

Marcus Neustetter

the observatory in the making

observation structures and sites of discovery



12 December 2009 – 23 January 2010

Opening on Saturday 12 December from 17:00 to 20:00

***Chasing Light* laser projection at 18:00**



Marcus Neustetter's third solo exhibition at GALLERY AOP pulls together various strands of the artist's visual thinking. On show are a series of works that evolved from the work-in-progress sculptural installation at the Joburg Art Fair 2009, as well as various visual explorations of experiences in Sutherland in the Western Cape, which will culminate in his version of an 'artist observatory' to be constructed there.

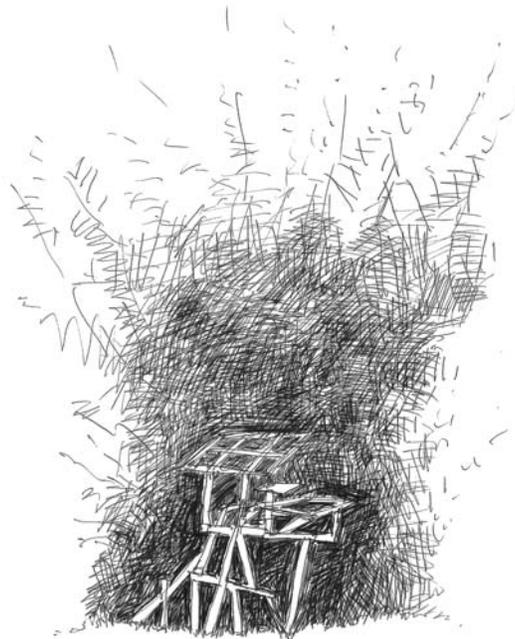
His intention is to suggest, advance and produce in a playful way, site specific situations, models and structures, akin to, among other things, the drawing frames of such 15th century artists as Alberti, Da Vinci and Dürer. These will serve as perspectives for observing, drawing and enabling a visual experience. Following Dürer's example, Van Gogh also constructed one of these drawing frames and in a letter to his brother, made a sketch of himself using it. Sir John Herschel's four foot telescope of around 1789 also served as inspiration for Neustetter's models and constructions. Neustetter has always had a pre-occupation with mapping and drawing Google earth perspectives as well as mapping and drawing the night sky in an attempt to understand his own position between the city lights and the stars.

In his pursuit to develop an artists' observatory amongst the international telescopes in Sutherland, Marcus Neustetter has been drawing, photographing, printing and constructing models and installations. His latest exhibition, *The observatory in the making* presents a selection of drawings and make-shift structures in relation to documentation of other significant experiments and discoveries.

His intention to make sense of the reflections on the night skies has taken him to various locations in 2009. Neustetter's explorations around the world have afforded him the opportunity to challenge his perceptions by means of on-site drawings and playful interventions in such diverse locations as the archaeological dig sites in Vela Spila (Croatia), the observatory in Sutherland, the Vredefort Dome meteorite impact crater south of Johannesburg, and in Norway, chasing the Aurora Borealis. His orientation, however, does not centre on a horizontal perspective rendering, but rather on a vertical one, looking up into the night sky and the stars, or down onto earth.

During his visits to Sutherland, Neustetter spends the nights working on glow-stick, laser and LED light installations that map constellations in the Karoo landscape, or drawing the space between the stars, much like artists were doing it before the camera was invented. While this activity has resulted in photographs and drawings, it has also encouraged him to look at structures such as observation decks and telescopes. Returning to his 16th floor apartment in a high rise building in Johannesburg city centre, Neustetter often contemplates his spacial position and has been toying with the idea of an observation platform on a rooftop nearby.

Thank you to: Oulet, Imajez, Silvertone, The Trinity Session, Main Street Life, Salt/SAAO, and especially Kevin Govender, Shane De Lange, Stacey Vorster, Ruth Rom, Gareth van Honschooten, James Webb, Jonathan Leibmann, Stephen Hobbs, Bronwyn Lace and John Hodgkiss for documenting the exhibition.

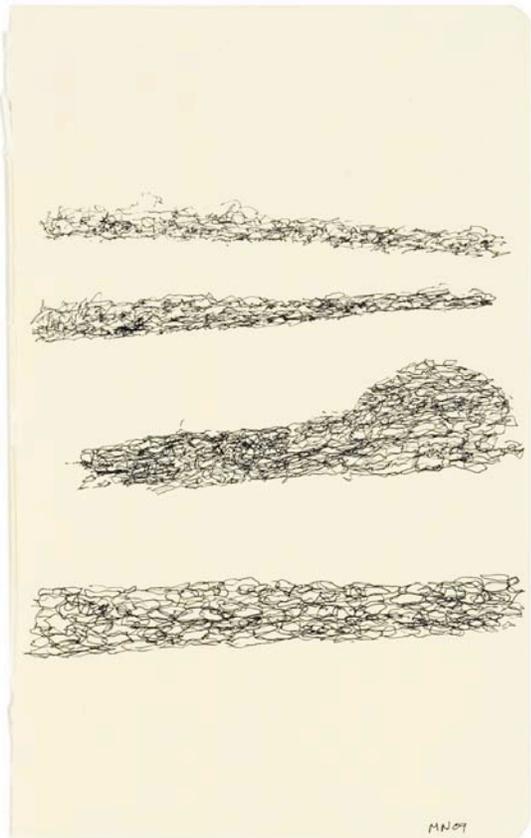
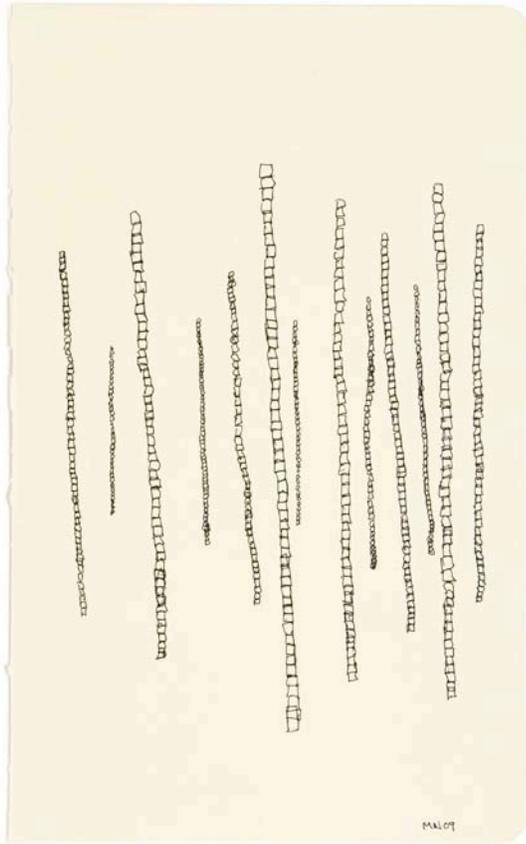
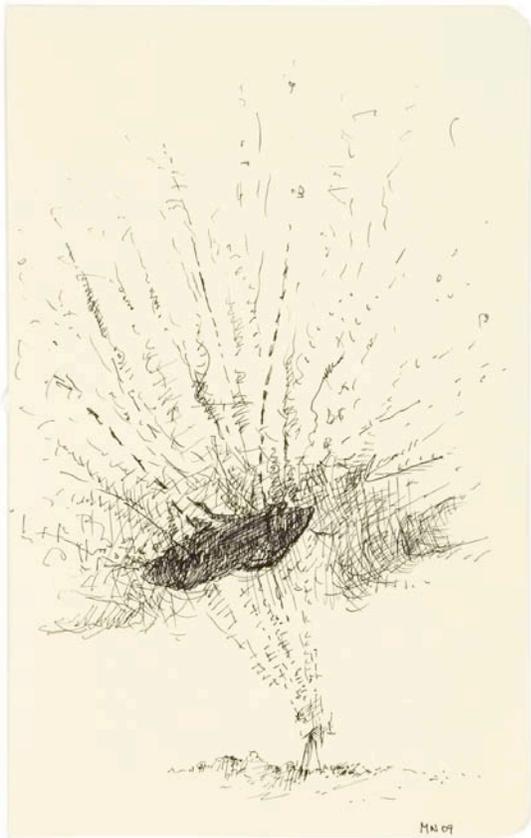










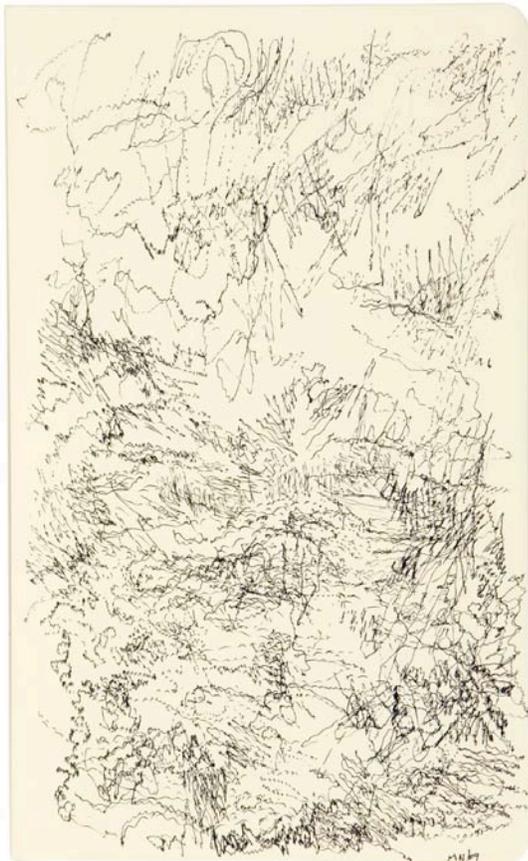
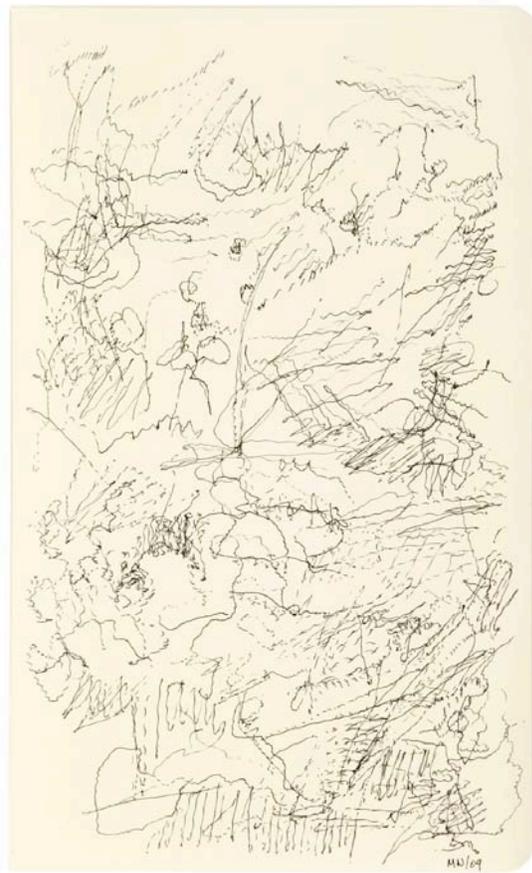


Observatory drawings 1, 2, 3, 4 (clockwise from t.l.) 2009 pen and ink



The Observatory I / balsa wood and pins 2009

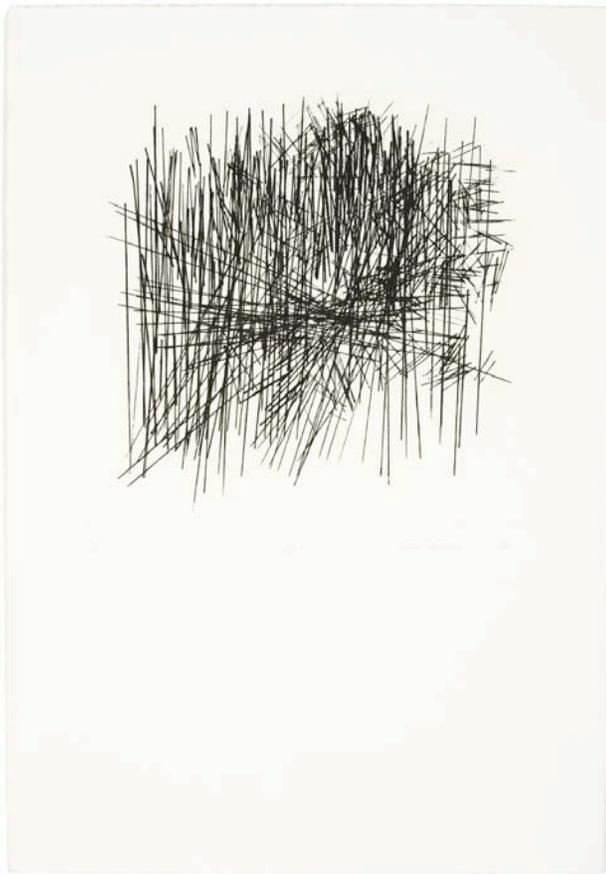
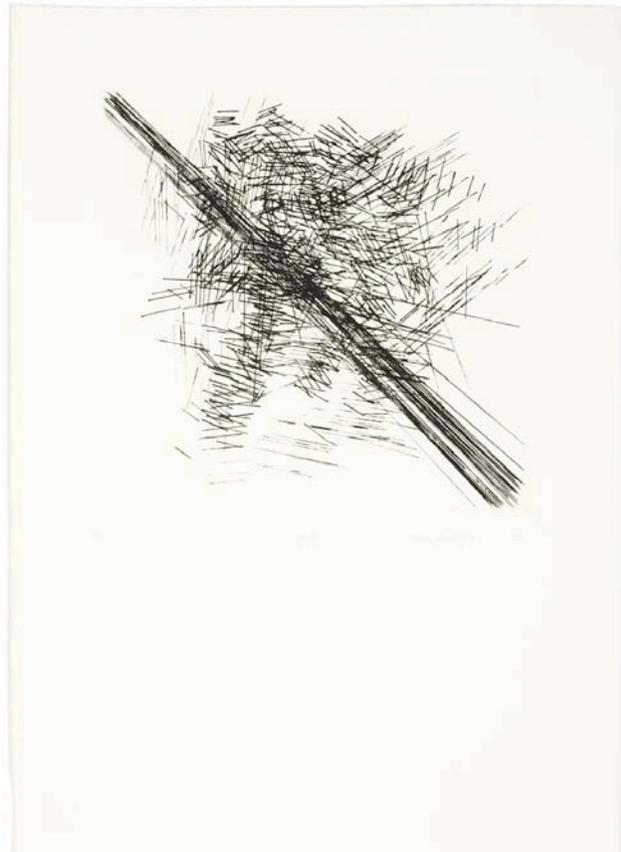
Sketch for a proposed artists' observatory in Sutherland, the home to SALT (Southern African Large Telescope) and the SAAO (South African Astronomical Observatory)



Vela Spila drawings 2009 pen and ink
Reflections on Vela Spila archaeological site, Croatia

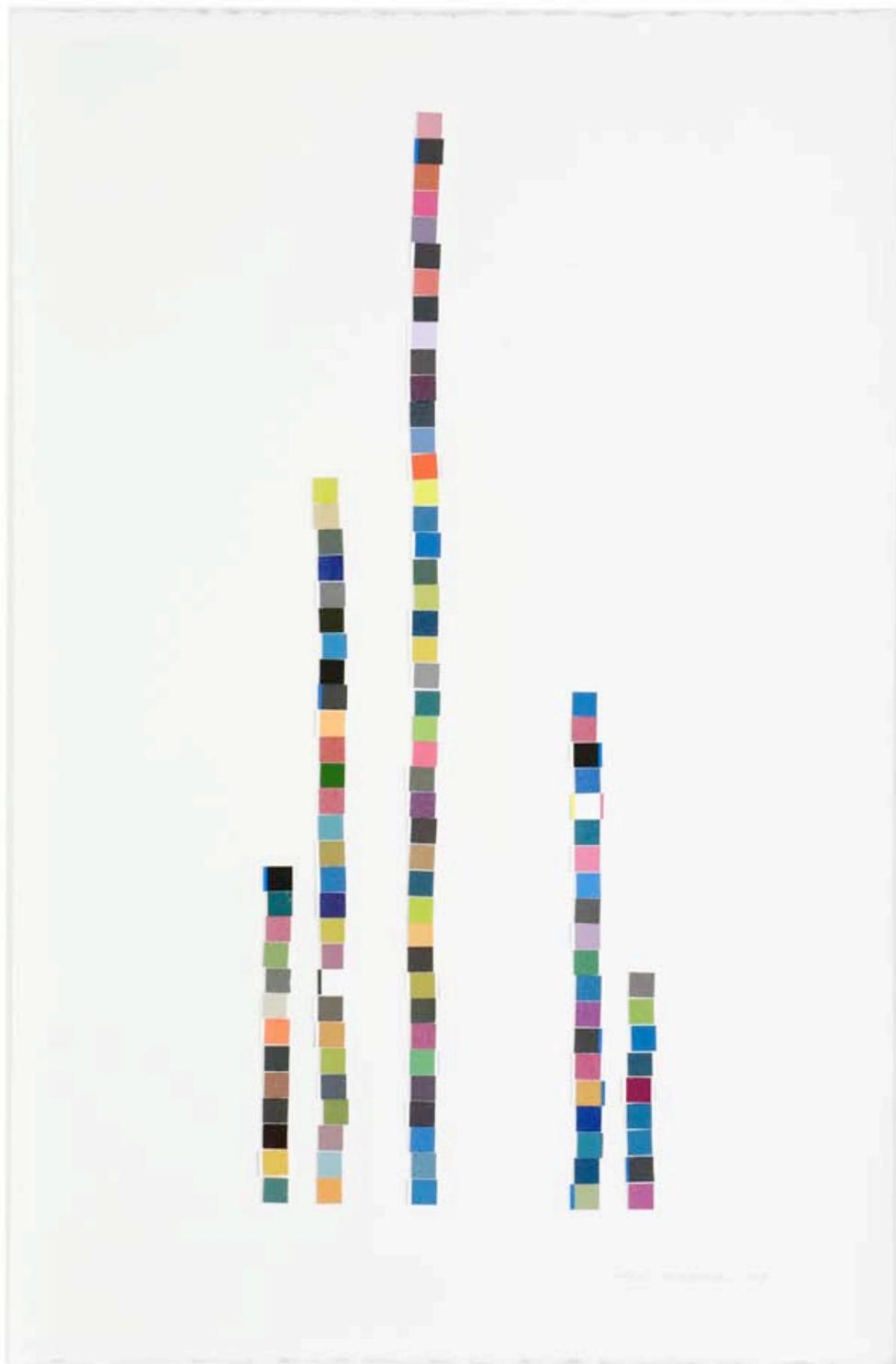


Space between the stars, Sutherland 1 and 2 (top to bottom) 2009 pen and ink



Cut I, II and III
2009
2 plate drypoint
edition 2

Printed from perspex cutting boards with
cut-lines for test-print collage (refer *Collage 1*)



Collage 1 2009 test-print cut-out collage



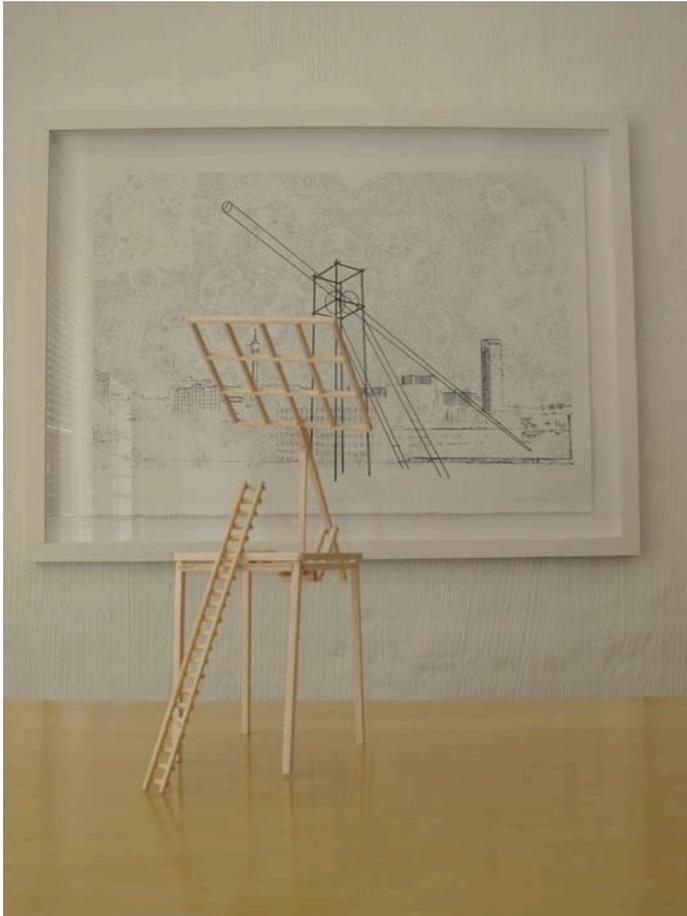
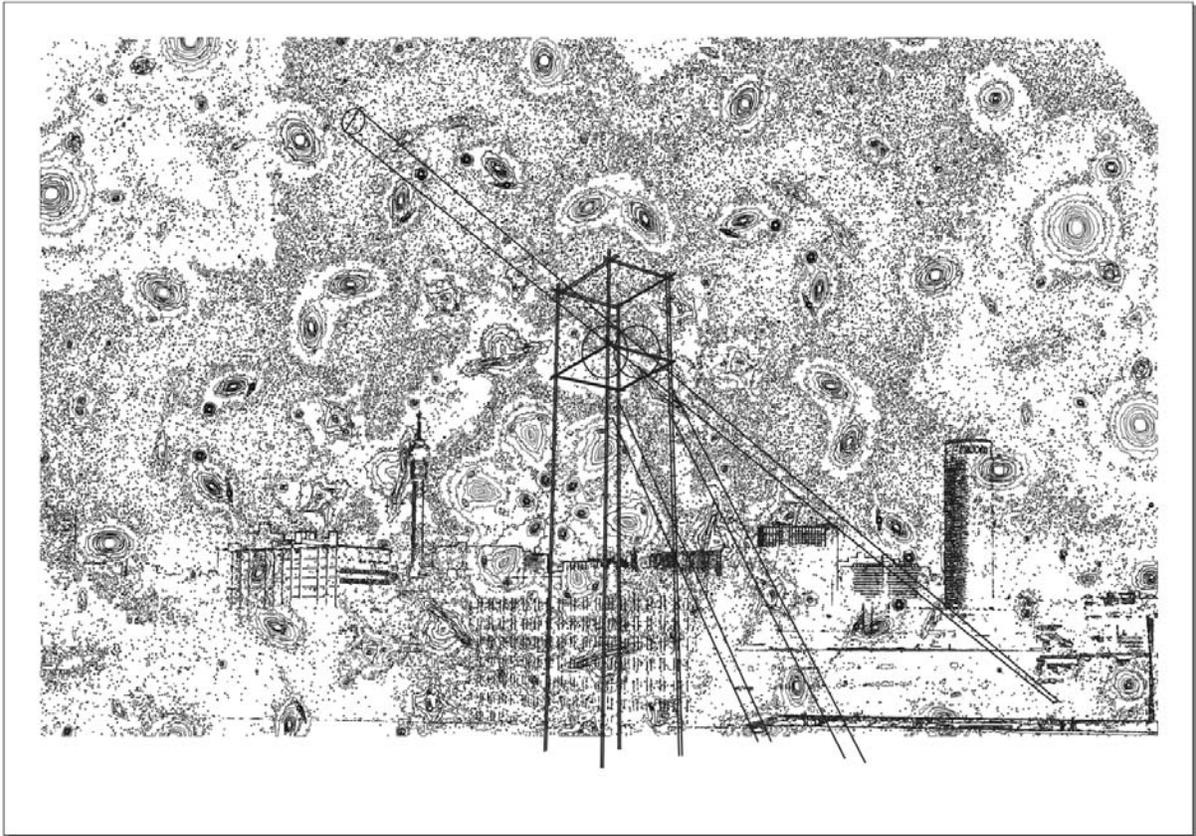
Observation Structure 1
2009
cardboard tube, chair, wood,
fabric pin drawing



Observation Structure 2 wood, stepladders, chair facing a white wall 2009

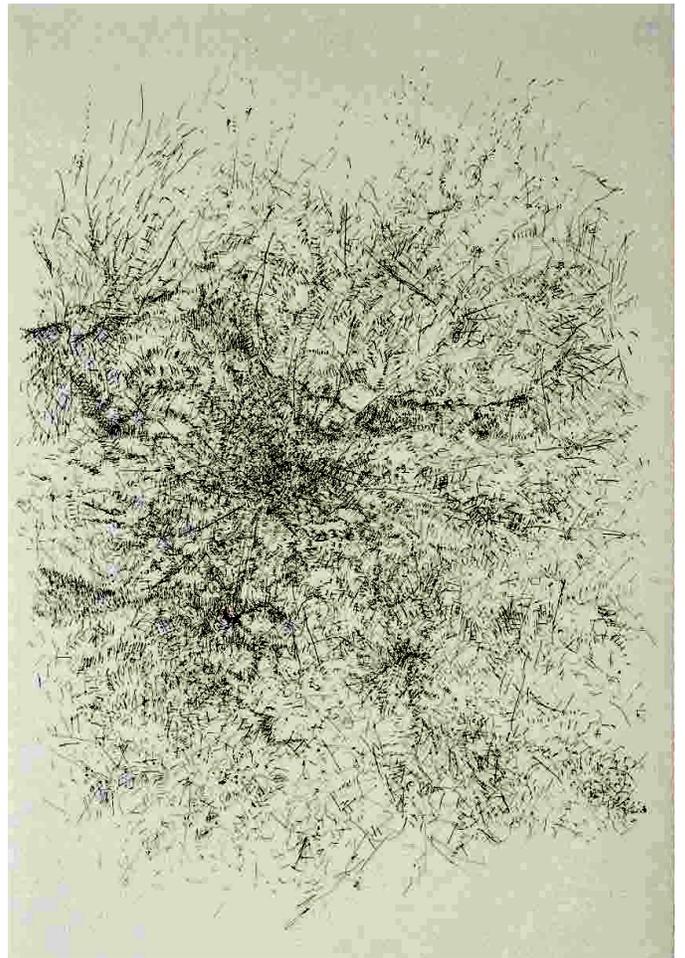
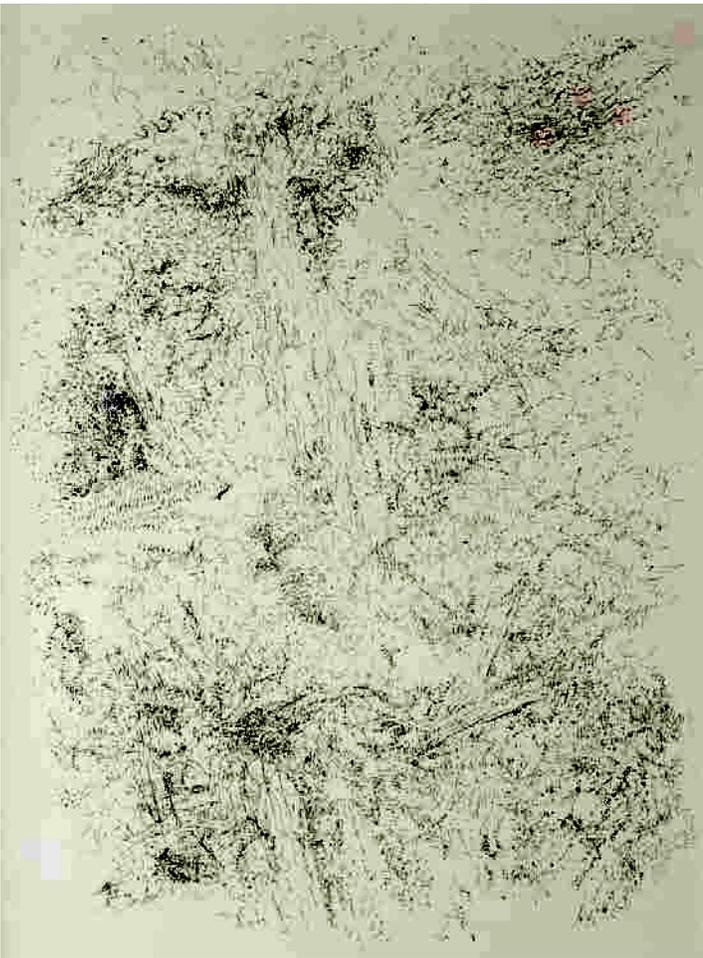


Observation Unstructured
2009
40 cardboard tubes, fabric pin drawings
(Inspired by Elena's primary school project)



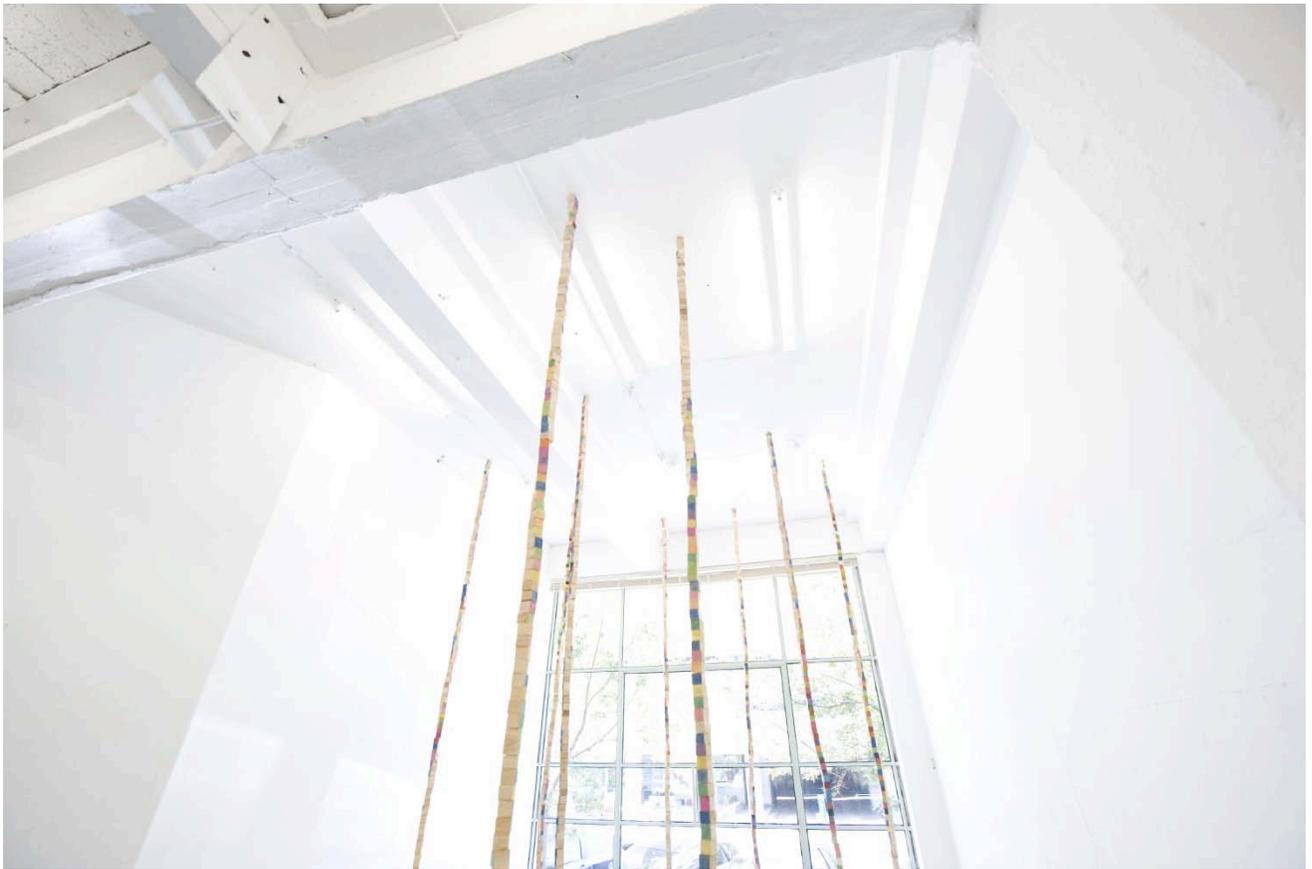
Vision – Main Street Life
2009
digital print on Fabriano paper
edition 10

Sketch for observation structure on the rooftop
of Main Street Life



Site of Discovery 1, 2 and 3
2009
pen and ink

(Contrast of reproduction has been enhanced to make marks visible)



work in progress (GALLERY AOP) 2009 wood and paint



Artist's source material 2009 Tromso (Norway); Outlet, Pretoria; Sutherland and Vredefort Dome (South Africa)



Chasing light - Tromso (Norway)



Vredefort interventions - Produced with the Space School Africa at Vredefort Dome, meteorite impact crater



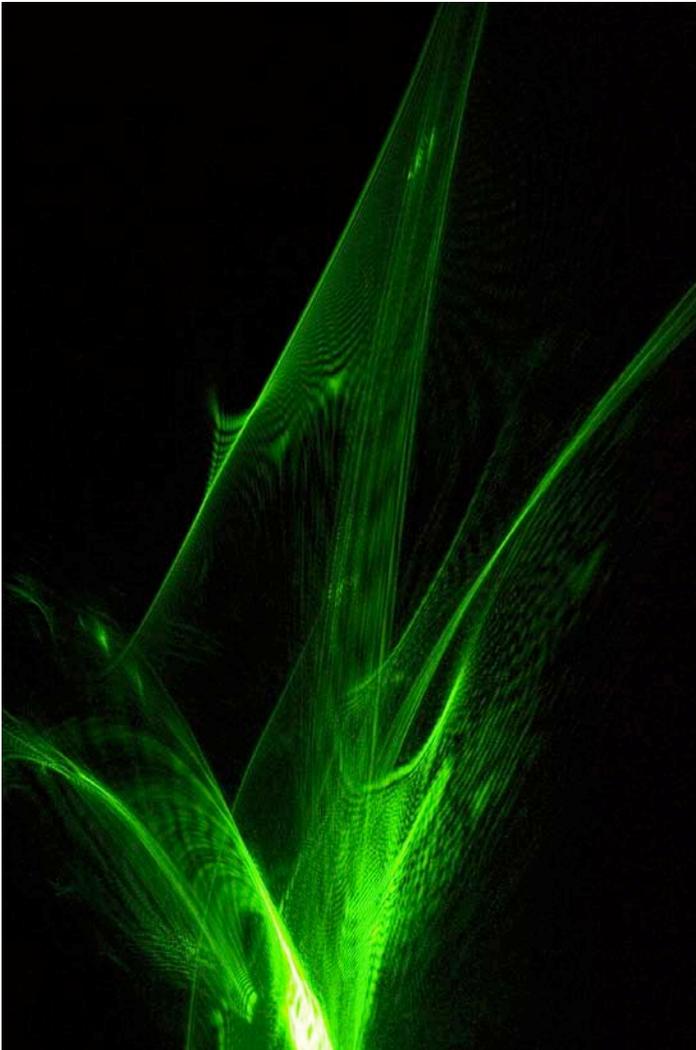
Vredefort Dome 2008/2009 I – Vredefort Dome 2009 digital print on Fabriano paper edition 10



Performance at the Vredefort Dome – meteorite impact crater, 2009



Glowstick Northern Light – Vredefort Dome 2009 digital print on Fabriano paper edition 10
Produced with the Space School Africa at Vredefort Dome, meteorite impact crater



Chasing Light
2009

sounds of the Aurora Borealis / Northern lights, speaker, amplifier, water, tray, laser

Chasing Light is an intervention based on Neustetter's recent excursion to Norway where he attempted to see the Northern Lights. Due to bad weather Neustetter was unable to fulfill his goal, leaving Norway with an experience lost. However, in collaboration with his travel partner James Webb, Neustetter was able to gather some relevant documentation from his search in the form of sound recordings, a series of photographs and drawings that depict his journey and search. From this foundation Neustetter attempts to re-visit his journey by extracting visual data from sound documentation through the manipulation of sound, water, laser-light, and drawing.

First presented at Outlet, Pretoria (October 2009) and featured at TEDx, Johannesburg

REVIEW:

Marcus Neustetter: Observatory in the Making at Art on Paper

by Mary Corrigan published in *The Sunday Independent*, 10 January, 2010

When viewing a Marcus Neustetter exhibition, it is always worth bearing in mind that he does not create art to be exhibited. What often goes on display are simply the products or by-products of performances or artistic and conceptual experiments driven by an ideological trajectory that he has been pursuing. As such, many will find that his latest exhibition is not terribly thrilling in a visual sense - well, except for the photographs that support or document his process, which are unusually alluring, given their practical function.

Photographs documenting Neustetter's journey to find the Northern Lights in Tromsø, Norway, present evocative banal, barren snow-covered landscapes infused by an eerie tangerine light. But Neustetter is not concerned with the end-product of his physical and conceptual expeditions but the journey itself, the process. His journeys may be driven by a calculated set of ideas, but when he has arrived at his destination, Neustetter immerses himself in the experience at hand. In the drawings at the Vela Spila site (an archeological site in Croatia), Neustetter doesn't attempt figurative representations of the site; rather he undertakes making what appears to be meaningless markings on paper. They are more than a testament that he was there; they are evidence that he has engaged in the act of viewing. Drawing is used to simply heighten his awareness of the space he is inhabiting.

In his previous exhibitions, *In Two Minds* (2008) and *One Moment* (2009), he has used more contemporary hi-tech means to document experience: photography and map-making by tracing Google Earth images. Both modes of recording are able to map space and experience with some degree of precision, but, as Neustetter observed in these exhibitions, they offer only partial truths and representations which in no way summon the magnitude of an experience. Presumably in frustration, Neustetter abandoned the idea of retrieving faithful representations of experience and has resorted to a low-tech method: drawing, a tool which allows him to immediately describe an experience.

He is mesmerised by the sheer physical or visual magnificence of natural wonders, but it is also their intangible connection to human development or history that undoubtedly holds his fascination. With this exhibition his gaze shifts up, towards the sky, the stars and the grand phenomenon that occurs in this vast territory, such as the Aurora Borealis, the northern lights. But this complicates his project. Capturing constellations, or such natural light displays, is beyond Neustetter's reach. When he heads off to Norway to photograph the Aurora Borealis and his efforts are thwarted by inclement weather, which prevent the display from being viewed, he discovers that even the visual manifestations of nature are sometimes elusive.

What beats at the core of Neustetter's quests is the desire to in some way capture the intangible, the transcendental and, if one pushes it further, an attempt to unlock the mysteries of the universe. Traditionally, this has been a scientific quest, but it is one which Neustetter subverts into an abstract, visceral adventure that has more to do with the act of seeing or viewing than gathering data. This idea is crystallised in his representations of observatories.

A wooden maquette of an observatory, titled *The Observatory I*, evinces the human compulsion to view the world beyond the earth, to surpass that which can be seen by the naked eye and thus a drive to transcend human limitations. The scale of Neustetter's model allows us to view this fixation from another perspective, one which highlights the sense of futility in this kind of viewing: our greatest instruments of discovery are tiny in comparison to the territory they are intended to probe. Neustetter's purposefully inconsequential drawings also demonstrate an awareness of this senselessness. Instead of capturing the specifics of the night sky he views in *Space between the Stars* (Sutherland 1 & 2), he embraces an abstract engagement that is focused on the act of contemplation. For Neustetter, it seems that the act of seeing precedes moments of clarity: staring into the dark evening sky allows us to temporarily become severed from terra firma and our present existence. Nevertheless, his efforts to draw - albeit abstract documents - of starry constellations suggests that "viewing", an immersive kind of viewing, provides the means for him to take refuge from thought altogether: caught in the act of transposing, he becomes consumed by the forms that he views in the sky.

Of all the modes of documentation that he uses in this exhibition, it is his laser, sound, performance piece, *Chasing Lights*, that is the most visually arresting. Unable to view the northern lights, he enlisted the help of James Webb, one of his contemporaries, to record the sounds that are emitted when it appears. Neustetter transposes these sounds into "images" using water, speakers and a laser beam. Ultimately, this exhibition is a thesis on seeing. Neustetter is fascinated with both the bold probing instruments that stretch out towards the sky and the methods of capturing the wonders that they allow us to see.

But he is not distanced from this project because he is caught up in the visceral pleasure of surveying the dark abyss, studying the configuration of stars and immersing himself in this limitless vast space, which activates the imagination and allows humans to think beyond the present. It is an imaginative space, which provides the inner eye with the ultimate reflexive motion: to view the world as if one is no longer of it.