

The Weight in the Air

An exhibition by Nina Barnett and Jeremy Bolen



Nina Barnett & Jeremy Bolen, *Top Star*, 2022, sandpaper, 16mm film, oil, sandpaper, projector, drive-in movie theatre speaker, audio soundtrack. Photo: Anthea Pokroy

Opening date: March 22 - July 30th 2022

The Origins Centre Museum
Corner Yale Road & 1 Enoch Sontonga Ave
Braamfontein
Johannesburg

The Origins Centre Museum and POOL present the exhibition, *The Weight in the Air* by collaborating artists Nina Barnett (ZA) and Jeremy Bolen (US). Using Johannesburg as a site from which to consider the ecological, the (post)colonial and the cyclical, the exhibition offers a series of immersive, materially complex installations encouraging viewers to consider what is present in the air we inhabit.

Johannesburg is built for (and among sites for) gold extraction. The mines have defined the landscape - giving rise to the architecture and industry built from the extracted wealth, and to the apartheid system, the destruction of viable land and clean water, and the yellow mountain-sized

piles of dust that mark and constitute the skyline. This dust, even when invisible, gives form to a history of colonialism and its destructive local cost. It moves freely through the porous air - settling on surfaces and within lungs. This dust is the catalyst for the exhibition, which considers ways of sensing or knowing matter as particulate in the context of this city. In thinking through Johannesburg's dust and its physical, symbolic, radioactive impact; the exhibition brings attention to how particles retain a record of where they have come from, and have the potential to send material messages between far reaching places.

Barnett and Bolen approach this installation using research and materially investigative methods. In recognition of Top Star Drive-in (an outdoor Johannesburg cinema located on a mine dump), a 16mm film loop of *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, marked by mine dust radiation, brings attention to the casual colonialism and plundering popularized by American cinema in the 1980s. A tower of mineral oil (in a form inspired by neutrino particle detectors) holds fragments of heavy metal deposits created by the mining process. These fragments read as strata in rock, or petrified trees, subverting the visual understanding of that which is natural or ancient (and similarly, that which is toxic and contemporary). Suspended rubber curtains and blue gum trees move by means of human activated fans, bringing awareness to the systems that circulate dust around the world and the impact on our bodies of these cycles.

Nina Barnett and Jeremy Bolen have been collaborating since 2015. With a focus on forms of visibility and knowledge production, their work and research spans a wide array of phenomena, from neutrinos to dust storms, and often incorporates research and practitioners from fields outside of art including physics, anthropology, mathematics and architecture. With an emphasis on modes of sensing and sensory archives, they employ various filmmaking and installation strategies that create immersive and interactive experiences for participants. Their collaborative work has been exhibited widely with recent exhibitions and screenings in Johannesburg, Lima, Mexico City, Bilbao and Chicago.

This exhibition is presented by POOL and made possible through the support of the Origins Centre, Klingspor Abrasives, edition~verso and Georgia State University.

Origins Centre, at the University of the Witwatersrand, is a public museum and interactive space that explores the origins of humanity and art in Africa. Surrounded by contemporary art installations that help visualize the past, the museum reviews ancient African archaeological finds and rock art traditions.

POOL is a Johannesburg based not-for-profit art organization that supports artists and curators through collaboration, commissioning, and the production and presentation of new work.

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