

PAUL EMMANUEL

TRANSITIONS

MUSEUM EXHIBITION CONCEPT DOCUMENT & MEDIA KIT



art
source
south africa



TRANSITIONS

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Museum exhibition concept document & media kit

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TRANSITIONS

*... copying my own photographic recordings of transient moments in
a vain attempt to uncover what really happened ...*

*Conversations on the Transience of Light
(Transitions booklet, Art Source, 2008)*

In late 2004 I was exploring how the military influenced and perpetuated notions of masculinity in South Africa. One morning, while thinking about moments of *change*, I decided to photograph an actual military recruit head shaving while it was happening – to witness to an unfolding drama. After some research, I discovered that there were only two remaining military bases in South Africa which still perform this obligatory ‘rite of passage’ on their premises, one in Oudtshoorn and the other, Third South African Infantry Battalion (3SAI) in Kimberley. I phoned the Kimberley base, spoke to the Officer-in-Command and arranged a visit to photograph head shavings from the January 2005 intake.

I remember feeling apprehensive of what I would find. I did not do military service. I only had references to military experiences told to me by my older brother and friends, who described their head shaving experiences of the apartheid military regime of the 1980s – their stories of feeling dehumanised, lots of shouting, indifference, bigotry and fear.

Instead, I found a very different setting ... quiet lawns with well tended flower beds full of roses. Lines of recruits waiting patiently. No shouting. No authoritarianism. No evidence of the violent breaking down of the human spirit. Compared with the horror stories related to South Africa’s past, the equanimity of the scene was arresting. I was spellbound.

These liminal moments of transition, when a young man either voluntarily – or is forced to – let go of one identity and take on a new identity as State Property with an assigned Force Number, prompted me to ask many questions: What was I actually witnessing? What is a “Rite of Passage” and how have similar “rituals” helped to form and perpetuate identities and belief systems throughout history? Why was I so powerfully drawn to and transfixed by these dramatic spectacles of subtle change and moments of suspended possibility and impossibility?

And so began an intensely reflexive outward and inward journey, in and beyond my studio, which was to last four long years ...

Paul Emmanuel 2008

Liminal moments in shifting white male identity.

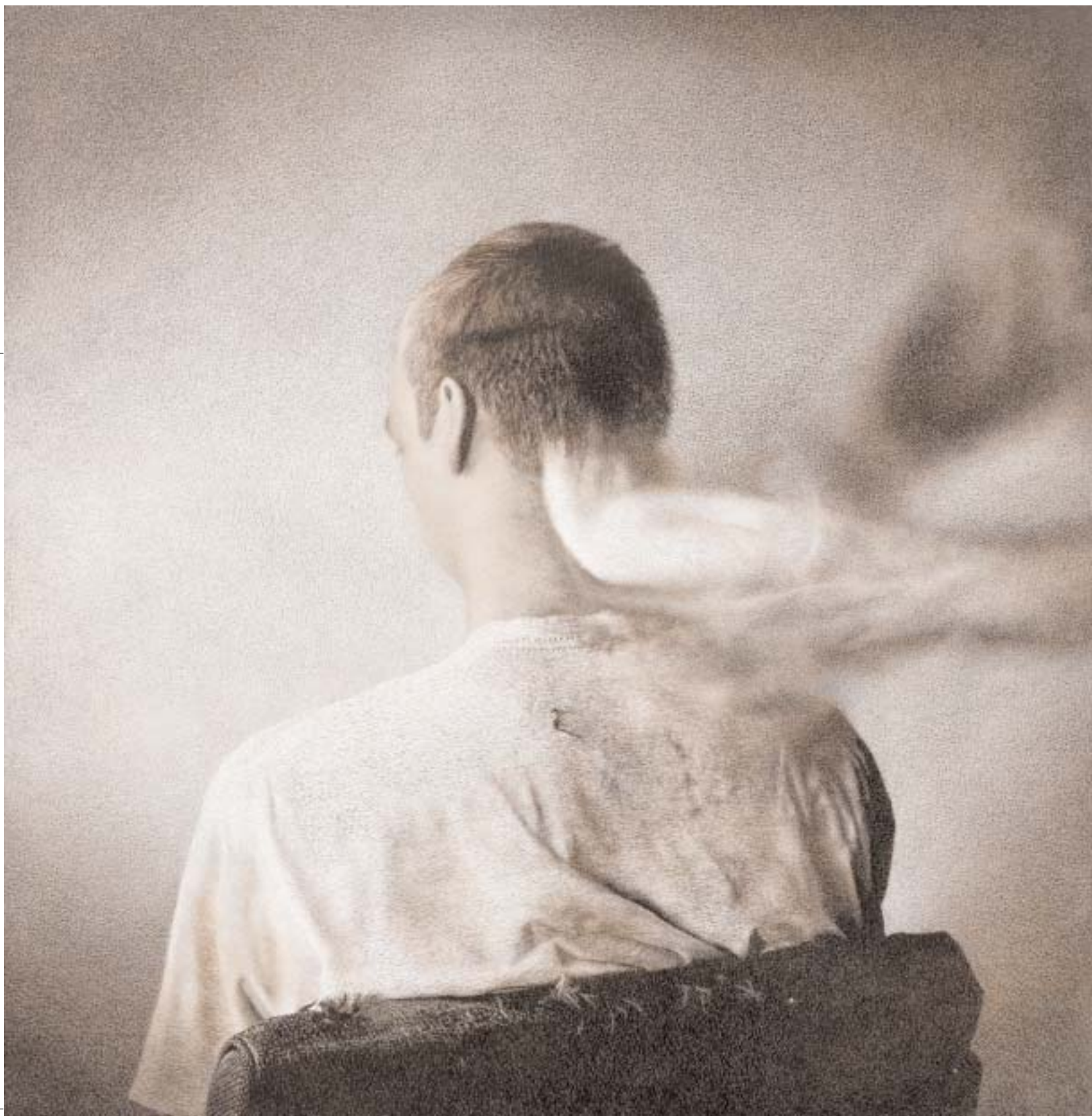
BACKGROUND TO THE WORK

In previous and concurrent works, namely *The Lost Men Project* and *after-image*, the artist produced installations and a major drawing engaged with public and private loss, memory and constructions of male identity. His interest in the 'documentary' nature of photography and the printmaking concept of leaving impressions, have informed new works over the past three years.

CONCEPT

A photograph is only a fragment, and with the passage of time its moorings become unstuck. It drifts away into a soft abstract pastness, open to any kind of reading.

SUSAN SONTAG, *ON PHOTOGRAPHY*, p.71





Transitions comprises a series of five ostensibly 'photographic' works which, when examined closely, are revealed as sensitively hand-drawn, photo-realist sequences of images. These film-like progressions obsessively capture liminal moments of five transitory stages in life.

A sixth work titled **3SAI: A Rite of Passage** – a 14 minute film produced by the artist – documents the head shaving of new recruits at the Third South African Infantry Battalion (3-SAI) in Kimberley. This is one of two South African military training camps which still performs the obligatory hair shaving of army recruits when they join the South African National Defence Force. For the artist, these moments which he observed, raised a number of questions. During South Africa's Apartheid era, obligatory head shaving was an enforced rite of passage for thousands of white male conscripts. This film extends the content of the second of the five drawings.



The remaining four drawings individually explore liminal experiences within a society and how these resonate with the artist. Unidentifiable men subjected to a transition of identity through different processes and in different contexts – the "ritualistic" stripping of one identity, and the apparent unresisting acceptance of another identity. These societal markers have particular relevance and meaning to the artist as a young, white, gay South African male.

PROCESS

In an attempt to hold on to a significant and fleeting moment the artist has obsessively scratched away the black exposed and processed emulsion of photographic paper, drawing with a fine steel blade to carefully reveal, in a process of photo-realist rendering, every shadow, every highlight. Portentous events, (observed by the artist) – which take minutes in situ to capture on light sensitive material – (the photographs), are painstakingly recaptured, and have been drawn over a period of three years in his studio. The rust coloured mid-tones are revealed and derived from the photographic emulsion being partially worn away by little more than the weight of the blade.

The production of this body of work is a love-affair with concept and surface.

The production of the DVD art film (**3SAI A Rite of Passage**), involved the artist in extensive theoretical and practical research to develop the skills required and to enable him to collaborate professionally with a film production company.



THE EXHIBITION

The *Transitions* exhibition creates through a poignant visual and aural experience for the viewer, a contemplative space to meditate on transitory life stages. It aims to stimulate thoughts on patriarchy and poses questions around perceptions of masculinity, the passage of time and the human condition.

TRANSITIONS EXHIBITION PROVENANCE AND CONFIRMED FUTURE MUSEUM VENUES TO DATE

- Apartheid Museum Johannesburg, South Africa 27 Sept – 31 Dec 2008
- Oliewenhuis Art Museum. Bloemfontein, South Africa 15 Jan – 31 Mar 2009
- William Humphreys Art Museum Kimberley, South Africa. 15 April – 15 May 2009
- KwaZulu Natal Society of Arts (KZNSA) Durban, South Africa 2 June – 21 June 2009
- Albany History Museum, National Arts Festival Grahamstown, South Africa 2 – 11 July 2009
- Spier Gallery (Spier Estate) Stellenbosch, South Africa 26 Nov 2009 – 31 March 2010
- Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. Washington DC, USA 1 May – 30 Sept 2010
- Kunst:raum Sylt Quelle Foundation Sylt, Germany 1 Nov 2010 – 31 Feb 2011

Other major museum venues in Europe and the USA are being explored.

TRANSITIONS COMPRISES THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS:

- (1) **An enclosed, viewing space projecting an artists film entitled *3SAI: A Rite of Passage*.**
The viewer experiences this film in a separate viewing space. The High Definition film runs for approximately 14 minutes and includes a stereo soundtrack. This film both complements the touring museum exhibition but also functions as a single independent artwork.

Still from the film *3 SAI A Rite of Passage*. Image courtesy Format Digital Production © Paul Emmanuel 2008



(2) Exhibition of five large framed drawings. (Each drawing 730 x 3 050 mm framed)

The content of the works capture portentous moments over a passage of time. They depict unidentifiable male subjects of varying age – sometimes in traditional institutions, eg. the military, as well as religious and secular institutions which have shaped the way in which male identity has been defined; as seen in the work titled **(2)** – a sequence of five ostensibly ‘photographic’ images capturing moments during the head shaving of a young military recruit. This particular drawing depicts an unknown young man subjected to a transition of identity through a fast-paced head shaving process – the ritual stripping of one identity, and the unresisting acceptance of another identity. The military is an institution which has been instrumental in forming perceptions of masculinity, especially in Apartheid era South Africa. (Courtesy Spier Contemporary Collection).

Detail from (4)



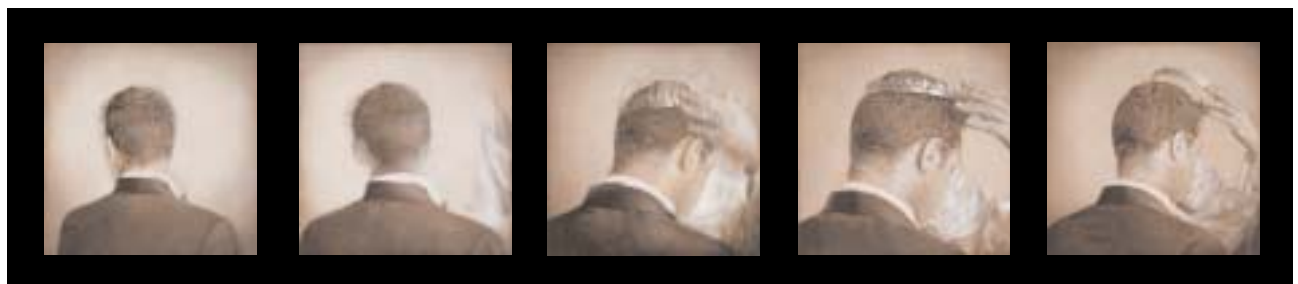
Original drawings, hand incised on exposed and processed colour photographic paper 730 x 3 050 each (framed) 2005 – 2008
(Courtesy Spier Contemporary Collection)



(1)



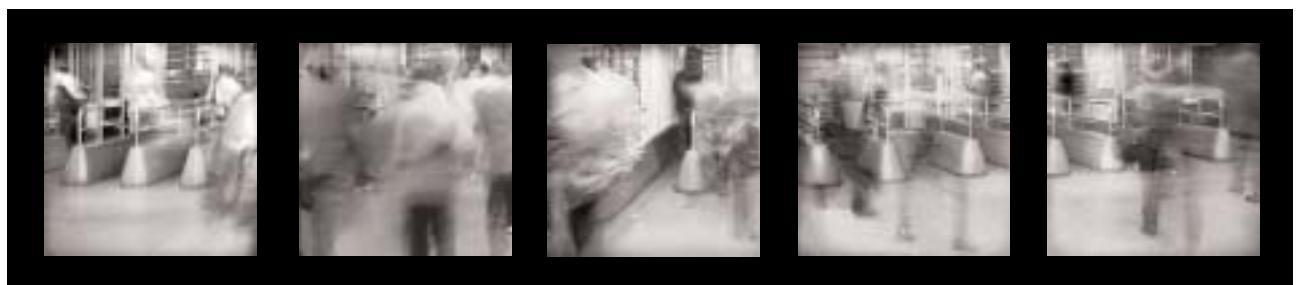
(2)



(3)



(4)



(5)

3SAI

A Rite of Passage



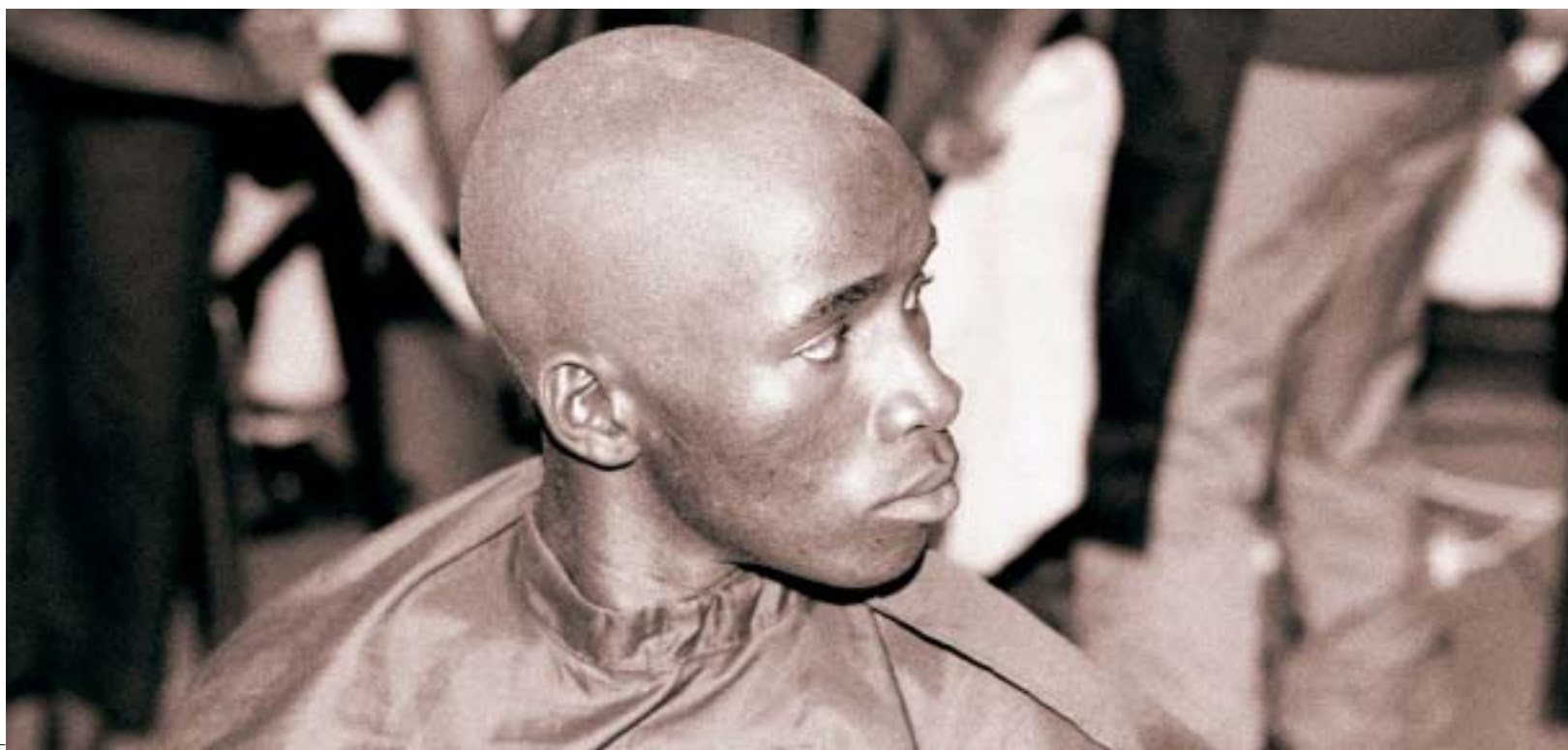
Says Stefanie Van de Peer, Co-director – Africa in Motion Film Festival:
“Congratulations, (on winning the jury prize)! We really loved your meditative film. The imagery and the silence, combined with the beautiful photography and the symbolic lyricism truly elevate the mundane action of shaving the heads of recruits.”

A FORMAT PRODUCTION AN ART SOURCE PROJECT A PAUL EMMANUEL FILM
PRODUCER MATTHEW KRAMER PRODUCTION MANAGER NATALIE STANGE
EDITOR MATTHEW KRAMER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ERAHN TAHOR, IVAN LEATHERS, ROBERT WILSON
PROJECT MANAGER LES COHN ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK WILBERT SCHUBEL
DIRECTOR AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER PAUL EMMANUEL
www.paulemanuel.net

This film explores rites of passage and transitions in male identity through a poignant visual and aural presentation of the head shaving “rituals” of young military recruits.

Originally conceived as an artwork for a touring museum exhibition, *3SAI: A Rite of Passage* is a short interpretive documentary in the non-verbal, experimental genre. The film has no plot or script. It is a poetic sequence of high quality footage documenting the head-shaving rituals of young recruits at the Third South African Infantry Battalion (3-SAI) in Kimberley, South Africa. Combined with evocative landscape imagery, time-lapse and slow-motion cinematography as well as a compelling soundtrack, this presentation of a universal male rite of passage asks us to re-examine these poignant moments of transition in masculine identity and consider what is captured and what is lost ...

Still from the film *3 SAI A Rite of Passage*. Image courtesy Format Digital Production © Paul Emmanuel 2008





Still from the film *3 SAI A Rite of Passage*. Image courtesy Format Digital Production © Paul Emmanuel 2008

FORMAT

3 SAI A Rite of Passage is a 1 080 p, single channel video projection (aspect ratio: 16 x 9) with stereo soundtrack. The output format of the film is a Blu-ray disc (PAL). The running time of the film is 13 minutes 58 seconds. Filmed in colour on 35 and 16 mm film as well as high definition digital formats with various scenes shot at up to 200 frames per second slowing the action to the required level. Evocative ambient sounds of razors and other head shaving paraphernalia are creatively combined with compelling sound design and composition.

The projection featured in the touring museum exhibition TRANSITIONS is supplied with a custom designed stereo sound and projection system.

Still from the film *3 SAI A Rite of Passage*. Image courtesy Format Digital Production © Paul Emmanuel 2008





Still from the film *3 SAI A Rite of Passage*. Image courtesy Format Digital Production © Paul Emmanuel 2008

SYNOPSIS

We open on the emptiness of the Gariep on the plains of the Karoo. The image is ambiguous. The ripples on the muddy water look like ripples in desert sand. The image is broken, violently, by the jolting voice of a loud military command. We cut to a line-up of young recruits waiting for their obligatory hair shaving at 3-SAI. We join the queue. We witness a monotonous sequence of indifferent head shavings. The industrial hum of an electric razor. The rhythm of a production line which increases in pace and intensity. Suddenly, at the peak of this syncopated spectacle, we are cast into a twilight realm of slow-time. We break through the military machine and witness a new head shaving in slow motion and in micro-close up format. There is now an intimacy and vulnerability that was not seen before – an altered state, abstracted, de-contextualised and open to interpretation. This then fades back into the contemplative spaces of the Gariep.

The work critically engages the medium of film itself in the way it plays with time, changing the possible meanings of an experience as time slows down. What is captured? What is lost?

To view the short promotional film (approx. 1 min)
and/or extracts from the final film (1 min 43 sec) online visit:

www.paulemanuel.net

3 SAI A Rite of Passage will be a feature of a traveling museum fine art exhibition entitled "*Transitions*" by the same artist, Paul Emmanuel. In this art exhibition, the artist will explore these themes using a variety of different media. It is planned to travel this exhibition, along with the film, to five fine art museums in South Africa, as well as to a series of international museum venues. The film, however, will also be independently marketed to selected relevant national and international film festivals and international fine art biennales.

PAUL EMMANUEL TRANSITIONS LITHOGRAPHIC SUITE

BACKGROUND TO THE TRANSITIONS PROJECT

Phase I

TRANSITIONS is a touring museum solo exhibition which has been shown at six national museum venues in South Africa. It is scheduled to travel Internationally over the next three to five years, including the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington DC. **TRANSITIONS** comprises a series of five ostensibly 'photographic' works which, when examined closely, are revealed as sensitively hand-drawn, photo-realist sequences of images. These film-like progressions obsessively capture liminal moments of five transitory stages in life.

A sixth work titled **3SAI: A RITE OF PASSAGE** – a 14 minute film produced by the artist – documents the head shaving of new recruits at the Third South African Infantry Battalion (3SAI) in Kimberley, South Africa. This film has been shown on a number of international film festivals and in 2009 was unanimously selected the winner by an international jury on the Africa in Motion Film Festival, Edinburgh. Initiated in collaboration with Art Source South Africa and managed by Les Cohn, **TRANSITIONS** now forms part of the Spier Collection, one of the largest collections of contemporary South African art.

Phase II

In 2009 work began on phase II of the *Transitions Project*. Paul Emmanuel started the production of a suite of hand drawn, hand printed lithographic series, with images based on **TRANSITIONS** concepts. Five *trptychs* (three images each) will be created over the next year. Each triptych will be hand printed by the artist in a limited edition of 35.



The technique applied to produce the lithographic images is *manière noire*, or “black method”. In the tradition of the old masters such as Rembrandt and Caravaggio, the artist works on a large flat limestone, slowly scratching the image into a layer of black ink with a blade, methodically working from dark to light. The completed image is inked up by hand and printed from the stone onto a 100% cotton archive-quality paper. The image on the stone is re-inked for each print. Each impression is an *original print*, as the artist has created each one by hand. Each print is signed and numbered by Emmanuel 1/35 to 35/35. After the edition is printed, the image on the stone is erased, thereby guaranteeing the edition’s integrity and rarity. Due to the time-consuming nature of the process, each triptych takes the artist about 3 to 6 months to complete, with the final triptych completed around the end of 2011.

Signed impressions from each editioned triptych by Paul Emmanuel are available for pre-purchase from Art Source South Africa.

A substantial book on TRANSITIONS will be published in early 2011. This publication will be a significant document and archive of the TRANSITIONS project. It will have texts by internationally recognised writers and the endorsement of prestigious institutions.

Selected commercial gallery exhibitions of the TRANSITIONS Prints and Multiples are planned for 2011 onwards.





Paul Emmanuel

Born in 1969 in Kabwe, Zambia, Emmanuel graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1993.

In 1997, The Ampersand Foundation made him the first recipient of the prestigious Ampersand Fellowship, which afforded him a three-month residency in New York. His first solo show in 2000 at the Open Window Gallery, Pretoria, was followed by three subsequent solo exhibitions in the Western Cape and Johannesburg in 2003 – 2005. In 2002, he was awarded first prize for AIR ON THE SKIN, in the Schumann-Sasol Wax Art Competition.

Emmanuel employs various media, including photography and film, to reveal layered visions concerned with his identity as a young white male living in post-apartheid South Africa.

In 2004, Phase I of his ephemeral memorial installation, THE LOST MEN PROJECT, was launched on the Grahamstown National Arts Festival main visual arts programme to public acclaim. In April 2007, phase II of this project took place in Maputo, Mozambique.

In September 2008, his touring museum exhibition entitled TRANSITIONS premiered at The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, featuring his critically acclaimed short film 3SAI: A RITE OF PASSAGE. In 2009 this short, non-verbal, experimental won the jury prize in the Short Film Competition at the 4th Africa-In-Motion Film Festival of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, UK. In the same year it was also officially selected for the 12th Antimatter International Film Festival in Victoria, Canada and the Design Indaba Expo National Film Festival in Cape Town, South Africa.

Emmanuel lives and works in Johannesburg.

Paul Emmanuel

1969 Born, Kabwe, Zambia

1988/93 BA Fine Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Solo exhibitions & public installations (c=catalogue)

- 2010-11 TRANSITIONS, Kunst:raum Sylt Quelle Foundation, Rantum, Sylt, Germany (c)
- 2010 TRANSITIONS, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington DC, USA (c)
- 2009-10 TRANSITIONS, Spier Old Wine Cellar Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa (c)
- 2009 TRANSITIONS, Albany Museum, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa (c)
- 2009 THE LOST MEN, Kunst Raum Sylt-Quelle, Rantum, Sylt, Germany
- 2009 TRANSITIONS, KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts, Durban, South Africa (c)
- 2009 TRANSITIONS, William Humphreys Art Gallery, Kimberley, South Africa (c)
- 2009 TRANSITIONS, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa (c)
- 2008 TRANSITIONS, Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg, South Africa (c)
- 2007 THE LOST MEN MOZAMBIQUE, Catembe Ferry Jetty, Maputo, Mozambique
- 2006 AFTER-IMAGE, Villa Arcadia, Johannesburg, South Africa (c)
- 2005 AFTER-IMAGE, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg, South Africa (c)
- 2005 AFTER-IMAGE, Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, South Africa (c)
- 2004 AFTER-IMAGE, University of Stellenbosch Art Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa (c)
- 2004 THE LOST MEN GRAHAMSTOWN, Monument Hill, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa (c)
- 2003 AIR ON THE SKIN, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2000 PAGES FROM CATHEXIS, Open Window Contemporary Art Gallery, Pretoria, South Africa

Selected group exhibitions, film screenings & events (c=catalogue)

- 2010 19th SÉQUENCE COURT-METRAGE INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL, Toulouse, France
- 2010 39th INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (c)
- 2009 4th AFRICA-IN-MOTION INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Filmhouse Cinema, Edinburgh, UK (c)
- 2009 ON MAKING: INTEGRATING APPROACHES TO PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH IN ART AND DESIGN, University of Johannesburg, South Africa (c)
- 2009 12th ANTIMATTER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Open Space Arts Centre, Victoria, Canada (c)
- 2009 ADDING SUBTRACTIONS, Fordsburg Artists' Studios, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2009 DESIGN INDABA EXPO NATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Cape Town International Convention Centre, South Africa (c)
- 2006 NAVIGATING THE BOOKSCAPE, ARTISTS BOOKS AND THE DIGITAL INTERFACE, (touring) Aardklop National Arts Festival, Potchefstroom, FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg, South Africa (c)
- 2004-7 WALDSEE 1944, (touring) Collegium Hungaricum, Berlin, Germany; 2B Galleria, Budapest, Hungary; Hebrew Union College Museum, New York, USA; Florida Holocaust Museum, USA; Hibel Museum, FAU-Jupiter, Florida, USA; Ben Uri Gallery, London, UK; Alper JCC, Miami, Florida, USA (c)
- 2003 THE AMPERSAND FOUNDATION, Warren Seibrits Modern and Contemporary, Johannesburg, South Africa (c)

- 2002 SCHUMANN-SASOL WAX ART COMPETITION, Sasolburg, South Africa (c)
- 2001 BAG FACTORY SHOW, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2000 AFTER NEW YORK, Civic Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1999 POSTCARDS FROM SOUTH AFRICA, Axis Gallery, New York, USA
- 1998 SOUTH AFRICAN PRINTMAKING, Stockholm, Sweden (c)
- 1997 BAG FACTORY GROUP EXHIBITION, Mexican Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa
- 1996 ARTISTS' BOOKS IN THE GINSBERG COLLECTION, Johannesburg Art Gallery, South Africa
- 1995 THE FIRST FOUR YEARS, Civic Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1994 OPEN BITE – A NEW LOOK AT INTAGLIO PRINTMAKING, Civic Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

Awards & Fellowships

- 2009 WINNER: BEST SHORT FILM – AFRICA-IN-MOTION SHORT FILM COMPETITION, Africa-in-Motion International Film Festival, Edinburgh International Film Festival, UK
- 2002 FIRST PRIZE: SASOL WAX ART COMPETITION, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1997 AMPERSAND FELLOWSHIP: AMPERSAND FOUNDATION, New York, USA
 Visiting artist & internship: Center for Book Arts, New York, USA
 Internship: Alma on Dobbin, New York, USA

Residencies

- 2009 KUNST:RAUM SYLT QUELLE FOUNDATION, Rantum, Sylt, Germany

Public & corporate collections

- Kunst:raum Sylt Quelle Foundation (Germany)
- William Humphreys Art Gallery (South Africa)
- First National Bank (South Africa)
- Spier Contemporary Collection (South Africa)
- Hollard Insurance Company Limited (South Africa)
- Johannesburg Securities Exchange (South Africa)
- Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)
- Gauteng Provincial Legislature (South Africa)
- Vodacom Limited (South Africa)
- MTN Limited (South Africa)
- Oliewenhuis Art Museum (South Africa)
- Sasol University of Stellenbosch Museum (South Africa)
- Pretoria Art Museum (South Africa)
- University of South Africa permanent collection (South Africa)
- Standard Bank (South Africa)
- SASOL Petroleum Company Limited (South Africa)
- South African Broadcasting Corporation Limited (South Africa)
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Chamalieres (France)

Solo catalogues & monographs

- 2008 TRANSITIONS. Texts by André Croucamp and Robyn Sassen. Art Source South Africa. Johannesburg, South Africa. (ISBN 978-0-620-41945-1)
- 2004 AFTER-IMAGE. Text by Julia Charlton. Paul Emmanuel. Johannesburg, South Africa. (ISBN 0-620-32295-0)



Art Source cc.

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Art Source South Africa are the project managers for all aspects of TRANSITIONS – an artists' project by Paul Emmanuel.

About Art Source South Africa

Art Source is a visual arts and culture consultancy occupying a unique niche within the contemporary South African arts sector. Launched in 2001 as a response to a gap in the rapidly maturing art market, Art Source handles an array of activities within the sector from fundraising and strategy development to curation, project development and management. It services a range of clients and interfaces between the worlds of cultural development at community and individual levels, corporate sponsors and sources of public donor funding. Specializing in strategic project development and career management of Fine Artists, Art Source South Africa has undertaken projects as diverse as contemporary visual art exhibitions, rural craft development projects, as well as initiated local and international artist exchanges which often include community outreach programmes.

Les Cohn:

Art Source cc (est. 2001) was established and is managed by Les Cohn, a qualified artist and an experienced arts administrator. She holds a BAFA from Michaelis School of Art, University of Cape Town and graduated with a H. Dip. in Fine Arts from the Technikon Witwatersrand (now University of Johannesburg). She was awarded a Technikon Merit Medal. Les Cohn gained a Diploma in Arts and Culture Management, from the P & DM School, Graduate School of Business, University of Witwatersrand. Les Cohn is a dynamic fine artist and arts project consultant well networked within the South African cultural sector. Her unique combination of qualifications, extensive experience in development and management positions, and various board connections, position her ideally to take a leading role in industry initiatives.

Taryn Cohn

After completing a BA Fine Art (hons) from the University of Stellenbosch, Taryn went on to obtain a Master of Philosophy in Cultural Development (under the co-supervision of Stellenbosch University's dept of Sociology, and the TWR's FADA – (under Kim Berman). Since 2002 she has worked in various capacities within the realm of arts management and cultural marketing. Her past projects and clients include, The Sasol wax art award, The Brett Kebble Art Award, The Zenex Foundation, Marketing Manager of Constitution Hill, among others. Her areas of speciality include marketing and communications for art and development projects, financial management, project management and strategy.

The transition to new perspectives

WILLIAM DOBSON

ON FIRST impression it would appear you are looking at five black-and-white pictures. On closer inspection of Paul Emmanuel's exhibition, *Transitions*, it transpires that what you are faced with is a series of pictures portraying the transitions that face the white male in modern South Africa.

Exploring life's progression from circumcision to old age, the works have been obsessively incised by hand into photographic paper, exposed and processed, thus rendered completely black.

The exhibition also includes a 14-minute film of men having their heads shaved as part of their initiation into the army – a rite of passage that shifts identity from civilian to state property. Although conscription has ended and this change is voluntary, the artist asserts that this idea remains relevant to a society in which the white male is battling to figure out his role.

The use of different media is indicative of Emmanuel, who is unable to categorise himself into a single discipline. For him, the medium and the process are as important as the artwork itself.

While the pictures are based on photographs he has taken, the effort to create the final work – months spent scratching with a steel blade "into the black paper" – is, he says, as significant as the end result.

It adds depth and richness, as well as emphasising that the ephemeral images are in fact created over months, years and lifetimes. For instance, one image shows the coronation of a man of Lebanese extraction at his wedding, a cultural phenomenon common in families of Middle Eastern origin, as Emmanuel himself is, and another a scene

from a grandfather's 90th birthday celebration.

There is in Emmanuel's work a sense of liminality – that idea of ambiguity, openness and indeterminacy, that disorientation leading to new perspectives. Identity is in a constant state of flux, especially for white males in a country such as South Africa.

Emmanuel sees a struggle to embrace the radical changes,



rites of passage: Artist Paul Emmanuel explores the shifting identity of white males in his exhibition *Transitions*.

positive and negative, happening all the time, a fear of something new. The idea of patriarchy has been a dominating influence, yet now there is a dichotomy.

There has been a huge shift to freer and looser ideals, yet as men and women reevaluate their roles, conservative values try to assert and establish themselves.

This is reflected in Emmanuel's work – images of rites

and rituals that seem often to have been almost predetermined, such as circumcision, marriage, and death.

He points to a society which on one hand has begun to re-embrace religion in a conservative manner as an affront to globalisation, yet on the other is beginning to come to terms and be comfortable with its multicultural identity and other previous taboos.

There is a duality in Emmanuel's thinking. While his artwork is intimate and incredibly personal, through its very nature it becomes collective.

He strives for timelessness, and hopes that despite the exhibition being a reflection on his life and how he relates to society, it will be as relevant in 100 years as it is today, causing people to stop, think, and perhaps even change their perceptions.

He points to the image of a baby's circumcision, an image that in previous generations would have evoked very different associations to now – in the past to religion, now seen as a cosmetic or hygienic procedure.

Again, the same is true of the head-shaving ritual, something that will resonate in a manner different for men over 40, who lived through conscription, from that of young men for whom joining the army is voluntary.

Transitions is to be displayed in the Smithsonian National Museum of Art in Washington later this year. The short film, *3SAI: A Rite Of Passage*, won the jury prize in the Short Film Competition at the fourth Africa-In-Motion Film Festival at the Edinburgh International Film Festival.

The exhibition is on display at the Spier Old Wine Cellar Gallery until March 31.

● See www.spierwines.co.za or www.paulmanuel.net



ART PIG

Alex Dodd

One of the juicier cultural by-products to emerge out of Damien Hirst's recent \$198-million Sotheby's auction was a crisp and catty debate between art critic Robert Hughes and writer Germaine Greer. When Hughes took a stand against Hirst, expressing the unpopular view that 'art as spectacle loses meaning', Greer went for the jugular, claiming that Hirst's work was beyond Hughes's analytical reach, and that his criticism of Hirst's ego-maniacal Bond Street greed fest was quite simply missing the point. 'Hughes doesn't understand a good deal of art – doesn't get Basquiat or Baselitz, for example,' wrote Greer in *The Guardian*. 'What is being presented as aesthetic sensibility is, in fact, moralism, of a kind that has always bedevilled innovative artists.' Personally, I think it is Greer who is missing the point.

Just because lazy, hollow installations and mass-produced art objects are the flavour of the moment doesn't mean we have to accept them in bent and cowered silence. In an age of the radical dematerialisation of the art object, in which concept tends to be king, I celebrate Hughes's courage in boldly pointing out that the emperor is wearing no clothes. 'No wonder so many business big shots go for Hirst: his work is both simple-minded and sensationalist, just the ticket for newbie collectors,' he writes. Hughes is the only writer I know of to have pointed out the

gross absurdity of Hirst's prices – \$12-million for a dead shark, \$10 000 for a mere photograph of a diamond-encrusted skull – when half the hungry world would be happy to have a bit of old pickled shark fin for supper.

To drive home her point, Greer satirises Hughes's love of Lucian Freud, jeering at the fact of him being impressed by the laboriousness of Freud's work. 'Ha ha ha!' jeers Greer from her invisible throne of contemporary derisiveness. But again, I'm with Hughes on this matter of labour. I may well be a child of the 20th century, but personal labour in art often impresses me.

Evidence of sweat excites me – even more so of late, for recently I have witnessed two major art prizes (the MTN New Contemporaries and the Sasol Wax Art Award) being awarded to the most chilly, unaffected installations I have had the displeasure and bewilderment of encountering.

(As for the Sasol Wax Art Awards evening, pass the spittoon, Sheila. I haven't endured a more awful evening since that ostrich farm in the Karoo, New Year's Eve circa 1999. I thought nothing could be more dismal than the table ar-

rangements, which agglomerated mirror balls with wooden hearts and cabbages dunked in wax, until the deputy minister of Arts and Culture, Ntombazana Botha, opened her mouth. It was all down hill from there.)

But just as I was about to drown in a small flagon of post-modern despair, I set out on the M1 South to experience Paul Emmanuel's current exhibition, *Transitions*, at the Apartheid Museum. A continuation of Emmanuel's lifelong engagement with issues of masculinity, this exhibition is an exploration of 'moments of shifting white male identity and liminal spaces'. Simultaneously humble and majestic, it entirely restored my faith in art's capacity to awaken and transform. And left me with a desire to proselytize and punt, to encourage every likeable and deserving citizen of this mad republic to haul their asses down south for a dose of real profundity. If it was evidence of hard labour

that I was after, I found it there in Emmanuel's insanely dedicated drawing technique – the exhibition took the artist over four years to research and create. Not that personal effort is my sole criteria in assessing the power of an artwork. But when it is unavoidably, irrevocably evident, it does somehow make a difference.



Paul Emmanuel, *Crowning*. Detail from *Transitions 3*.

Transitions comprises a series of five ostensibly 'photographic' sequences of images which, when examined closely, are revealed to be drawings which have been sensitively hand-incised into photographic paper with a blade. You can't help but marvel at the madness of sheer painstaking application. There is something miraculous in the object that stands before you – something magical, sublime and beyond the ordinary. But this superior level of draftsmanship is something I have come to expect from Emmanuel. It was his film, *3 SAI A Rite of Passage*, that left me wordless. For he has managed to translate that excruciatingly sensitized essence of his drawings into a whole new medium. The film documents the head shaving of new recruits at the Third South African Infantry Battalion in Kimberley, one of two national military training camps, which still performs the obligatory hair shaving of new recruits. With its haunting soundtrack, it succeeds in taking the viewer out of flat documentary reality for 12 perfect minutes – and in that sublime stretch of time outside of time, the world becomes charged with emotional and symbolic resonances that render even the fleeting expression on a young boy's face quite unforgettably nuanced. You're in a stark mess hall in Kimberley circa 2008, but it might as well be *Death in Venice*.



3 SAI A Rite of Passage

film: Paul Emmanuel

review: Mary Corrigan

It wasn't the typical setting for a film preview. With an array of garden, lounge and dining chairs lined up in front of a white wall that would function as the screen, Paul Emmanuel had created a makeshift cinema in his loft apartment in Milpark for the screening of *3 SAI A Rite of Passage*, which is part of his *Transitions* exhibition at the Apartheid Museum.

Haunted by the *Hansie* movie preview, the small clutch of arts journalists gathered in Emmanuel's loft apartment looked apprehensive. It also didn't help knowing that the discipline of film is a completely new avenue for Emmanuel. He is a fine artist by trade, and though he has five solo exhibitions under his belt, he is not known as a video artist – the designation for those who employ film as their medium of expression.

Video art has experienced a bit of a revival on the South African art scene. The Spler Contemporary Award exhibition earlier this year boasted quite an array of video artworks and the exhibition that Simon Njami curated for the

Jo'burg Art Fair, called *As You Like It*, was dominated by video art. Almost every important exhibition of late has featured a video artwork. It's an immediate form of expression that demands viewers' attention in ways that static objects can't. But it is mostly prized by artists for its capacity to represent altered states. Its dynamic nature allows artists to visibly map change. This is probably why it appealed to Emmanuel; his new exhibition is focused on transformation, the shifts in male identity.

Billed as a cinematic art film *3 SAI* (the Third South African Infantry Battalion), *A Rite of Passage* promised to be something different from the outset. And it didn't disappoint. Emmanuel is an obsessive art maker; not in the sense that he is simply fixated with his craft but the meticulous and detailed etchings for which he is known are clearly the result of a compulsive hand and thinker. How was this approach going to translate into film? And, more importantly, how did Emmanuel concede control of his art? After all, creating a film is not a solo project; ultimately, its success depends on the chemistry between all its co-creators. Perhaps this is why Emmanuel's art film took so long to craft. It is mind-blowing to think that it took Emmanuel and his team more than



Parallel worlds: A still from Paul Emmanuel's film, *A Rite of Passage*, which juxtaposes the abstract with reality.

Fine artist shows a flare for video

Artist Paul Emmanuel's 12-minute film is both an intellectual and aesthetic triumph

four years to produce just 12 minutes of film. Drawing from art, photography and the documentary film genres, Emmanuel's film probes the politics of male identity through a series of non-narrative vignettes that move between images of vast and barren landscapes to army recruits being inducted into the South African National Defence Force. In this way Emmanuel juxtaposes reality with abstraction or truth with lyricism.

Most video art tends to draw on performance art: a set of artificially constructed or contrived actions that are designed to elude meaning. Emmanuel's film, however, captures slices of reality. The individuals in his film may be performers but they are presented as real-life folk undergoing change.

The poetic or lyrical imagery depicting picturesque landscapes that are spliced in between creates these two parallel worlds: one of control and order and another of wild, sensual abandon. They could also signify the contrast between one's empirical and emotional experiences of the world. Neither realm is static, however, even the seemingly untouched natural landscapes.

Using time-lapse photography techniques, Emmanuel shows this outwardly unchanging topography to be in a constant state of flux. In contrast, young men are shown

having their hair shaven as they enter the army in real time, presenting a different kind of shift.

The two worlds aren't necessarily separate and, as the film progresses, elements in the young men's lives filter into or are echoed in, the empty landscapes, such as the physical connection between blond hair falling and the honey strands of grass blowing in the wind.

Whatever compromises Emmanuel may or may not have made in assuming this new medium, the end result is impressive. The film's intellectual or conceptual dimensions are challenging, stimulating and rich: probing white identity, maleness, race and, on a more transcendental level, the link between our cognitive and emotional selves. Emmanuel has also achieved what no South African video artist has to date: he has created an artwork which fully utilises or exploits the qualities that only film can offer.

So many artists today are wont to employ various mediums in their art making, including photography, digital art and film, but more often than not they have no technical mastery over their medium. How can they when they flit from paint to photography and then to sculpture? And though the value of art is no longer measured by the artist's proficiency with his

or her medium, one can't deny the impact that a well-crafted object can have on the overall communication. This is why big-wig artists such as Damien Hirst pay folk to make his art for him rather than fiddling with mediums that he is not completely au fait with.

With *3 SAI A Rite of Passage*, however, Emmanuel has created an artwork that has value as a cinematic initiative and not just as an art object. Most video artworks in this country have absolutely no visual appeal; they are completely concept driven. But *3 SAI A Rite of Passage* is as aesthetically pleasing as it is intellectually exciting.

□ *3 SAI A Rite of Passage* is part of *Transitions*, an exhibition by Paul Emmanuel that is showing at the Apartheid Museum until December