



Cameron Platter

Transvestite killer zebras from outer space
(and other stories)

WORDS: sarah jayne fell

IMAGES: courtesy of the artist & whatiftheworld gallery

Cameron Ndevasia Platter is a mixed-media artist whose satirical work has ignited a massive response of an equally mixed nature, locally and abroad. Just peer in closer and you'll discover a sense of humour so dark it's almost antimatter! In his ten years working as an artist, critics have labelled him a "delinquent outsider", "apocalyptically prolific" and "the embittered and delinquent love child of Quentin Tarantino and Dr Seuss". Accurate or not, Cameron's off-the-wall temperament – a black hole of psychosis, hilarity and, when you least expect it, poignancy – has certainly earned him this share of name-calling.

www.cameronplatter.com

When I saw your latest Cape Town exhibition, *Hard Times / Great Expectations*, your animal characters gave me such déjà vu. Later I realised they're the same inhabitants of a video installation I saw at the KZNSA Gallery in Durban some years ago. Back then I'd been part shocked, part enthralled by what I'd seen. It's a bit blurry now, but I recall a crocodile drinking and driving, on a mission to find red boots. At some point there's a massive penis and a scene with the croc raping a lion. I think I blocked the rest out! Can you fill in the missing pieces?

You've got a great memory, but what about the scene of the stripper giving the crocodile head, while being taken from behind by a lion. There's also the part where a man eats an ecstasy pill labelled 'love', turns into an elephant (with Nikes), and promptly does a psychedelic sex scene with a decapitated woman. Or how about the sceptre-clutching rap star who, after dying of a cocaine overdose, holds court in the underworld (doomed never to be able to get hard). And the final suicide scene in a downtown office (with cigar smoke curling to the ceiling) where the crocodile cries his last crocodile tear and lifts a gun to his head, all accompanied by a severely chopped up 'Midnight Train' by Journey.

Your new video 'The Old Fashion' (set in 2010, when "shit was totally, completely out of control eg: The head of Interpol liked to shop for Italian shoes and drink cappunico with a known mafia drug kingpin.") stars a deranged S&M cyber-kitty bent on world domination. Then there's the Killer Transvestite Scorpion Zebras from Planet Asstropolis, a lion named The Notorious Mr X (a casino owner – as a front for his drug empire – and successful tele-evangelist) and, my favourite character, the crocodile – this time known as Prince Barrack Hussein: "Private Detective, Herbalist & Healer". Now I'm curious – in 2008 you said you'd killed your main protagonist, the crocodile... but now he's back again.

He rose from the dead in true *Night of the Zombie Crocodile* fashion (with his hand breaking through the grave). In the words of Silvio Dante from *The Sopranos*: "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in...". He won't go away because he's a self-portrait, an everyman, and is good and bad at the same time.

Tell me about your animal characters.

People find it easier to see animals doing human things than humans doing animal things. I can get an animal to rape another, cut off his penis, and shoot his head off, and people laugh. Imagine I used real actors. At the moment, I'm really feeling the Transvestite Killer Zebras From Outer Space. They are perverse good-guy superheroes, who enjoy life's nefarious pleasures.

The themes that weave through your work – love, sex, death, prostitution, philosophising about sex and death – can be traced through the history of Modern art (right to that archetypal opener of Modern art books, Picasso's 1907 'Les Femmes d'Alger' (O.J. Version)). How much of your work is a reference to, or continuation of, historical modern art?

I'm a hugely traditional artist. I work in the conservative mediums of drawing, bronze, woodcarving, ceramics, and printmaking. My heroes are old-school South African artists: John [Ndevasia] Muafangejo and Cecil Skotnes. Not Warhol or Koons. And I love art history, all of it. Having said that, I like to recontextualise issues, give them new life, turn things around, and push things over the edge. I'd like to think my work combines the best of the past with the worst of the future.

What's happening in your latest body of work?

The usual: sex, money, violence, sex... The storyline is [the British film noir] *The Third Man* combined with an infomercial for penis enlargement, a dance/strip scene, and numerous sex scenes (obviously). I'm currently interested in creating multi-story videos that link together (and don't), with no beginnings or ends. I'd like to create life-size environments that are 3D versions of what goes on inside my videos – spaces that people can spend an hour or two getting lost in.

There's an interesting harmony in your work between the darker undertones and the equally prominent air of frivolity.

Sin, excess, sleaze, dirtiness are all good. People should celebrate the less sunny parts of life with gaiety and frivolity.

Two things I love about contemporary art are its intent to shock and its jokes. Tell me about these in relation to your work.

I'm not out to shock people – my work isn't in-your-face, look-at-me-I'm-so-clever shocking. It's more sly, underhand, and subtle. And I love nothing more than a well-told story or joke. See Herman Charles Bosman for the master class.

After a certain point in history, art and advertising become intertwined. Why does advertising play such a large role in your recent work?

Advertising, especially that of the lurid KFC, penis-enlargement variety, is an acute portrait of where we're at as a nation – depoliticised, franchised, and ruthlessly, violently braindead in our rampant drive to consume. Also, advertising (or, more accurately, signs) are brilliant, simple ways of communicating a message – so I love them on that level.

072 712 3082 – is that your number?

Yes, but you can also get hold of me on 071 716 6607.



I ♥ durban (2010) | 170.5cm x 170.5cm | pencil crayon on paper



(Shakira, Shakira) The Kiliminjaro Action Bar (Open 24hrs) (2010)
160cm x 160cm | pencil crayon on paper



erotique best freedom charter KFC (2010) | 176cm x 178.5cm | pencil crayon on paper



in the beginning things were good (2010) | 172cm x 170cm | pencil crayon on paper

Medium-wise, it seems you clumsily draw your images in Paint or Photoshop using a mouse, and from there blow up their scale to huge hand-drawn pieces, meticulously coloured in with pencil crayons. What's up with this 'reversal' of operations? Going from digital to hand created, from a technological medium to a child-like one.

You're on the money. It's about slowing down, taking time, thinking, and having an excuse to listen to five-day test cricket on the radio. Also, people are desperate for The Next New Thing. And that's The Handmade. Although, obviously, we're bombarded by new, plastic things so fast, all the time (GET HD TV NOW!!! WATCH SEAGAL AND CRUISE BLOW THINGS UP!!!); it's quaint to find something handmade.

Oddly, your migratory pattern reflects this: your move from Johannesburg to Cape Town then Durban and now finally Shaka's Rock in KZN is also a little counterintuitive! Is this retreat from urban life intentional?

If artists do things in opposition to the norm, is going to all the right exhibition openings, hanging out in the right bars, and seeing the same hipster people over again being different or challenging the status quo in any way? I'm quite proud to have done the opposite, and to be working from the subtropics.

You've exhibited worldwide (Vienna, Miami, Cannes, London, Art Basel...), the list of publications you're in is longer than my arm, and you've recently had work acquired by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. How does it feel to be such a successful artist?

Success is relative and always looks better from the other side. You would be shocked if you saw my bank account. In honesty, I'm a bit of a Lebowsky and never think I work hard enough. But, after all, being an artist is choosing to drop out on a bunch of levels.

What's next for Cameron Platter?

Wearing my new red pleather thigh-high, high-heeled boots around the house. In a sequinned dress.



destitute (2010) | 172.5cm x 171cm | pencil crayon on paper



black up that white ass II (2009) | duration 26min 55sec, colour, sound | video stills

