

AKIMBLOG

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Dineo Seshee Bopape & David Arseneau at Darling Foundry

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At first glance, the **Darling Foundry's** double-exhibition of works by **Dineo Seshee Bopape** and **David Arseneau** seems utterly divided in tone, technique and content. What might a South African mixed-media artist sorting through the politics of settler-colonial conflict and a Canadian painter riffing on images from the slasher film franchise *Friday the 13th* have to say to each other? A great deal, it turns out. Both draw our attention to the psycho-social effects of violence as it is endured on the ground and as it is consumed in screen culture.



Dineo Seshee Bopape

Bopape's works reprise the visual language of land and body art associated with mostly the American rights movements of the sixties and seventies, but her energy is focused on South Africa during and after the apartheid era. Visitors circulate, keeping vigil, past casket-sized mud-bricks and small clay sculptures laid out in grids. The bricks are decorated with bundles of partly burned sage, candles, petals in warm colours, and white feathers stained with yellow wax. Ceiling fans move loose gold-leaf flakes on several uterus-shaped sculptures. The golden wombs are placed on top of the mud-bricks or nestled into their faults along with seashells and clay sculptures describing the inside of a closed fist. With these smaller works, Bopape draws us inside the raised fist of the Black Power Movement and beyond what art historian Lucy Lippard called the "vaginal iconography" of 1970s Feminist art. The struggles of artists like Hannah Wilke and Ana Mandieta are honoured in Bopape's work and opened onto a global and post-colonial horizon.

A towering, egg-shaped adobe brick structure looms over the exhibition. Surging up through the Foundry's concrete floor or eroding into it, the mound is ambiguous, caught in geological or mythical time. Another small gold-leaf womb rests on a patch of sheepskin at its peak. Here and there, the object catches the light, but its precise shape is hard to make out from the ground. The work reads as a monument, or perhaps an anti-monument to South Africa's coveted gold mines. Dust and petals scattered around its base give it a funerary feel. It is a gold mine turned inside out. If the world were to just quit on us and bury itself, this is where we might gather to mourn and say our prayers. Or perhaps it's where we'd be summoned to try again.



David Arseneau, *SF 13 Super Map*

David Arseneau's DIY museum for the *Friday the 13th* franchise in the next room is darkly playful. Post-internet in its attitude, but pre-internet in its imagery, the work carves out a space between the historical terms of painting and the Millennial's habits of scanning, roving, filing, and classifying. Crystal Lake, the fictional setting for the films, is rendered in a large canvas titled *SF 13 Super Map* and in a primitive video game of Arseneau's own design. Panoramic and topographical views are fused vertiginously in the map, and the video game leads players from choppy, low-flying bird's eye views of the town into claustrophobic crime scenes. Our cheeriest feelings about Google Street View and VR collide in these works with a darker history of technologies, disorders, and abuses of looking. Looking, however deeply, Arseneau suggests, is reducible to a kind of consumer choice. And with that choice comes a responsibility we don't often acknowledge. What do we choose to look at and where do the pictures we consume leave us once we look away?

Arseneau cuts a path through F13's gory image-repertoire, organizing it into a painter's categories: still-lives, figures, and portraits. An inventory of props from the films hangs across the gallery's front wall. Narratively unimportant items are recorded as hastily as decisive ones – guns, switchblades, handcuffs and severed heads. Sartre's *No Exit* is painted face down in the middle of the canvas, between a ghetto blaster and a bloodstained kitchen knife. The book is a precarious philosophical anchor in this swirl of violent and banal images. Graphite portraits of the films' minor characters are arranged in a grid on an adjacent wall. Thrown up unceremoniously with tacks, they recall mug-shots in a detective's office and grainy missing-person pictures at highway rest stops or on milk cartons. They hover in a grey zone between guilt and innocence, between the positions of victims and perpetrators of violence. The remaining space is given to more carefully presented drawings of all twelve iconic F13 posters and a first-person shooter game called *STUDIO Doom Multiplayer*. Modeled on Arseneau's own studio upstairs, the game bids us to participate in a painter's existential struggle with images of violence. Players are invited to take aim at digital renderings of the pictures in the exhibition – to do violence to the images of violence just seen.

The works at the Darling Foundry expose cycles of violence and remind us to "stay woke" in the face of them. Bopape attends to the forces of political and economic violence in settler-colonial situations. Arseneau probes the surface of screened violence to get at the technological conditions of its normalization. Bopape began an artist's talk at Concordia University the night before her opening with a clip from a 1976 Nina Simone performance. In it, Simone interrupts her song *Feelings* with an agitated question for the audience: "What are the conditions that make it necessary to write a song like this in the first place?" Bopape and Arseneau pose the question again for our times.

The Darling Foundry: <http://fonderiedarling.org/en/>

Dineo Seshee Bopape: and- in. the light of this. _____ continues until May 21.

David Arseneau: Super F13 Part 1 to Part 12 Redesign Studio Doom continues until May 21.

Tammer El-Sheikh is a writer and teacher based in Montreal. His art criticism has appeared in Parachute, Canadian Art, ETC and C Magazine.