

Spier Residency Fellowship for Rhodes graduate

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By Harriet Knight

Lindi Arbi, a recent Master of Fine Art graduate from Rhodes University, won the prestigious Spier Residency Fellowship at the Gyeonggi Creation Centre in South Korea. Winners were announced at the City Hall Launch in Cape Town last month.

The coveted Spier Residency includes airfare, a studio and accommodation as well as a monthly stipend of 500 000 South Korean won (about 500 USD). Arbi hopes to take up the residency in late September 2010. The residency affords her an excellent opportunity to “simply be an artist in a new stimulating environment, while also developing invaluable connections”.

The work that got her the acknowledgement and acclaim was part of her Master’s Portfolio, as well as a submission for the Residency project she wishes to work on which focuses on endemic endangered plants. This project will form part of group exhibition titled ‘Last one Standing’ together with Grahamstown artist Tanya Poole and Rhodes MFA alumni Michelle Key.

Arbi wowed the Fine Art Department with her Master’s work detailing themes of loss and memory and the redefinition of self through her experience of widowhood. Working as a sculptor she used different material representations of her own body to develop self portraiture work. Deeper inspection of her work goes beyond the beautifully unusual sculptural techniques she uses to allude to a much more poignant feeling of loss and the tangential nature of life.



Part of her work *Unearthed* was a circular wall where she hung up hundreds of sculpted clay hot water bottles. Entitled *One More Night with You*, these fetish objects acted as ineffectual stand-ins for the absent body of the loved one. More tragically the medium in which the work is done is clay, the bottles themselves now offer no warmth or comfort, they are instead fragile, cold and unyielding and have the potential to break if embraced, again illustrating the fragility of life and its temporal status.

These unyielding hot water bottles facilitated the transition to the second part of the exhibition, *Anon*, where the same form was repeatedly cast in clear plastic and filled with destroyed fragments of treasured mementoes of Arbi's late husband. Most famously she is noted for her body cast emerging from a flesh-like block, which she buried in a Grahamstown cemetery for 18 months. Many would be afraid of burying their Master's work and being out of control of what happens to the sculpted form. However, Arbi has a preference for artworks that themselves undergo change.

Excavated, the work held more than just beauty in its imposing sculptural form but now had elements of nature with roots and dirt, redefining this work from a sculpture to something far more conceptual about life and our perceptions of ourselves in it.

Arbi notes that "Kudos should go to my sculpture lecturer, Maureen de Jager, who mentored and nurtured me throughout my BFA and MFA degree at Rhodes, and encouraged me to enter the Spier competition."