

Discovery, 2016

Antoinette Karsten

Mixed media on canvas, 91,5x122cm

Materials: Charcoal, pastels, rooibos tea, metal, acrylic paint, ink

This work with is a response to my own process of immigration and discovery of a new country and its natural assets.

I used to collect insects as a child, which makes me look a little closer at the creatures in this new world, and this connection with my distant past gives the project a sense of nostalgia, added to further by the fact that we left Africa behind for new adventures.

Just as the early settlers discovered and documented the wonders of the land, so I am also doing my own 'settling' into the country by this process of research and observation of all that is new.

My choice of materials supports this theme. Rooibos tea is a common and nutritious African drink and remedy, used since childhood in many families. For me it has nurturing, comforting and healing associations. I used its strong stain properties to create an antiqued base for this work, like the brittle paper in the journals of first explorers. The use of Australian maps (relevant to the distribution area of the particular beetle), is symbolic of our personal exploration of the geographic region, while tribal African patterning on the metal 'shield' (that forms the body/exoskeleton of the insect), symbolically connects this new world with to the country of my birth. It is as if I see the Australian beetle through an African filter, tinted with a lifetime of memories and perceptions.

My love for and history of working with metal is also incorporated in the embossed wings, and the metal also reflects the weight or importance of our current process of change and adaptation. I also layered in some illuminating wording; referring to the scientific name (formal script) of the particular type of beetle (Christmas beetle), as well as the IsiZulu name (informal script, native South African tribal language) for the closest related African beetle in the region of my childhood, where I made my first entomological discoveries. These two terms are both equally exotic, and communicate the idea that the process that I am in is loaded with deeper meaning and varied knowledge. The choice of font style reflects the contrast between tribal/traditional and modern/academic life, a constant interplay in the life of the modern African living in Australia

The stamped pattern of traditional African Shwe-shwe fabric in the negative space adds a final layer of emotional memory to the work.