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Test Patterns: Recent Video from South Africa **A new exhibition this winter at SF Camerawork**

January 8 through March 25, 2009

SAN FRANCISCO-- This winter, SF Camerawork presents *Test Patterns: Recent Video From South Africa*, a new exhibition that brings together the work of nine contemporary South African video artists who explore ideas of citizenship and belonging in the post apartheid era. The artists include Churchill Madikida, Penny Siopis, Berni Searle, Simon Gush, Jo Ractliffe, Ismail Farouk, Ruth Sacks, Steven Cohen and Usha Seejarim. The exhibition is on view January 8 – March 25, 2009 at SF Camerawork, the Bay Area's only non profit gallery dedicated to contemporary photography located in the heart of San Francisco's vibrant downtown art scene at 657 Mission Street.

Video is a distinctly post apartheid medium. Artists in the United States began working with video in the 1960s, but South Africans hadn't even seen television until 1976. The government had banned it previously, fearing it would expose the country to the dangerous ideas of the non-apartheid world. And it was not until the 1980s that television was available in any language other than English or Afrikaans. South African national identity under apartheid, as it was portrayed on TV, belonged strictly to the whites.

The breakaway of video from its exclusive use as a television broadcast tool and into the hands of activists and artists is significant in South Africa. If television had been the preserve of white national identity, video became a way to develop diverse narratives about South Africa's past and to recalibrate contemporary ideas of citizenship and belonging in the post apartheid era.

The exhibition will be presented in two parts. Part One explores ideas of memory and identity under colonialism and apartheid. Part Two surveys post apartheid South Africa as it struggles to define a new national identity amidst the significant challenges of skyrocketing unemployment, HIV/AIDS, corruption, instability, migration and xenophobia.

PART ONE (January 8 – February 14):

Churchill Madikida

Struggles of the Heart, 2002

Struggles of the Heart shows the artist in the clay face paint of a Xhosa initiate, eating and regurgitating "pap", a maize porridge staple of South Africa. In the video, Madikida explores the relationship of cultural memory, national and personal identity and the contemporary.

Madikida was born in 1973 in Butterworth, Eastern Cape. He was the recipient of the 2004 *Brett Kebble Award* and the *Standard Bank Young Artist Award* in 2006. He has participated in numerous group exhibitions including *Documenta XII* in 2007 and *Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art* at the Museum for African Art and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in 2004. Madikida lives and works in Johannesburg.

Jo Ractliffe

Vlakplaas, 1999/2000

Ractliffe pans a video camera over a series of black and white photographs taken with a Holga toy camera on the day of the second free and democratic elections in South Africa as she drove past the former headquarters of South Africa's apartheid era counterinsurgency force, Vlakplaas. Ractliffe's work looks at the erasure of memory through the transformation of the former farm space.

Born in 1961 in Cape Town, Ractliffe lives and works in Johannesburg. She is a lecturer in the Fine Arts Department at the University of the Witwatersrand. She has exhibited both in South Africa and internationally, including at the *Seville Biennial*, *Snap Judgments* at the International Center of Photography in New York and the 2008 *Gwangju Biennial*.

Simon Gush

Ranger Circle, 2007

Ranger Circle refers to the colonial monuments that symbolize the occupation of Africa and the violent division of space that it created. The work also refers to South Africa's game parks,

leisure places where colonialism is reenacted.

Born in South Africa in 1981, Gush is currently a Candidate-Laureate of the Hoger Instituut van Schone Kunsten in Ghent, Belgium. He has exhibited both in South Africa and abroad and was nominated South Africa's 11th Bright Young Thing.

Usha Seejarim
Eight To Four, 2001

Seejarim's interest is in mapping her personal space in South African society. She films the shadows of cars driving along the M1 South highway that links Johannesburg with Lenasia, a nearby town where Indians were forced to relocate during apartheid.

Seejarim was nominated for South Africa's 2002 FNB Vita Art Prize. Her work was recently featured in *Sublimation*, Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, Oudtshoorn, South Africa (2002); *Videoformes 2002*, *Carnet de Voyages: Afrique du Sud*, Paris, France (2002); and *Interchange-Moving Images, Camouflage*, Brussels, Belgium (2000). In 2000 she was an artist-in-residence at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. Born in Bethal in Mpumalanga Province, Seejarim lives and works in Johannesburg.

PART TWO (February 17 – March 25):

Churchill Madikida
Virus, 2005

The artist uses his own body to show the replication of HIV. Starting with footage of his whole body, the image continues to break apart and becomes part of the cellular pattern of the video. The sound track is a song sung in Xhosa by the artist's sister who recently died of AIDS.

Penny Siopis
Pray Prey, 2008

Siopis's *Pray Prey* looks at the role of the game park in South African national identity. It is also a piece that implicates the Zimbabwe crisis and the twenty thousand or more refugees who brave the dangers of the bush every month to flee Zimbabwe to South Africa for a better life.

Siopis was born in Vryburg in 1953 and is based in Johannesburg, where she is Associate Professor in Fine Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand. She has exhibited widely both in South Africa and internationally.

Ismail Farouk

Johannesburg Time Lapse, Jack Mincer Taxi Rank, 2006

Farouk's work looks at the transformation of Johannesburg from a segregated apartheid city to an emerging African city. This work focuses on the Jack Mincer Taxi Rank, an informal, widely used transportation system that services hundreds of thousands of South African commuters.

Farouk is an urban geographer and artist who lives and works in Johannesburg.

Berni Searle

Seeking Refuge, 2008

Commissioned by the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, *Seeking Refuge* looks at ideas of migration and xenophobia and how people survive in an inhospitable landscape.

Searle has exhibited both in South Africa and internationally. She was one of three artists selected for the annual *New Photography* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2007). Her work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions in the past year, including *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, USA; *Apartheid: The South African Mirror* at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània, Barcelona; and *Global Feminisms* at the Brooklyn Museum, New York. Born in Cape Town in 1964, Searle lives and works in both Cape Town and New York.

Steven Cohen

Chandelier, 2002

Wearing a tutu made from a wrought iron chandelier, Cohen walks in fetish heels through a squatter camp in Johannesburg that is being dismantled by municipal workers, forcing the

residents of the community's make-shift shacks to relocate. Remembering the forced removals under apartheid, the work highlights both the enormous disparities between privilege and severe poverty, and racial, cultural and gender disjunctures in post apartheid South Africa.

Born in 1962 in Johannesburg, South Africa, Cohen lives in LaRocheville, France with his life partner and collaborator, Elu. His work has been shown at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, the 1995 Africus Biennale at the Johannesburg Art Gallery and in "Personal Affects: Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art" at both the Museum for African Art in New York and the Contemporary Art Museum in Honolulu.

THROUGHOUT THE EXHIBITION:

Ruth Sacks

Don't Panic, 2005

Sack's video documents a public intervention that took place on Human Rights Day in 2005 (formerly the apartheid era Day of the Vow commemorating the Voortrekkers victory over the Zulus). Sacks arranged for a pilot to write "DON'T PANIC" across the Cape Town sky in two-kilometer-long letters. Sack's skywriting investigates the boundlessness of South Africa's contemporary challenges.

Sacks was born in 1977 in Port Elizabeth. As the 2008-2009 laureate of the Hoger Instituut van Schone Kunsten, she currently lives and works in Ghent, Belgium. She has been included in *Ist Architecture, Art and Landscape Biennial of the Canaries*, Los Lavaderos, Tenerife, Spain (2006) and in the *Cape Town Biennale 2006*, Cape Town, South Africa. She is also a recipient of the 2006 ABSA L'Atelier Award.

This exhibition is being shown concurrently with *United in Nima: Bay Area and Ghanaian Youth Share Lives Through the Lens* featuring photographs by low-income youth from SF Camerawork's First Exposures photography mentoring program and teens living in the notoriously poor Nima slum of Accra, Ghana who spent three weeks together last summer in Africa sharing their lives, culture and art.

All exhibitions are on view Tuesdays – Saturdays 12-5 p.m. at SF Camerawork, 657 Mission St., Second Floor. Admission to the gallery is \$5.00; \$2.00 for students and seniors; free to Camerawork members. For more information, the public should visit www.sfcamerawork.org or call 415.512.2020.

About SF Camerawork

Founded in 1974, SF Camerawork encourages emerging and mid-career artists to explore new directions in photography and related media by fostering creative forms of expression that push existing boundaries. Throughout its history, SF Camerawork has nurtured artists, mentored youth and helped make San Francisco a destination for the exploration of photography as an artist's medium. Its exhibitions are nationally recognized as a focal point for innovation, a pacesetter for new trends in the medium and a launching pad for the careers of young artists. With three galleries and an education center at its new centrally located facility, SF Camerawork is the only non-profit organization in the Bay Area with an exhibition space and educational programs focused exclusively on contemporary photography and related visual image media. It is an accessible venue for people to view exhibitions, meet artists, participate in educational programs, peruse photographic publications, and gather for lectures, screenings, portfolio reviews, and discussions.

JPG images can be requested electronically. Please contact Nina Sazevich, Public Relations, at (415) 752-2483 or nina911@pacbell.net.