



exhibition catalogue

# REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

ISBN 978-0-620-58930-7

NIGHT FIGHTER – PRINT VERSION

ISBN 978-0-620-58931-4

NIGHT FIGHTER – E-BOOK VERSION

THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY KURT CAMPBELL ©2014  
PRINTED DIGITAL INDIGO IN THE YEAR 2014 BY REMATA ON  
PHOENIX-MOTION XANTUR. 135g/M² NATURAL WHITE FOR BODY AND 280g/M² NATURAL WHITE FOR COVER.  
DESIGNED BY CYBERGRAPHICS.BZ

I would like to formally acknowledge the financial support of the National Research Foundation.

I wish to thank each and every colleague at the Michaelis School of Fine Art (UCT) and at the Centre for Humanities Research (UWC) for their support and encouragement.

A special mention must go to my wife Nikita for her patience, and to my parents Lionel and Claudette.

This catalogue and exhibition is dedicated to my grandfather Albert Campbell.

# Night Fighter

## TIME TO TIME, TEXT TO TEXT:

**The divergence of Andrew Jephtha's booklet in the exhibition Night Fighter.**

**While the standing boxer is in time,  
the fallen boxer is out of time.**

**Counted out, he is counted "dead".**

JOYCE CAROL OATES. *On Boxing*

PUBLISHED BY

**Kurt Campbell**

UCT, MICHAELIS SCHOOL OF FINE ART, 2014

[www.kurt-campbell.com](http://www.kurt-campbell.com)



Dedication image:  
Albert Campbell  
(right).

## INTRODUCTION

*Time* is the official master of the boxing ring, authorising boxers both to fight, and then cease when the round is concluded. *Time* however, functions in a more substantive way in relation to said boxers beyond the chronology of a specific contest. Boxers are captured *in time* via their inscription in the official fighting records, fundamentally

mediating them using the binary of the contest outcome: as winner, or loser. Yet, we know that many fighters, the earliest record dating to 1792<sup>1</sup>, perform a work of reversal: not only being captured *in time* via an inscription denoting success or failure in relation to boxing matches, but actively producing texts as the authors of self-directed books. Thus, they achieve a measure of mastery against a *reductive time*, by denoting conditions of their own life beyond mere fistic statistics. It is this type of publication that has inspired this exhibition: *A South African Boxer in Britain*, authored by Andrew Jephtha, the Cape Town born boxer who, in attaining the welterweight championship of Britain in 1907 against Curley Watson, became the first black fighter to secure an official British title. Although Jephtha was the first black fighter to trouble the British fraternity of boxing with a sanctioned title fight victory, the history of early South African boxing is filled with a number of black fighters who achieved a level of international prominence. The earliest example is Joe Brown of Port Elizabeth, who had the fighting name of “Young Pluto”, and on 17 January 1899<sup>2</sup>, challenged for the world featherweight title in New York. He can thus be considered the first South African to challenge for a world title. Jimmy Dixon and Arthur Cupido<sup>3</sup> serve as additional examples of black fighters from South Africa who were active in the early 1900’s,

both travelling to Brazil in 1920 where they competed in the prize ring, with Cupido winning all eight matches. It is Jephtha however, who is most significant as a historical subject in that his claiming of the welterweight title as a black subject of a Colony strengthened certain racist fears in Britain at the time, eventually culminating in the exclusion of all black fighters as challengers for any English boxing title. The nature of the fear related partly to the symbolic power boxing titles held in relation to nationalism, as articulated by the secretary of the British boxing fraternity:

*It is only right that a small country such as ours should have championships restricted to boxers of white parents—otherwise we might be faced with a situation where all our British titles are held by coloured Empire boxers*<sup>4</sup>.

The ‘Colour Bar’ officially came into effect when this sentiment was exacerbated by the imminent arrival of Jack Johnson, the black heavyweight champion of America, who was scheduled to challenge for the World Title against the British born Billy Wells in 1911. The debate about the merits or dangers of inter-racial boxing on such a public scale was a matter of heated public debate, involving both civil and religious society. Fears of an unfair contest due to “the Negro’s instinctive passion and animal development”<sup>5</sup> personified by Johnson came into play. Eventually it was Winston Churchill who supported the decision to deny Johnson access. The formal ‘normative enforcement’ of the colour bar was subsequently codified by the British Boxing Board of Control in 1929. Dick Turpin, of mixed heritage eventually broke the “colour bar” in 1948 when he secured a victory against Vince Hawkins for the British middleweight title.

1. Mendoza, Daniel (1792). *The Art of Boxing*. 25 January. 2014 <http://www.hroarr.com/manuals/boxing-pugilism/Mendoza%20-%20The%20Art%20of%20Boxing.pdf>. Here I refer specifically to the introductory paragraphs, which deal with his motivations for writing the book and the discussion on the position he enjoyed within his community.
2. Greyenstein, Chris (1981). *The Fighters*. Johannesburg: Don Nelson.
3. *Cupido’s first victory is recorded at the Wynberg military camp in 1910*.
4. The most comprehensive scholarly article on the matter: Runstedtler, Theresa (2010). “White Anglo-Saxon Hopes and Black Americans” *Atlantic Dreams: Jack Johnson and the British Boxing Colour Bar*. *Journal of World History* 21.4: 657-689.
5. Ward, Geoffrey (2005). *Unforgivable Blackness: The rise and fall of Jack Johnson*. London: Pimlico.

Beyond the political ramifications of the title fight of 1907 that rendered Jephtha as the welterweight champion of Britain, the personal consequences were very severe for the newly crowned champion, as the title match cost him his eyes, and thus forced Jephtha into avenues beyond boxing to make a living; manifested as the self published booklet *A South African Boxer in Britain*<sup>6</sup>. At the time of writing the booklet, Andrew Jephtha was completely blind, acknowledging this in the very introduction of the book, and carefully describing how, through dictation, he was able to present an account of his career to the South African public. The archive he had amassed (comprised of international newspaper clippings and articles) ensured an authenticity and chronology that would bolster his personal recollection of events (Jephtha, 1910:8). It is my sincere hope that the exhibition *Night Fighter* will place Andrew Jephtha into contemporary public record<sup>7</sup> as an individual who negotiated two worlds (South Africa and Britain) in relation to race, politics and disability. This desire is made all the more urgent when one considers that the Black Cultural Archive of Britain, whose mandate is the preservation of and education about the contributions made by black subjects in early British society (of which boxing is a defined category of research), currently has no record of Andrew Jephtha or his achievement, rendering his victory all but obscure in official boxing records of the formal British sporting imagination.

#### Wounds and trophies

*It will be manifest to you that I have seen a good deal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain, and have boxed North, South, East and West... you may very rightly ask that I should pen a few words of advice, the outcome of my own experience, to those of the rising generation of boxers of this land who have yet to go "through the mill" of an English boxing career... I would impress on the young South African, intent on a career in the fistic world of England, that he should look upon his sojourn across the water as a needful preparation for a return to his native country, well equipped to advance boxing here, imparting what he knows to the younger men...*

(Jephtha, 1910:19)

6. I have been able to locate only one copy of the booklet, housed at the National Library of South Africa.

7. As a result of my recent correspondence with the Director of the Disability Unit at the University of Cape Town, Jephtha's booklet will be translated into Braille and Audio.

The paragraph above signals an unequivocal knowledge of a battle hardened fighter, one who has been "through the mill". Jephtha's blindness thus operated as a symbol of authenticity in relation to boxing matters and no barrier was made explicit between body and mind when he constituted himself as a teacher within his booklet:

*Since the complete loss of my eyesight...the idea has never ceased to be with me that...the details of my boxing career, might prove of interest to the many followers of the "noble art"...*

(Jephtha, 1910:5)

The loss of eyesight linked to "details of a boxing career" within an art that retains its signification as "noble" is a clear example of how the injury of blindness is put to a new task, not disqualifying the potency of a teacher, but in fact perfectly in keeping with that position. This re-deployment of damage is foregrounded in Morris's reading of damaged bodies<sup>8</sup>:

*The wound thus is not simply a hole in the flesh but—as in war—a sign that represents and authenticates belief.*

(Morris, 1987:153)

Thus, if the wound of the teacher authorises the notion of experience, it is the intimating of "the details" of a boxing career that is crucial, marking the experience of both body and mind. The exhibition *Night Fighter* has gestured toward this past body and experience, manifest in the concept of the 'anti-trophy'.

The conventional trophy in contemporary sporting culture is a tangible symbol of excellence, proof of a certain athletic achievement. In the sport of boxing, title belts, trophies and various medals similarly serve as objects that emphatically declare the owner 'champion' or victor. This exhibition troubles the conceptual and material conditions of the trophy, by rendering the trophy-object as an 'anti-trophy', a dark form, devoid of the highly polished precious metal and explicit inscriptions to commemorate a victory or victor. Rather the trophy in this exhibition is deployed to resonate a wound, and this in relation to Andrew Jephtha and his fighting career. The works on exhibit thus relate to specific contests mentioned in Jephtha's booklet, and are created to

8. Morris, David (1987). 'How to read the body in Pain.' *Literature and Medicine* 6: 139-155.

correspond to injuries obtained in these matches. Injuries include broken fists (see the artwork: *Medallions for broken hands*), cracked wrists (see the artwork: *Fist wrap series*) and, most significantly, blinded eyes (see the artwork: *Night Fighter training helmet*). Thus, what is presented in this exhibition is the commemoration of wounds, symbolically marking the experience of a fighting body in an intimate modality, one that is divergent from Jephtha's text in that it embraces a historical reading of a subject, yet deploys a personal imagining in the rendering of a visual text (read: 'Night Fighter'). This positions the exhibition not as a burial site at which we may come and mourn, but rather as an engagement with a distinctive mind that mobilised rhetoric and desire through a form that had a reach well beyond his own fists. This reach, that is, the social trajectory of his text, has indeed endured both space and time. If this was not the case, *Night Fighter* would not be a reality and the immanent translations would not come to pass (see footnote seven).

#### PARTING SHOT

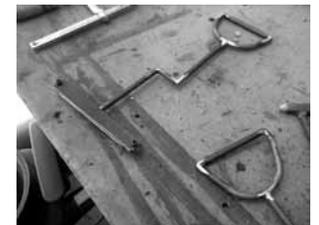
In as much as I have attempted to foreground the motives for the creation of artworks on this exhibition, I have also maintained certain silences. These silences are deployed to achieve what is best described by Wittgenstein in his writing<sup>9</sup> on the limits of enunciation:

*"Nothing is lost if one does not seek to say the unsayable. Instead, that which cannot be spoken is-unspeakably-contained in that which is said!"*

This choice of strategic textual silences will ensure the reader returns to the divergent text-the artworks themselves-for a "toe to toe" encounter, as the corporeal nature of the objects in this exhibition hold the promise of a certain degree of comprehensibility and transparency, even as they point to a time, text and subject long before the present moment.

9. Letter to Paul Engelman, 9th April 1917 as cited in Martens, Paul (2013). 'George Steiner: Playing Kierkegaard's Theological-Philosophic-Psychological Sports.' *Kierkegaard's Influence on Literature, Criticism and Art: The Anglophone world*. Ed. Jon Stewart. Surrey: Ashgate

KURT CAMPBELL | Cape Town | 25.01.2014



## STREET FIGHTING YEARS

I returned to memories of boxing accidentally, in the presence of Kurt Campbell, when he unexpectedly revealed his encounter with the early twentieth

century prize-fighter, Andrew Jephtha. As he placed fragments and photographs from the archive of a forgotten figure of the world of boxing before me, I doubted my capacity to say anything vaguely interesting or meaningful about the sport of boxing. After two years, I worry that I may have even less to say. But something of his interest sparked memories of years gone by. Perhaps, I thought, there was something about the sport of boxing and the figure of the boxer that resonated with my street fighting years – long before the stereotypical language of gang warfare took hold of the Cape Flats.

Growing up in the neighbourhood of Athlone, and overcome with an unfettered desire to emulate Mohamed Ali, there was always hope that one could punch one's way to stardom, out of the trappings of dust and sand and wind of the Cape Flats. I recall specifically how one day a pair of boxing gloves appeared in our midst. I remember them distinctly. They were red and well worn, even cracked in places. It was a clear day, and the dust and wind settled with an unusual kindness, paving the way for what seemed like a long-awaited bout – depending, of course, on whose view on the matter one solicited. Junaid Akoojee, son of the local District Surgeon, was given the right glove. Due to a habitual misfortune at tossing the coin, I received the left. Around us there was a pulsating throng, spurring us on to battle. No sooner had the injunction to fight been issued, than I felt my brain rattle in my skull. The red glove seemed to have left a more marked indent on my lower jaw. The nose bled profusely, the blood flowing through the cracks in my opponent's glove as water flows in the crevices of a dried riverbed. As I fell to the tarmac of a neighbour's driveway, I felt a rare sense of accomplishment. It all happened speedily, but I recall thinking that the punch that laid me low also put paid to my dreams of being a boxer. And, perhaps that fateful punch that decided my fate was for the better.

From that day, boxing was only ever mediated through the safety of a screen. The local Cine 400, with its fifty stairs leading to a grand cinema with sheepskin seats was where many witnessed the feats of Rocky Balboa in 1976. Outside, the students had taken to the streets in the first ever schools boycott. For those too young to march and join in the Black Power salutes, the cinema offered a comfortable space of retreat. After the bioscope as it was known in those

days, hundreds of over-enthusiastic thirteen-year olds, stood atop the cinema's stairwell with fists penetrating the tear-gassed air and eyes reaching beyond the dusty Cape Flats, proclaiming premature victory over the forces of evil down below. From afar, one could hear the echoes of a confused mix of baritone, tenor and bass, belching out a cacophony that faintly made up the outlines of the theme music of Rocky.

Then in 1979, as if to anticipate the first combined solidarity action between workers and students, Jon Voight (as Bill Flynn) and Ricky Schroeder (as T.J) offered us the story of a destitute father and son in *The Champ*. To prepare audiences for a heart-wrenching experience, the local cinema handed out free packs of tissues. The tears flowed as the desperate attempt by Voight to get back into the ring to secure his son's future, ended in his demise. "Wake up champ", TJ demands. Franco Zeffirelli's remake of a 1931 film brought to us the unusual bonds of solidarity between father and son, and the way the financialisation of everything was interfering in the basic relations of society.

In 1980, we stealthily slipped into the cinema to watch an age-restricted *Raging Bull* with Robert De Niro. Martin Scorsese's black and white film portrayed a boxer by the name of Jake LaMotta, prize fighter in the 1930s, whose life of great feats is matched by personal demise, brought about by a boundless rage. The film ends with the prophetic Biblical words:

"All I know is this: Once I was blind and now I can see."

One might mistake this as a simple and derivative lesson in morality. In the environment in which the film was screened, its prophetic tone would reach further into the charged passions that apartheid had provoked. The view from the cinema was now clouded by the schools boycott that swept through the Western Cape, that was convened and coordinated by the Committee of '81. It was a scene of rage, against family, institution and power. An Oedipal drama unfolded before our eyes, and the sad passions were provoked in a different direction. The guiding song of students was Pink Floyd's 'We Don't Need No Education', which was promptly banned by an ever-anxious state. The world of the boxer of popular cinema was folded into a thousand chants of rage - a scene of street fighting that would extend beyond the wildest dreams of Scorsese.

In the years that followed, we watched Muhammad Ali and George Foreman, Leon Spinks and Gerrie Coetzee. I arose at the crack of dawn to watch what promised to be the moment when a white South African would be taught a lesson. It was a rare moment shared with my father. Spinks promise was not to be. He dropped in the first rounds of the fight. The memory of watching the fight with my dad was priceless. As the legends died, and the independent cinemas of the Cape Flats turned into night clubs and bottle stores, boxing drifted further and further from my imagination. I developed a particular indifference to the sport - that is until I was introduced to Andrew Jephtha.

Ever since Kurt Campbell introduced me to Andrew Jephtha, I have returned to those repressed early memories. It has allowed me to think differently of films like *When We Were Kings*, or texts such as Gavin Evans' *Dancing Shoes is Dead*. Rather than simply seeing these as statements of rage or hyper-masculinity, I have learnt to appreciate the world of the boxer as a craft that indefatigably feeds life.

In the rough and tumble of a lingering stereotype about boxing lay an unprecedented awakening that was not clear in all those screened mediations of my early youth. No sooner had I been introduced to Jephtha, than the world of boxing came to register a particular way of speaking about the assemblage of bios and techné, those features of modern life that appear to have become undone at the seams in our technologically over-determined times.

From what I have learnt from Kurt Campbell, Jephtha cut a figure of the self as fighting spirit in the milieu of empire. His was not, however, simply a standpoint on race, or merely a posture, but a source of cultivation to stand up to the bigotry that the imperial formation gave rise to. In many respects, this is the figure that wills the self while giving the self over as a gift. Beyond a world carved up in the logic of inclusion and exclusion, Jephtha reminds us that empire was always also a stage to occupy. How one occupied that space was critical for ensuring that the self retained a relationship to life. Perhaps, his was the practice of what Roberto Esposito has called an affirmative bios, one that reaches repeatedly into a renewal of a concept of life, even as it takes on a few blows along the way.

Jephtha passes from blindness to insight – not the more literal act of seeing as in the Biblical reference towards the end of Scorsese's *Raging Bull*. Andrew Jephtha's accomplishments as a prize fighter, as also, his attempt to create a set of codes as an instruction for a care of the self, is not merely a lesson in

morality, but an experiment in exceeding that which the scripts of race prescribed. This is also the brilliant insight we gain from Kurt Campbell's forays into the textual production of Andrew Jephtha who ended his life punting his text alongside the flower sellers of Adderley Street. As his vision faded, his attempt to fold the life of boxing into a manual on life is reason for pause. In the delicacy and gentleness of his insight, is a reminder of the composite sense that popular culture tried so desperately to nurture through the filmic rendering of the boxer, but which only ever produced a sense of recognition, identification and despair. Where popular culture leaves us with the raw materials of an affect, Jephtha is the iconic figure who allows us to access what will later become the virtues of an insight about how empire compels new relations of techné to bios. Such is the only modality of transcending race. It is this care of the self, of reaching beyond the self into life that we see brought together in the encounter between boxer and chronicler. It is there where our eyes ought to be drawn, on the screen that Kurt Campbell offers as a gift. That is where we might craft a concept of anti-racism as the very grounds for a reconstituted humanities.

PREMESH LALU is Director of the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) and Adjunct Professor of History at the University of the Western Cape. His book, *The deaths of Hints: Postapartheid South Africa and Shape of the Recurring Pasts*, was published by the HSRC press in 2009. He completed his Ph.D. in 2003 as a MacArthur Fellow at the University of Minnesota and has published in *History and Theory*, the *South African Historical Journal*, *Current Writing*, *Africa Today*, the *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, and *Innovation*. Premesh Lalú's major research interests are in postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, and critical theory. More recently, his research has focused on the question of aesthetics and politics and the question of the postcolonial university in Africa. In 2007, Premesh was selected for the prestigious fellowship in the Institutions of Public Scholarship Programme at Emory University in the USA. UWC awarded Lalú the Vice-Chancellor's Award for teaching excellence, the Vice-Chancellor's Young Researcher Award, and three Faculty of Arts Research Incentives Award. *The Deaths of Hints* was nominated for the Alan Paton Longlist in 2010.



## WHEN BACKS ARE TURNED: PROCESS...AFTERMATH

Ruth Simbao



Mziwoxolo Ndwayana performing in *Boxing Is*, curated by Athina Valha.  
Rhodes University Drama Department, 30 October 2013. Photo: MARK WILBY

Title:

**BOXING IS<sub>1</sub>**

Setting:

Rhodes Black Box Theatre, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape

Characters:

Eastern Cape Welterweight Champion: Mziwoxolo Ndwayana (12 fights: won 9, lost 2, drew 1)

Boxing Coach: Thabang Hlalele, Masibambane Boxing Club, Joza, Grahamstown Curator and

Choreographer: Athina Valha, Drama Department, Rhodes University

Title:

**BLACK AGAINST WHITE<sub>2</sub>**

Setting:

Wonderland Fight Hall, Mile End and Vaudeville Theatre, West End, London

Characters:

1907 British Welterweight Champion: Andrew Jephtha (62 fights: won 29, lost 23, drew 5)

Opponent: Curley Watson

British Lightweight Champion Jack Goldswain

Vaudeville Actor: Mabel Goldswain

## ACT I: PROCESS

### SCENE ONE: REHEARSAL

"[T]he rigour and discipline of...preparation  
...only for devotees..."<sub>3</sub>

Brute training of the mind  
Psycho-corporeal process and the need to repeat  
Again  
Until muscle speaks to the brain

Before it's spoken to

Dance; the theatre of sport not seen  
Fitness of the mind and invisible brawn

"I believe that the seed of his 'argon'

his effort to transcend...  
lie[s] within..."

as Shakespeare in Hamlet names

'mortal coil'..."<sub>4</sub>

### ROUND ONE: BACK

Turn your back and drop your guard  
No longer a position of defence

Body closed; open attack  
Back stage  
Behind the screen  
You; dancing with yourself

Turn their backs  
On you  
(They know not)

Alone in the ring; life  
A square world  
Where decisions are made

On your own

Solitary acts of precision distilled  
In your hands

Your mind...

## SCENE TWO: (IN)VISIBLE

Beneath. Behind  
Where no one sees

Visualise a voice  
Thabang; a need

Turn your back and drop your guard  
You; training (with) yourself

“[E]ncounter...the imaginary ‘other’”<sup>5</sup>  
(In)visible rival—your inner being

“drama, mime, comedy, theatre”<sup>6</sup>

Vaudeville Black  
Box

## ROUND TWO: SPECTACLE

Between process and aftermath

Just a sliver

Eyes on target  
No release

*Specere*

Even the quiet corners meant  
For reprieve

## SCENE THREE: DELICATE VIOLENCE

“A dance driven by aesthetic grace, a blood sport  
driven  
...winning-losing...”<sup>7</sup>

Dance tiptoe silent pain  
Blood, blistered sequins  
Shine

Ballet of the sweet science  
A forgiven aesthetic

Body tort

Footwork; work horse

Realised light-foot

Nimble. Step. Swollen hands...  
At the end of drawn-out arms

Mziwoxolo versus

Reaching Barely reached

## ROUND THREE: SWEET SCIENCE

Precision. Science, for fighting weight  
Weigh-in  
Build-up  
Sweat to drop

‘Make weight’

Fifteen rounds  
Twelve . Rather twelve than bitter sweet

Victory  
Pleasure (number four)  
Sweet science of bruising; blood is rising

Pristine blood

Immaculate “mastery of...control”<sup>8</sup>

## ACT II: AFTERMATH

### ROUND ONE: DIS-CURSIVE

“...strict code of rules...base platform for the unexpected...”<sup>9</sup>

Open ends  
Tough precision  
(interpreted through my eye)

Your call, his call  
My  
Contingent act of text

Assigned to cursive:

*Emptied victory, blown-up fall*

## ACT ONE: SCRIPT

Play once more:  
*Black Against White*

Jack and Mabel, scripted fight  
Blackface  
Face back  
Punch to face

Lightweight, light Jack...

Ascribed fate

## ROUND TWO: BLINDNESS

Train to see forward, not around  
Embargo  
Fear (hit delete)

Blind spot  
Small thought (can't delete)

Train to see forward, not around  
Looking backward; seeing right through

## ACT TWO: SHADOW

Hardly perceptible in the shadow (boxing)  
Black object shown up against

White?

Damaged body not your own  
Attached to what you are (not)

Shadow slips from beneath your feet  
Liquid air

Deflate

---

1. *Boxing Is* was an interdisciplinary event conceived and curated by choreographer Athina Vahla and performed at the Rhodes University Drama Department Black Box Theatre in October 2013. According to Vahla, "Its purpose was to look at the exchange between a sport and physical theatre and attempts a bridge between the two...". *Boxing Is* focused on the training of boxers rather than the spectacle of the fight. In preparation for the event, workshops were run with five boxers from the Masibambane Boxing Club in Joza, Grahamstown including Eastern Cape Welterweight champion, Mziwoxolo Ndwayana, as well as boxing coach Thabang Hlalele, a sports psychologist and a choreographer. Three invited instructors included a physical theatre lecturer/practitioner, a ballet teacher/choreographer, and a fitness trainer/sprinter. Workshops included physical training, an introduction to ballet and physical theatre and the use of visualisation ("Thoughts on the 'Boxing Training Project'" by Athina Vahla, 2013).

2. When Andrew Jephtha's eyesight started to deteriorate he continued to make a living by acting in the vaudeville play *Black Against White* alongside actor Mabel Goldswain and British Lightweight Champion Jack Goldswain. Receiving punches to the head was part of the script, which impacted his poor eyesight. Jephtha performed in blackface and it is believed that the burnt cork he used to blacken his face further contributed to eye infections (<http://www.ervba.co.za/andrew-jephtha.html>. Accessed October 2013). By juxtaposing *Boxing Is* and *Black Against White*, "When Backs are Turned: Process...Aftermath" engages with the events of boxers' lives outside of the ring and draws comparisons between theatre, ballet (an acceptable form of 'violent' training of the body) and sport, particularly boxing, which is stereotyped as a blood-thirsty sport. In *Boxing Is*, Vahla aimed to highlight the beauty of physical movement in boxing as a way of moving beyond this stereotype. Examining the notion of 'agon', she asks: "Where is the notion of conflict and catharsis in theatre and sports performance as well as training activities? How is it perceived, experienced and monitored by the athletes, and the public? What is its value for the participants and the spectators? Can an understanding of conflict and catharsis in sports help develop the dramatic element in contemporary performance? Is it possible that this can enhance both the performers' and the audience's experience of *tragedy* and its transcendental power in art, as manifested in artworks throughout history?" (Athina Vahla, notes from "Journal on Agon").

3. In "Art, Boxing and Modern Life", James Sey (2010) writes: "The ritual violence of boxing is a deeply ambivalent experience for most, certainly most spectators, and the rigour and discipline of its preparation marks it out only for devotees and initiates".

4. Athina Vahla (2013), "Thoughts on the 'Boxing Training Project'". Through the use of the word 'agon' Vahla draws together the struggle of the boxer's contest and ideas of conflict in literature and Greek drama.

5. Athina Vahla (2013), "Thoughts on the 'Boxing Training Project'".

6. Athina Vahla (2013), "Thoughts on the 'Boxing Training Project'".

7. In "Thoughts on the 'Boxing Training Project'", Athina Vahla (2013) writes, "Ballet and boxing for many lay diametrically opposite to each other as 'soma-centric' practices, the first one a dance driven by aesthetic grace [and] the other a blood sport driven by wining-losing a fight". Comparing ballet and boxing, she points to various tensions: "The body/torso of the boxer remains mostly contained and closed inwards during the fight, in position of 'en guard' for reasons of self-defence and protection of the organs, also contraction to gather energy for the 'throwing' of the jab, from the centre to the periphery...Ballet demands open chest and pelvis {en dehors} an 'open' body in which preparation is also slow and meditated".

8. In "Art, Boxing and Modern Life", James Sey (2010) asserts, "For spectators there is rarely the outright brutality and naked violence of a street fight, despite the objections of the sport's politically correct detractors. Mastery of emotion and control of the body are paramount". While boxing is stereotyped as a 'dirty', 'bloody' sport, boxers are forced to adhere to strict rules in terms of physical health, training programmes and performance rules.

9. James Sey (2010) argues that despite the strict rules of boxing, there is an inevitable element of contingency and the unknown. He writes, "boxing's strict code of rules serve as a base platform for the unexpected, unforeseen combination or single punch that produces the most desired result—the knockout".

RUTH SIMBAO is an Associate Professor of Art History & Visual Culture at Rhodes University and received a PhD from Harvard University. She is currently the Project Leader for the Humanities Focus Area: Visual and Performing Arts of Africa, and in 2009 was the recipient of the Vice Chancellor's Distinguished Research Award. Ruth has published in various journals such as Third Text, Parachute, African Arts, Mix, Art South Africa, De Arte, NKA: Journal for Contemporary African Art, The International Journal for African Historical Studies, Kronos and the Journal of the Contemporary African Art: New Approaches (JACANA). She has written catalogue essays for exhibitions in Canada, the USA, Europe and South Africa, and her work has been translated into Portuguese, Spanish and Danish.



**Memorial to the (un)known champion**

*Many formidable black pugilists have never been formally acknowledged for their skill and endurance in the prize ring.*

*Historians could never recover a comprehensive archive of champions as the contests in which they competed were secret affairs and highly illegal.*

*This steel belt serves as a marker of the incomplete history of boxing, at once dedicated to a known individual fighter (Jeptha), and simultaneously dedicated to a group of unknown fighters who will never be researched.*





### **Night Fighter training helmet**

*Blindness was the most damaging injury suffered by Andrew Jephtha during his career.*

*He engaged in boxing matches, despite his blindness, until he could no longer hide his condition from opponents.*

*The mask created for this exhibition intimates the threat of retinal damage and potential disability that is an irrefutable part of the "noble science" of boxing.*

*The training helmet is styled on the antique models made available to the artist during a trip to London in 2009.*



**Medallions for broken hands**

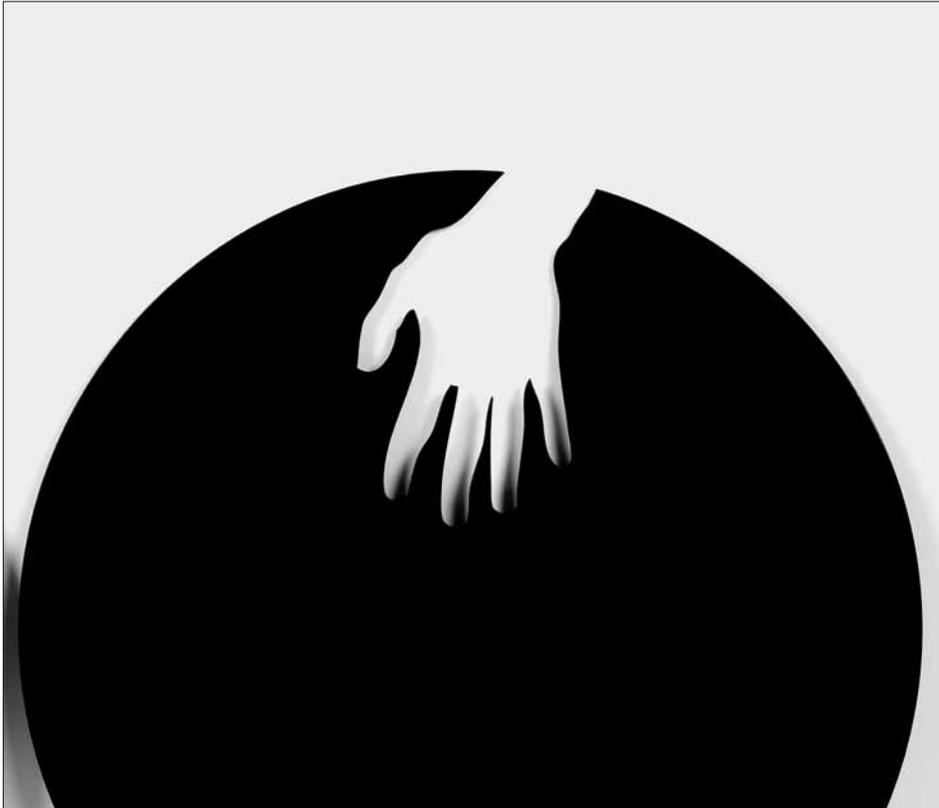
*This pair of sculptures have the shape of contorted hands cut into a large medallion.*

*These medallions mark the damage, endured by Jephtha, of his left and right hands.*

*When activated with lighting, the sculptures are capable of casting large shadows.*



*"...religiously keep the right in reserve...keep cool when you knock a man down. When he is up, use your left, advancing and leading with the left."  
(Jeptha, 1910:2)*



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### **'Shovel handle' tablet holder**

*This structure, created to house the tablet computer that activates the Augmented Reality video, is crucial to the concept of this exhibition.*

*The tablet holder has two steel 'shovel' handles that force the user to stretch his/her arms into a particular position. The arms of the user will soon become tired and strained, activating the muscles in a manner similar to an ancient boxing exercise meant to strengthen the arms.*

*The shovel handles are derived from the bicycle that Jeptha used when in London called a 'Penny Farthing'.*

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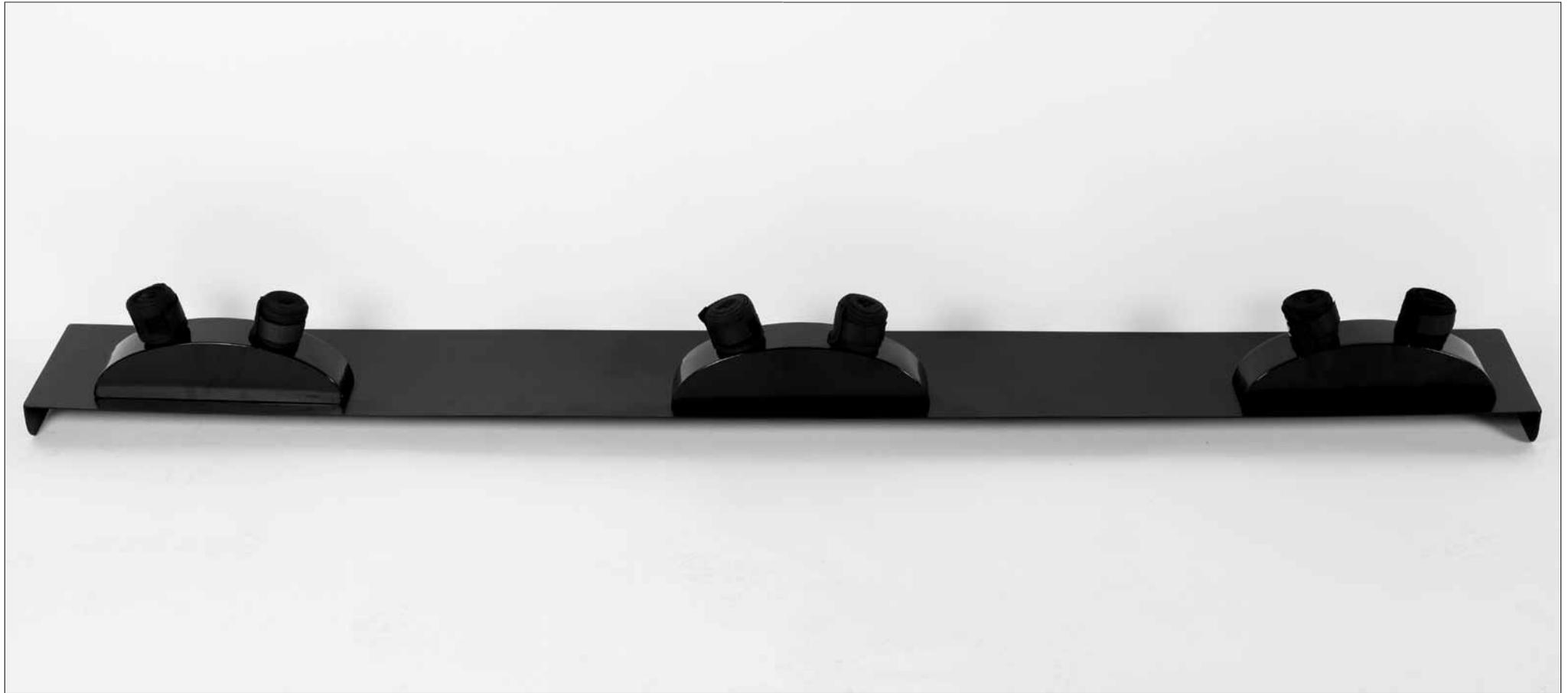
31

### **Fist Wrap Series**

*Three sets of fist wraps are displayed in this series, denoting the three fights Jephtha endured before receiving the opportunity to challenge for the welterweight title.*

*The actual fist wraps themselves, speak of an immanent corporeal engagement with a fighting body.*

*The repetition of the sculptures gesture to a progression of contests leading to a summative confrontation.*





### **Augmented Reality video footage**

*A crucial feature of this exhibition is the deployment of Augmented Reality software, which allows certain images on display to be over-layered with a digital video that appears on the screen of a tablet computer that is held in close proximity to the trigger image.*

*The digital videos have been gathered from archives around the world, and show significant black boxers at their prime.*

*The boxers include: Jack Johnson, Joe Louise and Dick Turpin. Some of these boxers knew Andrew Jephtha personally, and others were directly inspired by his fighting techniques. Their inclusion thus serves to bolster a radial reading of Jephtha's boxing legacy.*

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# A South African Boxer

IN BRITAIN.



Experiences of  
**ANDREW JEPHTA.**

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

