

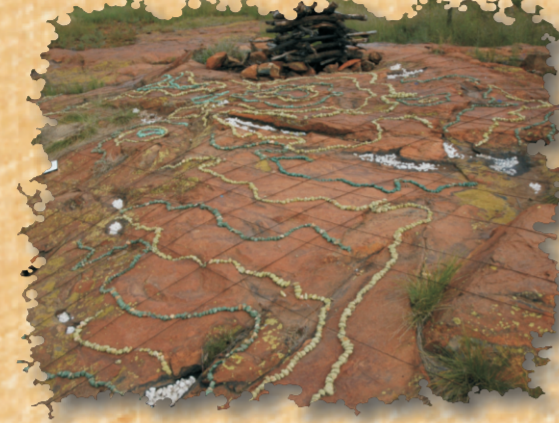
D I G G I N G S I & I I

by Esther Simonis

Esther Simonis' keen interest in archaeology and her eagerness to preserve the Tswana cultural heritage lead to the excavation project together with Professor Mason at the site of Thaba Ya Batswana (phase one). This preceded her work for the Masters Degree in Visual Arts. Her art project is presented in two exhibitions that contain reinterpretations and traces of two traversing histories. The first exhibition (Diggings I) consist of eight 'levels' of site specific installations presented at this archaeological site in the southern hills of Johannesburg (phase two). The second exhibition (Diggings II) at FRIED Contemporary Art Gallery, exhibit photo and other documentation of the first exhibition (phase three). The catalogued dissertation serves as the fourth and last phase of this endeavor.



Level I - Crypted Script (2)



Level II - Charting the Rise and Fall

The rockface, a 'clean slate' turned into topographical map - symbolising a new start for the artist but with a guiding 'roadmap' which refers to both the network of artworks, as well as the parallel histories of the artist and the Tswana people.



Level III - Reframing Time

The frame focuses the attention of the viewer and guides him to take a mental snapshot of his view across histories. It is reminiscent of the technological division of seconds into 'frames' and pictures into pixels. Truths need to be 'transported' through time and across histories to facilitate meaning.



Level IV - Tandem Timelines (1)

The walls are shelters from onslaughts thus allowing the preservation of symbols of the personal pasts they contain. In this way - smaller 'worlds' are enclosed within the larger 'worlds' - i.e. that of the Tswana alongside that of contemporary history.

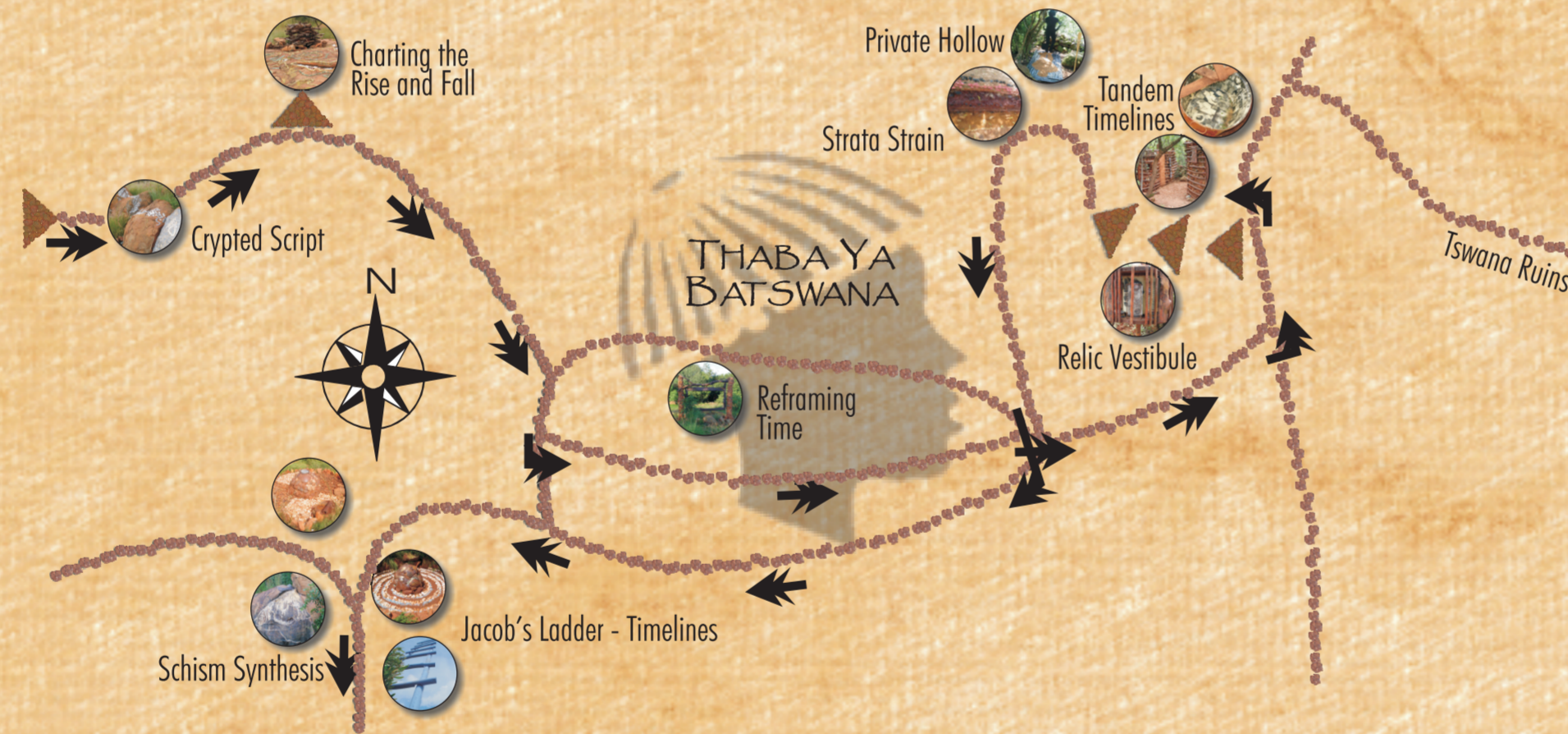


Level IV - Tandem Timelines (2)



Level I - Crypted Script (1)

The artist engages in an archaeological unearthing of archives (cache of memories) and bring them to (the) light, in an attempt to come to terms with a personal past and to achieve closure. The past is then buried again - this time for the purpose of preservation - implying a reconciliation with the past.



Level V - Relic Vestibules

A collection of reminiscences and treasured small 'finds' parceled in containers or 3D collages. Fossilised foot and hand prints, and other marks and traces are physical records of past events/stories.

Level V - Yellow Ochre Grave

The Yellow Ochre Grave exhibits objects that accentuate how the presence of archaeological objects may be considered intrusive to the natural surroundings.



Level VIII - Jacob's Ladder

Circular timelines in nature are reminiscent of circular Tswana settlements and symbolise the passage of time in nature and in cultural activities and also allude to the 'network' of the author's past - the ladder suggesting closure and transcendence.



Level VIII - Jacob's Ladder - Timelines



Level VII - Schism Synthesis

The cracks and fissures symbolise strife and tension between cultures as well as between culture and nature. The water by virtue of its fluidity or flexibility, conciliates, purifies and unifies.



Level VI - Strata Strain

Successive layers - representing the histories of the Tswana, contemporary society and that of the artist's personal life. The interspersed charcoal layers signify the filtering of artefacts, resulting in a clearer vision of the past.



Level VI - Private Hollow

A private portal to an enclosed space where the artist encounters obscured truths, fears and realities concerning past, present and future.

BEGINNINGS

