

Paradox of Plenty Artists Visual Response to the Industrial Landscape

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Artists are the end users of mining material. This paper explores my own artistic practice and research in relation to various contemporary artists whose work responds to industrial landscapes.

Mine headgear constructions support the wheel mechanisms for suspending winding cables that transport workers and ore up and down deep level shafts. These strange anthropomorphic structures have become the iconic symbol for mining. I have been compelled to document and draw these in multiples to capture this as a memory to our changing landscape. These mine head frames are reminiscent of the work of the Becher's of Dusseldorf who photo-documented 'typologies'. Blast furnaces, mine shaft heads and water towers are photographed with similar horizon lines against bland cloudy skies and presented numerous of these alongside each other, thereby highlighting similarities but also revealing idiosyncratically different engineered structures.

Congolese artist Sammy Baloji uses photomontages of historical colonial images combined with current photographs of the Gecamines that are haunting reflections of neo-colonial resource extraction. Artists and photographers in South Africa including William Kentridge, Sam Nhlengethwa, Pat Mautloa, David Goldblatt and David Koloane reflect on the resource extraction industry and how this has shaped the cultural identity of South Africans.

In over twelve years of on-going research I have visited archives, libraries and museums in mining areas, exploring the issues related to mineral extraction and the impact of neo-colonialism on the contemporary African industrial landscape. With 2011 seeing the 125th anniversary of the discovery of gold in Johannesburg, my new body of work reflects on how this discovery has shaped the social-political history of South Africa. This archive is of a few thousand industrial images used as source material for a series of composite, collaged drawings in an exhibition entitled the Paradox of Plenty.