

Republic Republic

In his fourth and final column **Gavin Younge** at last says a few perfunctory things about sculpture (and things ministerial)

The event, *Republic: Art, Authority and Nationhood* at the Cape Town City Hall during September featured theatre, photography, films, Neville Alexander/Max du Preez, and an exhibition by sculptor Kurt Campbell. Campbell is registered for a PhD at the University of the Western Cape and is passionate about typography, more especially fonts. Central to his exhibition *From the Experiences of a South African Boxer in Britain* is a pair of legs, tattooed with the words “Boer” and “Black”. The lettering is large and rendered in a font developed in South Africa. Campbell is currently designing his own font as a tribute to the boxer, Andrew Jephtha, based on archival specimens of Jephtha’s handwriting. Once loaded on his computer the “fighting font” could be accessed as easily as, say, Frutiger Light 45.

Jephtha hailed from the mean streets of Cape Town where he was born in 1879. For six months in 1907 he was British welterweight champion after knocking out Curly Watson. This caused controversy, and it was another forty-one years before British boxing rules were relaxed to allow a “coloured” fighter to challenge for a British boxing title. His promoter, a man of low moral horizons, ran a string of boxing booths (large, colourful tents erected at fairs), and billed Jephtha as “The Boer” – a name that acted as a drawcard for Englishmen so soon after the end of the South African War.

As a booth fighter, Jephtha was forced to take on all comers, irrespective of weight class. He began losing his eyesight before his title fight, and he returned to Cape Town virtually penniless. Campbell’s exhibition for *Republic* mimicked the “boxing booth” format in which members of the public could either stay “ring side” or cross the ropes to enter the ring as an adversary. The large-format photograph of a boxer’s legs is entitled *Locus Standi*, a reference to Jephtha’s unresolved legal standing. Two “boxing books” (extremely large, bound books) are presented on custom-made stands. The pages are blank and hang downwards in mute testimony to that period in Europe before the wars when black people were exhibited as physical curiosities to be stared at, examined and, on occasion, admired.

High Horse

Ricky Burnett has stepped into the curatorial ring again, this time with an impressive, sixty-artist strong exhibition devoted to the horse. The exhibition, at Everard Read and Circa in Rosebank, marks the end of the Bronze Age (3300 BC–2011 AD) with magnificent works in bronze by Wilma Cruise, Angus Taylor and Olivia Musgrave. From now on, artists will only be allowed to work in rubber or video. Scaffolding poles are also acceptable. Horse art started on coins in the fourth century BC and featured horsemen using stirrups. It reached its zenith in modern times with every main city being given a bronze equestrian sculpture. Cape Town has *General Louis Botha: Farmer/Warrior/Statesman*, which stands outside Parliament and was created by the Florentine sculptor Raffaello Romanelli. Other famous bronze horse sculptures throughout Western art history include *Horse stripped bare by her Councilors Even* (in Polokwane, Limpopo), *Physical Mugging*, by Frederick Watts RA (on the slopes of Table Mountain) and *Crazy Horse Saloon* (Long Street Cape Town with branches all over Texas).

Mad Art

Hans-Ulrich Obrist is co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes at the Serpentine Gallery in London. One of the first exhibitions he curated was *The Kitchen Show* in the kitchen of his apartment. That was in 1991. It featured work by Christian Boltanski and the art-duo Fischli and Weiss. His new curatorial endeavour relates to unrealised, site-specific projects. These include Siah Armajani’s 1969 work, *A Fairly Tall Tower, 48,000 Miles High* (which was to be anchored by two cables, one in outer space, and the other on earth). According to Cristina Ruiz, the late French sculptor Louise Bourgeois designed a wooden amphitheatre in 1978 in the shape of an “upside down dome”, which she wanted to paint in sky blue and white.¹ She called it *The World is a*

Theater and We Each have a Role. She envisioned a small figure standing in the building’s centre as a metaphor. It was never realised. The Agency of Unrealized Projects (AUP) started collecting “censored, forgotten, postponed, impossible, or rejected, unrealized projects” as a monument to non-action.²

Bag Lady

Whilst considering the international arena, our own Minister of International Relations and Co-operation, Mrs Nkoana-Mashabane refused to have her handbag scanned before boarding a flight at Oslo airport. Airport security stood their ground, and Minister Mashabane returned to the Hotel Grand while her aides booked her a private jet to take her to her next diplomatic assignment in Bulgaria. The flight cost South African taxpayers a further R235,343, money not well spent because she was three hours late and missed giving her speech.³ Many ordinary people, not only nervous, fare-paying airline passengers, want to know why the Minister claimed diplomatic immunity and refused, on principle, to have her bag X-rayed. These people want to know what was in her bag that she was scared of having show up on those airport scanner screens. A huge Norwegian dildo with batteries? Narcotics? What these people don’t realise is that it was not what was *in* her handbag, it was the handbag itself: she was carrying the Ministerial Handbag. This is the semi-secretive bible that determines how much Ministers can spend on luxury German 4x4s in any given year. Set out in minute detail, in each luxurious napa-leather stitch, are details as to size of the second mansion, farm, mining rights, number of wives etc. allowable by Ministers.

Domestic Policy

President Zuma’s wife Nompumelelo Ntuli-Zuma, whom he married in January 2008, was found guilty by the CCMA of unlawfully dismissing her domestic worker, Sibongile Doris Ngobese. The Commission gave Mrs Zuma fourteen days to pay the hapless domestic R16,000 in back-pay for the eight months that her salary was outstanding. That comes to R2,000 a month. Not much when one considers that the husband earns R207,153.25 a month.

Parliamentary Bed Pan Shift

However, two grand is more than the minimum wage as laid down by law. One needs an actuarial degree to work out the minimum wage for any sector in South Africa. For a start, minimum wages for domestic workers are divided into areas. Area A – includes urban areas, and Area B includes all other areas. The minimum rate for the period up until 30 November 2010, that is for those working more than twenty-seven ordinary hours per week (surely the entire labour force?) was R1,506.35 for Area A. To work out the rate for the period 1 December 2011 to 30 November 2012, one takes the previous period’s wage, plus CPIX plus 1%. This would amount to R1,620.83 a month. However, according to the *Government Gazette* No. 32397 regulation R. 737 dated 17 July 2009, The CPI (excluding Owners Equivalent Rent) has replaced CPIX. If you are considering a career move into the Security Sector don’t move to Bloem, East London, Kimberley, Klerksdorp, Pietermaritzburg, Somerset West, Stellenbosch or the Strand. For reasons known only to government, you will be entitled to less wages than if you worked in Mitchell’s Plain.⁴ Now you know. It’s the law.

1. Cristina Ruiz, “Mad, Bad and Impossible to Make” in *Art Basel Daily Edition* (14 June 2011).

2. <http://present2artist.tumblr.com/>.

3. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/8768906/South-African-foreign-minister-rents-20000-private-jet-over-airport-row.html>.

4. <http://www.mywage.co.za/documents/Private-Security-Sector-Wag.gif>.

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Kurt Campbell, *Locus Standi*, 2011, archival ink on poster paper, 200 x 150cm