

Sean Slemon at Outlet

By Robyn Sassen, 2005



Maquette. Aerial view, Laser cut mild steel



Forty Nine Layers, Beech ply

A poetic development on the notion of topography and landscape, the first part of Sean Slemon's project which focuses on the negative forms of urban spaces, took place during March at Outlet. Its second incarnation will take place at Johannesburg's The Premises. Here Slemon reflects on, amongst other spaces, that of The Premises itself, in terms of its dimensions, proportions and idiosyncrasies.

A little space, clocking in at roughly 3.5 x 3.5m, Outlet is an innovative counterpart to the great white cube gallery, and, under the curatorship of Abrie Fourie, is able to provide a meaningful take on exhibiting work to its best and most sensitive possibilities. Located at Tshwane University of Technology (ex Pretoria Technikon), this is by no means a 'student' gallery but rather an intimate professional exhibition space.

Entitled 'The Mountain and the City', on paper Slemon's exhibition seems to smack of Cape Town idioms, but on direct perusal, the title encapsulates the artist's passion for map-making and the connotations of isobars for society and aesthetics. This mountain is an extrapolation on the negative internal form that an urban space contains. Slemon's sculptures and etchings on this theme straddle a nebulous elegance, somewhere between abstraction and technical drawing.

Framed uniformly in black box-like frames, Slemon's etchings are spontaneous and rather maverick. While they are not well printed and are certainly not pristine accounts of the acid-impaired surfaces of the plates, they present a loose resemblance to plans or topographical plots. The etchings and drawings of Cy Twombly come to mind in these small linear works, comprising both sketchily formed structures and contour exercises, which leave the illusion of a single line that describes a space, spinning into a tight but all-consuming vortex.

These are juxtaposed with a series of sculptures - both wall-mounted and floor standing. Turning the proportional size and layout of The Premises gallery space virtually inside out, these stacked and contoured works are surprisingly small in scale and organic in feel. 'Physical contours', Slemon comments, pondering the structuring of maps, 'are a reflection of communication modes, each is separate from the next, and yet each reliant upon the last to define itself.'

Slemon works with great facility in a diversity of sculptural media, from zinc to wood. This serves as diligent preparatory work for the larger manifestation of the project at The Premises in the near future. 'Uplift: the Mountain Premises' promises to be a major installation which plays with the notion of curatorial space and its power to restrict or free up the physical movement of visitors.

Judging by the sensitivity and originality with which this experimental pre-show was handled, Slemon's Premises debut is something to anticipate.

Closed: April 4