

barsa

Jack Roberts

Bloem

22 gener - 19 febrer, 2026

an apple, peeled and roughly chopped, on a small plate.
a silver pen, with the owner's initials engraved on the side.

a book with a reddish brown cover, and golden letters on the front: *a history of the city of bloemfontein*.
a scarf, made of poor quality wool, folded and placed beside the book.

two coins, one stacked on top of the other.
a golden lock, placed around three quarters of the height of a white door.

outside the door, a gentle wind, coming from the sea, from an island.
inside, a man picks up a chunk of apple, and puts it in his mouth.

[jack roberts]

i.

*the sea is so heavy inside us
and i won't sleep tonight.
i have buckets of memory in a jar
that i keep for days and nights like these*

– mxolisi nyezwa, *sea*

ii.

in the winter of 1913, south african journalist / editor / secretary of south african native national congress (an org founded in 1912 in bloemfontein and later anc), sol. plaatje (1876-1932), is said to have been moved by the spectacular cruelty of the sa government's land act that he cycled across parts of the orange free state to document its effects on the people, the animals & landscape. the famous cycling tour is a fiction, a well intentioned origin story. the spectacle a fact, scar in the geography.

iii.

the land is old / the society is new – lesego rampolokeng, #movement/soldierslament

iv.

plaatje, moving and conversing with people across the semi-arid vast lands of the orange free state, was often stunned to death by the catastrophe and carelessness with which the land act was carried out. his observations, later published in 1916 as *Native Life in South Africa*, would freeze this moment. written during his travels by sea to england with the sannc to implore the british gov to intervene on behalf of black south africa.

v.

only the sea can tell the full account of the south africa england romance. a brutal romance of bodies in water. what did the british navy see while patrolling the waters of the cape in the 1830s? what could they see? what would they have permitted themselves to see? & be in the treacherous waters that would greedily swallow rev isaac williams wauchope & his men inside *mendi* of the south african native labour contingent (sanlc).

vi.

*remember the saying of the old people:
"Nothing comes down, without coming down."*

– s.e.k. mqhayi, *sinking of the mendi*

vii.

ityala aliboli.

[vusumzi nkomo]

It is advised that one reads each phrase twice before moving on to the successive phrase:

- a. it may well be that there lies an element of parochialism yet every history is the story that highways can tell
- b. follow the Gap cross where the journey on the old roads that go by but these will be the pastimes of an exile
- c. will return to a home whose routes if not roads are as aged if not as old as these
- d. followed the road-maker and the bridge-builder until a small portion of their story is told here
- e. the early tracks are lost but can be found by searching yet be found
- f. some unskilled hand must first turn the rough soil before there can be a garden
- g. from a reading of these pages the impulse is conveyed to tell the story as it must yet be told then the rough but loving labour spent on them will not have been in vain

[jack roberts]

Works

Wall

Untitled
2025
Paper, linen, artist's frame
23.5 x 12.5 cm

Floor

Untitled
2025
Watercolour and gouache on linen
60 x 6 cm

Untitled
2025
Watercolour and gouache on linen
60 x 6 cm

Untitled
2025
Wood
16.5 x 20.5 cm

Untitled
2025
Paper, linen, artist's frame
16 x 18 cm