

sally rumball

Pet Penthouse

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# Acknowledgements

Contributions, donations & funding

Adam Rumball  
Alison McKay  
Amber-Jade Geldenhuys  
Carolina Kartus  
Chivonne Naude  
Circuitboard Manufacturing  
Esterhuizen Family  
Kevin Humphrey  
Kobie Viljoen  
Ilse Pahl & Gabriel Stephen  
Matrix Warehouse  
Naked IT  
National Arts Council  
National Research Foundation  
Robin Walters

# Foreword

"People persevere in feeding their need for contact with nature, but what satisfies that longing is increasingly notional. Our culture surrounds itself with natural forms; patterns of flora and fauna abound on walls, sheets, and clothes, but we remove ourselves from the real things in their normal environments. I think we have become a species that prefers the substitute". Catherine Chalmers: *American Cockroach* 2004.<sup>1</sup>

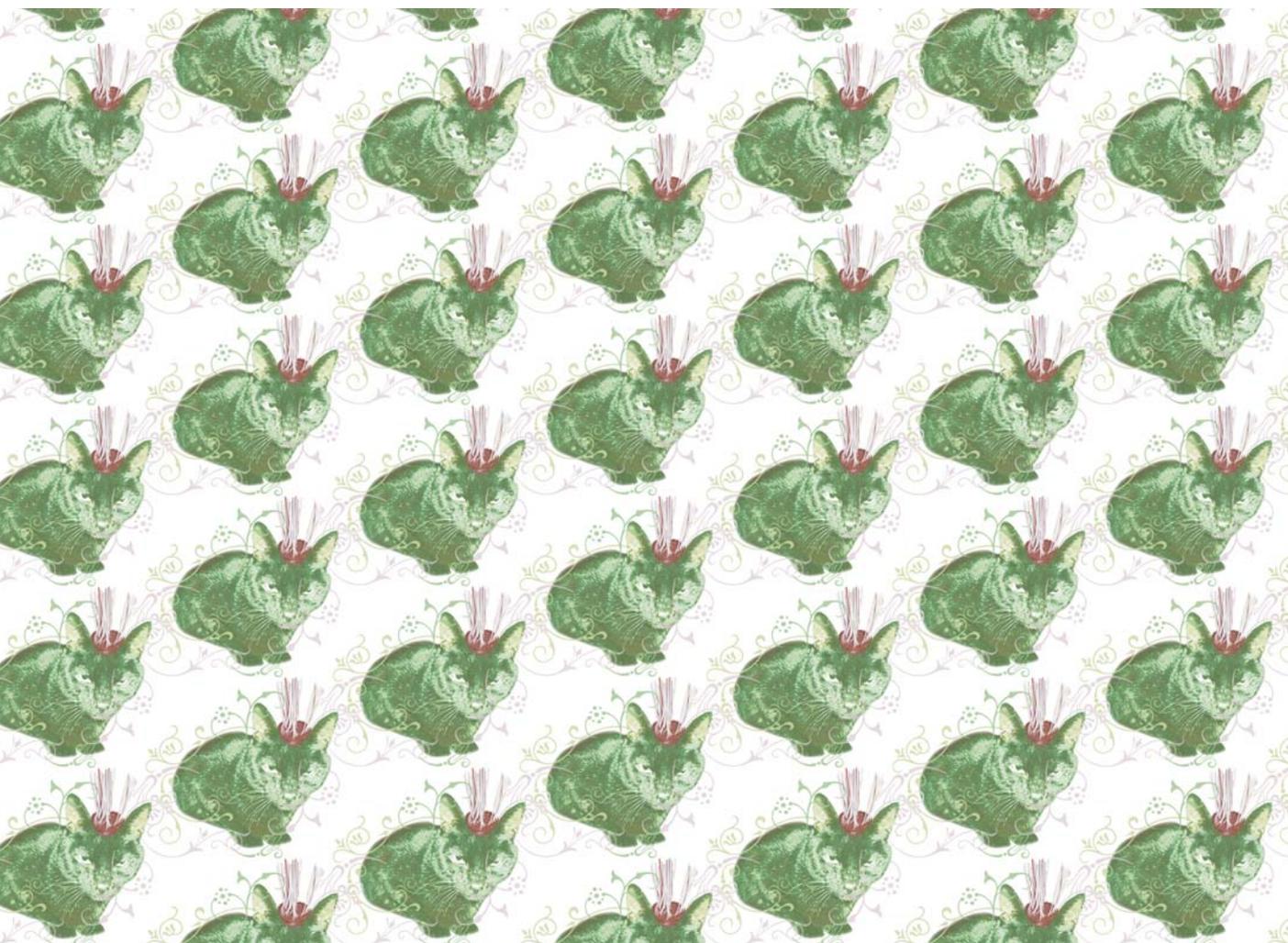
My initial, personal understanding of Chalmer's quote was that many humans use idealistically 'pretty' and 'happy' animal-related imagery, consciously and subconsciously, in their daily lives for various reasons, rather than associating themselves with the 'real' thing, and often oblivious of, or intentionally denying, the various forms of cruelty inflicted on animals daily.

By manipulating common and recognisable household items and furnishings, I have created an installation that represents a human home environment, to illustrate what I believe to be irregularities and contradictions in how humans perceive, utilise and represent non-human animals.

My process involved identifying animal related issues that are important to me and then metaphorically 'combining' them with found objects, although not necessarily in that order. Sometimes I discovered the found object first and then wrestled with practical methods of alteration and intervention to illustrate the animal issue.

The exhibition title - *Pet Penthouse* - uses a play on words one may associate with the objectification of women in pornographic publications and by association the references to women as 'pieces of meat' - a comparison too vast to include in this statement - but rather that in the context of my installation is intended to describe an urban human dwelling, that appears disconnected from the natural world, but that can accommodate nature, domesticated and otherwise, and representations thereof.

Sally Rumball  
October 25th 2011



Wallpaper: Cat (detail)  
2011  
digital print on matt vinyl  
2200 x 4700 mm

## Wallpaper:Cat

In decor history, wallpaper was traditionally utilised to set the colour and theme of a room. Although considered as "background" to other furnishings, it clearly influenced subsequent décor choices. Legendary nineteenth century designer William Morris once stated "*whatever you have in your rooms, think first of the walls for they are that which makes your house and home*".<sup>4</sup>

Having said that, wallpaper is often disregarded for being unremarkable, unoriginal, transitory, homely, 'pretty' and always the backdrop, never the art.<sup>5</sup>

My use of wallpaper transports us from a traditional gallery space, into a home environment. One's home often reflects and, conversely, influences the character of its inhabitants. One's home is a safe place to retire to when weary or threatened by the "dark forest" we grow up hearing about in fairy stories.<sup>4</sup>

Wallpaper serves as a type of 'subliminal messaging', entering our subconscious and reiterating a mind-set, through the use of repetitive patterns. Through wallpaper, messages are easily shared, and often not questioned.<sup>4</sup>

In my installation, the wallpaper is no longer void of significance or substance and no longer submissive. The

design shows a seated domestic cat with electrodes attached to his brain - a vivisection procedure commonly used for human stroke and brain research.<sup>5</sup>

The issue of vivisection on animals has been cleverly marketed as a successful and necessary practice, vital for medical progress and biological safety. I am in no position to discuss first-hand the successes or failures of these scientific methods, but I do object outright to vivisection on animals and to how easily it is used, with little thought to existing alternative means. By readily exploiting dogs, cats, monkeys, rabbits and other species, the message is clear that they are a means to an end for only human benefit, suggesting that humans are the superior species.<sup>5</sup>



*Cage: Fur large & small  
2011  
bamboo bird cage, mink fur  
coat, fish grill, fox fur,  
wood tables  
large: 600 x 400 x 400 mm  
small: 400 x 200 x 100 mm*

## Cage : Fur

While pondering a photo of an opulent birdcage I considered its size and imagined what type of bird would be rehomed in it. Birds have a unique gift of being able to move themselves through air at great heights using wings. Many humans choose to remove birds from the exhaustive space around our earth, to imprison them in immobile cages, convenient enough to fit on a lounge side table. This action defeats the main purpose of being a bird and the reason why humans admire and marvel over them. The same can be said for animal trophy heads. Many humans travel great distances and pay high prices to observe wild animals in their natural habitat. We enjoy observing them move, feed, nurture, fight and flee, but once shot dead, stuffed and mounted on a wall, they no longer do these remarkable things.<sup>6</sup>

Through my investigation of the worldwide fur trade I have realised that the list of animals killed for their pelts is getting longer. Very few mammal species are safe from being bludgeoned and skinned to serve a human 'want'. The recent challenge for animal rights groups is China and Thailand's abuse of domestic dogs and cats. Animals of all sizes are trapped and then crammed into cages, for storage and transportation. Unfortunately the size of the animal does

not determine the size of the cage, and animals that were not 'traditionally' kept in cages, now are.<sup>7</sup> I've observed the 'goal posts' shifting constantly and, in terms of my art pieces, a pretty bamboo cage no longer holds a petit canary or budgie, and the grill doesn't hold a fish, but an unidentifiable mass. The cage is hovering above the table, to create tension, implying weightlessness, flight, escape, ascension.

Catherine Harper, Head of Architecture and Design at the University of Brighton and founder member of the Animal Rights Movement of Northern Ireland, makes this comment on animal fur wearers, in her essay *I Found Myself Inside Her Fur*:

*(S)adistic consumers... for whom terror, death, pain, and abject suffering inform the fur they wear, deflect their enjoyment of it, and allows their dominion over the animals and their potency, phallic or otherwise, to be part of the enactment of their pleasure... This form of fur-loving is close in essence to the extreme enjoyment of the real death action of ultimate "snuff".<sup>8</sup>*



Frame:Nature

2011

digital prints on gloss photographic paper, found frames  
total size 1900 x 1500 mm

## Frame : Nature

This is a series of 40 framed photographs, appropriated from various book sources, and manipulated in Adobe Photoshop computer software.

One of these sources is the intriguing *Time-Life Nature Library* books series, printed in the 1960s. The *Animal Behaviour* volume features articles and images depicting research and experimentation conducted on various creature groups. An example of this is a procedure that removes new-born Rhesus monkeys from their mothers, exposing them to metal and cloth 'surrogates', in order to observe their responses. Another describes usage of military nerve gas or electrically-charged probes on domestic cats in order to record their reactions to their rodent companions. Further experiments involve testing various animals eyesight when deliberately and painfully obscured, observing their responses to addictive drugs, training them to perform human related actions - like lighting cigarettes - and using lights and levers to find rewards.<sup>9</sup>

Another collection of books I found equally fascinating covers advertising and branding of popular consumer products over the last sixty years. The images I found here include a cartoon-like pig promoting bacon, a chicken selling drumsticks, a penguin marketing cigarettes

and dogs wearing men's underwear.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps these images are ordinary and common, to many viewers. Perhaps they do not elicit the shocked response that I am hoping for. I believe clever marketing over many years has conditioned consumers to accept and overlook what I consider to be bizarre. An interesting way to convince an overwhelmed consumer to buy your brand of pork is to show a jolly hog, wearing dungarees, holding a tray of bacon. Similarly, poultry advertisements could depict a farmer lovingly caressing his chickens like his own children.<sup>11</sup> Inappropriate advertising would show live 'stock' being beaten, force-fed, taken from their mothers too young and crammed into space-saving cages.<sup>12</sup>

My collection of prints reminds me of family photo collections that are started spontaneously, with one or two favourites, and then added to as the family grows and memories are captured. They often have little interest to visitors in the house, and lose their novelty as the inhabitants begin to overlook them; much like the wallpaper I discussed earlier, and the trophy head on pages 10 & 11.<sup>13</sup>



Homage to Bubby

2011

digital print on matt photographic paper, presented in found frame

580 x 510 mm

## Homage to Bubby

This image takes pride of place, away from the other group of photographs.

It should depict 'man's best friend' as strong, faithful, obedient and brave. But Bubby does not perform his duties due to, or possibly resulting in, his deteriorating physical condition.

In history, canines have been important additions to countless households, often kenneled, trained and rewarded, in exchange for faithfulness and physical power.<sup>14</sup> Many humans still consider animals as 'property' that exists purely to perform certain tasks, and give little consideration to the basics of how the animal functions and survives, and their physical and emotional capabilities and limitations.

In the photograph, Bubby's spirit is bowing gently, as if to humbly accept his responsibility of martyrdom for a larger concern. The mobile phone 'sms' correspondence creates a texture within the sand, holding the figures on the page.



*Head:Wires*  
2011  
taxidermied hartebeest head,  
computer parts, electrical  
wires, components & solder  
1800 x 500 x 500 mm

## Head:Wires

A fellow artist rescued this abandoned trophy head from a dumpster, and kindly donated it to me. The Hartebeests ears were damaged and his horns had been roughly removed, leaving a gaping hole in the top of his head, which I filled with a circuit board, electrical components and wires.

The electrical parts are not contained to the 'bokkie's' head, but have spilled out in areas. Molten solder has oozed out of wounds creating a crown-like crust, and electrical components have spread and burrowed into the buck's fur. By filling the cavity, and replacing his 'brain' with electronics, the Hartebeest appears to be 'running' on an external power source, in an attempt to be resurrected from the dead. From his imposed and frozen vantage point he surveys and observes the perpetrators who have placed him in this position. In his essay *Why Look at Animals* (1971) John Berger remarked that "animals are always the observed. *The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance*".<sup>15</sup>

Animals like the Hartebeest are exploited for sport. Courageous hunters reconnect with their 'roots' by tracking and taking pot-shots at animals in their natural habitat, from the comfort of luxurious off-road vehicles. The hunter passes his limp kill over to a taxidermist who makes it appear rigid again, to hold its own on the hunter's lounge wall. But, as "de-

taxidermy" artist Angela Singer mentions, rather than "becoming an object of worship and respect, trophies generally tend to annoyingly merge with the furnishings, vegetate as some pitiful dust catcher and finally end up being thrown away by disgusted grandchildren who are rather ambivalent about this unwanted inheritance".<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, taxidermy has entered contemporary art exhibitions and collections, but rarely without prior artistic intervention. This re-emergence is not in the hope of reviving a lost fashion object, but rather as a means of communicating a new awareness of nature-related concerns. Dr Pat Morris describes taxidermy in Victorian history as being "a reminder of nice things in nature beyond the grimy cities... They were like three-dimensional pictures in people's drawing rooms." Contemporary artists have removed the "nice-ness" from 'new' taxidermy, choosing instead to highlight current debates such as endangered species, evolution, cloning and animal hybrids.<sup>17</sup>

Surprisingly, the new breed of taxidermy artists is predominately women, who set out to "subvert the masculine idea of the taxidermied trophy in favour of a different narrative-approach to art making".<sup>17</sup>



Chair: Bones ♂  
 2011  
 wooden chair,  
 donkey & blesbuck bones  
 1000 x 1200 x 500 mm.



Chair: Bones ♀  
 2011  
 wooden chair, meat hook, fishing gut,  
 hadeda, muskeljaatkat & chicken bones  
 1000 x 800 x 500 mm

## Chair:Bones ♂ and Chair:Bones ♀

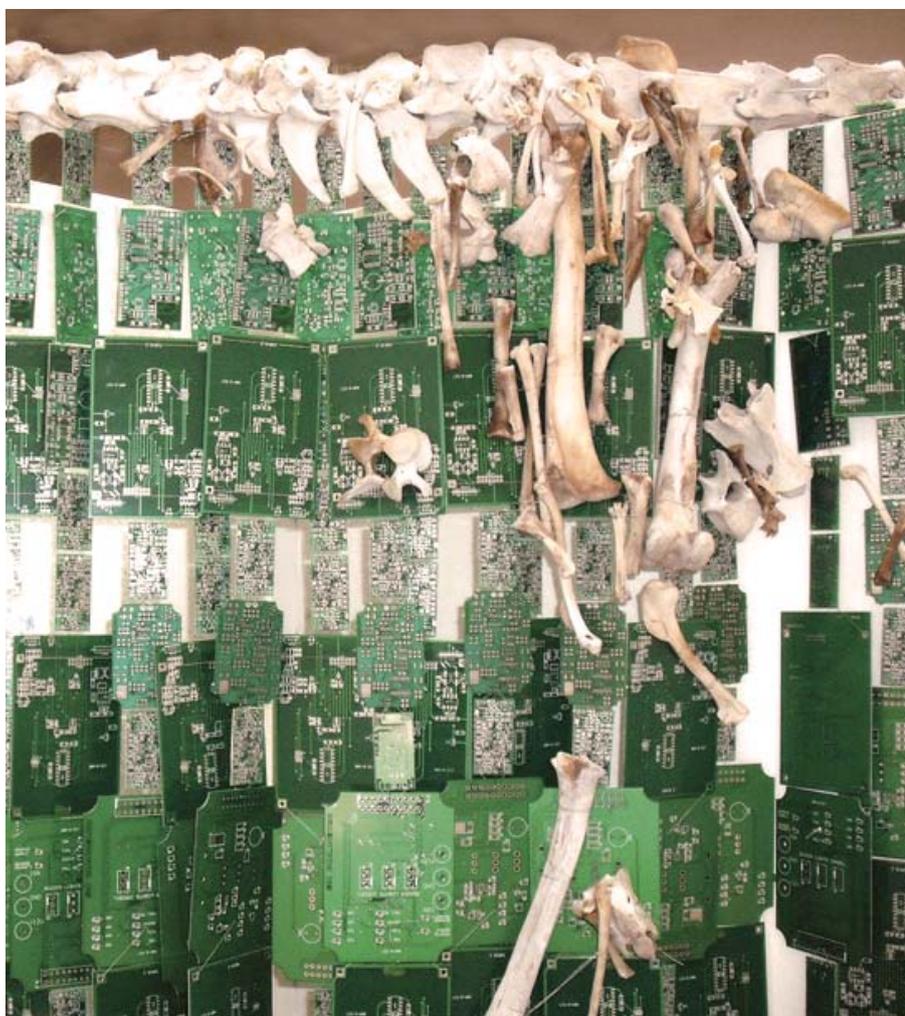
While planning my virtual room, it seemed obvious to me that it would contain furniture. I chose to begin with the wooden dining-room chairs that I found at a charity shop. I considered the purpose of a chair - to sit on, relax, take comfort, rest - and then the visual similarities between chair and four-legged animal.

My inspiration for *Chair:Bones* ♂ came from an image on a website that exposes the atrocities of vivisection. It shows a domestic cat with a damaged spine dragging its lame back legs. Like the cat, my chair is unable to function correctly with only two working legs. The twisted and curved backrest spine is made up of a variety of mammal bones, but arranged and presented in a way so as to be non-specific.

*Chair:Bones* ♂ 'mate' *Chair:Bones* ♀ was inspired by an internet image on a website opposing the cat fur and meat trades in parts of Asia. This image showed a cat hanging off a hook ready for skinning and gutting. With her bulging belly she appeared to be pregnant. The chair has the skeleton of her unborn offspring suspended in her 'belly'. Again, the bones are from several creatures, and meant to be non-specific, as I believe this type of

treatment happens to various creatures world-wide. My chairs are stressed, worn and scratched, to imply a lengthy period of abuse and suffering and, no doubt, struggling

My comparison of animal and chair is deliberate and ironic for the purpose of this piece. I believe that chairs are objects that have no emotional or physical feeling, but that animals do. The South African Animal Protection Act 72 of 1962 still refers to animals as being "things... or movable property".<sup>18</sup>



*Boards:Bones*

2011

electrical circuit boards, mini wire cable, meat hooks, cable,  
donkey, blesbuck, hadeda, muskeljaatkat & chicken bones

2200 x 1000 x 100 mm

## Boards : Bones

An image from the *Animal Behaviour Time-Life Nature Library* book instigated the direction for this piece. The image shows an experimental psychologist in his laboratory, surrounded by electrical test equipment, wiring, lights, switches and buttons. His contraptions are attached to a small metal and glass box that holds a rat, who sniffs at a lever. The rat has learnt to activate a switch every time a bulb is lit, thereby gaining access to a food reward.<sup>9</sup>

This *Time-Life* image conjured up extravagant and diabolical devices comprising electrical circuitry attached to animal body parts, as metaphor for the larger picture of vivisection worldwide. The wires cascading out of electrical machinery brought to mind a bohemian bead curtain that hangs in a doorway and tinkles gently after someone has walked through it.

In keeping with the electrical theme I joined hundreds of small green circuit boards with thin cable wire, to hang in strips. The strips

connect to a horizontal metal rod that runs through a row of large animal vertebrae. Various other leg and neck bones spill randomly from the hanging device, contrasting and sometimes connecting with the shiny green boards. The uniform manufactured boards and irregular organic bones are fundamental opposites, but now find themselves working together, as parts making up a whole and a process.



## Bed:Cage:Dogs

Like the *Cage:Fur* piece, this work refers to the captivity of animals for the fur trade in the Far East. A cage the size of this single bed will fit about eight full-grown labradors or alsatians. Constructed from 'chicken wire', a common enough material used primarily for keeping ill-fated chickens, the clues indicate that no chickens will be housed here. Like the two chairs, the bed has been altered sufficiently to eliminate its basic use.

The nightmares of the overused bed-cage is offset by the sweet and simple decorative headboard fabric, that depicts smiling domesticated dogs rolling over, sleeping, playing and delivering gifts - all the 'normal' things dogs should be doing.

This fabric could possibly be used as cheery kitchen curtains or tablecloth, or in a child's bedroom. From a young age children are exposed to images of happy animals, fat and smiling cows and pigs, and 'friendly' groups of sheep and chickens - characteristics that humans bestow on animals for various reasons. Imposing cute and contented 'facial expressions' on animals destined for the fur factory or our dinner plates somehow appears to erase the 'half-way' slaughter stage.

*Bed:Cage:Dogs*

2011

metal bed, chicken wire,  
plastic dog bowl, fabric,  
foam, animal hair, wax, sand  
1800 x 900 x 700 mm



*Small and Manageable*  
2011  
wooden printer's tray, found ornaments,  
cardboard labels & catalogue cards, wooden box on shelf  
500 x 400 x 50 mm + 600 x 300 x 150 mm

## Small and Manageable

The *Small and Manageable* piece emerged from the various 'cabinet of curiosity' works I had studied at unconventional art exhibitions and in antique shops. Traditionally, a 'cabinet of curiosity' serves to store and classify a collection of objects.

I liken this concept to the miniature printer's trays that my three sisters and I had as children. Our parents presented us with our own little trays between the ages of eight and twelve. Over the years that followed, whenever a family friend was visiting from out of town or holidaying somewhere special, we requested tiny ornaments for our precious trays. We arranged, cleaned and rearranged our beloved figurines, and sometimes swapped and shared pieces between us. I remember the little dust rings that settled around objects on the shelves if we didn't clean often enough. Maybe over time, as we got a little older, the 'novelty' of the trays wore off. For a period the trays had represented something petite and fragile, but manageable, for our childish hands to care for.

The *Small and Manageable* piece is a sentimental reminder of the need to control. The miniature figurines are all animals that have been, or are being, exploited by humans in one

way or another.<sup>12</sup> Each creature, some beautifully crafted and others mass-produced, is labelled and numbered to correspond to a data card in the catalogue box. The cards record facts and statistics of the animal as produce or stock. The piece can be viewed as a researcher's findings of samples and evidence.

## Afterword

Bringing nature into the 'home' is most often unnatural and detrimental, causing a series of consequences that may not be reversible. We may very well have more nature (derivatives) in our homes than we realise. My artworks request the viewers to reconsider their opinions and feelings of the relationships they may share with the natural world. Through knowing, or assuming, that humans share remarkably comparable behavioural patterns to animals, the viewer may develop empathy for these victims of consumerism. I understand that in an ideal and respectful co-existence, humans and animals could 'use' each for mutually beneficial outcomes, and not need to resort to injury and murder. The same can be said for how humans should relate to each other (Kanwal & Shanor 2009:1-8).

Kathleen Kete, History Professor at Trinity College in Connecticut, makes an interesting observation with regard to the mass murders during the eighteenth century French Revolution. She mentions that the local butcher was usually employed to carry out the public executions - obviously an easy shift from slaughtering animals - and, had the French been vegetarian, the French Revolution might never have happened (De Coux & Paparella 2007:12-20).

# Curriculum Vitae

Sally Rumball

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DOB: 25th October 1971

## Education

2011: University of Johannesburg, PADA,  
Auckland Park, JHB

Currently completing BTech Fine Art Degree

2010: University of Johannesburg, PADA,  
Auckland Park, JHB

National Diploma Fine Art

July 2004 - February 2005: Cultural Helpdesk,  
Newtown, JHB

Arts & Culture Administration Diploma NQF4

1990 - 1994: Technikon Witwatersrand,  
Doornfontein, JHB

1st & 2nd Years of National Diploma  
Architecture

1985 - 1989: Northview High School, Highlands  
North, JHB

Matric Certificate

## Participation in Art Exhibitions

July - November 2011: *Altered Pieces: Songs of Leonard Cohen*. Group Exhibition - Curated by Gordon Froud. (1)Thompson Gallery, Melville; (2)Pandora Gallery, Pretoria; (3) Aardklop, Potchefstroom. Artwork - *The Ballad of the Absent Mare* (2011, ink, charcoal, acrylic on wooden altar, 60x60cm), as well as design and layout of digital exhibition catalogue

June 2011: *More is More*

Private collection - Curated by Gordon Froud @ PADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg. Co-curator and Artist - *Icon* (2009, drypoint on Fabriano, 42x30cm), as well as design and layout of digital exhibition catalogue

July 2010: *Towers of Brixton*

Group Exhibition - Curated by Elzabe Zietsman @ Zietsies, Brixton, JHB.

Artworks - black & white photography series (2010)

June - July 2010: *A Sense of Place*

Group exhibition @ Red Line Gallery, Kensington, JHB. Curator and Artist - various works (2008-2010)

March 2010: *Jan Gilliers Centenary Art*

Exhibition. Group Show - Curated by Artspace Gallery @ Jan Gilliers School, Parkview, JHB. Artwork - *Homage to Gainsborough* (2009, acrylic on canvas, 61x51cm)

December 2009 - January 2010: *Babette's Feast*. Group Exhibition @ Artspace Gallery - Warehouse Space, Fairlands, JHB. Artwork - *Homage to Gainsborough* (2009, acrylic on canvas, 61x51cm)

July 2004: *Her Out Doors*. Group Exhibition @ Evolution Restaurant, Grahamstown Festival. Various works (2000-2004)

December 2001: *Expose*. Group Exhibition @ Lou-Lou's Collectables, Rosebank, JHB. Various works (2000-2001)

### Competitions

September 2011: *Thami Mnyele Fine Art Awards*, Group Exhibition, 72 selected artists. Coen Scholtz Recreation Centre, Kempton Park, JHB. *Homage to Bubby* (2011, digital photographic print, 45x30cm)

September 2010: *Make a Difference*, HIV Aids Poster Competition. University of Johannesburg, FADA, Auckland Park, JHB. 2nd Prize for *A3 Hangman* poster (2010, designed in Adobe Illustrator, 42x29cm)

July 2010: *Thami Mnyele Fine Art Awards*, Group Exhibition, 63 selected artists. Coen Scholtz Recreation Centre, Kempton Park, JHB. *Bib* (2009, aquatint and colour etching on paper, 19x29.7cm)

July 2009: *Thami Mnyele Fine Art Awards*, Group Exhibition, 76 selected artists. Coen Scholtz Recreation Centre, Kempton Park, JHB. *I Am Jack's Liver* (2009, cement sculpture, 50x12x32cm)

July 2009: *Standard Bank New Members Exhibition*. Standard Bank Gallery, JHB. Competition winner for 'wild card' artist search. *Scorpion* (2008, playing card sculpture, 100x100x50cm)

### Awards

2011: National Research Foundation Bursary. National Arts Council Bursary. University of Johannesburg, merit bursary  
2010: University of Johannesburg, merit bursary  
2008: University of Johannesburg, First Year Top Achiever Award and part-bursary

### Commissions

2002 - 2004: Rhodes University Health Suite Logo & Sports Council Awards Dinner logo, Grahamstown

### Work Experience

19-25 September 2011: Artspace Gallery, Parktown and Johannesburg Art Fair, Sandton Convention Centre. Administration and Art Sales

2000 - 2011: Various temporary positions in film, TV and advertising industry. Freelance Artist, Storyboards, Set Dressing, Production Coordinator, Cast Coordinator

July 2002 & 2003: Grahamstown Festival Village Green Market

1999 - 2001: Jenna Clifford Jewellers, Johannesburg. Batching/ Costing Department:

2000: Beadworks Wholesale and Imports, Johannesburg. Co-Manager

1997 - 1999: STE Publishing, Johannesburg. Personal Assistant to Marketing Manager and Office Administration

1990 - 1997:  
Technikon Witwatersrand work placements.  
Chris Steel Architects, Rosebank, JHB.  
Cyril Schlosberg Architects, Norwood, JHB.  
MV3 Architects, Sandton.  
Neil Lucas Architect, Queenstown

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