

**A GRAPHIC INTERPRETATION OF SOME SOCIAL
CONSTRUCTIONS OF DISABILITY**

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ERRATA

Page 9 "sight of power" should read "site of power".

Page 16 The second last sentence under the heading "The use of colour in the work" should read:

"Using various tones of colour helped in describing the nature of physical properties within various elements depicted in the image."

Page 19 "The Rising Woman" should read "Rising Woman".

The word phrase "the general pathetic" should read "generally pathetic".

Under the heading "Lucas and Talana", the last sentence should read:

"The couple look confidently at the viewer through the shadows that the fig tree casts upon them. The shadows from the fig leaves suggest a similarity with the Biblical myth of Adam and Eve. However, unlike Adam and Eve, they do not attempt to hide their nakedness with fig leaves after their apparent sin."

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“ and God saw all that He had made, and it was very good”.

Genesis Chapter 1 verse 31.

The fowls were fluffing in the dust and sun:
that crook-nek white pullet Mumma said she would
hit on the head if she had the courage to;
but she hadn't. So the white crook-nek thing stood
around grabbing what and whenever it could, but sort of sideways.
“Why're the others pecking at it, Pa ? ”
Because they don't like the look of it. Because
it's different.

Patrick White. The vivisector.

“If I have any kids,” says Hardy, “I hope they're
disabled. Then they'll be militant bastards like me.
If they're crips, they're going to learn what handcuffs are”

Ian Parker interviewing a Disabled People's Direct Action
Network (DAN) member,
The Independent 1995.

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Venceremos !

INTRODUCTION

The work undertaken for my Masters degree seeks to address some of the prejudice experienced by disabled people. Society's concept of a normal body prescribes unattainable standards for people with disabilities, thereby isolating and marginalising them. Instead of accommodating these physical differences, society encourages disabled people to withdraw from society or to try to conform to able-bodied ideals and to appear 'as normal as possible'.

The very physical presence of disabled people challenges these assumptions of normality. Therefore, attempts are made to cosmetically hide the offending part or exclude the person from society (e.g. a hollow shirt sleeve or 'special' school). When individuals fail to conform to the prescribed standards of normality, they face the stigma of being viewed as pitifully inferior and dependent upon their able-bodied counterparts. In this way disabled people do not 'suffer' so much from their condition, as from the oppression of able-bodied biases. Through different eyes, society could be seen as handicapped as a result of its inability to adapt to, or deal with difference. In reality, however, disabilities are experienced by many people and can range from those which are physically visible and easily identified to those less obvious, but often more debilitating such as abrasive, socially aggressive personalities or learning disabilities. It is possible, therefore, to extend the understanding of the term disability to any physical or emotional impairment that limits a person's functioning within a so-called normal society.

Although many people and organisations have searched for less pejorative or negative terms to describe an impairment such as 'Very Special', 'people with abilities' or 'physically challenged', these attempts have failed to reverse prejudice. Instead, these descriptions have only re-described the emphasis on 'otherness' and 'difference'. In addition, these replaced descriptions are again associated with the same stigmas that they were intentionally designed to avoid. In the following discussion I have consciously used the word disabled or disability to refer to individuals with various disabilities which I have nevertheless defined as socially constructed. In doing so I am suggesting no pejorative associations. Through this project I wanted to explore notions of disability within various debates associated with disability and society. I have done this in the context of my own experience of disability, and my own attempts to come to terms with disability. In this sense this project represents a personal journey.

Literature on disability related issues as well as contact with disability organisations both here and in Britain (Disabled People South Africa and the British National Disability Arts Forum) has helped me clear my path through the mine field of loaded terminology and difficult subject matter. My involvement with organisations and with some of the more theoretical aspects has assisted me in formulating my views by creating an appropriate visual and theoretical basis for my work. My intention was to avoid

discriminatory and oppressive stereotypes, and to take care not to replace them with other oppressive types. Art and literature relating to disability issues introduced me to the debates on disability identity within a multi-cultural society, as well as the social history of disability, "of which much is unwritten, unclaimed" (Parker 1995:4).

It is a part of the history of our western society that people identifying with values other than the 'dominant White Anglo Saxon' (Finkelstein 1993:4) set of social values were discriminated against by the dominant social bias. With disability generally being viewed as different and inferior within dominant cultures there is a common experience of being oppressed by the majority of people with disabilities within these societies. To this extent, denying or eluding disabilities does not assist in assimilating disabled people into a world designed for 'normal' people.

Real social integration can be achieved on the basis of recognising this difference, which would greatly depend on disabled people making a free choice in identifying themselves as a social group (Finkelstein 1993:4).

The dilemma that I was presented with at the outset of this project, was whether or not to align myself with the Disability Movement. On the one hand, such an alignment could potentially exaggerate difference and produce a greater degree of 'othering' by polarising groups. On the other hand, association with a disability movement offered the potential to structure myself within a social group with its own identity, distinct from the identity created for it by the dominant social groups through prejudice expressed in literature, charity advertising and the arts. In choosing the latter option, I feel that I have been able to express a personal experience of disability within the framework of the Disability Movement, and thus to represent some of their interests too.

1. SOME STRUCTURES OF DISABILITY

In this section I explore various social structures through which many disabled individuals construct their identities.

This section is in turn divided up into seven sub-sections, each of which outlines those aspects of this subject which have most influenced my thinking and, as a result, the work I have produced.

1.1 Sutherland's 'Myth of the normal healthy body'

Sutherland suggests that society assigns people to two body categories: able and disabled. This categorisation is upheld and perpetuated by a socially accepted scale of physical extremes, for example: Spinal bifida on the one extreme and hayfever on the other. Physically disabled people are categorised according to their disability group, rather than seen as individual people. In this way Sutherland argues that a person with severe hayfever may be more incapacitated than a person who has mild, or well controlled epilepsy. As a result of this biased categorisation the severe hayfever sufferer is readily accepted as normal and yet the sufferer of epilepsy retains the stigma of disability. People, by and large, play down their disabilities and try to keep above the line of what is considered as normal, rather than take a course of action that might confront biased values. This struggle to pass as normal succeeds most often when disabled people are separated from each other, thus condemning them to even further social isolation.

Sutherland further questions the existence of an immaculate working body as all people face a decline in physical and mental ability with age.

The fact that ageism is generally treated as a separate issue is simply a measure of the extent of acceptance of the false distinction between disabled and able-bodied. (Sutherland 1981:19).

1.2 Oliver's concept of disability being in a 'suspended state', and social misconceptions about disability

Through the social pursuit of what is regarded as bodily perfection, the beautiful body becomes a sight of power, deserving of respect and admiration from those who seek to conform to these social values. Religion, art, literature and the popular media perpetuate the myth that the body reflects one's personal psychological state, i.e. a beautiful body reflects goodness and a twisted body reflects a twisted mind. In reaction to these conceptions the Disability Movement aims, as do the organisations representing similarly socially repressed people such as blacks, women and gay people, to shift the emphasis away from the body onto the social constructions and prejudices that turn these physical attributes into disabilities.

Prejudice against disability generally comes from a fear of the unknown, hence the absence of disabled people (besides charity advertisement and horror films) from normal social contexts and in the media. This results in most people never having to confront disability as a normal part of society. In this regard Oliver points out that disabled people occupy a suspended state within society (Hevey 1992:13).

They are human beings but their bodies are warped or malfunctioned, leaving their full humanity in doubt... The disabled spend a lifetime in a suspended state. They are neither fish nor fowl; they exist in partial isolation from society as undefined, ambiguous people (Hevey 1992:13).

In reaction to this socially undefined state where few ethical boundaries exist, disability is used by artists, for example, in the creation of anti-social monsters, (see figure 1). These monsters either expose their tragic bitterness within the harmony of 'normal' society thereby threatening it (e.g. villains in James Bond films) or become freaks or victims for normal-bodied audiences. This association of disability with freaks, monsters or victims is not treated problematically, and is most often exploited for its fear or pity value.

This state of suspension and ambiguity is clearly visible in Western religions which have been influential in promoting moral and ethical guidelines for Western society.



Figure 1. *Creature from the Black Lagoon* Sygma Agency.

In the Biblical interpretation of absolutes of right and wrong, Christianity, for example, does not appear to define any clear position concerning disability. It is in this grey area between absolutes that oppressive thought regarding the origin of disability flourishes. Believers, unable to imagine an imperfect God “Man was made in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:26) would sooner view disability as punishment by God for past sins.

This notion is further entrenched in Christian art by the absence of disability in heaven, but the abundance of twisted bodies of demons and victims in hell, influencing the viewer to associate disability with wrong or the Devil (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Hubrecht van Eyck
1366–1426 *The Last Judgment*

1.3 Hevey's tragic principle of viewing a disability as a 'sense of loss'

Hevey asserts that the unifying feature of all Western discourse associated with the oppression of those with disabilities in culture (from Classical Greek theatre to contemporary James Bond villains and charity advertising) is the concept that “disablement means impairment and impairment means social flaw” (Hevey 1992:113). Hevey states that this ‘tragic’ model may change in form, but the content of showing disability as tragedy remains the same.

This social construction is naturalised through the artist's, or playwright's creation of a disabled character who carries a flaw on his or her body (for example, Shakespeare's hunchback, King Richard III). Through these fictional and flawed characters the creators speak to a normal bodied audience of the character's self loathing and their

terrible fate. The creator also plays on the fears of the normal-bodied audiences of themselves becoming like the disabled character. The character's self loathing, as well as their apparent threat to society challenges socially accepted order. Justice is seemingly done when the hero, for example – James Bond, kills off this monstrous threat to civilised values, or the deformed monster self-destructs out of its own despair or bitterness as it realises its inability to be accepted by society. The fact that Shakespeare's King Richard III was in real life not a hunchback is an example of the powerful tradition that has associated the disabled body as a symbol of an evil mind.

Another less obvious oppressive device is the excess amount of sympathy poured over the tragic but brave view of disability. An example of this could be seen in the portrayal of John Merrick in the film 'The Elephant Man' (director David Lynch 1982).

A more blatant use of this model is evident in charity advertising where praise or sympathy promotes feelings of patronisation in the normal-bodied, and the view of disabled people being not as fortunate as themselves. In this regard disabled people are used as examples of how fortunate normal persons are in having control over their minds and their bodies, and thus over their social environment (see figure 3).



Figure 3. *Action speaking louder than words.* Disability protest, London, 1989.

1.4 Charity advertising

Ironically one of the greatest factors in society promoting oppressively inferior stereotypes of disability is charity advertising involving the disabled.

Most disability charity advertising operates on a "dependency model" (Sutherland 1981:113) that actively promotes the idea that the disabled are essentially tragically pitiful creatures. The more pitiful the depiction of the disabled, the deeper the advertisers hope society will dig into their pockets, 'for people less fortunate than ourselves'. Therefore the more tragic the advertisers' imagery becomes the more it discriminates and alienates disabled people from society. In this way these advertisers "allow themselves to remain trapped in a vicious circle, without consolidating with disabled individuals" (Sutherland 1981:113). Yet the same charities and advertisers claim to represent

the best interests of disabled people. This dependency model, claims Sutherland, can only work because the disabled are socially conditioned to believe in their own powerlessness. In addition to this, is the belief that;

... if you stand up for yourself, and for your rights, you're biting the hand that feeds you, and you in turn will lose the support that you physically need to survive (Sutherland 1981:114).

Another repercussion for disabled people is the possible resentment that normal-bodied society may express as a result of the perception that disabled people have very little to offer society. The process of giving money further enforces this notion of dependency on normal-bodied society. Recently, over the past decade, individuals partaking in the Disability Movement have taken it into their own hands to challenging these negative stereotypes (see figure 3.)

1.5 The transition from a medical to a social model of disability

In recent years the Disability Movement has promoted a move from a medical to a social model of disability. This position is argued by Sutherland (1984:18) and others where they question the medical definition of certain impairments as disabilities.

A society which does not see itself as an amalgam of differences creates disabilities by pretending to a norm which is the set up as a test to be passed before access to full participation is allowed (Sutherland 1984:18).

In this transition from the medical to the social model, the differences permeate through the issue of language. In the social model the preferred terminology is not physically based, but places the onus on society for change. Physical difference is no longer perceived as essentially negative.

Far more restrictive are social attitudes, behaviour and practice. It is these which disable people. It is society that is the disabling force. Picture it more specifically. Some of us have mobility restrictions, which are facilitated by wheelchairs. By the criteria of the medical model, wheelchairs are regarded as restrictive. In terminology this has the consequences of such phrases as 'wheelchair bound', 'confined to a wheelchair. Actually, wheelchairs are facilitating freedom of mobility. Therefore, wheelchair users prefer a term which is purely functional: quite simply 'wheelchair users' (Davies 1993:20).

2. VISUAL THEMES IN THE IMAGES

In this body of work I have tried visually to explore and to challenge traditional concepts of disability. I have examined the classical assumptions that beauty and physical perfection reflect truth and moral worth, and the impact these values have had on the attitudes of society to people with disabilities. I have also tried to propose that disability is, after all, a condition that, given time, will affect all of us, and that has many manifestations, apart from the physical. My work has thus been concerned with various contrasts. I have identified various themes which prevail throughout the work though each is foregrounded in specific prints.

2.1 Facades of society

The starting point for the planning of my images was to explore and emphasise the social construction of disability and the contrast between conformity and difference. An important focus of this exploration was the suburban house, and the housing constructions which are typical of many parts of every city. I chose to represent the flimsiness of socially constructed social order in the form of suburban scapes. In emphasising this social order (illustrated in the uniformity of the construction of houses, in *Brooklyn, Cape Town*) I wanted to propose that this need of people to conform to the prevailing social values represents a form of 'disorder' when compared to an apparent universally random nature.

Through the presence of a person who appears disabled I wanted to imply that because of their being labeled socially different they have the capacity to see differently, and thus through some of the prejudice encribed in social order. This action of observing is evident in the print *Looking up* where I stand on the roof of my house, above suburbia. The action of 'seeing' is evident in *Above Budapest* whereby the tilting of the model of a building project acts as a metaphor for the flimsiness of social order.

In *Self portrait with dollar* the 'disabled' observer observes the room that metaphorically represents reality. The crude props depicting a big house, family and garden are facades to surround the people and create an illusion of ordinary reality. The steps of a dance are placed on the floor to assist in learning a social approach, or way of doing things through good social etiquette. The block of flats outside and other rooms in the mansion indicate that there are similar rooms representing similarly constructed realities.

This idea is restated in *Rising woman*, where the occupants have constructed a world within a world within one room. This room is only one kind of reality in contrast to the similar looking houses outside.

In *The river* the physical appearance of disability in society, by implication questions the foundations of social values. In this image I suggest that even the ground that people stand on is a facade, below it runs the water, the same water of the river further out in the image.

2.2 The desire to impose structure onto nature

The desire of humans to find universal hierarchical order in both nature and society is an attempt to categorise, contain and control in the face of infinite diversity and the contingency of historical process. This gives meaning to human ideals and notions of truth. In *Suburban house* the space in the suburban setting is artificially marked off by walls as opposed to a natural landscape. Continuity of this order is represented by the heavy square blocks laid over the ground. However, this humanly constructed order is repelled, to be overcome by the prevailing chaotic plant life beneath it which also threatens the ordered house built on the cement blocks.

In *Woman rising* this desire to impose order over nature is evident in the mixed natural landscape which is tamed by train tracks and engineered constructions. The earth itself is harnessed into order in *The river* where it has been domesticated into arable land.

2.3 The empowerment of disability

In order to try to break with the stereotypes of depicting disabled persons as either pathetic, tragic or monstrous beings, I wanted to depict people with disabilities as subject to the same range of emotions as all people. My decision to include myself in this body of work, as in *Looking up*, is rooted in my childhood classification as disabled within a medical model (discussed above) and my imaging of myself and others is a reaction to most images of disabled people that include their portrayal as victims of tragic loss and social alienation.

In this regard James Baldwin, writes: "The victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim; he or she has become a threat" (Hevey 1992:102). In this image I wanted to emphasise to the viewer other qualities: the tattoo of the smiling skull suggests a rejection of the passive and pathetic image of disability.

In *Rising woman* the kneeling naked woman confronts the viewer with her sombre expression. Although her nakedness may suggest vulnerability and an unequal relationship with the viewer she confronts the viewer with her stare and stiff pose. The woman is empowered by the control box that she holds firmly in her hand. She has deliberately steered the locomotive off the rails. In this image I wanted the train set to indicate the desire of humans to conform as part of their social reality.

This notion of being able to empower oneself is further emphasised in *Painting reality*. A painter is reading from a book from which she is painting what she understands to be reality. She stands in front of Adam and Eve, representing the perfection created by God before imperfection and sin came into the world. The woman, who has a spinal curvature holds a paint roller ready to paint over the surface reality that associates her with the nameless medical victims that surround her. She has the means and desire to eradicate the surface reality created by a medical model of disability.

2.4 Biblical and metaphorical themes in the work

In my upbringing Christian symbolism was important and has influenced my work and the meaning I attach to it.

In *Touching history* the concept of blame for disability is dealt with. The mother accuses the father, while the father accuses Jesus Christ, or in Christian terms, God incarnate.

The question is, who is to blame for imperfection? Since man was made in "God's image and likeness", (Genesis 1:26) is God's image imperfect or is the Devil or human sin to blame? This concept of sin associated with disability and deformity is again portrayed in *Painting reality*, where a black man with a pigeon chest tries to wash himself clean of the sin that has caused it.

In *Creating our Eden* I wanted to explore the creation of a paradise being manifest in the minds of a union between two lovers, rather like the biblical construction of creating a new Eden in which to begin pure and unadulterated principles of truth and love. This Eden replaces the old suburban Eden or paradise, whose structures, symbolic of socially conceived truths, lie in ruins.

In *Above Budapest* the image of Michelangelo's *The Final Judgment* (1512, Sistine Chapel, Rome) serves as a warning to mortals who play god on earth, emphasised by the image of myself and my hand touching the model, echoing the finger of God in Michelangelo's 'The Creation of Adam' (1510, Sistine Chapel, Rome, see figure 4).



Figure 4. Michelangelo *The Creation of Adam* (1510) Sistine Chapel

In the etching titled, *Lucas and Talana* the two boys wrestling in the background suggest Jung's description "Life is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be, and if it were not so existence would come to an end" (Jung 1968: 75).

The River carries with it symbols of death and the after life. The mansion on the other side of the river indicates the Biblical reference to paradise that "In my fathers house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

The river is a metaphysical allusion to life passing, the man swimming to the other side indicates the death of the man and his passage 'to the other side'. Death is represented by the moon, or a hole in the sky from which light emanates.

2.5 The concept of alienation in the work

In the work I have emphasised that disability, as with all social constructions which claim to reflect (religious) truths, is, to a large extent, superficial. These human creations offer no protection against the alienation of the universe.

The presence of an empty black sky emphasises this vast expanse, dwarfing the flimsy buildings in both *Suburban house*, and in *Looking up*. This same sense of the fragility of life is present in *Lucas and Talana*, where small lights of the town below indicate other houses in the darkness of night.

I wanted to suggest that human presence in the world is transitory and ephemeral, and indicated this through imagery in *The river*, for example, where I left out the shadows that the moon should have cast. A further suggestion of alienation was represented by the destruction of the bridge over the river, symbolically showing that the metaphysical link with the 'other side' had been broken.

2.6 The use of colour in the work

Through selectively colouring areas of the work my intention was to enhance the reading of narratives, by means of details in the prints being visually fore-grounded through contrasting tonal areas.

In *Painting reality* the furthest room is printed in a lighter red emphasising the quality of light both inside and outside the room, whereas the room closest to the viewer is printed in a darker red/black. While this contrast emphasises a special perspective it contrasts the light of day (and normality) with the dark room occupied by twisted forms, heightening the association of darkness with disability. The desire to change this concept is illustrated in the red paint roller the disabled woman holds. The woman with the paint roller has the ability to paint over the traditional surface reality (represented in the heaped bodies) that associates her with the medical model of disability. Using various tones of colour also served to accentuate the description of physical properties of the iconography in the images. This is evident in *The river* whereby the use of two tones describe the lightness and space of the sky, and blackness of land.

3. WORKING METHODS AND ETCHING PROCESSES

3.1 Working method

One of my central concerns in this body of work has been to produce pictorial environments with a strongly recognisable sense of realism. This realism has assisted in the believable portrayal of the narrative content of the work. Part of the nature of the images has also been determined by my source material, which has been largely photographic. The use of photographs has allowed me to represent various physical conditions in a recognisable way, but the idiom has also enabled me to distort and subvert the physical manifestation of these conditions, while still retaining the realism of the genre, thus suggesting that it is possible to manipulate perceived reality, or more importantly, the perception of reality.

In preparing the images, I relied on the easily manipulated processes of collage, and explored some of the ways in which meanings changed with the conjunction of different images. My starting point was usually a collection of photocopied images as well as photographic 'snapshots' taken of some friends who have disabilities. A rough collage would be copied onto the plate, after which I would employ a range of intaglio etching processes to develop the image.

3.2 Technical processes

All the prints were produced on .9mm copper plates. The material qualities of copper provided a surface that would stand up to reworking and would retain delicate aquatints through extended print runs. Ferric chloride was used due to its stability and dependable etching properties.

All the images were generally processed in a similar way. Firstly the photocopied collage was traced directly onto a smoked, blackened hardground, to provide a rough guide for the image. Through the use of various sharpened etching needles I drew and stippled through the waxed surface. The plate was step-etched to achieve the various tones of the lines. After the application of etched lines on the plate I applied aquatint to the plate by means of an aquatint box. In this process I usually laid different aquatint grounds, normally a fine aquatint in areas denoting flesh and coarser aquatints to emphasise other substances, such as earth in *The river*. The contrast of aquatints served to create variation of texture in the image. The aquatinted grounds were again step-bitten to produce a range of tones. After this stage a proof was taken to determine what needed to be accentuated or reworked. To emphasise volume and detail, as well as to create integration of various areas in the etching, I would burnish areas of the aquatint.

In *Above Budapest* I used a gelatin-based dichromate light-sensitive emulsion to expose a photographic image onto the plate. I deliberately cut up the film positive in order to fracture the image. In this way I integrated the various component parts. In addition to this I unevenly etched different areas of the photographic image by spit-biting, thereby further breaking down the photographic image and giving it the appearance of a hanging curtain.

In various images I introduced spit-biting techniques directly onto areas of an aquatint ground. This produced a softer, watercolour-like quality to some of the images, such as in the television screen in *Lucas and Talana*, as opposed to the hard edge produced by a bitumen resist.

In printing the plates I mixed various versions of black, bistro and green into the reds and blue colour inks in which the images were printed. The application of the colour inks onto the plate was done 'à la poupée', or by means of selectively wiping each area of plate separately, with the desired colour.

All prints printed on 230 gram Hahnemuhle etching paper, 1200mm x 800mm.

3.3 Technical challenges

In the beginning the size of my images was limited by the size of the etching press. At first I was able to make the plate as big as the press bed (550 x 900 mm), and fold the edges of the paper over the sides of the bed. With the arrival of the new Brand press my plates were increased in size though I was still restricted by the size of the acid baths and aquatint cupboard. I decided to work with these limitations and with the last five plates I was able to achieve both a manageable and desirable scale.

4. BACKGROUND NOTES ON THE PRINTS

The tower

The man shaving looks ambitiously from a low built suburban scape to a high office tower. The presence of blood on his face shows his humaness in contrast to the concrete of the desolate houses and cold tower. A discordant aspect of the image is that disabled people have rarely been depicted as ambitious or having power unless they were evil. The coldness of expression is contrasted by a seemingly naive and sweet child's painting behind the man. On closer examination one can see small children being beaten by rough boys.

Rising woman

The kneeling naked woman looks angry in contrast to the general pathetic, sad looking depictions of disabled people such as in the popular media. In this image I wanted the train set to indicate the desire of people to conform as part of their social reality. The woman is gripped by a moment of realisation that she can challenge this need to conform.

Lucas and Talana

I wanted to compose the portrait within the familiarity of the sitters' own domestic surroundings. Lucas, being in a wheelchair, has eye-level contact with the viewer, who is also encouraged to feel part of the relaxed group, despite Lucas being half naked and exposing his curved chest. I wanted to depict Lucas sitting in his wheelchair juxtapositioned to Talana's cage-like chair, suggesting an inversion. This highlights Lucas' prevailing over what is traditionally seen by the medical model of disability (see 1.5) as being wheelchair bound.

There is a theme of the Garden of Eden in the image. The couple look confidently at the viewer through the shadows of the fig tree falling on them, in no attempt to 'hide their nakedness' after their apparent sin (see 2.4).

Suburban house

I wanted to illustrate the house in a monumental way emphasising the conformity of its plain geometry. The deadness of the box-like house has been heightened by the curve of the pool, and the figure within it. The thin garden hose indicates an almost metaphysical umbilical cord between the unfathomed depth of the pool and the protection offered by the house. The woman floating in the pool could be alive or dead, adding a surreality to the image. She floats between levels of consciousness within the water. It is not clear if the water is distorting the image of her body, or if she is physically deformed herself. The presence of the woman and the weeds emphasise the struggle for life in contrast to the almost lifeless shell of the house.

The house heightens the division between the open expanse of the universe and tightly ordered, rationalised and protected space of the suburb.

Creating our Eden

I wanted to explore the creation of a paradise manifest in the minds of two people in union with each other rather than in the material construction of Eden (which here is represented by the destruction of a suburban paradise behind them).

Sean-James with art agent

The image of Sean-James comes from photographs I took of him in 1993. Sean-James is a homeless person, and an artist, amongst other things. His work is seen as having value in terms of his being different (he is an albino), rather than in terms of its content, or merit.

The mirror on the car reflects the vast difference between Cape Town's wealthy southern suburbs and, a short distance away from the flimsy shacks in the foreground. The poverty and financial disability of the township dwellers have been brought about by the historically unfair access to the means of good education and ability to create wealth. The poverty is heightened by the interior of the luxury car.

Above Budapest

In this image, I wanted to emphasise the power of the individual to see the basic underlying structures and to create, influence and destroy parts of society. The image of the boy holding the lens, shouting, illustrates the need to change the way we understand existing social values.

The river

The protecting woman in the medical nurse's uniform keeping the child away from the group of people, represents the separation of the disabled from society. In protecting disabled people from society or visa versa they are alienated from normal integration, thus aiding the perpetuation of bias against them. Secondly, the appearance of disability in society supposedly promotes the undesirable questioning of the strength of its social values. The potential for the child to reveal truth is represented by the spade in her hand. In the other she carries a patch of earth with a diversity of plants on it representing the diversity of living organisms. This patch provides a contrast to the tamed agricultural land that they stand on.

Double self portrait

In this image I wanted to portray myself now, in contrast to myself ten years ago, in examining my disability. I feel that I have grown away from the conscious feeling of trying to become 'as normal as possible' and have identified disability as a condition that exists within a range of normality.

Brooklyn, Cape Town

The father that carries his child has his eyes closed, suggesting that this world represented in the image is just part of his imagination. The child, from his father's shoulders, can see more of the general structure of the suburb. In this image disability is suggested through the monotony of the urban environment and the lack of potential for change and growth.

Self portrait with dollar

Looking out from the fragile mirror, I can see everything for what it seemingly is, a structured set of conforming values, which, reduce the lovers to mere flesh, blood, need and desire. The stairways leading up towards the light indicate the ambiguity of a possible heaven, or a hole in the roof. This is in stark contrast to the banner that the aeroplane is carrying stating 'Arbeit macht frei'. This means 'Work makes free', and was placed over most Nazi Concentration Camps. Through this I wanted to emphasise that human concepts of truth can be radically distorted to suit those in power. The predominance of the dollar note points to the power of wealth, both its destructiveness and its potential to help change prevailing concepts of truth, goodness and beauty.

5. INDEX TO THE PRINTS



Title: The tower
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 540 x 590 mm
Edition: 12 (2 x A.P.)



Title: The woman rising
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 530 x 710 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Looking up
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 450 x 705 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Creating our Eden
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 510 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Above Budapest
Medium: Dichromate photosensitive ground, hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 610 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Suburban house
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 530 x 730 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Sean-James with art agent
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 550 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Lucas and Talana
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 530 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: The river
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 630 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Brooklyn, Cape Town
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 690 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Touching history
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 680 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Self portrait with dollar
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 680 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)



Title: Painting reality
Medium: Hardground, aquatint on copper
Print size: 700 x 890 mm
Edition: 30 (3 x A.P.)

6. APPENDIX

Aims of the Disability Movement

The International Disability Movement seeks to promote the awareness and practice of equal human rights for disabled people.

Traditionally, disability has been seen as the 'problem' of the individual who has had to change, or be changed by professionals through rehabilitation or cure. Now, disabled people and their organisations have described, from their own experience, how it is economic and social barriers which stop people with impairments participating fully in society. These barriers are so widespread that we are prevented from ensuring a good quality life for ourselves (UNESCO publication 1992).

Despite there being '500 million disabled people in the world' (UNESCO estimate) there are no disability organisations that can claim to represent all groups of disabled persons. Even within the various organisations there exists diverse opinion regarding the means and the goals of the movement. However, the existence as an international movement offers disabled people more power and influence within their countries, in both creating and implementing anti-discriminatory legislation.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1. Sygma Agency. 1978. *Human Oddities*. Monestier, M. New Jersey: Citadel Press
- Figure 2. van Eyck, Hubrecht. 1366 – 1426. *The Last Judgment* Hogarth, B. 1958. *Dynamic Anatomy*. London: Pitman Publishers.
- Figure 3. Ross, Bernard. DAIL Magazine 1993. London: Disability Arts Forum.
- Figure 4. Michelangelo. *The Creation of Adam* Clark, J. 1992. *The Illustrated History of Art*. London: New Burlington Books.

