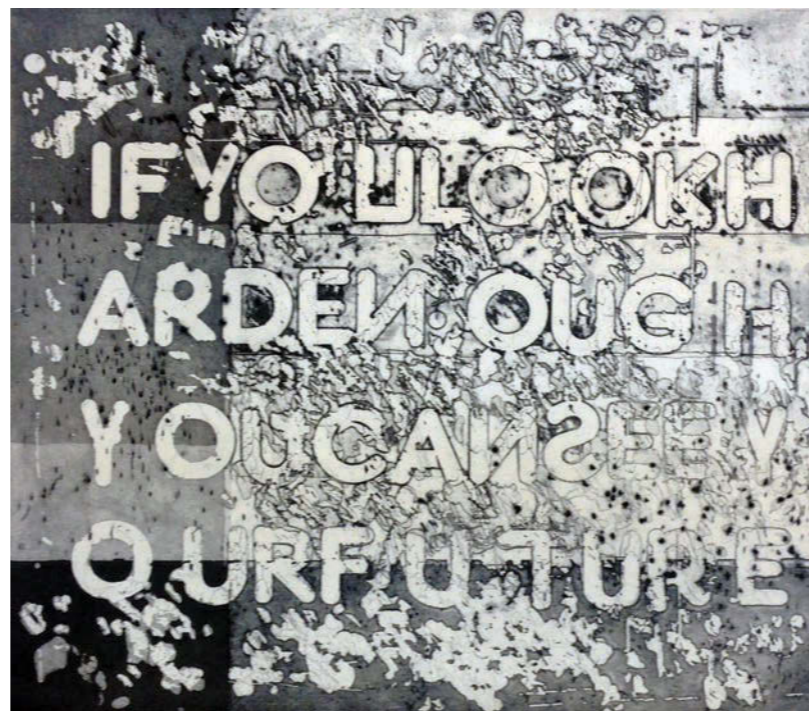


Early in his career, Stephen Hobbs recognised the need to produce and publish across the disciplines of artistic production, curatorial practice and cultural management. Hobbs held his debut solo exhibition at David Krut Projects in 2010, entitled *Fool's Gold*, a multi-media exhibition in which Hobbs encouraged the viewer to see the points in between the points by exposing the multi-faceted potential the city (Johannesburg) holds, beyond what is obvious to the naked eye. Hobbs continues to work with David Krut Projects (DK Projects) and the David Krut Workshop (DKW), with his work featuring in, among many others, both *The Benediction of Shade* (Cape Town, 2013) and *The Benediction of Shade II* (Johannesburg, 2014), as well as in *Johannesburg in Print* at the Carnegie Hall in New York in 2014.

Stephen Hobbs – Permanent Culture runs from 20 February until 25 April 2015.



ABOVE *If you look hard enough*; 2015, aquatint, open bite and drypoint, 31 x 30.8cm
FRONT *Dappled bunker*; 2015, hardground etching and sugarlift aquatint, 54.2 x 42cm
INSIDE *In the canopy*; 2014, woodcut, 127 x 96.5cm

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DAVID KRUT
PROJECTS



STEPHEN HOBBS
PERMANENT CULTURE

STEPHEN HOBBS – PERMANENT CULTURE 20.02.2015 – 25.04.2015

Three years ago, Stephen Hobbs began an investigation, starting with a study of the characteristics of the David Krut Projects space in Newlands. This extended outwards, from the canopy of the Newlands forest to the concealed First and Second World War bunkers and gun batteries of the Cape Peninsula. His perennial preoccupation with the politics of town planning and urban design (particularly in African cities like Johannesburg) along territorial and defensive lines has underpinned the exploration. However, the project has ultimately been rooted in the milieu of the Cape. David Krut Projects is pleased to present the resulting solo exhibition, Hobbs' first in Cape Town since 2009.

Permanent Culture represents an elaborate multi-media revelry in the optical and psychological effects of camouflage and the historical role the arts have played in creating deception in the battlefield. Equally, the exhibition is an artistic analysis of the isolated nature of the gallery and suburban surrounds relative to the socio-political transformation of the Cape in the past 400 years.

Drawing from extensive field investigations and archival research, Hobbs' new series of etchings and large-scale woodcut prints make deliberate use of disruptive patterns and blurring to encourage a reading between the built and the natural. The illusionistic aspects of this interrogation extend beyond the walls of the gallery into the environment of the Montebello Design Centre. The near-domestic charm of the interior of the gallery is both enhanced and lampooned by various 'weapons' of mass deception, in the form of sculptural and installation features. The strong presence of camouflage in this body of work emphasises its value, for Hobbs, as a metaphor for understanding tactical consciousness in urban planning. This is particularly relevant in Cape Town, which retains in its structure the militaristic logic of its design over centuries – issues of inclusion/exclusion, visibility/marginalisation, the politics of separation and attendant power relations are evident in the shaping of both the built and natural environment.

The accompanying publication, *The Hobbsian Line*, represents an inquiry which draws on Justin Fox's extensive knowledge of both World Wars, particularly in Africa, and Hobbs' artistic interpretation of the local relics that stand testament to that time. Fox's piece of creative non-fiction, illustrated by Hobbs, gives an anecdotal perspective to the research that provided the catalyst to this project. It also offers insight into the personal stories underlying Hobbs' conceptual practice, and the unadulterated masculine intensity of an obsession with war and military paraphernalia.

– JACQUELINE NURSE, JANUARY 2015

STEPHEN HOBBS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF *PERMANENT CULTURE*

Coming from Johannesburg the overwhelming sense of permanence of history in this part of South Africa, the Cape, poses a challenge to the adaptability of one's work (which finds continuity in the rapid, ruined state of the City of Gold). And when concrete is one's preference, nature's abundance doesn't help either. Hence, this project has rambled over a number of years, shapeshifting, but with a central focus on reconnaissance: the mapping of structures, politics and behaviours concealed and revealed in and amongst the foliage. Around midway through this investigation, the narrative solution was to embrace the notion of deception in relation to the tactical design of defences along the coastline and the great wars of the 20th century. The fact that in South Africa not a single shot was fired in anger throughout this long period attests to the folly of over-preparedness, in this case for war.

An encounter with a nine-inch cannon, with its mapping rooms, tunnels and storage bunkers nestled nearby in a lush landscape, is a trigger for imagining (or reimagining) any number of defensive operations. That these relics are virtually invisible in the landscape today creates even more intrigue. The resultant archive of visits, tours, walks and photographs has given rise to a turn in practice: where structures compete for recognition in relation to dappled light and organic shapes, what's left is an attempt to dazzle the viewer, to deceive, confuse, disrupt and obscure.

The relevance of this shift in approach is rooted in efforts through the ages to employ artists and designers to create illusion in the battlefield; from fields of inflatable tanks and *trompe l'oeil* landscapes to fake tree look-out posts and *papier-mâché* soldier's heads ... the examples are endless. These efforts speak to the relationship between aesthetics, invention, innovation and technology, and also to an extremely rich and vibrant, but equally cynical, function for and of art.

For David Krut Projects the starting point of an exhibition is the development of a series of graphic works, and in this case the works began as a formal exploration of ideas borne from research conducted in Cape Town. In parallel, outside of the workshop, various large-scale projects of an entirely different nature have been unfolding. One of these is the architectural commission for the Craftsmen's Ship building development in the Maboneng neighbourhood of Johannesburg, which began two years ago. More recently, the possibility of a dramatic site-specific audio-visual treatment for the SAS *Somerset*, a boom defense vessel moored in the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town, became an option.

In thinking of the prints, there is value in connecting to the ethos of producing multiples, a mechanism for getting one's work out into the world. Over time the

public-ness of the architectural work and outdoor installations evolve an understanding for the specific iconography developed in the prints. The two kinds of activity are in constant conversation. The progression of work for this exhibition, therefore, is multi-modal, site-specific and grounded in both local and world history.

On a more personal note, this body of work relates back to early concerns, where a pre-occupation with seeing and opticality informed formal solutions for artworks that make the viewer conscious of the act of looking. While the stakes are considerably higher in a war zone (and perhaps the comparison is spurious), what tactics does one employ in the field of art to capture one's audience?

The place that is Montebello Design Centre, situated in what is effectively a piece of the Newlands forest that looms up the side of the mountain, is in such radical contrast to any exhibition site I have worked with previously, that the thinking for this project has been pushed to a particular extreme. Hence, an extensive career in public art and urban design is submerged in bark and leaves, encouraging – indeed, obliging – the employment of new visual interpretive techniques.

To this extent, the collaboration with Jacqueline Nurse on the research of this area relative to the objectives of an art exhibition has been highly rewarding. This work sits with many of the layers of enquiry that will find their forms in months and years to come.

In the case of two and a half days of scouting for gun batteries with Justin Fox, I imagine this experience is best understood in Justin's *The Hobbsian Line*. Needless to say, an intense conversation began in 2012 and is evolving into an appreciation and respect for the role that South Africa has played in the World Wars, the memorialisation of which is ongoing.

Finally, during recent signing of the editions for this show, Master Printer at the David Krut Workshop, Jill Ross, and her team offered positive remarks on works proofed over a year ago, which at the time were met with uncertainty. Such has been the flow of the images through the workshop, with an understanding of the aesthetic and technical possibilities for each image evolving organically. In the four years that we have been making prints together, the extent of the potential is only now becoming clear.

– STEPHEN HOBBS, JANUARY 2015