

working artist project

2007 - 2008

The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia

working artist project

2007 - 2008

larry walker

June 14 – July 26, 2008

don cooper

August 9 – September 20, 2008

danielle roney

October 4 – November 15, 2008

Jurors:

Jeffrey Grove, Wieland Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, High Museum of Art
Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, Director, Spelman College Museum of Fine Art
Annette Cone-Skelton, Director, MOCA GA

The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia
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Suite A2
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The Working Artist Project is an initiative of
The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia to support established, working artists in
the Atlanta metropolitan area

danielle roney

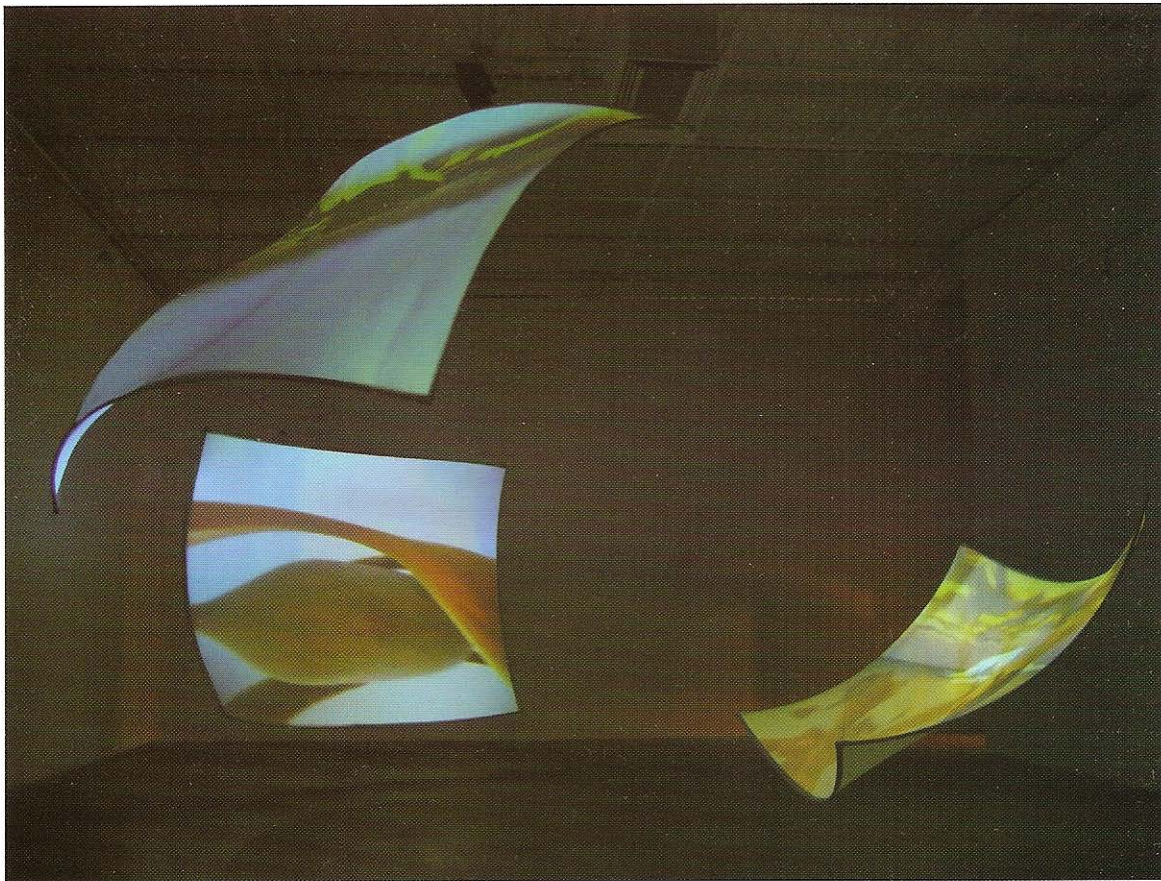


PLATE IX
Installation View, *eGoli* (with Jeff Conefry)
3 channel video, 3D animation

Genesis Trial: Johannesburg

October 4 – November 15, 2008

Essay by Joey Orr

Joey Orr is a Chicago based writer and curator, currently an instructor in Visual and Critical Studies for the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

GENESIS TRAVELER

Working across media is not a new practice, and we have only to look back to the 1960s and '70s for examples of early video artists working in installation formats. Vocabularies surrounding the reception of this kind of visual practice, however, are in constant flux. *Genesis Trial: Johannesburg* engages many modes of visual, spatial and audio support including drawing, video projection, three dimensional animation and installation. But, there are many other forms the artist's work takes, such as meetings, discussions and research. By interacting with publics as differently engaged as the socially innovative, international media and design conference, TED Global, to local communities in Beijing, Johannesburg, São Paulo and Atlanta, this wide ranging interaction takes up many important contemporary issues, from globalism to regionalism and from social engagement to emerging technologies. When hybrid practices are engaged and deployed in multiple contexts, it is important that we understand visual art not simply as a form of presentation or representation, but also as a mode of inquiry in its own right, a way to understand ourselves and our relation to larger social and political structures.

Danielle Roney's *Johannesburg* is the second exhibition in her *Genesis Trial* series. In 2005, Roney worked for the first time in Beijing as an artist-in-residence at the Red Gate Gallery and presented installation work as part of the *Beijing Off Biennial*. As a result of this residency, she set up a Beijing studio with collaborator Jeff Conefry and two other New York-based artists—not only a space for the creation of work, but also a site for gathering area artists. This residency resulted in *Genesis Trial: China* (2006), an exhibition of video, sculptural works and installation that introduced audiences to Roney's artistic considerations surrounding global identities. Building an international web of artists has been the cornerstone of her Global Portals project, which, in 2007, propelled her into Johannesburg, South Africa where she hosted a series of live simulcasts in which artists from South Africa and the U.S. were able to speak directly about creative practices, as well as their social contexts and the kinds of publics they were attempting to address. It should be understood from the outset that *Genesis Trial* is, first and foremost, a relational way of inhabiting the world, one filled with the contradictions inherent in any thorough reflection on cosmopolitanism and global culture.

What has happened to the body in Danielle Roney's work? Earlier exhibitions consisted of figurative sculptural installations structured by unique sound environments, created using parabolic domes and ultrasonic sound emitters (*HOME*, The Project Room, Saltworks, 2002 and *Wave*, City Hall East, 2003). In her video installation, *one*, she explored micro and macro visual depictions of the body as landscape and image (*Film/Video: Georgia*, MOCA GA, 2003-2004). These inquiries into the figure led to further dialogues with other artists in her curatorial venture, *Conversations with the Contemporary Figure* (Eyedrum, 2004), which explored not only alternative modes of imaging the figure, but also covered new ground in Roney's interest in the body's absence. Finally, her work *AS* presented a fantastic built environment as a playful exploration of identity, now radically shifted from a representational register to a spatial negotiation (ShedSpace, 2004). When she appeared in her video for *Genesis Trial: China*, she was present only as allegory—a performance of the collision between traditional and contemporary, fragmented cultures, at once mending and shattering their tentative and always fluctuating relations (*The Contemporary*, 2006).

It seems that Roney's body of work has expelled its previous corporeal specificity as a sculptural solution. The artist at work in *Genesis Trial* is a global traveler. The subject as the seat of identity is a worldview from which the *Genesis* traveler has been exiled. The subject is now a kind of information set contingent on locations, politics and economies—constituting these situations while being constituted by them. In the video environment *Westcliff Hotel, Johannesburg: July 17, 2007*, for example, the artist gives us a literal document of race, locale and economics, but is present herself as a reflection and fragment of those relations. In the video, the mirror reflection of the artist's feet signifies that she is seated on the couch, apparently watching the African maid clean the room. In a slowed pace, the only interruption in the piece's documentary rhythm, Roney brings dramatic attention to the cleaning of the mirror where a fragment of the artist's body is imaged. It is not only the gaze that has defined the African worker, but also

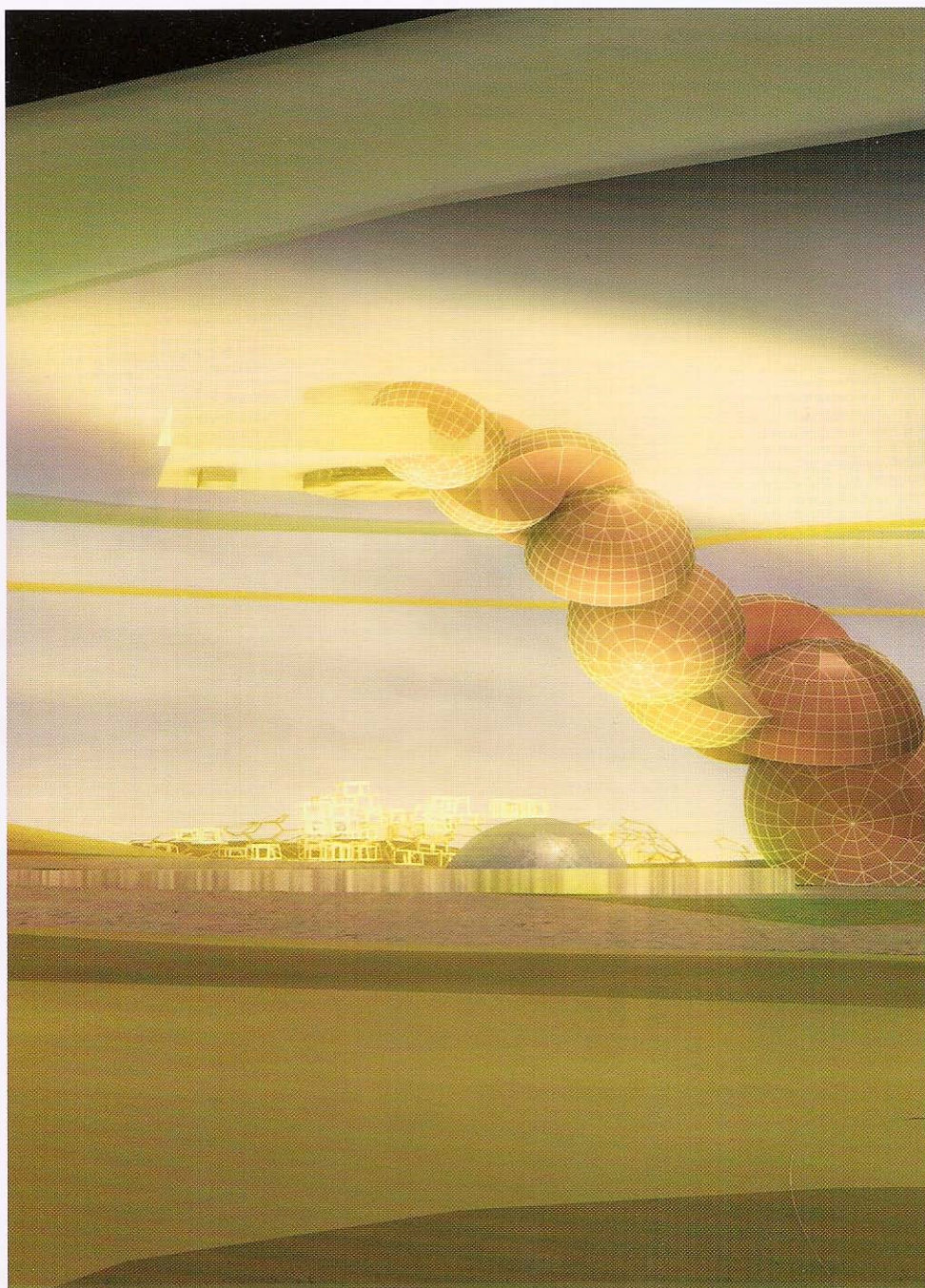


PLATE X
eGoli (with Jeff Conefry)
2008
3-D Animation Still

the woman's labor that enables Roney, and consequently the viewer, a relational, and productively problematic visibility. The space for this projection is delineated with tape on the floor to describe the dimensions of the room in the Westcliff hotel, which has become an imagined space based on the memory of the traveler. In *Genesis Trial: Johannesburg*, architecture functions as a metaphor for the *concept* of the city—not only a built environment, but also one imagined through indigenous patterning, utopian visions and desire.

The video and sculptural installation, *eGoli*, covers broad territory. Referencing both an informal and mythical layer of the city of Johannesburg, it is at once utopian and entropic, futuristic and nostalgic. The idealistic landscape playfully dwindles through architectural abstraction, nature and media systems and finally expands into a loose field of relations as it pans back from its locational specificity. Anthropomorphic sculptural forms and surrealist landscapes bring to mind the temporal strangeness of dislocation, as well. Presented as a dramatic video installation, which uses the main gallery's austerity to maximum effect, the body is active in the space while the imagination is consumed in a visual, global fantasy, a dichotomy that speaks clearly to the fractured *Genesis* traveler's lived experiences and the memories they morph into. Place does not only serve our material needs, but also enjoys many lives that describe our desires about ourselves and the cities we inhabit.

The voices on the soundtrack for *eGoli* come from interviews the artist conducted with residents of Soweto, a southwest suburb of Johannesburg where lack of urban infrastructure has led to impoverished conditions that have resulted in rioting. Working with sound as much as video and sculpture, Roney fills the *Urban Land Cruiser's* room with the multiple languages spoken in South Africa as they drift in over the radio. Networks of information, modes of travel, who has access to which physical, psychical and economic properties...all of these ideas merge in the object of the Land Cruiser, an all too potent reminder of the collision between mobility and international communities.

This traveler also makes contributions to a discourse already in progress. It was New York-based, Nigerian born artist, Fatimah Tuggar, who so productively and with humor overlapped the spaces of a technological futurism with an Africa previously excluded from such cultural projections. And, *Spatial City*, a work by Paris-based, Hungarian born architect, Yona Friedman, has many formal and theoretical connections, from user-designed spaces, to entire urban structures envisioned over land and pre-existing city structures. Danielle Roney's *Genesis Trial: Johannesburg* visually connects and extends this contemporary dialogue by bringing together multiple media in the service of hybrid critical and creative inquiries.

There are many ethical imperatives in the exhibition, and these are best illustrated in the abstract sculptural work, *Invisible Boundaries*. This installation of acrylic rods presents a seamless curtain whose pattern is disturbed by the distortion of four rods, which bend up and stretch back in a tense and arched gesture. While all contexts are described by particular boundaries, economic, political or social, when these boundaries become ubiquitous, they also become invisible. The ideas of two intellectuals come to mind at once.

Exile, no matter what form it takes, is a breeding ground for creative activity; for the new. - Vilém Flusser

It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home. - Edward Said

Both writers are evoking the imperative to make visible our boundaries and contexts so that they can be brought into discourse, negotiated and even challenged. The *Genesis* traveler in Johannesburg moves around and behind the curtain, creating smooth slippages of imagination met with the intermittent ruffling of the illusion.

- Joey Orr

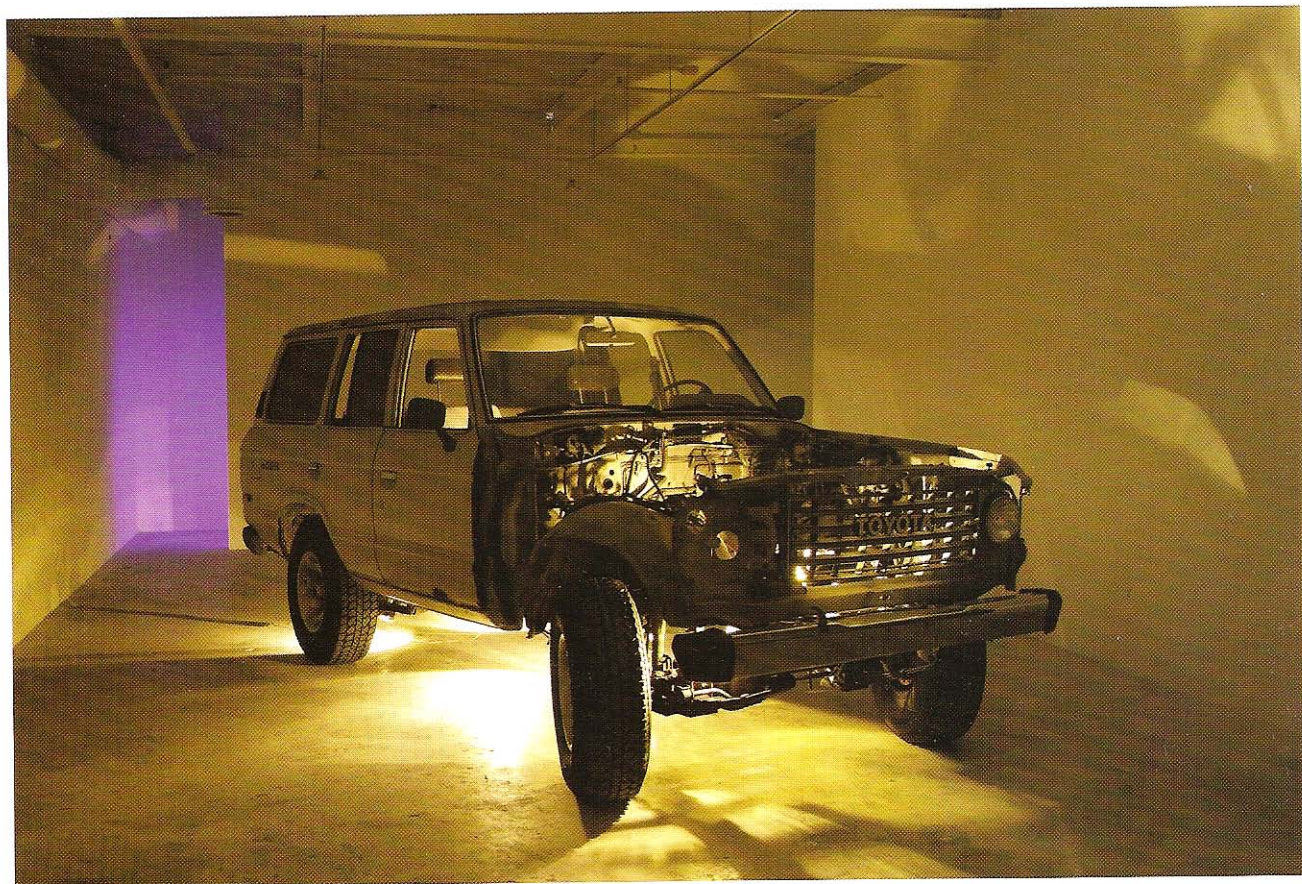


PLATE XI

Urban Land Cruisers

2008

1980 Toyota Land Cruiser, light, soundtrack, running time 15:22

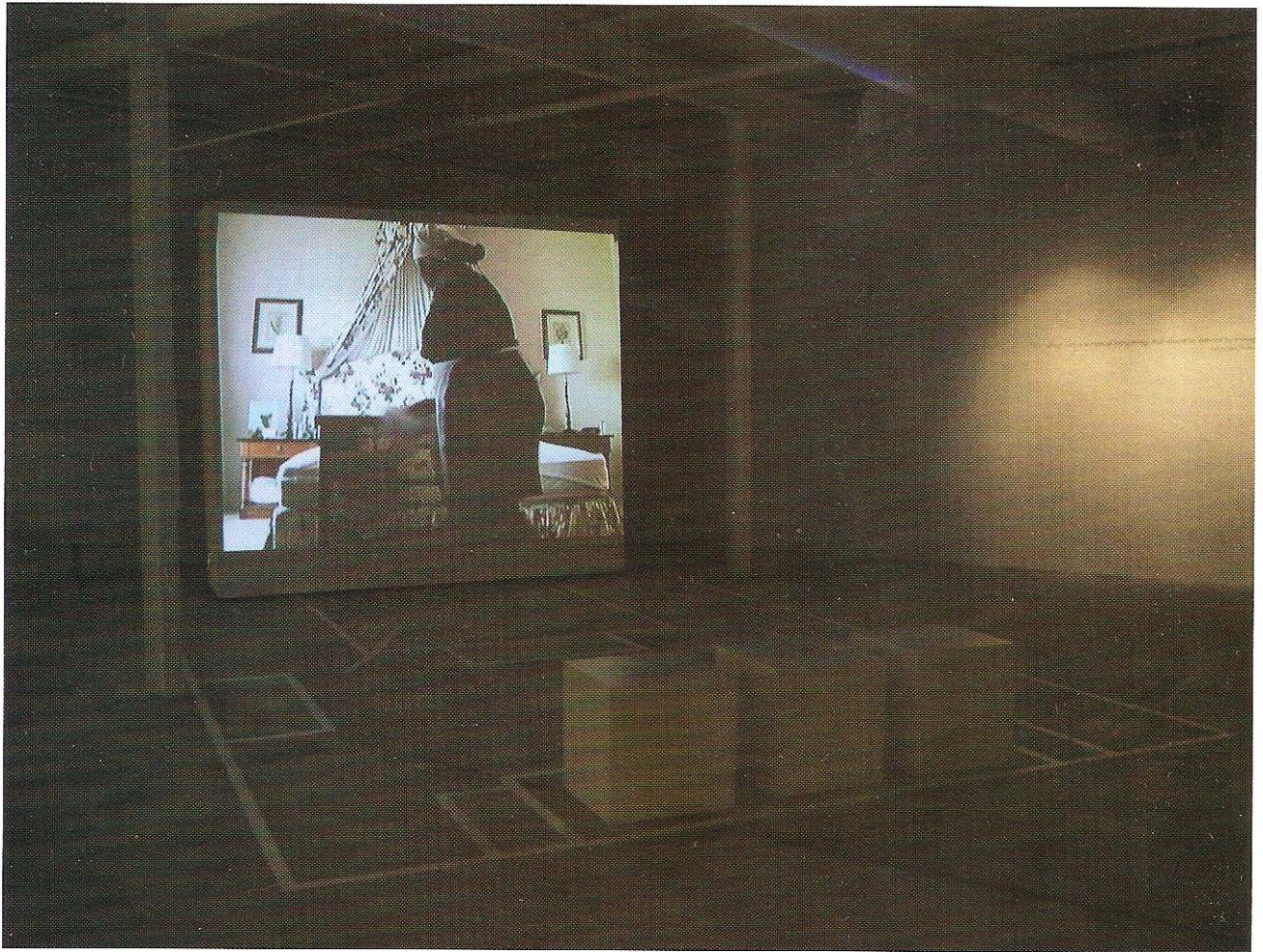


PLATE XII

Installation View: Westcliff Hotel, Johannesburg: July 17, 2007

2007

Digital video, hotel floor-plan in tape, dimensions variable, running time 4:20

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