

A TRIBUTE TO ANDREW MEINTJES

Presented by The Goodman Gallery

Andrew Meintjes described himself as a camera maker and industrial designer, photographer and digital printmaker, but in October 2004, three months before his 50th birthday, when armed robbers murdered him in his Johannesburg studio, tribute was paid to him as an artist, inventor and superbly skilled craftsman.

Andrew's passion for photography was kindled as a child when his father set up family slide shows, taught him the workings of a Nikon and introduced him to his grandfather's metal workshop, where he made his first tripod, aged twelve. After being expelled from St Stithians and while training as a light current electrical apprentice based in Hillbrow, he shot an extensive street-portrait portfolio which he presented to his early mentor and icon, David Goldblatt, for a critique.

David recognised Andrew's giftedness and helped him select the portfolio for his acceptance into the Michaelis School of Fine Art (UCT). Their friendship was to last for the rest of Andrew's life.

In 1980, after his 4-year stint in Graphic Design at Michaelis (where he stubbornly submitted photographs for every assignment, including life drawing) and another year as a demonstrator in photography, he set up a studio in Cape Town. The same year he was exhibited at the South African National Gallery in *5 Young Photographers*. A year later he held a solo exhibition, *Public Holidays*, at the Market Photo Gallery in Johannesburg.

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The design and manufacture of Pincam, a commercial 35mm pin-registered still-animation camera for the audio-visual industry in 1985 was a benchmark precursor to his Panfield, a 4 x 5" field camera, which was first marketed in 1987 (seventy six of which he sold to architectural and interior design photographers in Europe, Australia and the US. David Goldblatt was one of his earliest investors, buying the hand-manufactured Panfield, a hybrid design that David described as "the best of its kind ever made anywhere". Pincam and Panfield established Andrew, at 32, as the only camera designer and maker in the southern hemisphere.

In 1995 he designed and partially installed a camera obscura in the roof of Museum Africa for the Bensusan Museum of Photography, the project finally stalling due to budget restraints before the massive lens was cut and ground.

He then moved straight into designing and manufacturing a uniquely sculptural 40-watt per channel stereo amplifier followed by a carbon-fibre tracking rig – a 12m, jointed, camera-carrying arm – used in the film and advertising industry for freezing images of moving cars in a motion-blurred landscape.

In 2000 he set up a computer and digital-image studio to print exhibitions for artist photographers. This was his greatest commercial success, but more significantly, his photographic collaborations with Tracy Rose and Katherine Smith among others, led to a serious re-engagement with his own photography. By 2002 he was shooting hyper-real, large-format

negatives of downtown Johannesburg and documenting the development of Constitution Hill. His death interrupted the series *Brixton Moments*, quiet, late afternoon images of the Brixton Tower from surrounding suburbs.

Emergent young photographers and interns from the Market Theatre Photography Workshop benefited from Andrew's generosity and determination to share his passion and skills. Not least of whom was his right-hand man, Andile Komenisi, a director in Andrew's business, who not only had his photographs published, but who also learned to manufacture cameras and rigs and become a whiz-kid in scanning and digital printing.

Nadine Hutton wrote in Andrew's *Mail & Guardian* obituary: "Meintjes was an inventor, photographer, artist and printing legend. He was a photographer's best friend and famous among us – a Photoshop jockey who could whip any badly exposed negative into shape. Pushing the limits, he dragged out the shadow detail and found the highlights. We took the pictures and Meintjes painted them."

Venue: *Ntsikana Gallery, Monument*



Mast, Free State, 2003, pigment print, 30 x 40 cm



Bndge and Johannesburg, 2003, pigment print on cotton paper, 64 x 125.6cm



360° panorama, Constitution Hill, 2004, pigment print on cotton paper, 40.5 x 240cm









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Self portrait (for *Jack in Johannesburg*). Assisted by Andile Komanisi, 2004, pigment print on cotton paper, 104 x 74cm