

Marcus Neustetter

GALLERY AOP | *Johannesburg*



Austrian writer Karl Kraus (1874-1936) was vehement in his criticism of journalists and authors for using language as a means to command rather than serve it as an end. He believed that language shouldn't be an empty means to disseminate ready-

made opinions, rather, it should be the means to thought itself; in the same literary breath, he condemned explorers - men who travelled to the poles of the world, who wished to travel to the stars and moon - for having the same type of specious and greedy relationship with the concept of travel. Kraus would have loved Marcus Neustetter's *One Moment*

It is an exhibition documenting, in spirit and magic, Neustetter's experience of climbing Mount Teide on Tenerife, Canary Islands, during October 2008. And he does so, exploiting all the visual grammar at hand, from digital media to videography and photography, to frottage and drawings, but not overburdening this magic with words of documentation or formality. The danger of contemplative and playful work of this nature is the possibility of slipping over into self-indulgence.

This is slightly at issue in two of the installations: a heap of blocks of wood, and the rusted detritus left in the wake of a block of ice. Performative and transient, these works may have carried the residue of magic or wonder, but the former relates to something that hasn't yet happened, and the other has already been.

Another piece that begs to evolve, to become stronger, is a video work containing a looped triptych of Mount Teide.

However, with the basic medium of pen and ink on paper, Neustetter evokes something deep yet nebulous in four folios. His humble, delicate cross-hatching is about feeling between the cracks of volcanic rock, of earth and sky, of urban light and starlight; about capturing the profundity of travelling to a place where hell seems actualised. Photographic images such as *Moment I-IV* give postcard perfect voice to this, the light of the oncoming day is like a synthetically generated oasis of orange, and the lights in the sky and those on earth present poetic corollaries to one another.

The primary untitled installation, positioned as you enter the gallery, however, engages with something completely different. It is illegal to export volcanic rock from the Canary Islands. Neustetter secreted a piece amidst his art equipment, and allowed it - with pencil on the wall - to form the nexus of a cross-hatched imaginary panorama stretching into a disarming sense of infinity against the plastered over bricks of the gallery. This tour de force piece, which skirts around issues of legality and power (that would have made Kraus frown), is transient enough to hold the magic, but timeless in its waywardness.

Robyn Sassen