pretoria and at the ABSA L'Atelier Exhibition of Merit Winners at the KKNK in Oudtshoorn. *Agenda* was screened at the Platform on 18th Gallery in Pretoria.

From August to October 2008, he conceptualised and created artwork for an animated sequence titled *B* (2008) (fig 96/DG548). Grobler animated the visuals while Badenhorst was responsible for the sound, and Wessel Van Wyk performed the music score.

Grobler describes *B* (2008) as a film about being. He explains: “*B* is a film about spiritual dislocation, about being at odds with one’s environment, both physically and emotionally” (Grobler 2009a). The modern day social, political and economic environment causes the individual to experience discomfort and fear. Grobler communicates this state of being through an

animated mixture of still photographs, digital illustrations and charcoal drawings.



Fig 96/DG548. Diek Grobler, *B* (2008).

The title of this work not only refers to the state of being, but also to the rating assigned to movies. A B-grade movie attempts to convey a narrative, despite its technical or conceptual weaknesses or limitations. Grobler draws from a variety of cinematic references and fluctuates between visual styles and absurd scenarios within this incoherent narrative. *B* (2008) explores various B-grade movie themes such as thrillers, disasters and alien abductions.

Furthermore, Grobler created individual artworks elaborating on the themes of spiritual dislocation and discomfort within the modern day environment, such as *His master's voice* (2008) (fig 97/DG627), *Take me*

to your leader (2008) (fig 98/DG581), *Pigeon men* (2008) (fig 99/DG582) and *Self-portrait with Space helmet* (2008) (fig 100/DG591).



Fig 97/DG627. Diek Grobler, *His master's voice* (2008).

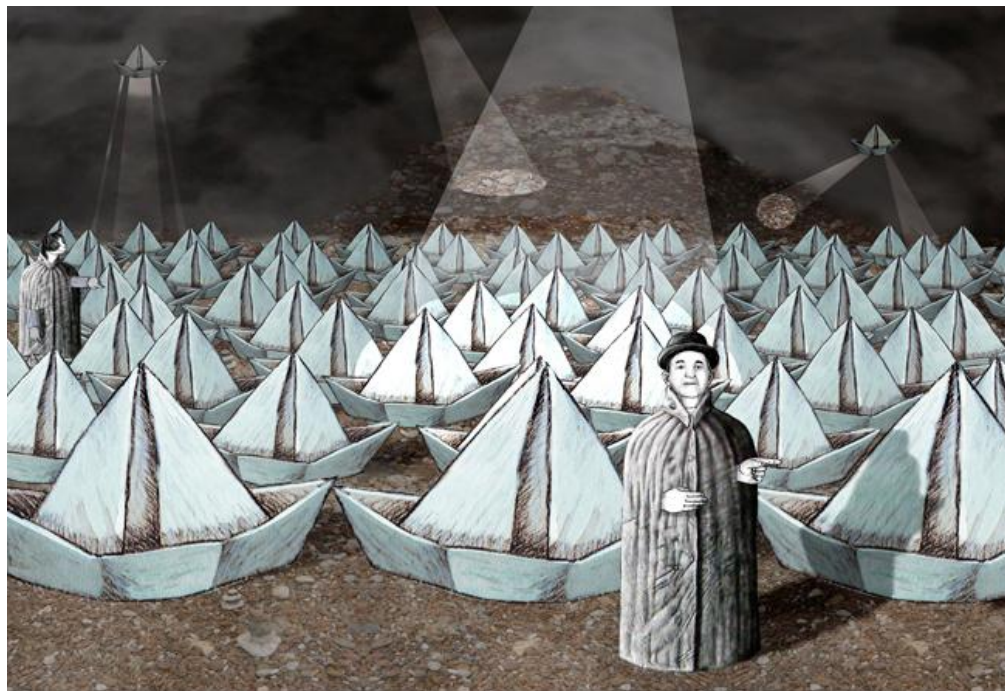


Fig 98/DG581. Diek Grobler, *Take me to your leader* (2008).



Fig 99/DG582. Diek Grobler, *Pigeon men* (2008).



Fig 100/DG591. Diek Grobler, *Self-portrait with Space helmet* (2008).

Grobler exhibited *B* (2008) and a selection of related artworks at the Fried Contemporary Art Gallery and Studio in Pretoria in 2008. He also participated in an exhibition titled *Stories* at the Gordart Gallery in Johannesburg. Furthermore *Agenda* was screened at the Bell-Roberts Contemporary Art Gallery in Cape Town.

In August and September 2008, Fopspeen Moving Pictures collaborated with Grobler's brother Piet in the creation of an award-winning animation titled *Little Birds ABC* (2009) (fig 101/DG618 and fig 102/DG618). The animation is named after, and built around a children's book written and illustrated by Piet Grobler, titled *Het Vogeltyes ABC*.

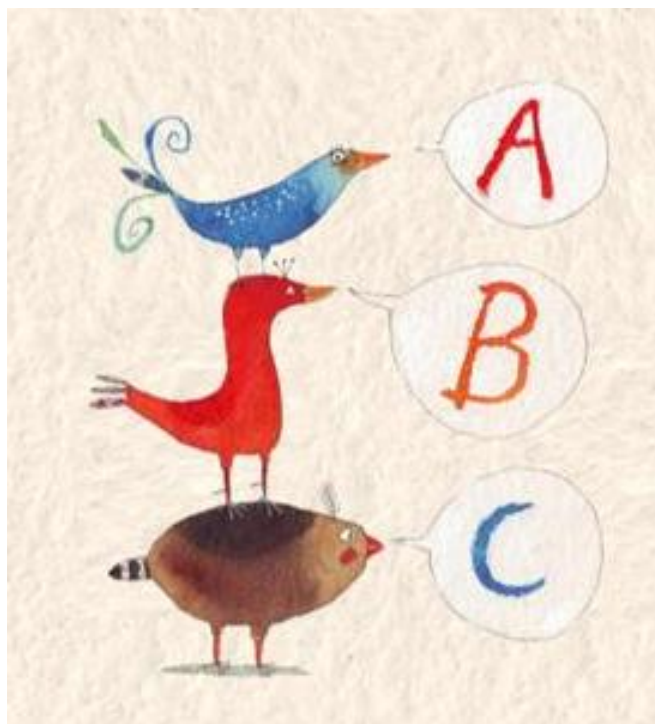


Fig 101/DG618. Diek Grobler, *Little Birds ABC* (2009).

Piet's humorous illustrations and Fopspeen Moving Pictures' animation skills proved a winning combination. Grobler (2009b) writes: "Piet Grobler's illustrations are fresh and witty, and we managed to capture that in the animation." Diek and Piet's art share the same offbeat sense of humour, appreciation for subtle detail and a narrative approach.

Little Birds ABC (2009) teaches the ABC in a fun way. Each letter is described in a unique and playful manner, accompanied by the twittering of little birds.



Fig 102/DG618. Diek Grobler, *Little Birds ABC* (2009).

With this film Fopspeen Moving Pictures won the Best Animated film for Children at the Tehran International Animation Festival in February 2009. This was their first international award. Moreover, they were invited to join the select group of animators on the International Animated Film Festival KROK²¹ ship in the Ukraine in October 2009. During this festival, they received a Brass Bell Award for Best Animation for Children.

As mentioned previously, *Agenda* was awarded a SAFTA Special Mention for Best Animated Short Film in February, and won the Africala Vote Film Festival award in April of 2009. Grobler travelled to Mexico to attend the Africala Film Festival. Due to a global outbreak of the H1N1 influenza

virus, also referred to as "swine flu", the festival was cancelled after its first day.

Upon his return, Grobler started working on two animations for the South African poet, Danie Marais (1971-). He created and animated digital collages to illustrate and accompany Marais' poems - *In Duitsland waar die wolke in gelid marsjeer* (2009) (fig 103/DG619)²² and *Saturday night alive* (2009) (fig 104/DG620).²³

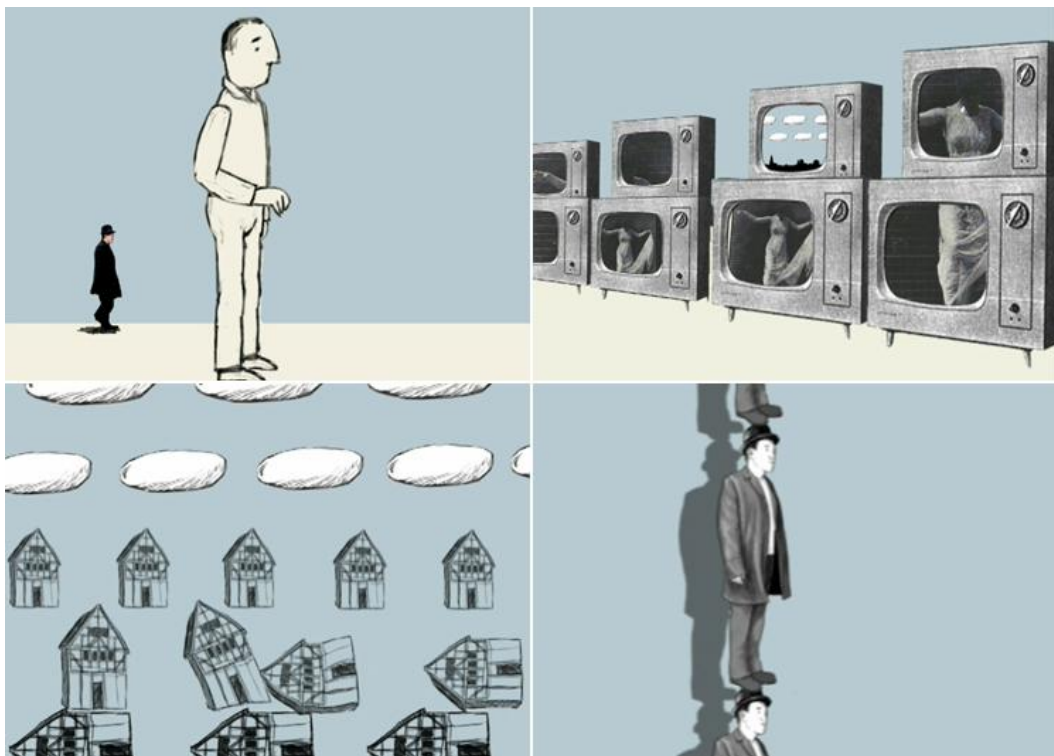


Fig 103/DG619. Diek Grobler, *In Duitsland waar die wolke in gelid marsjeer* (2009).

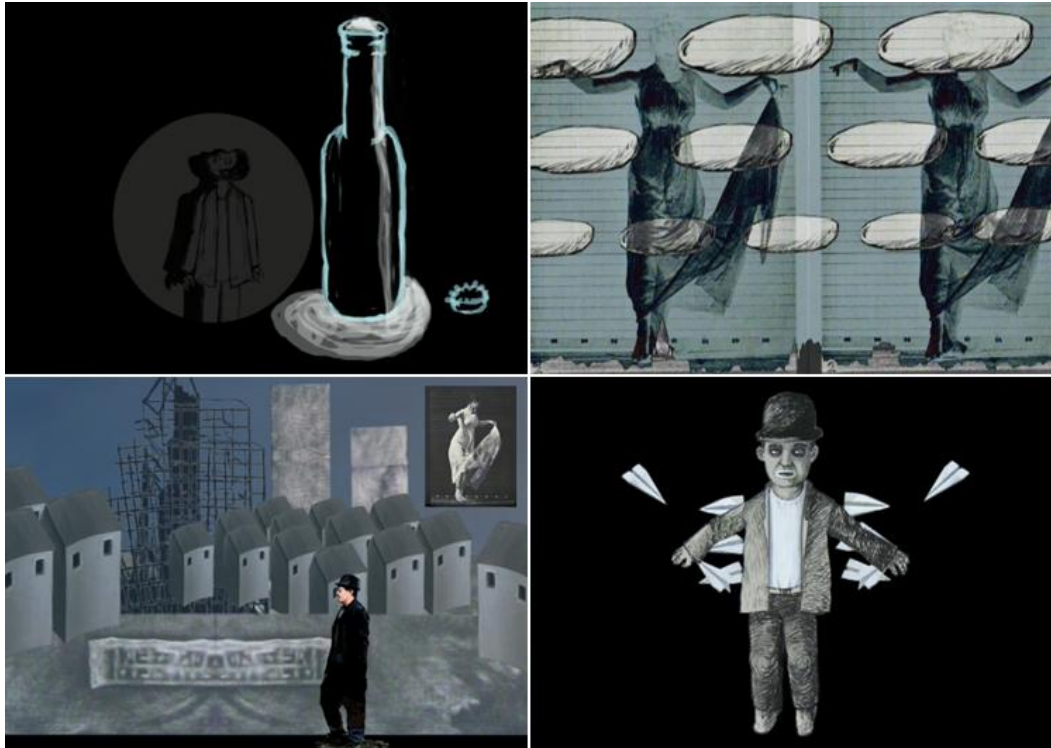


Fig 104/DG620. Diek Grobler, *Saturday night alive* (2009).

In October and November 2009, Fopspeen Moving Pictures conceptualised and created a trailer for a new animated television series around a suburban Afrikaans family. They presented the trailer to a local Afrikaans television channel, kykNET.

The animation, titled *Uit die Bloute* (2009) (fig 105/DG621) tells the story of a 12-year old amateur filmmaker, Jakobus Johannes van Alleman, also known as Seun. Seun films himself sitting on a couch in his suburban home, narrating tales about life in a stereotypical, white Afrikaner family.

Grobler (<http://www.fopspeen.co.za/index>) explains:

“Uit die Bloute” is Seun’s first attempt at documentary filmmaking. He is making a film about the Afrikaner, hoping that it will be sent into space, or buried in a time capsule, or something – so that in 100 year’s time, people of the future, or the aliens from Alfa Centauri, will know who and what the Afrikaners were.

KykNET agreed to broadcast the animations as a channel branding series in 2010.



Fig 105/DG621. Diek Grobler, *Uit die bloute* (pilot episode) (2009).

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Two of this dissertation, Grobler uses selected Internet based, social media channels such as Facebook as platforms where audiences can interact with his art. The lead characters from *Uit die Bloute* (2009) have regularly updated Facebook profile pages, and he also writes a regular online blog as Seun van Alleman,

encouraging constant interaction between his audience and his art.²⁴ Grobler has also created a Facebook profile page for his controversial alterego, Kropotkin Pretorius.²⁵

Since his turn towards motion art, Grobler has introduced various initiatives to expose and educate audiences about the genre, and to invite debate and promote interaction with the artworks. He guest lectures at local film schools and hosts monthly screenings of seminal films from his personal collection of international films via the Fopspeen Animation Playgroup.²⁶

During 2009, Grobler participated in events such as the *Pretoria Artists* exhibition at the Oliewenhuys Art Museum in Bloemfontein; the Alloo Volksblad Kunstefees in Bloemfontein and an exhibition titled *Mot en roes*, at Die Pienk Kerk in Johannesburg.

Some of the work Grobler exhibited at the *Mot en roes* exhibition includes a series of digital collages and -art he completed after his return from the Ukraine in October 2009. The series portrays an Odyssean journey, featuring the monster Scylla²⁷ in *The Odyssey (again!): The Monster Scylla* (2009) (fig 106/DG598), the lonely wanderer in *The Odyssey (again!): 99 red balloons* (2009) (fig 107/DG599), and a solitary individual, drifting away in *The Odyssey (again!): Arrival/departure* (2009) (fig 108/DG600). These works have a nostalgic, romantic²⁸ air foreign to Grobler's artistic style.



Fig 106/DG598. Diek Grobler, *The Odyssey (again!): The monster Scylla* (2009).

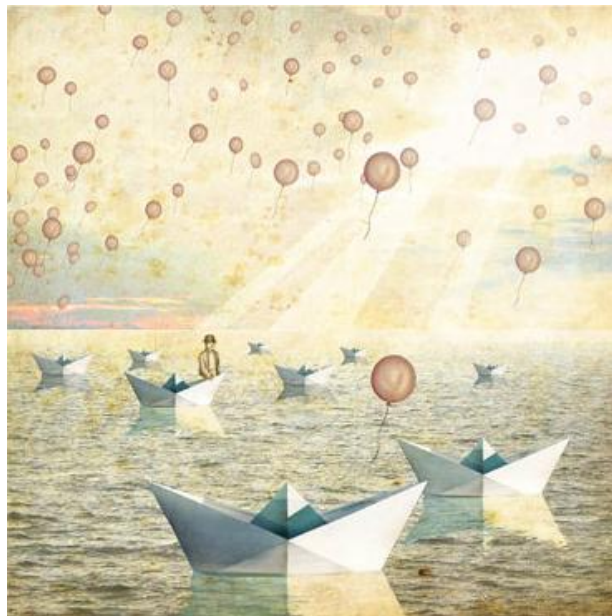


Fig 107/DG599. Diek Grobler, *The Odyssey (again!): 99 red balloons* (2009).



Fig 108/DG600. Diek Grobler, *The Odyssey (again!): Arrival/departure* (2009).

Grobler (2010:47) identifies an evolution in terms of the way he utilised the process of collage since his Parisian stay in 2000-2001. His first attempts consisted of traditional collages,²⁹ which led to experimentation with the process of digital collage and the visible layering of found objects as seen in *His master's voice* (2008) (fig 97/DG627),³⁰ and the eventual shift towards a form of digital painting, as seen in *The Odyssey (again!): Arrival/departure* (2009) (fig 108/DG600).

The *Mot en roes* exhibition also showcased selected oil paintings in which Grobler explores themes of surrealism and magic realism. Examples of these include *Kitchen sink surrealism*³¹ (2009) (fig 109/DG637), *The representatives* (2009) (fig 110/DG638) and *At the psychiatrist* (2009) (fig 111/DG616).



Fig 109/DG637. Diek Grobler, *Kitchen sink surrealism* (2009).



Fig 110/DG638. Diek Grobler, *The representatives* (2009).



Fig 111/DG616. Diek Grobler, *At the psychiatrist* (2009).

This chapter documented Grobler's artistic development from 2004-2009. In addition to illustrations and paintings in traditional and new media, it also listed examples of 2D animation and stop-motion animated films created by the artist in his own artistic capacity, as well as collaborative works created by Fopspeen Moving Pictures. I highlighted the extensive international exposure and success associated with Grobler's work in motion art until 2009. Some of the visual themes identified throughout this chapter were life journeys, spiritual dislocation and the concept of feelings at odds with one's environment on physical and emotional levels.

This concludes the art historical documentation of Grobler's life and work from 1964-2009. In the following chapter, I will examine Grobler's oeuvre as a whole, with specific reference to his artistic style, and the recurring visual metaphors and themes that form the basis of his art.

Notes: Chapter 4

- 1 See <http://www.fopspeen.co.za/content/aboutUs> in reference to Grobler's shift towards motion arts.
- 2 Tillis (1999: 190-191) provides a detailed description of the process of stop-action animation:

A material object without any visible means of control is set in a particular pose and shot with a single frame of film. The figure is then given a minutely different pose, the film is advanced, and another single frame is shot. And on and on, until the finished sequence of frames, when viewed at projected speed, gives the illusion that the figure is moving of its own accord, while in fact, the film does not actually record any movement, *per se*, of the figure, but only a sequence of still positions.
- 3 The succulent Karoo, covering 102,691 square kilometres of desert, is divided into two regions. The first region is the Namaqualand which extends along the west coast of South Africa into southern Namibia, and the second region falls in the Southern Karoo (<http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org>). This region contains a third of the world's 10,000 succulent plants, with well over 4,000 plant species (<http://www.southafrica.net/sat/content/en/za>).
- 4 Information sourced from Grobler (2007h).
- 5 This summary of *Sanna's garden* is based on an unpublished Progress Report compiled by Diek Grobler, dated 31 July 2004.
- 6 The CEPF was founded in 2000. This global program provides grants and technical assistance to nongovernmental and private sector organisations to protect critical ecosystems (http://www.cepf.net/about_cepf/Pages/default). The fund is a joint initiative of L'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, The Government of Japan, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and The World Bank (http://www.cepf.net/about_cepf/Pages/who_we_are).
- 7 Nieuwoudt (2004:1) quotes the NFVF: "Jammer, maar jou diere klink wit en 'ontstellend Afrikaner'."
- 8 The original text by Nieuwoudt (2004:1) states: "Die NRVS maak ook beswaar teen die karakter Pythagoras, 'n wyse skilpad, wat volgens die stigting 'n onaanvaarbare uitbeelding van wittes as die 'draers van kennis' verteenwoordig."
- 9 Grobler and Badenhorst collaborated with Ann Walton on the writing of the script and Hardus Koekemoer assisted with lighting.
- 10 *Bou 'n Boot* (2004) was created for an exhibition of Grobler's work at the Tina Skukan Art Gallery in Pretoria in 2005. This animation is based on the Biblical narrative of Noah, whom God commanded to build a boat to survive the great flood. Charles Badenhorst composed and performed the theme song for *Bou 'n Boot* (2004). Grobler and Badenhorst created the final product using a combination of pixilation, stop-motion and 2D computer animation (Grobler 2007b).
- 11 View Hard (2004:238-245) in reference to the heroic deeds of Perseus.

- 12 Aardman Animation received seven Oscar® nominations, and won four Oscar® awards. Their famous animation characters include, among others, Wallace and Gromit, Morph, Angry Kid and Shaun the Sheep (<http://www.aardman.com/about-us>).
- 13 The comprehensive list of events was sourced from Grobler (2008a):
 Tirana International Film Festival in Albania, 2006; the Tampere Film Festival in Finland, 2007; the Bimini International Festival of Animation Films in Riga, Latvia 2007; the Syracuse International Film Festival in New York, 2007; the Trickfilm Festival – Stuttgart International Animated Film Festival in Germany, 2007; the Titanic International Film Festival in Budapest, 2007; the Durban International Film Festival in South Africa, 2007; the Athens Video Art Festival in Greece, 2007; the AFIA Film Festival in Aarhus, Denmark, 2007; Ohne Kohle Independent Film Festival in Vienna, Austria, 2007; the AVANCA Film Festival in Portugal, 2007; the UPC-AXN Rövidfilm Fesztivál in Hungary, 2007; the BUSHO Budapest Short film festival in 2007; the Auburn International Film Festival for Children and Young Adults in Australia, 2007; the Geneva Summer Arts Festival 2007 in Illinois, USA 2007; the Multivision International Festival of Animation Arts in St Petersburg, 2007, and at the Istanbul International Short Film Festival in 2007.
- 14 Fopspeen Moving Pictures created an educational animation series for the mobile and television titled *The Finer Things* (2007). They won Best Short Form Audiovisual Entertainment made for Mobile and/or Internet at the Mipcom Audiovisual Content Market in Cannes, France in September 2007. Their educational, animated series on Children's Rights, called *The Justice Gang* (2007) was screened on South African television in 2008. Furthermore, Fopspeen Moving Pictures created commercial animated music videos for South African musicians like Karin Hougaard, Buckfever Underground, Nedine Blom, Juanita du Plessis and Bittervrug (Grobler 2007a).
- 15 Photographic images of Du Toit's sculptures for *Agenda* (2007) are available at <http://bell-roberts.com>
- 16 See <http://www.gautengfilm.co.za/live>
- 17 *Agenda* (2007) was screened at the following events (Grobler 2008a):
 The Zlín International Film Festival for Children and Youth in the Czech Republic, 2008; Animafest Zagreb in 2008; the Durban International Film Festival in South Africa, 2008; Out the Box: Festival of Puppetry and Visual Performance in Cape Town, South Africa, 2008; the Apollo Film Festival, Barkley West, South Africa, 2008; the Africa in Motion (AiM) Film Festival Edinburgh, Scotland, 2008; the Tehran International Short Film Festival, Iran, 2008; the Göteborg International Film Festival in Sweden, 2009; the Mediawave International Film and Music Festival in Győr, Hungary, 2009; Africala Film Festival in Mexico City, 2009 and at the Rwanda Film Festival in 2009, where it also won an award.
- 18 Van Wyk's accolades include winning the 1981 Bösendorfer Piano Competition in Vienna.
- 19 Grobler's *The answer my friend 2* (2007) (DG534), *Die wind die waai* (2008) (DG553), *The mime* (2008) (DG561) and *Coats* (2008) (DG563) serve as examples of these digital artworks.

- 20 Opus 67 no 4 is one of many *Songs without Words* composed by Mendelssohn. The song's title was later added by publishers rather than by the composer himself and this popular work is known as the *Spinning Song* or *Bee's Wedding* (<http://www.mfiles.co.uk/scores>).
- 21 The International Animated Film Festival KROK takes place on board of a ship in the Ukraine or Russia. The ship's route is alternated yearly between the Volga River in Russia, and the Dnieper River and the Black Sea in the Ukraine. Attendance is by invitation only. The animators attending the festival are afforded the opportunity to showcase their work to their peers and to promote and discuss future endeavours. See <http://www.krokfestival.com> and <http://www.day.kiev.ua> in reference to this festival.
- 22 Danie Marais' poem *Duitsland is waar die wolke in gelid marsjeer* is available at <http://versindaba.co.za/2010>. Grobler's animation for *Duitsland is waar die wolke in gelid marsjeer* (2009) is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Czw1Urp6fyM&feature=related/> and in the interactive catalogue (DG619).
- 23 Danie Marais' poem *Saturday night alive* is available at (<http://versindaba.co.za/tag>). Grobler's animation for *Saturday night alive* (2009) is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7PWM2Vlcf8> and in the interactive catalogue (DG620).
- 24 View Chapter Two, Note 6 of this dissertation for the Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) or Internet addresses for the Facebook profile pages.
- 25 Pretorius's profile page is hosted at <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=569323945&ref=ts>
- 26 The Fopspeen Animation Playgroup is available at: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=127730367266817&ref=ts>
- 27 According to the myth, described by Homer (books 4-12 1946:139-202), Odysseus encountered the monster Scylla during his epic sea voyage.
- 28 Grobler (2010:56) explains:
 Hierdie werk het ek gedoen nadat ek van die Ukraine af gekom het. Die hele ervaring was fantasties – amper 'n *epic journey*. Dit is hoekom die *imagery* so romanties is. Ek het teruggekem en drie weke later moes ek 'n uitstalling hou. So die ervaring was baie vars. Dit is 'n bietjie sentimenteel. Hierdie is die eerste keer wat ek hierdie tegniek gebruik het.
- 29 Examples of Grobler's use of traditional collage techniques are visible in *Man selecting a hat* (2001) (DG404) and *Man under construction* (2001) (fig 59/DG403).
- 30 Grobler (2010:47) compares a digital collage from 2008, *His master's voice* (2008) (fig 99) with the digital art he produced in 2009. He maintains:
His master's voice het nog 'n *collagerige* gevoel. Dit lyk nog na *found images*. Ek behou die feit dat dit *found images* is. ... Ek probeer dit nie verdoes nie. In my werk in 2009 is dit asof ek nuwe images skep uit goed wat ek *source*. Dis nie net die plak van bestaande dinge bo-op mekaar nie.

31

The term Kitchen sink surrealism was coined in 1954, in reference to a figurative movement of social realism. This movement consisted mainly of four British artists: Edward Middleditch, John Bratby, Derrick Greaves and Jack Smith. Their art celebrated the lives of ordinary people. Their aim was to make social comment through art that was both relevant and accessible. See Swenson (<http://www.oxfordartonline.com>) and <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com>

CONCLUSION

In this study of the life and oeuvre of the South African artist Diek Grobler, I have demonstrated how the artist's life inspired and influenced his art and where his art impacted on his life journey.

In the early years (1964-1989), Grobler used recurring motifs of abandoned buildings inside desolate landscapes corresponding with his memories of similar structures in the countryside in which he grew up. Grobler's childhood affinity for puppet-making, staging of puppet shows and role-playing surfaced repeatedly throughout his oeuvre. His enthusiastic involvement in performance art productions, the creation and enactment of different personas in both his live and static artworks, and the construction of sets and puppets for stop-motion animated films attest to this. The artist's Christian, Afrikaner upbringing and related knowledge of Biblical stories inspired many of his artworks, such as his visual narratives of Jonah and Noah. The time Grobler spent in military camp not only invoked personal feelings of disillusionment with, and defiance of the political status quo, but also inspired sculptures of soldiers on horseback and *The invisible circus* series of artworks.

In the second period (1990-1997), Grobler's early career as an art teacher coincided with his exposure to scraperboard. This medium complemented his artistic style and allowed him to create intricate visual narratives, which earned him local artistic acclaim. Grobler's wedding was the next key life event which also impacted on his artmaking. He began using the motif of the bride as a metaphor for the political union between different cultures associated with the end of apartheid. A short sabbatical journey to Europe inspired the artist to find magic in the mundane. This was expressed in various artworks created during this period, such as the *Storyboard for a documentary* series. Grobler's studies for a Master's degree in Fine Arts in which he examined the application of magical realism by artists such as

Stanley Spencer and Paula Rego proved instrumental in the refining of his own artistic approach.

From 1998, Grobler started participating in performance art productions at local arts festivals. In this instance his art impacted on his life. Grobler's wife Marí also participated in his productions, blurring the boundaries between his private life and his public artistic endeavours. His involvement in the controversial JAA exposed the artist to both public criticism and acclaim, and caused tension in his marriage. A timely Parisian visit not only provided a break from the controversy but also presented the artist with a multitude of ideas and visual inspiration, which led to a series of collages and a turn towards motion art.

In the last documented period (2004-2009), Grobler turned his attention to the genre of motion art. In my view, his return to puppet-making stirred deep emotions in the artist and motivated him to diligently work towards mastering the technical challenges of the genre. Just as scraperboard proved highly suited to Grobler's artistic style, motion art similarly complimented his interests and artistic strengths. It was therefore not surprising that the artist combined these media to create animated sequences of scraperboard-like drawings. To date, Grobler's work in motion art has already earned him local and international acclaim.

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of Grobler's style is his application of magical realism. It involves the blending of conventional everyday imagery with the fantastic and supernatural to create a visual narrative that destabilises the boundaries between reality and myth. He appropriates and transforms legends, folk tales, classic narratives and sacred scriptures¹ to create unexpected or unusual depictions of otherwise mundane events. Warnes (2009:18, 131) is of opinion that familiar texts are read outside of their original context to identify universal truths, and to

explain or enhance magical realism instead of magical realism serving as a tool to interpret texts.

Grobler also blends humour and irony with magical realism, adding an element of surprise to his art.² The subtle twisting of classic texts blended with elements of African folklore in his artworks requires prior knowledge or familiarity with these texts, in order for the viewer to fully comprehend or even identify the elements of irony and humour.³ Consequently, Grobler's art is not always accessible to all audiences. However, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the artist does not view comprehension of an artwork as a prerequisite of its appreciation. According to Grobler, his art should be enjoyed instead of over-analysed. Moreover, his art is open-ended rather than prescriptive. Grobler authenticates his artworks through the application of his personal signature.⁴ In some instances he inscribes significant information directly onto the surface, or the frame of the artwork.⁵ Although the titling and additional inscriptions hint at the origin or meaning of the artwork, the viewer is encouraged to engage with the multiple layers of meaning contained in his visual metaphors. By reading the visual narrative, the viewer assigns new meaning to the artwork. Following Roland Barthes' (1915-1980) theory of intertextuality (quoted by Worton & Still 1990:20) "the artwork is plural in its meanings"⁶ and as a modern text it can be "infinitely rewritten by the reader".

Grobler further applies magical realism to negotiate issues of cultural differences and identity in his South African milieu. Homi Bhabha (quoted by Hart 2005:1) identifies magical realism as the "language of the emergent postcolonial world". Zamora (2005:31) bases the attraction of magical realism within a postcolonial context on its capacity to "integrate various kinds of otherness (cultural, metaphysical) without reconciling their contradictions". Ouyang (2005:14) similarly poses that magical realism "has served as the common ground for discussions of many issues pertinent to cultural and identity politics termed as postcolonialism and

postmodernism ... “. However, Warnes (2009:1-2) questions the suitability of magical realism as a vehicle to address postcolonial matters:

Magic realism has by turns been praised for founding “a new multicultural artistic reality” ... and it has been denigrated as “dangerous and shallow” It has even been accused of being underpinned by “pernicious – even racist – ideologies”. At the heart of the critical uncertainty about magical realism are the meanings that the term is assumed to signify: ideas clustered around notions of narrative and representation, culture, history, identity, what is natural and what is supernatural.

Contrary to Warnes’ scepticism, Grobler’s application of magical realism as a vehicle to navigate across boundaries in the South African political environment has suited him well.⁷ His artistic vocabulary is permeated with culture-specific references to folklore and legends which reflect his South African origin.⁸ Although his cultural references are diverse, he makes them part of his private mythology and portrays them through his Afrikaner perspective. For example, when he depicts the Ananse he does not denigrate the culture-specific symbolic value of the figure, but rather adapts it to reflect his own perceptions and interpretation. Moreover, Grobler’s frequent interaction with elements from his immediate social and political environment, as highlighted by this monograph, reflects an aspect of the life-and-work model where the artist’s life inspires and influences his art. His persistent questioning of the identity of the Afrikaner may be viewed as a natural result of the political changes associated with the end of the apartheid era. The challenges he faced in his efforts to promote performance art among local audiences were most likely a key motivator behind the forming of the JAA. Through Kropotkin Pretorius he urged the Afrikaner to critically contemplate the popular notions related to local arts and culture.

Grobler’s oeuvre reveals further elements of identity in terms of gender roles and sexual identity. Popular female figures from various narratives are often portrayed in a metaphoric context. Among these are Biblical figures like Salome,⁹ mythological characters such as Lorelei, Pomona,

Danae and Leda,¹⁰ supernatural beings such as mermaids and angels,¹¹ heroines from classic literature like Alice and Lady Godiva,¹² and other female archetypes such as a diva and a muse.¹³ The mythic Minotaur is sometimes used as a metaphor for masculinity. In Grobler's artworks of household rituals he often depicts himself enacting various gender roles such as the ruler of a domestic kingdom.

Throughout Grobler's oeuvre, there is a preoccupation with mythological journeys. On the one hand he illustrates the theme of a metaphoric journey towards the fulfilment of a destiny¹⁴ and on the other hand he depicts the journey as a metaphor for the process of creating an identity.¹⁵ In the first approach, the perilous journey, be it that of the Greek mythological warrior Odysseus, or of Jonah and Noah from the Bible, is applied as a metaphor for life and man's struggle to reach his destiny. Personal visual symbols such as a paper boat, flood water, a big fish or mythological monsters are clues Grobler uses in relation to this metaphor. In the second approach, Grobler employs religious stories, scenes from the Bible and mythic tales as metaphors for human nature and identity. In my view, Grobler's recurring thematic interest in journeys reflects a lifelong quest to distill his own identity and purpose in life. Throughout the first two periods of his artistic development, as set out by this dissertation, the artist struggled to rid himself of other people's expectations for his life and repeatedly questioned his learned beliefs about politics, religion, identity and culture. Grobler's life journey and the unfolding of his oeuvre through many twists and turns resemble his signature theme of the mythic hero battling various monsters during his perilous journey towards a destiny. He has ventured into various artistic genres and made his artistic mark on South African art.

Since the artist is still alive and producing art, this monograph is not complete. However, as an art historical documentation of Grobler's partial

oeuvre it provides a comprehensive foundation for future research on the artist's life and work.

Notes: Conclusion

- 1 Artworks such as *Myths and legends from the Promised Land* (triptych) (1993) (fig 18/DG143) were discussed in relation to the artist's blending of narrative from myth, classic literature and sacred texts. Grobler blurs the boundaries separating the spiritual and the everyday by depicting Biblical narratives or saintly figures in a contemporary setting. Biblical stories of the Last Supper, the Passion, Paradise, and tales of saints such as St Francis, St Genevieve, St Denis and the Madonna abound throughout Grobler's oeuvre.
- 2 Grobler (<http://www.art.co.za/diekgrobler/cv>) states:

Humour and irony is [sic] important in my work because of its communicative power, but especially because humour requires the subversion of the usual meaning of something. In order for something to be funny or ironical, its context or outcome should be other than what could normally be expected. This is also the aim of my work.
- 3 Vedder (2002:205) maintains that the creation of meaning is only effective when the reader or viewer is capable of recognising the metaphors. Vedder (2002:205) explains:

The metaphorical translation ... is only noticed when it is recognized by the reader or hearer. The tradition determines what may be translated, and this encounters its limits in tradition In order to understand an allusion to Aristotle one must know Aristotle's work. In order to read Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, one must be familiar with the theological and philosophical tractates of the Middle Ages.
- 4 Grobler's early pastel drawings (1964-1989) show the artist experimenting with various signatures. *Portret van 'n besigheidsman* (1987) (DG019) is signed and dated "D.G. 87", while *A walk in the country* (1988) (DG020) bears the signature "DIEK GROBLER 1988", and *The hat maker* (1988) (DG023) displays the information "1988 DIEK GROBLER". The most common form of signature applied to the majority of artworks throughout Grobler's oeuvre is "DIEK GROBLER" followed by the date in full, such as "1999" or in part "99", with or without an apostrophe preceding the numbers.
- 5 In the sculpture *The poet's wife* (1994) (DG173) Grobler inscribed the first stanza of the poem, *The tiger* by William Blake on the back of the seated female figure. In *The American woman had the boulebaïs* (2004) (DG467) he inserted the inscription "Please sir, may I have some more?" to further enhance the enthusiasm of the diner, already emphasised by the use of hierarchic scale. Grobler's *Nine chapters from my novel. Chapter 7* (2002) (DG429) displays a combination of inscriptions on the glass and the double wooden frames of the artwork.
- 6 Intertextuality, coined by Julia Kristeva, describes a theory whereby "text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system" (Worton & Still 1990:1). The writer or audience reads the text or art work and becomes a creator themselves by writing or creating meaning. Therefore the work of art is, according to Worton and Still (1990:1) "shot through with references, quotations, and influences of every kind".
- 7 Images of the hadeda, Ananse, crocodile, monkey, strelitzia flowers and animal print patterns, as well as stories like Van Hunks and the devil are some of the examples highlighted throughout the monograph.

- 8 Themes related to post-apartheid, postcolonialism and the identity of the Afrikaner are addressed through narratives or visual metaphors in the form of ceramic sculptures, pastel illustrations, paintings, performance art productions and 2D animations.
- 9 The Biblical figure of Salome is depicted in Grobler's *Salome rehearsing* (1993) (DG133), *Salome's dream 1* (1993) (DG149) and *Salome's dream 2* (1993) (DG150).
- 10 Examples of artworks featuring female figures from Classic mythology are *Lorelei* (1989) (DG051), *Pomona awaiting her lover* (1991) (DG076), *Danae waiting for the money to roll in* (1993) (DG132) and *Leda and the Swan* (1993) (fig 25/DG136).
- 11 Images of mermaids and angels are seen in *The voyeur* (1989) (DG039), *Mrs Neptune I* (1990) (DG066), and *Pets* (1992) (DG124).
- 12 The characters of Alice and Lady Godiva are depicted in the following artworks: *Queen Alice* (1993) (DG154), *Lady Godiva* (1991) (DG077), *Lady Godiva at her toilette* (1991) (DG080) and *Lady Godiva, die diva en die komeet* (1991) (DG082).
- 13 Artworks such as Grobler's *Diva in die industriële gebied* (1991) (DG093), *Brooding* (1992) (DG127) and *Diva in the garden* (1992) (DG128) contain the motif of the Diva as a metaphor for extinct cultural values. According to Grobler (2011:10), the Diva in *Brooding* (1992) is likened to an extinct bird just as certain art forms such as opera are frequented by an elite few. It belongs to a reality which is removed from that of the ordinary South African. The figure of the muse is found in Grobler's *The muse* (1988) (fig 6/DG027).
- 14 See Chapter Two, Note 46 for a list of artworks displaying this metaphor.
- 15 In *Our Lady of Compassion* (1994) (fig 27/DG170), *Deadly sins: Pride* (1996) (fig 32/DG218), *The judgement of Paris* (1993) (fig 24/DG135) and *Narcissus* (1993) (fig 22/DG131) Grobler narrates stories of man's greed, pride, vanity and overall sinful nature. In *Sewe dae in Babel* (1998) (fig 56/DG374), the Biblical story of the Babylonian confusion becomes a metaphor for the loss of human identity, as a product of political change. Grobler's *Baken* (1997) (fig 46/DG265), *Skuiling/shelter* (1997) (fig 47/DG266), and *Wash-day in Babel* (1998) (fig 57/DG316), comment on the loss of identity or traces of identity scattered throughout history. In *The dual* (2001) (fig 66/DG418), various hats serve as a metaphor for identities and roles.

APPENDIX 1

Solo exhibitions

- 1988 - Two-Person show at Aleta Michaletos Gallery in Pretoria.
- 1989 - Two two-person shows at The Gallery on the Market in Newtown, Johannesburg.
- 1990 - Two-person show at The Association of Arts in Pretoria.
- 1992 - Two-person show at Gallery 709 in Cape Town.
- 1993 - Gallery on Tyrone in Parkview, Johannesburg.
- 1994 - Gallery on Tyrone in Parkview, Johannesburg.
- 1995 - Two-person show at Dorpstraat Gallery in Stellenbosch.
- 1997 - The Thompson Gallery in Johannesburg.
 - Two-person show at James Colman Fine Art in London.
 - The Association of Arts in Pretoria.
- 1998 - Two-person show at the Johannes Stegman Gallery at the University of the Orange Free State (UOFS) in Bloemfontein.
 - Two-person show at the Dorp Street Gallery, Stellenbosch.
- 1999 - Gencor Art Gallery at the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) in Johannesburg.
 - Millennium Gallery in Pretoria.
- 2001 - Chelsea Gallery in Wynberg, Cape Town.
- 2003 - The Art Space in Johannesburg.
- 2004 - Tina Skukan Art Gallery in Pretoria.
- 2005 - Gordart Gallery in Mellville, Johannesburg.
 - Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, France.
- 2006 - The Association of Arts in Pretoria.

- 2007 - The Association of Arts in Pretoria.
- 2008 - Gordart Art Gallery, Johannesburg.
- Fried Contemporary Art Gallery & Studio, Pretoria.

Group exhibitions

- 1985 - Sasol New Signatures exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum.
- 1986 - Sasol New Signatures exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum.
- 1987 - Sasol New Signatures exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum.
- 1988 - Sasol New Signatures exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum.
- Clay + at the Unisa Art Gallery in Pretoria.
- ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- 1989 - ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- Vita Art Now exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery.
- 1991 - Love, Landscape and Lonely Escape exhibition at The Gallery on the Market in Newtown, Johannesburg.
- ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- 1992 - ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- 1993 - ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- 1994 - ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- 1995 - ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- World Environment Day exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum.
- MA Fine Arts exhibition at the Gertrude Posel Gallery at Wits, in Johannesburg.
- 1996 - World Environment Day exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum.

- A Little Show of Drawers, University of Pretoria Art Gallery.
- Royal Overseas League Annual Open Exhibition at the Overseas House in London, and at the Royal College of Art in Edinburgh.
- South African Association of Arts (SAAA) International Project exhibition at the El Gezira Sheraton Hotel in Cairo.
- 1997 - ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- 1998 - ABSA L'Atelier Competition exhibition at various locations in South Africa.
- Exhibition of South African Contemporary Art in the SASOL Collection at the KKNK in Oudtshoorn.
- 2002 - Group exhibitions with the Korean Society of Illustrators in Prague and Peking.
- Solar Eclipse exhibition at Mind's i Art Space in Pretoria, in collaboration with the Foundation for Education, Science and Technology.
- 2003 - Hope Box/Weather Report International Art Project by the Dutch artist Rienke Enghart, at the Mind's i RAU Gallery in Johannesburg.
- *Om die Bosch gelei* exhibition at Mind's i Art Space in Pretoria.
- Fine Line Drawing exhibition at Mind's i Art Space in Pretoria.
- Edition Printmaking exhibition at Mind's i Art Space in Pretoria.
- 2004 - Nine Dragon Heads International Environment Art Symposium in Cheongju City, South Korea.
- Gallery 88 in Sasolburg.
- International Olympic Committee Art Exhibition in Geneva,
- 2005 - The South African delegation to the Delphic Games 2005 in Kuching, Malaysia.
- 2006 - Platform on 18th Art Gallery in Pretoria.
- 2007 - Snert exhibition at the Tina Skukan Art Gallery in Pretoria.
- Platform on 18th Art Gallery in Pretoria.
- ABSA L'Atelier exhibition featuring work by Merit Winners at the KKNK in Oudtshoorn.

- 2008 - Bell-Roberts Gallery in Cape Town.
- 2009 - Pretoria Artists exhibition at the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in Bloemfontein.
- *Allooi-kunsprojek* at the Volksblad Kunstefees in Bloemfontein.
- *Mot en roes* exhibition at Die Pienk Kerk in Johannesburg.

Art collections

Grobler's art is included in various private collections in South Africa and Europe, as well as the following public and corporate collections:

- (1) Pretoria Art Museum Collection
- (2) Tatham Gallery, Pietermaritzburg Collection
- (3) Durban Art Gallery Collection
- (4) University of South Africa Art Collection
- (5) UOFS Art Collection
- (6) RAU Art Collection
- (7) SASOL Art Collection
- (8) ABSA Art Collection
- (9) GENCOR Art Collection
- (10) TELCOM Art Collection
- (11) SANLAM Art Collection
- (12) Gauteng Legislature Art Collection
- (13) Rand Merchant Bank Art Collection

APPENDIX 2

South African awards

- 1988 - Merit Award for Sculpture at the Sasol New Signatures Competition.
- 1993 - Merit Award in the ABSA L'Atelier Competition.
- 1995 - Merit Award in the ABSA L'Atelier Competition.
- 1999 - Dekat Herrie Award at the KKNK in Oudtshoorn.
- 2000 - Two Business and Arts South Africa awards for his Artwall Metrorail Art Gallery initiative.
- 2006 - *Little Bang* (2006) (fig 85) wins a Merit Award at the Thami Myele Fine Arts Awards.
- 2007 - *Agenda* (2007) (fig 86 and 87) is nominated for a SAFTA for Best Short Film.
- 2009 - *Agenda* (2007) (fig 86 and 87) wins a SAFTA Special Mention Award for Best Animated Short Film.

International awards

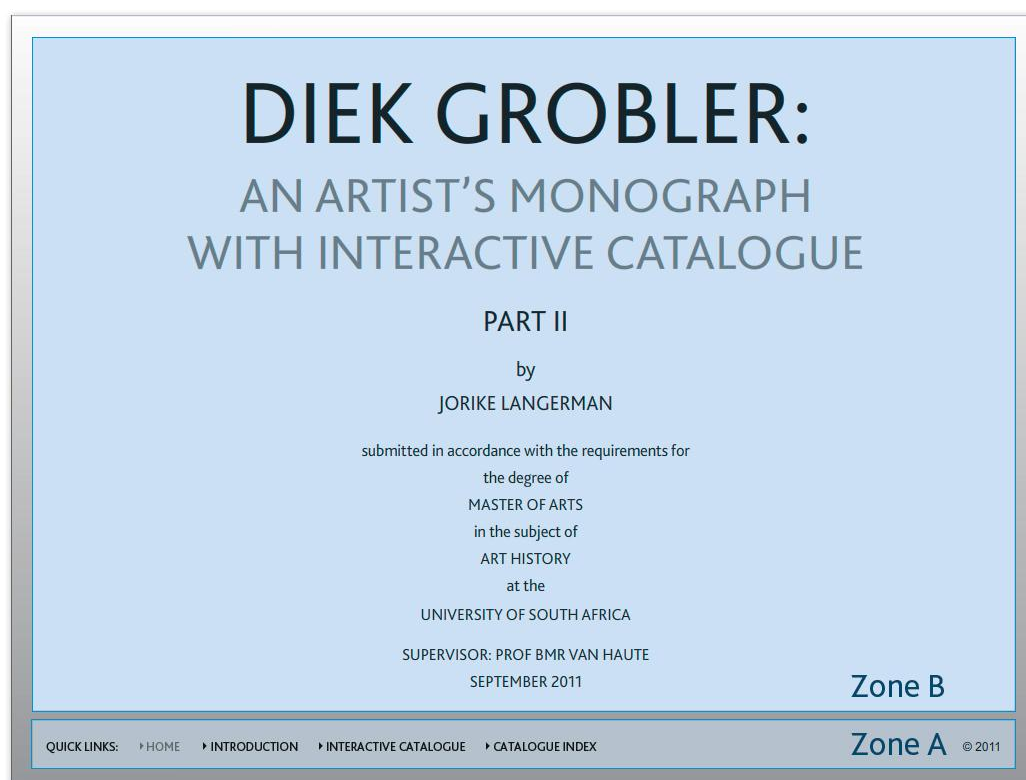
- 1996 - Work selected for the Royal Overseas League Annual Open Exhibition at the Overseas House in London, and at the Royal College of Art in Edinburgh.
- 2003 - Winner of the Graphic Arts Section of the South African leg of the International Olympic Committee Art Competition.
- 2005 - Gold medal for painting at the International Delphic Games in Kuching, Malaysia.
- 2009 - *Little Birds ABC* (2009) (fig 104 and 105) is awarded the Best Animated Film for Children at the Tehran International Animation.
 - *Little Birds ABC* (2009) (fig 104 and 105) wins a Brass Bell Award for Best Animation for Children at the International Animated Film Festival KROK, in the Ukraine.
 - *Agenda* (2007) (fig 86 and 87) wins the Africala Vote Film Festival Award.

- *Agenda* (2007) (fig 86 and 87) is shortlisted for Best African Short Film at the Africa in Motion (AiM) Film Festival in Edinburgh.

APPENDIX 3


User's guide to Part II: Interactive catalogue (1987-2009)

The interactive catalogue (1987-2009) is a visual showcase of Grobler's oeuvre, compiled with Adobe Flash CS5 and presented in a DVD-ROM format. The opening screen contains the title of the dissertation and the main navigation quick links.



The user interface is divided into two zones. Zone A comprises the main navigation links to the home page, introduction page, interactive catalogue and the catalogue index. Zone B indicates the main content area. This basic layout structure applies to all the content pages.

Step 1: Click on the introduction quick link to display the introduction page.



INTRODUCTION

The Interactive catalogue (1987-2009) is a visual showcase of Grobler's oeuvre, and forms the second part of the monograph [Diek Grobler: an artist's monograph with interactive catalogue](#) (PDF 10,430 KB).

This DVD comprises two sections: **a) the interactive catalogue** and **b) the catalogue index**. Although both entry points provide access to the entire body of artworks, they offer different browsing experiences.

a) Interactive catalogue: Structurally, the interactive catalogue divides Grobler's oeuvre into four navigable segments: 1987-1989, 1990-1997, 1998-2003 and 2004-2009. This section is ideal for leisurely browsing through the artist's oeuvre to gain an overview of the art created during a specific period, or to take a closer look at specific artworks. Each artwork is represented by a small thumbnail image. On mouse-over an identifier provides the catalogue number (DG000), the title and date of each artwork. On mouse-click the small thumbnail image links to a larger picture format inside a modal window with the complete empirical data of the specific artwork.

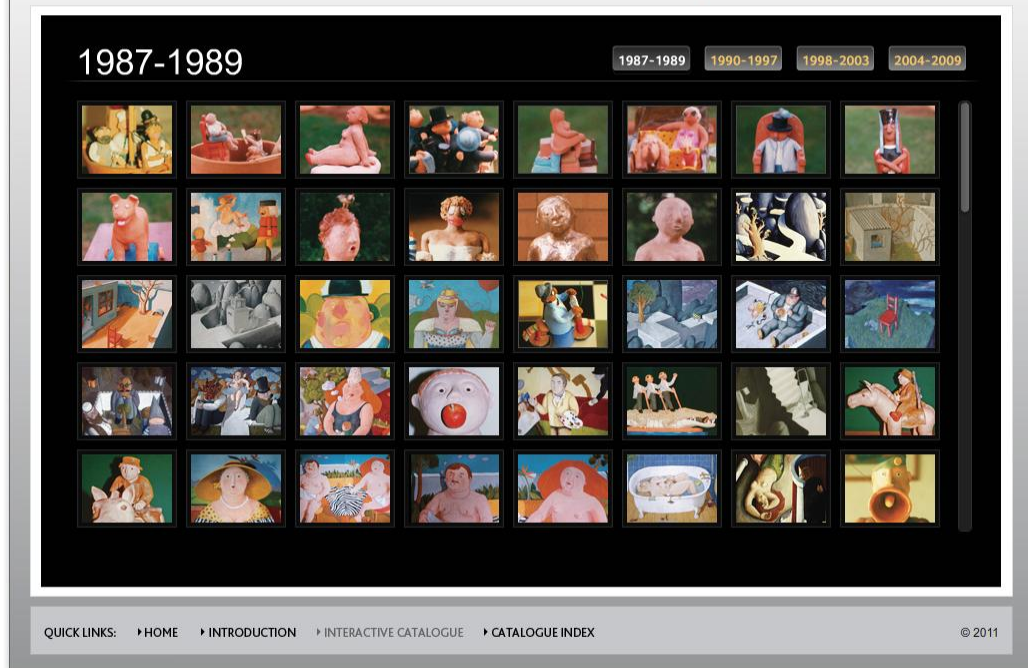
b) Catalogue index: The catalogue index consists of a list of all the artworks documented in the interactive catalogue. This is the preferred browsing mode to quickly locate a specific artwork or to sort artworks according to specific criteria in order to view patterns in the data. Each artwork is listed according to its database identification number, catalogue number, title, date and medium and size. The list can be sorted by any of these five categories, by clicking on the column header. Selecting a specific data entry will open a modal window displaying the photographic image or video, and the empirical data of the chosen artwork.

QUICK LINKS: [▶ HOME](#) [▶ INTRODUCTION](#) [▶ INTERACTIVE CATALOGUE](#) [▶ CATALOGUE INDEX](#) © 2011

The introduction page offers a short overview of the structural layout of the interactive catalogue and the catalogue index. It also provides the user with the option to download a PDF document of Part I of Diek Grobler: an artist's monograph with interactive catalogue.

Step 2: Click on the interactive catalogue navigation link to launch the interactive gallery of artworks.

INTERACTIVE CATALOGUE (1987-2009)



Structurally, the interactive catalogue divides Grobler's oeuvre into four periods: 1987-1989, 1990-1997, 1998-2003 and 2004-2009. These periods function as secondary navigation links in the top right-hand corner of the interface. The first link 1987-1989 loads as the default. Mouse-clicking on a different time segment changes its text colour from yellow to white, and updates the page content with a collection of artworks from the specified period.

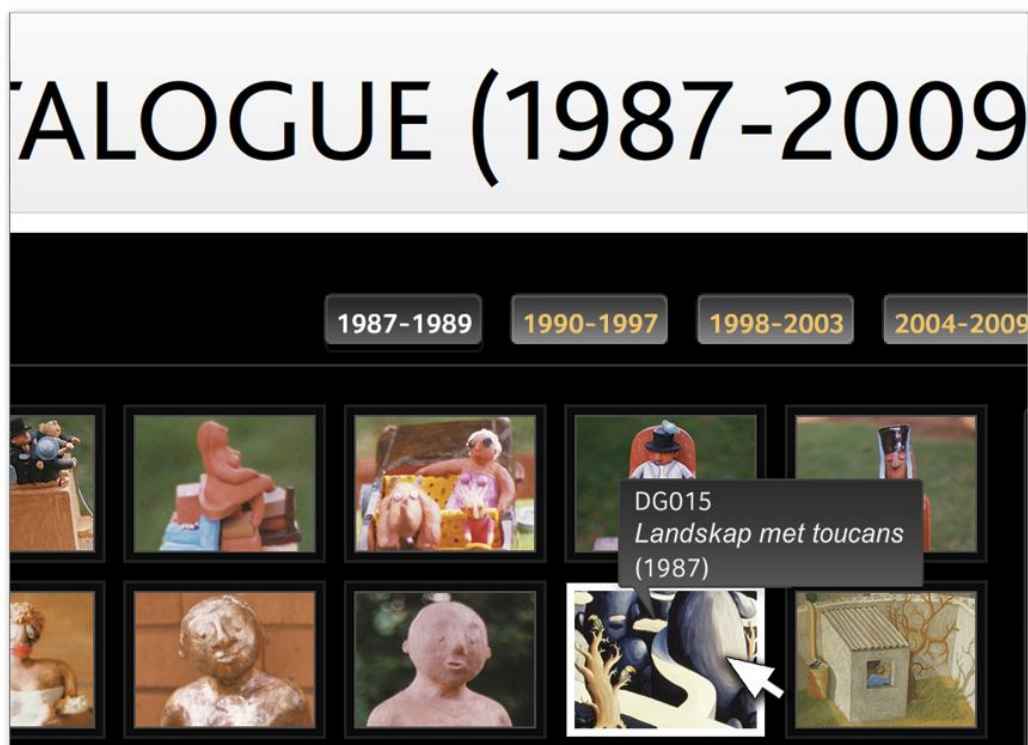
While the thumbnail images are being loaded the scrollbar will pulsate gently. It is advised to wait until the scrollbar is static before dragging it to navigate to the bottom of the page. The scrollbar will not function smoothly until the loading process is completed. However, it is possible to interact with the thumbnail images while the loading process is taking place.

Each thumbnail image represents a complete or partial preview of a single artwork. In some instances the thumbnail image might display a partial view of more than one panel of a combination artwork such as a triptych.

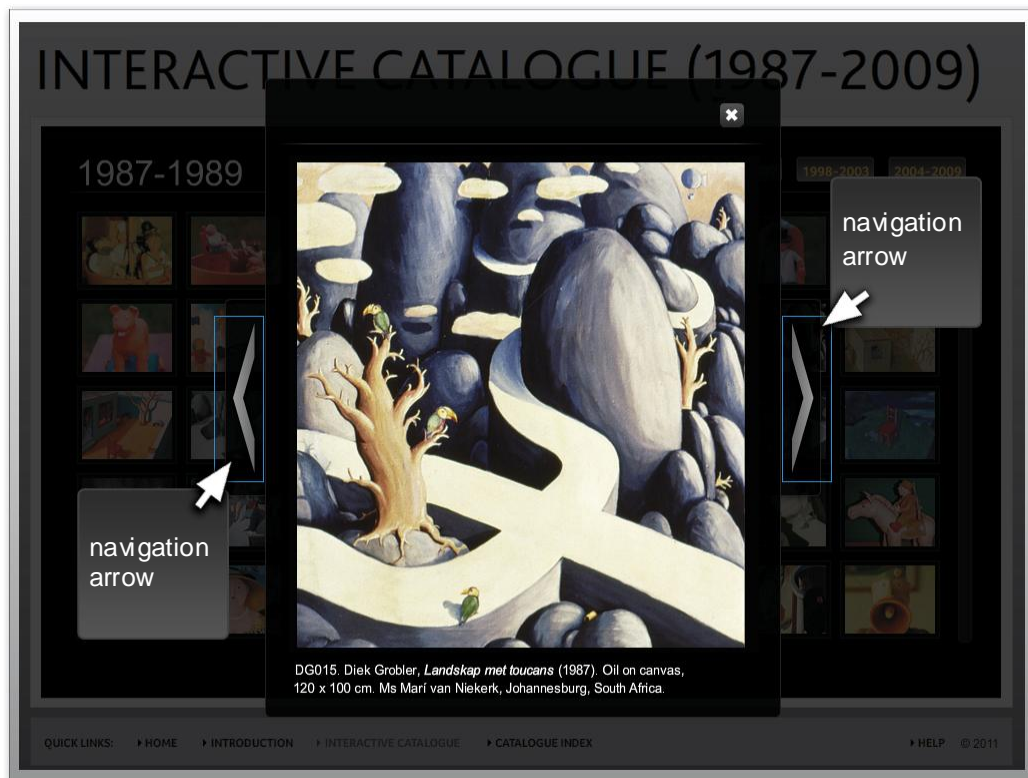
All diptychs and triptychs have been catalogued as complete units, as well as individual panels. This offers the user an overview of the complete artwork, and a detailed view of each individual panel.

3.1 How to use the interactive catalogue

Step 1: Move the mouse pointer over a thumbnail image to reveal a pop-up window listing the artwork's catalogue number, title and date (see example below).

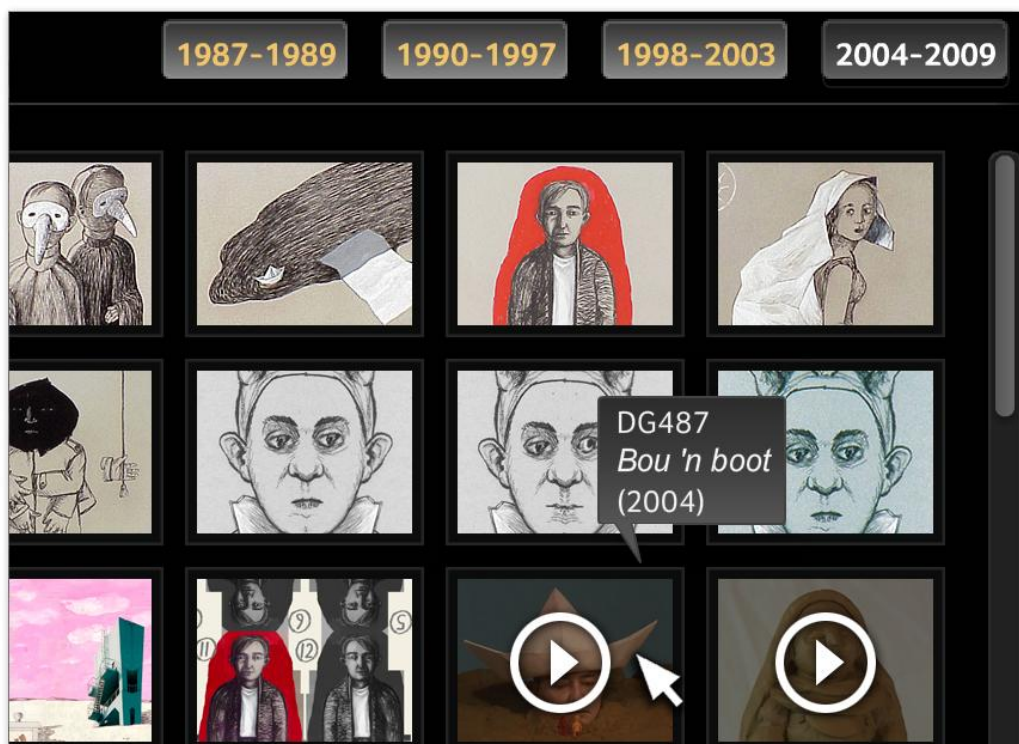


Step 2: Mouse-click on the thumbnail image to open a modal window with a larger representation of the artwork and its empirical data (see example). The empirical data of each artwork are listed as follows: interactive catalogue number, name of the artist, title of artwork, date, alternative titles, medium, size of work, signature and date and collection.

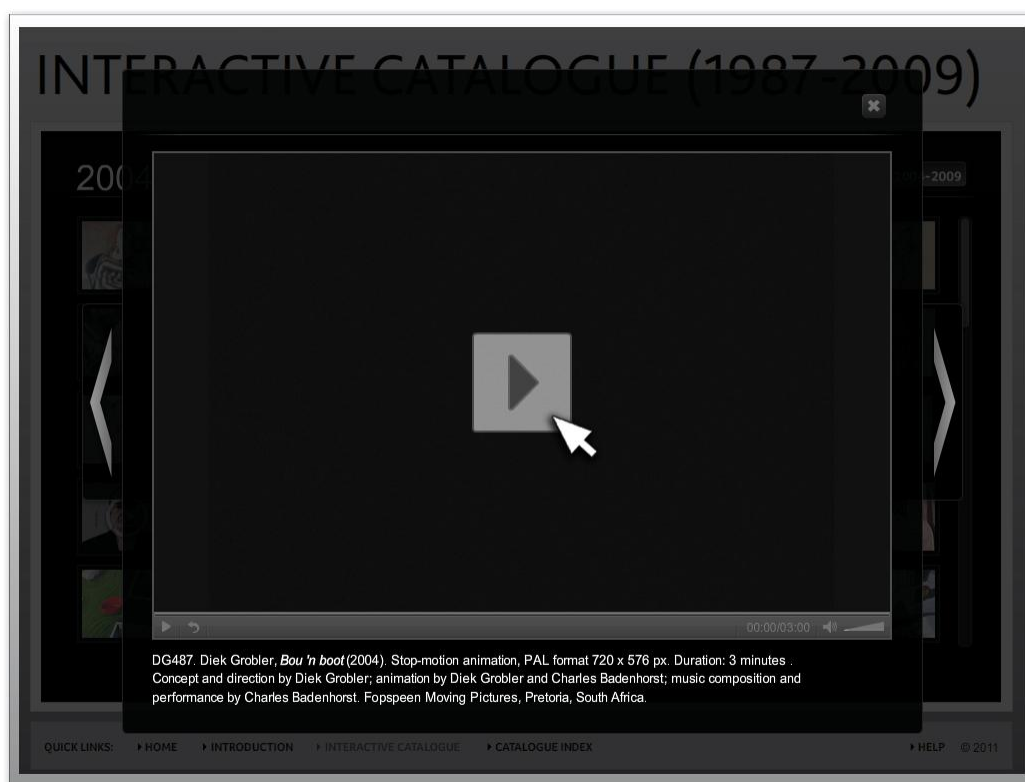


Step 3: Click on the navigation arrows to the right and left of the modal window to display the next or previous artwork. Alternatively click on the cross icon in the top right hand corner of the window to close it and return to the list of thumbnail images.

Step 4: Motion artworks such as 2D animations, stop-motion animated films and other video content are distinguished from static artworks by a white “play” icon displayed on the thumbnail image (see example). Clicking on the thumbnail image opens the modal window containing an embedded video file and the complete empirical data of the artwork.



Step 5: Click the “play” icon to activate the video.



3.2 How to use the catalogue index

Open the catalogue index by clicking on the corresponding quick link inside the main navigation area. The catalogue index lists all the artworks documented in the interactive catalogue in numerical order. The empirical data of each artwork are split into the following columns: database identity number, catalogue number, title of artwork, date and medium and size of artwork. Due to technical constraints additional empirical data of each artwork are not listed as columns on the main catalogue index page.

Step 1: Click on any of the column headers to sort the list of artworks on the data in that column.

Step 2: Move the mouse pointer over the data listing of an artwork to highlight. Click on the highlighted data to launch a modal window displaying a representation of the artwork, as well as the full empirical data of the selected artwork.

ID	Catalogue #	Title	Date	Medium and size
126	DG127	Brooding	1992	Oil on canvas, 90 x 40 cm
127	DG128	Diva in the garden	1992	Scrapboard, 30 x 21 cm
128	DG129	Curtain call	1992	Oil on wood, 130 x 200 cm
129	DG130	Flower arrangement with ginger cat	1993	Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm
130	DG131	Narcissus	1993	Gouache on paper, 100 x 70 cm
131	DG132	Danae waiting for the money to roll in	1993	Gouache on paper, 24 x 30 cm
132	DG133	Salome rehearsing	1993	Oil on paper, 30 x 24 cm
133	DG134	The meeting of two incompatible myths	1993	Gouache on paper, 100 x 70 cm
134	DG135	The judgement of Paris	1993	Gouache on paper, 100 x 70 cm
135	DG136	Leda and the swan	1993	Gouache on paper, 24 x 30 cm
136	DG137	Die intog van Jesus in Jerusalem	1993	Gouache on paper, 59,4 x 42 cm
137	DG138	Madonna ascending	1993	Scrapboard, 59,4 x 42 cm
138	DG139	Die Passie: Judas	1993	Scrapboard, 29,7 x 21 cm
139	DG140	Die Passie: Petrus	1993	Scrapboard, 29,7 x 21 cm
140	DG141	Die Passie: Gethsemane	1993	Scrapboard, 29,7 x 21 cm
141	DG142	Die Passie: Pilatus	1993	Scrapboard, 29,7 x 21 cm
142	DG143	Myths and legends from the Promised Land (triptych)	1993	Scrapboard, 59,4 x 126 cm
143	DG144	Myths and legends from the Promised Land (left panel of triptych)	1993	Scrapboard, 59,4 x 42 cm
144	DG145	Myths and legends from the Promised Land (central panel of triptych)	1993	Scrapboard, 59,4 x 42 cm
145	DG146	Myths and legends from the Promised Land (right panel of triptych)	1993	Scrapboard, 59,4 x 42 cm
146	DG147	Our lady of paperwork	1993	Earthenware and oil paint, 42 x 26 x 22 cm
147	DG148	Sheep piece	1993	Earthenware and oil paint, 36 x 24 x 24 cm
148	DG149	Salome's dream 1	1993	Earthenware and oil paint, 55 x 30 x 30 cm
149	DG150	Salome's dream 2	1993	Earthenware and oil paint, 50 x 24 x 40 cm
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DG136. Diek Grobler, *Leda and the swan* (1993). Gouache on paper, 24 x 30 cm. Signed and dated: "DIEK GROBLER '93". Collection unknown.

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