

# ***Silence as a Room***

## ***#1 of #5***

**Q and A with Ari Sitas**

**By Coral Anne Bijoux**

An unknown individual drove a grader across a veld in the Karoo outside Richmond and levelled an art installation that had been carved and constructed over three long, hard years into the heat-baked desert soil. Ari Sitas interviewed the artist, CORAL ANNE BIJOUX, who developed the land artwork in the Karoo veld, after months of consultation, research, and development, to emulate a womb in the earth. However, her decision to create it in the open veld instead of on a private farm to allow equal and free access to all resulted in bitter consequences.

Interior enclave wall drawing with light rays through holes in the bricks that moderate the air inside.  
Photo by Coral Anne Bijoux



A.S.: Tell the story about Mr Righteous who climbed onto a grader and flattened the work (*Silence as a Room*#1 of #5). Why do you think he did it?

C.B.: It's anyone's guess, Ari. I wrote a little on this during my 40-Day Silence Meditations (see my Facebook page<sup>1</sup>) after this incident took place. The meditations took the form of prose, visual prose, lamentations, raging, and questioning ... all the processes until acceptance ... forgiveness, recognising Mr Grader's<sup>2</sup> role in the eco-system of the arts and land art by a brown woman in South Africa, in particular. (I attempted to develop the work as far out [as possible] – but within walking distance to the town, not realising ... "Jy veroorsaak 'n problem hier," sê die man [you are creating a problem, he said], after I had conducted an on-site workshop with a large group of children from the location.



**Coral Anne**

4d ·

Silence meditation...

Red earth

In Silence

Nourishes my very bones

The deep seat of my human-ness

The truth of my being

**#thesilencehasspoken**

Silence as a Room #1 of #5,

Richmond, Karoo

*Excerpt 1 of 40-Day Silence Meditations at*

[https://web.facebook.com/coral.bijoux.5?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr#](https://web.facebook.com/coral.bijoux.5?_rdc=1&_rdr#)



(There are those who poach the farmers' springbok and sheep, among other things, [who] could hide there. In a veld that is open and reasonably flat, there are few hiding places except the shallow caves under the cliff overhang.) "Should they hide in the *Silence Room* or *Stille Kamer*, (as it's known by some of the locals), you will know where to find them," I retorted. I do not condone 'poaching', however, if one considers that, should the local hunters have dollars, pounds, or euros, they will most likely not be considered poachers, but rather hunters. The difference is money, paid access. Hunting – pleasure (and ego) for *Some*, survival for *Others*.

At the time, I had consulted broadly – starting with the *Greys Palais mense*, the townspeople, in casual conversation, at the *biblioteek* [library], the local *Plaaskombuis*, staff, the wives/acquaintances who own/run the restaurant (one who planned to picnic at the *Silence Room*#1 site one evening with staff members after work with a basket full of goodies – at that stage the enclave had just been carved out – joining artist Mongezi Ncombe and I during Earth Hour. Unfortunately they became nervous, turned back, when they could not find our fire in the veld).

I spoke to members of the farming community. For example, the owners of *Stille Waters* farm, who had offered me a site (on their farm) to develop the *Silence as a Room*#1 of #5 land artwork. Had I accepted, the

**Silence meditation on...  
those who walked before...**

**On grounds of earth in red and  
ochre...**

**Tread Softly  
Leave a light  
Trail behind  
For those that follow  
Tread Softly...  
Leave a Silence  
Trail behind  
For those that  
Follow  
Tread Softly...**

**(Message for the patriarchy  
For the hater and the bigot  
For the rodent who cannot face the  
Silence Feminine in red earth and  
ochre)**

Excerpt 2 of *40-Day Silence Meditations* at  
[https://web.facebook.com/coral.bijoux.5?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr#](https://web.facebook.com/coral.bijoux.5?_rdc=1&_rdr#)



work would have been safe from destruction, but not easily accessible to most. The owners, a South African-German couple, shared their farm's colourful history with me – how he came to own a sheep farm (he still designs textiles for Chanel's male range, and she had been a nurse in Iraq during the war years, where they first met). I did not accept his invitation at the time – protected, tempting, beautiful, and with assistance – because I preferred that visitors/travellers, passers-by, the townsfolk, and *die mense* from the 'lokasie' [the people from the location] would be able to access the work – freely, without asking for gate keys or having to pay an entrance fee. I preferred that shepherds, and 'hunters', would just happen upon it, or *Others* could find the *Silence#1* while wandering through, or passing by *en route* to 'somewhere else', stopping by, overnighting. Or those from afar who found out about the work may want to seek it out – *Some* did before the *Silence#1* roof's demolition.

While working on the piece, I made an effort to engage with local people as best I could. Some asked if they could join me – for a small fee. All were welcomed unless of course, they had other (questionable) intentions (*Some* did). I offered to mentor/train any of the young people who expressed an interest in being the site-guide for the work. They could earn from that – independently. In that case, they could just notify me so that I would not have any surprises. The only prerequisite was that they had to be responsible and knowledgeable about the work.

I created a video of a few young people who had expressed interest in this idea, which I agreed to upload on my website – as a contactable guide for travellers. Unfortunately, this did not work, as it required commitment and keen interest to hike the short distance (less than 5km) ... to tell stories of the veld, the town, the plants and animals ... and of course, *Silence as a Room#1 of #5*. At some stage, there was interference – who knows from whom – when all of a sudden the enthusiastic members became reluctant, afraid perhaps (?) and so I opted out from this intention. I assume it would have been for the benefit of the town with its high unemployment rate; drug and alcohol abuse just waiting to consume an unoccupied young person – this without the intention of oversimplifying solutions to something that is part of a greater travesty that has affected so many, particularly in low-income areas.

Some men who worked with me were less tolerant of a woman who wanted to do *manse werk* [men's work]. *Mansmense*, my mum used to say, shaking her head. She was not Afrikaans, though my dad was from an Afrikaans-speaking background. (The concept of the Feminine engages and encourages solutions beyond gender parities).





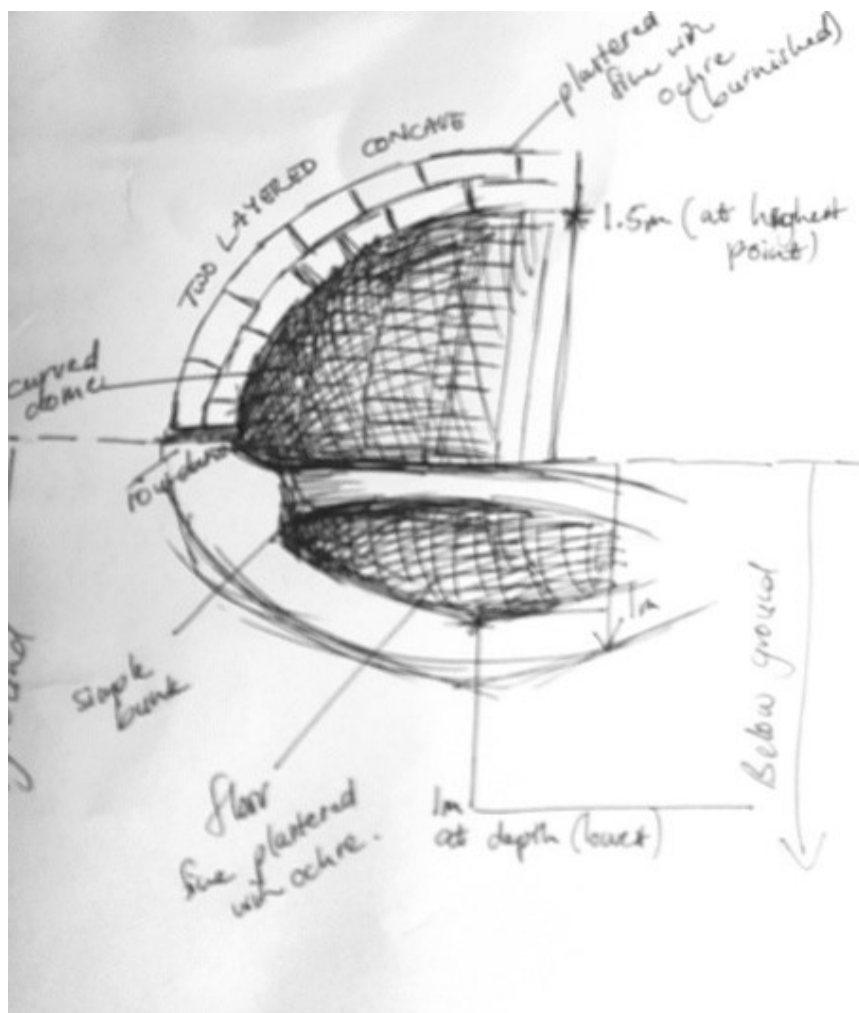
The bricklayer who assisted me in this phase, arrogant in his demeanour, was determined that he be identified as the artist though he did not design it, solve the problems, dig, or lay the foundation, nor did he build the steel structure with us, carve out the enclave for 60 days or more ... I remember that he said, "*Ek* (thumping his chest) *het die Stilte Kamer gebou en Ek kan dit afbreek as Ek wil!*" [I built the Silent Room and I will break it down/demolish it if I want to]. This after spending time engaging anyone who came to work on the site about its intentions. I, however, understood the desire for recognition in a place that does not always 'see you'.

MAPSA [Modern Art Projects South Africa], a guesthouse and artist residency in the town, established with its own art collection of more than 1,000 pieces – a favourite artwork in black had accommodated me during the development phases 1 and 2 of *Silence as a Room#1 of #5*. A *buurman* [neighbour] and MAPSA 'overseer', as well as head of the family from whom most of the staff emanated – assisted where he could. He is a long-time resident in the town and was a repository of *Other* local histories that do not form part of the Richmond or Horse Museum historical narrative. He knew many of the people of long ago, and to some extent, much of the local politics of the town ... and its many churches. (I have an interview with him – still to upload.) He hankers after the 'old' Richmond.

During the last phase, I was 'interviewed' by a local woman at *Plaaskombius* who indicated that her son was an architect who also makes art. She was curious ... interested in the *Silence as a Room#1 of #5* work. She seemed to know much about the work – though not from me.

Some passers-by who knew of the work also indicated that they asked locals where to find *Silence as a Room#1*, and being informed of it, were therefore able to locate it easily! Various individuals have sent me photographs they had taken at different times. Every so often, I would receive these photographs during and after the process of creating it. *Others* still planned to visit the work and experience it for themselves. Unfortunately, they will not get a chance to do so, other than as an 'interest' piece in 'archaeological finds'.

I was visited; photographs were taken by a local art gallery in Richmond during my planned long interview with a post-doc student, who was interested in the artwork's healing potential. The gallery group spent time there, asked about my process, my thinking about the work, and my intentions. Running hands on its interior textures, walking around, and inside of it. Documented. Photographed. I have since asked if



*Silence#1 draft design – embedding the work in the earth – much like the numerous heuweltjies [termite mounds] found in the veld, creating a visible cone or in the case of Silence#1, a domed roof.*

they could share these photographs with me. After promises, I still have not received any.

A local guesthouse and gallery sent a group of three men, who stayed at their accommodation, to the site while I worked there. They were involved in 'surveillance' projects. I was photographed without my permission while working. I allowed it – after the fact. I gave them 'the tour' while they were there. They were friendly. I invited them back early



the following morning to experience the *sonstrale* [rays] as they reflect the morning's sun. They did not arrive.

Some friends of a friend who were in the secret services during 'those years' visited the *Silence#1*, seeking it out as a place of healing. I would have liked to meet them at some point, but did not get a chance to.

A local architect in Durban recently asked me about what she refers to as "My little exercise in the Karoo" and "My little housie," she says with a snigger and a smile similar to that of a now late Richmond resident who taunted, "*vrouetjie maak 'n huisie*," [little woman builds a little house] as he visited the site, and whenever he saw me. In feminine solidarity, she laughed at the news of its demolition.

Any of these thoughts, this thinking ... the possibility, the people, and intentions has in some way contributed to the tale of *Silence as a Room#1 of #5* in Richmond. Anyone could have been or could have subcontracted *Mr Righteous – Mr Grader* – to demolish the work. The motives? It seems like an endless list from jealousy, arrogance, ignorance, indignation, ownership, politics, *politics* of race, gender, the land. Politics of the veld, and *who goes there*? These motives are written between the lines. It's a South African story, it's a local story particular to the Karoo veld and its many towns, its many historical narratives. It's also a global narrative that we may recognise. It's also how Silences are borne.

*Others* were appreciative and supportive of the work. Many engaged it physically or virtually. Many wanted to visit, spend time there, and some to conduct a retreat there ... but did not get a chance to do so, thanks to *Mr Grader* or *Mr Righteous* and his contractor.

A.S.: *What was so monstrous about it?*

C.B.: Well, firstly, anyone can justify their motives for almost anything these days, as they clearly did ... including perhaps (and I refer to news events of the past and recent past) the person who attacks a pre-school and shoots little children in a racist attack to prevent ... what (!); a man with HIV/Aids who rapes a baby ... as a cure (?); a missile that lands on people lining up for food ... 'by accident' (?); a grader that could level a domed sculpture roof that forms part of a land art womb in the earth – representing the Earth Mother – because it's annoying or ... (?)

Perhaps someone did not like that a woman was engaged in a structure perceived as *manse werk*, because women must do *vrouens werk* [women's work](?)



Someone with brown-ochre skin dares to challenge the status quo on land, and an amended land appropriation bill was approved on the eve ... so *Some* say, it must go ... (?)

What is monstrous about this? I can only speak as the artist ... it was monstrous because of the violence of the action. (Somehow it would have seemed more 'acceptable' to me had the shepherds taken picks and with these basic tools and hands, bashed the roof in – passionately, violence directed by and through the hand. Honest.) This machine – the grader – felt like a violent action against my body, my person, and the body of the womb, the earth. My time, my physical, psychical, and emotional effort, my endless sharing of the work to all, destroyed in one fell swoop by a man and his machine.

Most in the town, including *Mr Grader*, were aware of the artwork's reference to the womb, *die moederbar* ... and if so, to demolish the womb? What does that reveal about who we are? Monsters?

The work posed no apparent harm to anyone. No-one besides the farmers' representative/s spelt it out for ME at the tail end of the last phase before completion. "*Dit veroorsaak 'n probleem hier* [This will create a problem here] ..." And without consultation with the artist this was the only solution offered to solve *die problem*.

I spent more than three years carving, constructing, engraving clay heat-baked earth with a spade, replenishing where I could as I went along, aware of my actions, painstakingly so ... the earth (the site I had selected was quite eroded – images are available on my website) – the clay bricks were created from the clayey soil of the area.

*Who watched and waited for the  
work to be completed before  
they decided to demolish the  
artwork? A twisted mind,  
surely... ?*





I was aware of every action of mine and *Others* while there, and *Now*.

I asked after the property agent that I engaged with over the years about living spaces in Richmond. I wanted to live there, initially, though every property at some point was not available, unless at a sizeable price beyond my means or it was bought ... already.

Perhaps it would have been preferable for me to have left then? And for *Others* to have remained silent?

My intention in creating this work was to draw attention to earth, and its ecological framing as a Feminine concept – a womb: the incubator of our species, our nurturer, and our source. It was my intention to draw attention to the land and how we engage it – carefully, caringly, with the hand – or machine as ‘time is money’, they say, disassociated, disconnected. To mimic aspects of the natural world – in this case, how the Karoo harvesting termites<sup>3</sup> engage earth in the



*From this...early stages of development*



*...to this, with the domed roof in place ...*



development of their communal home, their technologies, and deeply-known intuition that serve to moderate heat, air, and moisture in its interior, how they employ 'eco-engineering' technologies that we can, and have, learnt from them. (I certainly have embraced this knowledge – I referred to the termites as my 'mentors' or 'teachers').

I also wanted to document an engagement with the land as a slow process, with hand tools speaking back to capitalism, big machines, extraction without care, without intentions, understanding, or knowledge of how to replenish what we extract. I wanted to draw attention to the historical Feminine severing from land (Bijoux, 2023; Federeci, 2004) and intentionally set it back towards a conceptual reconnection ... *feet first*.

If 'the farmer' or *Mr Grader* (who I assume did not act alone), or *Mr Righteous* as you describe him, felt the sculpture endangered his farm, there were ways I/we could have dealt with it, but it seemed that the intention was less a concern (for them) or they would have contacted me, made suggestions, opened discussion. I believe that it was much more about evisceration. Black, brown or white, woman or man, whatever the reason, the politics, the decision – because it was a decision and an act of deliberation – to drive across the veld with a grader was a 'monstrous act'. Deliberate. To have waited three years for me to complete the work was a deliberate act.

My regular returns and long stays in Richmond – most knew who I was. They recognised my vehicle and recognised me. I would greet those whom I got to know; visit, engage in local events, visit the *biblioteek* where I had conducted workshops, and a local *kerk* [church], where I engaged, and conducted an earth-oriented *Dream* workshop for the women there from the earth of the *Silence#1* site. (I was asked to 'testify' in one of the churches there as to my reasons for making the work. The pastor prayed on me, blessing me and the work ... Ha!) I engaged the local grocers and *BKB Retail* where I would buy hardware-type supplies, who knew me well, and had visited the *Silence#1* site.

Nasty. Mean. Monstrous.

And if the work represented Earth Mother, the womb even more monstrously so, but then, as a society, we allow monstrous acts on vulnerable men, women, and children, the earth. Why not a sculpture that represents the earth and the mother?

The town – as a whole – is silent about 'the monstrous act'. Some speak out, but behind closed doors, some avert their eyes, others know, shake their heads, give benign smiles and muffled apologies, and still



others suspect one or the other, but will not say it out loud. That is the nature of quaint towns, or big cities and even larger countries where monstrous acts take place. This act can be a mirror of who we are. We reveal ourselves in our engagement with the artwork (even from a distance), and we reveal ourselves in our engagement with its demolition.

A.S.: *Why did you choose the Karoo as an art space?*

C.B.: I don't think I chose this town in the Karoo as an art space. Rather, it chose me. In terms of the *Silence as a Room* sculptural designs and its series of five – I had completed three draft designs – this was one of the first three. I created these with different ecologies/typographies in mind, in southern Africa. The Karoo type ecology stretches across the interior of the country, across the Eastern, Northern, and Western Cape. Alternatively, there are forested swamps; natural and man-made forests, which formed around the mountainous and coastal regions; highveld regions with rocky outcrops, mountains with layered shale, igneous and other rock formations; towns and cities with their build-up of decaying buildings, sewers, bridges and people ... the list is long, but I intend focusing on five major areas – what for me is a biome or focus area that I want to feature in this body of work.

I wanted a Feminine reference to speak into the land in these diverse spaces and ecologies, its cultural aspect, its people and its people's people ... its legacy and contemporary reference to its land, the space: the ecological, socio-cultural, and political context. I wanted peoples – anyone – who could see themselves, their losses and gains, their connections or disconnect with the land through this body of work. Silence as a phenomenon becomes the conceptual conduit through which I engage this work. And after its making, it no longer belongs to me – the physical work that is. I left it there to be engaged with by nature, insects, birds, animals ... people. *And it has*. But it feels sore nonetheless.

I was invited to an arts residency by MAPSA, which piqued my interest in that particular space. I had for many years traversed the Karoo lands – just been drawn to these spaces – not for romantic notions of open empty lands *a la Pienneef*, but my own innate hankering after ... something. My ancestors, and so too most of our ancestors, walked the lands and while trying to find them and their marks on the land, I found routes, smells, dust – earth – and peoples that spoke to me quite intuitively. Others were suspicious of me. I opted to listen to these intuitive directives and not try to intellectualise them too much. In other words, I did not want it to be a strategic decision, yes, in the enactment or



development stages, but initially, my core, my gut, had to be the driver. I have felt this pull, this directive, equally with the design and research.

The Karoo, therefore, represents a certain typography, a biome, and a certain historical narrative that I had only scratched the surface of. I had intended to return annually, resources allowing, to maintain the work somewhat and to document its engagement with people and the elements of wind, heat, sun, rain, lightning, the animals that graze there, the hares, tortoises, reptiles, insects, and birds that live and occupy the space.

*A.S.: What was the piece about and describe the three-year process to do it?*

C.B.: There is far too much to speak about. I have a website page<sup>4</sup> and social media posts dedicated to this work – why this work, what it is, the process, stages or phases of completion, meanings. I have communicated these over a period of three to four years. I still am. Now, I speak about the return of *Silence AlterEgo* as I make my way back to Richmond to retrieve remnants of the sculpture for a permanent monument to the *Silence#1* installation at Nirox Sculpture Park for the current *Soil and Water* exhibition.



*Silence #1R–Membrane at Nirox Sculpture Park for Soil and Water exhibition.*

*Photo: Coral Anne Bijoux*



The presence of *AlterEgo* (my shadow) was my way of documenting 'the artist at work' as *the third person*. In my previous large-scale installation, *Dreams as R-evolution*, I engaged the *AlterEgo*, a Feminine reclining figure who languished in the *Room for AlterEgo*<sup>5</sup> – a four-walled space, created from polymer, awaiting moments of awakening. It was positioned central to the installation, with a sparkling roof as it caught the light from the midday sun.<sup>6</sup>

The *AlterEgo*<sup>7</sup> appeared in *this* work, in the stark Karoo light, as a shadow figure in various guises, engaging the space, the earth, engaging the work, and its process. As *she* says, "Much like *AlterEgo* in *Dreams as R-evolution*, the *Silence Shadow Diary* presents a witness to the making of *Silence as a Room*. At times, she's sacred, sometimes quirky, often playful, but always ... present."

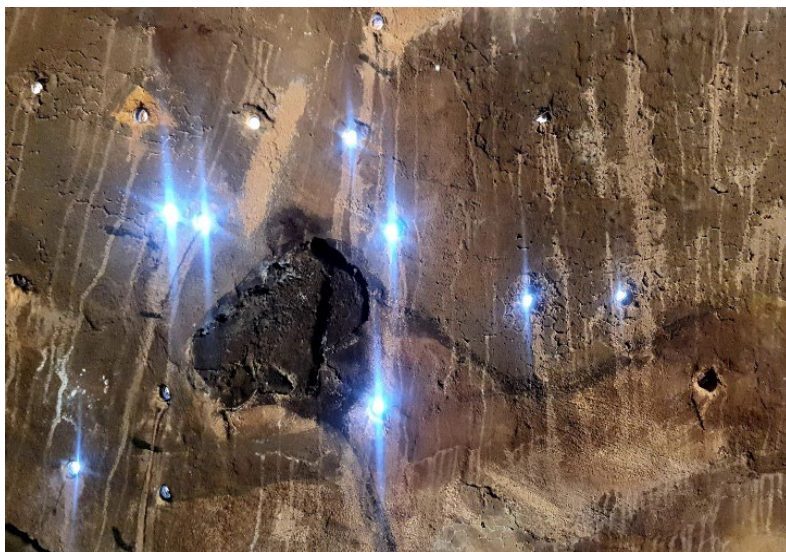
This work falls within the ambit of land art. The genre, and one could say, virtually everything, our very way of being, our mobiles, our technologies, our cement-plastered homes and offices, our perfumes and our agriculture, our meat and our diamonds, incorporates some form of extractivism, which our art must draw attention to. The art poses the questions by its presence. In this work, I used the action of extracting, then replacing, replenishing the same back to the earth (for instance, clay earth and ash, into the clay bricks for the domed roof of the earth womb).

There are well-known examples such as *Spiral Jetty*, 1972,<sup>8</sup> created in the salt pans of Salt Lake City by Robert Smithson, who was interested in the notion of entropy and that things change ... the land changes. He was interested in changing the fixed nature of monuments. I, too, am interested in natural entropy in *Silence as a Room*#1 of #5<sup>9</sup> and the relationships people have to earth, and land, but of course, Mr Grader did not allow time to do that.

*A line made by Walking* by Richard Long, 1967, and more recently, a three-part series on waves, *Wave Field*, *Flutter*, and *Storm King Wavefield* by Maya Lin, 1995-2008, revealing her interest in science and nature. This art form was/is often associated with privilege and access. In South Africa, it also deals with access to spaces that were prohibited for many, just some 21 years ago.

The *Silence*#1 sculpture was created by digging into the earth, as the first phase during which I created the enclave (5m in diameter and 1m deep at its core). I carved into the hard-baked clay earth with a spade, in the heat of a Karoo summer for over 60 days, of which I had assistance on 12 half-days (or six full days).





*Interior enclave wall drawing with light rays through air holes that moderate the air of the interior.*  
*Photo: Coral Anne Bijoux*

The second phase, which took place in the winter of that year, was assisted by Aligned Consulting and a local bricklayer to create the domed roof, thereby completing the womb. None of us had created a domed roof before, but I had ideas about how I wanted to achieve this. I wanted to see these thoughts and intuitive ways with material and process become tangible, getting my hands into the brick-laying, and the technical and conceptual problem-solving. It was difficult because the men I worked with often had trouble taking instructions from me or working with me. *Dis nie werk vir vrouens nie* [This is not women's work]. I had to really convince them to try a few things *my way* – which eventually worked. Some steps I had to come back to, rather working on them alone.

This meant that I had to return for a third phase (plastering, re-working hundreds of holes, this time by drilling open the holes I had created in the brick design that had been deliberately sealed by the bricklayer), and the fourth phase that involved the installation of amulets, which I created from the same clay earth after a downpour, then baked in that veld oven. These amulets had formed part of the three-site exhibition by Nirox, curated by Sven Christian, titled *Layers: Rock Art through Time and Space*, finally concluding at the Wits Origins Centre in 2024.

Creating this womb in the earth – not sitting above, hovering over it, but within it – I intended to draw attention to the smells, the feel,



and texture of earth, allowing one to feel, experience, and not simply look at. The Gaze. I believe that we are often disconnected from the things that we should feel most connected to – like the earth that we rely on for our very existence. I felt that if we entered into the space, felt the earth around us, immersed [ourselves] in it, we might rethink our disconnect. We might appreciate and respect what gives us life – just a little more.

The work is 5m from within the interior walls and 1m at the core of the curved enclave, 1.5m from ground level at the centre of the curved dome. The sculpture is created predominantly from the same red clay I dug out, combined with ash this created the bricks I had designed specifically for *Silence#1*. The bricks were made by a local brick-making business, *Werk, Wrek of Trek*, and baked in their veld oven for two weeks, cooled for one week, before breaking down the oven and releasing the bricks.

Following the example of the Karoo harvesting termites or ‘eco-engineers,’ I designed the bricks with either one or two holes that would remain open, (yes, they also functioned as a fix for cement and clay mix) in order to allow air to enter and escape the inner sanctum, thereby creating a moderating effect in temperature for the structure within a harsh climate. The holes also formed a type of sundial, allowing the passage of daily time (and every full moon, a lunar time scale) to reflect on the interior walls and floor of the sculptural womb. This was also one of my attempts to ensure a measure of longevity for the work by allowing for air moderation, as it would easily crack under extreme conditions such as the heat in summer, the freezing cold conditions in winter.

As with many of my larger projects, I am focused on the participant's experience as much as I am on the making-creating of the work – designed for people, spaces, and creatures of nature (which we also are) to experience, be moved by, and be shifted by – in whatever way. It feels sore that the work was demolished – mostly by spite, jealousy, or a sense of righteousness (whose, I don't know), an attempt at eviscerating the truth that an unexpected somebody could create a work of this nature at this scale with minimal resources and just a dream, an idea, a vision and lots of determination. But it was/is what it is. I have a record of it. I have a memory of being mostly tired, the physical effort in its making; the determination despite the numerous obstacles. Often, when I wanted to give up, my daughters would encourage me and then those fleeting moments when I knew I could see why I created this work. I, too, was moved, shifted by it, and on some occasions, like my nights there in the full moon, completely transfixed as though the work was



created outside of me. The inner, its curved walls and floor became the sky with pin-pricks and blue-light spots of moonlight.

I knew that I did not create this work alone – and I'm not referring to the helpers, nor my brother (Aligned Consulting), who came to support me, and those that supported the work, but I had a sense that as I walked, and as I worked, I was supported by those who walked before me. I simply followed along an unknown path.

*A.S.: What does it tell us about Karoo micropolitics?*

C.B.: I think the micropolitics, as you refer to it, occur in all instances wherever groups gather – including in 'the workplace', where people live in community, where people engage with each other in intense spaces, small towns, vying for power, working together, working against each other, maintaining the status quo. I have worked in many places, from the energised spaces in Joburg and Newtown, the corporate environment, government departments, to deep rural areas – the micropolitics are not that different. I recognised it, have encountered it many times before – different, yet unsurprisingly, similar. Secrets kept. Silences are created around what is permitted, spoken about, and revealed and what is not. Who speaks and to whom. People also need to survive and live together, as such it's best that everything remains the same as much as possible. Often in close spaces, communities, workplaces, survival means looking the other way, whispering behind closed doors and behind each other's backs, though smiles are bright and people friendly if you're passing by.

On the other hand, there is also much kindness, where everyone knows the Other, and tolerance means we can survive another day. People connect with and rely on each other in ways that do not happen in larger towns and cities, and that's positive. I found Richmond to be such a place. I encountered people who were kind, and caring, while others were menacing. It's no different elsewhere. There are stories to be shared of yesteryear, and meals to enjoy together ... and when something like this happens, people whisper and everybody knows, but no-one knows as well. There are very many churches in this small town ... some say it's because people have different ideas about worship, while someone said that "it's a way to make money". I don't know. I had been invited to a few churches while there.

In Richmond, as small a community as it is, diverse interests abound; which church group you belong to, social group, race, are you based in the town or in the location, across the bridge or *langsaaan* [alongside], or on a farm, which farm (?) ... visitor or persons who have



hybrid living situations – here and elsewhere. Artists and writers, construction workers and labourers, *skaapwagters* [shepherds] and *skaapboere* [sheep farmers], each group with its own dynamic, each with its own sense of hierarchy. I was not there to research or record the town, but I had significant encounters with people in different scenarios there. I therefore developed a sense, a *knowing*, of the town through my work.

The *skaapwagters* were a group on their own. I sensed that they have their own ethics and engagement with the town. They know the veld. They know the earth and the animals in their care. They watch and they wait. They speak across open lands with whistles and sounds and signs ... in the tradition of people of the veld and the shepherds from long ago and today.

The bareback riders threw themselves elegantly onto their beasts who were wild, with fire in their eyes after running away, free ... heading to *Silence as a Room* ... stopping just short of 'the owner's' back gate. The riders, in a mad dash after them, tried everything to coax them back. Nearer, beckoning them to join them ... then punishing them, then whispering and placating. I watch, transfixed at the performance. *Ek praat so 'n bietjie met hulle ... Twee van hulle se vir my dat hy moet seker maak dat die eienaar die perde nou moes terug kry ... asook die skape. Hulle is nie die problem nie, maar die perde..?! Hulle hardloop weg elke keer hulle kans kry ... Hulle gee hul name ... ek se wie ek is...* [I chatted to them briefly ... two of them said they must make sure the horses are returned to the owner ... the sheep as well. They [the sheep] are not the problem, but the horses! They run away at every opportunity ... They told me their names ... I said who I was].

Shepherd life is aloneness, yet connected to the broader community, connected to the earth, and those in their care, I imagine. Individual, yet part of a whole, a way of life. A nuance, stretching back centuries through time from whence the first domesticated agricultural lifestyles appeared. A tradition that spans centuries, I quite understand – as artist, often apart, alone. Observant. Whole. Connected ... to my spaces, my materials, concepts, visions and *Others*. Some signs are left for me in *Silence as a Room* #1 of #5, and some ritual leftovers, I assume by shepherd/s or hunter-type-gatherers. I see it. Respond. Leave a sign for 'them' to find too. Some signs were to scare me, while others, well others, I embraced.

At some point I consider my role as the outsider-insider. Depending on 'the size of your purse,' which suggests the level of influence one has, and of course who you are – your profile – you could be 'in' or 'out'. The role of the outsider, I find upon some 'light'



investigation, is often determined by outsiders themselves – who have become insiders through the passage of time or the ‘size of the purse’. I conclude that at some point [we] were all first insiders – spaces where our feet had tread freely, then made to be outsiders (through laws, rules ... or the size of the purse), and now depending on who offers their insights, usually based on the size of the purse, this status is determined, and acted upon accordingly. Creating a public work *in this way* leaves all these questions in the sand for us to cogitate upon.

Communication in most instances is difficult: there isn't one story, one narrative, one way. To create a work in the midst of conflicting, multiple narratives was/is a challenge. It is dangerous. But that is what this work attempts – obliquely, and overtly. Engaging contemporary issues in the land, historical narratives, and memories obscured by time, influenced by people and politics.

The archives of the land lie beneath us while capital giants run roughshod over all without a care. Care is for people who care ... and there is no time for that. Time is money, don't they say? Money is power, and we all race to get it ... as much as we can. But change is afoot, we can feel it in earth; earth's shifts and the un-readiness and present dis-ease of our world ...

*Who goes there said the guard at the gate  
What is the news that you ride so late  
News most pressing that must be spoken to Caesar alone  
And this cannot wait...*  
Excerpt from 'The Rider at the Gate' by John Masefield, 1923.

This warning echoes to me from a long ago past – when I was made to recite it, not knowing why or what it really was about. The sands of time broadcast this past warning, vast and clear, and we are aware. I continue my work on *Silence as a Room* and speak into the silences of yesterday and today ... just in case someone wants to listen, hear, see and experience. #thesilencehasspoken





## REFERENCES

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Coral Anne Bijoux's facebook link can be accessed via the coral4art website at <https://coral4art.co.za/> or [https://web.facebook.com/coral.bijoux.5?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdc#](https://web.facebook.com/coral.bijoux.5?_rdc=1&_rdc#)
- <sup>2</sup> See on Facebook – *40-Day Silence Meditations – Ode to Mr Grader* .
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.sanbi.org/animal-of-the-week/african-harvester-termite/> or <https://coral4art.co.za/silence-as-a-room-flora-and-fauna/>
- <sup>4</sup> [coral4art.co.za/silence-as-a-room-process-and-people/](https://coral4art.co.za/silence-as-a-room-process-and-people/)
- <sup>5</sup> <https://coral4art.co.za/dreams-as-r-evolution-2/>
- <sup>6</sup> See <https://coral4art.co.za/dreams-as-r-evolution-2/>
- <sup>7</sup> For examples, see <https://coral4art.co.za/silence-as-a-room/>
- <sup>8</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWd\\_YGHjWKM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWd_YGHjWKM)
- <sup>9</sup> <https://coral4art.co.za/silence-as-a-room/>

## BIOGRAPHY

Coral Bijoux is a curator and artist with a background in education, skills development, heritage and museology. Her collective career spans more than 27 years in development work; arts education; organisation practice; heritage and tourism; research and writing; archival development and museology.