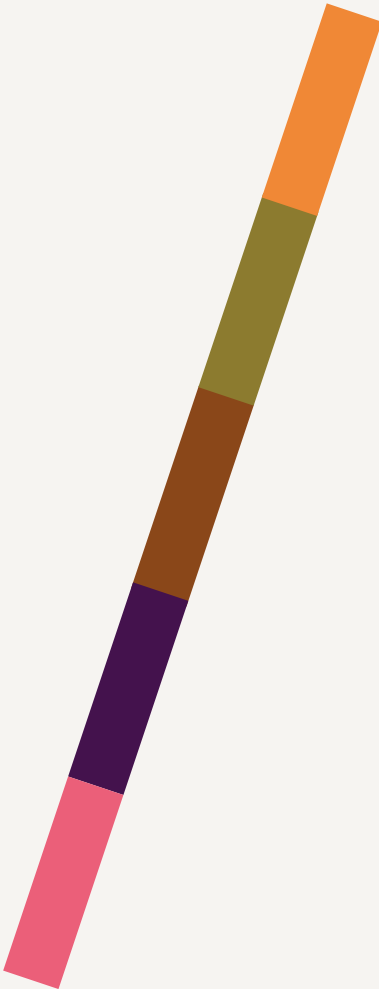


Social Impact Arts Prize '22

ABRI DE SWARDT

This refers to the various movements that transpired in the wake of South Africa's Rhodes Must Fall protests in 2015.



KAMMAKAMMA

'Kammakamma' is a project by Abri de Swardt that uses fabulation and collage to address the confluence of unstable narratives arising from, erased by and co-existing with the Eerste River mouth. Drawing from slippages between the indigenous Khoekhoe language terms for water '//gamma', and for similitude 'khama', 'kamma' has been absorbed into Afrikaans to mean 'make believe'. 'Kammakamma' considers the river as a space of entanglement, a saturation point where fluvial bodies converge with human communities, histories and practices. If the river's mouth could speak, what would it say?

Working with historian Dr. Saarah Jappie, poet Ronelda S. Kamfer and composer Thuthuka Sibisi, De Swardt is producing a screenplay for a wide-format video that engages oral histories, fictions, and scientific research from various points along the Eerste River. In so doing, the project seeks to re-imagine relations between the river and the racially, spatially and economically divided communities along its trajectory by insisting upon the river as a commons.

'Kammakamma' follows an earlier project, 'Ridder Thirst' (2015 -18), which explores queer agency in connection with the fallist movement. Through the overlaying of a meandering tale of murky heroism with archival and a filmed material and dense voiceover narration, the video probes the Eerste River's relationship to Stellenbosch as a site of settler inhabitation and the expression of colonial interests. 'Kammakamma' is the second iteration in this series and shifts its focus to the stretch of the river between the Rupert Museum and the mouth at Macassar beach. This stretch intersects the edge of the Cape Winelands and City of Cape Town municipalities, with the waters increasingly toxic through the Plankenburg River and Kuils River tributaries. In 'Kammakamma' as in 'Ridder Thirst', the river is treated as a witness to shifting histories, which slip, catch, converge and are expelled along its course.

Macassar is named for Sheikh Yusuf Taj al-Khalwati al-Makassari who was exiled from present day Makassar, Indonesia in 1694 to Zandvliet farm outside Cape Town by the Dutch, who perceived him as a threat to their operations as the Dutch East India Company. Credited with introducing the Islamic faith to South Africa, and regarded as a Sufi saint, Sheikh Yusuf established a committed following and spread his faith across the slave community. Yusuf's tomb, or 'kramat', overlooks Macassar and is a site of pilgrimage for the South African Muslim community. Macassar beach, the Eerste River mouth and its surrounding communities developed partly around this history but it also borders cattle grazing and sand-mining, among other industries. The Eerste River mouth is located alongside the Macassar Wastewater Treatment Works and is part of the Macassar Dunes Conservation Area along with Macassar beach. The latter once boasted a public pavilion and braai facilities, which have now been subsumed by the dunes. Host to a wide range of activities including fishing, quad biking, sex work, and swimming, the site is an unofficial commons claimed by a diverse public.

The notion of 'entanglement' is often used in the reading of complex ecosystems subject to multiple human and nonhuman agencies (rivers, industry, enslavement, quad biking, hagiography, viniculture, kelp – for example). As an alternative or extension of this, De Swardt introduces the term 'saturation' in thinking through the complexities of ownership, responsibility and personhood in relation to the Eerste River and its well-being, which is inseparable from the well-being of all those who use it. Where 'entanglement' suggests the interlinking of discrete elements, 'saturation' proposes more fluidity in understanding how these elements come together and what they produce. Outlined in 'Saturation: An Elemental Politics' by Melody Jue and Rafico Ruiz as a lens through which to rethink environments, saturation "...involves an attitude of ontological openness, wherein the researcher does not know all the substances, elements, agencies, or processes in advance, but rather explores what may co-saturate within a given situation." De Swardt is interested in this "material heuristic" not only as it adheres to the site and subjects of 'Kammakamma', but also to the structure of the collaboration between himself, Jappie, Kamfer and Sibisi.

The narrative of 'Kammakamma' is imagined through the confluence of three voices. Saarah Jappie is an historian and writer with a research base in the 'afterlives' of transoceanic relations between South Africa and the East Indies. Her PhD research (2018) was focused in part on Sheikh Yusuf of Makassar / Macassar. Ronelda S. Kamfer is a poet and novelist who writes in Kaaps-Afrikaans and grew up partially in the suburb of Eerste River. Kamfer's writing highlights the ongoing precariousness faced by communities subject to the violence of racially-driven dispossession and marginalisation, with a focus on themes of gendered defiance, reclamation and mental health. De Swardt will be working with Jappie and Kamfer to figure the script for 'Kammakamma', with musical director Thuthuka Sibisi collaborating as a composer.

Through this collaboration, 'Kammakamma' addresses itself to the Eerste River mouth – sodden with ecological, human and historical matter – and dreams that it speaks for itself.



Melody Jue and Rafico Ruiz, 2021.
Saturation: An Elemental Politics, pp. 2.

ibid. Jue and Ruiz define "material heuristic" as an "interpretive lens that guides the way scholars speak about phenomena, based on some material or environmental feature."



